

DOGMA OR DOCTRINE

Dogma or  
Doctrine

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# Dogma or Doctrine?

And other Essays

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## PREFACE

THE twelve essays in this volume have already been issued separately as 'Unitarian Tracts.' Several of them have had a very large circulation in this way. The address on 'Science and Religion' by the late Dr. W. B. Carpenter, has been revised by his grandson, Dr. H. C. H. Carpenter. The two essays by the Rev. Alex. Webster were prepared chiefly with a view to their use in Scotland. The discourse on 'The Covenant of the Spirit,' by the Rev. Dr. James Drummond, late Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, was delivered in connexion with the Anniversary Meetings of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association last Whitsuntide.

Many people who have ceased to believe the creeds and dogmas of 'orthodox' churches are unaware of the existence of a religious community to which they may belong without surrendering their freedom of thought. Unitarian Churches offer a home to liberal religious thinkers and workers.

There are varieties of thought and expression in the twelve essays here published, but the writers all agree in upholding pure religion and perfect liberty.

W. C. B.

LONDON, December, 1906.

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A religion wide as the widest outlook of the modern mind ; a religion free as human thought, concurrent with reason, co-ordinate with science ; a religion in which the present predominates over the past, and the future over the present ; in which judgment tops authority, and vision outruns tradition,—this is the instant demand of a liberal faith.—FREDERICK H. HEDGE.

## DOGMA OR DOCTRINE ?

WHEN a people's moral instincts have lost sensitiveness men naturally refer for principles of life and conduct to the maxims and customs and traditions of bygone days. They cannot appeal to any vivid or spontaneous ideals of their own, for all their standards have become fogged and blurred and they are thus forced to live an ethically parasitic life on the past. And although the wildest revolutionary depends far more than he thinks on the civilization to which he belongs, it remains true that it is one of the disturbing symptoms of moral decadence that a natural reference to the past should become an abject dependence upon it.

The Conservative—I do not speak in a merely political sense—having no forward



look to an Ideal Future, having no upward vision of a presently living Holiness turns back and exhausts his reverence upon fulfilled achievements. The solidarity of life becomes something to which he is impotent to contribute any real increment of being, something therefore on which he feebly hangs like a decrepit pensioner. And this applies, of course, no less to intellectual than to moral convictions. As the orthodox theology crumbles away until it becomes in our day a great landslide, men find themselves without firm footing. They remain in all their spiritual affinities and desires essentially religious, but they find themselves without any kind of doctrinal anchorage. And it is a paradox more true than any truism that Agnosticism is the prolific mother of Dogma. It is not surprising then to notice how there is going on to-day in the press, as well as in more permanent literature, a busy and persistent effort to rehabilitate dogma in all its ancient authority. In so far as this is a protest against vagueness we may welcome it, but in so far as it is the old

impotence rushing to a delusive promise of strength, it is full of danger.

I propose to deal with only one small aspect of this modern movement, namely, the perverse way in which apologists speak as if all clear and distinct moral principles and truths rested on dogma—and as if the very term dogma meant only a body of strong and ultimate convictions. Now, this seems to me a strange and pernicious confusion of ideas. Precise truths, clear convictions, must at the outset be distinguished from fixed artificial creeds. And zeal for the true faith and for the true doctrine must be distinguished from zeal for compulsory dogma.

Our congregation, for example, by its very constitution, cannot elaborate a common creed for all its members, but it does not follow that our members must be indifferent to doctrinal truth or doctrinal teaching. Every one of us must seek clear intellectual convictions, and these will be vital and sacred. No thinking man or woman can remain without a doctrine of some sort, written or unwritten,

without some working beliefs about Religion and Life. That doctrine may be out of sight, hidden by faith, like the skeleton of a living body by the bloom and beauty of warm flesh and blood. Or that doctrine may be obtruded on the vision and appear ugly and ghastly like scaffolding round an ancient abbey. But the doctrine must be *there*, within or without. If you and I have any religious ideals at all we must reflect upon them, and think about them, and, as far as may be, systematize them. This congregation as a congregation may not adopt a creed, but the several members of this congregation not only may, but must adopt a theology, a doctrine. You cannot impose your doctrine on me, I cannot impose mine on you, but the intrinsic authority and majesty of the Truth must speak to all of us if our mind is not to become a mere mush of vagueness.

Religious life, let us never forget, is not emotion *alone*, nor yet action alone; it is also *thought*. We must translate and interpret our spiritual ideals into terms first of *feeling*, secondly of *will*, and thirdly

*of thought.* As *feeling* our Religion must pass into worship, into prayer and praise, into music, into architecture, into symbolism, into colour and form, into everything that can exalt and heighten and purify the life of the emotion. As *will*, as volition, our Religion must pass into acts and deeds, into political and philanthropic activities, into works of social service and domestic reform, into self-sacrifice, and all strong and heroic action. As *thought* our Religion must pass into reasoned discourse, into theology and philosophy, into an articulated system of doctrine that can illuminate and satisfy the understanding. We should therefore be not more, but less than human if we did not meet here as thinking beings for whom doctrine of some kind is an absolute intellectual necessity.

But please carefully note this—I say doctrine, *not dogma*. The two things must be clearly distinguished, for they are almost hopelessly confused. Dogma is something else than doctrine. It is *doctrine authoritatively decreed by some society or church*. Dogma is not doctrine simply, it is doctrine

*officially imposed.* And it is this element of external imposition that converts doctrine into dogma. The very word dogma signifies a command, an order, a decree. In the second chapter of Luke we read : ' Now it came to pass in those days there went out a *decree* from Caesar Augustus.' The word there translated decree is in the original Greek *δῶγμα* (dogma). It implies a command from the Emperor, an external authority claiming and compelling obedience. To disobey or deny a ' dogma ' thus becomes *heresy* in ecclesiastical theology, just as to disobey a statute may become a *crime* in law. It is therefore this element of compulsion and command that carries doctrine over into dogma, and degrades the Church from a voluntary fellowship of the spirit into a legislative and judicial authority. Doctrine is not only innocent and beneficial, it is necessary ; but dogma remains pernicious, unnecessary, and intolerable. An analogy from the world of science may help to bring this out clearly. Science prides itself on freedom from

dogma, but it is never so foolish as to pride itself on freedom from doctrine.

The doctrine of evolution, for example, is pretty well universally accepted among scientific men—but it is not a dogma, because any man is at liberty to test it or variously to interpret it, so that Spencer or Weismann or Wallace may not speak exactly the same thing; and if one is so convinced he may deny it altogether, and still perhaps lay some claim to be a man of Science. But suppose that in order to put an end to all discussion and difference the Royal Society or the British Association said: 'Such and such is the doctrine of evolution, and the same is hereby declared to be true and binding upon all our members. If any man deny the same let him be anathema and excommunicated from our fellowship'—there you have the element of extrinsic authority and compulsion—what was a scientific doctrine has now become a scientific dogma. It is precisely so in Religion. It was a perfectly legitimate thing for the theologians of the early

centuries to teach, for instance, the doctrine of the Trinity—or any other doctrine that seemed to them true. But when they converted this doctrine into dogma by getting their synods and councils once and for all to declare it as true and binding upon all Christians, and once and for all to reject every opposing or hostile doctrine as heresy, you have the great mistake of the theologians and the appalling tragedy of ecclesiastical history.

Limitations were put on the search for Truth. External artificial authority checked free inquiry and nailed down the needle of the compass instead of letting it swing freely to the Pole of Truth. Is it not significant that the intellectual liberty of science has resulted in a practical unanimity of opinion, while the intellectual despotism of dogma has begotten hundreds of creed-bound sects, and a profound distrust of the professional theologian ?

Theology should be a science. Time was when it claimed to be the Queen of the Sciences. She would be the Queen of the Sciences now if she had kept her eyes open

to the light instead of letting men bandage and blindfold her to lead her helplessly, hopelessly out of the path of Truth.

Science was faith once : Faith were science now  
Would she but lay her bow and arrow by  
And arm her with the weapons of the time.

Science has always won her victories through doctrine *overcoming* dogma, and Liberal Theology must win her victories by the same process. That the earth stood still for the Church have become a dogma, for Science it was but a false doctrine that had to give way before a true one.

Precisely so with Theology. It can never do away with doctrine, but it can, when free, do away with dogma, with false authoritative decrees, and so grow and evolve into fuller and more perfect Truth. Let no hatred of dogma make you impatient of doctrine, and let no zeal for definite doctrine make you tolerant of dogma. Religion must indeed ever be doctrinally interpreted. Religion must be held not vaguely, like moisture



in a fog, but like water in a vessel. My vessel may be but a poor wooden leaking bowl, yours may be, if you will, a jewelled golden chalice—but *some* vessel each of us must have unless our Religion is to be wasted and lost. I do not say that you must necessarily have an *exact* philosophy of Religion, though it would surely be well if you had; yet you may have much Religion with very little ability to give an account of it: just as a man may be hugely humorous, but never be able to give a definition or offer a doctrine of humour. A man may be a rare and holy saint, and yet a poor theologian. Still, one of the differences between vertebrate and invertebrate Religion lies just here, that one has a doctrinal backbone, is well poised and organized in a consistent, closely knitted, firmly adjusted system of thought; the other is loose, flabby, sloppy, an india-rubber dummy, buffeted by every passing blow and bounced about by every casual kick.

Religion is not a disembodied ghost: it is a spirit of Life, clothed upon with firm

flesh and sinews, and strengthened by the 'dry bones' of reasoned, carefully articulated thought. Indeed, in its final significance knowledge is more than an intellectual account or explanation of Life; it is itself part of Life: similarly Doctrine, in its ultimate meaning, is more than a mere interpretation of Religion; it is itself an organic and constituent element in the Religious Life.

When therefore we hear people too weary or too lazy to think, saying 'There is too much doctrine in the Churches,' do not let us join in that cuckoo cry. There is not half enough doctrine, if by doctrine is meant the earnest, strenuous discussion and teaching of the deep things of God. What these people really mean is 'There is too much dogma and creed and official confession and blind unreasoned acceptance.' The age of dogma is past—like the stone age, or the age of bows and arrows. The age of clear doctrine is at hand. Dogma was reared in a time of comparative ignorance, and it is now crumbling into ruins. The age of dogma is gone: th

age of doctrinal reconstruction is now beginning. In this work of reconstruction it is the business of members of our Liberal Churches to be pioneers. We are as free to think, to make hypotheses, to advance propositions, to make discoveries, as the biologist or psychologist. It is an essential part of our grand and glorious vocation to rehabilitate Theology and restore her once more into beauty and dignity as the Queen of the Sciences. If we neglect our opportunity, other men and congregations will not neglect theirs. Already as we see they are busy defending dogma in the sense of a decree, by adducing arguments for dogma in the sense of doctrine—pretending to prove one thing by arguing for another. If we refuse to think, if we are not alert, vigilant, and awake to this kind of jugglery with words, if we are too lazy to work out a reason for the faith that is in us, those more mentally vigorous than ourselves will take our place, and the fittest intellectually will, spite of their bondage, survive.

It is our function, as it is that of every

true and living Church, to interpret the reality of God as far as may be in its fulness and totality, not only as the *love* of our hearts, not only as the *strength* of our deeds, but also as the *light* and *truth* of our intellect. It is our bounden duty to support and propagate true thought as well as to provide and foster fit means for Free Catholic worship. It is indeed too true that we live in an age of immoral compromise—when men do not scruple to stay in creed-bound churches after they have utterly abandoned the beliefs they are supposed to maintain as personal convictions. I am well aware that the ethics of creed subscription is thorny, full of difficulty and intricacy. Nevertheless, no Jesuitical casuistry or sophistry can avail to convince an honest and straightforward man that it is either right or honourable for men to stay in orthodox churches and countenance modes of thought which in their heart of hearts and before God they know to be false. Still, there they *are* in their hundreds and thousands: there they are in the pulpit and in the pew,

and this makes it all the more incumbent upon us who have cut our cables at the call of duty to support at whatever cost and sacrifice the doctrines which we have avowed in the eye of light and in the presence of all Israel. We of all people must stand up before the world and call men back to intellectual honesty—to veracity of thought and to truth of statement. This infidelity to conviction is a most portentous symptom of decay in our national morality. 'This tampering with sincerity,' said Dr. Martineau, 'not only arrests the advance to higher truth but eats like a canker into the morals of our time.' It has inevitably brought its penalty in well-deserved suspicion and contempt upon theologians and preachers and professing Christians, from those who would worship the Father not only in Spirit but in *Truth*, from those disciples of Christ who have learnt with Paul that 'love rejoiceth not in unrighteousness but *rejoiceth with the truth.*' Hence the great and urgent need, not only for increased insistence upon doctrine, but also of

increased loyalty to that doctrine when embraced. Let us hearten ourselves with those ringing words of Milton's *Areopagitica*: 'Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the world, so *truth* be in the field we do injuriously . . . to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple: whoever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?'

I would not however end with a mere justification of doctrine, but rather with that old and necessary caution that however important doctrine may be, still Religion is *always and everywhere before doctrine*, as the life is more than meat and the body than raiment.

Remember, burn it into your brain, that the first great thing is the Religious Life. The *greatest* of these is Love—an experience of God without which we cannot reason at all. We must get our data first; collect our facts—the facts given in our own soul and in human history—the facts of hunger and thirst after righteousness, the facts of high aspiration after holiness, the facts of

effort after personal consecration and godliness; the failures and victories of the soul, the high quest of the Holy Grail in the adventurous dream domains of the inward life. Let us not talk of penitence till we know what it is to abase ourselves before God, conscious of our sins. Let us not talk of 'the sense of sin' till the consciousness of guilt has marred our peace of mind. Let us not speak of communion with God unless we have felt his spirit surging into our own like the ocean tide into the river. Let us never speak of grace or forgiveness or reconciliation unless we have experienced these things in our own lives. Now and always we must live intimately with men and deeply in God, so that our hearts may go out in pity and compassion, in trust and faith, in love and adoration. And God will fill our souls with fresh *energies* for the *will*, rich *emotions* for the *heart*, and new and vital *truths* for the *understanding*. We shall know the truth and the truth shall make us free.

## SCIENCE AND RELIGION

WHEN it was kindly left to myself to choose a subject for this address,<sup>1</sup> I felt that I could most fitly select one that would rise naturally out of my own half-century's work as a learner, as a teacher, and as a labourer in the domain of Science ; because throughout that time my thoughts have constantly been directed to the relation of Scientific progress to Religious inquiry. As one who may now be considered in some degree a veteran in this service, I have thought that some of the results of that consideration might be fitly offered to an assembly like this.

Now, what do I mean by Science ? I regard it as *the intellectual interpretation*

<sup>1</sup> Delivered at the Unitarian Conference, Saratoga, U.S.A., 19 September 1882



*of Nature*, in contradistinction to the poetic or the artistic interpretation, each of which has its own especial field. The man of Science (whatever his particular department of research) studies the phenomena of Nature with senses rendered acute by habits of observation, aided by instruments capable of revealing to him what his unaided senses do not allow him to discern. He brings to that study perceptive powers trained to accurate appreciation of the indications of his senses, and of the instruments by which those senses are, so to speak, perfected and extended. To those perceptions he applies reasoning powers, cultivated and disciplined by careful training, for the construction of a fabric of thought upon the basis of the facts which he has observed.

The first consideration that I would bring before you, is *the vast extension* of our religious conceptions which Science has given us. I need not go over ground which is familiar, I presume, to all of you. I need not discuss the revelations of the telescope, the certain information which

we have gained, not only as to the vast numbers, but as to the vast distances of the celestial bodies—information which gives us the nearest approach to the conception of infinity that our finite minds are capable of receiving. It was said by a great thinker, at a time when we seemed to have come pretty nearly to the end of what we could learn from the telescope alone, that its revelations enabled reason to soar to heights where the imagination could scarcely venture to follow. I think you must feel the truth of this remark; but I would now ask you to follow me to a still greater height, by tracing a few of the steps in the progress of that most remarkable inquiry, which the invention of a totally new instrument, brought to a wonderful degree of perfection within the last quarter of a century, has enabled the scientific investigator to carry out; this inquiry having been prosecuted by the application of the strictest and severest scientific reasoning to the indications given by the spectroscope. If anyone, a quarter of a century ago, had ventured to assert

that within twenty-five years from that time we should be able to study the Chemical and Physical conditions of every body that the telescope can render visible with the highest powers possible to use—that we should be able to follow by its means the actual progress of that great Evolution of the physical universe which is now regarded as beyond the reach of discussion—every one would have believed him a dreamer. Yet, during those years, that which you remember as the Nebular Hypothesis has passed into the condition of an approved and accepted Theory.

It chanced to me not long ago to be present at a Clerical meeting in London, at which the writer of a paper spoke of the nebular hypothesis as one that we never hear discussed now; the difficulties attending it being so great that scientific men had put it aside. I was called upon to speak with reference to this subject; and I ventured to suggest that this reverend gentleman must have lived in a cave during the last thirty years, and was now in the condition of Rip Van Winkle;

for the reason that he did not hear this theory discussed, was simply because it had passed beyond the reach of discussion. It is a thing perfectly well established and settled, not in all its details as conceived by Laplace, but as regards its general features.<sup>(1)</sup>

What does this mean? It gives us the conception of a Creation not finished and completed, but one which is always going on, and has been always going on from the time when there was but one diffused fire-mist. It gives us a distinct conception of a *beginning*; for it is inconceivable that there should have been an infinite existence of matter in any shape, except in a con-

NOTE (1). Sir Archibald Geikie states in his 'Text Book of Geology' (1903 edition): 'The Nebular Hypothesis as ordinarily understood has recently been challenged by Dr. F. R. Moulton, who has brought forward calculations and arguments which, if sustained, will require considerable modification of the computations that have been made as to the heat that the sun has radiated, and as to the age of the earth.' The hypothesis has also been simultaneously attacked by Professor Chamberlin.—H.C.

dition of perfect homogeneousness ; and if perfectly homogeneous, it would have remained in the same condition through all eternity. The moment a departure from that state took place, *change* began the great Evolution. What could have produced this change, but the will and the power to disturb the previous homogeneity ? There must have been a *beginning* ; and the work of Creation has since been going on through all time as a continuous act. We can now study by the spectroscope not only the birth of worlds, but the ages of worlds—the ages of the various members of our planetary system. We can, for instance, say with regard to Jupiter and Saturn that they are still in an early stage of evolution. We used to be taught that Jupiter is no heavier than water, and Saturn as light as cork ; and we used to surmise what could be the material of these globes. We could not suppose Saturn to be really made of cork ; but could only speculate as to the materials of which these planets are formed, and whether they correspond in any degree

with those of our own globe. We now *know* that they do. We know that the question of their relative specific gravities is the question of their degree of consolidation; and that on their respective degrees of consolidation depends their ability to sustain organic Life. There have been many books written on the question, 'Are there more worlds than one?' We can now say with certainty that Mars, and probably Venus, do more or less correspond to our own Earth, while Jupiter and Saturn are not yet in that condition; and that the Moon, on the other hand, having cooled more rapidly, after passing through that consolidation, is now, in her old age, like dried-up scorix of extinct volcanoes.

Such being the revelations of Science, I think you must feel that they tend in a most remarkable degree to the extension and elevation of our Religious thought. For similar processes can be shown to be going on with grand uniformity of sequence, through the vast depths of space, in every aggregation of matter that the telescope can discern.

The unity of Creation is the great fundamental idea which all Science tends to establish. You are all familiar with the first great extension of that idea, from the terrestrial to the celestial, in that identification of the attraction of the Earth for the Moon and of the Sun for the Planets, with the attraction of the Earth for the stone that falls upon it, which we owe to the genius of Newton; and with the subsequent extension of that idea to the Stellar universe, which has been made by the study of the motions of the double stars, which have been found to follow the law of universal gravitation. We now find the same unity of composition, and the same manifestation of continuous, orderly sequence, in the process of consolidation.

And so completely has this idea of *continuity* now taken possession of the scientific mind of the day, that several of our ablest Physicists consider it the better method of studying the history of the evolution of our system, to work *backwards* from its present condition; and, beginning with the action of the Sun and Moon in the

production of the tides, to investigate the effect which this *must* have had during the earlier periods of their history, in the determination of the present rates of axial and orbital movement of the Earth and Moon.

These general considerations lead us to Geological inquiry—that is, to the history of our Earth since the first formation of its solid crust—and give a new and most interesting direction to that study.

No one now questions that the Earth has cooled down from a molten sphere, a condition like that which Jupiter and Saturn will present when they shall have shrunk by consolidation, we cannot say how many millions of years hence; for *they* have not yet by any means arrived at the condition in which geology regards the earth as having commenced. Some idea of the vast lapse of time required for geologic change may be derived from simple observation (such as I have just had the opportunity of making for myself on the great chasm of Niagara) of operations that have been in progress during the latest phases of its history. The



educated eye can there see with certainty the gradual attrition of the hard rock over which the great cataract flows ; and from the known rate of that attrition, it can be affirmed that at least thirty thousand years must have been required to scoop back this great chasm. That change has been probably made since man made his appearance on the earth ; at any rate, since the general surface of that region took its present shape after the last considerable period of disturbance. I have had again the opportunity of seeing those most ancient mountains of your country, the Laurentian : the study of what I believe to be the earliest form of living existence contained in those rocks, having been the special object that brought me on a visit to Montreal. There we are carried back to periods of time so remote that it is almost impossible to conceive them.—The phenomena of Geology are presented on so much grander a scale in this great Continent than in our country, that our comparatively limited ideas have to receive an extension and enlargement of which we

had scarcely a conception. The researches of your Professor Marsh in the earliest Tertiary strata, or those which connect the Chalk with the Tertiary, bridge over one of those great gaps, which former geologists were wont to consider the most marked epochs in geological history. Professor Marsh tells us that, in making these researches, strata were brought to light which have to be measured by the mile in thickness, where *we* have them of only a few hundred feet. Think of the enormous lapse of time involved in the deposition of that one comparatively recent formation; and then carry your minds backward through the remote Secondary, and the yet more remote Palæozoic ages, to the elevation of those archaic Laurentian mountains, the slow degradation of which afforded the materials of those old Silurian strata, over which I have been lately passing for hundreds of miles.<sup>(2)</sup>

NOTE (2). The writer of this note is not a geologist. He has, however, tried to make himself acquainted with the current arguments bearing on this point, and, with

The ideas to which Geological Science thus introduces us, in regard to the immense lapse of time required for the production of the long series of stratified deposits that form the crust of our globe, and to the continuity of the same methods of operation in that production, distinctly imply the identity of the Physical Causes to which they are due, and the continuity of their action. Geological science no longer concerns itself with the great cataclysms which were once supposed to

the reservation given below, it is his opinion that it would hardly be scientific to state the matter thus somewhat dogmatically at the present time. It must be remembered that at the time the author of this essay stated 'No one now questions that the Earth has cooled down from a molten sphere,' there was no reason for supposing that any spontaneous process could occur continuously in Nature except one attended with cooling. Now however that natural processes are known (in which the so-called radioactive elements, radium, uranium, thorium, etc., play so important a part) which occur continuously with a *gain* of heat, a self-heating planet is not

interfere with the orderly succession of formative processes—sweeping off the animals and plants of each period, and introducing a new series with each new group of mineral deposits. Geological science has for many years completely adopted the principle of *continuity*, and accepted it in its fullest entirety. There may have been more active changes at certain periods than at others, but there never has been a cessation of change. The same processes are in operation at the present time, as when the Laurentian

inconceivable. Accordingly the whole question must be faced a priori, as to how far it is necessary to assume a past period in which the earth was molten in order to explain geological facts. The writer has tried to find a statement of the evidence for considering that the earth must have been molten at one time, and has not been successful. It is more than probable that such a statement exists, and it is possible that there are conclusive reasons in its favour independent of any assumptions that the earth is a self-cooling planet. If this is so, Dr. W. B. Carpenter's above-quoted sentence still remains true.—H.C.

mountains were worn down by ice and water, to supply the materials of the sedimentary strata at their base.

These facts have a direct bearing on Religious thought, in extending our ideas not only of the vastness of creation, but of the continuity of creative operation; and in leading us to those conceptions of order and system, which strangely (to my mind) have led some to see in all this the result of blind necessity. Yet in every one of those great specimens (if I may use the term) of order and symmetry, that are presented in the architecture of a beautiful building, in the successful operations of a well-disciplined and well-commanded army, in the admirable harmony of a well-directed orchestra, what is that but the result of plan—design? I have never much rested on any individual instances of design, as proving the purposive adaptation of means to ends. For I have seen too many instances of 'chance' suitability (in the fitting of furniture to a house, for example), to allow me to feel that such an argument as Paley's could be rightly based on single

incidents of adaptation. But my own mind rests with the greatest satisfaction on the great conceptions of order and uniformity to which we are led by Palæontological science; and on those highest adaptations (as the human eye, or the eye of the Insect, each perfect in its kind) which have come into existence and attained perfection through a long series of antecedent changes, all tending in the upward direction.

One great object of the man of Science is the discovery of *laws* which express these Uniformities of Nature. There is a certain set of scientific men who constantly speak of the Laws of Science as *regulating* phenomena. Against this expression I always utter my protest, fortified by the authority of such masters of the Logic of Science as Herschel, Mill, and Whewell; all of whom agree that a law, in the scientific sense, is nothing more nor less than an expression of the *uniformities* which Science discerns in Nature, without any controlling or coercive power whatever. It is only a mistaken analogy, that such expressions

can be compared with the laws of a State. But even a Law of the State does not govern. It is the Power behind the law that governs ; and the law is an expression of the Will of that Power. Any law of nature as conceived by science really expresses in human language the nearest approach that man can form to the thought of the Creator. Kepler, that devoutest of men, when he discovered his great laws of planetary motion, rejoiced that he had been permitted to think the thoughts of God. And it is at the present time the highest privilege of the religious Scientist, to be able to believe that every step that he takes in giving a higher generality, a larger comprehensiveness, to his expressions of the Uniformities of Nature, is leading him nearer and nearer to the Divine Idea.

I come now to the scientific conception of *force* and *power*. It is not so many years ago, that several of our ablest Mathematicians and Physicists were expressing every mechanical phenomenon in terms of *motion* ; thus departing from the path

marked out by Newton, who expressed them in terms of *force*. I am glad to say that, in this and other departments of Physical science, men are now returning to the thought that it is in terms of *energy* or effective force that the phenomena of nature are to be best expressed. Modern science, moreover, grasps the idea of the Unity of the Forces of nature. There is not one force called Electricity, another called Heat, another Chemistry. These are merely modes of expression of certain manifestations of the great Energy of Nature, which it is necessary to classify and arrange. All scientific men now accept the doctrine that energy is one, and that there is neither beginning nor cessation of its action.

The Unity of the Physical Forces being thus the highest conception of Science, I side with those who push their speculations as to Physical Causation to the utmost limit, and who hold that nothing ought to check their perfect freedom in this kind of investigation, as long as it is based upon accurate data and carried on upon sound



methods. For, after all, it can land us only in the conception of one Force operating under a great variety of conditions, and in a statement of the one Law, or general expression of the conditions according to which that force acts. When we have attained that conception, Science ends. It seems as if, in some directions, we are approaching a Law of such generality as shall include even the law of universal Gravitation in the same expression as other great laws of Physics; and are getting a glimpse of the solution of Newton's great difficulty of 'action at a distance' without any intervening medium. We are like observers in a great mill, watching machines in motion, and tracing all this motion to one common force derived from a shaft that comes through the wall, bringing with it the *power* that does this work. Whence that power? We have to go to the other side of the wall to find out its source, and we trace it to a steam-engine or a water-wheel: so that in each case it ultimately comes from the Sun—because the fire that boils the water is

maintained by the combustion of the coal that was formed by the light and heat of the sun in bygone ages, while the water of the water-wheel is pumped up by the solar heat of the present time. In Physical science, we thus get to the Sun as the source of all our 'energy.' But whence the light and heat of the Sun? We go back to Nebular matter and to Chemical change: and we frame the best theories we can to account for their maintenance—the most remarkable of which is that of Dr. Siemens, who conceives of the Sun as a great self-feeding furnace, continuously regenerating itself. But even there we are led back to a *beginning*—the first departure from the state of perfect homogeneousness; and of this Physical science can give no account.<sup>(3)</sup>

NOTE (3). It should be realized that at the time this view was put forward it was very difficult, if not impossible, to form any idea of the mechanism of the process. Now, however, it is far less difficult to do so in consequence of recent discoveries of radioactive change attended by evolution of heat. The general view that seems

Having dwelt so long upon this part of my subject, I must be brief in what remains. One of the most important of the influences of Science on Religion, has been its emancipation from the trammels of authority. We all know what these trammels were in the Middle Ages. We know it was not merely the Church of Rome with its own dogmata, but the support that the Church gave to the dogmata of Aristotle, that was the great obstacle to progress. If I were to tell you now some of the conceptions which it would then

most probable is that radioactive changes known to be occurring in matter evolve sufficient heat to account for the temperature of the various bodies. Since the quantity of heat generated is proportional to the mass (radius)<sup>3</sup> and the quantity lost is proportional to the surface (radius)<sup>2</sup> it would be expected that if these processes were taking place uniformly the temperature of a world would be connected with its diameter in the sense that the hotter bodies would be the larger (the density being similar). This view seems to be borne out by the facts that the four heavenly bodies best known to astron-

have been heresy to question, you would be surprised that grown-up men and women could entertain notions so childish—such, for example, as that the Planets *must* move in circles, because the circle was the most perfect figure! So that, when Kepler found that Mars and other planets moved in ellipses, he promulgated it with fear and trembling, lest the Church should proceed against him for upsetting Aristotle's doctrine. And when Galileo dared to assert that a weight of ten pounds would fall no faster than a weight of one pound, it was so far against the prevailing doctrine,

omers, the Moon, Earth, Jupiter, and Sun increase progressively in the order given in size and brightness (and therefore in temperature). It may be urged in contradiction that large dark bodies are known, for example, the companion of Sirius. This exists in a different part of space, and if it were ring-shaped, or nebulous, or of small specific gravity, its darkness would be accounted for.

In composing Notes 2 and 3 the writer cordially acknowledges the assistance he has derived from a conversation with Mr. Frederick Soddy.—H.C.

that he had to prove it by ascending the leaning tower of Pisa, from the top of which, in the presence of all the Professors of the University, he let fall these two weights simultaneously, which fell in the same time, according to his prediction. That was the first step in the emancipation of Science.

Geological inquiry has been the last opponent of Theological prejudice. It has happened, rather curiously, that this prejudice has been strongest in Protestant countries; perhaps stronger in Great Britain than elsewhere. And why? You all know that Roman Catholicism was not based upon the Bible. It was based on the authority of the Church. The Church undertook the explanation of the Bible, or of such parts of it as it chose to pronounce upon. But, when Luther and Calvin and Melancthon undermined the authority of the Roman Church they were not prepared to accept perfect freedom of thought. Seeking to base their doctrines on authority they fell back on an infallible Bible. We all know what that idea of the

Infallibility of Scripture has led to. We know how Geology has had to fight its way inch by inch, especially in our country. I remember the history of the conflict; and I can tell you of curious occurrences in connexion with it.

Let me mention one of the last, which will strike you as most childish. You are doubtless acquainted with a book of considerable value, Dr. W. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible. I happened to know the influences under which that dictionary was framed. The idea of its publisher and of its editor was to give as much scholarship, and such results of modern criticism, as should be compatible with a judicious conservatism. There was to be no objection to Geology, but the universality of the Deluge was to be strictly maintained. The Editor committed the article 'Deluge' to a writer whom he considered trustworthy but, when the article came to him, he found that it was so excessively heretical that he could not venture to put it in. There was not time for a second article under that head; and, if you look in this

dictionary, you will find under the word 'Deluge' a reference to 'Flood.' Before 'Flood' came, a second article had been commissioned from a source that was believed to be safely conservative. But, when that article came in, it was found to be worse than the first. A third article was then commissioned, and care was taken to secure its 'safety.' If you look for the word 'Flood' in the dictionary, you will find a reference to 'Noah.' Under that name you will find an article written by a distinguished Professor of Cambridge, of which I remember that Bishop Colenso said to me at the time, 'In a very guarded way, the writer concedes the whole thing.' You will see by this under what trammels scientific thought has laboured.

