

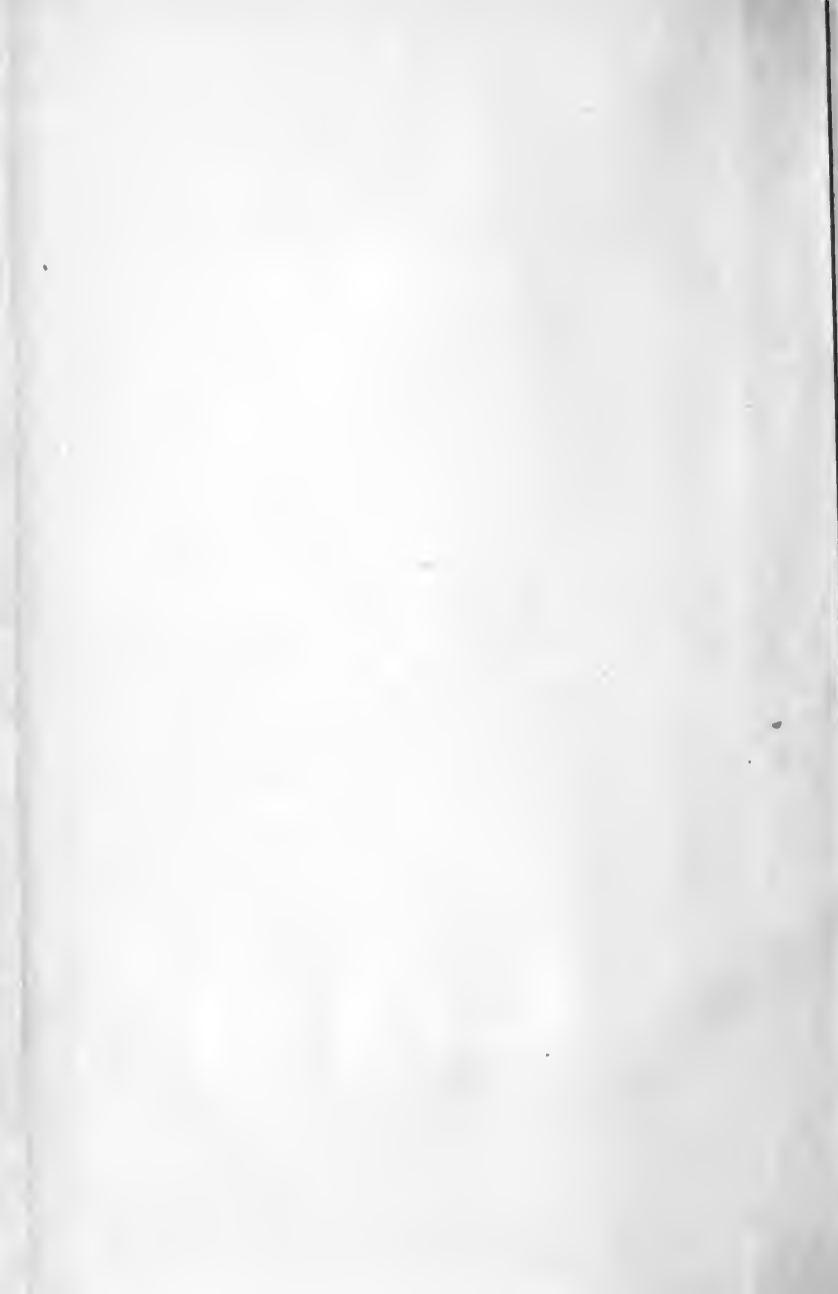
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A CONFLICT OF OPINION

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CAMEL AND THE NEEDLE'S EYE
THE DECLINE OF ARISTOCRACY
DEMOCRACY AND DIPLOMACY
WARS AND TREATIES (1815-1914)

(With Dorothea Ponsonby)

REBELS AND REFORMERS

*Some
Religion*

A CONFLICT OF OPINION

A DISCUSSION ON THE
FAILURE OF THE CHURCH

BY

ARTHUR PONSONBY



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TO
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A Conflict of Opinion

I

MONDAY

THE CHURCH

THE PARSON. I have called to see you because, although we have exchanged formal visits, I have now been three months in the parish, and I notice you do not attend the services in our Church. Forgive me for coming straight to the point, but I have made it a practice from the days when I was a curate to go round to all my parishioners, whether they are in the fold or outside it, and urge their attendance at divine service. If they are outside the fold I consider it all the more my duty to make some attempt to draw them in. In several cases in which their neglect has been due to apathy or carelessness I have been successful in correcting their indifference and converting them to a higher sense of their spiritual duties. I make no distinction what-

ever between rich and poor. Indeed, I am prepared to confront anyone with a protest against negligence and failure to participate in religious exercises, which I consider to be of profound and vital importance to them. Being charged as I am with the care of the spiritual welfare of this community, I should myself be guilty of negligence if I failed to approach every soul in the district and bring home to them the message with which I am entrusted. I need not say that I do not interfere with those who attend Chapel or go to the Roman Catholic Church. But in your case I gather you do not practise your devotions in any quarter. You will understand, I hope, that my direct challenge is not inspired by any motive other than a determination to discharge an imperative duty.

THE DOCTOR. I quite understand, and I greatly respect the attitude you adopt. I have been here for many years, and during that time several of your predecessors have occupied the vicarage. Whether they thought I was past praying for, or whether they were guilty of the negligence you speak of, I do not know. Anyhow, while we were on friendly terms none of them approached me with the crucial question. Now, I am not a unique phenomenon, and I expect in your experience

you have come in contact with many other instances of men and women who do not go to Church. Have you found it worth while to embark on controversial discussions with them ?

THE PARSON. In some cases, yes. In other cases I acknowledge I have found it useless. I have been met by open hostility, and uncompromising opposition, due for the most part to a disbelief in the spiritual forces and an innate preference for the material to the ideal which I have found impossible to combat. These people were devoid of the religious sense, and I had not sufficient skill or powers of persuasion to penetrate their armour.

THE DOCTOR. I cannot be classed under that category. But I very much doubt that a prolonged discussion between us would be of any avail ; and I would ask whether it might not be better to accept my dissentient attitude and pass me by. My friends here are accustomed to me and do not object. I think you had better regard me as a hopeless case.

THE PARSON. I cannot do that without, if you will allow me, understanding your position better. You say you cannot be classed among those who are devoid of any religious sense. This makes me hope that, like many,

you are troubled with doubts and misgivings which might be removed.

THE DOCTOR. No, I am not afflicted with those sort of doubts and misgivings. If we embark on a discussion we shall find that the difference between us is too wide and fundamental to be bridged. I am no longer young, and at my age a change of mind is not to be expected.

THE PARSON. I have known people at an advanced age repudiate the sceptical views they have embraced for years and turn for consolation to the Church. You say you have religion. May I enquire to what sect you belong?

THE DOCTOR. I do not belong to any sect nor do I wish to found one.

THE PARSON. You are then in a completely isolated position.

THE DOCTOR. No, I should say there were a number of people who, in the main, share my views. Indeed, what has impressed me very deeply as I have gone through life, mixing with all sorts and conditions of men, has been the fact that the most sincerely religious men and women I know, people who have the highest sense of duty and the finest ideal of conduct, are people who have no sort of connection with the Church, or with

any form of dogmatic religion, while Church people appear to me to have less appreciation of things that really matter. But I fear in a discussion I might run the risk of offending you.

THE PARSON. I assure you not. Men may differ, differ seriously, without losing their mutual respect. I think the reticence which too often prevents people who do not see eye to eye from talking over these subjects out of fear of offending one another is entirely mistaken. The only indispensable element to prevent discussion from degenerating into acrimonious dispute is sincerity, and that I have no manner of doubt that you possess. So let us continue. If you say you are religious, well, then we can start from common ground, and that is a great deal. We both realize the importance of religion.

THE DOCTOR. Yes. But do we both mean the same thing by it? Religion to me is the mainspring of existence. Without it no individual's life is worth living; no community or nation can prosper or even exist.

THE PARSON. I cordially agree with every word.

THE DOCTOR. Religion is an instinct of civilized man which nothing can suppress, and in my opinion this instinct is very highly developed in the British people.

THE PARSON. That is a great tribute to the work of the Church.

THE DOCTOR. No. It is not because of, but in spite of, the Church that I believe this to be the case. I myself became religious when I left off going to Church. I was christened, brought up, educated, and confirmed as a member of the Church of England. But not one scintilla of real religious feeling was engendered in me or inspired me until I had released every tie and broken every link with the Church; until root and branch I had rejected the whole elaborate structure on which the Church rests.

THE PARSON. You had, I suppose, been reading theological books full of destructive criticism.

THE DOCTOR. I had never read any critical theological books: I had not the time. I had a natural leaning towards spiritual development. I realized that a material life alone was incomplete, was, so to speak, not enough, and that idealism was as necessary to our moral nature as food to our physical. But I found the Church was hampering me, binding me up at every turn, and leading me off into a bypath and making me think it was religion. I was taken in for a long time, and supposed that doctrines and dogmas, ceremonies and

ritual, creeds, catechism and collects were religion. And lo and behold! I found it was all an empty shell.

THE PARSON. Dear me! But other people do not find that. On the contrary they receive the greatest spiritual nourishment from the ministrations of the Church. The Church is all in all to them, and her ideal gives them complete satisfaction. For she has weathered all the storms and withstood attack and persecution, criticism and opposition for nearly two thousand years.

THE DOCTOR. Well, that is not very long considering that man probably began to think and speak for himself over two hundred thousand years ago. But in those two thousand years what have the Churches and their representatives been responsible for? More crimes, more persecutions, more bloodshed and more torture than any other institution that can be named. The abolition of torture, for instance, in the seventeenth century was effected against the opposition of the Church and by men whom the Church had cursed. I can assure you history does not bear out the civilizing claims of the Christian Church.

THE PARSON. Oh! But come, I am not here to defend mediæval customs. We have all

advanced since then ; and the Church, no more than any other institution, should be condemned because it had passed through the dark ages of barbarism which humanity has left behind.

THE DOCTOR. I am not at all sure that we are entitled to speak of having emerged from the dark ages of barbarism. We have just experienced a war which for ferocity, destruction, and devastation makes every war of the past fade into insignificance. We Christian nations have for years devoted the best of our energy, our industry, and our enterprise to the invention and perfection of engines for destroying human life. If you examine the forty-eight wars of the last hundred years you will find only two in which Christian nations were not primarily involved. We have, too, in this highly civilized land in the twentieth century of the Christian era to support a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children ! No, we have not much to pride ourselves on yet awhile. Whatever may be said of the doctrines of Christianity, the Church has not managed to uphold them, or to persuade the people of their truth and practical value.

THE PARSON. Progress may be slow, and there are reactions which are disheartening.

The Church has ever a stiff fight to carry on against the forces of evil.

THE DOCTOR. But is it always on the side of the forces of light? Do its representatives denounce the taking of life; do they inveigh against armed conflict; are they the champions of democracy; are they the protagonists of liberty; are they a potent influence in the industrial life of the people; have they any roots at all in the world of labour; do they ceaselessly combat the drink interests, the monied interests, the monopolies, autocracies and all that tends to enslave the vast mass of the people and make their lives miserable? I think not. Has it not been admitted by prominent Churchmen that the Church is not in touch with the mass of the working class; that it is a Church of the rich rather than a Church of the poor? To call yourselves the Church militant is an absurd misnomer. The general position of the Anglican Church is not, as it ought to be, one of constant and combative protest but of timid acquiescence. You are an institution founded on privilege. Your bishops sit permanently on the government side. They always support authority, whatever reactionary policy it may pursue.

THE PARSON. I see it is the socialist in you in revolt against our system of society

that makes you denounce the Church as a participant in that system. I should be the first to admit the failure of the Church in many directions, more especially on our social side. But if our interpretation and propagation of the divine message is faulty that does not vitiate the message itself. I am among those who would readily agree that in our method and organization there is room for great improvement, and that every endeavour should be made to adapt our activities and remodel our appeal so as to make it more in accordance with modern requirements.