The Antiquity of Man has similarly had to fight its way; but no one now would venture to question that great truth. For a long time, our English geologists were excessively conservative. They purchased their freedom to claim any number of ages that might be required for the pre-Adamite succession of strata, by holding to the date

of 4004 B.C. as that of the Creation of Man. On that point any heretic who ventured to question the accepted doctrine was told to be silent: and it was only when my friend Professor Prestwich, whose leanings were all in the other direction, brought forward as a thing beyond the reach of question, the fact that in the gravels of the valley of the Somme, flint instruments must have been deposited before the erosion of that river channel, and that there must have been an enormous lapse of time between the deposit of the upper and the lower gravels in which they are found—it was not until this was brought before the world in a form which could no longer be denied, that the Antiquity of Man was granted. Then was brought up a mass of evidence which had long been accumulating; and the question was discussed until a conclusion was attained which no one now disputes.

Once more, I would say that one of the most important influences which Science has exercised and is exercising, is the cultivation of the *love of truth for its own*



*sake*. The readiness to confess error has been the characteristic of all our most eminent workers. I remember that, when Professor Liebig was taunted with a mistake he had made, he replied, 'Show me a man who has made no mistake, and I will show you one who has never worked.' Every man of genius who has opened up a new path of inquiry has made mistakes in the early period of his inquiries.

I could not point to any more notable exemplification of that attribute—the love of truth for its own sake—than was given in the life of the late Charles Darwin. With Charles Darwin, as Professor Huxley said, 'the love of truth was the passion of his noble nature.' And what has been the result? With a splendid carelessness of personal calumny and of all selfish considerations, he simply followed on, step by step, his great inquiries. Nothing was too small or low for his investigation. The earthworm was not too trivial a subject for his study. Nothing was too mean, nothing too remote from his scientific range of thought. Everything was brought

in and combined, by that wonderful philosophic power of assimilation which he possessed in a degree beyond any man of his time—perhaps of all time. What has been the result? I attended his funeral in Westminster Abbey, along with, I may say, the greatest gathering of intellect that was ever brought together in our country. From those most impressive solemnities in our great National Mausoleum, I went straight to the Council of our Unitarian Association, which happened to be held on the same afternoon. And there I ventured, with the assistance of my friend Rev. W. H. Channing, to formulate a resolution which should express the feeling of that Council on the occasion. It was a most congenial duty to be requested to convey that resolution to Mrs. Darwin, and to be able to add what might make it of special interest to her. The Darwin and Wedgewood families had been closely associated in early days, as free religious inquirers, with Priestley and Unitarianism. Charles Darwin's father was a seat-holder in the Unitarian chapel at Shrewsbury; and, though Charles Darwin

was baptized in the Church, some of his brothers and sisters were baptized by the then minister of that chapel. I said to Mrs. Darwin that this resolution might come to her with the more interest, as having been framed in immediate sequence to the services at the Abbey, and because it came from a body, however small, that had *never been afraid of any truth whatever.*

'Every man who serves truth serves God; and the unconscious servants are often the truest servants of all.' I claim that all who are earnestly devoted to the cause of scientific truth, are true servants of God, though they may not be consciously serving him; for they are striving to promote that ultimate victory of knowledge over ignorance, of truth over error, of light over darkness, which is the greatest work of science. And it will be through the reflection of that light in Religious thought, that the highest influence of Science will be ultimately exerted; by promoting that victory of good over evil, of right over wrong, which will constitute the real Millennium of our race.

## THE REVOLT AGAINST CALVINISM IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

A REVOLT against Calvinism and the general thought and temper of the two preceding centuries is manifest in the Scottish literature of the eighteenth century. The spirit of those centuries was papal and feudalistic. Its ecclesiastical and political influence was autocratic. It repressed thought and aspiration. It was unfavourable to literature and art. It fostered haughtiness among the upper classes and servility among the lower. There was no democratic movement: the people had not risen to social consciousness. Life lacked integrity. The Church and State were both corrupt.

But the close of the pre-reformation period in Scotland was strangely marked

by a brilliant, meteoric literary display. There was a brief golden age of poetry which faded into darkness and silence.

With the Reformation a new spirit arose calling for veracity and serviceability. As an essential condition of fitness it demanded liberty and unity.

Scotland at the dawn of the Reformation was not a whole. The Protestant ideal had broken in upon the Papacy, and there was civil war.

The Reformation did not directly promote literature. At its inception it had but one definite purpose—to cast off the trammels and corruptions of Popery. That engrossed the time and power of the Reformers. But the liberty and virtue they promoted involved more than they intended.

Their main appeal was from the Pope to the Bible. They merely changed authorities, but the change involved the evolution of a new type of mind, virtually a new manhood. The people were united in their reverence and study of the Bible. The Scriptures as the sole divine authority had

to be examined and understood. For that purpose intellect was called into requisition: the rational faculties were stimulated to seek spiritual illumination. Reason was set in subjection to Scripture, but it was enfranchised. The ability to read was desired for the common people. The first fruit of the Reformation was the public school.

The Reformers, however, limited liberty and restricted learning. The freedom they granted did not extend beyond their own dogmatic boundaries; the learning they countenanced was Calvinistic. They gave no leave to literature of a comprehensive and humanistic kind. They liberated reason from Papal bonds to give it over to Presbyterial subjection.

Against the narrow, autocratic, dogmatic supernaturalism of Covenanting times, the freer minds of the eighteenth century revolted. They were Naturalists and Humanists touched by the scientific and the sympathetic spirit.

The theory of evolution had not then risen, but they had reason to believe that

man was not a ruined and helpless creature but a respectable being capable of self-control and elevation by deliberate determination. They advocated culture and promoted the study of human nature. They had but little taste for dogmatic theology or Biblical interpretation. They disliked bigotry and persecution, and sought fraternity and progress.

The purely theological literature of the eighteenth century gives clear evidence of the changed attitude. It is plain by it that the dawn of Naturalism had come and that the old Supernaturalism was fading. Blair's sermons reflect the transition, while the heretical discourses of McGill, Simpson, and others show that the roots of revolt had spread deep and wide.

When we enter the field of eighteenth century Scottish philosophy we find the revolt strongly marked. There is discernible a deliberate strenuous turning away from the Calvinistic conception of human nature. The Hutchesonians dissociated Moral Philosophy from Theology and built up a system of morality based

on natural sanctions. They had a theology of a deistical sort, but it was not the ground of their philosophy. They took experience as their basis, and wrought from the supposition that in human nature itself there was material and motive sufficient for a perfected humanity. 'Touch the natural springs of action properly,' they said, 'and the emotions will vibrate harmoniously. Bring intelligence, apply reason, co-ordinate the sentiments, and human character will become proportionate and fair.'

They were charged with 'infidelity,' and scornfully pointed at as those who resorted to 'gumlie dubs' of their 'ain delvin,' but the Genius of Philosophy acknowledges them as her prophets.

The course of Scottish philosophy ran outside the Church and in a contrary direction to orthodoxy. The philosopher was kept or driven out of the Church by the action of the Covenanters in making all schoolmasters and collegiate teachers, and also all students, on their passing examinations for degrees, sign the Covenant.



The result of the creedal requirement was the divorce of philosophy from the standards, and the taking up by its representatives of an attitude antagonistic to orthodoxy.

The philosophers, with Francis Hutcheson at their head, were actually outcasts of the Church. They exalted reason above the letter of the Bible, and applied it critically to the Biblical narratives. They were the first of the Higher Critics. Hutcheson set the daring example of ignoring the standards and going direct to Jesus himself. Hume carried the scepticism of reason into consideration of miracles and shocked orthodoxy by his arguments against the miraculous.

Paine's 'Age of Reason' was in demand among the people. Burns had it, and Thomas Muir of Huntershill was made a felon for circulating it. Even common belief was in revolt.

Philosophy had evidently left the dogmatic position and gone on to scientific and progressive lines. It desired to be practical, to be of immediate service.

Thought of heavenly things was exchanged for thought of earthly things. Political and social questions were elevated to prime importance, and Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson led the way to economic and historic spheres hardly yet realized.

Perhaps the philosophers trusted human nature as it was too much; perhaps they expected from reason more than it could give by itself; perhaps they overrated the power of liberty, but they were deliverers, pioneers, regenerators.

The French Revolution startled them as it did others, and made them revise their theories.

To them the credit belongs of raising a reverence for nature and humanity, and of setting thought and action on practical lines. They were precursors of natural science and of serviceable political and social activity.

Connected with them, in the line of intellectual and experimental development, we find a remarkable array of prophetic scientists, amongst whom Black, Leslie, and Hunter are the most distinguished.

In their writings there are notable anticipations of modern biological discoveries. Their reverent regard for Nature and devoted watching of her ways (to say nothing of the revolutionary ideas brought from Nature-study) were regarded as impious by those who, like the framers of the 'Confession of Faith,' despised 'the light of Nature.'

On the same practical lines we come upon the writings of Robert Owen and his experiment at New Lanark, and also upon the epoch-making discovery of steam by James Watt.

All these movements were apart from and virtually in opposition to the dominant Calvinism, but they were the animating and advancing activities of the century. While the creed-bound Church was vainly endeavouring to conserve its dogmas, to save the Bible from criticism, and to keep the mind fenced in by its articles, the thinkers and workers outside were stating their prophecies, hailing the new intelligence, and seeking the practical embodiment of their ideas.

Beside them, but nearer to the people, were the poets and novelists endeavouring to present the new faith in song and story. In the Scottish poetry which followed the Reformation we find a movement of mind directly expressive of the thoughts and emotions of the masses.

It, like the philosophy, shows a reference to Nature which marks a distinct reaction from the Supernaturalism and Inhumanism of the orthodox theology. This is visibly shown in Allan Ramsay's poetry. He introduced a new type of poesy—the spontaneous. Through him the Scottish muse, coming with the hill vigour and the meadow fragrance, moved fluently, and produced a native poetry. He escaped from the imitative temptation and let the Scottish feelings have an unconstrained and truly fitting expression.

Ramsay's Naturalism was vulgar, but it was sincere. Its exuberance was pardonable as an escape from pious repression. The rollicking, uncouth humour which had free scope in his poetry was, in its way, a protest against the galling restrictions set

up in the name of religion. It was an expression of the liberated passions not yet disciplined by culture, but rejoicing boisterously in freedom.

Ferguson was Ramsay's literary successor, and with purer feeling and mightier mastery of form carried up the naturalistic ideal and emotion. He ministered delightfully to a life that had decisively parted from the rigid orthodoxy that sought to shape and rule everything. The freed and uplooking soul had become aware of the infinite significance and sublime charm of Nature, and of the divineness of its own faculties. Its religion and morality had other roots and reasons than orthodoxy supplied. They were nourished and sustained by sympathy with the spiritual energies that circulated mysteriously in

the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean, and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

Comparing Ferguson, as he stands midway between Ramsay and Burns, with a representative Calvinistic preacher of his

day, we perceive that the poet and the preacher represent opposite conceptions of life. The preacher was the exponent of a dogmatic, speculative supernaturalism. He spoke scripturally; his matter was textual; he proclaimed regeneration by doctrinal belief, salvation by faith in the Church's creed.

The poet was the singer of a conception of natural worth, of life by the exercise of natural faculty. He got his authority from Nature and felt it to be his mission to glorify the natural. Religion to him was the enhalloiment of the human; sympathetic association for work; recreation was a sacrament; and reverence of the true, the beautiful, and the good was worship.

Without expressly declaring war against each other, the poet and preacher felt that they were opponents. The poet was defamed and persecuted by the preacher, and even to the day of Ferguson the declaration in the Preface to the 'Early Popular Poetry of Scotland' applies: 'The dark religious bigotry which distin-

guished the early Scottish life and character promoted in more than one way the destruction of the popular literature of all kinds.'

But the poet was avenged on the preacher. The difference between them was accentuated very distinctly in the poetry of Burns. In his chief poems the opposition was made clearly manifest; the revolt from Calvinism was avowedly confirmed. The Naturalism and Humanism that bubbled out in Ramsay from a gladsome fountain-head, and ran with blithe, sparkling clearness in Ferguson, deepened and broadened in Burns into a vigorous stream on whose banks rich verdure and beauteous flowers grew.

The critical power that trembled in Ramsay was strong and courageous in Burns, and attacked the Pharisaic orthodoxy of the age with unsparing vigour. Calvinism felt that a mighty adversary had arisen with whom it had to do battle till death.

The poems and songs of Burns gave substance and shape to the latent and

cowed aversion to and common uneasiness under Calvinism. He championed the independence that murmured but could not rise against dictatorial authority.

Ever since his day the line of literary revolt against Calvinism has been maintained. It is more or less distinct in all the poets. The only Scottish poet on whom the touch of Calvinism holds is Pollock. He is the solitary poetic representative of the Covenanting belief. All the rest shook off the Calvinistic influence, and in various strains were lyrists of Naturalism and Humanism.

Lady Nairne, though afflicted with a morbid Calvinism, rose above it in her songs. No Scottish lyrics are more inwardly saturated with natural affection than her exquisite songs. The suppressive influence of orthodoxy is seen in the fact that she dared not, even to her husband, avow the authorship of the sweet and tender effusions.

Tannahill, Aird, Cunningham, Hogg, Joanna Baillie, Jean Adams, Robert Nicoll, Ballantyne, William Miller, Alexander



Smith, David Gray, William and Robert Leighton, Blackie, James Nicolson, Alexander Anderson, James Smith—the hundred and one Scottish lyrists, are all distinctly anti-Calvinistic.

As the poetic and prophetic streams run through the Old Testament protestantly and refreshingly, so does the stream of poetry run through Scottish literature. It marks the course of vital feeling.

The Humanism that came with a strong tidal flow in Burns had in it a vindication of Scottish inspiration as contradistinguished from Hebraic inspiration. It did not belittle the Jewish afflatus, but it showed another independent of it; a Scottish inspiration quite as divine and worthy of its flow as the Jewish. The afflatus made the Scottish man aware that he had a soul, and that inspiration was not past.

That was the great emancipating, enlightening, and sanctifying service which the new anti-Calvinistic literature rendered. It broke the bonds of Hebraic restriction and secured a place for Scottish thought

and a function for Scottish manhood. Thenceforth the Scot could feel that he was God's, and called of him, as well as the Jew, by his own special endowments to think, speak, and act in the line of the divine purpose.

Burns made the literary calling and election of the Scottish mind sure. After its manifestation in him no one can mistake its character or doubt its power.

The rising of a distinctly Scottish literature which was destined to be cherished throughout the ages of Scottish life as a source of spiritual refreshment is a remarkable phenomenon. The literature has its source in human nature as reflecting and thrilled by the divine movements in earth, sky, and sea. It consists mainly of expressions of emotion in view of natural things or as touched by social sympathies. It contains an analysis of emotion and direction for it. The source of it is not Biblical; it is not technically pious in its character; it is unconnected with the kirk. In its spirit it is wholly opposed to sectarianism and stationariness.

When we compare the influence of the poetic literature of Scotland, which reached its highest watermark in Burns, with that of the literature produced in the sphere of orthodoxy, we see a power and permanency in the one far exceeding that of the other.

The critical poems of Burns that expose the hypocrisies of religious profession have vigorous life in them, while the sermons of polemics are dead and buried out of sight ; his poems that reflect the homely customs and joys of cotfolk have a perennial vitality, though the doctrinal treatises of their age are out of existence. His songs of human love are promoted to immortality, while the literature of eternal torment is cast to the limbo of unreason.

The difference in the thought and feeling of the song literature as compared with those of the Calvinistic literature goes all the way through.

The orthodox literature, on its theological side, has a severe and wrathful atmosphere ; terror and passive submission are the feelings it arouses ; but in the spontaneous literature the atmosphere is

sunny and sweet, the emotions are those of love and trust, and there is vigorous and aspiring life.

The orthodox literature places the chief concern on belief: the other places it on behaviour; the Calvinist prescribes the creed; the Humanism promotes character; with the one Religion and Morality are separate, to the other they are aspects of the same thing—reverence for the essentialities of life. On its underside that reverence is moral; on the upper side it is religious.

Experience has shown which of the two classes of literature—the Calvinian or the anti-Calvinian—is the more congenial to the Scottish soul. There is hardly an honoured survival of any sort of the Calvinistic literature of the eighteenth century. Even the orthodox Churches have left it behind. They carry their ancient standards without belief and find them impediments. All the creeds were forced products, and they and the catechisms together are now intolerable. They have only a legal existence; morally they are repudiated.

But the Humanistic literature lives on ; the development of human nature makes it more and more precious. It is actually imperishable. The two literatures are opposite in their character and exercise contrary influences.

There can be little if any doubt as to which of the two influences has been the healthier and greater. Take as representative poems 'The Cottar's Saturday Night,' 'The Holy Fair,' and 'The Address to the De'il,' and compare their influence with that of the favourite reading of rigid Calvinists, and then say which has had the more truly vitalizing influence on the Scottish mind.

Or take as typical lyrics 'Scots wha hae and 'A man's a man for a' that,' and consider whether these or 'The Confession of Faith' make manifest the line on which Scottish character has most richly and rightly developed.

Again, consider such songs as 'The Land o' the Leal,' 'There's nae Luck about the House,' and 'Auld Robin Gray,' and see whether their influence or that of the

'Shorter Catechism' has been the better. The prompt verdict is sure to be given for the songs.

There is one department of Scottish literature that shows a distinction clearly anti-Calvinistic. In the Scottish nature there are veins of strong and fine humour, but their opening was disallowed by Calvinism. By Calvinistic authority humour was profane, and fun, satire, and drollery were Satanic. A smile was hardly permissible, and even a genial laugh was deemed ungodly. The 'rigid feature' was held to be a mark of piety, and was never to be relaxed. All mirth had to seek opportunity out of the Church's bounds, and was driven into illicit ways.

Indeed, the pathetic, as much as the humorous, was repressed by the authoritative sternness. All natural feeling was regarded as corrupt and had to be restrained. Especially when emotion took a dramatic form it was to be rigidly repressed. Plays, whether comic or tragic, were regarded as the worst form of literature. Songs and poems intended to glorify

human passion and to arouse affectionate or hilarious feeling were stigmatized as evil.

All the recreative emotions—the pathos that enlarges and purifies, the mirth that vivifies and gladdens, the fire and flame that rise indignantly against harshness and glow reprovingly around folly—these were declared to be improper, if not wicked, and the people were driven from them to their psalm books and Bibles.

But the humorous literature has justified itself, and along with the pathetic has risen to immortality. These together form permanent part of the spontaneous literature of Scotland.

We may glance now particularly at Scottish fiction. From Walter Scott to John Douglas Brown the line of novelists stretches far. In the great literary wizard we find a Germanic influence which met and qualified the French influence affecting earlier writers. The German spirit touched Scott with a genial romanticism. His tales and poems mark a turning-point in Scottish literature. His genius for romance introduced an element needed for the

correction of Calvinism and of the drier Humanism also.

Calvinism, on its literary side, was bound to textual methods: the letter held it in bondage. The little imagination and poetic feeling which it had were subdued to a stiff literalism. Its intellect wrought within a cramped dogmatic area, and was pragmatic and mechanical. All its thoughts, its manner, its symbols, its ideas were hardened in conformity with its cast-iron system. Its pious prose was monotonous, heavy, cumbrous, and its religious poetry was rigid, bare, and unmusical. It lacked spirituality and ideality: the imagination that fulfils the real. It needed the touch of romance, the saving grace of poetic sensibility.

In its system Humanity was a ruin, a corrupt remnant of a pristine perfection, fit only for abhorrence. Romanticism saw nobleness and beauty in humanity, and arrayed it imaginatively in the virtues of its enthusiasm.

Scott discerned the solidarity of the human race, and loved to show the action



of the compassions that dissolve social distinctions and unite men as human beings. He was cosmopolitan in his treatment of men. He virtually set aside the theory of a single select people, and glorified the truly human in whatever nation it was found. Like Shakespeare he was for mankind. He found the heroic, the magnanimous, the self-sacrificing spirit in all classes, and delighted to represent its action.

He revived the romantic favour for strength and valour found in the old ballads and folk-songs, and showed a prowess and chivalry which was not of ecclesiastical make or connected with orthodoxy.

Without deliberately intending it, Scott was anti-Calvinistic in his treatment of human nature. He takes us into the company of swineherds, gipsies, and outlaws, and shows us traits of character that are admirable. To the Calvinist such are fit for hell only: he thinks that even to look at them favourably is to become partaker of their wickedness.

The Romanticist redeemed even the 'Jolly Beggars' from scorn, and brought them into the pale of the human with a saving sympathy. With Scott there came also the touch of poetic insight needed for the interpretation of the Bible. In his day there was no true insight into the Bible. The dogmatist was blind to the real nature of the Biblical literature. It is mainly romantic and poetic and its best interpreter is the poet and artist. The Creed-maker is the worst of all Biblical interpreters.

Scott's attitude to the Covenanters indicates an aversion to their narrowness and bigotry. He had more sympathy with the culture and statesmanship of Claverhouse. He had a devout mind and large compassions, and his influence as a story-teller, so far at least as the conception of human nature is concerned, is opposite to that of Calvinism.

An examination of the writings of Scottish novelists, from Miss Ferrier onwards, would detect an anti-Calvinistic interest in human beings. The lady who

introduced the domestic novel had no scorn of human character. She analysed compassionately, and even in her satire was kindly, like Burns before her. Galt, in his parochial way, found heroes and heroines in villages, and while he dealt with common tragedies he did not see any reprobation on God's part.

In Allan Cunningham and James Hogg we find a fresh naturalism and genial humanism far apart from Calvinistic thought and feeling.

The 'Tales of the Borders' that delighted our forefathers so highly were intensely humanistic. They were in the romantic vein, but there was a pathos and humour in them of a counthie and hopeful kind. Laughter and tears followed wonder and terror in the reading of them, and the mind and heart were stirred to admiration of the heroic and compassion with the distressed.

Even these were forbidden by the strictly orthodox, for it was instinctively felt that their attitude to human nature was not that of the Confession. They were

actually an antidote to Calvinism: they gave scope to thought and sanctity to affection, and prepared the people for a theology with reason in it.

In the line of these tales we have those of Robert Louis Stevenson. He too was a romancer and loved to present his heroes in striking situations and gather round them the weird and awful. In him and the other story-tellers we have a style utterly unlike the stiff, stilted style of orthodox dogmatists. That alone is much, for it indicates a new and higher spiritual taste.

In Stevenson's poetry we find traces of the heretical which manifest a mystical rationalism beyond all the creeds. It is not Calvinism that he sings, but another faith born of the science and spirituality of the nineteenth century. His prayers prove that he was more with the mystics than the dogmatists. They are the simple, trustful outbursts of a childlike soul.

George Macdonald's tales and poems more directly than any other nineteenth century writings express the revolt of the

Scottish mind from Calvinism. His early poems, 'Within and Without,' 'A Hidden Life,' 'The Disciple,' etc., are decidedly anti-Calvinistic. Indeed, he was the first of the poets after Burns who gave specific expression to the new Protestantism. He sang the struggles and sorrows of the Scottish soul in the cell of Calvinism, and gave it light and cheer for its exodus. His poems are saturated with the spiritual satisfaction that proceeds from the idea of God's Fatherhood. That idea marks the line of cleavage between the Calvinism and the Humanitarian theology. Macdonald was well aware that the Calvinistic system is based on the conception of God as sovereign. Its atmosphere and apparatus are despotic; its procedure is legal; its whole build is autocratic. God is throned in almightiness: human beings are his subjects to be elected and blest or reprobated and tormented as he wills. He rules by might and judges in wrath. The relation between him and his creatures is entirely official: there is no moral standing between them, and hardly any legal

sufferance, for his will is arbitrary. He acts solely as he pleases, and being absolute must not be questioned.

But with God, the Father, as George Macdonald represents him, we are in a home; the relation between us is constituted by affection; we are not subjects but sons and daughters. It is love that rules and judges, love that directs and forgives, love that educates and destines. God is not the sovereign official clothed with despotic might, but the Perfect Father, holding his children by the sympathetic power of a supreme love.

George Macdonald deliberately chose the Humanitarian conception, and devoted his art to the presentation of it to his countrymen. His revolt from Calvinism is distinctly manifested in 'Robert Falconer.' No indictment against Calvinism drawn up in the fiercest days of the Morisonian onslaught was so scathing as that contained in the story of a boy's experience under Calvinistic training.

In the person of Mrs. Falconer there is shown the unimaginative severity, the

unreasoning credence, and the stubborn inhumanity of Calvinistic character, and at the same time the abject terror and agonizing misery accompanying Calvinistic belief. And in Robert there is revealed the harsh cramping, the painful perversion, and the continuous crucifixion of all natural intellectual and affectional movement. Calvinism stands in the story exposed in its blind and grim bigotry and baleful repressiveness.

Though Barrie does not express himself theologically or give an explicit indication of his attitude to Calvinism, his dealing with ministers, elders, and kirk folk is such as shows that he does not favour the sectarian and dogmatic temper of orthodoxy. His characters have the Calvinistic cramp upon them, and he intends us to see and dislike it. The blithe humour, the gentle affection, the native strength of mind, the trust and courage which Calvinism suppressed are the things he delights in. The dour, bigoted, superstitious side of Scottish character which Calvinism superinduced as a parasitic second nature is not

the one that Barrie brings into view. His characters are Calvinistic in their circumstances and in their make, but he redeems and transforms them, and sets them in the light of natural goodness.

Crockett and Ian Maclaren do the same. The new light shed by the Fatherhood of God is on the men and women they glorify. In the radiance of that light they show the promise and potency of a nobler manhood and womanhood than Calvinism could produce.

If but in passing a story may be mentioned which in another way, but even more strongly than 'Robert Falconer,' shows the moral mischief wrought by Calvinism—'The House with the Green Shutters.' The selfish, sordid, savage despotism bred by Calvinistic influence, with its gigantic monopoly and ruthless cruelty, is terribly portrayed. Its village tyrant is a reflection of the despotic sovereign who

Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell  
A' for his glory.

Its unsparring representation of the in-



grained Calvinistic characteristics is almost enough to make one ashamed to own himself a Scotchman.

No review of the literature of Scotland would be complete without a reference to the unique writings of Carlyle. In him, as in Scott, we find a Germanic influence, but with the Craigenputtock thinker it went deeper. It gave him at once a spirit and a style as a writer. He had all the Covenanters' spiritual earnestness to be right with God, but along with that he had philosophic passion, and could not be content till the question of the soul was settled. He grafted the Calvinistic sourness on to a large philosophy and evolved a sweeter and brighter flower of faith. His phraseology is Calvinistic, but his philosophy is not: in fact, he, more than any other Scottish writer, helped to transform Calvinism from the philosophic side, and to develop concern for at-onement with God into a rational and ethical religion. He roused an ethical passion which regenerated the soul.

The crossing of Scottish Calvinism with

German Philosophy was the best thing that happened to the Scottish soul in the nineteenth century. The Scotchman had been taught to dread investigation, shun criticism and renounce reason, as things that destroyed religion; but Carlyle showed the possibility of having a lofty and sincere theism and a robust religion along with the most thorough rationalism. His introduction of the German thought to the Scottish soul was its deliverance, and the opening to it of a new world of intelligence and faith. The regenerative effects of that introduction are still proceeding.

The influence of Carlyle made for enthusiasm in truthseeking, sincerity in believing, and earnestness in living. After it came the enlarging and enriching influence of physical science. That influence gave the intellect a fresh field and a new hope. It produced in Scotland a succession of scientists, all of them more or less heretical—Brewster, Lyell, Geikie, in the first rank; Miller, Dick, and Edwards, in the second. In that greater and more complex world to which physical

science has introduced us, we need more than ever the fervent earnestness of Carlyle, and there are symptoms of its return with even a loftier and a more joyous faith.

Our review of Scottish literature has shown us that the really native and spontaneous portions are not Calvinistic; that the Scottish mind and heart take more naturally and kindly to a faith which 'blends with the light of rising and of setting suns, with the flying cloud, the singing bird, and the breath of flowers,' and has its sanction in reason and affection.

Only when Scotland has set herself to develop her own divine endowments, will she have a religion and morality worthy of her land and people. Let her take deeply home to her heart the sage counsel of her greatest poet:—

Preserve the dignity of man  
With soul erect,  
And trust the Universal Plan  
Will all protect.

## GEORGE MACDONALD'S INFLUENCE ON SCOTTISH RELIGION

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### *Robert Falconer's Plan for emptying Hell*

GEORGE MACDONALD is a representative of a type of mind which though born and bred in strict orthodoxy departed from it.

Like Thomas Carlyle and Robert Louis Stevenson, he is a notable example of variation from Calvinism. His heresy is not a 'sport' but an 'effect,' more or less direct, of subtly working natural causes.

He first saw the light in a circle of the severest Scottish Calvinism: in his childhood and youth he was subjected to the repressive influence of this circle, and yet when he started to express his own deliberate convictions he showed that his thoughts were not those of his fathers.

By his earlier writings we see that his departure from the sphere of spiritual

bondage was caused partly by a constitutional disposition towards freedom, and by irresistible outdrawing influences operating in the atmosphere of his time.

Seven years before Macdonald entered the University of Aberdeen, Charles Darwin returned from the voyage in which he discovered the new world in which science now lives.

At the same time, Ralph Waldo Emerson published his first work, 'Nature,' which set forth his spiritual vision of the law whose reality the intelligence of Darwin demonstrated.

These two, emerging from different and distant points were pioneers of the way of the new thought which required the regeneration of Theology and Religion.

By the make of his mind Macdonald was likely to be more attracted and more deeply influenced by spiritual philosophy like that set forth by Emerson than by the physical theories of Darwin, but it is evident that he was a reflector of both.

He is quite Darwinian in the verse which occurs in 'The Diary of an Old Soul' :—

Leave not thy son in half-made beastly guise,  
Less than a man with more than human cries—  
An unshaped thing in which Thyself cries out !  
Finish me, Father ; now I am but a doubt,  
O make thy moaning thing for joy to leap and  
shout.

But while open to the declarations of the physicist, Macdonald had the constitution of a spiritist. He had the poet's divination, and was saved from the tyranny of Calvinistic creeds by his fine imagination. Out of the prison of the Catechism and Confession he emerged with the song of a new faith.

His earlier poems are full of the Naturalism and Humanism that Calvinism forbade ; but his express protest against Calvinism, in the form in which his countrymen could best understand it, was made in ' Robert Falconer.'

The chief value of the group of northern stories of which ' Robert Falconer ' is the most special theologically, lies in their portraiture of persons living in a Calvinistic atmosphere.

Born and bred in that atmosphere,

Macdonald knew it by experience, but having escaped from it, he turned upon it analytically, to identify its elements and compare its products.

His pictures of northern village life are unsurpassed in quaint vividness. He had a strong touch of the power that Burns showed of making his characters stand out in full individuality; much also of David Wilkie's skill in grouping. He saw the sombre humour and stern pathos of northern life; its grey grimness as it struggled with the forces of a rigorous climate; its subdued aspect under the fear of God. With a gentle sympathy for mirth, and a keen eye for drollery, he is never away from the seriousness of life pressed upon the people by the Creed which ever kept hell before them.

He caught the Calvinistic atmosphere at its change, when a softer and balmier air was coming upon it, and its austerities were yielding to the larger hope. He saw the artificial severity of character produced by the fear inwrought into the spiritual constitution of the people; the sensual

baseness which the fear drove into darker haunts; the hypocrisies accompanying the irrationalities that men were required to believe; and withal the gawkiness and unfinishedness of the common folk.

In 'Robert Falconer,' he depicted the soul of his people struggling to be free from the Calvinism that had bound and confined them.

If he did not deliberately set himself to show the breaking of the meshes, he instinctively saw that the soul was yearning to be free, and that a larger and sweeter sphere of life was being prepared for it.

In Robert Falconer's grandmother we have shown the type of character formed under the influence of Calvinism. Her mental peculiarities are thus described. 'Her conscience was more tender than her feelings. The first relation she bore to most that came near her was one of severity and rebuke, but underneath her cold outside lay a warm heart, to which conscience acted the part of somewhat capricious stoker, now quenching its heat with the cold water of duty, now stirring



it up with the poker of reproach and ever treating it as an inferior and a slave.

'But her conscience was on the whole a better friend to her race than her heart. She not infrequently took refuge in severity of tone and manner from the threatened ebullition of a feeling which she could not otherwise control, and which she was ashamed to manifest. . . .

'Hence in doing the kindest thing in the world she would speak in a tone of command, even of rebuke, as if she were compelling the performance of the most unpleasant duty in the person who received the kindness. . . .

'To Robert she was wonderfully gentle for her nature and sought to exercise the saving harshness which she still believed necessary, solely in keeping from him every enjoyment of life which the narrowest theories as to the rule and will of God set down as worldly. Frivolity, of which there was little in this sober boy, was in her eyes a vice; loud laughter almost a crime; cards and *novelles*, as she called them, were such in her estimation as to

be beyond characterization. Her commonest injunction was "Noo be douce," uttered to the soberest boy she could ever have known.'

With all her stateliness and sincerity, Mrs. Falconer is not an admirable character. She is rather a kind of ogre, made such by the 'dreadful articles of her creed.'

The gentler and sweeter elements in her nature were gnarled and embittered by her Calvinism. She grew in the shadow, and was spiritually stunted and impoverished. The same kind of severity which thought itself pious and showed its rigour in the burning of Servetus, was the motive of her taking away Robert's fiddle from him and putting it to the flames.

Her Calvinism made her miserable. Her belief in election prevented her trust that her wayward son would be saved. She lived in continual anguish regarding him. He was away, she knew not whither, a prodigal, and his fate was heavy on her soul. Her wrestlings with God in prayer for him were agonizing. Her motherhood

instinctively flew to its divine source, but her Calvinistic training forbade trust in her motherly feelings.

She was taught that her mother-love was corrupt, a vain deceptive thing, and though it prompted all that was good in her affection she had to cast it out as a vile inspiration, and bow loveless under the inflexible justice of the Almighty.

Thus Calvinism tore and crushed her heart, and made her sceptical of the holy spirit of her motherhood.

Mrs. Falconer was a woman of noble character naturally, but at the command of her creed she had to sacrifice her best self, and find her religion in her worst self. Much Evangelical condemnation has been spent on savage religious rites—the tortures and horrors connected with barbaric sacrifices, but under Calvinism spiritual torture and horror have proceeded of a kind more inhuman than any found among 'heathens.' By these the best in Scottish manhood and womanhood was repressed and vitiated.

We see by Mrs. Falconer the fatal illogicality of the separation in the Calvin-

istic creed of love and justice. She was taught that God's justice was separate from his love, and that while his love was fain to save, his justice must damn. If ever she thought that love and justice were one: that justice was the effect of right love, she would have been afraid of her thought and been obliged to reckon it a blasphemy.

Her life was a spiritual suicide at the bidding of her harsh faith. No one who had studied the influence of Calvinism in its own circle can doubt that, in Mrs. Falconer, George Macdonald represents in complete veracity a real product of its factorship. It is painful to read his judgment over the product, pronounced with compassion but with candour: 'She felt bound to go on believing as she had been taught; and her submission and obedience led her to accept as the will of God . . . that which it was anything but giving him honour to accept as such. Therefore her love to God was too like the love of the slave or the dog; too little like the love of the child, with whose

obedience the Father cannot be satisfied until he cares for his reason as the highest form of his will.'

No severer indictment against Calvinism was ever written than that; and its proof in the fact of a typical character cannot be overturned. But there is worse than that in 'Robert Falconer.' The author shows us the backwash and debris along with the direct effects of Calvinism. The vagrants, the dissolute, the wantonly wicked: Shargar's mother, 'Dooble Sanny,' Lord Rothie, and the rest of the squalid and ravenous set, appear as the by-products of the fearful creed.

It taught men to put a low estimate on themselves, to assume their total depravity, and their condemnation to misery, and they believed in accordance with the estimate.

They were instructed that good works were regarded by God as filthy rags, and so were prevented from attempting goodness. It was drilled into them that they were 'elect' or 'non-elect,' not for any virtue or vice in them, but solely by God's sovereign will, and so it did not matter for

salvation what their character was. The effect was positively demoralizing.

And there can be little doubt that the sensuousness which showed itself in illegitimacy and drunkenness was a direct result of the suppression of spirit to which the people were subjected. Denied open and proper means of pleasure, they resorted to secret and vicious means; without resources of innocent recreation, they indulged in reckless wantonness.

'The Symposium' in the 'Boar's Head,' with its scandal and intoxication, is an evidence of the profanity of human faculty which went on among men whom Calvinism set to do nothing better. Much has been said by the apologists of Calvinism for its truthfulness to the Bible, its logicality, and its power of welding a nation, but 'Robert Falconer,' being witness, Calvinism bewildered the Scottish people, arrested the development of their genius, and coarsened and hardened their life and character.

— Except 'The House with the Green Shutters,' no piece of Scottish literary

work so truthfully shows Calvinism its own grizzly image, as 'Robert Falconer' does. Neither Douglas Brown nor George Macdonald deliberately intended to expose the 'seamy side' of Calvinism, but by simply showing village life under the influence of dogmatic teaching prevailing for ten generations, they did actually make manifest the kind of man and woman and of society produced by Calvinism. No critic of Calvinism ever did so effectually expose the demoralizing tendencies of the system as George Macdonald did in this book. The bewildering and dehumanizing influence of the authorized Scottish theology is, however, most effectively exposed in Robert Falconer himself, the hero of the story.

His spiritual portrait is carefully, sympathetically drawn. Robert was growing intellectually and becoming sensible of cramps and stiflings.

'His was a nature which, failed in one direction, must, absolutely helpless against its own vitality, straightway send out its searching roots in another.' Of all forces,

that of growth is the one irresistible, for it is the creating power of God, the law of life and being. Therefore no accumulation of refusals, and checks, and twinings, and forbiddings, from all the good old grandmothers in the world could have prevented Robert from striking root downward and bearing fruit upward, though as in all higher natures, the fruit was a long way off as yet.

'But his soul was only sad and hungry. He was not unhappy, for he had been guilty of nothing that weighed on his conscience: he was only much disappointed, very empty, and somewhat gloomy.

'To understand Robert's spiritual condition we must remember that around the childhood of Robert, which he was fast leaving behind him, there had gathered no tenderness. He had no recollection of having ever been kissed. From the darkness and negation of such an embryo existence, his nature had been unconsciously striving to escape—struggling to get from below ground into the sunlit air, sighing after a freedom he could not



have defined, the freedom that comes, not of independence, but of love—not of lawlessness, but of the perfection of law.

'And there now arose within him, not without ultimate good, the evil phantasms of a theology which would explain all God's doings by low conceptions; low I mean for humanity even, of right, and law, and justice, then only taking refuge in the fact of the incapacity of the human understanding when its own inventions are impugned as divine. In such a system hell is invariably the deepest truth, and the love of God is not so deep as hell. Hence, as foundations must be laid in the deepest, the system is founded in hell, and the first article in the creed that Robert Falconer learned was, "I believe in hell."'

That reduction of Calvinism to a belief in hell shows the incisiveness of the analysis of George Macdonald. Laid completely bare, Calvinism is belief in hell: that is the stark, grim substance of it. What a hideous, hateful thing it thus appears!

We talk in horror of heathen idols, but

there is nothing in heathen theology more monstrous and positively horrible than the devil of Calvinism in whose fear the Scottish people have cowered so long. To name God in connexion with that hideous creation of morbid fancy is to profane the name of God; and to assert that the Infinitely Good created such a monster for the purpose of tormenting some of his children for ever, is to blaspheme against goodness.

Like all other Scotch boys brought up religiously on the Shorter Catechism, Robert Falconer was constrained to believe in hell. He had been so instructed that it was inevitable that 'when a thought of religious duty arose in his mind, it appeared in the form of escaping hell, of fleeing from the wrath to come. For his very nature (he was informed) was hell, being not born *in sin* and brought forth *in* iniquity, but born sin and brought forth iniquity.

'And yet (he was told) God made him. He must believe that. And he must believe, too, that God was just, awfully just, punishing with fearful pains those

who did not go through a certain process of mind which it was utterly impossible they should go through without a help which he would give to some and withhold from others, the reason of the difference not being such, to say the least of it, as to come within the reach of the persons concerned. And this God they said was love. It was logically absurd, of course.<sup>1</sup>

But though absurd, the thought sown in Robert's mind persisted there. 'To him God seemed to lean over the world, a dark care, an unmovable fate, bearing down with the weight of his presence all aspiration, all budding delights of children and young persons ; all must crouch before him, and uphold his glory with the sacrificial death of every impulse, every admiration, every lightness of heart, every bubble of laughter.

<sup>1</sup> No one ever dreamed of saying—at least such a glad word of prophecy never reached Rothieden—that, while nobody can do without the help of the Father any more than a new born babe could of itself live and grow to a man, yet that in the

giving of that help the very fatherhood of the Father finds its one gladsome labour ; that for that the Lord came ; for that the world was made ; for that we were born into it ; for that God lives and loves like the most loving man or woman on earth, only infinitely more, and in other ways and kinds besides, which we cannot understand ; and that therefore to be a man is the soul of eternal jubilation.

Robert began to take fits of soul saving. He made many frantic efforts to believe that he believed : took to keeping the Sabbath very carefully—that is, by going to Church three times, and to Sunday School as well ; by never walking a step save to or from Church ; by never saying a word upon any subject unconnected with religion, chiefly theoretical ; by never reading any but religious books ; by never whistling ; by never thinking of his lost fiddle, and so on—all the time feeling that God was ready to pounce upon him if he failed once ; till again and again the intensity of his efforts utterly defeated their object by destroying for the time the

desire to prosecute them with the power to will them. But through the terrible vapours of these vain endeavours, which denied God altogether as the maker of the world, and the former of his soul and heart and brain, and sought to worship him as a capricious demon, there broke a little light, a little soothing, soft twilight, from the dim windows of such literature as came in his way.'

The one dread subject of Robert's thought was 'the devil.' Why did God make him? Why did he not convert him? He read in Klopstock's *Messiah* of a repentant cherub, mourning over his apostasy, haunting the steps of Christ, and desiring to return to his place in heaven, and the idea of the repentance of Satan got hold of him.

'Shargar,' he said one day, suddenly, to the helpless lad he had befriended, 'What think ye? Gin a deil war to repent, wad God forgie him?' 'There's no sayin' what fowk wad dae till ance they're tried,' returned Shargar, with instinctive caution; and Robert knew

that he could get no light on the question from Shargar.

In his confidence with Eric Ericson, the Caithness student, Robert ventured to state the haunting question:—

‘Do you think, Mr. Ericson, do you think if a devil was to repent, God would forgive him?’

Ericson turned and looked at him. Their eyes met. The youth wondered at the boy. He had recognized in him a younger brother, one who had begun to ask questions, calling them out into the deaf and dumb abyss of the universe.

Ericson himself had intellectual difficulties, and there were rifts in his theology. So he somewhat enigmatically replied:—

‘If God was as good as I would like him to be, the devils themselves would repent.’

Robert was sorely troubled with the answer, and ‘choking with a strange mingling of horror and hope, he said:

“Then ye dinna believe that God is good, Mr. Ericson?” “I didn’t say that, my boy,” replied the gentle student. “But to know that God was good and fair and

kind—heartily, I mean, not halfways, and with *ifs* and *buts*, my boy, there would be nothing left to be miserable about.”

With Ericson, Robert's thoughts about God began slowly to crystallize. But Ericson went away, and he was left alone with Grannie.

One Sunday afternoon, being set to it by the 'botched-up' sermon he had heard, and the chapter about Benjamin's sack that he read, Robert broached the mighty subject.—'I hae been thinkin' o' a plan for maist han' toomin' hell.'

Grannie was startled, but being curious to know what had been moving in his mind let him proceed, while she watched 'ready to spring upon the first visible hair of the old Adam.'

By a circular route Robert led up to his plan. 'Weel, gin I win in there, the verra first nicht I sit doon wi' the lave o' them. I'm gaun to rise up an' say—that is, gin the Maister, at the heid o' the table, dinna bid me sit doon—an' say, "Brithers and sisters, the haill o' ye hearken to me for ae minute; an' O Lord! gin I say wrang, just tak the

speech frae me, and I'll sit doon, dumb an' rebukit. We're a' here by grace and no by merit, save his, as ye a' ken better nor I can tell ye, for ye hae been langer here nor me. But it's just ruggin' an' rivin' at my hert to think o' them 'ats doon there. Maybe ye can hear them. I canna. Noo, we hae nae merit, an' they hae nae merit, an' what for are we here and them there? But we're washed clean and innocent noo; and noo, when there's no wyte lying upo' oursels, it seems to me that we micht beir some o' the sins o' them 'at hae ower mony. I call upo' ilk ane o' ye at has a frien' or a neebor down yonner, to rise up an' taste nor bite nor sup mair till we gang up a' thegither to the fut o' the throne, and pray the Lord to let's gang and do as the Maister did afore's, and beir their griefs and carry their sorrows doon in hell there; gin it may be that they may repent and get remission o' their sins, an' come up here wi' us at the long last, and sit doon wi's at this table, a' throw the merits o' oor Saviour Jesus Christ, at the heid o' the table there, Amen."'



Half ashamed of his long speech, half overcome by the feelings fighting within him, and altogether bewildered, Robert burst out crying, and ran out of the room up to his own place of meditation, where he threw himself on the floor.

The boy was suffering the divine pains of soul travail, but dare not be satisfied with the higher thought striving for birth.

His grannie was deeply touched, but could not permit the humanity in her to come fully out. When tea was ready, she sent Shargar to look for him, and when he appeared she was so gentle to him that it woke quite a new sensation in him. But after tea was over she said :—

'Noo, Robert, let's hae nae mair o' this. Ye ken as weel's I do that them 'at gangs *there*, their doom is fixed, and naething *can* alter't. An' we're not to aloo oor ain fancies to carry's ayont the Scriptor. We hae oor ain salvation to work oot wi' fear an' trimblin'. We hae naething to do wi' what's hidden. Luik ye till't 'at ye win in yersel. That's enouch for you to min' '

So the earnest soul of the boy seeking light was rebuffed and consigned to darkness.

In the person of Mrs. Falconer we have a pitiable illustration of the utter incompetence of Calvinism to minister to a growing mind. Its dogmatic rigidity and inhuman spirit make it the stifler of thought and the slayer of emotion; and it says much for the native strength and health of the Scottish mind that under the influence of Calvinistic autocracy it sank not into atheism or madness.

What was done to Robert Falconer was done to every Scotch boy forced to learn, say, and accept the Catechism, and we see in him what went on in the mind of every one who thought and tried to resolve what he was taught into a faith for his own reason. The agony, the spoiling, and the degradation of it are terrible to think of.

Thanks to George Macdonald and other brave critics it is almost past now. The atmosphere of theological thought and religious aspiration is changed, and the constitution of the mind is altered. Such

women as Mrs. Falconer are hardly possible now. Relics of Calvinism still exist, and the Catechism has a shadowy life, but the make of the modern boy is not due to dogmatism, but rather to liberty.

Compared with the boy of Calvinism, the boy of Liberalism may be less subjective and serious, but he is on the make for better things than Calvin imagined and the framers of the Catechism knew.

In his own inimitable way, George Macdonald has described the growth of Robert's soul under the refreshing and reforming influences of nature and youthful human sympathy, and in his development we may see what Scottish manhood could become when set into communion with the Infinite Love.

One specific honour belongs to George Macdonald—that of being the first distinctively Scottish writer to popularize the idea of God's Fatherhood. When he began to write, the idea had not got into Scottish theology. The phrase had not become current coin. The Scotch theologian had not emerged from the sphere of

feudalism : he still spoke of God as King and Judge. It was only in heretical quarters that the term Father was used to express the relation of God to man.

Macdonald tells in the dedication to 'A Hidden Life' that he learnt the idea from his father. His acknowledgment of the teaching is thus expressed :—

Yet most I thank thee, not for any deed  
But for the sense thy living self did breed  
That fatherhood is at the great world's core.

That sense made him shed his Calvinism, and become an apostle of the idea of God taught by Jesus. When he got the sense, his people and his country were in the bonds of Biblical literalism. The authorized faith was built on texts. A Bible word was a spell, an absolute oracle, a doom : it was feared and held as a thing beyond criticism or any kind of rational examination.

Calvin had come in between them and Christ. The Calvinistic dogmas had shaped for them their conception of God, of salvation, of eternal bliss and eternal bale.

They regarded revelation as finished. The elements of saving faith were to them complete. God's speech was past; his personal presence was withdrawn; we had but an echo and a shadow.

The essence and something of the substance of the new faith which Macdonald had to sing are discernible in his poem, 'Within and Without,' published in 1855. Therein is evident the Naturalism which was to him a refuge from the artificialism of dogmatic theology. From text and creed he turned his soul to earth and sky and found in their phenomena the presence of an Infinite spirit.

Naturalism is the fundamental characteristic of his teaching. It marks him as truly Christian in his perceptions and aspirations, for the outstanding thing in the leadership of Jesus is its outgoing attitude, its acknowledgment of the continuous presence of God in nature, and of the duty of the soul to follow him in natural ways.

Julian, the chief character of the poem, escapes from the monastery which had

been to him a prison of the soul, and seeks communion with God in the outer world. The monastery in the poem stands for Calvinism or for dogmatism generally, and Julian for a liberated spirit seeking spiritual life in atonement with the Universal Spirit.

The poem was a prelude to Macdonald's riper and richer work; it prophetically indicated the lines of his thought, and made his countrymen aware of the possibilities of new religious life that lay in the soul which had turned to the Living God, and in its rapture said:—

I thank thee, thou hast comforted me,  
 Thou in whom I live, who lives in me  
 And makes me live in thee: by whose one thought  
 Alone, unreachable, the making thought  
 Infinite and self-bounded, I am here.

He was the spokesman of the slow, dumb soul of Scotland seeking for an Infinite Love. He had the Scottish disposition towards theology, the rare faculty of applying affection to the quest for God and the art to express his faith in popular form. By poems, sermons, and specially by tales, he popularized the idea of the

Fatherhood of God, the divineness of the human soul, and the certainty of universal salvation. Through his tales he has had a wide and deep influence in modifying the theological thought and religious feeling of Scottish people. He was a preacher without a pulpit, a theological storyteller, a poet of regenerated religion.

Well might the soul of Scotland, which still lingers on an old past, loath to leave the crumbled creeds and the dim domain of dogma, take the advice he gave :—

And do not fear to hope. Can poet's brain  
 More than the father's heart rich good invent ?  
 Each time we smell the autumn's dying scent,  
 We know the primrose time will come again ;  
 Not more we hope, nor less would soothe our pain.  
 Be bounteous in thy faith, for not misspent  
 Is confidence unto the Father lent ;  
 Thy seed is sown and rooted for his rain.  
 His thoughts are as thine own ; nor are his ways  
 Other than thine, but by their loftier sense  
 Of beauty infinite and love intense.  
 Work on, one day, beyond all thought of praise,  
 A sunny joy will crown thee with its rays,  
 Nor other than thy need, thy recompense.

## THEOLOGY AND MIRACLE

### I

THE relations between science and theology have of late years been in a state of tension, if not of open war—one side contending that the course of Nature is unchangeable, and the other that it is changed by the direct action of God himself—and the manner in which this result has been arrived at and that in which the war is carried on, does not seem either wise in the interests of truth, or favourable to a serious end of the quarrel. Both scientific and religious interests have been gravely imperilled.

I cannot say that the fault of the widespread disturbance, so far as it is angry and violent, lay altogether at the door



of the masters of science. They pursued their work quietly ; slowly collecting facts, very slowly generalizing their observations into a theory, and as slowly proving their theory ; and when they had completed their work, they gave its results to the world, believing them to be true, and eager that truth should be known. Who can deny that they were absolutely right, that they would have been false prophets had they held their tongue ?

But these results, in many instances, came into the most contradictory contact with the traditional views of theology—with those, for example, of the creation of the world, of prayer, of the existence of a soul separate from form, of the whole of the miraculous element in theology. It was enough to disturb the public, still more the theologians. But it was a matter in which wise, and careful, and tolerant sifting of the truth was especially necessary on the side of theology. It was a matter in which theologians ought to have made themselves masters of the evidence by which natural philosophers

had arrived at their conclusions, and to have at least believed that these men, many of whom were profoundly religious, spoke solely in the interests of that which justly is dearer than all things else to mankind—of truth alone.

Instead of doing this, they did not either sift the truth or master the evidence, or believe that scientific men were anxious for truth alone. They took the results arrived at, and they threw them at the head of the public, and said: 'If these things be true, religion is lost; therefore those who promulgate them are atheists, materialists, destroyers of faith.' They woke up, that is, not the spirit of faith in the verities of religion, nor the spirit of a sound mind, but the spirit of blind and cruel terror, and the spirit of superstition. They took the most terrifying of the theories, and represented them as more in opposition to the faith than they really were. It was partly their ignorance of the proofs of the results which led them to act in this way; but that ignorance was their worst crime. Many of them

forbade investigation of these scientific results as sinful, and encouraged ignorance of them. They would not, if they could, have enlightened the people. They wished to deceive them into an internecine war against science. 'These tactics would not astonish us in war, where they say all things are fair, but they are strange in the empire of truth, where victories should be impersonal,' and where the loss of charity makes even the victory of truth a painful victory.

The results of all this have been good neither for theology nor for science. Theology, in the heat of the battle, has bound itself up with the support of what is untrue in physics, and suffers from its alliance with the false. It has already begun to retreat, beaten, and with much shame, from the positions it has taken up against physical truth. And the defeat will do it harm, as it has already done, in the work it has to do upon the spirit of man in the world. If the very existence of God is called in question to-day, the chief reason is that theologians have

bound it up with a defence of which half the points are manifestly untrue.

And science also has suffered in the war. For the battle has been taken up with such anger—and no wonder—by scientific men, that they, or perhaps it would be fairer to say, their followers, have sometimes claimed theories as proved which are not so; that they themselves have attempted to apply the methods of the understanding to things which do not come under those methods; that they have lost a good deal of the dignity of impersonal truth in personalities, and have been too often driven, by opposition, into positions of which they are not certain.

As to religion—which is neither science nor theology—it has suffered in every way; suffered because truth and reverence for truth have been neglected; because justice and care for it have not been shown to men; because charity and the sense that it is the first thing has perished; because belief in men's goodness has often wholly disappeared. The very grounds of a religious life, all

that makes religion arise out of his life who died for truth and love, have been too much put aside in the conduct of the quarrel.

What wonder, as a further result, that two other large classes have arisen in society—those who are quite indifferent to all religious or scientific questions whatever, and who take refuge in what is beautiful, and loving, in Nature and man—and those who say, 'We will find a religion of humanity, a religion of morality and self-sacrifice, which has to do with this world alone; which is not disturbed by questions of God, immortality, or the soul, matters on which no conclusion is possible.'

Things would have been very different had men thought more of truth than of their own view of it; had they felt that union was more important than victory over an enemy. But it is, perhaps, too much to expect that when old traditions and opinions are in danger, men should not at first defend them by every means in their power, especially when they think their souls are in danger also. It

has always happened so, and one ought not to expect more of human nature than its usual way of acting. But now, now that the contest has been waged in this wrong way for so long, and so much harm has been done—now, it is time to ask oneself whether there may not be some ground of unity; whether we may not find the real issue at stake, and in finding it, get rid of those side issues which are the cause of the battle, and the cause of its bitterness.

In religion—as distinguished from theology—it is the true end which is important, not the means by which we attain that end. All ceremonies, creeds, opinions, forms of worship, are methods by which religion is supported and developed, but they are *not* religion. The one important thing for us is to believe in God our Father who loves us, and whom we can love. If we attain that, we attain the end of religion, its goal, and its source. And having attained it, the means by which we do so are—except so far as they influence our character for the time being—compara-

tively indifferent. And it equally follows that those who attain the same end by one set of means, as, for example, by belief in miracles, may live in unity with those who attain it by another set of means—by means from which belief in miracles is excluded. The end being reached, the means are no longer so important as to produce dissidence. Take the question which resumes all the division between theologians and natural philosophers—between those religious men who deny, and those who accept results of scientific investigation—the question of the supernatural. The word itself is a stupid one. It has no clear meaning, no self-definition, and half the noise and contest that have gathered round it are due to the arguers taking it in different senses. But it has two distinct meanings on which we can fix our minds. First, it may mean the world of invisible realities, the world of ideas, the world of religious ideas especially, that world in which the spirit of man and God meet and mingle together; the world to which Christ

speaks in the heart ; the world in which, while he dwelt on earth, he also lived ; a world which has nothing to do with phenomena, which cannot be investigated or understood by the methods of science. This world is allowed to exist by all those who believe in God, or who care for religion ; and if, as religious men, we only defend the existence of such a spiritual world of thought and feeling of which God is the centre, when we defend the supernatural, then there can be no quarrel among men who care to be religious, about the supernatural.

The quarrel only arises when the supernatural is taken to mean the miraculous. When it is distinctly averred as necessary for faith in God that belief must be given to phenomena which are in contradiction to sequences of Nature which have been proved to be without exception ; to events which violate the very ideas on which we know with certainty that the universe is built ; when it is said, for example, that it is an integral part of faith to believe that a dead body comes to



life at the touch of the bones of a prophet ; that wine is made out of water ; that a man can walk upon the sea ; that a body decayed for days in the grave can suddenly repair its decay—then comes the clash ! The moment these things are said to be necessary to believe, the moment the supernatural is declared to be identical with the miraculous, and that a miracle is not an extraordinary fact of which science has not yet found the explanation, but a suspension, or a violation of the observed and proved order of Nature—that moment the battle begins ; disunion is set up among men who care for religion, and in the noise, the end of religion—belief in God, and the root of a religious life, love to one another—are lost sight of.

This, then, is the real point of difference at present among men of science who desire a religion, and religious men who cling to the traditional view of God's relation to Nature. They cannot agree ; and the division between these two parties who belong to the religious world is, on this question, as great as it is between the

theologian and the natural philosopher who has divided himself altogether from religion. Now, is there no point of union possible? I think there is—and it is in the consideration of the end which both wish to attain.

What is it—what is the supreme interest which those who cling to the miraculous wish to preserve? It is the living relation of God to man. They feel, in the midst of a world that founds all declaration of physical truth on direct experiment, that miracle becomes harder and harder to prove, that they have no proof of miracle existing nowadays, and some even feel that spiritual truth does not need miracle to prove its reality, nay, that it is better without it—but, in spite of all this, they are afraid that if they let go the possibility of God's personal interference as shown by miracle, or by special providence for the sake of man in the world of Nature, they will lose the sense of a living God, of a God whose will can act beyond, and independent of, Nature, who has a character, who is separate from the universe.

That is the deepest need of their heart. It is the deepest need of all hearts; and no wonder the fear of losing it terrifies them into combat for miracle. They think that miracle proves it, and that if miracle were destroyed it would cease to be true. They dread the notion of man, orphaned of God, left face to face alone with dead matter, with chance, with impersonal force, with laws which have no care for him. They shudder when they think of societies, nations, of their own life, left thus alone. They are miserable when they think that morality and religion are only developments of man's mind, that there is no absolute will in which they essentially inhere. On one side they shrink from the cold impersonality of Pantheism, on the other from the still colder impersonality of materialism.

Therefore, they cling to the miraculous. It seems to them that only in the unexpected and sudden interferences of God with natural order, can they find what they want—a proof that he has a will, that he is personal enough to be their

God; a proof, among the distracting constancy of Nature and human progress, that there is a divine power and thought and love that directs the universe and governs mankind. 'There, in miracle,' they cry, 'we find a proof of a personal will. Take it away, and we are ruined. Unless the laws of Nature are sometimes suspended, we have no proof of a Being above Nature, from whom Nature proceeds.' Of what value this theory of the miraculous is, of what real use it is to those who think it, for the furtherance of faith, whether it helps men to believe in God nobly or not, is not my work at present. I have only to state it, and to say that the miraculous has no other interest and no other use for the most determined defender of the supernatural, than as a means to secure the important end of belief in a living and personal God, whose will is powerful in Nature, and active in the spirit of mankind and of men. That is its only use. It is a means to an end, but it is not the end. It is not the essential thing, it is one path, but not the only path to that essential thing.

Now, a large mass of religious men are saying at present that if they could gain that essential thing—belief in a living God in Nature, or in a Father of men—without using the means of the miraculous, it would be of infinite value to the cause of religion. No one can deny, they say, that the removal of the necessity of believing in the supernatural, that is in miracle, would free Christianity from its greatest burden and its greatest hindrance—a burden, too, which is growing heavier, and a hindrance which is more intensely felt every year, as the knowledge of physical truth advances. It is impossible, they say, if we bind up the truths of Christianity, in a bond which may not be broken, with the belief of the miraculous, not to exclude from the Christian circle, or to force away from it, all those who are sure of the constancy of Nature; all who understand what science has done, and all those also, who apart from science, hold the doctrine which in another sphere of thought from that of science is yet at one with the conclusions

of science—the doctrine of the necessary immutability of God's ideas. That exclusion and that opposition can never be put an end to except by putting aside belief in the miraculous as a necessity of Christianity, or of being a Christian. To put that aside is, they declare, the first step towards a union between science and religion, between Christianity and modern thought, and perhaps the only step necessary. The need of battle would cease when theology ceased to deny things which have been proved to be true, when it ceased to assert things for which there is no evidence whatever. And then, freed from this hindrance, they think that the spiritual part of their nature—no longer forced into disagreement with their reason—would have free room to develop itself, and would seek its true food in God, its true home in the true supernatural, in that world where the spirit dwells among spiritual ideas with God the Father of Spirits. And, no longer forced to defend truth they are sure of against its denial, violence, intolerance denuncia-

tion, scorn, and want of charity would also perish in this matter, and a more Christian life be rendered possible.

These intellectual, spiritual, and practical results, they say, would follow. But, then, the great end must not be lost sight of. If miracle is to perish as a part of faith, it must not be with loss of that belief to which it was for so long a means—the belief in a living God whose will directs the universe, and who loves men. That end, they think, nay, they are certain, they attain without the aid of the miraculous, and attain more perfectly than with its aid.

We see, they think, the deep intelligence and all-pervading life of God far more vividly, far more intensely, in the unbroken order and development of a few all-embracing ideas, through infinite variety of their forms—God present and immanent in every change—than we saw him when, wholly divided from the universe, he entered into it only by miracle, by interference with order, by special providence. The revelation of science, we say, has

ennobled in our minds our whole conception of God, as thought and will at work in Nature. God is now to us more living than before. And then, in this unchangeable, uncapricious Being, who is always as true to the ideas on which the world of Nature is developed, as he is true to moral ideas, we find a character dearer to the soul, more to be relied on by faith, more to be clung to in trouble, than the God who made men the subject of special providences, who turned from his care of the whole of mankind to concentrate his tenderness in a miracle for one or two. We are never certain of a God who helps his people by changing his laws, or by overstepping them. This places his help somewhat in the realm of caprice, of favouritism. This makes his will personal, it is true, but personal only to a certain number, or for a purpose which does not necessarily involve all mankind.

On the other hand we are sure of a God whose moral and spiritual action we see now to be as unalterable as we have found it in the physical world. He never can



cease, we say, to be to all of us what Christ says he is—a Father. Misfortune, trouble, sorrow, pain, death are no longer things outside of him, things that he allows. They are no more special than any removal of them is special. But they are always coincident with his unchangeable love of us and of mankind. His ideas march to their end in unbroken order, but we are contained in them, and if he remembers and labours for the whole, he remembers and labours for each of the parts. Not know him as a Father now! Not know him as personal in ourselves! Not love him, and be loved by him! All our love is deepened, exalted, ennobled, since we have found him irrefragably true to himself. His will to do good is no longer personal to a few—it is personal now to all mankind. 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.'

And our religion, no longer at war with our reason, turns, with infinite joy, to God revealed in Christ as Love and Truth, Justice and Pity, as caring for the

raven and the sparrow, for the child and the outcast, for the rich and poor, for each individual, and for the whole universally, and claims him as our own God, because he is the God of all. In his love for us and in our love for him, we are not divided from mankind, but unbrokenly bound up with it. Our spiritual life within, our human life without, among our fellows, unchecked now by theories which specialize his care to ourselves, goes forth, without the hindrance which these theories drove the intellect constantly to make, in one rejoicing tide of love to him who is the Father, Friend, Redeemer of the race, the Author of the immortal Life of Love, of Knowledge, of Joy to all mankind.