THE DOCTOR. But how can you do that? If in business, in science, or even in politics the leading men were bound to accept axioms, formulas, and principles laid down for them centuries ago; if, moreover, they were strictly prevented from discussing or criticizing them, and enjoined under penalty of being turned out of their calling to adhere rigidly *verbatim et literatim* to the pronouncements of authority in the remote past; if any attempt to alter, adapt, or reject, as new circumstances might demand, the tenets of past ages were condemned as heresy, what sort of state would these or any other branch of social or intellectual activity be in now? It is the ultra conservative attitude which is forced on the

Church which permeates the whole institution, and necessitates their assuming an anti-progressive tone all along the line. I am not blaming you personally, but that is the position in which you are placed.

THE PARSON. I hardly think that is a just criticism. The elasticity of Christianity and its adaptability to succeeding generations of men is its great strength, and prevents it from being anti-progressive like some of the other religions whose disciplinary rigidity and immobility cramp them.

THE DOCTOR. But there is a finality about dogmatic Christianity which appears to me to make it unsuitable as a permanent religious system for an everchanging world. In spite of what you call its elasticity it is without doubt a static rather than a dynamic force.

THE PARSON. You must remember that we have charge of a priceless treasure of eternal truth, and there may be a reluctance on our part to destroy any part of the casket in which it is contained lest the treasure itself be endangered. That treasure, being eternal truth, is immutable, and while the method of exposing it, describing it, and allowing its influence to be felt should, I admit, be varied, and may not always be varied in accordance with the changing requirements

of the age, care must be taken not to compromise or weaken the position of the very foundation of our existence. As regards interpretation and organization you do not seem to be aware that there is an active movement in favour of greater liberty and of the reform of some of the ancient usages and obsolete arrangements of Church administration. A new spirit is wanted, there is no manner of doubt; but I can assure you it is rising, and we want help from every quarter to free ourselves from the hampering chains of out-of-date traditions.

THE DOCTOR. You would not let me help you.

THE PARSON. Why not? It is because I want your help that I am talking to you now.

THE DOCTOR. Well, when we have concluded our discussions I will ask you again if you want my help. You speak of active movements in favour of change. But what do they amount to, what can they amount to?

THE PARSON. You evidently do not know that there are progressive spirits in the Church. You seem to think that every clergyman is so hampered by what you would call outworn formulas that their work as spiritual pastor

is useless and sterile. Surely you have heard of a number of . . .

THE DOCTOR. Stop a moment. I want to save you from arguing against an opinion I do not hold. I know there are progressive spirits in the Church, and I know there are men who lead lives of sublime self-sacrifice and service, even among those who are not progressive. I know, too, there are men who are endeavouring by broader interpretations and readjustment of forms and ceremonies to make a wider appeal; and that so far as their congregations are concerned their efforts are sometimes attended with success. But in what light does the Church regard such reformers? Are they not in constant danger of being expelled for their pains? This prevents them from going as far as they would like. If they break the chain they know they are done for. But it is ridiculous to suppose that this handful of men are representative. They are a very small minority. The powerful authority that stands behind institutional religion does not fear them, nor does it take the trouble to oppose them. On the contrary it smothers them with sympathy and smiles at their efforts, knowing full well that it can easily thwart an inconvenient movement and successfully counteract the zeal of reformers.

THE PARSON. But all great changes have had small beginnings: minorities have in time been turned into majorities.

THE DOCTOR. Quite true. But if they succeed in improving Diocesan administration, alter the functions of Rural Deans, reform the system of ecclesiastical patronage, deal with episcopal incomes, and the low stipends of the clergy, and even make the Church autonomous and independent of the State, will that really be getting to the root of the matter? Will it correct the fundamental failure of the Church's influence?

THE PARSON. I think it will do a great deal, for it will give greater freedom to the clergy. I believe, too, the aims that are being sought are attainable.

THE DOCTOR. I doubt very much the value of the changes if they are unaccompanied by drastic alterations in the cardinal principles of doctrine and dogma. You know as well as I do that if any one of those who are imbued with the reforming spirit were to embark on radical changes in that direction, they could not retain their livings or remain in the Church a week.

THE PARSON. But I do not think any of them want to touch the fundamentals. It would be tampering with the treasure itself,

and they would find the whole edifice come crashing down over their heads were they to attempt such a thing.

THE DOCTOR. The Church would come crashing down but religion would rise up. It is the nature of the treasure itself about which we shall disagree. If I may respectfully say so, I think the great error lies in the wrong estimate of the essentials. The insistence on points of faith, which to my mind are far from essential, obscures and obstructs the course of the spiritual guidance which might be given. An admirable Churchman may be very far removed from a religious man. Piety and credulity have very little to do with spiritual excellence. Let me give you three actual instances to illustrate what I mean, though I think I could quote many more. I know a man who can be regarded as a pillar of the Church, a most strict observer in every detail of its doctrines and rites, and a partaker of its sacraments. He lived for years nursing a grievance against a sister, refusing advances towards reconciliation, taking advantage of any trivial incident further to embitter the relationship, irreconcilable, self-righteous, luxuriating in his rejection of the elementary obligations of brotherhood. I know a clergyman in every way orthodox

and correct, no crank or faddist, but quite conventional, who spent years in a personal feud with the patron of the living who was a strict Churchgoer, and careful observer of all ceremonies and beliefs and yet was as ready as he to continue the feud and make all social relationship practically impossible. Both sides were content year in year out to disregard the ordinary dictates of friendship and fellowship. Lastly I know a boy carefully grounded in the teaching of the Church, in which he showed special proficiency, a pious pupil, a winner of scripture prizes, a model for his schoolfellows, the pride of his ecclesiastical teachers. This boy embarked deliberately on a career of fraud, deceit, and crime.

THE PARSON. I do not think you can find any argument on individual cases of failure which may be due to personal idiosyncrasies and abnormal natural defects. After all I could instance many more cases of men and women and children who have gone wrong owing to their neglect of religious observances.

THE DOCTOR. No doubt you could, and in doing so you at once ascribe a cause for their downfall. But what is the cause in the instances I have given, and could give, where what you would call the message of the Church

has been accepted and assimilated, not superficially but very thoroughly? I refuse to agree that it can be put down to insuperable defects of character. No, it is due to the fact *that there is something wrong with the message*. Indeed, when I look to see how that message is received by, and what effect it has on, the average man and woman; when I observe the callous indifference or purely mechanical acceptance of those who do not deny God and duty but ignore them; when I notice the sort of characters who absorb themselves solely in the functions and ceremonies and ritual of the Church, and the positively weakening effect it has on their nature; when I see how superstition is bred and self-reliance weakened; when I constantly read of sectarian disputes and differences of opinion about points of ritual which seem to stir members of the Church more deeply than anything else; and when I discover how increasing numbers of intelligent and high-minded people reject Church ministrations—I am more than ever convinced that the message is wrongly interpreted, the essentials are wrongly estimated, the importance of accessories have become beyond all reason, and that some fatal obstacle is interfering and preventing forces

which might assist the growth of the spiritual life from operating as they ought. I have read many of the reasons given for the falling off in Churchgoing, and I do not think any of them reach the root of the matter. Signs of the reforming spirit or any desire for new adaptations on the part of the clergy are deprecated and disapproved, and timid and tentative alterations of ceremonial are suggested which would not meet the crying need at all. It is assumed, wrongly, I think, that the religious habit must be conservative, and that the preservation of supernatural dogma is beyond all else essential. Consequently religion becomes detached from ordinary life, is a function performed on certain specified occasions, and is the exclusive ceremonial observance of certain rites and beliefs in esoteric mysteries all of which encourage spiritual indolence. This is the Church's fault. I do not want to offend you, but I am seriously of opinion that the Church, as at present constituted, with its Church religion as at present taught and presented, constitutes the greatest obstacle to spiritual development that exists. Its influence is worse than if it took the form of blank opposition. It diverts the natural spiritual hunger, which is present to a more

or less degree in every individual, into a blind alley and empty channel, providing food which cannot assist but stunts and sterilizes all the higher forms of human endeavour.

THE PARSON. Blame her ministers if you will, show up their inefficiency if you want to, blame our congregations, too, for I can assure you they are not so easily led as you may imagine and in many cases have a more obstinate objection to any change than the clergy ; but do not blame the Church. Your attack is wrongly directed. The Church is not just a collection of clergymen, a corporation of ecclesiastics. It is a divinely founded institution, the eternal witness to truth, the magnetic centre of all religious impulse which has to depend for the exercise of its influence and the spread of its beneficent teaching on the aid of men who make no pretence personally of being immune from the faults and failings common to all humanity. We no doubt fail severally and corporately to give the best expression to the divine message ; we do not succeed, perhaps, in reaching the hearts of all those who may be ready to listen ; we are handicapped by our human failings, our want of sympathy, lack of foresight and discrimination ; many of us may not have the ability or force to counteract all

the multiplicity of evil influence which stand between us and the object of our desires. But most of us are deeply conscious of the divine inspiration which is shed upon us, however far short of the perfect example we may fall ourselves. Blame us, I say, but do not speak lightly of the great ideal we serve. It is unfair to disparage and belittle, or, as you would seem to do, proclaim the falsity of the very essence which forms the priceless jewel of which we have charge simply because of the failure, lamentable failure if you will, of our method.

THE DOCTOR. Really I assure you it is not just a question of method. I repeat it is the wrong interpretation of the essentials. The question we must face is of what this treasure, this jewel you speak of, consists. Is it definable, and what part of it do you consider indispensable? But do allow me to make it quite clear that I am not out for personal abuse of the clergy. I have nothing but the highest praise for the social service rendered by many of them. But if I, in my profession, were forced to abide by decisions and maxims of past centuries and bound by mediæval traditions, it would be absolutely impossible for me to continue my work. The Clergy, like schoolmasters, are

placed in a highly responsible position of authority. Their word is accepted as law, without question and without opportunity of dispute. This reacts on their characters to some extent, and allows them too often to assume the pontifical air of one who is above comment and criticism. Like school-masters, too, who readily attach blame to their pupils for not learning, when in nine cases out of ten it is the teaching that is at fault, the clergy are apt to dwell on the shortcomings of their congregations and ignore their own inability to teach them. However, it is not persons I wish to criticize: it is the Church of England, with its establishment which emphasizes its national character (as if religion were one of the superficial nationalistic differences and not one of the great international and universal bonds of affinity between mankind); it is this institution, which is officially recognized as the spring-head of English orthodox religion, against which I desire to concentrate my attack.

THE PARSON. Your criticisms and objections would hold good, I imagine, against other denominations.

THE DOCTOR. To some extent, yes. A good many other considerations would have to be taken into account were we to broaden

the discussion over the whole field of all Christian denominations. Some are narrower and more rigid than the Anglican Church, others freer and less formal. Nonconformity may have led in some cases to agnosticism, but on the whole it has broadened the religious sense and given it scope and freedom. In the haven of the Church of England there is stagnation. Other denominations have their weaknesses and subterfuges, and alike with you they are all feeling the present lack of response to their teaching. It is a sign of the times. You all attribute it to the state of the public mind; I attribute it to the lack of vitality in the call of religion. But I think now we ought to turn our attention to the essentials.

THE PARSON. Yes. I do not think we can derive much more from generalizations. I think you are inclined to exaggerate and dwell too much on the darker side. But as it has been so far a matter of personal opinion, contradiction on my part would not carry us much farther. When we get to closer quarters with the underlying principles we can make our respective points of view clearer. Will you come round to my study to-morrow evening and we will continue our discussion?



II

TUESDAY

THE SUPERNATURAL

THE DOCTOR. I was thinking over our talk yesterday, and the prospect of continuing it to-day; and were it not for your kindly tolerance I am still inclined to believe there is no possibility of approach on either side.

THE PARSON. It is too early to say that. It would be a pity not to go on, as so far we have only touched upon the surface of the subject. We are now going deeper; and perhaps I may utter a note of warning. It is this. I foresee that you are going to overwhelm me with quotations from learned philosophers and from abstruse theological disquisitions to disprove this, that, and the other. This will no doubt give you a great advantage in argument, but I may as well tell you that that sort of scientific criticism leaves me quite cold, and will have no effect whatever in shaking the faith that is in me.

THE DOCTOR. Let me say at once that

I have no intention whatever of referring to any books of the higher criticism or works on theological controversy. All that may be of scientific and archæological interest for the high authorities on both sides. But it has very little to do with the religion of the ordinary busy man who can never read such books. Nor will I quote the clergy, much as I shall be tempted to do so. I do not desire, like the agnostics of the last generation, to approach the subject by repudiating revelation and disproving on the ground of evidence this or that miracle. Their method laid a valuable foundation, but at the time it only led to wrangling. I want rather to show that the whole supernatural structure is essentially ineffective and is blocking the way to the realization of far more important truths. To make my position clear I must tell you what I accept and what I reject. That is why, if we continue the discussion, it is necessary to deal with the fundamentals. But I hope in an examination of the essence of your faith I may avoid in any way wounding your susceptibilities, by what may appear to you irreverent comment on the beliefs you hold sacred.

THE PARSON. You need not fear that. We are discussing the matter seriously, and it is far better for you to be perfectly frank.

THE DOCTOR. Very well. Now let us begin from a point where we are likely to find some agreement. The Christian precepts as expounded in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount and other recorded sayings of Jesus Christ are part of the essentials we have spoken of.

THE PARSON. Most certainly.

THE DOCTOR. Now does the Church consistently and persistently press for the acceptance of these principles both in private and in public life?

THE PARSON. I know what you are leading up to. You are going to say that we do not condemn riches, that we have failed to declare that you must love your enemies, that we do not insist on the turning of the other cheek, and so on. Granted some inconsistencies exist, though they are not universal. But society being constituted as it is, and human nature being what it is, I am not sure you cannot get more satisfactory results by leading people towards the better rather than offending them by insisting on the best. After all the perfect Christian life, literally observed, is a counsel of perfection, and so long as we dwell constantly on the main principles of Christian conduct and preach sacrifice and service, love and brotherhood, we should lose rather than gain

influence by an uncompromising insistence on the literal observance of precepts which are ideals, and which cannot, unfortunately, be carried out practically as yet without dislocating the whole of our social life. I only wish they could.

THE DOCTOR. I must say I think that is a very weak position to adopt. It means that the Church is ready to compromise, and desires to march with the times instead of always being well in advance of the times. It renounces its leadership, and is content to cater for the herd but not to lead it. But I find at the outset that you are distinguishing between essentials and non-essentials in the treasure which you described as immutable and eternal truth.

THE PARSON. No, I am not rejecting anything at all. I am only saying that denunciation may not always be opportune and may sometimes be utterly profitless. Take riches, for instance. I believe the noble example of many of the clergy, who live in comparative poverty and yet in contentment and happiness, is more valuable than if they were to shake their fists at the rich squires from their pulpits every Sunday. We all of us attempt to observe Christ's teaching as literally as we can, but we may fail to induce others to do so.

THE DOCTOR. You not only do not denounce riches, but you are always on the side of the rich. To begin with, you belong to their class. The pastors of the flock are selected exclusively from the upper strata of society. A working-man clergyman would seem to you absurd. He might teach conduct, he could not teach dogma; that must be learnt in theological colleges. You are as exclusive as Christ was, only in the opposite direction: he selected his disciples from among the poor alone. The rich are your friends. You support them, excuse them, condone their misdemeanours and apply a different standard of morality to them. Yet the keystone of Christ's teaching was positive renunciation, because he rightly saw that, from the economic as well as from the moral point of view, rich men were an impossibility in an ideal society. It is all very well being abstemious yourselves. In your position you ought to preach your principles as well as practise them. How about "Love your enemies?"

THE PARSON. If you raise that discussion it will lead us off into a long controversy on the war, which might be interesting, but would be irrelevant, and carry us very far afield. Please let us avoid that.

THE DOCTOR. It seems to me very rele-

vant because the Church's deplorable failure to give any sort of lead in the tremendous crisis through which we have just passed is largely the cause of the more active antagonism which is growing so rapidly against it. It has been the same in every war; the opportunity is always missed to declare the uncompromising opposition between spiritual ideals and material expediency. However, I will not dwell on this if you do not wish to. My contention is that Christ's teaching takes a subordinate part in your sermons and services. What you regard as greater essentials, and what appears to overshadow all else, is the dogmatic belief in the supernatural.

THE PARSON. What precisely do you mean by that?

THE DOCTOR. The Trinity, the Divinity of Christ and the Resurrection, only to mention three of the most important doctrines.

THE PARSON. Oh, of course, those cardinal beliefs must be reverently accepted and ceaselessly expounded. They are vital, and must of necessity be kept beyond the range of dispute.

THE DOCTOR. Now we have reached the edges of the chasm that divides us. Shall we continue, or had we better stop?

THE PARSON. Surely we can continue. I may have to be more precise in my definitions

than you, but still we may find some common ground.

THE DOCTOR. I fear not. You believe in a divine revelation. I entirely reject it. You believe, I take it, in an Omnipotent and Omniscient Deity, an anthropomorphic conception, that is to say a God possessing human attributes and affections.

THE PARSON. Your definition is bald and inadequate.

THE DOCTOR. Please correct me.

THE PARSON. Almighty God, whose presence is felt by us all, is essentially a spirit. We, groping in the darkness of ignorance and hampered by our human limitations, must naturally regard the great power to whom we appeal and on whom we rely as a heavenly Father, a guide and a protector, possessing in a sublime degree the highest attributes of which we are conscious, and ready to accord us the love, sympathy, care and assistance that gives us solace and encouragement even when received in a small degree from our fellowmen. If we visualize Him as a sublimated version of humanity, if we invest Him with human qualities, it is the most simple and natural conception we can form; and it is only by this means that we can have moral relationship with Him. The accuracy

or inaccuracy of our conception cannot be tested, and really does not signify so long as our vision of God is of a kind which will allow us to be drawn into the closest personal communion with Him.

THE DOCTOR. You have amplified eloquently and in mystical language the definition I gave, but you have not rejected it.

THE PARSON. You must expect my language to be mystical in dealing with a profound and unfathomable mystery which we are only allowed to apprehend dimly. Ordinary language is indeed quite inadequate for the explanation of sentiments such as these.

THE DOCTOR. It is the only medium, however, at our disposal for the expression of our thoughts. I have no objection whatever to mysticism so long as it does not become quite extravagant. Now is God omnipotent?

THE PARSON. He is and He is not. We have our freedom; and through our failure strife and evil have arisen.

THE DOCTOR. But He gave us our freedom, I suppose?

THE PARSON. That is so.

THE DOCTOR. And He chastens us because of our abuse of it. Is that the idea?

THE PARSON. Yes. By leading us through corruption He will bring us to incorruption.

THE DOCTOR. He is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament?

THE PARSON. That is a manifestation of Him described by writers who were only crudely realizing His presence. Our conception may still be very faulty, and far from complete, but it is becoming clarified as we become more enlightened.

THE DOCTOR. You do not believe, then, that the Bible is a divinely inspired book?

THE PARSON. No; that idea, in the strict sense, must, I think, be discarded. However, the criticisms of the Old Testament, and of the New also, which have been forthcoming in recent years, deepen and enlarge but do not impair our reverence for the Word of God. The Bible contains the divine message embodied in a rough husk which is the work of erring man.

THE DOCTOR. A little difficult to say where the message begins and the husk ends. And may I remind you that when you were ordained you declared solemnly that you unfeignedly believed all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments? Perhaps that is only one of the many empty formulas. But do you teach your flock that the Bible is not inspired?

THE PARSON. I cannot say I do. Without

care and study, which most of them would be unable to devote to the subject, it might raise doubts in their minds with regard to the great truths it contains.

THE DOCTOR. No doubt it would. So you continue to pray to the "Blessed Lord who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning" without believing it; and you leave your congregations deliberately to infer that this is true. Frankly I do not think that that is honest. However, I will pass on. You will admit that, setting aside the very ignorant who believe more or less that God wrote the Bible, the vast majority of Churchmen hold that the Bible is a divinely inspired book and accept the truth of all it contains.

THE PARSON. Generally speaking, I think that is so.

THE DOCTOR. Very well. The God presented to them, therefore, is the God of Battle, the God of Vengeance, the God who showered blessings upon Jacob after he had committed one of the meanest acts recorded in history, the God who stopped the Sun for Joshua and allowed Jonah to live in the whale's belly, the God who hardened Pharaoh's heart and then punished him, the God who enjoined Saul to massacre the Amalakites "man and

woman, infant and suckling" and reprimanded him because he failed to obey, the God who was responsible for many unspeakable cruelties chronicled in the Old Testament. You make them sing:—

When God of old came down from heaven,
In power and wrath He came.

He is a God who is angry with us, a jealous God who "will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation"; a God, therefore, that has to be supplicated "to have mercy on us," otherwise we may suffer at His hands; a God to whom we have to address ourselves as "miserable sinners," who has to be besought because we "for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished," and who has to be entreated to "spare us" and "deliver us from everlasting damnation"; a God who requires us to approach Him in fear; a God who has to be appeased, propitiated, and bargained with, and before whom we have to prostrate ourselves in abject humility. I say most emphatically and in all earnestness that this God, who is disclosed repeatedly in your prayers and hymns and lessons, is a hideous ogre, a mere relic of some old, barbarous and cruel idol, whose supposed existence has

a disastrously cramping and stifling effect on the spiritual nature of man, and whose worship is an insuperable barrier to the advancement of true religion. He has no more real existence than the devil himself.

THE PARSON. No doubt he has not. In your violent tirade you have fabricated an ogre.

THE DOCTOR. I have not used a single expression that does not occur repeatedly in your services. If you yourself do not believe in a God such as this, do you tell your congregation that they need not believe these descriptions? Do you omit the prayers and hymns from which I have quoted? Have you eliminated from your services the expressions of abject and servile self-abasement? Of course not. You cannot, you are not allowed to.

THE PARSON. You deliberately omit to say anything about the God of Love, the Merciful Father, the Protector, the Fountain of all Wisdom, our Refuge and Strength, the Author and Giver of all good things from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed. That would not suit your argument.

THE DOCTOR. It is no good my quoting unexceptionable expressions when I am telling you what I object to. But as you have done

so, I may say in passing that the extraordinary contradictions involved in the two tones assumed do not make the conception of God which you teach any easier to grasp. But I want to get to close quarters with something which you yourself hold as an indispensable belief. Some two thousand years ago God, the semi-omnipotent, spiritual, but anthropomorphic Deity you have described, decided to dislocate the laws of nature and to appear on earth in human form in the person of Jesus Christ. As I have said we know now that man, as a more or less intelligent being, has existed on this planet for over two hundred thousand years. It is difficult to understand why only two thousand years ago, in Palestine, it should have been decided that this supernatural manifestation should take place. There is no historical evidence to show that mankind was in a specially desperate condition just then. Now, so long as the geocentric theory was universally believed, so long as the Bible was accepted as inspired and authentic history, so long as the creation of the world and of Adam was actually dated as taking place a very few thousand years ago, the whole idea of the fall, the chosen people and the mystery of the Incarnation appeared more or less

intelligible. But we know now that the earth is not the centre of the universe, you no longer believe that the opening chapters of Genesis are scientifically accurate, and you also know of the great similarity between the appearance of a divine Christ and other legends of older religious beliefs. Our whole point of view, therefore, has undergone a complete change, and we are forced from wider knowledge to alter our perspective. The miraculous existence of a divine personality is common ground in all the old religions. A Triune God is not an original conception. It existed among the Chaldeans and is part of the Brahmanic religion.

THE PARSON. The idea of a Divine element, a human element divinely inspired, and a spiritual element has no doubt made itself felt in the human mind from the remotest times.

THE DOCTOR. Oh, but that is not the Church doctrine of the Trinity, which cannot have existed or become complete until the coming of Christ. It is not taught or believed by the Church as an abstract theory. It is God, the personal Creator, who in His wrath at man's sin sent His Son, the incarnation of Himself, to save the world, and operated in a mysterious way through the Holy Ghost.