So, then, the great end is attained. We reach a personal and a living God, and believe in him, without the means of miracle.

If so, there is not only in this a ground of union established between science and religion, there is also a ground of union possible between those who believe still in the miraculous and those who have

ceased to believe in it. If we are all in agreement concerning the end of religion ; if we all can affirm a living God, who cares like a Father for all his children ; if we can all pray to him, and enter into union with him by love ; if we, in sorrow and in joy alike, call him, with Christ, ' Our Father which art in Heaven '—then we are at one in the end of religion, and we may cease to quarrel about the means whereby we reach the end. The unity of Christendom is not broken ; and those who hold fast to the miraculous as a means—though they may accuse those who reject it of unwisdom—have not the right to deny to them the title of Christian men—for those who oppose the supernatural and they who cling to it, are alike united in one love of the Father of Mankind.

## II

BEFORE I proceed further with the question of the contest between science and the miraculous, I wish to say to what classes of thinkers I address myself. I do *not* speak to those, whether masters in science or their followers, who have separated themselves from all care for belief in religious truths, who either deny the existence of God, or say that they are ignorant or careless whether there be a God or not, who has to do with Nature and man. The primary question to be discussed with them is this very question of the Being of God; and there is not much use ever in discussing it. The light by which it is seen is an inward light, and many may never in this life possess that light. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit.' But I speak to two classes of men, both of whom desire at least to believe in God; both of whom

consider religion the first thing, provided they can get it true, but who are yet in opposition upon the question of the miraculous. One of these is the class who support the traditional theology, and who hold that it and religion itself fall into ruin if miracles are untrue. The other is an increasing class in modern society : those who, convinced of the truth of the constancy of Nature, yet cling to religion ; who, rejecting the miraculous, yet believe in a spiritual world which is to them the supernatural, and who are treated very hardly by those who say that disbelief in the miraculous is equivalent to denial of religion. In this class I range myself, and I should dearly like to bring these two classes together, to lead the one to allow that those who deny miracles may yet be Christians, and the other to feel that its members, in their denial of miracles, are not shut out from union with those who assert them. I want to show that there is a possibility of both parties meeting in unity, on the ground of unity of belief in the great religious truths which remain true

equally for those who accept or who deny the miraculous.

But that cannot be done by any longer shirking the question, or putting it off on side issues. It is just as well, as I implied before, and wish to state still more plainly, that every congregation in the land should clearly understand that the contest between science and theology on the subject of the miraculous—that is, the miraculous understood as a suspension or violation of the order of Nature—is an internecine question. Of these two opinions, one which asserts that a miracle of the kind I mention cannot take place, and the other which asserts that it can; or, to put it otherwise, one which asserts that God can no more work a miracle of this nature than he can tell a lie, and the other that he can work it; of these two opinions, now in duel, neither one nor the other can leave the field till one is dead. All sorts of reconciliations are proposed, but they are only proposed by those who do not understand the grounds of the quarrel. The contest is not on this

or that special point—small isolated statements or unproved theories, things which are sought to be made principals but are only secondary—such as the date of the creation of the world, or even the whole theory of development—the contest is one of two contradictory ideas, one or other of which is true, and the truth of one, and the victory of one, implies the untruth and the death of the other. There is no reconciliation possible upon this question. That is what we must come to understand, and the sooner the better for the advance of mankind in truth, for the sake of religion, and for the sake of science.

In what state is the question now? I will look at it on two sides. Science does not deny that there are many strange occurrences in Nature for which, as yet, it has no explanation, but it does deny that these occurrences are outside the kingdom of constant order. They are not interferences of God, but natural events. It does not deny that a number of wonderful cures are and were performed by the working of mind and spirit, highly

exalted by love or faith or excitement, upon the body; nay, it asserts these, but it pronounces that they are natural, that they, though extraordinary, belong to order, especially when it considers that mind and body are of the same root and obey the same law, so that the work of the one is the work also of the other. These things it does not deny, and almost all the miracles of healing recorded in the New Testament might come under this category. But it does deny any violation or suspension through the interference of a personal will, apart from the universe, of that which it calls laws, and which others, with myself, who do not separate God from the universe, call radical, irreversible ideas in the mind of God. And among such violations or suspensions it is forced to include any event like the multiplication of the loaves, like a heavy body walking on the sea, like the preservation of a body which has suffered death from disintegration, or the repair of that disintegration. These things contradict vitally the constancy of energy, the law



of gravitation, and the whole course of Nature. They are not unexplained facts capable of explanation. They are contradictions. It is impossible to allow them without the overthrow of all the principles of science.

Now, of the truth of these principles science declares that it has the most amazing, the most exhaustive, the most continuous series of proofs that have ever been offered to the intellect of man, and that it adds, hour by hour, without one break, or failure of continuity, to this series. It is a volume of proof, drawn not only from the present state of things, but from myriads and myriads of years in the past. The principles it maintains were, it says, as unbroken by any interference, or by any violation of them, when all the universe was only imponderable gas, as they are now; and it is as inconceivable that any violation of them should take place a myriad, myriad of years hence, as it is now. Science has never found, in all its vast investigation into every province of Nature in the past,

any single event which contradicts certain of its principles, those which it claims to be proved. Their proof is inexhaustible.

Theology, on the other hand, asserts that these principles have been broken through at certain odd times, for the sake of great spiritual good to the race; that the constancy of Nature has been suspended or violated. It used to assert that these examples were common; that they were continuous. Many persons say so still. The Roman Church accepts many of the miracles of the Middle Ages, and among Protestants the same belief lingers in the assertion of special providences. But for the most part, theologians in Protestant Churches only cling to the miracles recorded in the Scriptures; and some only to those recorded in the New Testament. The circumference of the circle of assertion narrows day by day. The miracles of the Old Testament—so we, who reverence science and religion alike, declare—are recorded in books written long after the events narrated, and at a time when people believed, quite

naturally, that everything strange was due to the direct interference of God. There was no trained observation of Nature, nothing in the world to prevent the assumption of a miracle, everything on the contrary to encourage it. A priori we should look for the assertion of miracle in the Bible. Indeed, it would be a convincing proof that the books were not authentic, if we did not find miracle there. But the more miracle is asserted in the Old Testament, the less is the historical proof of miracle.

The miracles of the New Testament are also set forth by persons who naturally believed in the miraculous, and who, over and above, belonged to a nation greedy of signs, and lived in a time when men, being extraordinarily excited on the questions of religion all over the Roman world, were eagerly looking out for the miraculous. Those miracles recorded in the Gospels were also written down many years after, when they had passed through a whole generation of oral tradition. And the same remark, so far as proof is

concerned, applies to them, as to those of the Old Testament. The proof of miracle is, face to face with scientific and historical criticism, equivalent to nothing. It is quite worthless, unless it is backed up from the outside ; unless infallible support is given to it. That support was given by the assertion of the infallible inspiration of the Scriptures. ' What is there written is in all points, it was said, the very words of God. Not only was incontestable spiritual truth revealed, but all the events and the words through which it was revealed, were also incontestable.' As long as that was allowed, miracles had their backing. But that theory of inspiration, bit by bit, and also owing to the attacks of science, had to be given up ; and only a very attenuated form of it is now preserved. Miracles have lost that support ; and they now lie open to challenge like any other event recorded in history. They rest now on the evidence alone, and science avers, still more historical criticism, that as against their tremendous volume of proof, the evidence offered by theology

is a cypher. They ask, whether on the ground of a few statements, made under these conditions, they are to accept as true, events which, if true, utterly overthrow and destroy the truths they maintain as absolute, and the overthrow of which truth would destroy every principle science has proved to prevail, without one single exception, over the whole universe.

That is on the side of proof the state of the question, and you see that the war, as I said, must be internecine.

Still, there is the point I have already put. The advocates of the miraculous fall back on the interests involved. They say, 'that only in the confession of the truth of miracle can we find, as against Pantheism on one side and Materialism on the other, any proof of a God whose will is personal towards us, who has to do with us or with Nature. And for the sake of keeping this truth, of the most infinite importance to mankind, we must, at all risks, preserve the miraculous.' But even from that point of view the miraculous does not seem needed. It was my aim

previously to show that this religious end and its attainment was not necessarily bound up with the truth of miracles; that they were only a means to that end for some persons, and that an ever-increasing number of people, who loved the religious truth of a God who had to do with them as a Father with a child, not only, while they denied miracle, held that truth, but also declared that they held it with more ease, certainty, and comfort when they were freed from the necessity of believing that God only showed his guidance of their lives by miracle. Here also, then, in the last refuge of theological reasoning, the claims of the miraculous are not only denied, but shown to be unnecessary. The true end of religion is better and more permanently reached without them.

The second side on which the subject may be viewed is the relative importance of the opposing views.

Science, that science which, while wholly denying the miraculous as impossible, still clings fast to the spiritual truths of

religion—for that is the point of view here—declares that the truth of the constancy of Nature is of infinite importance, not only for knowledge and therefore for man, but also of equal importance for the sake of the just idea of God, and therefore, also, for the progress of man.

If we allow, it says, that God acts in this independent way, in a way, that is, independent of the ideas on which he has built the universe, independent, that is, of himself; if we allow that he is thus changeable, if we allow that he suspends or violates in even one instance—and one is as bad as a million—the constancy of his thought in Nature, then we have, in investigation, no certainty at all, and no certain ground for investigation. The whole of science—that is, of the explanation of God's revelation of his mind in Nature—is without a foundation, and we are driven into the dilemma of either having to give up belief in God, or of having to give up further investigation. And to give up either would be of incalculable harm to the progress of mankind. Nor is that a

fanciful dilemma which the religious men of science put. You know that great numbers of men have been driven into giving up belief in God, just because it is demanded of them by the theologians that they should believe that God's action suspends or violates the course of Nature.

Secondly, they say that it is important to hold the constancy of Nature, because it is miracle that separates God from Nature. The miraculous theory naturally conceives of Nature as a machine, apart from God as a machine is from its maker, and in some sense independent of him. Nay, it is even more than that. For even the maker of a machine cannot stop it at one point without stopping it altogether, or cannot violate the ideas on which it was made without throwing the whole of it out of gear. Yet miracle says that God can do this ; and, nevertheless, that the machine is not stopped and not thrown out of gear ; as if that were conceivable or possible. From one point of view, that a miracle should not annihilate the universe is the greatest



of all miracles. A single miracle, were it possible, would separate God from matter as we know it, and make it self-existing or the creature of chance.

That is the way science teaches us to look at the question, and instead of miracles proving to us God in Nature, they disprove it.

When they are given up, we are then capable of conceiving God in Nature—eternal thought, always constant, always certain, always working on immutable ideas, infinite in change of form, but never, through all change, violating itself. It is in this thought that we find God, in everlasting, unchangeable order. But admit the disorder of a miracle which contradicts one of these ground-thoughts, and God is gone from Nature, for us; we cannot find him there. We only find a course of things which now and then God interrupts from a distance. That was once a possible view. But science has now made it impossible, and the only two views now possible are—first that God is immanent in all matter, and then

its laws must be as inviolable and unchangeable as God himself must be or cease to be God ; or, secondly, that matter has an existence wholly independent of God, and that is equivalent to a denial of God's absoluteness of Being. If then, we are now to retain the truth of God in Nature, miracle must be surrendered. But if it is said that we must retain miracle, then we, who have discovered the truth of Nature's constancy, must give up belief in God ; while those others, who retain belief in a miracle working God, must deny the truth of Nature's constancy, and with it, all possibility of God and Nature being at one. And that is just the very fact of the position at present. The natural philosopher, of whom belief in miracle is demanded as an absolute condition of religion, is forced to give up belief in God—in any spiritual truth. The theologian is forced into the opposite. Clinging to miracle, he is finally driven to give up belief in physical truth. Those are things which lie before your eyes.

Thirdly, the science which is religious

says that the truth of the constancy of Nature is of infinite importance, because the whole idea of God is exalted thereby, and the importance of *that* to the race and its progress cannot be exaggerated. To believe it adds the same element of consistency, constancy, unchangeability of intellectual character to our idea of God's intelligence, to all in him that we call mind and intellect, as we have already been led by centuries of education to connect with our idea of his moral character. It makes this intellect, if I may use the term, seem as unchangeable to us as we know and feel his moral character to be—that is, the same things are true with regard to the thought of God as seen in the order of the universe as are true with regard to the moral being of God as seen in the souls of men.

Now, science has enabled us, through years of constant work, to declare the existence in Nature of an absolute set of ideas by which Nature consists, and which may all be comprehended in the one term—unchangeable constancy. They

are the great equivalents in God's creative thinking of that which we call truth, righteousness, harmony, in God's moral acting. Now, when we say the ideas upon which Nature is built are inherent in God, that he is their centre and source, then we also say that he cannot suspend or violate his own ideas, that he is self-limited not to contradict his intellectual character, just as he is self-limited not to contradict his moral character.

And on our belief, as religious men of science, in this, rests the whole of our belief in an absolute intellectual truth beyond ourselves and beyond Nature; the whole fabric of our knowledge from top-stone to foundation; the whole of our belief in God's action in Nature; the whole of our trust in the sanctions of natural law; the whole of our faith in our own scientific work being certain; the whole of our belief in the certain progress of knowledge; the whole of the certainty of our natural life and of our natural actions. Take away the belief in the unchangeable grounds of Thought

in the universe—and miracle does take away that belief—and the result is, among those who pursue knowledge, loss in belief of all that makes the certainties of science; or in reaction from this, the creation of a large class who create for themselves a science out of which the very notion of God is expelled—the very thing you see going on all round about you.

But if we, seeing these things, deny miracle on the ground of the unchangeability of God's ideas, the whole conception of God is indefinitely exalted. Our conception of his mind is brought into perfect harmony with our conception of his moral character. He is all through conceived of as the constant, the unchangeable One; as the living source of order in the physical, as in the moral universe. And in the growth, support, and progress of this exalted conception of God, the progress of mankind is infinitely extended.

## TRINITY SUNDAY

WHENEVER Trinity Sunday comes round, and I know that in every church in the land is being read a creed which makes salvation dependent upon the acceptance of a metaphysical doctrine of God, defined by a nameless theologian in the darkest of what are called the Dark Ages, I am moved to calm but decisive protest. I do not love controversy, as you know: I feel that it is better for us all to build up our own religious life than to attack the foundations of another's; and it is my habit far less to try to show how false are doctrines with which I find myself unable to agree, than to detect in them, if I can, the germ of truth which gives them their hold upon the minds of men. But there are occasions on which it is desirable and necessary to adopt another course, and this is one of them. Ours is, no doubt,

by principle and by inheritance a free church, ready to welcome any fresh inspiration of truth, and refusing either to be bound by the past or to put the future in pledge: but we are, at the same time, ready to confess that our present theology is what is called Unitarian, and we stand by a theory of the Divine Nature which separates us from the rest of Christendom. And just in proportion as we realize the depth and meaning of that separation, just in proportion as we find ourselves the bond-slaves of our convictions, and unable to take up any other attitude of faith than that which we actually occupy, are we required from time to time to review thoughtfully and to state accurately the grounds of our belief. And this is what I propose—of necessity in a brief and imperfect way—to do.

The days are past, at all events for us, at which, on such a subject, we should argue from particular texts of Scripture, or balance isolated phrase against isolated phrase. We weigh evidence now in the mass rather than count its particular

items: we watch tendencies of thought and take account of the development of ideas. And it is from this point of view that I call your attention to the words of the text.<sup>1</sup> For of the monotheism of the Jews, of the doctrine of God, stated and implied in the whole of the literature which we call the Old Testament, there can be no doubt. Monotheism is the central doctrine of all Semitic religion, both Hebrew and Mohammedan; while the doctrine of the Trinity is to this day the reason why orthodox Christianity makes so little way with Jew and Moslem alike. You can see, if you will, the growth of monotheism in the Old Testament: Jehovah is first the tribal God of the Hebrews, having the children of Abraham in his special care; next, he is a God to whom all other deities are subordinate; last of all, he is the One God, Creator of heaven and earth, before whom all other gods are mere senseless idols, the work of the fools who adore them. And all the attempts that are

<sup>1</sup> *And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.*—MARK xii, 29.



sometimes made by despairing controversialists to read some dim premonition of a Trinity into the Old Testament thought of God, are flimsy to the last degree. It is impossible to read the Hebrew literature with an unprejudiced mind, and not to see that this thought of the undivided Unity of God is its central theological conception. That, and the great correlative thought of the righteousness of God, is what distinguishes the religious life of Israel from the religious life of all other peoples with which he comes into contact. It is, so to speak, the fact of universal import to which he lives to bear witness. Take his monotheism from him, and the passion which he throws into his affirmation of it, and you destroy what is characteristic in him, and depose him from his place in history. He is a mere Arab then, distinguished from other Arabs in little else than by having given up his wandering habits to till a rocky corner of Syria, and to play an undistinguished part in the politics of the East.

Now observe, that it is precisely to this Hebrew doctrine of God that Jesus in the text gives his unquestioning support. I have always been wont to look upon this passage as quite a central one, standing out, even in the Gospel, with exceptional clearness and force. The scribe's question, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' or, as Luke has it in the parallel passage, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?'—Christ's double answer, involving at once the simplest obligations of belief and the largest demands of Godward and manward affection—his approval when the scribe cordially assents to and adopts his statement, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God'—all combine to make the story and its lesson unique. And I hardly like, even for the sake of my argument, to disturb its clear religious impression, which you will find the more forcible and the more durable the more you reflect upon it. Still, is it not plain that if Jesus wished to move his disciples away from the old Hebrew standpoint of belief, this was emphatically the time

and the occasion to do it? Can you reconcile with his reiteration of the old Mosaic and prophetic doctrine of God, his knowledge of the fact that he was himself the Second Person in the Trinity, coequal and coeternal with the Father? For if this were so, he not only hid his divine majesty under a most effectual veil, but gave his adhesion to a form of theological thought which was directly inconsistent with it. I, at least, can have no doubt that his thought of the nature of God, from what, without irreverence, I may call the numerical point of view, was precisely the same as that of Moses, of David, of Isaiah, and that he meant to say so in the clearest and most intelligible way.

But there is, in truth, a greater gulf between the Hebrew and the Athanasian point of view than is visible at first sight. It is characteristic of Semitic religion in both its forms, Jewish and Mohammedan, to place an awful distance between God and man. It admits of no confusion between the two ideas. On one side there is the Infinite, the Eternal, the Self-

subsistent, the Omnipresent, the Omnipotent, the All-wise; on the other, the creature of bounded intelligence, of limited power, whose days are a poor threescore years and ten, who is at the mercy of a thousand strokes of fate. I do not say that this contrast is equally developed in both forms of Semitic faith: it is carried much farther in Mohammedanism than in Judaism: but the root conception is the same in both. It does not in either case preclude the idea of prophecy, of a real communication between heaven and earth: in each the prophet is God's messenger, upon whose lips is placed the word of command, warning, rebuke, encouragement. Equally it does not preclude the possibility of a direct influence of the Divine upon the human spirit: it only denies in the most emphatic way that God can be man, or man God. But the tendency of Aryan belief was quite otherwise. There—with Greeks and Romans—yawned no impassable gulf between the human and the Divine nature. The gods descended from heaven and took unto

themselves wives of the children of men ; and a race of heroes came into existence, greater than men, less than gods, and in dignity intermediate between the two. Propose to a Jew, at any period of the national history, to elevate to the divine dignity or to pay divine honours to any son of man, even the brightest and the best, and with what horror will he not receive your thought, which from his point of view is unspeakably impious and blasphemous ! Yet the Romans in all good faith raised emperor after emperor to the skies, so far as we can see now, without regard even to moral considerations, and simply as a fitting tribute to the grandeur of eternal Rome. And it was when Christianity had passed from its Semitic birthplace into this Aryan atmosphere that the doctrine of the Trinity became possible. It was from the first a Greek thought, moulded by Greek philosophical influences, developed by Greek disputants into its present shape. I regard it as absolutely certain, that had Christianity escaped the intellectual impact

of Greece, and made its way among mankind in its original Palestinian form, the world would have been Unitarian now.

This view receives powerful support from the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity has a history, the main lines of which are quite easy to trace. Now that the Three Heavenly Witnesses are, by the universal consent of scholars, expunged from the First Epistle of John, the New Testament contains no Trinitarian text. It does contain passages, I am perfectly willing to admit, which seem to ascribe to Christ something more than a mere human nature, and this especially in that Fourth Gospel which we believe to be among the latest in date of the New Testament writings. But this is the first fact in that development of which I am speaking; and I need not say that there is nothing in the Fourth Gospel which at all resembles the developed and co-ordinated doctrine of the Trinity. The remains of the post-apostolic age of Christian literature are comparatively few; but they are not Trinitarian. In that

singularly interesting work, recently discovered, 'The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,' there is neither Trinity nor Atonement. In proportion as we recede from the time of Christ's sojourn upon earth—when all those are gone who had seen him in the flesh, or whose fathers had handed down to them the living traditions of his person—we find a gradual tendency to emancipate the thought of him from all earthly conditions; but that is all. It is when this process of elevating Christ above the ordinary level of humanity has gone on for two hundred years, that the Arian controversy arises, and the Church is called upon to choose between the theory of a subordinate God, which would certainly have ended in Ditheism, or the union of the Father and Son in a single Divine substance. The latter, the Athanasian view, was expressed in the year 325 in the Nicene Creed, the main deliverance of which is that the Son is of one substance with the Father. But if you will compare the Nicene, with the so-called Athanasian Creed, in what

it says of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, you will see that a long period of development stretches between one and the other. That period is filled by some of the most futile, the most embittered, the most disgraceful controversies that ever divided the Church—a period that brings a burning blush to the cheek of every student of it, unless indeed he is animated by nothing better than a purely dogmatic interest. And at last out of the darkness, written by we know not whom, adopted by the Church at no general council, imposed upon the Church of England only by parliamentary authority, issues that minatory creed which is everywhere being fulminated against us to-day.

I am not so foolish as to suppose that this doctrine would have kept its ground as well as it has, unless it fell in with some strong tendency of human thought and feeling. It seems to me, indeed, that it is every day being held in a looser grasp : that it is not one of the Christian doctrines which really interest men : and that even from those who will not give it up, it now



seldom receives full and accurate statement. Still it lives ; and we must not forget that when, not many years ago, it was proposed to remove the Athanasian Creed from the services of the Church of England, the attempt signally failed for want of lay, as well as clerical support. And the real turning-point of the controversy is the person of Christ. Not whether God is metaphysically one, or three in one, but whether Christ is God or man—that is what people care about. The former they see to be a transcendental question, essentially beyond the reach of the human intellect ; while the latter may well be a practical matter, touching them, as they think, in the tenderest part. And this, as it appears to me, in three ways, all connected together, yet at the same time easily to be distinguished from one another.

First, the Deity of Christ plays an important dogmatic part in the scheme of a vicarious Atonement. That doctrine received its final logical shape at the end of the eleventh century, when Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, formulated it

in his little book, 'Cur Deus Homo?' 'Why was God made Man?' The answer to this question is, in brief, that the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of the Atonement are really not two, but one. Man's offence being against an infinite God, acquires therefrom an infinite character. But an infinite offence can be atoned for only by an infinite victim; and therefore the Christ, the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world, can be no other than God himself, the Second Person in the Trinity. It is not my business at the present moment to criticize this reasoning: to ask whether the words 'infinite offence' have really any intelligible meaning: or whether there is any virtual connexion between the ideas of infinite sin and infinite victim. The whole argument belongs to that scholastic philosophy which busies itself more with words than with thoughts, and more with thoughts than with things. At the same time, grant Anselm his premises, put upon his phrases the meaning that he desires, and it is easy to come to his

conclusions. But if so, you can see how those who put their whole trust in Christ's atoning sacrifice, and have got into their heads this medieval jargon of infinite sin and infinite sacrifice, should cling to the doctrine of his Deity as the sheet-anchor of their salvation. Man—he is not great enough to protect them; God—they feel safe in the shelter of his arms.

Secondly, it is plain that the same doctrine presents the Son in a much more engaging light than the Father. God is a Being whose omnipotent wrath needs to be charmed away, whose unswerving justice needs to be satisfied; and it is Christ who voluntarily, for the sake of sinful men, leaves the abode of eternal bliss, assumes the limitations of humanity, and suffers a lingering and painful death on the cross. His characteristic word is, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' He is the Good Shepherd, who goes out into the wilderness to find and bring back the lost sheep; he is the Physician of souls, whose helpful love never fails and

is never weary. But round about God gather clouds of menace and of terror: he is the Lawgiver, requiring obedience to an impossible law; he is the Judge, who will bate no jot of the demand of justice; and the penalties which he inflicts are harsh, heavy, enduring beyond words. Do you fail to recognize this picture of the God of a severely dogmatic Protestantism? Look in the mirror of Roman Catholicism, and you will understand it better. There, in the days of the Renaissance, Christ had so completely taken the place of the Father that he had usurped his sterner attributes too; and in Michael Angelo's famous fresco of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel, it is Jesus who, with angry face and uplifted arm, is hurling the unrepentant sinner into hell; while all the pity, all the mercy, all the love which the picture shows, are concentrated in the face of his interceding Mother. Can we wonder that men should love only that which presents itself to them as loving? that they should be drawn to the pleading, the pitiful, the

self-sacrificing Advocate, more than to the stern and implacable Judge? It seems to me to be one of the gravest objections to the doctrine of the Atonement—one which all the refinements of Mr. Maurice and his school do not avail to remove—that it hides from men the character of that Heavenly Father who knoweth our frame, who remembereth that we are dust, and who waits, in eternal patience, to welcome back to his arms, without mediator, without victim, the whole repentant world.

In the last place, strange as it may seem to say so, I do not believe that most of us are able to rise to the level of Hebrew spirituality. We are of Aryan race: we want a God whom we can see: we find it hard to stretch out our arms into the void, and grasp there an Infinite Reality which surpasses our power of imagination, which will not be reduced within the limits of our logic. For justification of what I say, I might well appeal to the character of Roman Catholic and of Greek worship, and the large use which is there made of

pictures and images : and recollect that within those two folds, which we are sometimes too ready to accuse of idolatry, are to be found the great majority of Christian believers. And it is a tendency of the same kind, though, I willingly admit, infinitely less crude and gross, which practically shuts up Deity within the human personality of Jesus. This strong Son of God, in whom our sternest moral criticism finds no flaw, from whose grave, sweet face radiates so mighty a force of love, whose influence extends itself in ever-widening flow down the ages, to whom we ourselves stand in so close a relation of grateful discipleship, who has liberated us from sin, and will bear us harmless (as some at least think) amid all terrors of earth and hell—is he not *God* to us, the completest impersonation of greatest, wisest, best? I respect the feeling even when I cannot sympathize with it : better by far worship the noblest of men, than a thought of God which is lower than the best. But I should lose my basal faith in religion if I thought that

any radical imperfectness or limitation of my nature compelled me to put man in the place of God, or believed that the Infinite escaped me by reason of his infinity. I am ready to utter my 'Oh Altitudo!' and to declare the judgments of God unsearchable, and his ways past finding out; but not to deny the possibility of the access of my humble and devout spirit to its infinite Fountain, or to believe that God will not visit in help and blessing the least of his children. So that last of all, trying to be Christ's disciples, we come back to Christ's words:

'The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.'

GOD THE FATHER  
THE ONLY INTELLIGIBLE OBJECT  
OF WORSHIP

LET us begin our meditations with thoughts of him in whose hand are all our times ! That Almighty and Eternal Being from whom our souls descended, and to whom we owe our being, our blessings, our hopes, and our future.

But how think of him, or worship him, whom we have not seen, and cannot see with our senses ; who is separated from us by such an impassable barrier of perfection ; who is often represented as a vague and indefinite cloud of brightness, without body or parts, without centre or circumference ; who hides himself in his inconceivable glory, and defies the utmost power of



our intellectual telescopes to reduce him to any measurable image? Can we know him who is unknowable, approach him who is unapproachable, worship him who needs no worship, and in whose presence we are less than nothing?

Let us not mistake the poetic efforts of the human soul, employing the beggarly elements of speech to magnify God's greatness, for logical statements; nor build upon the phrases which humble saints and profound worshippers of God have employed to emphasize their adoration, an argument for banishing the eternal Father of Spirits from the faith and prayers of his children! All that is said in the Scriptures about the impossibility of knowing God to perfection, of his invisibility, and unsearchableness, is said in the interest of faith and piety—as one method of apprehending God—as a ground of trust and worship—never as an obstruction to it, a discouragement of it. When Job asked, 'Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?' he

meant to rebuke that distrust of him which comes from the assumption that he is only such another as ourselves, one whom we can utterly fathom, all whose providence we can understand, and whom we can judge by purely human standards. He wished to rebuke the limited and unspiritual conceptions of him, which made him only like the gods of Egypt, Isis or Osiris, a magnified earthly monarch, or like Jupiter and Saturn, a being of human passions on a gigantic scale. He aimed to convey the sublime thought that beyond all we know of God, there is always, and ever must be, a great unknown—but not to throw doubts and indefiniteness upon what we really do know of him. But because we cannot know God to perfection and altogether, it by no means follows, and it was as far as possible from the design of any sacred writer to suggest the idea, that we do not and cannot know him at all, know him as he desires to be known, and know him sufficiently to make him the object of our intelligent worship, reasonable

service, and perfect love. Paul specially rebukes this plea of ignorance, not by concealing the boundless depths of the Godhead or puffing man up with the idea that he can exhaust his perfections, or penetrate his mysteries, but by declaring that the eternal power and Godhead of the Creator is seen and known in his works—because that which may be known of God is *manifest in them*; for God hath showed it unto them; and, still more, according to the apostle, is God known in his spiritual attributes by our spiritual nature. For God hath revealed them unto us—that is, his invisible attributes—by his spirit—for the spirit teacheth all things, yea the deep things of God.

Jesus combined in his thought the most profound and glorious conceptions of God, as past finding out to perfection, with the most childlike apprehension of his character, and his providence and paternity. Nobody has ever said anything more discouraging to human confidence, or which tends to lift God farther beyond human thoughts, than Jesus in his words, 'neither

knoweth any man the Father but the Son,' but he adds, 'and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.' Yet Jesus promised that his Father would come, and dwell with him in the heart of his humblest disciple! He said, 'God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'; but he also said, 'If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou, then, show us the Father?' Jesus never recognizes any difficulty in knowing God practically. He assumed that even children knew him, and that their angels or spirits always beheld the face of his Father. He had no apparent difficulty in uniting the sense of him as a boundless, fathomless, omnipotent, invisible spirit, with the thought of him as a father, friend, companion, object of personal love, prayer, knowledge. And in this respect he was only following with a firmer and more assured step the Hebrew prophets, who after saying, 'clouds and

darkness are about him,' are quick to add, 'righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.'

And when Job has said, 'Behold I go forward and he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him, on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him,' he also tells us 'to acquaint ourselves with God and be at peace.' And Paul, when he says that 'they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him,' adds, 'though he be not far from every one of us.'

The truth is, the whole Bible teaching rests upon the assumption that God is both known and unknown; the most knowable of beings, but also the one least capable of being known unto perfection. To argue from what is unknown in him against the importance, reality, or sufficiency of what is known, is like saying that we do not know the ocean because we cannot survey it all at once, or sound its depths, or comprehend its vast reach

within our thoughts; that we do not know space, because it is boundless and immeasurable; that we do not know our souls, because we never saw them; or our ancestors, or any of the great men of the past, because they are only objects of tradition.