Divine Transcendence, Divine Mediation and Divine Immanence. I think that is the approved way of describing it. I must keep to the teaching of the Church. Now if religion is, as I think the Church still makes it, the preservation of supernatural traditions and manifestations with a view to driving man through fear of the supernatural powers into right thinking, then the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, and faith in miracles are a necessary part of it. But if religion is, as I think it ought to be, the guidance of man by the cultivation of self-reliance and independence into a course of conduct which he accepts rationally as best for himself and best for his fellowmen, then the supernatural element is unnecessary and is merely hampering and weakening. As the words of God Himself, the teaching of Christ is inadequate and incomplete; as the words of a man, much of it is full of inspiration, novel, revolutionary, and contains lasting truths. As the act of God, the crucifixion is a pure bit of self-indulgence; as the act of a man, it is a wonderful example of service and sacrifice to high principles. If by the Divinity of Christ you meant that he appeared to possess in an unusual degree a divine nature, that is to say great spiritual power,

that would be acceptable to a large number of people. I am not sure indeed that a good many Churchmen do not take refuge in this interpretation. But that is not and cannot be the orthodox Church doctrine. The Church teaches not only the Divinity but the Deity of Christ ; that is what the Incarnation means. I am right there, am I not ?

THE PARSON. Certainly. A superlative degree of Divinity implies Deity.

THE DOCTOR. Yes ; well, a doctrine such as this, while assisting the mystical, supernatural, transcendental aspect of religion, all of which I think is superfluous and injurious to the growth of true religion, seriously obstructs the rational appeal which, as time goes on, is being found to be the best avenue of approach to the inner being and higher nature of man.

THE PARSON. You expect a great deal from reason. Have you not yourself any irrational beliefs ?

THE DOCTOR. Certainly I have, any number. But I do not impose them on other people.

THE PARSON. Your complaint is against the presence in religious teaching of the supernatural element. Once admit this element, and all the rest is a matter of degree, a matter of whether we accept one interpretation or

another. It really has nothing whatever to do with the question whether the supernatural is necessary and helpful or not. I maintain it is there, and it is for us to make the highest and best use of it we can, and to teach and explain it to all who are conscious of its presence in a way best calculated to help them in the conduct of their lives. I have already admitted that we may fail to do this properly, and I am further prepared to admit that parts of our Church services are not wholly suitable to modern requirements, and lay stress on details which, if detached from the whole mystery, may strike the modern critical mind as incredible, and contrary to reason and evidence such as we are accustomed to in other fields where the intellect alone is concerned. The reform of the liturgy, however, and the difficulties that attend it is a thorny question which I do not propose to embark upon now. But what is the supernatural? It is not a negation of the laws of nature but an extension of the laws of nature beyond the reach of our reason but not beyond the vision of our faith. It is the unknowable, the inexplicable, the margin which always remains over after all the power of science and reason and logic has been brought to bear on any human problem. If you admit the inexpli-

cable, you admit the supernatural. But I would go further and say that you yourself, by talking of the spiritual life in man, as you do, have intimated your belief in forces which are not under the control of the same specified and recognized laws which govern physical phenomena. There may be laws which govern this region, but even psychologists have not discovered them. Now I say by your own admission you believe in the supernatural, and your only quarrel with us ought to be that the Church, by its traditions, growth, and history, is inclined to be too precise and dogmatic with regard to particular manifestations of the supernatural and over emphasizes the significance of them.

THE DOCTOR. Although what you say is very interesting, you are really missing my point. The inexplicable is not by any means necessarily the supernatural; nor must you confound the supernatural with the spiritual. A devotion to the occult is not ennobling, whereas a love of the spiritual is. There is all the difference in the world between my belief in a spiritual force and your belief in the Virgin Birth, for instance, which is a specific breach of the laws of nature.

THE PARSON. You have singled out a doctrine which has mystical rather than actual

value, and which I hardly think can be regarded as indispensable to faith in the Divinity of our Blessed Lord. It need not be specially emphasized if it forms a stumbling block in the path of those who approach the life of Christ with the eye of faith.

THE DOCTOR. And yet in the creed you say "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." In two collects you affirm that He was "born of a pure Virgin," and you read passages from the Gospels confirming this view. Again, the idea is not original. Gautama, according to the Buddhists, descended of his own accord from heaven into his mother's womb, without the intervention of any earthly father; and quite recently the notion has been pushed another step in the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin. I promised not to quote, but as you know colleagues of yours have thought the Virgin Birth of such importance that they have declared that they would feel bound in all honesty to renounce their orders if they did not accept this article of faith. The resurrection assuredly you consider to be quite indispensable as an article of faith. But there is no more evidence for it than there is for the Virgin Birth or any of the miracles and events which were mostly

breaches of the laws of nature. There is the Transfiguration, the Ascension and Pentecost, but it is impossible to discuss them all. They all stand or fall together. You, however, appear to pick and choose out of the collection of supernatural events those which you believe yourself and consider indispensable to the Christian faith. But at the same time you enjoin your congregation to believe them all. Yours is, in reality, a less comprehensible position than that of a strictly orthodox believer who accepts literally everything from Genesis to Revelation, taking the structure as a whole and receiving it as a matter of faith, not of reason. Those, in fact, in other religious denominations who believe in absolute authority, and without any question subscribe to the entire scheme presented to them, are logically in a stronger position, though of course the renunciation of all right to private judgment is, in my opinion, deplorable.

THE PARSON. But I do accept the mystery as a whole, exercising at the same time my own judgment; and I do not think it is inconsistent with that position to prefer and insist on certain events rather than another. A certain amount of Christian dogma consists of nothing more than a statement of what God has taught us. There is in this a maximum

of divine revelation and a minimum of the human element. Such dogmas must necessarily be the less mutable. Other things are of inferior authority because there is represented in them to a large extent a process of human thought and only to a relatively small extent the revealed truth of God, and therefore, because of the preponderance of the human element, the dogmas in question are much more susceptible to revision. Moreover, in expounding the scriptures you cannot tell children what you can tell adults.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, and you say more to an ignorant person than you would dare say to an educated person.

THE PARSON. No. We put things differently. We adapt our language to their capacity of understanding. But there are mysteries you cannot examine too closely. You cannot explain the inexplicable.

THE DOCTOR. But that is just what I complain of. The Church is always explaining the inexplicable and giving us details of the unknowable. I have read the most subtle and abstruse explanations of the Trinity and the Incarnation. I have heard sermons describing the Last Judgment, Heaven and Hell. But if a man rejects the Trinity which is inexplicable, or the Resurrection, which is

inexplicable, you refuse to admit him into the Church. You know as well as I do that there are people who by their conduct and habits openly transgress the precepts of Christ, but who accept without demur all your supernatural dogmas. You receive them into your fellowship without hesitation. On the other hand men who endeavour to their utmost to observe Christ's teaching, but cannot accept the supernatural dogmas, must stay outside. This fact shows that the Church attributes far greater importance to the supernatural dogma than to the ethical teaching, and this is what makes its message so false and ineffective.

THE PARSON. The dogma which represents the concrete is of immense service to the less enlightened minds which are the majority and must therefore receive special attention. The higher type of mind can reach through it to the spiritual essentials.

THE DOCTOR. I do not object to that idea, generally speaking, except that you ought not to allow expediency to make you teach anything of the actual truth of which you are in doubt. But in practice you lay so much stress on the concrete as almost to prevent the simpler minds from reaching beyond it; and by your own declared or implied faith

in it you prevent those who treat it as a mere relic of past superstitions from co-operating with you, although as regards conduct and duty there may be common ground for agreement.

THE PARSON. You cannot really detach the two in the way you pretend. They are interdependent. The authority of Christ's teaching and the marvellous nature of its influence arise from the fact that He was the Word made Flesh. The spirit of God for a time clothed in human form in order that its manifestation might be of special significance to humanity, and by close contact exercise a new and revivifying influence on the course of human history. This it has done; and the fact that it has done so is a greater proof of the divine nature of Christ than anything could be. No mere man could possibly have influenced the world's history in the same way. Once that is realized the miraculous nature of the incidents connected with His life are natural and quite comprehensible.

THE DOCTOR. Buddhists and Confucians, who number hundreds of millions, would use very much the same argument. But even so you build from the wrong end. Instead of saying "These eternal truths are of such

priceless value in saving men from all the evils which beset them that they must be of divine origin and the author of them must be God Himself" you take certain incidents, give them a supernatural character, and then say "Because of these events this man was God: therefore listen to what he has to say. But his inspired sayings are not so important as His divine mission." Moreover, the Church during these two thousand years has been busy adding to the supernatural structure, so that in certain quarters you have a maze of superstitions with the result that the more credulous a man is the more credit he gets for his piety. Anyhow, you invite critics by your method to examine and question your evidence. I do not want to go into that branch of the subject more than to say that nothing is more remarkable than the fallibility of human testimony. You cannot get two people to give a strictly accurate account of a commonplace event which both of them witnessed. And yet you ask inquiring minds to accept without question a mass of conflicting and incomplete fragments of evidence written about events which were not witnessed by the writers and were recorded many years after they had happened.

THE PARSON. You want to apply material

laws to spiritual phenomena ; you want to test by logic and reason transcendental mysteries. You acknowledge your logic and reason fail you in your testimony of ordinary everyday occurrences, and yet you want to apply these very limited powers to test the truth of revelations of which our spiritual being is conscious, but the presence of which, the origin of which, and the truth of which cannot be interpreted by the language of the usual intellectual analysis. You must not be too impatient with inconsistencies and what appear to you to be superstitions. These are the growth of ages, and while they may from time to time need pruning, in cutting off dead branches you must not risk damaging the green wood which is full of sap and always ready to bud and blossom. Because our spiritual powers of investigation and ratiocination are very defective that does not imply that the conclusions towards which the upward soaring of our trains of thought are leading us are false or non-existent.

THE DOCTOR. I am getting out of my depth.

THE PARSON. Quite right. That is precisely the state of mind we ought all to be in—unable to touch bottom, floundering perhaps, swimming boldly at times, but trusting all

the while in something above and beyond us to guide us and keep us afloat; unable to see the far shore, without certain information, in the earthly sense, that it exists, but confident, in the spiritual sense, that a great culmination of our efforts is in store for us.

THE DOCTOR. I like that idea very much. It is not untrue. When you preach like that no doubt it is helpful. But that is because you leave the region of actual historical abnormal facts which you have to return to when you descend from the pulpit and say prayers and teach doctrine. In the abstract region, indefinite though it may be, you and I would have a certain sympathetic affinity. But I am not up against you in that direction. I am telling you that you are chained to the Church and you do not seem to object. So let us return once more to the doctrines which are indispensable. We have said a word about Christ's Divinity and His teaching, but there is the further important doctrine of the Atonement.

THE PARSON. Certainly all important. In fact it is quite inseparable from the idea of Christ's Divinity, as it is the reason and explanation of His sojourn here on earth. Without it the Incarnation is meaningless.

THE DOCTOR. Well, I must confess that so

far from believing it I have never really understood it, and I know many Churchgoers who have a very hazy idea of what it means.

THE PARSON. I do not see why it should present such difficulty. Sin is a state of alienation from God, in other words a state of guilt. Man alone is unequal to achieving a complete expiation of his sin. The wrath of God, which does not in any way resemble the personal anger and temper of man, but is the hostility of the Divine nature to sin, was propitiated by the sacrifice of Christ, who by His full and perfect oblation obtained for all men the remission of the consequences of sin, and our mystical union with Christ ensures our share in His sacrifice.

THE DOCTOR. Does Mrs. Berry, the woodman's wife, understand that?

THE PARSON. Oh, I would tell her in far simpler language. I should say Christ died to save all sinners. By His death you become an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE DOCTOR. She does not really understand that either. With uneducated people your method is obfuscation because you know that in religious matters they prefer not to understand. You hold out Heaven as a bribe to those who say they believe and promise them salvation from suffering hereafter.

Does the Atonement apply to the billions of people who lived before Christ?

THE PARSON. Those hundreds of thousands of years seem to trouble you terribly. Time does not count with God. The supreme sacrifice was made for all time and for all mankind.

THE DOCTOR. If it had not been made, what would have happened to us all?

THE PARSON. That is a hypothesis we need not entertain, because it implies the incompleteness of the Almighty's great design.

THE DOCTOR. I know I am stupid, and you no doubt think me material and matter of fact. But I am trying to imagine what influence such a belief must have on the ordinary man and woman. To begin with, only very mystically minded and metaphysically inclined people can possibly grasp such a gigantic assumption as is made in this belief. The ordinary Churchgoer is made to believe that owing to the crucifixion he will have a chance of going to heaven, and had it not been for that event we should all of us go to perdition. But the devil and hell are rapidly disappearing, though I know some clergymen still believe in them and preach about them. Some uncertainty must therefore arise as to what the Atonement has saved us from. Moreover,

people are often puzzled and troubled by the idea that the betrayal of Judas Iscariot was the actual cause of the crucifixion—as you insist on the authenticity of all the historical details. Therefore his falseness was indispensable in the accomplishment of the divine purpose. Yet if anyone is to be punished in after-life the betrayer of Christ would surely be the first, although by his deceit he made possible the salvation of the world. But I will not pain you further by analysis of the doctrine of the Atonement. It is merely the survival of a very ancient barbaric idea of appeasing a deity by means of sacrifice. As I, for my part, think the notion of original sin one of the most pernicious beliefs that has ever been taught, and as I regard Jesus the legendary man of greater significance than Christ the God, I am quite willing to leave the Atonement beyond the range of my comprehension. It certainly would not make me more comfortable in my relations with the Creator to believe that until the coming of Christ his original intention with regard to the human race was to let us all suffer eternally for our sins.

THE PARSON. That is a travesty of God's purpose.

THE DOCTOR. How is it a travesty?

Salvation, the most frequently used word in Church Christianity, sums up the idea of the Incarnation and the Atonement. We cannot be saved in the abstract, we must be saved from something. Unless you have definitely in view some form of punishment, retribution, or conscious suffering in after-life salvation is meaningless, the Atonement is purposeless. The worse the possible fate that awaits sinners hereafter, the greater the benefit and blessing derived from the intercession of the Son of God in saving believers from that fate. I see how it all hangs logically together, and those who pick and choose parts of the orthodox faith, giving those parts only an abstract and moral significance, are in truth disavowing the whole.

There are many other aspects of the supernatural, but they are all derived from the major premise of the Incarnation. It is not necessary to dwell on them, but the very important place given to them all would make one suppose that an attempt was being made by the Church to prevent people from thinking for themselves, lest they might repudiate their instructors were they to examine more closely the lessons forced upon them.

THE PARSON. You entirely fail to grasp how the Life of our Lord, and His Love and

Sacrifice, bring consolation to thousands in their sorrow and trouble. How the mystery appeals to them, the certainty of resurrection and the opening out of joys to come in compensation for the troubles of this world gives solace to them in their weariness and afflictions, and how the divine inspiration that emanates from the Saviour's everlasting presence guards them in the dark hour against the ills of the flesh and the powers of evil. They may not have inquiring minds like you. You want to know the why and wherefore for everything. They have a simple faith.

THE DOCTOR. What is faith?

THE PARSON. As certitude is impossible in certain regions Faith is required. It needs courage, for there is always a risk. But in the courage of faith there is a certain nobility which is entirely absent from the inquiring mind in search of certitude at every step. Faith is implicit reliance in God's mercy, the simple adhesion of the Soul to God. It is the compromise between the consciousness of God and the importunities of our understanding that has wrought itself into the language and institutions of the Church.

THE DOCTOR. Faith that involves intellectual assent to certain objective propositions and historical events is one thing, and faith

that involves a prevailing conviction of the operation of a moral force is quite another thing. The latter is real and indispensable, the former comes dangerously near to mere credulity. Faith hardening into dogma becomes the enemy of religion. But I have no desire to speak disparagingly of those who have faith. My quarrel is with those who supply the supernatural material for the faithful.

THE PARSON. But the supernatural has always been recognized and been welcomed by man's spiritual nature. He does not ask for the explanations which he requires in the material incidents of his life, he does not want a cut and dried analysis of his spiritual conceptions. He is content that one great divine revelation has given him spiritual insight, and provided him with the means of reaching out in his life towards a great ideal which in its completeness furnishes the highest motive and aim his mind can grasp. The simple-minded more than others appreciate the consolations the Church offers them, and readily and eagerly seek refuge in her sheltering bosom.

THE DOCTOR. Simple and innocent faith can only exist with inactive or undeveloped speculative faculties. There is no way of

obtaining the equivalent of this faith in a person of exercised intellect except by sophistication and perversion of the understanding or of the conscience. That large numbers seek refuge in the sheltering bosom of the Church is, I think, becoming less and less true as time goes on. You are not reaching the people. You are not in touch with the spiritual life of the nation. Other forms of religion keep on arising. People are falling away from your grasp. Those who have been merely indoctrinated with a crude belief in the supernatural actually turn to the spiritualist charlatans, who they hope will give them more tangible manifestations of the supernatural and more immediate proof of human immortality, while others are dropping out altogether in direct antagonism. You still have a hold, chiefly because of the authority your position in the State gives you—for authority has immense power, specially over the majority of men who are in a state of uncertainty. It is far less trouble to accept the judgments of a recognized institution than to set about inquiring for oneself; it is far easier to be taken in tow by a large vessel than to steer your own course. There are many who by temperament prefer to submit to discipline exercised from outside, rather than undertake

the very troublesome and difficult task of cultivating it within themselves by a spirit of independence. But in addition to this, the association of Church teaching with childhood's early days and the sentimental tie which binds men with instinctive reverence to old familiar lessons learnt at their mother's knee, make people very reluctant to cast aside the well-known phrases and formulas lest in doing so they should find themselves driven out into a wilderness of doubt and bewilderment. So partly from laziness, partly from sentiment, partly from tradition, partly from the absence of any alternative, they continue to go to your services and conform to your ceremonies and regulations which become part of the routine of their lives. But that is not religion. The hold you have on them is negative, and therefore you will find more and more as generation succeeds generation that your grasp is weakening, your influence waning, and your message falling on deaf ears.

THE PARSON. The Church as an institution has passed through many vicissitudes. The task entrusted to her may be beyond achievement by her ministers. She may have failed in her ideal. She has at one time been enriched, at another time plundered; in one age she

has been supreme, in another age dishonoured and rejected ; she has been governed by men of profligate character, ambitious for temporal power ; she has been led by men of marvellous spiritual influence and saintlike lives ; she has been captured by the superstitious and the pharisaical ; she has been the refuge of the holy and the pure ; she has been weakened by schism, attacked by science, and scoffed at by society with its passing whims and fashions. You may point to this failure, that inconsistency ; you may detach this dogma as irrational and that ceremony as stale ; you may point to decaying stones in the structure and deplore the inadequacy of its plan in the light of modern ideas ; you may single out this or that exponent of its teaching as misguided and wrongheaded. All this has been done times without number, and there are volumes upon volumes attacking the Church from one point of view or another. But with all these shortcomings, failures, abuses, crimes and perils there she remains, the Spouse of Christ, the visible organ of the Risen Lord, the chief instrument for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, the great witness to the eternal truth. She has to meet the claims of the individual as well as the needs of society ;

she has to inculcate spiritual realities in such a way as to appeal to all classes and all natures. She has to preserve corporate unity and yet make an intimate individual appeal. Many sided, far reaching, combatting obstacles, overcoming barriers, the Church holds on its way—if you will forgive me for this one quotation—“by glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceiving and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying and behold it lives; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor and yet making rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.”

THE DOCTOR. Splendid. What a wonderful effect beautiful words have! Almost thou persuadest me—but, alas! the Church to-day does not appear to me at all in that light: very far from it.

THE PARSON. The material successes and the mechanical triumphs of the nineteenth century have produced a lower standard of moral values and have elevated the worldly objects of human ambition into a very dominant position. The difficulties, therefore, by which she is beset in an age when gross materialism has got so firm a hold on all sections of the community, when utilitarian commercialism reigns supreme and when strange fancies and

ill-assimilated ideas abound, are perhaps more formidable than at any previous period of her history. Society is pleasure-seeking and indifferent, the industrial world, ill-guided, is in a state of transition which involves a certain antagonism to recognized tradition, political thought is in utter confusion, giving no sense of confidence or security, science in its strides seems only to sap the old positions without substituting any acceptable alternative ; and in the midst of all this the Church, unchangeable, comprehensive, deep founded in the past, branching out where it can to reach new fields, stands on its impregnable rock, and I can assure you, Sir, is an immense power for good. Corporate worship, which kindles the power of common enthusiasm, is in itself a means of invigorating and directing the inner yearning for better things which buds in every human soul. The Christian message, the divine revelation, can alone help it to blossom. Go into a crowded London church, hear the wonderful thrill of human voices united in harmony in presence of the Majesty of God, listen to the preacher, often—I do not pretend always—keeping his congregation spellbound, not by his eloquence, but by the life-giving truth which radiates through his words!

And I challenge anyone to say that the Church is a negligible agent for progress in the best possible sense of the word. I whole-heartedly assert that her extinction would be the greatest calamity that could befall the human race. Forgive me for getting excited. I feel it deeply.

THE DOCTOR. There is no need to apologize. You have greatly impressed me. But I am not arguing in favour of the extinction of the Church, because that is not a practical proposition.

THE PARSON. You may not be actually. But by undermining and blasting the rock on which she is built you must inevitably bring about her downfall.

THE DOCTOR. In my opinion the Church does not rest on a rock, but on a shifting quick-sand. I want to substitute a rock, and by clearing away mildew and rust, by preventing dry rot, by the ruthless scrapping of superfluous accessories and useless buttresses which were no part of the original design, I would attempt to create an edifice well suited to direct and fortify the growing spiritual needs of the individual and of the nation, and I would thereby establish, not so much an institution as an agency, which would attract by its sympathetic method and or-

ganization a far larger number than at present seek shelter under your roof.

THE PARSON. All I can say is that if you set to work to criticize and find fault with every detail which appears to you to conflict with logic and reason, if part of your process is to attempt to rationalize expressions of idealism, if the structure you propose to erect is to receive the approval of the cultured few and satisfy the worldly wisdom of a utilitarian age, I think your efforts will be in vain. Many trees are very untidy, cankered, gnarled and split; the mountain side is full of flaws and useless cracks and broken rock. But can man imitate the beauty of a tree or the glory of a mountain by artifice, by plan, or even by ingenious workmanship?

THE DOCTOR. I have evidently given you the impression that I want to cut out every phrase or idea or rite that is not strictly rational. That is not the case. I should be the first to appreciate the value of the symbolic, the figurative and the decorative beauty of the archaic. But I should like to go into more detail with regard to your services and ceremonies. It is late now, let us reserve that till to-morrow.

THE PARSON. Very well. Please come in again to-morrow evening.

III

WEDNESDAY

FORMS AND CEREMONIES

THE PARSON. I expect you are going to be very sarcastic to-day. There will be opportunities for you.

THE DOCTOR. No, I assure you, I will try to be reasonable. But I am aware that we are approaching a part of the subject in which I shall find it difficult to restrain a certain amount of indignation. Well, now, you are very fortunate in having enlisted in your support the highest artistic genius. Architecture, music, and painting have given some of their best to you.

THE PARSON. It was Christianity that inspired the best in art.

THE DOCTOR. Not Christianity, but religion. Both art and thought were on every bit as high a level, if not higher, before the Christian era. But do not let us discuss the rival claims of Praxiteles and Michelangelo. What

I mean is, you have got at your disposal some of the finest and most magnificent buildings ever erected by human hands; cathedrals the sight of which alone seems to lift up one's very soul into higher realms. Music, through its choirs and organs, gives you the beautiful accompaniment to your services which attracts people more than the services themselves. I would say without fear of contradiction that a great cathedral in which singing and organ playing were taking place without a service would inspire one with a far deeper religious feeling than the service without the cathedral and without the music. I remember sitting and looking up into the vaults and traceries and the intersecting arches of one of our beautiful cathedrals listening to the organ playing a divine bit of music. It stopped, and I heard in the distance "Dearly beloved brethren . . ." With a sudden bump I came down to earth from the heaven in which my spirit had been soaring, and I bolted past the amazed verger out of the door.

THE PARSON. Your aesthetic sense is more developed than your religious sense.