Nothing is so universally known, has been known so long, is known so well in the most important characteristics, is known so uniformly—as God! Behind all the gods of fancy, superstition, and ignorance, has lived in all ages, the powerful conception of the origin of all inferior deities—the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the infinite source of creation! His omnipresence, omnipotence, invisibility, and unchangeableness, his holiness and justice, have been sung and adored in all ages, languages, and climes. He has never left himself without a witness! Four hundred years before Christ, Cleanthes wrote a hymn in praise of Almighty God, which Paul quotes in his sermon on Mars Hill, and which is worthy of his own inspired lips. All the great heathen poets

had momentary states of exaltation and spiritual insight, when the very God whom Christ worshipped showed himself enshrined in their deepest hearts, known to their souls, and the only real object of their worship and trust. God as he is, in his majestic justice, holiness, and truth, his love and pity, is a being whom the human soul—independently of age and time or changing culture—cannot advance to a certain pitch of self-knowledge without feeling and inwardly knowing, and knowing in one way. Moses did not create the knowledge of God among the Jews. He built upon the primitive, unchangeable revelation of him in the human soul, and in his works, and defined and characterized him by certain local and temporary distinctions, most useful and successful for ages, but which the sacred prophets in a riper age had to tear away and discard, in order to fall back upon the original and more permanent revelation of him in the soul. When Moses, aiming to relieve the chosen people from the dominion of false gods, gave them somewhat national and local

ideas of Jehovah as their peculiar king, he took the greatest pains to guard that somewhat perilous limitation of the Universal One by insisting on his disembodied spirituality. 'Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of *similitude* on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire.' He is afraid they will fall back upon the terrible temptation of the carnal nature in all history, to set up visible images of the invisible God; to put idols into the sacred emptiness in which God's viewless spirit awaits the worship of man's viewless spirit; not the prostrations of their palpable bodies before some substantial likeness of himself—but the adoration of their souls before the Father of all Souls.

And now consider how little real force or truth there is in a favourite modern notion of philosophers and theologians—for they are now combined in declaring God unknown and unknowable—when they complain of the vagueness and inaccessibleness of God's presence and being.



For what is there, in spite of our contrary impressions, in God's *spirituality* to *hide* him? Is it not the idol, is it not the image, is it not the corporeal, and tangible, and limiting representations of God, that *really* hide him? Can you take a visible body, or form, into your soul? Can you carry a temple, a tabernacle, round with you into all places, and have it in your solitude, in your bed-chamber, as well as in your public worship; at Jerusalem and 'on this mountain'? What has given God to the world, and to all human hearts, to be with them everywhere and at all times, except it be his spirituality? Nay, is not his omnipresence and omnipotence, his special providence, his knowledge of the sparrow's fall, and his numbering the very hairs of our head, practically made possible or conceivable only by the assumption and realization of his spirituality. Limit him, confine him, shut him up in any temple, or in any image or shrine, or in any angel or visible being, even though it were his own holy Son, and you banish him by that

imprisonment from boundless realms and from millions of souls. The morning star might as well undertake the duties of the sun, as any person or image, or limited conception of God attempt to fill the place and function of the Infinite Spirit! Is it because God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, that we cannot find him nor know him? But what are *we* but spirits? And what do any of us know about things visible which can compare in depth, wonder, simplicity, and knowableness, with what we know of things invisible, namely, our own thoughts, feelings, longings, hopes, will, passions? Have we *seen them* with any outward eye? But what *have we seen* with the outward eyes, which we know so well and are so sure of? God is a spirit and we know him, as being spirits ourselves, and with our spirits! If we were not his offspring, his spiritual children, and his miniatures, we could not know him at all. Being what we are, we know nothing so well, so deeply, so fundamentally, in spite

of what remains, and will ever remain to be known in his infinitude.

And is it God's holiness we do not know, being ourselves such weak and sinful creatures? But what but the knowledge of God's holiness makes us know that we *are* weak and sinful creatures? Would people bow with awe and terror before their consciences, if the conscience were a mere local and personal attribute of themselves? What is it that conscience says, when she warns and humbles me with her awful whisper—'Thy God, the eternal holiness which I represent, speaks to thee in a voice thou knowest to be divine and eternal! She speaks with no borrowed, and no strange, and no questionable accents! Her authority is more ancient than the sun, than the records of revelations, or the traditions of history; plainer is its speech than the light of day, or the sound of many waters. She refuses testimony; she will not be endorsed; she claims in man a child, with a father's authority; she commands a subject, with a king's divine right; she assumes a sure

and absolute relation, not to be broken or impaired, between man and his inspirer.'

It is God, and God's holiness! and wherever conscience is and speaks (and where is she not?) she proclaims the greatest certainty, the clearest fact, the thing best known and most generally acknowledged—the sanctity, the holiness of him who set his moral law up in the inner shrine of our nature when he made man in his moral image! Dare any man who has seen and felt that awful tenant of his soul, shaking his guilty heart, say he does not believe in, he does not know, he cannot find God?

Or is it that God's works, which are declared to make him known, make him only as a God of law, of impersonal and absent interest, not a direct and care-taking and fatherly sovereign? Ah! there are revelations of his works, his unbroken order, his vast affairs, his impersonal ways, that do sometimes chill the soul's eager longings, and fling in the shrinking, home-seeking individual craving a special exceptional recognition, with the common

lot, refusing to minister to his sense of personal importance, and denying him the private and exclusive place he covets close to his Father's heart. Well, and are not these revelations of God's works proof that what we painfully resist, and yet finally, in proportion to our thoughtfulness and courage, are compelled to accept, as the indications of God's teachings in nature, are really just what it becomes God to be, and just what it is best and noblest for us to be willing to have him? We are obliged to give up our fond but partial conceptions of God to receive, in the manifestations of his sublime reserve, his awful distance, his broad impartiality, his indisposition to deal with us too softly and spoilingly, the real revelations of the invisible things, and of the attributes that properly belong to the character of God, forcing us to confess that those effeminate and puerile conceptions which debilitated and selfish natures try to persuade themselves are more Christian, are only corrupting and demoralizing ideas of favouritism and partiality, and accom-

modations to human weakness, indolence, and self-love, which God's real character is the least fitted to promote. God is our Father, but our Father is God! God is the present, universal, and particular providence, without whom a planet does not keep its orbit, nor a sparrow fall to the ground; but he is not, his works tell us, an effeminate mother who spoils her children, as a part of her own selfish and self-indulgent weakness; he is not the partial father who, seeing something more to his taste in one of his children than in others, favours him at the expense of the rest. He is not like a superserviceable nurse running to catch up and kiss the child every time it stumbles. He says, by his works, 'Stand on thy feet.' He says by his broad laws—read my statutes; they are not merely private and personal to you, they belong to all my children, and I utter them in the great family with one parental voice, that the children may know their relations to a common law, and to each other as children of one father. He says, I am the winter as well as the

summer, the tonic cold as well as the genial heat. I am law as well as love, I am dignity as well as condescension. I am to be feared as well as loved, I can be silent as well as speak ; and I must be trusted when I choose to be reserved, as well as when I choose to open my heart. There are snows and storms, and volcanoes, and lightning, and poisons, and serpents, and clouds, and darkness, and death, and general sorrows, and vast common trials, and sufferings for each other, and a thousand things besides that go to show and prove that Nature, God's other name, does not mean to cosset her children, nor bring them up on beds of roses, and in silken leading-strings, nor flatter them with conceptions of their personal importance. But what are these revelations of the real dignity of God's character and government, and of the real glory of his creation, and the real and noble relation of the human soul to its source ? Does the legislation of a great human monarch, the impartiality of his laws, the sometimes permitted pressure on the local or personal

interests of individuals, prove him to be not a *person*, or necessarily not the father of his people? Nay, does the discipline and hardening processes of a school bring just discredit on the love and essential tenderness of its master and head? What then? Is there no love, no tenderness, no personal approach, no sense of fitness to meet private wants and sorrows, no nearness of God in nature? Who that has studied birds in their nests, or ants in their hills, or flowers in their buds or their full beauty—who that has felt Nature's sympathy with his gladness or his sorrow, who that has contemplated in stillness the glorious and silent stars, or looked on the spring-tide, or felt the summer's perfect beauty, or tasted the breath of June—who that has looked into the eyes of human love, and considered the ways of God's creatures, the child in its mother's arms, or even the frolic of lambs, the song of birds, the fragrance of violets, the voice of soft winds—who, melted and awed, and lifted and loved by Nature, shall dare to say that the invisible



Paul appealed to the grain of wheat in defence of the reasonableness of the resurrection. Jesus never allowed his disciples to terminate their love or fix their goal in him. He was the way, not the destination ; the light, not the object searched for by its aid. He drew men to himself to direct and lead them to God, his Father. Blessed be his help and inspiration ! But let not the attempt to put him in his Father's place, end in dethroning him from his own beautiful and glorious seat. Alas, when the extravagance of the pretensions of his followers, and the tendency of his idolaters to forget the first and fundamental doctrine of all religion, God's sole worship, draw thoughtful men even to the forgetfulness and depreciation of the Gospel which he brought !

The God that Jesus knew and loved and worshipped is definite and knowable enough for his disciples. David knew, adored, and loved him. Patriarchs and prophets, saints and sages, have not found him far from any one of them. They

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asked for no bodily and personal appearance of God, who is a Spirit, in order to clear up their worship or their knowledge. And those who think Christ came to give us a new God, or a less spiritual God, or to acknowledge any essential difficulty, or remove any essential difficulty in man's intercourse with God, wholly misunderstand and perilously mutilate and degrade his mission. Jesus indeed has unspeakably clarified, and warmed, and extended by his own character and spiritual precepts, the knowledge of God's fatherhood. He has held a glorious and tender light up to the divine character. But how must his heart bleed afresh as he sees man falling down and worshipping a creature like himself in place of the invisible God! How must he plead with God, to be permitted to disabuse millions of souls as to the acceptableness of this idolatry! Thank God, that interference is not necessary. A solemn instinct guards humanity from any permanent continuance in this old track of making images of God in the likeness of man! The nations not already

in Christendom refuse to accept Christianity until the Church returns to its original, final monotheism. They will not have a Trinity, more than any other polytheistic multiplication of gods. Science and philosophy protest and quit the Church, to rid themselves of this incredible worship of a creature. The false doctrine of a deified Jesus, whose exclusive worship has only of late become a raging fanaticism in the Christian Church, as if the spirituality of the old Trinitarian divines in the Church had been lost in the materialism of the age, will ere long take its place with the worship of the Madonna. Not until the spirituality of God, and the undivided supremacy of the Father is re-established, and put where nature, reason, revelation, science, philosophy, Jesus Christ, patriarchs, and apostles have placed it, will the real religion of Jesus, and his real place in our reverence, and love, and imitation, and service be fully established.

Is this a time to be turning back from the glorious simplicity of our Unitarian

faith ? Is this a time to step down from the worship of God as a Spirit, in spirit and in truth, to a lower round of the ladder, and to change the truth of God into a lie, and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever ? God forbid !

## RATIONAL VIEW OF THE BIBLE

It is surprising how few there are in our country who seem to understand that Christianity is not the only great religion in the world, or the Old and New Testament by any means the only Bible. Yet even from our own Bible three great world-religions have sprung, namely, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan. The Jew accepts the Old Testament but not the New; the Christian accepts both; and the Mohammedan (who is a sort of Christian heretic) believes in the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Gospels, besides his own miraculously delivered and infallible book, the Koran. Then as to other Bibles of the world, the Egyptians had their Book of the Dead, the ancient Hindoos their Vedas, the

Parsees their Zend-Avesta, the Chinese their Sacred Books of Kings, the Buddhists their Tripitaka, and so on. There is no great religion in the world without a literature to which special sanctity is assigned; minor developments, too, are represented in some cases by books of great power and beauty; and even certain phases of religion which have disappeared altogether from active life have bequeathed to these later days valuable writings, scanty and fragmentary unfortunately, but still of considerable worth. Not a few of the more important developments of religion at the present day claim just as much inspiration, revelation, and authority for their sacred books as are often claimed for the Christian Scriptures. Yet the average Christian is content to remain in sublime ignorance of this great fact, fancying that his religion alone is true and the supreme religion of the world, whereas Buddhism, e.g., has more disciples than Christianity in all its forms, and three-fourths of the inhabitants of the world have nothing to do with Christianity. Some good

Christians shake their heads sadly when they hear about inquiries into other religions and other Sacred Scriptures, not considering that the Buddhist might shake his head just as sagaciously and in just as much self-confidence, if he found some one professing his own faith actually daring to inquire regarding that heretical denomination called Christianity and that heathen book called the Bible!

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
 To see oursels as ithers see us!  
 It wad frae monie a blunder free us,  
 And foolish notion.—*Burns.*

Our Bible must be content to take its place alongside of the other Bibles of the world. The 'orthodox' Christian does not accept any Bible but his own as infallible; no other religion looks on the Christian's Bible as infallible; but each naturally claims that his own is best. Is it not a piece of presumption for one form of religion to claim for itself all the truth and all the inspiration, and despise all other forms of religion because they will not bow to a standard which a small



section of humanity chooses to call infallible? Ought we not to be ashamed when we hear Christianity boastfully called 'the true religion' while all the rest are contemptuously called 'false'? True religion would have more charity. If Christianity could learn to become a little more like its Founder, gentle and forbearing and patient with those who conscientiously differ from it, it would be much more of a religion and have a far stronger influence on the world's life than is the case to-day. Let it learn to take its place side by side with the other world-religions—towering above them in the sublimity of its grand principles, no doubt, but from that very fact not obtrusive or overweening. Let it learn the great and blessed lesson that

God sends his teachers unto every age,  
 To every clime and every race of men,  
 With revelations fitted for their growth  
 And shape of mind: nor gives the realm of Truth  
 Into the selfish rule of one sole race.—*Lowell*.

And when those who profess and call themselves Christians think of what is

called Heathenism (which means simply everything outside the pale of Christianity, however good it may be), let them certainly be grateful to God for the higher revelation of his will which they are privileged to enjoy ; but at the same time let them have so much of Jesus Christ's loving spirit in themselves as to be numbered amongst those

Whose hearts are fresh and simple,  
Who have faith in God and nature,  
Who believe that in all ages  
Every human heart is human ;  
That in even savage bosoms  
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,  
For the good they comprehend not ;  
That the feeble hands and helpless,  
Groping blindly in the darkness,  
Touch God's right hand in that darkness,  
And are lifted up and strengthened.

*Longfellow.*

The very origin of our word 'Bible' is enough in itself to set us upon this track—*τα βιβλία*, not 'a book' but 'the books,' i.e., separate productions which for historical reasons and for convenience' sake are bound together to-day in a single

volume. The huge mistake in the treatment of these books is when they are regarded, not each on its own merits, but each merely as a fragment of one great book. Vast differences in time, place, culture, and tone of thought are overlooked when the words of a Moses are revered as much as the words of a Paul, or when the Song of Solomon is placed on a level with the Epistle of James. The Bible is not a book, but a whole library, containing in its present form no less than sixty-six books, mostly written by different persons widely diverse in culture and spirituality, in ages far removed from one another, in places very far apart, and under circumstances the most varied. For the most part the writers were unacquainted with each other; and we must always allow for those local and historical associations which at all times have coloured the expression of religion, making the dominant form of Christian faith in our own country, e.g., Episcopalian in England, Presbyterian in Scotland, and Roman Catholic in Ireland. The authorship of

many of the books is quite unknown and of others uncertain; the exact time of writing can seldom be fixed, and there are abundant evidences that many of the documents, such as the Books of the Law in the Old Testament, and the Synoptic Gospels in the New are not now in the form in which they were first written. If the various books were all infallible expressions of the only revealed plan of salvation sent by God to man, man should at least be able to put his finger on the authorship and exact date of each. But how far from this natural demand are the facts!

In the Pentateuch and Book of Joshua we can observe the hands of at least three writers far apart in age and widely different in spirituality, and to Ezra, only 444 years before Christ can be traced the compilation and editing of the Book of the Law in something like the form in which it now stands at the commencement of our Bible. Different stories of the same events, such as the Creation, the Deluge, etc., have been interwoven; but it is not a difficult task

to separate even at this late period the weft from the warp, and follow the separate threads till we find them quite distinct and unlike. In this little recognized fact we have the explanation of those puzzling contradictions and variations which we find in the records of the earliest Jewish history. Each writer told the story as he had heard it or as he believed it, and the editor has, in patching these stories together, probably not observed the want of harmony in the shades, or has not ventured to discard any of his traditional material.

In the books of Ruth, Esther, Daniel, and Jonah, we have specimens of the power of the Jewish novelist; for not one of these books is a record of history, but each simply tells a story to convey a moral; and it was clear to those for whom they were written that they *were* works of fiction and had no pretension to historical accuracy. It is sad to see the literalism of those who insist that we must view such books as records of actual facts, and angrily inform us that if they are not true

history they can only be lies. How many there are who in face of the sternest facts persist in reading the Scriptures 'in the letter and not in the spirit'!

The books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings carry on the story of the Hebrew people, mixing up, no doubt, legend and myth with undeniable facts. Probably all these books were written during the Babylonish Captivity, though drawing upon older sources of information. The books of Chronicles were not written till about 250 years before Christ, and are a priestly attempt to retell the history of the Jewish people, and place it in a more favourable (and less true) light than the earlier and more reliable writers. Chronicles is quite unhistorical, and many of its versions of events which have already been told in Samuel and Kings flatly contradict the more ancient records.

In the book of Job we have one of the finest dramatic poems that the world has ever produced. The writer tries to reconcile human suffering and apparent injustice with God's righteousness, but fails to solve

the problem satisfactorily and can give no hope of immortality<sup>1</sup> which it seems he would fain believe. This writer is a sceptic, but a more deeply-dyed one is found in the writer of Ecclesiastes, who thinks life is not worth living, for his keynote is 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' He is a thorough pessimist, looking always on the dark side, having no hope of immortality,<sup>2</sup> considering knowledge to be the source of unhappiness,<sup>3</sup> finding no blessedness in work,<sup>4</sup> advising the young that 'much study is a weariness to the flesh,' giving the sad advice, 'Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself over-wise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself?' and summing up 'the conclusion of the whole matter' by telling us that all we have to do is to be afraid of God and keep his commandments, lest he should bring us unto judgment. The spectacle of such a man is enough to make angels weep; but how true a life-picture

<sup>1</sup> *Job* xiv., especially verses 7-12, 19-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Eccles.* i. 11, ii. 16, iii. 19-20, ix. 5-10, xi. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Eccles.* i. 18.      <sup>4</sup> *Eccles.* ii. 11, 18.

has he given us of his own crooked soul, and how like he is to some people we have met in the course of our own experience ! Through him we obtain a significant glance at another side of Jewish character and history which it would be a great loss to have missed.

The Book of Psalms is the grandest collection of hymns that history has ever produced, marred certainly by imprecations against personal enemies and containing some fearful curses, but nevertheless, on the whole, a record of the aspirations of the soul of that nation which has been pre-eminent for its hold upon the grand truth that there is One God, with whom we may hold intimate spiritual communion and who watches over us all. They make a sad mistake who suppose that David wrote all these Psalms. He was not pure enough in spirit to write some of them, which show the writer's inmost soul to be clean and undefiled—which is more than we can say for David. We have no clear proof that he wrote a single one : all that we can



positively say is, that some were undoubtedly written about his time, and we know that he was a sweet singer in Israel; hence a few may well be his. But there are strongest proofs that most of the Psalms were written long after his time, and in several cases we can trace the exact period of their origin. A large number were written during the Captivity, and some even as late as the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (170 B.C.).

The Book of Proverbs is, as its name implies, a collection of maxims of worldly wisdom and ancient saws, with many a quaint touch and much insight into work-a-day life. The book itself does not profess to be entirely written by Solomon;<sup>1</sup> there are traces of several smaller collections now absorbed into the larger one.<sup>2</sup> The present collection was made in much later times, and the sayings recorded are culled from various ages.

In the Song of Solomon we have a sensuous love song which has been most

<sup>1</sup> *Prov.* xxx. 1, xxxi. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Prov.* i. 1, x. 1, xxv. 1.

unwisely perverted in the minds of many to signify the spiritual union between Christ and his Church. It sings the praise of fidelity to virtue for love's sake, though the setting is not all that could be desired. The language is beautiful, but the imagery is too closely associated with an Eastern harem to be used for Western youths and maidens to set forth a spiritual truth.

The truest glory of the Old Testament is to be found in its Prophets or *preachers*, whose written pages are the most glowing sermons of an early age, and teem with moral force and spiritual earnestness. The prophets, honoured in after-times, were the despised or neglected heretics of their own day. Their voice was against national impurity, injustice, idolatry, and worldliness. It is a poor estimate of the prophet that makes him into a soothsayer or fortune-teller. Where the Hebrew prophets made predictions they were generally wrong, unless they confined themselves to predicting such things as the growth of high principle and true religion. The prophets were the men who

had climbed higher, and could therefore see further and clearer. They were far in advance of their time; they were the leaders in the vanguard of the nation's religious progress, holding up the pure ideal of righteousness as a stimulus to natures that were struggling to rise and feel their own dignity and glory. From Isaiah, Micah, and Ezekiel came inspiring messages to progress, and at these founts of spiritual truth that greater prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, took copious draughts.—Yet the Book of Isaiah was not the production of a single individual: there is a break of two centuries between the thirty-ninth and fortieth chapters. The first thirty-nine chapters (with the exception of a few scattered passages which bear their own proofs of being written by a different hand) were written by one Isaiah who lived in the eighth century B.C.; but from the fortieth chapter onward we have the production of another and much more spiritual man, possibly Isaiah by name also, who lived at the much later time of the Captivity in Babylon. And

other prophetic writings, such as Zechariah, are pieced together and edited by some later hand in exactly the same way.

When the canon of the Old Testament was finally closed (i.e., when it was decided how many and what books should be included amongst the sacred writings of the Jews) we do not precisely know; but as some portions of it date down to the defilement of the temple<sup>1</sup> by Antiochus Epiphanes (170 B.C.), it cannot have been definitely settled until near the time of Christ. Certain other books besides those admitted into the Protestant Old Testament, viz., *The Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, appear in the Roman Catholic Bible, and formed part of the Authorized Version in King James's time. Some of these are much superior in tone and teaching to certain of the writings admitted within the circle, and so far as authenticity and genuineness are concerned have a better claim to be included. But the average Protestant believes in the inspiration of the morose Ecclesiastes, though

<sup>1</sup> e.g., *Psalms lxxiv., lxxix.*

not in that of the inspiring Ecclesiasticus : he accepts the fleshly Song of Solomon, and rejects the thoughtful Wisdom of Solomon : he puts faith in the Book of Chronicles, but not in the first Book of Maccabees. The freer mind will judge each book on its own merits, whether it happens to be within or without the canon, rejecting such portions as are clearly fabulous and traditional, and accepting just so much as bears the impress of reliability and truth.

The New Testament is very different in its origin from the Old Testament. Instead of being, like the Old Testament, a collection of legends and traditional stories about the history of a people, together with such of its literary works as had survived the lapse of ages and the misfortunes of conflict, it is a collection of writings concerning one particular religious Teacher, containing several versions of the story of his life, different accounts of his teachings, a record of the doings of his chief followers, a series of letters written by the early preachers of Christ-

ianity to the infant churches struggling for existence, encouraging, warning, approving, or condemning them for their condition, and a dream of the end of the world which all the first Christians, apparently including Jesus himself, believed to be close at hand.

We have seen how the Old Testament became a natural growth from the religious life of a *Nation*; and in the same way arose the Hindoo Vedas and other Bibles of the world. But most of the world's Bibles have had their starting-point in the career of some great *Man*, just as the New Testament had. The Tripitaka is a collection of the sayings and doings of Gautama Buddha, and the Koran came from the hand of Mohammed. In the one case Buddha was the central figure, in the other Mohammed: in the New Testament it was Jesus Christ.

It is not difficult to understand how such sacred books grow. Take the case of Jesus. The Teacher comes and leaves a vast influence on the life of his time, gathering around him a band of devoted disciples. His attention is so much occu-

pied in dealing with the needs of his own age, and he thinks so little of the possibility of his influence continuing after his life, that he keeps no record of his teachings; and those who hang upon his lips are too much absorbed in him to think of the importance of so doing. It is only when the Teacher is dead, when he has fallen a victim to bitter persecution, and yet in his death displays the crowning triumph of his life and teachings, that the followers, recovering from the shock, begin to wish that some record had been kept. His words are fast fading from their memory, losing some of their deep significance or gathering unworthy accretions as they are told by imaginative or shallow believers; and the need is felt for those who were nearest to the Teacher to write down what they can remember of his words and works. Many loving hands set about this task, no one writing a complete life, but each jotting down his own recollections or the results of his conversations with others who had seen and heard the beloved Leader. Then, in course

of time, as his image becomes still more indistinct, it is felt that these documents must be brought together so as to form a fuller record, giving as far as possible the complete story of his life. Long after his death, therefore, this work of editing and compiling is independently performed by certain faithful followers. One editor, relying on the documents and traditions which have come down with the name of Matthew attached, and writing especially for the Jewish Christians, produces the Gospel according to Matthew; so, under different circumstances, with Mark and Luke. This is the actual process through which the first three Gospels passed before they assumed their present form. They are so much alike in their records as to gain the name 'Synoptics' (i.e., seeing eye to eye); yet they are so different from one another that it is clear each Gospel was prepared independently, the writers having a few of the same documents as a basis to work upon, but at the same time drawing upon materials which were not common to the rest.



The Fourth Gospel is of much later origin, and therefore much less historical and reliable, written perhaps by a John, but not by the Apostle John, who, however, probably enough is the author of Revelation, a book of quite different tone from the Fourth Gospel. This Gospel was composed in a foreign country, bears the impress of Gentile thought, and is a patent attempt to reconcile Egyptian and Greek speculation with the mission and teachings of Jesus. The writer gives to his own philosophical and spiritual thoughts the name and authority of Jesus.

The Book of Acts was written by the compiler of Luke's Gospel, and gives prominence to the work and teachings of Peter and Paul. If Paul's Epistles are reliable, the Book of Acts is historically unreliable. It imports into the well-marked character of Peter so much of the free spirit of Paul, and into the large soul of Paul so much of the narrowness of Peter, as to suggest irresistibly the reason of its own origin, viz., to compromise

between the two quarrelling factions among the primitive Christians.

Many of the Epistles, or letters to the Churches, attributed to Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, are undoubtedly his, such as Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, though others, such as Ephesians and Hebrews, were not written by him at all. In the writings of Paul we find quite a different picture of Jesus from that given in any of the Gospels, due to the fact that he had never seen the Teacher, and was drawing an ideal picture to reconcile with his own philosophical conceptions. The common Christian theology of to-day is a vulgarized Paulinism, founded upon mistaken views of what Paul taught. It is not the Christianity of the first three Gospels ; it is not the religion which Jesus himself taught : it is a theological system, founded partly upon John and mainly upon Paul, though neither of these men had ever seen or heard in actual life the prophet about whom they wrote. It is to be remarked, moreover, that Paul knows nothing of the miraculous concep-

tion of Jesus and gives no evidence of a belief in the miracles recorded about him. This is significant when we remember that some of Paul's Epistles are the earliest complete books of the New Testament which we possess, and the Gospels which record these traditional events are of later date. If Paul had known anything about them and believed in them, he would surely have quoted them, for they would have been a wonderful support to him when he was trying to impress spiritual truths on ignorant and credulous minds which perpetually demand a sign. But, said Jesus, sighing deeply, when the Pharisees came to ask him for a sign, 'Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.'<sup>1</sup> Well might Jesus sigh when he saw the gross materialism which seeks after signs to prove spiritual power. I would that he could inspire his professed disciples to-day with the same message!

In this same New Testament there are a

<sup>1</sup> *Mark* viii. 11-12.

few letters attributed to other disciples, amidst which the tender and practical Epistle of James stands pre-eminent, and also a weird allegory or dream, probably Jewish in origin, but revised and adapted by John the Apostle, which not even the wisest theologian is able to interpret satisfactorily, but which at least clearly taught the immediate approach of the end of the world—an early Christian dream doomed to disappointment.

The canon of the New Testament was not settled definitely until a very late period in the history of the Christian Church, and the need for a canon was the result of the many heresies which naturally arose from the uncertainty as to which books ought to be received, as well as from the very opposite teachings of some of these books. Many times the canon was closed by the authority of the church, only to be opened again and altered. At times James, Hebrews, and Revelation were omitted, at other times included; sometimes other early Christian writings, forming part of the Apocrypha of the

New Testament, were included, e.g., the Epistles of Clement and Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews ; and it was not until the third council of Carthage in A.D. 397, that the limits of inspiration were finally fixed by a vote of the representatives ! The early Christians never thought of regarding the first Christian writings as specially inspired : their appeal was always to the Law and the Prophets. It was lapse of time and lack of knowledge which led to the introduction of this notion into the New Testament, just as it had been previously with the Old. The writers themselves never imagined that they were ' making history,' setting down records for good or ill which after ages would deem to be infallible inspirations from God.

Thus did our Bible assume its present shape ; and we learn from its history that it is not one book, as we are so often assured, but a whole literature—nay, two literatures, one Jewish, the other Christian. How few there are who ever dream of

the mines of wealth lying hidden under the covers of the old Bible ! There are many who talk loudly about it, but to whom the history of the Bible is a sealed book, and who therefore cannot possibly interpret it properly. So often is it the case that the shallow brook makes the most noise.

Here indeed lies its great charm, and the secret of its power. It is because of the varied experiences there recorded and the many vicissitudes of fortune with which it deals, that we find so much in it to fit on to our present needs. It has something to say on almost every conceivable contingency ; and as we recognize its life-like pictures, we find our own hearts beating in unison with it, and hence we gain comfort and peace in reading its pages. Though the cruelty and injustice attributed to God in the pages of the Old Testament utterly overthrow the theory of Infallible Inspiration, these passages simply show how men of the past thought of God, and how infinitely higher and more elevating are our own conceptions to-day. Not one of the

curses of David nor one of his sins would we brush from the record, because we must see the man in his true character and rejoice at the contrast between him and our best political leaders to-day. The gloomy Agnosticism of Ecclesiastes may trouble my 'orthodox' friend; but, though I utterly repudiate such thoughts myself, I see that they have been held in the world from very early times, and these ancient records help me to understand the scepticism of to-day. The fabled miracles of the Old and New Testaments have an intense significance, because they are so many indications of that spirit of credulity and reliance on external authority which has often buried all spiritual religion miles deep, and is the most baneful influence we have to contend against in the theological world to-day.

In fact I value the Bible above all because of its transparent truthfulness and simplicity. Its writers have turned their souls inside out for us to see them just as they are, and they present us with a more vivid picture of the world's

life in their own times than we could ever gain from smoother pens or more refined tongues. It is the human spirit in the Bible which gives it its chief worth. Just so far as it represents human life with its struggling, sorrowing, rejoicing, sinning, conquering, hating, loving, living episodes, is it worthy of our careful study. As an Infallible Book it would be a sad failure, and I for one should put it aside with a sigh, and turn to human life and experience to give me more reliable guidance. There is a deep significance in the paraphrased words of Thomas Carlyle :—

Wouldst thou a Temple ? look above ;  
 The heavens stretch over all in love :  
 A Book ? for thine evangel scan  
 The wondrous history of man.

But as a golden treasury of religious growth, containing many beautiful gems, though placed in an imperfect setting ; as a pretty faithful record of the religious history of a nation whose ideals were the highest, if its achievements were among the lowest ; as a spiritual storehouse from which we can take down at will the



sublimest thoughts and most precious truths that the world has ever known—I honour the Bible, fallible and human as it is, and thank God for its influence on the life of the world; and my firm wish is that men may study it more thoroughly and reasonably. The very contradictions it contains are the evidences of its honesty: the very differences in narrative as told by the various Gospels prove that the writers were at least telling the story as it seemed true to them. What remains for us to do is to gather from the pages of the Bible all that is helpful and instructive for the life of to-day, leaving its mistakes and contradictions to one side, and employing our own God-given powers to discriminate between the truths which have been revealed to the souls of its writers and the errors with which they were encrusted.

Those who say 'you must believe everything or nothing in the Bible' are illogical and unreasonable, and they never dream of putting such an alternative before themselves in regard to anything

but the Bible. They do not feel bound to believe everything they read in any other book; nor do they believe all that their dearest friend tells them, though they give him credit for honesty in what he says; they do not accept every word that their favourite minister speaks from the pulpit, or approve of every action of his in private life. Some of them have certain mental reservations as to the acceptance of their own creed or confession of faith; and, in the recesses of their own souls, the most credulous have qualms of conscience sometimes about approving of everything in the Bible.