THE DOCTOR. The one ministers to the other. But however that may be, you have the immense advantage of the co-operation

of the arts. Architecture serves you, too, in a multitude of village churches all over the country. Wonderful little monuments of the past, redolent with history, fragrant with the memory of long departed generations, lovely in themselves, appropriate in every way as meeting places for all and sundry; the possession of the people in reality, though you ward off the outsiders and reserve these churches jealously for your own sect. But where these musical and architectural advantages are absent there is a noticeable falling off in the enthusiasm for your services.

THE PARSON. I have seen a large, ugly East-end London church, without a choir, packed from door to door.

THE DOCTOR. That was the parson's doing, I have no doubt; some great preacher, or one of those splendid self-sacrificing friends of the people who are beloved. I have never disputed the existence of many of them in the Church. They have special magnetism, but such men do exist in other callings. I daresay you have been to a crowded political meeting.

THE PARSON. Oh, but that is very different. Abuse us as much as you like, but please do not compare us to politicians. We have a great message, we are not out for ourselves.

They are out for vote catching, popularity, and power in various degrees.

THE DOCTOR. That is not quite fair. There are good and bad amongst them. I see you think politics is in a different compartment from religion, an inferior category. Whereas indubitably both should be permeated by the same spirit. But inferior politicians receive their due, whereas inferior clergymen do not. The inferior politician can be heckled, interrupted, howled down; he can even be the target for rotten eggs or the signal for emptying the benches in the House of Commons. Not so the inferior parson. He has his say, and descends from the pulpit after his uninterrupted, and yet perhaps utterly futile discourse, completely self-complacent and without any sense of failure. It would not be a bad idea if people might leave the church if the sermon were intolerably bad. On the other hand, the successful preacher is not misled or carried away, like a politician, by the allurements of applause, though I am afraid that outside the church he sometimes falls a victim to the ecstatic worship of his parishioners. And yet the wiser in both professions no doubt know how ephemeral the influence of the spoken word is. I am not going to quote from particular sermons, but you know as well

as I do that the majority of them are dull and uninspiring; you know better than I do how the clergy are often prevented from doing themselves justice by the conditions under which they work. It would be far better if you copied the Jesuits and had an order of preachers. Taking sermons as a whole, my criticism would be that far too much stress is laid on incomprehensible dogma, and far too little attention is paid to the ordinary difficulties in the lives of ordinary men and women. Preachers seem to take refuge in the former because of their supposed monopoly of supernatural knowledge, and avoid the latter where they might be more easily caught out in making mistakes.

THE PARSON. You see we differ with regard to the importance of dogmatic teaching. But the constant exposition of the example of Jesus Christ seems to me to cover both sides; and this, I think, is the theme of the majority of sermons.

THE DOCTOR. Now let me take the village church. You have the front pews railed off for the squire, his family and his servants; behind them the gentry, and at the back the labourers and their wives; a careful observance, in fact, of the class differences of society which are in direct contradiction to the communalistic teaching of Christ.

THE PARSON. That concession to social convention is no doubt made. But if you ask your parlourmaid to sit in your drawing-room probably you might not be uncomfortable, but she certainly would be. The arrangement may not be ideal because our society is not ideal, but, things being as they are, it is convenient, and I do not believe anyone objects to it. On the contrary I think they might object to a change. Moreover, in the larger churches where people are strangers to one another no such distinctions are observed.

THE DOCTOR. Well, I, personally, object very much to these class distinctions being recognized in what you would call the presence of God. Then why should people dress up to go to Church? Why should it be regarded as an opportunity for self-display? Is not this habit an encouragement to the vanity of those who are liable to overrate the importance of outward appearance? Isn't there something utterly depressing about the prevailing smell of naphthaline, camphor and pomatum? The sight of a congregation issuing from Church on their way to Sunday dinner has a most devastating and depressing effect on me. From ecclesiastical repletion they pass to physical repletion. It is all part of Sunday observance, and it is all religion—or rather not religion.

THE PARSON. You magnify these trivialities and take them out of all proportion. To dress decently is only a mark of respect. To have a good meal on your day of rest is not a great sin.

THE DOCTOR. I see it does not strike you as it does me. I think it is the external sign of an inward misconception of their devotions. But let me pass now to the service itself. Through intense familiarity and constant repetition it has become largely mechanical and perfunctory. For constant Churchgoers to keep their attention alert during the prayers and lessons and psalms must require an immense effort. Repetition, which is one of the features of the service, is a relic of very barbaric forms of worship. It dulls the faculties and prevents concentration. The extraordinary lack of reverence in the almost professional manner of the very frequent Churchgoer is most noticeable.

Now the opening sentences of the service are one and all about our sins, transgressions and iniquities. We crave for forgiveness and beg that God's anger may not be directed against us. This tone is kept up in the prayers and litany. We acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, we confess with a humble, lowly, penitent and obedient

heart, we have offended against holy laws, there is no health in us (this to an omnipotent God! Could insult go further?), we are miserable offenders, we ask God to make haste to help us, and by way of consolation we sing, "It is a people that do err in their hearts for they have not known my ways. Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest." That, no doubt, applies to people who do not come to Church, so it can be sung with gusto.

THE PARSON. It is easy enough to ridicule phrases in these old canticles. Are we to scrap all the beautiful old legacies handed down to us through the ages because a phrase here and there is archaic in form?

THE DOCTOR. Certainly not. I do not ask a duke to scrap the vizer used by his ancestor in the days of the Plantagenets, but I do not expect him to wear it. There is a curious resemblance between the Church and those aristocrats who are so much impressed by the length of their lineage and their historical family traditions that they forget altogether to consider how they themselves fit into the life of to-day. But to return to the services. You have a great number of prayers devoted to high personages, sovereigns and royalties who are

to be endued with heavenly gifts and enriched with heavenly grace. In the litany seven clauses are devoted to kings, princes, bishops, the nobility, and magistrates, and one half clause to the desolate and oppressed. The workers, the poor, and the destitute attract very little of your attention. The prayers are, in the dogmatic sense, quite definite. There is one that begins "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob," reminding people that the God they are worshipping *is* the Jehovah of the Old Testament about whom I have already expressed myself, I fear rather vehemently. I do not want to offend you by quoting more from prayers and collects. It is the whole tone of abject self-condemnation arising from the main motive of avoiding sin, namely, fear of the wrath of God, and therefore the necessity of propitiating Him; it is the whole attitude of servility, of subservience to authority, of self-depreciation and supplication which I unhesitatingly condemn as unhealthy, harmful and bad. It is the wrong tone for intelligent self-respecting beings to adopt. Moreover, the encouragement of self-depreciation is a danger in itself, because morbid and neurotic dispositions revel in it, and readily believe that the indulgence on stated occasions of this habit of mind—

this self-flagellation, so to speak—exonerates them from all blame and leaves them free to pursue their own wayward course in life with only the prospect of another orgy of self-condemnation in view. If it is not intended seriously but is, as it would appear to be from the general appearance of the well-dressed self-satisfied congregation, only a stereotyped form to be gabbled through, then it is a bit of rank hypocrisy for the retention of which there is no excuse whatever.

THE PARSON. Remember I have already said there are very great difficulties in the way of any change in the old forms of liturgy, though I hope they will be overcome in the near future.

THE DOCTOR. You mean the necessity of getting Parliamentary sanction?

THE PARSON. Yes, but there are signs that we may possibly attain that degree of autonomy.

THE DOCTOR. If you do I shall be very much surprised if your own people, Convocation or whatever the authority may be, will allow you to alter much or indeed anything that really matters.

THE PARSON. But I do not want the service altered to the extent you suggest, because it appears to me that the attitude

of humility and of frank acknowledgment of our sinfulness is the proper one in which to approach the Almighty. We must repent our sins.

THE DOCTOR. Do not let us waste time on repentance, which entails confession, a morbid form of self-indulgence.

THE PARSON. Repentance is essential if we are to endeavour to lead new lives. If instead we come in self-righteous arrogance to find fault with God rather than with ourselves, if we approach the throne with no contrition in our hearts, we mistake the whole spirit of Christ's teaching. In comparison with divine perfection we are miserable sinners, as compared with Jesus we are full of fault and iniquity. It is right for us to realize it, and in the presence of God to confess it. Before the altar our own imperfections call for notice, and if we desire to attempt to correct them we must first acknowledge their obvious existence. Words of the earlier centuries may not always appear apt for minds of to-day. But the spirit behind them is the same, and the retention of these old formulas and prayers has great value in preserving the long continuity of Christian worship and tradition and in linking us with those of previous ages who, with the same ills and the

same adversities and the same faults as ourselves, have approached the same God through the intermediary of the same Saviour possibly in the very same building. You might get a committee of literary celebrities to draft a more suitable and to you satisfactory form of service; but would it have anything like the same precious significance?

THE DOCTOR. That is the conservative spirit *in excelsis*. The Church, if it is to be a living force, ought not to be a museum. Look at your creeds. The legendary Apostles' Creed, of unknown but very ancient origin; the Nicene Creed, the result of ecclesiastical disputes in the early fourth century; the Athanasian Creed, a product of the fifth century! Very interesting, no doubt, all of them, as historical relics to be looked at in glass cases, but fatal to the growing spiritual needs of man. The Athanasian Creed, as you know, is a definite object of offence to many people. I have come from Church on festival days incensed with rage that people in the sacred name of religion should be made to repeat such——, well, I don't want to be offensive, so I will leave a blank.

THE PARSON. As you know, the obligation to use that creed is being considered.

THE DOCTOR. But if there is no great

difference between one or other of them why should any of them be obligatory? They are all the creation of ancient ecclesiastics who ought not to regulate the beliefs of men living generations after them. The Nicene Creed, for instance, is made up of clauses some of which come from a Council whose decisions a Churchman is told he need not acknowledge; other clauses were condemned in anticipation by a Council whose decisions he is told he must acknowledge; and this jumble of inconsistencies is declared to be revealed Truth! What may appear to be an imperative necessity in one generation may become unnecessary and even positively injurious in another. Whatever is defective in thought at any given time is crystalized by a creed composed at that time. Creeds close the door of the mind and stifle spontaneous inspiration. There is nothing divine or spiritual about the creeds; and the hurried, thoughtless and perfunctory recital of belief in a series of portentous mysteries always strikes me as the most irreverent, desultory and meaningless act of worship that can be conceived. The howling dervish in his ecstasy is, according to his lights, in a far more religious frame of mind than the dressed-up respectable Churchgoer rapidly mumbling the Nicene Creed. If a child

declared its love and respect for its parents with the same effortless glibness with which the Churchman recites his formularies of reverence for God, it would be justly blamed for its heartless lack of feeling and rightly suspected of insincerity. I venture to say very respectfully that if Jesus Christ came on earth again he would not understand what you were doing in his name; he would be utterly mystified at the crust of superstition that has grown up over the lessons he taught; he would see that you had incorporated the very doctrines and practices which he himself had condemned. He would not understand your creeds. It is not the ordinances of Christ you are preserving with such zeal; it is the doctrines of the fathers of the Church, and of ecclesiastical pundits of the early centuries. They were surely liable to error; and because mistakes were made centuries ago, there is no reason why they should remain uncorrected to-day.

THE PARSON. I do not admit mistakes. I think the Apostles' Creed is a very simple epitome in as few words as possible of the cardinal and indispensable articles of faith.

THE DOCTOR. Well, then, of course we must agree to differ. I do not want to go over ground we have already covered. But

even you have reservations. You believe God is only relatively Almighty, and did not create heaven and earth in the way described in Genesis. The Virgin Birth you do not believe literally, and the Last Judgment involves a belief in hell which you discard. Now if you allow yourself any latitude at all you must allow others latitude. Where does it end? At what point would you tell them that their qualifications and reservations and even rejections preclude them from being entitled to take part in the service at all?

THE PARSON. That is not my affair. That is a matter for each individual to decide for himself in perfect freedom. If his doubts are only superficial he would feel in all probability that he could conscientiously continue in our communion. If they were fundamental he could not, without outraging his conscience, repeat the creeds, though I do not see even then, if he is so minded, why he should not continue to attend our services.

THE DOCTOR. Would you let him partake of the Sacrament if he were simply impressed by the beauty of the service and, though not believing in the actual Divinity of Christ, considered his example of such sacred value that he might well participate in a ceremony in remembrance of him?