Let them then be consistent and honest. Let them cease to be afraid of the spirit of inquiry, which is the only thing that has ever brought a word of truth to human minds; and let them trust the Spirit of the Living God to keep his own truth safe, in spite of human wanderings and doubt. To each of them God has given Reason and Conscience, which are sufficient guides to the way of eternal life. Let them cease to hand over

these glorious prerogatives to the keeping of the Church, or the Bible, or the Minister. 'Think for yourself' should be the watchword of every true man and woman. Cease to bind with chains of slavery the faculties with which a loving God has endowed you, and which the best of the Bible heroes used so completely themselves. 'Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.' Whatever Reason approves and Conscience proclaims to be right is good for us; and whatever these ultimate courts of appeal pronounce to be wrong we must reject. The fact that David or Isaiah or John or Paul has made a particular assertion is not an absolute guarantee of its truth. We must search and inquire for ourselves whether these things are so. Reason causes us to reject as inaccurate many statements in the Bible, just as we should reject them if we read them elsewhere: it at the same time enables us to ascertain the truth contained in the Bible. Conscience hides its head in shame when some portions

of the Bible are viewed ; it beams with joy and holds up its head in triumph when we read of righteousness, self-sacrifice and love.

Treated in this way, the Bible soon shows its surpassing worth. No other book can be found which contains such grandeur of conception, such purity of thought, such devotion to righteousness, such loyalty to truth, such fervency of aspiration as the Bible : no other book breathes such pure religion or presents us with such true views of God and duty : no other book is so full of hope, of faith, of universal love. We may and ought to look to the other Bibles of the world, and in all we can find much to appreciate and admire, but not one can bear comparison with the Christian Scriptures. From these grand old books are acquired sweetest rest for the weary soul, divine comfort for the sorrow-stricken heart, plenteous love for the poorest outcast and the most degraded sinner. In health and sickness, in wealth and poverty, in joy and sorrow, in life and death, a suitable word may always be found.

We of the freer faith, then, yield to none in our appreciation of the Bible's worth, but we insist that what is needed is an intelligent appreciation of it. As the mists of superstition are cleared away, the independent thinker loves the venerable pages more. His heart is grateful to God that men like unto ourselves have left to mankind a precious and imperishable heirloom, bright with their best thoughts, and rich in unfading glory.

## JESUS CHRIST

OF all the objects of religious thought there is none on which I so rejoice to speak to you as on Jesus Christ. We may differ from other churches as to what exactly was that unique personality ; but we all alike look to him as, above all others, the Teacher, and, in the surpassing greatness of his help to mankind, the Saviour. In all the problem of religion, Christ is the chief factor. If you would work out that problem from the human side, in Christ you have humanity at its highest religious power. If we think that the problem is to be worked out from the Divine side, still of all lives and words in which we find the manifestation of the divine, Christ is the highest and clearest. Morally and religiously, he stands at the

head of our race. With him began what Dr. Martineau well calls 'a new edition of human nature'; and for nineteen centuries now, the world's best life has kept referring itself back to him as its originating and sustaining influence.

There is something in all this which would make the person and the work of Christ always interesting, even as a mere historical study. But it is something far greater than an historical study. The work of Christ, as I hope to show you, is still going on; and the power of that work still lies, as it has ever done, in reverential discipleship to his person, to that word and spirit and life which constitute the Christ of the Gospels.

And now if I should describe in brief what it is that our Unitarian Churches stand for in regard to what one may call the person of Christ, I cannot put it in any better words than those which I have just used, 'the Christ of the Gospels.' That which the Gospels are full of is a Life—a life of wonderful holiness and goodness. To after ages, that life seemed so

wonderful, so above any level of human living, that it became the great controversy of Christendom what it really was; and the Orthodox explanation came to be that Jesus Christ was, in reality, Almighty God. Now we cannot receive that explanation. We believe it is a mistake. But what we specially stand for is not some other explanation of our own. As a fact, our explanations are various, and some Unitarians frankly own that it is beyond their explaining. But what we want is to go behind these explanations and definitions which make up the Christ of the Creeds, back to the life itself—the Christ of the Gospels. That is where we lay the emphasis. In the Gospels, we believe that we get back the very nearest that we can to Christ as he really lived among men, and as he seemed to those who actually listened to his voice and looked up into his face. It was that voice which set Christianity going in the world. In that Christ of the Gospels resides the central, undying power of Christianity.

A great question, however, meets us on



the threshold. When I speak of the Christ of the Gospels as that which we should study and cling to, I am at once asked, 'Is there really enough known to us about Christ's life and thought for us to cling to?' There is a widespread impression abroad that modern Biblical criticism has cut away the very ground of any permanent discipleship to Christ by showing that the accounts we have are not historical; that all the clear outlines of that figure which the world has bowed down to are mythical or legendary; that the whole is a half imaginary picture—nothing to depend upon in it, nothing discernible enough to stand for.

This is an utter mistake, however. What criticism has really done is this: it has cleared away the idea that the four Gospels are inspired and infallible narratives; but it has not touched this fact: that those four Gospels, taken simply as you would take any other accounts of any other ancient life, give us such a picture of the life and spirit and word of Jesus as we have of no other life in all the ancient

world. Take the extremest criticism even: suppose that not one of our four Gospels was actually written by those immediate followers of Christ whose names they bear; that it was some generations before the story of Jesus was thus written down at all. This does not affect the main facts. It does not affect the historic reality of that great figure which left such an impress on those around that even for so long, though unrecorded, it kept itself in mind so clearly and distinctly. Fortunately, we know exactly in what direction to allow for the effect of such a lapse of time and for the accretions of tradition. That was put fairly and clearly by John Stuart Mill, who looked at the whole matter simply as an outsider, certainly with no predisposition to find more in the Gospels than there really is. 'The tradition of followers,' he says, 'suffices to insert any number of marvels, and may have inserted all the miracles. . . . But who among his disciples, or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining

the life and character revealed in the Gospels?' Exactly. Every exaggeration of Christ by the world must have been in the direction of the world's ideals of greatness; but then, every one of those ideals of greatness, alike among Jew and Gentile, was quite different from that which the Gospels actually present to us. Judaism might have invented a grand Messianic figure; the Gentile world might have invented a warrior-patriot or a philosopher; and either Jewish or Gentile followers might have toned up the actual Christ-life in either of these directions: but neither Jewish nor Gentile enthusiasm was capable of inventing or of evolving that actual Jesus of Nazareth who went right in the teeth of both, whose life and death alike were a disappointment to the Jew and an absurdity to the Gentile. Nay, you see how the idealizing tendency did work. It gradually glorified Jesus into that grand celestial Christ, that mighty divine being which, as I shall show you by and by, the creeds expounded. Fortunately, they were so busy exaggerating

in this direction that the human life of Jesus was hardly meddled with at all. That was not the line along which exaggeration was going on. So that there is good reason to accept that human life as, in all its main features, true; and the figure of Jesus stands out untouched by criticism — 'a unique figure,' as Mill calls him, and 'in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our race can boast.'

What a figure, what a life, that is, of which the Gospels are full! If you only read them casually, still it is an impression, very distinct in its way, that they leave upon you—the impression of a life glowing with a strange, close consciousness of God, and, in the impulse of this, going about doing good with beautiful, tender loving-kindness, and constantly, on the way, letting fall teachings of deep wisdom about the heavenly Father, and duty, and life.

When you go near, when you look carefully into the Gospels, the features of all this take form more and more vividly. You see that life as it came out into the

public view, and went about from place to place for a few brief years, and then passed away. You see the surroundings of that life, which gave it its form: that Jewish people, the Puritans and irreconcilables of the ancient world, looking with intensity of longing for a great political Messiah; misreading the old prophecies of the triumph of the Jewish faith into predictions of the triumph of Jewish power, and losing all the light and blessing of that old faith in the eager waiting for a mighty conquering deliverer. And among them rises up one who says: 'My people, come unto me! The Lord has put his spirit upon me, hath anointed me—made me his "Messiah," or anointed one—to preach to you that his kingdom is at hand, and to call you to believe the good tidings, and to enter into it!' But the kingdom that he preached was not a successful Jewish revolution, but simply the drawing of all men together into brotherhood with one another, and childlike love to the great Father, and into earnest, dutiful life, and the loving even of their enemies! What a wonderful

thought to come with such possessing power into the soul of one who to the people about was only Jesus, the carpenter's son, of a little Galilean village! People sometimes try to make out that Christ was simply the product of his time. No: you cannot get Christ that way! The very master-thought of his life was the very opposite to the great thoughts of his time, rose clear above it.

With that great, tender thought swelling within him, he went forth among his people, preaching this kingdom of God, that wanted no revolt, no bloodshed; that waited for no great national opportunity; that was right 'at hand,' open to every one, rich or poor, the Gentile or the Samaritan as well as to the Jew—to every one who would believe it, and repent and enter in; yea, which was even something 'within.' This was God's message which was upon him, and which he wanted to tell as glad tidings to cheer the sorrowful, to save the lost, and to make all men happier and better. He cared not how he lived, nor where, so that he could gather people

around him to tell them of it, or touch with its healing power some sorrowful or sin-bound heart. He loves to go much among the homes of poor men like himself; but he sits down at the Pharisee's table as readily, or goes with his new disciple, Matthew, to where a company of the shunned and hated tax-gatherers had come together to see him. People did not understand it. 'This man a prophet!' said the Pharisees. 'Why he goes eating and drinking just like any common man; and eats with the unclean too!' But Jesus went right on. At marriage festivals, at rich men's feasts, he might be seen one day; the next, wandering in lonely places, with only the crust that his disciples had saved from yesterday, and the fishing-boat on the mountain-side the only place where he could lay his head; and ever full of the tenderest sympathy, weeping with those that wept, taking up little children in his arms to bless them, pitying the leper from whom all others shrank away, and full of great thoughts, and words that have been living, glowing words ever since.

Sometimes those thoughts and words came forth in great discourses to the listening multitude, like that grand charter of simple, practical, spiritual religion, the Sermon on the Mount; sometimes they flashed out upon those who tried him with their questions; sometimes they broke in upon the petty bickerings and jealousies which went on in undertones around him; and, oftenest of all, they shaped themselves into some homespun parable, in which he held the mirror up to nature, and made men teach themselves.

'And the common people heard him gladly.' They do not seem ever for a moment to have given up their old hope of a great national leader, but they hoped that Jesus would by and by throw off this disguise of a lowly teacher, and come out in the character they looked for. So they gave themselves up to the delight of his wise, kind, beautiful teachings. Very touching it is to see how they flocked about him! When the news spread that Jesus of Nazareth was in the neighbourhood, the farmer left his farm, the labourers



came out from the cornfields and the vineyards; the mother forgot her household cares, and, snatching up her little child, set off, with others holding by her skirts, eager to have the prophet say a word of blessing for her little one; the cripple limped away after the rest, blind men begged the passer-by to lead them, even the village children left their play, and hurried along. And so they came about him, and sometimes almost trod each other down in their eagerness to get within the range of his voice or the touch of his garment.

And so he went on to the end. He never swerved from his preaching of that great spiritual blessing for all men, which he wanted to substitute for the old Messianic dream of his people. Once, at least, the people tried to force him to fulfil that dream—would have taken him by force and made him king; but he only went right away—hid himself from them. And thus came over a little cooling of the popular feeling; and meanwhile the priestly party, who had hated him from

the beginning, grew bolder in their attacks. Still he went straight on—straight on, though apparently his mission had failed—straight on, though it led right to his death! And so, with a great anguish for the people he had longed to save, and could not, with a great pleading of prayer for some other way, if it might be the Father's will, but with a faith that was over all, he took up that cross in which the light of his great love for man was focused to its most touching and imperishable brightness.

This is the Christ of the Gospels; only the barest sketch of that great life, only the outline of those moral and spiritual features of it which no criticism can touch, and yet, still, what a life it is! I do not wonder that men have puzzled over it. I do not wonder that, when the story of it spread among heathen peoples who were familiar with the idea of incarnations and demi-gods, the thought grew up and gathered strength, 'This must have been God!' But the whole history of the way that idea grew, and the very kind of creed-

making to which it turned the Church, and the results which have followed these creeds through the ages, make me sure that it was all a mistake. I am convinced that, the more men study Christ's life as it was, the more they will come back to his simple humanity—humanity *plus* God's spirit, indeed, but *plus* God's spirit in a way which did not make him God in any sense whatever. And, after all, in saying that men will come back to Christ's simple humanity the more they study his life, what is this but saying that his life will make upon them simply the same impression that it did actually make upon those who were spectators and companions of it? Here is the one thing which, it seems to me, there is no getting over: that Christ-life—which, on the reading of it, our Orthodox friends think must surely have been the life of God—to those who actually witnessed it, who saw it at its brightest, never suggested any such idea. It was all an afterthought. Even those who believe that he really was God, generally admit that those who were all about him

were not aware of it. To them he was simply 'Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth.' Why, even such a writer as William Ewart Gladstone, one of the fairest scholars of his time—an Orthodox Episcopalian, too, who believed from other sources that Christ was God—frankly admitted that, according to the gospel accounts, Jesus appeared to those about him simply as a man. He wrote: 'It appears on the whole, as respects the person of our Lord, that its ordinary exhibition to ordinary hearers and spectators was that of a man engaged in the best and holiest ministries, . . . and teaching, too, the best and holiest lessons, and claiming unequivocally, and without appeal, a divine authority for what he said and did; but, beyond this, asserting respecting himself nothing, and leaving himself to be freely judged by his words and deeds.' True, he thinks it was only because of the hardness and dullness of the time that Christ did not fully reveal himself; but the important thing is the fact explained that those about Jesus did not know anything about his being God

during his life. And it is evident it was so. It does not depend upon a few texts; the whole account of how those about him regarded him and treated him shows it. You find his own family thinking him 'beside himself' even for setting himself up as the Messiah; and they go out 'to lay hold on him' (Mark iii. 21). Evidently, the disciples had no idea of his being God, or Judas could never have betrayed him, nor Peter denied him, nor the rest forsaken him. Evidently, the Jews had not, or they never could have crucified him. No; and we have this curious corroboration of the idea of his deity having come afterward; that, a few centuries later, when it *had* come, one of the points which we constantly find theologians setting themselves to explain is, why such a grand truth had not been made known during his life? Even Athanasius says—and this was the common explanation—'All the Jews were so firmly persuaded that their Messiah was to be nothing more than a man like themselves, that the apostles were obliged to

use great caution in divulging the doctrine of the proper divinity of Christ.' Some of those old fathers gave a more curious explanation: for example, Ignatius, who said that it was kept secret that the devil might not know it; and subsequent writers took up the idea, and argued that if the devil had known it, he would have taken care not to put it into the heads of the Jews to crucify Jesus, and so would have spoiled the plan of salvation. Here, again, the explanation matters little; but the fact for which such explanations were set up is most significant. It is a fact which there seems to me no getting over. For, see: that very life, which seems, as we read of it, so far above ordinary human life that after ages thought the idea of a hidden Godhead necessary to account for it—that life, to those who actually witnessed it, who saw its very reality and glory, never suggested any such thought.

But then I am told it was revealed afterwards. I want to know when. Because it was such a stupendous fact; so stupendous, it must have been, when it

first came really upon his followers, that this Jesus with whom they had been going about was verily Almighty God; and so stupendous to the Jews, so utterly contrary to all their preconceived ideas. If it were indeed so, and if this great news of Christ having been God was to be henceforth, as it has been represented, the one thing which it is most important for Christians to believe, then all the more we must expect to find it very clearly and emphatically proclaimed.

Yet do we find it so? Why, look at the great occasions which have been recorded for us, on which the apostles gave, not some passing allusion to the gospel, but a great, marked, emphatic proclamation of it. On all those occasions they speak of their Master, but how? Take that great preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii.). It is simply 'Jesus of Nazareth, a *man* approved of God among you.' Take that solemn setting forth of Christ by Paul at Antioch, occupying nearly a whole chapter (Acts xiii.), and how does that long address wind up? 'Be

it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this *man* is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.' Listen to Paul, as at Athens, he stands before the philosophers. There was nothing in their minds to make 'great caution' necessary; there was every reason why, if Christ were God, he should have so proclaimed him; nay, the very way was opened by his having found that 'altar to the unknown God.' But that 'unknown God' whom he declared to them was simply the one Almighty; and, when he comes to speak of Christ, it is simply to say that the Almighty 'hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world by that *man* whom he hath ordained.' Now this is surely a remarkable fact. Can you set a few passing expressions here and there in Paul's letters—expressions all of which are more or less doubtful—against the entire absence of any hint in Christ's deity on these great and marked occasions?

Again, there is another class of occasions on which, if Christ were God, it could hardly help appearing unmistakably. I



mean, when the disciples have to speak of what are called the 'offices' of Christ. Sometimes they call him 'the Judge,' sometimes the 'Mediator,' sometimes the 'Ransom,' sometimes as one through whom they have 'forgiveness of sins.' Now a strong point is usually made that Jesus could only fulfil such offices through the fact of his being divine. The explanation is, that there were two natures in him—a human nature, by which he was 'Son of man,' and a divine, which made him the 'Son of God.' If that were so, surely we might expect to find some trace of this distinction in the New Testament; for instance, that, while the ordinary life he shared with humanity should be alluded to in connexion with the name 'man,' or 'Son of man,' these more exalted offices should be ascribed to him as 'Son of God.' But, if you look, you find no trace of any such distinction. When Paul has to speak of him as the mighty Judge, it is simply, 'He will judge the world by that *man* whom he hath ordained'; when he declares the forgiveness of sins, it is,

'Through this *man* is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.' It is especially as Mediator and Ransom that our Orthodox brethren, utterly misunderstanding the sense in which Christ was so, claim that nothing less than God to mediate and save would be of any use ; and yet, on the one occasion when Paul speaks of Christ as having done this, how does he speak of him ? 'There is one mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all' (1 Tim. ii. 5). I do not say that these expressions prove that Jesus was only man ; but when you never find them making that solemn and surprising announcement that Christ was God any part of their greatest and most formal proclamations of the gospel, and when you find them speaking of the highest aspects and elements in his humanity, and when it appears that the doctrine of his deity, said to be the most important thing of all, is never directly and clearly asserted at all, but only inferred from occasional expressions, we are surely justified in regarding it as an after-

thought, the joint result of glorifying reverence and theosophic speculations.

But is this idea of Christ being *man*, then, all, it may be said? Yes: as to *nature*, I believe it is; but man, *plus* such fullest inflowing and indwelling of the divine spirit, as surely lifted him above all others. The divine life and the human life are always in contact, and in many a different degree—from that felt nearness which in prayer we call 'communion,' to that overmastering uplifting and teaching which in prophet-souls we call 'inspiration.' I give you only my own thought now; for, as I have said, Unitarianism leaves all these as open questions to be studied, but not dogmatized upon: but to me it seems that in Christ we have this contact and communion at its highest, divinest point. It is in this that I find the secret at once of those expressions of Christ's consciousness of close, wonderful life with God, and also of the fact that he uses the very same expressions about his disciples, to teach them to seek for the same thing. Does he claim, 'The words

that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself' ? Hear him, also, as he encourages his followers to look to God for the word to speak ; ' for,' he says, ' it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.' Does he speak of the spirit of the Father that dwelleth in himself ? He says also to them, ' He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.' Does he utter that sublimest word of all, ' I and my Father are one ' ? Listen to him in his prayer, and he is asking that it may be so with his disciples too : ' That they may be one, even as we are one ; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.' Do I misunderstand all this way of speaking ? Yet this is the very way in which Christ's own apostles understood it all : they found in the exaltation of their Master's life the token of what all Christian life might aspire to. Why, what a word is that which Paul uses about Christ, ' In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily ! ' We cooler-blooded modern Christians are inclined to say, That is a

word about Jesus that never could be said about *man*. And so we might have thought, only that we find the very same idea applied by Paul to the Ephesians; for he writes to them the ecstatic wish, 'That ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.' No: we do not profess to be able to understand every word that Christ says about his close life with God. It is not likely we should. We must come far nearer to God ourselves first. But this one thing seems to stand out broad and clear on the face of the New Testament: that, in Christ's close, near life with God, just as much as in his tender, loving life with man, he was 'leaving us an example.' This also is part of that helpful, encouraging life which pleads with us in the Gospels, and helps man onwards and upwards to that true human life which is the very essence of salvation.

And now, if I have succeeded at all in bringing out the touching, impressive power of this Jesus Christ, as he stands for us in the Gospels, you will more readily receive what I have now to say about his

work. For it will not seem to you any small thing—any lessening of his work—to say that we regard Christ's work as entirely a moral and religious work, an influence in human hearts. We have no part whatever in that idea, so strongly insisted on by some of our Orthodox friends, of Christ having died as man's substitute; of his death on the cross having, as it were, bought mankind off from hell; of his 'blood' being something to shelter behind from the wrath of God. All that seems to us a shocking perversion of the beautiful work which Christ lived and died to do. And no such work was needed. God never needed any reconciling. It was to turn man to God, not God to man, that Christ lived and died. God never needed any such 'satisfaction.' The only thing which can give God satisfaction is that his children leave off sinning, and try to do better. Christ's whole blessed work was simply towards this, in human hearts: to show men the infinite love of God waiting for their repentance; to help them to feel the

awfulness of sin; to put a new love of goodness and kindness into them; to make mankind happier and better; to set the great realities of God's will and man's duty and destiny in the clearest light, and on an immovable foundation.

All this is what he did, and what his spirit and word are still doing with a strange, undying power. That image of Christ, simply as he was, apart from any explanation of him, with the thought of his loving, merciful life, and of the things he spoke to men about, has altogether taken a serious hold on mankind. Through long ages, during which all that the churches held up before men's gaze was the great theological Christ, glorified in heaven, still the thought of the lowly Jesus, as he went about doing good on earth, never died quite out, still lived on, with a marvellous power for good. When it seems sometimes as if the Christian Church had nothing of Christ left in it but the name, that name quietly standing for what it ought to mean, was the strength of every reformer. That name of Christ,

the fact of the Church being based on Christ, has really been the one perpetually saving and renewing power of Christianity. Wherever you find men going back, not to what Wesley preached or Calvin taught, or to what the councils decreed or the fathers wrote, nor even to what the apostles laid down, but to what Jesus Christ himself was and said, you are sure to find them coming back to broad and simple faith, and to kindly practical life. And Christ is still always helping men to such life. His word and spirit are a help to all kindly feeling among men, a rebuke to all anger and selfishness, to all shows and shams and pretences ; and even those who most think that they reject Christianity, will speak, almost all of them, with deep veneration of the personal Jesus Christ.

There is more than this, however, in Christ. A merely beautiful character would hardly have given him that place of leadership in the world's best religious life which has been his. But connected with that life are great, world-wide, im-



perishable ideas or principles. In teaching that God is the heavenly Father of all; that all men are brothers, bound to brotherly duty and kindness; and that the service of religion is not in this or that form of worship, but in duty and kindness and simple piety of heart: in teaching these things, Jesus touched a *universal religion*. Never mind whether these things were entirely new things or not—probably, indeed certainly, not entirely new—but he brought them out with a clearness, with a simplicity, and with a power with which they had never been put before; and in so doing, even though they were old stones he used, he did lay them as a 'foundation'—put man's religion upon a broader, stronger, surer basis than ever before.

Let us look for a moment at that comparison which Paul uses: a 'foundation'; for I think it touches very closely on the point of the paramount help which Christ is to the religious life of mankind. When we talk of laying a foundation for a building, what we want is something level,

strong, that we can build upon. That foundation which you try to get is not the ultimate basis, is not the bottom of all. Underneath are all the depths of the earth-strata, of all sorts, of various density and cohesion, from mere quicksand to solid rock. But you do not want to dig right down to the earth's centre every time a house is wanted to work in or live in. You lay a foundation near the surface, a foundation of great massive stones; these are really only parts of the earth's substance; but you bring them together and set them, broadly based and levelled; and there you stand, and your building stands, if it is good building. Now, it is very much the same thing that we want in our religious life. The real ultimate basis of all religion is the very nature of man—that tendency towards religion, that sense of divine and spiritual realities, which seems inwoven with the very texture of mankind's life and thinking. You find this religious nature everywhere, just as the earth is under you everywhere. As a philosophical matter, I believe that religion rests per-

fectly securely upon this ; in the large world-wide fact of it, always has grown up out of this—always will. But still, for the practical building of your thoughts or mine about religion, we want the foundation made a little more definite. That religious consciousness of mankind, like the earth-strata, is of very various consistency, and not easy to build upon. We cannot for ever be referring back to the universal consciousness of man, and arguing up from first principles of thought and faith. For a deep theological inquiry, go down to the very depths of human nature ; but, for your daily living thought, you want something more practicable. And it is just this which we have in the spirit and word of Christ. In Christ the general religious nature of man came to its broadest, highest, strongest. It does not matter how. It does not matter whether you regard that Christ-life as the finest flower of human spiritual development, or as the brightest incoming of divine inspiration ; there the fact is, a consciousness of divine realities in Christ ; a sense

of God's fatherliness, nearness, love; a sense of the immortal spirit-life in man; a discernment of the principles of human duty, a clear seeing of the innermost truth about *life*, such as had never been in the world before, and never have been since. Christ believed it was his great mission from God to teach men all this; and he did teach it and live it, with a simplicity, with a clearness, and with an intense certainty and authority, which have made religion, as he so taught and lived it, a clearer, stronger, broader thing to man ever since. The great fundamental realities of religious thought and human duty have been upon a different footing since Christ came from what they ever were before. It is true that men have overlaid them with all sorts of thought-building and creed-building and form-building, which have had to come down. True; but there has even been, in this simple Christ of the New Testament, the old foundation to refer to. And, as I said at first, all through the ages, whenever men have referred back to that—dug down

through their ecclesiastical superstructures to what Christ was and what Christ said—they have always kept coming back to the broad, simple realities of religion.

And there is a value and help in this which ages have not weakened. I think it is as truly a help for us to-day as it ever was in the past. There are times when we have to dig right down into the ultimate facts of human nature, to see what even Christ rests upon; but from all such deeper investigations—from all looking abroad among the religious thoughts of the world's many peoples, and other great religions, and great teachers—I always come back with a strengthened and confirmed sense of how, in the spirit and word of Christ, the realities of religion are laid in a broad, immovable foundation, on which I can stand and feel that I am on the very rock. Amidst all the systems with which the churches bewilder me, amidst all the mazes of the theology which the ages have built up, amidst all the perplexities of this at once speculative and questioning age, I always feel that, if

I can get my foot upon some great, unmistakable thought of Christ himself, I can stand there. I am upon a sort of divine common sense, which stands from age to age, solid and plain and strong.

And I want you, further, to notice that this help which we have from Christ, in the subject of religion, is only the counterpart of the help which we frankly acknowledge and rest upon in various other parts of life. In every branch of study, of thought, of action, there is such a thing as going right down to abstract first principles; but we do not practically do it. We do it now and then for a philosophical investigation perhaps, but not for the practical purposes of life. In every branch of study or action, what we practically do is, to accept some strong, broad, clear foundation which we find already laid long ago by some great thinker of the past; and we build on that. In every branch there has been thus some strong, massive foundation laid. What is the practical foundation on which political economy has been built? Adam Smith's

great work, 'The Wealth of Nations.' Who laid the foundation of all this infinitely varied modern science, that with microscope and notebook goes up and down the earth, observing facts, and from them generalizing laws? Every one acquainted with the history of thought at once answers, 'Lord Bacon.' See, I can give you an instance closer still. What is the 'foundation that has been laid' in geometry? That little work, over which I suppose most of us puzzled when at school—puzzled until the beauty of its great principles dawned on us like a revelation—that little work, 'Euclid.' What is it? That is the book which from before the time of Christ has been the practical foundation of geometrical study. It is simply the work of a man named Euclid, who, some three hundred years before Christ, was one of the professors in the great schools of Alexandria. So close is the parallel: you could imagine some admiring student of that old mathematician writing, in Paul's very phrase, 'Other foundation of mathematics can

no man lay than that is laid, which is this work of Euclid.' It would have seemed very presumptuous, no doubt; but see, it has turned out to be the fact. That work has stood as the one sure foundation of geometrical study for nearly three centuries longer than Christianity; and it is standing yet. It is men's practical starting-point in that matter. When they can set their feet on a 'Q.E.D.' of Euclid, they look no further; they feel they are on the rock. And all students feel that the world owes a marvellous debt of gratitude to that old Egyptian teacher, who, though it was no new truth he was laying down, but simply some of the everlasting relations of things, yet so unveiled those everlasting relations, so put them in a simple way evident to all, that ever since they have been one of the steady lights of man.

When you think of that, it may not seem quite so absurd as some would regard it, that we should still have to look for the great broad foundation of our religious thinking, almost, though not quite, as



far back. It is a far higher subject, that of this vague, mysterious life of ours, and its invisible qualities and relations, than that of the mere relations of squares and circles; and its wisdom depends on a different set of perceptions. But yet Christ has set the great, broad realities of faith and duty in that same clear light, on that same solid foundation, as the old world mathematician set the relations of lines and squares and circles. The great truths of the Sermon on the Mount are as universally accepted as Euclid's axioms. The meaning of the parable of the Good Samaritan is as certain as that of the forty-seventh proposition—and a great deal plainer.

Nor am I speaking of this as a mere theoretical help. It is a most practical one. It is just the very help we all of us want, in the weakness and uncertainty of our own personal discerning. I suppose there are hours when God and duty and immortality seem clear and real to our hearts. We feel them for ourselves. We do not need anyone, not even Christ, to

show them to us. Perhaps, if we could fix our hearts into that frame of settled faith we should not need any helper, least of all need to look back so far for one. But we cannot so fix our hearts. There come other times when all seems dim and uncertain to us. Cold shades of doubt are over us: sometimes the mist of sin and sinful feeling hides everything from us. Which is the truth, which corresponds to the reality?—the happy faith of the brighter hours, or this closed in blindness and vacuity of our darker? Those are the experiences in which I, for one, feel it an unspeakable help to be able to fall back upon that great word of life which we have in Jesus Christ. When all is dark about my own life, there always seems light there. I do not say that we have there all that man's ever onward thought needs. I do not pretend to find there ready-made answers to all the questionings of life. Christ is not the whole building, but he *is* the foundation. Amid the speculations of the schools, amid the tottering structures of the creeds, amid all

the dimness and wavering of our personal faith, here is solid ground. Here are the great fundamentals of duty and faith, the thought of God, the hope of everlasting life put into words of matchless simplicity and force, and wrought into the changeless likeness of earth's most perfect life. That 'life' is 'the light of men.' And still along the centuries comes borne to us his pleading call, not to adore him, but to follow him: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' And still, in our true hours, when we see clearest through the maze of care or doubt, our hearts cry back to him: 'Lord, to whom else should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

## THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

THERE is something about the idea of blood at once sacred and shocking to us. We revolt from the sight of it. At the same time it represents to us the very life and energy of the living creature. Its swift pulsations bring renewal to all the tissues, maintain the bodily heat, restore the incessant expenditure of power. As the breath stands for the finer ethereal essence of the spirit, so the blood stands for the life—the full warm vitality of the human being. That is the way it is regarded long before anybody has found out its exact function in the animal economy. Before people know anything about its circulation—or its constitution—they know it as the especial seat and agent of life. To shed a man's blood is equiva-

lent to killing him. And though there are many ways of killing that do not require bloodshed, this primitive way of bloodshed still revolts our feeling the most, seems to imply the deepest brutality in the perpetrator—the deepest outrage to the victim.

To a visitant, say from another planet—who should observe our modern sensibility to the shedding of blood—I mean, of course, to the shedding it in our actual presence and in our ordinary mood—(for, to the bloodshed which is at a distance—we are by no means so sensitive)—to such a visitant, it would seem perplexing to find in our theological treatises, in our prayers and hymns, in our books of devotion, such frequent references to this idea of bloodshedding, such singular and exceptional efficacy ascribed to it. He would find it made the ground of the forgiveness of sins. He would find cleansing and purifying virtue attributed to it. He would find exhortations to drink it, to bathe in it, to wash one's garments in it ; ideas which, in their literal and natural significance would

be, in the highest degree, abhorrent to the very people who use them. He would find results attributed to these actions which would perplex him still more, from their being the very opposite of the natural results. Blood stains, defiles, disgusts. It does not purify. If the shedding of blood be a crime—how can it be the means of salvation? What would add still more to his perplexity, would be to see piety and devotion attach themselves with such zeal, such enthusiasm, to precisely these phrases; to find the Gospel of Jesus identified with them; to find the very sentiments and sentimentalities, to which he would have supposed them repulsive, revelling, so to speak, in them. How—he might ask—how have ideas and images so contradictory got entangled together? How has the one set passed over into the other? How much is real, and how much figurative, in these constantly recurring phrases? What is their real meaning on the lips of those who use them? And this is substantially the answer he would receive.