THE PARSON. I confess I do not understand or appreciate that attitude, though I am well aware that it exists. The sacred words repeated in that service, and indeed the whole meaning of the Sacrament, implies an acceptance of the doctrine of the Atonement, which in its turn, of course, involves a belief in the Divinity of Christ. In this implicit faith the priest administers the elements to him, and those around him are receiving them in a like spirit. By applying an entirely unauthorized and unorthodox interpretation to his act it appears to me he is placing himself in a very false position. There is no Church in the world in which so much liberty is allowed to a man as the Church of England. You can judge for yourself by the great variety and degrees of opinion held even by the clergy. But there must be a limit somewhere, for if the very essence of our creed is rejected our whole fabric would begin to crumble.

THE DOCTOR. Perhaps people such as I refer to are the thin end of the wedge which is going eventually to be instrumental in splitting off from you the unnecessary crust of ecclesiasticism; and then you will discover that, so far from the whole fabric crumbling, the essence of Christianity, which is not the

supernatural but the spirit of righteousness, will remain and will be far more visible and far more attractive. I take it from what you say that you are amongst those who would only regard communicants as entitled to be recognized as full members of the Church?

THE PARSON. Yes, that is so. I regret the decision to broaden membership on the baptismal basis, but I always think in any association it is best only to regard as members those who, so to speak, actually subscribe.

THE DOCTOR. You think this is a wise policy in face of the very patent dangers that lie before you? Surely in your present state it would be wiser to open your doors wider rather than close them more securely.

THE PARSON. I think a handful of the elect are worth a crowd of the heterodox.

THE DOCTOR. I understand. It is the inevitable consequence of your attachment to the supernatural. But before I leave your services I should like to say a word about the hymns. They have been collected together more or less recently. They possess no archæological or historical merit like the liturgy but they illustrate the sort of sentiments and beliefs which are favoured. The supernatural and the incomprehensible predominate to an enormous extent. Not long ago, when the

church was being rededicated, a function for which the whole village turned out, I watched small boys and labourers shouting lustily :

Laud and honour to the Father,
Laud and honour to the Son,
Laud and honour to the Spirit
Ever three and ever One
Consubstantial, co-eternal,
While unending ages run.

Now, honestly, don't you think that is positively ludicrous ?

THE PARSON. Well, those particular lines may be a little difficult and not very suitable for public worship.

THE DOCTOR. No, no, I am not going to let you off on this point. To those who sing it, it is utter gibberish. They have not the remotest conception of what it means.

THE PARSON. There is a line in a hymn which runs " Vainly would reason grasp the things divine."

THE DOCTOR. That merely absolves the congregation from making any hair-splitting efforts at comprehension, but it does not alter the absurd position in which you place them when you tell them to sing lines such as I have quoted. No, I should like you to say that that sort of jargon ought to be eliminated for good and all.

THE PARSON. Very well. I have no objection to cutting out that hymn.

THE DOCTOR. I could quote many others. For instance :—

There is a fountain fill'd with Blood
 Drawn from Emanuel's veins,
 And sinners plunged beneath that flood
 Lose all their guilty stains.

which I think simply horrible. Or the belief in hell, which is declared in the lines :—

My God, I love Thee ; not because
 I hope for heaven thereby,
 Nor yet because who love Thee not
 Are lost eternally.

The echo of the service's emphasis on self-condemnation abounds in many maudlin sickly verses, notably in the lines :—

Wash off my foul offence,
 And cleanse me from my sin,
 For I confess my crime and see
 How great my guilt has been.

In "Rock of Ages," "Jesu, lover of my soul," and numberless other hymns the same note is struck, making men declare they are helpless, hopeless, wretched, weak creatures whose one wish is to save their souls from punishment, and whose only hope of doing

this is a continual declaration of belief in the Divinity of Jesus and in the Trinity. The joy expressed in your services and hymns is equally unattractive: "Ten thousand times ten thousand," "The golden gates," "A thousand harps," "How my spirit yearns and faints, For the converse of thy saints,"—unrestrained, senseless ecstasy, the general result being, in my opinion, inexpressible dreariness. A well-dressed congregation, singing to a swinging melody, with a pleasant stir of their emotions, words which denote the most extreme confessions of penitence, descriptions of the most sacred mysteries, or the most exaggerated expressions of awe has often struck me as extraordinarily insincere.

THE PARSON. Well, I do not mind honestly telling you that I have frequently been struck in the same way, and consequently I am very particular in the choice of my hymns. After all, they are not all bad.

THE DOCTOR. No, certainly not. There are fine verses, and some hymns are popular solely on account of their beautiful tunes—like "The Church's one Foundation." The words count for very little. But considering the mine of beauty that exists in English poetry surely it is about time that something drastic was done to cut out ruthlessly the

meaningless doggerel and the sentimental rubbish that now disfigures the hymn book.

THE PARSON. Your language is too violent, but I do agree that there is room for reform here and attempts have been made in that direction.

THE DOCTOR. They do not amount to much. But I will not quote any more hymns because I see you take a reasonable view on this point. As to the Psalms, I will only say that some of them are very fine, some are very dull, and some are very inappropriate and full of exaggeration. So long as it was supposed that David wrote them all under God's inspiration there was some excuse for keeping them as a whole. But now that it is known that they are a collection of songs of varied origin I should have thought some discrimination might be exercised in making a selection. I have not touched on other forms of service, the ordination service, the commination service—which was regarded as a huge joke when I was at school—the baptismal and burial services, the prayers for rain, the collects, etc. They all have the same tone running through them, the propitiation of some furious and revengeful deity. It is not as if you lacked the right sort of material. You have got the most wonderfully inspiring

language in the Bible, not to mention other great books. But for the sake of tradition you prefer to keep your service cold, unattractive, and largely unintelligible.

THE PARSON. Yet how many times have you not heard it said that the Church of England service is very beautiful?

THE DOCTOR. So it is in a beautiful cathedral, with beautiful music, beautiful voices, and a beautiful organ, when you do not have too much of the words of the service.

THE PARSON. I can imagine how violently you would express yourself about a service in a ritualistic church.

THE DOCTOR. You are quite wrong. I think colour, symbolism and ceremony have great attractions, and I believe many people can be appealed to through their senses and emotions in this way. It is a little dangerous, however, for I have noticed that rapturous appreciation of this sort of thing is combined sometimes with a decadent and degenerate artistic temperament. No, my complaint about ritualism is that it absorbs attention to the exclusion of everything else. You Churchmen are occupied in quarrelling among yourselves about vestments and candles and incense, so that your attention is often entirely distracted from the great crusade you are

supposed to be leading against the forces of evil. Talk of brotherly love ! Why, an evangelical detests a ritualist far more than he does me. These are matters that appear to you vital. Yet it was against the teaching of priests and the worthlessness of ceremonialism that Christ himself, and indeed all great religious reformers, have vehemently protested. It sometimes astounds me when I see what Churchmen think important. Take a parish magazine, that strange periodical which is distributed and bound into the local sheet ; you know what I mean. It consists of sentimental stories, and photographs of savages and bishops—at the end there are questions which show the sort of thing Church people are interested in—*the sort of thing you have taught them to be interested in !*

THE PARSON. Please don't shout, I am not deaf.

THE DOCTOR. I beg your pardon. But just listen to these : “ Why do people make the sign of the cross at the end of the creed ? ” “ Why do Ember days fall always on the same days of the week ? ” “ Should we make a deep reverence to the Cross ? ” “ Why do churchwardens have staves ? ” “ Please explain about candles in ceremonies.” “ Should not——”

THE PARSON. Yes, yes, I know, I know. You need not go on. Very trivial, rather ridiculous to you, no doubt. But such is human nature. The external will always seem very important. We are an association of human beings, not of saints and scholars. Many of us are very petty, very ignorant, very unenlightened no one will deny. But for all that, in small efforts and in great, by simple means and by great movements, by attention to trivialities and details as well as to the broad and comprehensive conceptions there is always a great and incessant striving forward. And, indeed, there are well constructed parish magazines which are useful and instructive.

THE DOCTOR. They are not distributed in hundreds, like the one I have just quoted from. However, the question of instruction is most important. I want to say a word about religious education. But we had better break off here. It is your turn to come and have a cup of tea with me to-morrow. As we have not come to blows to-day I feel encouraged to go on.

IV

THURSDAY

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE DOCTOR. I really did not say enough yesterday.

THE PARSON. I think you gave vent to your feelings pretty freely.

THE DOCTOR. No, there was something restraining in the atmosphere of your study, which shows that even I am susceptible to the influence of authority. But as we are going to deal with religious education to-day, I may perhaps be allowed to refer to the ministration of baptism, because that is the obvious starting point. Now, if it were just an initiation and admission of a new member into your fellowship there would be no very great harm in the mystical rite of baptism. Anyhow, I should not quarrel with you about the supernatural element which enters here, as elsewhere, in your services, though I should say that the reference in one of the opening prayers

to Noah and the Ark is hardly calculated to add to the dignity and solemnity of the ceremony. But baptism is very specifically something more than a mere initiation. And it is here that the great mischief for which the Church is responsible first begins. The theory is that the child is born in sin; it is a child of wrath. By baptism and admission into the Christian community it is brought within reach of salvation. Without this it is condemned to eternal punishment.

THE PARSON. Stay, I do not think you are justified in proclaiming the alternative as an indispensable belief.

THE DOCTOR. There are, however, many who hold it. But do not let us waste time over anything so ridiculous as the eternal damnation of unchristened babies. It is the positive side I want to examine. Sin is taken to be the natural state, and a process of correction consequently becomes necessary. You proceed by indoctrinating the child with the formulas necessary for a belief in the whole supernatural structure of your Church. It is no easy matter, because many of the doctrines are extremely difficult to grasp, specially for a child mind. But a perfect repetition of them in the catechism will suffice. Children are taught this astonishing form of instruction

at a comparatively early age and succeed in repeating it without fault. The child is made to believe in a personal devil, he is made to talk fluently about the sinful lusts of the flesh—this at the age of about eight, though when he is eighteen there are few who think it worth while to explain to him what the lusts are and what they mean. He reels off the subtle theological intricacies of the creed, and the injunctions of ancient Hebrew law contained in the ten commandments, and then he describes the significance of his own baptism “a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness; for being by nature born in sin and the children of wrath we are thereby made the children of Grace.” Now this doctrine, I repeat, is responsible for the whole attitude adopted towards children by their pastors and masters—the repression of evil and the inoculation of good.

THE PARSON. All this is quite consistent with the doctrine of the Atonement.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, just so. But I want to show how it works out practically and what mischievous consequences it has.

THE PARSON. But surely man is sinful, surely he exhibits tendencies towards an evil disposition, surely the frailty of our nature is patent, surely the powers of evil too often

gain the upper hand. Through admission into the fellowship of Christ the child obtains means of grace, the opportunity for correction, the championship of One who has overcome all evil. This seems to me perfectly rational. But I hope you are not going to make the Church responsible for all the shortcomings of our system of education.

THE DOCTOR. You clergy manage to establish yourselves at the head of the majority of our schools and colleges. But I am not dealing with education as a whole, only so-called religious education, which, as it stands now, does have an injurious effect on children's natures; not in a positive way, perhaps, but by neglecting to rouse the proper feelings of moral responsibility and by preventing the growth of reverence for those things and those sentiments which ought to be revered. An external and ceremonial reverence for the incomprehensible is as much as they gain from their instruction. Now to my mind true religion should be the spinal cord, or rather the nerve centre, of all education. It should be the keynote in the formation of character. It should run through all intellectual pursuits, all knowledge, and indeed all forms of human activity like a silken thread through pearls.

THE PARSON. I absolutely agree.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, but these occasional abstract agreements of ours are of no use. We differ so fundamentally as to what true religion is.

THE PARSON. You have never yet told me what you think it is. You have been so much occupied in telling me the Church version of it is all wrong.

THE DOCTOR. That is perfectly true. But I will give you my views, for what they are worth, before we have finished. Now you have often heard children doing their scripture lesson in a village school. They may get a parrot knowledge of certain phrases, and they may become word perfect in their catechism, creeds and collects. But do you for a moment believe that these difficult formulas they learn, have in their minds any bearing on their home life or their conduct towards their schoolfellows?