The blood of Christ is literally that blood of his shed on the cross. It is his death, whereby he made a complete satisfaction and atonement to the Eternal Justice for the sins of the whole world; wherein he took upon himself the entire punishment due to the sins of the human race, and bore it in our stead. Through this death we obtain full remission of our sins. They are blotted out—their consequences are turned aside—they are as though they had never been. God does not recognize them any more. And the one condition on which we may appropriate this inestimable benefit is simply that we believe in it. Believe that this is so—believe that Jesus suffered and died for you, and that through this death all your sins are washed away, and it is so. His blood obliterates our offences. It becomes a torrent which bears them away—a tide vast enough to engulf them all. It washes us, cleanses, heals. ‘Sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.’

Ah! we are dealing here with tropes

and figures. The fancy takes up the thought and plays with it, applies it in a hundred lively ways, to bring out its sense of benefit more vividly, till it hardly itself distinguishes between metaphor and actual meaning. But they are all meant to converge upon Jesus; to attach the heart to him; to trace up our salvation to his death; to fix our thought on 'the innumerable benefits which by his precious blood-shedding he hath obtained for us.'—Something has been procured for us by this blood impossible without it. It has satisfied God—it has put him in a new relation to us. It has effected a change outside us, a change on us, a change for us; not merely a change in us.

Now, let us grant that there is a side on which this representation of the blood of Christ and its effects, appeals very strongly to human beings and touches some of their best emotions. Accepting it without question as the plan of salvation—as a mysterious solution of the situation, which God has at last triumphantly worked out, taking it as something not to be



examined, or questioned, but simply received : not venturing to ask, is it true ?—is it just ?—but taking it on the assertion of its believers as true (and this is the way we are always told we must accept it ; and, I may add, the only way we can accept it)—then in the profound sense of the personal gratitude towards Jesus which it ought to arouse, in the recognition of so tremendous a sacrifice borne for the love of us, and to extricate us from hopeless ruin ; in realizing that it is for me individually all this was undergone, there is something to reach even the callous and hardened nature ; something that, if believed, may well waken an affection, a reverence for him who has done so much for us ; and these are sources of new and nobler life. I do not doubt that this has been, and still may be, the effect produced by such representations in certain crises of the heart, and on certain natures. But I am equally sure that on other natures they produce different and disastrous effects, blurring moral perceptions, intensifying

selfishness, fixing the attention on morbid or self-indulgent emotions instead of on noble efforts, weakening and stunting character, instead of strengthening it.

But granting so much—surely, it cannot be expected that we shall never stop to ask what grounds we have for believing this to be the plan of salvation at all? What grounds have we for believing that the blood of Christ has this mysterious efficacy in that region which transcends our experience: that it works this magical act of oblivion for the past, this cancelling of penalty, this appeasing of the divine majesty? Surely, considering the tremendous assumptions, and the equally tremendous issues involved, we must sometimes ask on what authority these statements rest. We must ask the simple question: are they true?

Well, we shall be referred to the Bible; and, more especially, to the New Testament. In fact, on turning to the New Testament we shall find in certain portions of it phrases that seem to bear out these ideas. We shall find a very strong

emphasis laid on the blood of Christ. We shall find the identical figures of washing, sprinkling, cleansing, employed; not indeed to the degree, or with the extravagance, that marks much modern religious literature; but still we shall find them there. And to some this will seem final.

But we wish to look closer. We, who understand that the Bible is not all of a piece, we, who understand that ideas got into the Bible because they were first in the minds of the writers of the Bible, shall find ourselves asking, how did this come into their minds? We, who know that the ideas of any writer can only be understood in relation to the intellectual atmosphere in which he writes, his education, his object in writing, do not find it enough to quote texts. One may transfer a text *en bloc* from the first century to the twentieth, without in any way transferring its real meaning. As the learned John Selden said two centuries ago, 'the text serves only to guess by. We must satisfy ourselves fully out of the authors that lived about those times.' That is,

the true meaning of a text will only be known by the light contemporary modes of thinking throw upon it.

Bearing this in mind then, the first thing we shall observe is, that the phrases in question do not proceed from Jesus himself. Scarcely any traces of them are found in the earlier gospels. They are almost confined to the writings of Paul, and the unknown author of the epistle to the Hebrews. It is here that we must account for them. It is here we must try to understand them.

And to do this we must go back a long way in the growth of religious ideas. We must do this to realize the point of view of a devout Jew of the first century. As we cannot explain the point of view of the Christian of the twentieth century without going back to that Jew, so we cannot explain him, without going back to a still remoter past behind him, the ideas of which, had entered into and shaped his ideas.

Back, then, in the earliest remembrances of religious feelings and customs,

lay the sense of gods who needed to be appeased, to be satisfied, to be made favourable to man. And the way of doing this was by sacrifices. The very best that men had, must be offered to these gods to win their favour, or placate their wrath. Human sacrifice and human blood are everywhere seen to be what the gods require, and are everywhere offered. The blood of slaughtered enemies, the blood of chosen victims, sometimes the blood of the nearest and dearest, of wife, of daughter, of son. All nations of whom we know anything have gone through this stage; and it has lasted in some of the backward races down to the present. But with the advance of intelligence, of moral feeling, a softer idea of the gods arises, and of what they require. For human sacrifice, is substituted the sacrifice of animals, of sheep and oxen. The worshipper redeems, that is, buys himself free from the offering of a human victim, by offering these instead. He brings these to atone for offences he has committed, or his household have committed, even

inadvertently; as you remember Job did 'continually.' He brings them on the birth of a child. He buys it back from these awful powers by such offerings.

Israel emancipated itself early from this dreadful habit of human sacrifice. The story of Abraham, misunderstood as it has been in a later age, marks a transition point in its development. The father about to offer up his only son at the bidding of religious feeling, is saved from consummating the fearful sacrifice by the divine interposition, which commanded the ram to be slain in the place of Isaac. Henceforth human sacrifice is refused by the God of Israel. It is an abomination to him. It is a mark of heathendom held in growing detestation by his people. Any recurrence to it is denounced as idolatry, as a wandering after strange gods, by the prophets. Human blood becomes a defilement and a profanation of the holy place, which will by and by fill the pious Jew with horror, with fury.

The practice of animal sacrifice, however, grew firmly established. It was

maintained with pomp and splendour at the magnificent temple which was the centre of the national life. It was bound up with the religious feeling and habit of Israel for ages. The pious Jew was accustomed to think of it as the direct appointment of Jehovah. It went back into his farthest past. It was going to continue into the farthest future. We can have no idea of how this custom of sacrifice coloured all his religious thoughts, how mixed it was with his holiest associations, his deepest awe and reverence. Especially would this be true of the Jerusalem Jew, of the temple student of the law. A religion without sacrifice would seem as inconceivable to him as a religion without sacraments, without a prayer book, without bishops, seems to many persons in our own day. We should find the morning and evening sacrifice of the temple painful and repulsive. It would seem to us to belong to the slaughter-house, not to the temple. Our senses would be shocked. We think of such rites as obsolete. But he thought of them

as the visible link between him and God. He thought of them as perpetual. He thought of the whole world at last coming to offer them. He could not think of religion without them.

It is very true that presentiments and openings of a still deeper view of God and his requirements were, from time to time, affirmed by Israel's prophets. 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.' 'I will offer to God sacrifices of thanksgiving.' Still bolder and more explicit: 'Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt-offering.' 'Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire. Then said I: Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.' Yes, the great vision of One, not bought off, or propitiated by these paltry bribes, but loving and gracious in his inmost nature—forgiving because it is his essence to forgive, was again and again proclaimed by Israel's noblest voices. But Israel as a whole was not ready for so lofty a thought. It clung to its sacrifices. Do not blame it too severely. Here are we, nineteen centuries further on. These



great thoughts are scattered thick along our Bibles. They are the very summit heights to which human thought has climbed in its perceptions of God, and we do not receive them yet. We stick to the idea of something extra, something interposed to make God placable. We must rely on something else than the inmost, eternally good and gracious essence of his very being; on something beside himself. We still think it not enough to be continually bent on fulfilling his will in all appointed duty, and all tender services to our fellows; not enough to offer him penitence and thanksgiving from sincere hearts; but must offer some one else's doings and sufferings in our stead for his acceptance, in order to be safe! No, do not let us blame the Jews for not having arrived at a stage of thought which the mass of Christians at this day repudiate, and will not recognize as Christian.

Well, now, an intense and strong nature, brought up in these ideas, to whom sacrifice is the culminating act of worship;

passionately zealous for the law, not the moral law merely, but this very law of sacrificial observances specially belonging to his people, a Jerusalem Jew, a student in the temple at the feet of their great Rabbis; so moulded, so convinced, so devoted, he, after long struggle and opposition, yields to the fascination of a new teaching; to the wonderful impression of a new personality. He accepts Jesus; he is conquered by the new faith, which he sees lifting men to such blameless life, to such patient suffering, to such heroic death. He abandons himself heart and soul to his new Master. Jesus becomes the centre of his life, his Lord and Leader. What repayment can he make for all that enmity, that outrage which he has poured on him so long? Undying gratitude, undying adoration, unwearied labours. By the Judo-Christian Church Jesus is already acknowledged as the Messiah, the deliverer promised by God to Israel. To Paul he is infinitely more than that. He is the deliverer of the whole world, sent to the whole world, Saviour of all.

Now do you think all Paul's past is going to count for nothing in this new development of his inner and outer life? That he is going to begin as from a blank table? It is never so. It never can be so. Paul's new life has to grow on the old life. He has got to reshape old conceptions, so that they will fit new feelings. He has got to make such a readjustment of ideas as will amount to revolution. But when the confusion and disorder subside, we shall recognize the familiar ideas in new relations, expanded, reduced, redistributed; but he will use them still to hold his thought, just as he will use his native language.

Jesus is for all men, Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus supersedes everything in the way of ordinance and ritual. Jesus comprehends everything. Whoso knows him has all the light, and truth, and grace man needs. All other revelations, all other ways of approach to God, are done away. Everything man wants for his guidance, his quickening, his peace, is found in Jesus. That is Paul's gospel.

That he reiterates without weariness.

There are two sets of persons he wants to persuade of this. One is the Jews, so passionately attached to their law. Paul understood that attachment; he has shared it. But now what he has found in Jesus so transcends that law, that it seems but a shadowy, unsubstantial thing. Jesus has fulfilled it. He sums it all up. This law of Israel has been an education to him; a schoolmaster to bring him to Christ. It has fulfilled its function. It has led up to what is higher than itself. Now its work is done. No more slain victims; no more symbolical sprinkling; no more purifyings and atonements. Jesus is everything—victim, priest, sacrifice, cleansing, purification, sanctification. Why what have we here, but the asseveration under all the figures of their ancient ritual, that these were superseded, ended, finished? Jesus included everything, answered to everything. Every sacred office and symbol is transferred to him. That is the way the piety, cradled in the past, will find its way to the

new faith. Not by breaking with its past, and dishonouring it : but by carrying it over, by using its language, by expanding its forms ; just as we see piety transferring itself now from the ancient to the modern type. We have not got in Paul's expressions, an elaborate, final system of theology. We have simply the natural transition from Judaism to Christianity. We have the line along which the devout Jew may pass with the least resistance into the new faith. Its summary will be, *Christ has fulfilled the law.*

But Paul has laid hold of the still greater idea, that Jesus is for the Gentiles too. What is the barrier between Jew and Gentile ? What makes the Jew ridiculous to the enlightened Gentile ? Why, this very ritual law, with its sacrifices, and purifyings, and sanctifyings. The monotheism of the Jew, the moral law of the Jew, was acceptable to very many of the Gentiles. What prevented the Gentile who perceived clearly the superiority of the Jew in these points, from becoming a Jew ? Why, this very ceremonial law

the Jew declared indispensable. The Gentile could not make up his mind to that. So, here again, Paul seized upon his great doctrine of the sufficiency of Jesus. He is now even bolder. Jesus, he says, has done away with the law altogether. It does not exist for the follower of Jesus. It is a kind of denial of Jesus to insist on it. In fact, by insisting on it, you really abolish Jesus. He is of no use to anybody who lays stress on the law. Lay your 'beggarly traditions' aside, he exclaims in scorn to the Jewish Christians who are trying to impose their law on the Greek converts. Jesus has once for all blotted this out 'nailing it to the cross.' What daring, what magnificent imagery! Here is the road along which the Gentiles will pass. *Christ has superseded the law.*

The substance of it all, to both alike, will be simply this. Jesus realizes everything: rites, sacrifices, sacraments, revelations, systems. To believe him, to love him, to follow him is all. All this apparatus associated with religion is henceforth superfluous. It is a hindrance.

Now to men supposing that this shedding of blood is a divinely appointed ordinance of perpetual obligation, to whom it is consecrated by ancient custom, who do not find it repugnant, but rather venerable, Paul's applications of all these associations to Jesus must have seemed full of life, of meaning, of force. It must have been an immeasurable opening of light and freedom. While to men who had never accepted the Jewish law, the assurance that Jesus had once for all done away with that law, that he in sacrificing himself abolished all other sacrifice, that *he* purified us, not the priest with his sprinklings and lustrations—was full of life, and freedom, and meaning too. To both of these, the imagery was familiar and vivid. The great fact expressed by it was, that the sacrifice of victims on the altar to atone for sin was a thing ended. It *did* end.

Now to us, to whom all the sights and ideas involved in this practice are unknown; who only by study get any idea of what they were in those distant days,

and even then only a feeble idea; to whom the slaying of a lamb, or a bull, as an act of worship would be as meaningless as it would be revolting; to us, you bring phrases and expressions from that distant age, phrases whose whole reason for existence lies in those notions, sentiments, and scenes which are quite irrecoverable by us; and you fancy they are going to convey the same meaning to us, that they gave to a man of the first century! The thing is impossible. Such phrases will be so unnatural to us, so meaningless, that you will have to force a meaning. Their simple meaning will not be appreciated by us, because we have got to such a distance from the experience for which it was intended.

This is just our position now. We do not, we cannot feel the force of the associations and feelings which filled out these expressions taken from a ritual of sacrifice and blood. These associations faded when the sacrificial act was no longer the climax of worship; and the expressions resting on them lost their original force.



But piety, so long accustomed to these symbols, could not abandon them. It tried to substitute a new meaning in them for the old one. That willing sacrifice of his life which Jesus offered in loyalty and in love grew weighted with mystical significance. Vague at first, but worked over and over by the fancies and philosophy and logic of ages it at last arrives at those features we know so well, at a supernatural expiation, a penalty outweighing the sin of the whole world—a substitution of Jesus for us—a satisfaction to Divine Justice—a propitiation to Divine Love. Even the tender memorial of that death becomes a mysterious sacrament wherein the priest offers afresh to God a repeated sacrifice.

How far are we here from Paul's standpoint! He spoke of the sacrifice of Jesus—and to him it was a fulcrum on which his thought rested, in order to throw off the idea of animal sacrifice, and all the observances therewith connected. When it had accomplished this, its real work was done.

The step was too wide for lesser natures. They could not span at one stride the distance between the two conceptions. The spiritual idea of sacrifice was still a long way out of their reach. So the death of Jesus itself became invested with supernatural significance. His blood became miraculous in its efficacy. Instead of abolishing the old idea, it was so used as to continue it.

Nevertheless, we know that under this crude conception has germinated, and is gradually growing the true idea of sacrifice. Despite themselves, and all their phrases, the spiritual idea of sacrifice has impressed itself more and more distinctly upon men ; its juster and higher idea of the meaning of the blood of Christ does slowly form in them and take the lead. More and more we see it stand for the love of Christ—the life of Christ—the vital power and energy of Christ—the penetrating, animating, invigorating principle of Christ's spirit which is to pass into us, and become our principle of life. We know that we ourselves are passing from the sense of

death to the sense of life—that the sacrifices we are to offer are not victims slain, but rather creatures rescued from death—pure thoughts and endeavours—high and holy affections—just deeds and purified souls—not substitutes, but ourselves.

'The blood of Christ' has stood long enough for his death. Henceforth let it stand, when the phrase is used at all, for that warm, vital force of his immortal life—a quickening, humanizing, regenerating, energizing power, which communicates itself to our lives, and perfects our spirits.

So the notion of sacrifice is not lost to us, but carried up to its purest meaning. All man's striving to please, to obey, to come into accord with the higher Power has slowly emerged from this crude beginning. From the bloody altar-stone of the far past, with its hideous rites of death, it has grown through successive transformations, to this. Love, purity, trust, goodness, are what God requires of us—not bleeding victims, not atoning lambs.

## RATIONALISM: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

BY RATIONALISM we mean that man has no other criterion of truth and goodness than those intellectual and moral faculties which, in different degrees of potency, are common to the race. When we claim to be religious rationalists, we do not mean that we regard religion as a mechanical construction of the discursive understanding, the conclusion of a series of logical arguments. Religion does not depend on the operation of any isolated faculty, it is rather the aspect of the soul, the tendency of the character, the general direction of the life, the condition of the complete manhood; and its validity and vindication must be found in the primary facts and inevitable developments of human nature.

The question is that of the method by which God reveals himself to man. The Catholic says the revelation comes through an infallible Church; the evangelical Protestant claims the Bible as the medium of divine truth; the Unitarian says that God reveals himself through the soul—that is, through the normal faculties of our nature and those long ages of human experience which have been the course of a providential discipline, and the unfolding of an eternal purpose.

## 1

When we make this appeal to the soul as the ultimate source of revelation, we are frequently accused of rejecting that authority by which religious thought must be governed, and so of wandering into labyrinths of error; we are told that our free thought is really licentious thought, freedom to think anything we choose, the erection of individual whim as the final arbiter of doctrine; and that by rejecting an outward criterion we involve ourselves

in intellectual anarchy. And so let me say, at the very outset, that rationalism is not the rejection of all authority—it is the acceptance of the very highest authority we can find. When we claim national and political liberty we do not desire that every man should do exactly what he chooses, unchecked by any outward restraints; by our claim we demand the abrogation of arbitrary laws which oppress the people, and hinder the development of national life, while in their place we seek the establishment of social enactments whose object shall be the welfare of all the members of the commonwealth. Our faith in human nature is the ground of our appeal—our faith in its divine origin, its inviolable sanctity, its potencies of endless growth. We believe that, when he is set free from artificial restraints, man has an inherent tendency to mental and moral expansion, that when outward hindrances are removed he will develop finer conditions of social life, rise into sublimer visions of truth, and achieve a destiny which shall surpass the most glowing prophecies. Our

protest against arbitrary power is, at the same time, an affirmation of the highest social sanctions. 'The only right of revolution,' it has been well said, 'is the right to seek a higher law.' When by constitutional means a nation seeks the repeal of oppressive enactments, or when in open rebellion it rises against an intolerable tyrant, it does not desire to cast off all social authority, but rather proclaims the highest authority of all, even the right of human nature to grow according to its own laws, and the prerogative of an enlightened people to claim freedom of speech and action. We make the same claim in religious matters. We reject the supreme authority of books and churches, not because we desire our thoughts to wander without regulation, not because we think a man is irresponsible for his belief, not because we think it matters little what creed a man adopts so that he is conscientious—but because we desire our thoughts to be guided by those laws which God has written in the very constitution of the soul, and contend most earnestly that man

is deeply responsible for his faith, so deeply that he ought not to accept it on any authority except the commendation of his own reason and conscience in the sight of God. Our chief objection to authoritative religion is that it detracts from the validity of a man's immediate conviction of truth, deflects the mind from its own natural tendency, and weakens the sense of personal responsibility. As rationalists we uphold freedom of thought, and the solemn duty of every man to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. We do not claim immunity from error, nor infallibility for our conclusions. Acknowledging the limitations of our faculties, we yet do say that there is no higher guarantee of truth than the inevitable conclusions of reason, that there is no better assurance of arriving at the truth of things than the unfettered exercise of earnest thought.

I ask you especially to mark that all the dangers into which we are warned that rationalism must lead us lie just as much in the way of those who desire to learn



truth from some infallible authority. In the one case a man seeks immediately for truth, in the other case he seeks a church which shall tell him infallibly what is truth; and I cannot see that it is any safer to choose our church than it is to choose our creed. For after all, unless you believe that a man should blindly remain in the faith in which he was born (a belief which would paralyse all missionary effort), we have to seek our religious home by a process of inquiry which involves the whole method of rationalism. Even granting that there is a supreme infallibility somewhere, how am I to find out *where* it is? Suppose I resolved to give up the troublesome business of thinking for myself, in order to be comfortable and safe within the pale of an authoritative church, how shall I carry out my resolution? I look around me, and I find a number of imposing authorities claiming my submission; it is impossible to obey them all, for the simple reason that they exclude one another, and if I submit to one, all the others combine in condemna-

tion of my choice. If I yield to the venerable authority of the Bishop of Rome, then I must be prepared to suffer the onslaughts of militant Protestantism—I am a disciple of the Scarlet Woman, a servant of Antichrist, a dupe of the most gigantic superstition. If, on the other hand, I accept the Bible, and the Bible alone, as the source of truth, then the thunderbolts of the Vatican are hurled at my heretical head; while I find, to my dismay, that Protestantism itself is a Babel of conflicting sects, each one of which interprets the watchword thus:—‘Our interpretation of the Bible, and our interpretation alone, is the genuine religion.’ I look at the Church of Rome, I examine the Thirty-nine Articles, I study the Confession of Faith, I read Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament, and how am I, even if I spend my life in the inquiry, to decide which of these is the real infallibility, the pure unadulterated truth? Cardinal Newman was just as sincere when he wrote his *Grammar of Assent*, as was John Calvin when he composed his

*Institutes.* I cannot accept all these authorities ; and I cannot choose one and reject the others except by a tremendous act of private judgment.

Before we deny the supremacy of reason, we have to employ it in the most serious and difficult task of deciding which Church is the sole repository of truth. Before binding on the fetters, I am compelled to exercise the utmost freedom of thought. For one short moment I am free ; I am obliged to bring Popes, Priests, Councils, Cardinals, and Commentators to the bar of my reason and conscience to be tried and tested ; and throughout my future life of submission, the certainty of my faith, much as I may boast about its infallibility, can never rise above the validity of that final decision of my private judgment. You may boast that you hold fast that which is good, but your hold of the truth must be the result of a course of rational inquiry whereby you have endeavoured to prove all things. If your choice is worth anything, it must have been decided by sound reason and sufficient evidence.

The Church you join must be that which appeals most directly to the conditions and needs of your own soul.

In the recognition of all this, Unitarians claim to be thoroughgoing Protestants. We follow the ultimate principle of Protestantism all the way, we trust it to the uttermost. With all its faults humanity is the best thing going, the soul is the divinest reality we know ; in reason and conscience God has given us power to find the truth, and to work out our spiritual destiny. There it is, that ultimately, we must lay the deep foundation—a foundation which can never fail us, when all outward authorities seem involved in doubt. The soul, with its divine consciousness, its spiritual experience, its interior laws, must become the final arbiter of Church, Bible, Creed, and Sacrament. The Church is an organism which the needs of human nature have created ; the Bible is a wonderful fragment of the history of man in his search for God ; the Creed is the effort of the intellect to formulate its faith ; the Sacrament is the symbol in

which the soul tries to clothe its emotions. As a matter of fact every religious teacher *does* appeal to the soul for the validity of faith, from Cardinal Newman, who finds the certainty of faith in the operation of the Illative Sense, to the revivalist who tries to convulse men and women with agony under a conviction of sin. In every instance the soul is the last resort, the final appeal, the supreme authority, in whose consciousness every form and dogma must find vindication; and whoever attempts to invalidate the soul's witness to truth is opening the floodgates to the most hopeless scepticism, he is really trying to prove that religion is impossible, and that we can never hope to reach anything but conflicting opinions and doubtful theories.

If this fail,  
The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,  
And earth's base built on stubble.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not ignoring the value of the outward forms in which the spiritual life seeks to express itself. As the soul must have a body,

so every interior experience must shape for itself an external symbol. Books, Creeds, Churches, Sacraments, are all useful, so far as they help to bring men nearer to God, and so long as they sustain an instant and vital relation to the religious consciousness. But, though the letter is useful, it must never be exalted above the spirit. It is impossible to find in a book a higher validity than that of the thought which produced it; the creed can have no authority above the mind by which it was formulated. The radical defect of Catholicism and of Evangelical Protestantism is the domination of the letter over the spirit—in the one case by the assertion of Papal authority, and in the other by the dogma of Biblical infallibility. Indeed, I do not see why Evangelical Protestants should be so angry with their Catholic brethren for acknowledging the supremacy of the Church, or even of the Pope. I confess I could quite as easily accept ecclesiastical as I could Biblical infallibility; the dogma of the verbal inspiration of Scripture is not nearly so

reasonable as that of the divine authority of a living Church, able to expound its own doctrine, the repository of truth through all ages of the world.

We find, in studying the history of the world, that men have continually been led astray by the foolish search for some miraculous medium of knowledge by which to get truth ready-made without the trouble of thinking for themselves. And, at first, it does seem as though it would be wonderfully convenient to have a patent religion to settle all our doubts, just as it would be convenient to have an infallible medicine which always cured, and an infallible machine which never broke down. But we find that Almighty God has not chosen to save us the trouble of thinking and working for ourselves ; his method of providence is moral discipline, intellectual development, spiritual growth. We are to feel our way after God ; we are to seek that we may find ; we are to work out our own salvation, knowing that every pure desire and earnest effort testifies to the presence of the Divine Spirit working

in us. That, surely, is the great thought which is transfiguring our views of history. The whole cycle of human progress is a gradually unfolding revelation, growing from more to more, deepening in all faithful souls the primary truths of a Divine Being and a Spiritual Life ; so that, in the consummation of the ages, we may hope for the establishment of a Holy Catholic Church united by one common fellowship with the Father, and one grand consensus of religious faith. When all men seek for truth by the unfettered exercise of their own faculties, then we may hope to find them gradually approaching to that unity of the spirit for which devout souls have always watched and prayed. Our own convictions of truth are fortified by discovering that they are more than personal and private, that they are shared by men in different ages and nations, that they are generic in human experience, that they are borne down upon thousands of souls with a power which no objections and difficulties of the analytic understanding can ever invalidate. There is a



Church of Humanity, extending from the dim instincts of the fetish-worshipper up to the clear vision of Christ—a Church universal in its scope, and august in its authority. And nothing is more remarkable in the history of this truly Catholic Church than the spontaneous process by which mankind has canonized those sublime prophets and heroes who, either in word or deed, have revealed the essential elements and eternal laws of spiritual life and destiny. We have an historical indication of such a Universal Church in the response of the Western World to the teaching of Christianity, the quickening influence throughout the nations of that divine consciousness which rose to its fullest power in Jesus Christ. That free spirit of Christianity became checked by ecclesiastical assumption and dogmatic authority, so that the majority of Christian Churches are 'arrested developments' of that faith which has yet to make its finest display of power, to sweep through its sublime career, and to achieve its largest victories. In Jesus Christ we have an

ideal of ethical integrity and spiritual discernment which quickens in men that 'best self' which is the very representative of God within the soul; and thus he presents a standard of perfection which invests him with the federal headship of that Catholic Church into which all disciples of the Spirit feel that our broken Christianity is being reconstructed—that Church whose living stones are rising in obedience to the music of a Divine Orpheus, to form the City of God for which all faithful men work and wait.

The city is built

To music, therefore never built at all,  
And therefore built for ever.

The highest claim you can make for Christianity is based upon its adequacy to human needs and its interpretation of human experience; it vindicates the nature of man as the child of God; it confirms the loftiest hopes into which the soul can rise; it appeals, not to doubtful tradition and outward authority, but to that generic consciousness whereby

Humanity claims a divine origin and an immortal life. The rationalism which we maintain asserts the primal revelation of God within the soul ; it finds in the history of the world the unfolding revelation of a divine purpose ; it discovers in Christianity the culmination of spiritual experience, the repository of the deepest facts of religious life ; and it prophesies in the future a Universal Church of the Spirit, when one law shall govern all minds, one love inspire all hearts, when, in the words of the Apocalyptic vision, ' The tabernacle of God shall be with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.'

## II

It is in our earnest vindication of spiritual religion that we feel compelled to express our sense of the evils arising from the claim to infallible authority. I am not stating any private opinion of my own, I am only enforcing a lesson written on

every page of history, when I say that authoritative religion engenders spiritual pride, ecclesiastical tyranny, and social persecution. 'Authority,' it has been said, 'is the greatest and most irreconcilable enemy to truth and rational argument that the world ever furnished out since it was in being. . . . Against authority there is no defence. It is authority alone which keeps up the grossest errors in the countries around us. . . . It was authority which would have prevented all reformation where it is, and which has put a barrier against it wherever it is not.'<sup>1</sup> And it is impressive to read these words from the pen of Richard Hooker, who emphasizes so frequently the claims of tradition: 'For men to be tied and led by authority, as it were with a kind of captivity of judgment, and though there be reason to the contrary, not to listen to it, but to follow like beasts the first in the herd, they know not nor care whither, this were

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Hoadly: *Answer to the Representation of the Committee of the Lower House of Convocation*, 1718, pp. 312 et seq.

brutish. Again, that authority of men should prevail with men either against or above Reason is no part of our belief. Companies of learned men, be they never so great and reverend, are to yield unto Reason, the weight whereof is no whit prejudiced by the simplicity of his person which doth allege it ; but being found to be sound and good, the bare opinion of men to the contrary must of necessity stoop and give place.<sup>1</sup> You find the spirit of intolerance and exclusiveness in all times and places, from St. Augustine, who said that the virtues of a man like Socrates were only splendid vices, to Mr. Moody, the evangelist, who declared that the best father, who was out of Christ (that is, who did not accept Mr. Moody's theology), would have a worse influence on his children than if he were a drunkard. The tyranny of authority, even among Protestants, has culminated in the dreadful doctrine that a man's salvation depends on his theological creed. This persecution of the immortal soul is,

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastical Polity*, ii. 7.

in its spirit, as intolerable as the torture of the mortal body in a few hours of martyrdom; the men who kindled the fires of Smithfield believed that they had a Divine warrant for their act just as sincerely as the orthodox Protestant believes that he can prove from Scripture the everlasting misery of those who cannot accept his theory of the moral government of the world. I am told that I must study the Bible for myself, but unless I find certain doctrines in it I am not merely mistaken—no sensible man objects to other people differing from his conclusions—but I am an enemy of God, and in danger of eternal punishment. Now, I ask, how can a man calmly and dispassionately exercise private judgment with that tremendous threat hanging over him? It is not possible for him to think clearly, and reason fairly, while the sword of Damocles is suspended over his head. He is told he must judge the Bible for himself, and yet unless he finds what certain theologians have found he shall without doubt perish everlastingly. The degree

in which a religion tests doctrine by its relation to personal danger and security is the measure of its approximation to a huge system of utilitarianism on a scale of unmitigated selfishness. Veracity is the one principle by which a man ought to be guided.

Of course, we all believe that, in the end, truth is best and safest; but truth can only be seen when mists of personal interest are dispelled, when side glances towards selfish security are changed for one clear vision of that which is and must be for ever. As Bishop Butler wisely says: ' Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be : why then should we desire to be deceived ? ' <sup>1</sup> Now, laying to heart these words of Butler's, and seeking from experience to discover the moral government of the world, there is one great truth that we maintain—that God judges a man not by his creed, but by his character, not by the opinions his intellect has formed, but by the moral condition

<sup>1</sup> *Fifteen Sermons*, vii.

of his whole nature. Or, if the creed affects the Divine judgment, it is only so far as moral qualities have entered into its adoption. Is the creed the very best expression of his own faith, or merely a convenient ticket to secure social recognition and ecclesiastical immunity? The sincerity of mind, the loyalty of heart, which lead one man to embrace certain doctrines, must, of course, be vital elements in the formation of his character; while the idle prejudice, moral lethargy, and selfish fear which influence another man in the possession of a creed, are symptoms of spiritual insensibility. But, simply regarded as an intellectual mistake, theological error can never be the final arbiter of eternal destiny.

Will an earthly father banish his child from his presence with curses because he cannot get the correct answer to a difficult problem in algebra?—will he disown his son because, when the lad comes home from school, he finds that in his celestial chart some stars are not correctly marked, or that in his



map of the world some islands are omitted, and some boundaries blundered over? And yet we are asked to believe that the Heavenly Father will be dreadfully angry with a man who blunders in the arrangement of the heavens and hells; and we are told that whoever does not hold certain doctrines about the problem of the Trinity, the psychology of Christ, and the method of atonement, is under the wrath of God. We do not believe it. We do believe that every man is bound to seek truth earnestly and sincerely; but we do not, and never can, believe that our moral destiny depends on intellectual opinions on the mysteries of Deity, the nature of Christ, and the metaphysics of redemption.

### III

There it is that rational religion lays such deep emphasis on character. Do not mistake me. I do not for one moment mean that Unitarians possess higher moral qualities than other people. There are good men in all Churches, and outside

all Churches. The ecclesiastical divisions are false and artificial. Some of the purest, best, most Christlike men and women have been unable to accept the theological expressions of the religious life. When I say that we stand for character, I mean that we regard a man's moral condition as the ground of divine judgment. In this matter we hold by the clearest teaching of Jesus Christ. He taught, over and over again, that religion is a new birth within the soul, a divine life which gradually transforms the character and purifies the affections. Never in a single instance does Christ make salvation depend on a correct creed. What can be more explicit than these words?—'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven'; 'Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'; 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom, but he that doeth the will of my Father'; 'Whosoever is willing to do his will, shall know of the doctrine

whether it be of God'; 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments.' A new life from within—that is the only salvation recognized by Christ. Indeed, in the light of this teaching, we have to revise our definitions of heaven and hell; they are not two *places* to which we are sent by our final Judge, they are two *conditions* generated by opposed moral characters. HEAVEN is the highest good into which the soul can rise; HELL is the deepest sin into which it can fall. As Thoreau says, 'Where angels travel it is heaven all the way; but where Satan travels it is burning marl and cinders.' Or, as Milton said long ago:—

The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

Character is destiny; true religion is a new birth into a heaven of righteousness. We claim, therefore, that our rational religion is one with the Christianity of Christ; it is a divine power, the quickening of the soul into a higher life. 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous.' Salva-

tion is not by creed, but by character; what a man *is* decides his fate. How can a man be reconciled to God?—for ever must the answer of Christ stand—'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

#### IV

It is, indeed, often objected that the profession of rationalism is evidence of a very undesirable state of character, that it is the offspring of spiritual pride and intellectual self-conceit. Before I attempt to answer that objection, I will give you a brief quotation from a distinguished writer, who, instead of being infected with mental pride, was most profoundly convinced of human ignorance, and wrote a very remarkable sermon on the subject. Bishop Butler, whose words I have already used in another connexion, has this emphatic statement: 'Reason is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself. . . . Reason can, and it ought to, judge, not *only* of the

meaning, but also of the morality and the evidence of revelation.'<sup>1</sup> Dr. Channing amplifies this thought when he finely says : ' If after a deliberate and impartial use of our best faculties, a professed revelation seems to us plainly to disagree with itself, or to clash with great principles which we cannot question, we ought not to hesitate to withhold from it our belief. *I am surer that my rational nature is from God than that any book is the expression of his will.*'<sup>2</sup>

If this is then so evident, why should we be accused of intellectual pride because we boldly affirm the fact that no revelation can be of any service, unless we have a faculty whereby to know the rational meaning of its words, and the ethical value of its doctrines ? We are not charged with arrogance when we say that the eye is the only organ we possess by which to perceive the light, or that without the ear we could never receive sound. And, in the same way, we confess that only through our faculty of spiritual discern-

<sup>1</sup> *Analogy*, ii. 3.   <sup>2</sup> *Discourse on Self-Denial*.

ment can we judge of a doctrine whether it be of God. Rationalism, instead of being intellectual pride, is reverent trust in the only power God has given us for the investigation of his truth.

Believe me, the rationalism I am endeavouring to expound is not the cold, hard intellectualism some would have you think; it raises the grandest emotion of which our nature is capable, without which all lower emotions are selfish and base—even the love of truth for its own divine sake alone. How can a man be faithful to his family or his country who has never learnt to deal sincerely with his own soul?

To thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

'All true religion begins in faithfulness to your own soul,' in a supreme passion for truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. That is the noblest emotion that can sway the mind. This is taught in those words of Christ, which sometimes

sound so harsh and strange, before a deep experience has explored their meaning : ' If any man come after me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' It is expressed also in those words of Colonel Lovelace, whose lover is entreating him not to leave her and risk his life in battle :—

I could not love thee, dear, so well,  
Loved I not honour more.

It is brought out in a passage in Landor's works : ' Love is a secondary passion in those who love most, a primary in those who love least. He who is inspired by it in a great degree is inspired by honour in a greater.' Loyalty to truth for its own sake—that emotion glorifies the soul, it casts out the fear and torment engendered by authoritative law, and by it we are converted from our dogmatism, and become as little children in trust and love. In religious matters we are often counselled that we must leave our reason,

and we hear much eloquent language about the childlike spirit and God's praise being perfected out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. But, if I am God's child, then let me realize my sonship by coming to the Father to see his face and hear his words! We must remember that these injunctions of the Bible as to childlikeness refer, not to the ignorance of the child, but to his docility and love—not to his intellectual, but to his moral qualities. Paul says : ' Brethren, be NOT children in mind : howbeit in malice be ye babes, BUT IN MIND BE MEN.'<sup>1</sup> And in another place he speaks of the spirit of Christianity thus : ' For God hath not given us the spirit of fear ; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.'<sup>2</sup> That is the essence of rational religion, the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

## V

As rationalism is free from rigid dogmatism, as it recognizes the growing

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 20.      <sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. i. 7.



revelation of God through all ages, as it makes supreme the higher developments of personal character, it must also be animated by a spirit of progress. In using all our power to seek the truth our spiritual discernment will be quickened into nobler views of God and his purposes in the world. As our religious consciousness is deepened we shall

Seek the things before us,  
Leave the things behind.

Now this principle of progress is continually checked by the antagonistic principle of authoritative dogma. When the Pilgrim Fathers were leaving Europe in *The Mayflower*, Pastor Robinson bade them always keep in mind that God had yet more light and truth to break forth from his ancient Word. And yet in many Protestant Churches when a thoughtful student finds new light in the page of Scripture he is treated as an ecclesiastical criminal. Now we go further than Pastor Robinson. We not only believe that God has new light to reveal out of his ancient

Word, but also that he has *new words* of truth for every succeeding age. The growth of the human mind is a perennial revelation of divine wisdom. Our poet sings :—

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing  
 purpose runs,  
 And the thoughts of men are widened with the  
 process of the suns.

I have met with some people who talked as though it were written at the end of their Bibles, 'Here the Holy Spirit spoke for the last time.' But God never speaks for the last time ; the very life of God is an everlasting act of self-revelation. What new revelations of eternal power and Godhead have been made during the last three hundred years ! The marvellous disclosures of science during that period are revelations of which the men of ancient times could never have dreamt. And I ask, why should theology be the only science that stands still ? If God is ever making new manifestations of his wisdom in the physical universe, why should we

doubt that he also makes deeper discoveries of the relations he sustains to his children in the spiritual realm? If we never think of teaching the astronomy or the chemistry of our fathers, why should we be so anxious to foreclose the growth of religious life by the imposition of the creeds of our fathers? Suppose a Professor of Chemistry were only allowed to lecture on condition that he signed a creed declaring that there were four elementary substances, fire, earth, air, and water, and that every one who denied the four elements should be regarded as a scientific heretic. Suppose the Astronomer-Royal were only admitted to his post after he had signed the astronomical creed of our fathers, and had taken an oath that he believed the blue heavens were a crystal vault through which the sun and stars travelled round the earth. You would regard such subscription as absurd, and would wonder how these men could bring themselves to submit to it, even though there was a tacit understanding that after swearing by the ancient

doctrines they were quite at liberty to teach the modern sciences. And surely that which is absurd in physical science is just as absurd in theological science; and we cannot but wonder in deep amazement at a condition of things by which a liberal, generous, broad-minded clergyman has to sign an antiquated creed, expressing with great clearness the very dogmas he does *not* believe, before he can be allowed to deliver what he *does* believe concerning God's love and Fatherhood to a modern congregation.

We are often warned that, without the imposition of a creed, liberty will run into licence; relax Calvinism, they say, and the mind will run its downward course to rationalism, agnosticism, secularism, and an abyss of atheism. My own conviction is, that Calvinistic dogma has driven from the Churches of Scotland some of the most earnest and devout men and women, that the description of the Divine character in the Confession of Faith has plunged people into unbelief far more effectually than any form of free thought has ever done.

In many instances we find that reverent rationalism is leading men to a deeper faith in God, and more loyal discipleship to Jesus Christ. If you want to know some of the ablest defenders of spiritual religion, you will find them in the ranks of Unitarian scholars and divines, whose freedom from dogmatic fetters has only led them into grander conceptions of God's will and character. The names of Channing and Martineau remind us how free thought can bring men to a sublime and beautiful Christian faith.

Freedom, character, progress, the Fatherhood of God, the regenerating power of Christianity, the hope of immortality—these are the great principles and truths for which the Unitarian Church stands. Ours is not a system of negations; and though we have no written creed, there is no Protestant Church more united in a common faith. We stand for the permanence and supremacy of religion in an age of scientific scepticism and theological reconstruction. We desire to emphasize

the essential elements of religion—those elements which remain, though every creed is invalidated, and every Church outworn. We base our faith on those things which cannot be shaken—the constitution of human nature, and the providential order of the world. It seems to us that the deepest currents of thought and feeling in this country are in the direction of that free and spiritual Christianity which we maintain. We seem to be moving along a great tide of divine tendency ; and in striving after clearer truth we know that we must ever come into closer fellowship with that God who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

What is Religion ? 'Tis man seeking God ;  
Inquiring, climbing towards his bright abode ;  
Striving to know, to do, to bear his will ;  
Growing for ever nearer, nearer still.

By thousand paths we climb that mount of rest ;  
Is there not one of all these ways the best ?  
Yes ; that is best for each aspiring soul  
Which goal leads it surest towards the heavenly.

There is no one broad way for all to go,  
Where none can wander, and which all may know;  
Then heed not thou where other mortals tread,  
But let thy gaze be toward the mountain-head.

Fix eye and heart where clear that towering height  
Alone stands bathed in heaven's refulgent light;  
Then climb and climb for ever towards the day,  
And fear not thou shalt miss the one true way.

## THE COVENANT OF THE SPIRIT <sup>1</sup>

IN addressing a society whose determining function is theological, it is natural that one who has passed his seventy-first year should cast a backward glance at the theological changes which have occurred during his own lifetime; and though in some of its aspects this is an oft-told tale, nevertheless some of our younger men may not be fully aware of the vast changes which have taken place in Unitarian theology in the course of the last century and how deeply that theology has been affected, in common with older creeds, by the general trend of thought; and a brief review, accompanied by a summary of the principal results, will not, I trust,

<sup>1</sup> A new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit.—2 Cor. iii. 6.



be wholly devoid of interest, and may bring before our attention some lessons for our future guidance. It will clearly be impossible, within the limits of a single discourse, to justify by solid argument the changes which attract our notice, and we must be content with suggesting lines of inquiry which have influenced men's thoughts without attempting to exhibit the detailed proofs. It is hardly necessary to remark that for any opinions which may be expressed I alone am responsible.

During the last fifty years a profound and far-reaching change has been slowly taking place in the theology of at least the Protestant section of Christendom, and, indeed, has not left even the Catholic Church wholly untouched. The change within the so-called orthodox denominations has, I think, been deeper and more significant than they themselves, with the exception of some highly trained scholars, have yet recognized; and it is probably among Unitarians that the change has been most complete, and most openly avowed. We may say, in the words of

Paul, that old things have passed away, and all things have become new. The change is fundamental, that is to say, it affects the very basis of religion, and with it the whole superstructure of theology. Though it has happily been unaccompanied by similar convulsions, the revolution of thought is probably more far-reaching than at the time of the Reformation ; for, while the revolt of the sixteenth century affected indeed the foundations of belief, it retained the ancient principle of reliance on an extraneous and miraculous authority. The Catholic Church accepted two co-ordinate Divinely sanctioned authorities, the Bible and unwritten tradition, both interpreted by the Church through its appointed organs ; and from their decision there was no appeal. The reformers found it impossible to bring these two authorities into unison, and they consequently rejected tradition, and insisted that the Scriptures were the sufficient and only rule of faith and practice. Even the Church of England, notwithstanding the present horror of simple

Bible teaching, is perfectly explicit upon this point. Although some authority is conceded to the Church, it is declared in the Articles that churches have erred even in matters of faith, and that even general councils have erred in things pertaining to God; and it is laid down that 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.' Thus the change brought about by the Reformation was fundamental, in so far as it rejected the supernatural claim of one of the two authorities on which the fabric of Christian theology was reared. The change in our own time, though it has been more gradual and has not rent Christendom into two contending parties, is even more fundamental, for the progress of thought has removed what remained of the old foundations, and dissolved the miraculous infallibility of the Scriptures. It might

seem indeed that this remark would not apply to Unitarians, and that the drift of thought has been towards their old position. As long ago as 1822 Belsham<sup>1</sup> denied the verbal inspiration of the Bible, and pointed out that Paul's arguments might be inconclusive; and in 1843, Professor Andrews Norton, of Harvard, rejected the 'divine origin and authority' of the books of the Old Testament, and assigned a very late date to the Pentateuch.<sup>2</sup> But these negations were a matter of detail rather than of principle. Belsham maintained that 'the Apostle carried in his mind at all times, in all places, and to the end of life, a complete and infallible knowledge of the doctrine of Christ, so that whatever he taught or wrote upon that subject is to be received as true, and as of divine authority'; and Norton declared that 'it is on Christianity, as a miraculous revelation, that

<sup>1</sup> *The Epistles of Paul*, i., Preliminary Dissertation, pp. xxiv. sqq.

<sup>2</sup> *Genuineness of the Gospels*, ii. pp. 402 sqq. English edition.

religion must rest as its principal and only safe support,' that it is guaranteed by 'the immediate action of the Deity intervening in the course of human affairs,' and is attested by 'his miraculous interposition';<sup>1</sup> and in relation to the Gospels he affirms that 'the essential facts of religion have been expressly made known to men on the authority of God.'<sup>2</sup> Thus, though the fallibility of the Bible was conceded, nevertheless, to Unitarians, as to others, it was the ultimate religious authority, as containing a miraculous communication of infallible truth, and this miraculous guarantee was the basis of faith. And, accordingly, it was usual, on occasions of this kind, to endeavour to prove, by a citation of texts, that the Bible taught Unitarianism, and to explain other texts which might seem inconsistent with this position. We are therefore justified in saying that the theoretic basis of Unitarianism was, at least in substance, identical with that of all the other varieties of Protestant theology.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310 sq.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

Now, whatever may be thought of the historical character of recorded miracles, it cannot be denied that they occupy a very different place in men's minds from that which they formerly enjoyed. Paley's famous argument no longer lies at the root of Christian faith, and we have come to see clearly that with the infallibility of the Bible its absolute authority is gone. We cannot appeal to it as the ultimate arbiter in controversy, for its decision on any point in question may, for anything we can tell, if we are destitute of some superior principle of judgment, be among its fallible utterances. If Paul was mistaken about the approaching end of the world, though he avowedly bases his view upon 'the word of the Lord,' he may have been wrong in other elements of his thought; and if John went astray in his chronology, his philosophy may have embodied some of the transient notions of his time. If it be said that divine and eternal truth lies embedded in the fallible matter of the record, this fails of coercive power because it has no external marks to make it known;

truth and error lie in an indistinguishable heap, and must remain so unless we have a sifting principle of spiritual discernment, and our faith responds, not to miraculous dogma, but to religious appeal.

We need not now enter upon the causes of this fundamental change—historical criticism, the advance of science, the theory of evolution, comparative religion, the enlargement of our outlook upon the universe in space and time. Whatever may have been the cause of change in individual minds, it swept with widespread desolation over the fields of educated thought. Numbers of those whose faith had rested upon miracle sank with a cry of despair into agnosticism, and while they saw with dismay the fading glories of the past they could not yet discern the glory that excels. Others, leaping forth as from the thralldom of superstition, rejoiced in the hard solidity of materialism, and looked back upon religion as a strange disease. But others believed that the core of religion was untouched, that indeed it was only shaking off its cumbrous integu-

ments, and that the spiritual glory of Christianity, long dimmed by unhallowed accretions, was about to shine forth with more effulgent rays.

For the change which has taken place was not wholly intellectual, but in part resulted from the demands of the religious spirit. The conception of a God who could be only distantly adored, who had to intervene or interpose in his own universe, who could be brought into communication with his creatures only by miracle, did not correspond with spiritual experience or satisfy spiritual need. That the older theology nourished strong and manly characters and genuine piety, only prejudice could deny. Nevertheless there were men to whom it seemed artificial, and remote from the higher thought of Christianity. There were men whose souls seemed to themselves to tremble under the touch of God, whose hearts were filled with exalted emotion, and who could not believe that the Heavenly Father was to be found only in the miraculous dicta of ancient history, and not in the immediate



revelations of spiritual worship. It was by such men that the situation was saved, men to whom religion came at first hand, who met God face to face in the solemn verdicts of conscience, who found in prayer a real communion of Spirit with spirit, who saw the beauty of the Lord their God in all the splendours of creation, and with reverent awe beheld in every man a sacred shrine of Divine mysteries. These men might still retain theoretically the old theology; but they dwelt more on the internal than on the external evidences of Christianity, and, perhaps unknown to themselves, their faith depended, not on questionable historical attestation, but on the requirements and perceptions of their own religious nature. And thus, when the supposed basis of faith, the infallibility of the Bible collapsed, they might experience, indeed, a temporary shock, but they found in time that their faith was unshaken, and that it rested on the immovable rock of spiritual experience, the experience, to use the words of an ancient writer, of God dwelling in man and man in God.

Thus the ultimate basis of theology lies in the religious nature of man when hallowed by the Spirit of God, and the great religious benefit that results from the breaking up of old forms of thought lies in this, that we are driven back upon the primary needs and aspirations and experiences of the human soul, and thus reach a foundation which does not perish with the shifting sands of knowledge, and find a fellowship of the Spirit which extends far beyond the narrow boundaries of our divergent thoughts. Theology expresses the hidden contents of this religious nature in terms of thought and knowledge, and so it necessarily changes, as all the elements of our being grow in depth and range; and *Christian* theology has to interpret, in conformity with expanding knowledge, the Christian spirit of life, which is nurtured and sustained by the Scriptures and by the tradition of holy living in the Church, and which we trust is to grow purer and more powerful from generation to generation. 'It is not I that live, but Christ that lives in

mé,' expresses, not a dogma, but an experience, and in proportion as we enter into that experience do we reach the ultimate basis of Christian theology.

And now let us take a hasty survey of some of the particular effects of this fundamental change.

In the first place, it follows immediately from what has been said that theology has ceased to be primary, and has become the secondary expression of an antecedent faith. Dogma has its source in religion, and not religion in dogma; and though religious emotion and the perception of religious truth are contemporaneous and mutually dependent, still religion grasps the reality of its object before attempting to describe its vision, or to express its immediate experiences in formulated thought. Christianity, accordingly, is not a miraculous communication of dogma, without which there can be no religion, but appeals to spiritual wants and capabilities which find in it their satisfaction, and infuses a principle of life which is at once felt to be divine, and to bring the

soul into relation with a higher realm of being. The creeds might disappear, and nevertheless the beatitudes and the parable of the prodigal son would not lose their beauty or their power of appeal. Many a humble Christian loves Christ, and worships God, and fulfils duty, and looks forward to immortality, who would be quite unable to justify these things to a sceptical philosopher; and the devout life which wells up within his heart may contain implicitly a multitude of truths of which he is hardly aware, and which certainly he has never attempted to define. Then, since man is intellectual as well as spiritual, theology steps in, and seeks, by interpreting the hidden life, to construct a system of religious truth, to justify it in the court of reason, and assign it its due place within the realm of knowledge. Theology is indeed as necessary to the perfection of religion as science is to our comprehension of the material world; but as sensation must precede science, so the soul must adore before it formulates.

Secondly, a new and precious light is

shed upon the teachings of the Bible itself. These have ceased to be hard and detached grains of doctrine or statements of some transient miraculous fact, and have become normal outpourings of the spirit of man in its communion with the Spirit of God, exceptional indeed, as the genius of Shakespeare is exceptional, in range and power, but nevertheless illustrating and thereby liberating the secret forces of our own souls, and revealing universal laws of life and growth. Well do I remember how, in my young days, some of the deepest sayings of the New Testament were explained away, as pertaining only to the primitive age, and how my heart refused to acquiesce in these explanations. Some things were referred solely to the circumstances of the time, and Paley was regarded as an oracle of wisdom when he declared that such expressions as regeneration and conversion had no meaning for us. Other things were explained as descriptive only of the miraculous gifts of the Apostles; for instance, 'God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.'

But now surely we can perceive that these utterances are declarations of universal truth, and we can enter with sympathetic insight into the spirit of the Apostles, and take home to ourselves, each in his own humble measure, the spiritual requirements and the spiritual revelations of the earliest disciples, yes, even of Christ himself. It is still to the pure and child-like heart that revelation comes. It is still true that men must be born from above, and that only the spiritual mind can search out the deep things of God.

Thus we are led to an altered view of revelation. Revelation was regarded, and in many quarters is still regarded, as a miraculous communication of dogma. The nature of revelation is a fair subject of inquiry; but it is hardly just to say that men do not believe in revelation because their conception of it is different from that which has been ordinarily held. Paul describes revelation as a taking away of a veil from the heart, so that God shines in the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of

Jesus Christ. Here there is an internal change, a Divine light rising within the heart. There is an external manifestation, the face of Jesus Christ, which so appeals to the heart that the veil of sense and prejudice and pride drops away, and the light is able to stream in. And what is revealed is not dogma, but the glory of God, the effulgence of his character, of his love, his forgiveness, his holiness, shining in a human face. Many of us may have seen faces which we have long remembered on account of the beauty and spirituality of their expression, a glory of God shining from them, a word made flesh, and tremblingly alive in every feature. *We* cannot look upon the face of Christ; but we love to picture it in our imagination, to feel the tender touch of his hand, and to hear the gracious words that issue from his lips; and though the impression conveyed by a record must lose in clearness and intensity, still the revelation is there, a revelation, not of dogma, but of spirit, not of the metaphysics, but of the character of God.

Akin to this is a changed view of inspiration. The words of Belsham represent the view which was formerly prevalent. He says : ' Inspiration, that is, the supernatural communication of truth to the mind, being a miracle, is not to be admitted in any case but upon the clearest evidence. The Apostles by their miracles exhibited the most satisfactory proofs that they were divinely instructed and authorized to teach the doctrine of Christ ; whatever, therefore, they advance as such, must be received as a revelation from heaven.'<sup>1</sup> In accordance with this doctrine unmeasured scorn was poured upon all who professed to act under the influence of any Divine illumination or impulse, if they were not able to work a miracle to prove that they were not fools or cheats ; and great prophetic souls were contemptuously set down as fanatical dreamers or impostors. But now we see that even the inspiration of the Apostles was no guarantee of intellectual infallibility. Paul describes with the utmost confidence the

<sup>1</sup>*The Epistles of Paul*, i. p. xxvii. 1832.



approaching advent of the glorified Christ ; but the event never took place, and Paul's holiest inspiration must be found in passages which appeal to our own spiritual apprehension. We do not want a miracle to guarantee the reality of our inward strife, and of the peace which comes from simple surrender to the love of God revealed in Christ. Hence we can give a vast extension to the idea of inspiration, and recognize it in the normal exaltation of human faculty, though that exaltation does not preclude the possibility of intellectual error. Human conditions and limitations mingle with the Divine action, and the imperfection of knowledge does not prove the absence of God. It may be that a mind absolutely pure and surrendered to the Father's will would reflect Divine truth without distortion, as a sleeping lake may reflect the midnight heavens ; but it is one thing for the pure in heart to see God, and another thing to describe the vision and all its accompaniments in faultless propositions. Theology may stumble, infallibility and

miracle may cease, and still we can see inspiration exhibited, in its various degrees, in all who are led by the Spirit of God, while that Spirit blows where it lists, and refuses our artificial trammels.

This altered view has a world-wide range, and makes it easy to accept results which are suggested by the comparative study of religions. It is no longer possible to look upon Judaism and Christianity as the only heaven-born faiths amid the foul mass of falsehood and fanaticism. Imperfection, I repeat, does not prove the absence of the Divine. Even in Christianity the treasure comes in an earthen casket, and everywhere the Divine Word has mingled in the sordid cares and puerile thought and unhallowed superstitions of men, gradually leading them to finer issues, and, like a hidden leaven, slowly penetrating the reluctant mass, and unfolding the creative idea to which our nature must ultimately conform. Christianity may indeed be, as we believe, the highest among the religions of mankind; but instead of shining like a solitary beacon in the midst

of a dark and ruined world, it sheds an interpreting light upon the struggling thoughts and the vague aspirations of men, and teaches us to see in all some traces of the guiding providence of him who is above all, and through all, and in all, and who, amid the infirmities and the sins and the errors of nations, is still working out his grand designs. This view has lifted a terrible oppression from the heart. We no longer sit mourning in the midst of a God-forsaken world, from whose awful doom a little band of the elect are saved; for in every nation the Divine voice has been heard, and even now, in spite of all the greed and fraud and violence which afflict the nations, the discordant cries of men are yielding to that higher voice, and the Christian hope of universal brotherhood was never so bright as at the present day.

It is less easy to speak of Christology, for on this subject there is probably a much greater diversity of opinion and sentiment among Unitarians than there is in regard to the topics already touched

upon, and I have no means of estimating the extent of the agreement. But, speaking generally, I may venture to say that the old view has disappeared which looked upon Christ as a kind of miraculous official, a man, indeed, but one who was quite distinct from all other men—the 'ambassador,' whose duty it was to proclaim and establish certain doctrines, and the judge who was to discharge certain functions in the grand catastrophe which was to close the history of the world. He has now taken his place among men as one of the supreme spiritual leaders, who through a divine insight have interpreted the things of God, and, while like some others he is necessarily alone in historical position, he is unique, not in the nature, but in the richness and purity of his endowments. He is *the* Son of God, not because there are no others, but because it was he who impressed this grand idea upon the consciousness of men, and because he had all the tenderness of love and all the intimacy of communion which the term suggests. Hence we are drawn to him, not by dry

theological proofs that we may trust his word, but by reverent and grateful love, by a perception of the deep things in his spirit, by a revealing of our own hidden life, with all its needs and possibilities, and by a sense of his healing and quickening power. Thus, while the doctrine of the person of Christ still marks the broad cleavage between the Unitarian and other forms of Christianity, there is, or at all events may be, a distinct approximation on the Unitarian side to the experiences and sentiments of evangelical Christians. But the approximation has not been all on one side. In circles known as orthodox there has been a growing tendency to dwell on the human side of Christ's personality. The hard and explicit dogma of the hypostatic union is sometimes converted into very vague expressions, such as 'the incarnation of Divine love,' a phrase which in itself does not go beyond pure Unitarianism. And again the very unorthodox, and to my mind very irrational, doctrine of Kenosis—the notion that the second person

of the Trinity, in becoming incarnate, emptied himself of some at least of his Divine attributes—has attracted a good deal of favour, though it is a distinct renunciation of the ecclesiastical dogma, and presents us with a Christ whose humanity has swallowed up his divinity. These approximations are due to the general recognition of the interpenetration of the human with the Divine, of God through all and in all, of man as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time to the felt impossibility of determining the precise extent and method of this union, and the perception that in its largest measure it does not wholly obliterate the limitations, the weakness, and the ignorance of man. Surely it is an immense gain if we can agree in acknowledging the intimate union of the Divine and human in Christ, and, in its degree, in the whole spiritual fraternity of the children of God, while we allow the various attempts to interpret this union dogmatically to sink into a secondary place.

And now, in conclusion, let us endeavour

to deduce a few practical lessons from this altered condition of thought.

In the first place, now, as in the days of Paul, our speech and our preaching should not be with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power. If theology has its ultimate roots in the deep recesses of the spiritual life, then, even as theologians, we must make our appeal first and chiefly to the spiritual nature; or, in other words, we must go down to the universal elements where, in communion with God, men become united with one another. There must be more loving service, more self-consecration, a more direct appeal to the devout emotions, a stronger building up of the faith that overcomes the world. We are divided from one another by our intellectual views; for these are necessarily partial, and dependent on varying knowledge, culture, and powers of thought. But when we adore, and love, and aspire, we feel that one spirit is animating every heart, and one divine attraction drawing us all towards the same central light.

Apart from this deep life in God, theology becomes a vain wrangle, which may puff us up with a sense of our superior wisdom, and debase us with a shallow contempt for beliefs which we are too dull to understand. But when theology supervenes upon a hidden life of the soul, which has been nurtured by the highest spiritual influences and been taught by its own profound experience, it will bring light and leading to the troubled thoughts of men; and if it be compelled to deny as well as affirm, it will go with loving and sympathetic touch amid the pathos of human error, and, lest too rude a hand should demolish the permanent truth along with its perishing form, it will seek above all to instil the nobler conception so that the soul will gently rise above its narrow views, and, when it dismisses a long-cherished error, will find itself already in a more glorious temple. Intellectual contempt and self-importance may destroy faith; only a soul on fire with the love of God and man can create it.

It follows from these remarks that in our



endeavour, which to us seems to be a very necessary endeavour, to reconstruct the system of Christian doctrine, we must seek to understand the old theology, and to treat it with a reverent and kindly insight. This would be our duty even if the kindness were not reciprocated. But a great change has come over the controversial field. There is a widespread movement, of which distinctive Unitarianism forms but a small part. To a very large extent Unitarians and Trinitarians are engaged upon the same problems, and investigation is taking the place of controversy. The need of some reconstruction is acknowledged in sects which till lately were entrenched in unalterable dogma. Our free position gives us to that extent an advantage in this work. But what is needed above all is a large and illumined soul, which can understand the religious impulses out of which the older theology grew, and the spiritual wants to which it appealed, and therefore, in rejecting what appears to be error, is able to conserve the underlying truth, and to give it a form and

expression in which the religious sentiment can rest with deeper satisfaction. It is easy to see what catholicity of thought and experience is required for this achievement. There are some who seem to pride themselves on their narrowness of mind, and give thanks that they are not as other men, full of childish sentiments and superstitious frailties. But the Christian theologian will know the limitation of his view, and be aware that clouds of error must hang over his thought and practice till he has reached the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. And so he will have a tender regard for what seem to him the mistakes of men; and for himself he will humbly aspire, knowing that he has not already attained, neither is already perfect.

Hence, lastly, we must endeavour to promote catholicity, and through catholicity the unity of the spirit. Christendom has walled itself off from the surrounding world, and within its own borders contentious parties have tried to shut up the Spirit of God within all sorts of sectarian cloisters. But the Word of God is not

bound. It goes on its own free way, and heeds not our artificial barriers. When our Whitsuntide celebrations bring a fresh outpouring of the Pentecostal Spirit, our discordant cries will die away, and with one heart and one voice we shall adore the Father, who is above all, and through all, and in all. Christianity is a religion of the universal and eternal Spirit, and proclaims a kingdom of God wide as the world and lasting as the race of man. We are moving here amid shadows, and see as in a mirror, darkly, and yet we are guided by the light that never changes. There are diversities of thought, of modes of worship, of social service, but one Spirit ; and all round the world we are members one of another. And even now the vision comes of a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness ; and the glorious Christ, in whom the fulness of the Spirit abode, is enthroned above empires and churches, and shall reign till he has put the hosts of sin and error under his feet, and at last God is all in all.