THE PARSON. Yes, I do. The duty towards your neighbour is a very good set of precepts on general conduct.

THE DOCTOR. I do not know that I admire very much that injunction. It teaches submission to authority, submission to external discipline, and resignation to whatever fate may befall you. It would seem to have been

framed to keep the lower classes in a state of obedience and subservience to their sovereign, governors, teachers, pastors, masters and betters. "To learn to labour truly to get mine own living" is not an item on which any stress is laid in our great public schools. In these the mechanical Chapel services, the daily prayers, the Bible questions and the construing of Greek Testament have not the smallest ethical or moral value. When I think of the amount of time I wasted with Bible dictionaries and concordances looking out passages in the Old Testament it makes me indignant.

THE PARSON. Such work has value as an historical study. It is a highly important branch of the world's history which every child should be taught.

THE DOCTOR. All I can say is, even from the historical point of view, I think I should have been better occupied in learning something about my own country and European history of the last hundred years of which I was taught literally and absolutely nothing. But I am speaking of religious, not historical, education. And I want to know how Jeroboam, Jehoiakin, Mephibosheth, Ahijah, Jehoshaphat, Huppim, Muppim, and the rest of them helped me in the conduct of my life and taught me what I should seek and what I should

avoid. As has been truly said of school children "they are loaded and ballasted with the chronicles of Baasha and Zimri, Methuselah, and Alexander the coppersmith, but take any of these religiously educated children and ask them what one must do to make life nobler and less sordid, they simply look puzzled."

THE PARSON. These things may not always be well taught. But I maintain they have their value as an historical analysis of the Bible in order that its unity of purpose may be made clear. Say what you like, but a knowledge of the Bible is of inestimable value to every man and woman. I cannot believe that you are advising that Bible teaching should be eliminated from the curriculum of our schools. Why Ecclesiastes, the book of Job, Isaiah, only to mention three books, are among the finest literature the world contains.

THE DOCTOR. I only discovered that years after I had left school. The beauties of the Bible were never shown me, and I doubt if I should have been capable of understanding them as a boy. However much one may appreciate these old stories, and however high one may estimate the historical and dramatic value of them, I repeat that divinity and

theology are not in themselves religious education.

THE PARSON. Do you really think that school children are capable of absorbing and benefiting by abstract moral instruction? And on what are you going to found your religious instruction and your moral code if not on the Bible?

THE DOCTOR. The morality of the Old Testament I should hardly have thought was exemplary. But I am not sure in the narrow sense of the word whether you can *teach* children religion. It is something that grows in the fullness of life's experience and requires guidance. My complaint is that under the guise of religious instruction you teach them something which to my mind has no remote connection with religion—Old Testament history, for instance.

THE PARSON. In its rough and archaic form it shows the development of religion from early times. It is all leading up to something. You can show that the fragments by themselves are incomplete, but they help to prepare the ground for the great culminating revelation contained in the Gospels. The Bible has been the great standby of the British people who, as you rightly say, are a religious people. They are religious because of the

part the Bible has played in their education, at home and at school. I should like to have it taught more not less. There need be no insistence on the actual and literal interpretation of all the Bible contains. But the legendary and symbolic have always played a prominent and valuable part in culture and enlightenment. Are you going to discourage people reading Homer and Dante and Milton because they deal with myths and creations of the imagination? Does not the value of works such as these rest not on the events recorded, but on the moral inferences, the aesthetic beauty, the marvellous ingenuity of mind of their authors and the continuity to which they testify in the higher aspirations of mankind?

THE DOCTOR. Certainly. But while the latter are appreciated solely on their own merits, which are such as you describe, you not only imply but you deliberately teach that Old Testament history is part and parcel of religion, because it is the record of the early manifestations of God among his chosen people. That is what I object to. If you said frankly "Here are some old records of ancient tribes; they are filled with symbolic legends, but have historical and literary value as they have had a great influence on the

thought of the world," I should make no protest. But as you know well, in ninety-nine schools out of a hundred, certainly in all elementary schools, they are explained as actual and literal facts and divinely inspired illustrations of the ways of the God whom the child is taught to worship. I do not know much about theological colleges where the clergy are trained, but I have seen some of the examination papers set for those entering the priesthood and just the same disregard is shown there for anything except exact technical biblical knowledge. This accounts for a great deal in the attitude of the majority of the clergy towards religion. They are sacrificed to an abominable system in which all emphasis is laid on the letter and the spirit is left to take care of itself.

Anyhow, the children, having absorbed what they can of the instruction, in due time are ready for confirmation. Hitherto their sponsors have vouched for them, now they have to take the responsibility on their own shoulders.

THE PARSON. A beautiful idea! They have arrived at an age of discretion, the realities of life are beginning to open out to them. It is a time for reviewing their lives and envisaging the future, with a higher sense of

responsibility in the shaping of their own destiny. In their infancy they have been steered, and the moment comes when, realizing God's love and the supreme sacrifice of their Saviour, they are prepared to take the tiller themselves.

THE DOCTOR. You are an incorrigible idealist.

THE PARSON. Are you going to find fault with a clergyman for that? What is wrong with the description of confirmation I have given?

THE DOCTOR. You seem to live in a world of your own, which does not correspond with the workaday world we live in. I am not finding fault with your ideals, nor indeed with the ultimate ideals of the Church. The idea of a general review of life is a good one. But it is the actual practice, the positive observance and the way in which your teaching is received and acted upon that you seem determined to ignore. Now, how does it all work out with regard to the child? Sponsors are not chosen because of their piety and moral influence. The higher up in the social scale you go the more it has become the practice to ask celebrities to act as godparents. I remember watching an eminent and notorious old rake saying "I renounce them all," that

is, the pomps and vanities and the sinful lusts of the flesh, to the intense amusement of the fashionable congregation assembled at the christening.

THE PARSON. That is just one of your individual instances of failure in the proper observation of a particular ceremony. It does not prove that the rite itself is inappropriate.

THE DOCTOR. But how is confirmation regarded by boys in general at their schools? They look upon it in precisely the same way as they do vaccination or an examination or passing out of one part of the school into a higher form. The significance you give to the ceremony is not apprehended, even dimly, by one out of a hundred of them. It is the way they regard it, not the way you regard it, against which I am protesting, and I think the Church is to blame.

THE PARSON. There is something in what you say. The opportunity is too often missed in schools, where a number of boys have to be dealt with simultaneously. It is a very intimate individual matter and cannot be treated in class like a lesson. There is certainly a tendency to convert the occasion into a mere external ceremony. But I have known the proper spirit instilled by parsons who are able to see the boys and girls individually

in their studies. It is a question of method, and I grant the method is often very faulty.

THE DOCTOR. Again I cannot admit it is only the method. You must bear in mind that I entirely disapprove of children being inoculated with the virus of superstition, and the perfunctory method aggravates the evil, not only in confirmation, but in all so-called religious practices the Church fails to gain any sort of lasting moral hold over them. Moreover, the inculcation of the dogmatic beliefs makes personal salvation the leading motive of worship. It is noteworthy that regular Church attendance breeds a self-centred view of religion: self-pity, salvation for self, consolation for self, remission of sins for self; and there are many who derive so much satisfaction from constant attendance at Church services that they are unwilling to sacrifice their punctual performance of the ecclesiastical routine for the dull humdrum and no doubt irksome duties of daily life. This is in direct opposition and contradiction to the real precepts of Christianity in which service is placed far above worship, conduct above recital of beliefs, and immediate duty above ultimate salvation. Church religion is, in fact, a violation of true Christianity. It enforces a disciplinary regulation without a religious spirit.

THE PARSON. But don't you think there is something specially beneficial and edifying in the discipline of a religious life? It is a help and an advantage to the younger and weaker natures, who thrive best when they can cling to some sort of prop, and on rebellious natures it may act as a restraint. Regulation is indispensable in any efficiently constituted organization.

THE DOCTOR. Discipline has its uses. But the Church has abused it very flagrantly. Monasticism was a failure. Discipline for discipline's sake, submission to exterior authority, penance and exaggerated self-denial have the effect of making people believe that the pursuit of a life of strict regulation and enforced renunciation is enough in itself, and is not only a satisfactory but an admirable form of religious life because it contains the element of obedience. But this is not what life is meant for. Abstinence and asceticism encourage spiritual pride. Neither the intellectual nature, far less the spiritual, can grow and unfold under such conditions. It is to a large extent because many have taken this to be the religious life, and have cut themselves off from the rough and tumble of the ordinary but real life of men, that so-called religion has lost its vitality and power. The more dis-

cipline is enforced from outside the less will self-discipline grow within. The former is mere automatic obedience to be attained through submission to authority, the latter is the fountain of the great spiritual initiative which differentiates men from animals. Educationally I should agree that a certain amount of discipline is advisable. But it must have meaning. At present the religious training and discipline for children is aimless, or rather is wrongly directed. I do not want to overstate the case by saying that this religious training makes children immoral. But the outcome of it all is nil. Their moral sense has not been roused or stimulated. They have been wearied and bored by petty disciplinary formulas and injunctions. They have heard little or nothing of the significance of life, of service, of fellowship, of conduct in the higher sense or of communal responsibility. The buds of their spiritual nature have been checked by the uncongenial environment, and the roots of their moral consciousness have found no fertile soil in which to penetrate. Nor is the situation often saved for them in their homes, in many of which doubt and indifference towards religion is the pervading atmosphere and where the opinion prevails that schools are able to supply the needful.

The result is that the majority of young people, when they grow up more out of apathy than opposition, gradually drift away and neglect the observances they were taught and at most attend your services as a social function.

THE PARSON. - I fully recognize that there is an indifference, but we should not agree as to the cause of it. I should attribute it to the more compelling attractions of the worldly and material interests which seem to-day to absorb men's minds more than ever, and perhaps, too, to a failure on the part of Church administration to devise special methods to counteract this tendency. I would go so far as to say that there is a want of vitality and conviction in the administration of the social side of our institution which tends to impair its practical efficiency and injure its spiritual influence. The undoubted advance of Non-conformity is to some extent a consequence of these shortcomings.

THE DOCTOR. The growth of sectarianism is the measure of the Church's failure. But it is interesting to note that the Free Churches do not have your architectural advantages nor do they avail themselves to the same extent of the assistance of music. Yet their villainously ugly buildings and plain, unadorned services seem to attract a larger number of

people—specially men—than you do. Most of you, however, refuse to co-operate with Non-conformists: you give them the cold shoulder, lest you might weaken the doctrinal basis of your creeds. This would seem to be a narrow and unbrotherly policy, and short-sighted, too, in view of the advance they are making. They have an advantage over you by being more essentially democratic and by not being subservient to the conventions of the social hierarchy. In your Church councils and conferences I notice the discussion is carried on by Bishops, Peers and Baronets, but I have not noticed the names of any working men. The Free Churches have not got your air of superiority. They have greater freedom, though many are preoccupied about their doctrinal integrity, and of course, in my opinion, they too are handicapped by the full acceptance of the supernatural elements in the Christian doctrine. Although it is a small point, I wish all of you would study the immense value of silence and meditation in your services. The silence of a mass of people devoutly inclined is not only impressive but helpful to each individual.

THE PARSON. I am sure it is. It affords an opportunity for silent prayer—a form of devotion which I think certainly ought to be encouraged.

THE DOCTOR. I did not mean it for prayer, although probably some would like to occupy their thoughts in that way.

THE PARSON. Do you mean to say that you do not believe in prayer?

THE DOCTOR. In your sense of the word I am afraid I do not. According to your view prayer is the supplication of a yearning spirit for sympathy and help from a personal God; the craving for the satisfaction of individual needs or at best the corporate expression of high aspirations and hopes for improved conditions; and at times intercession on behalf of others before a supreme ruler. It is performed more or less mechanically, either according to set formulas and on fixed occasions, or else privately at recognized times quite irrespective of inclination. All this may possibly have some use subjectively but it can amount to very little owing to the uninspiring and rigid forms into which it is directed. I have no high estimation of the motive and principle which underlie it. I dislike intensely the whole idea of moral prostration. Nature has evolved man physically to stand on his legs and not go about on all fours. Man should adopt the same attitude spiritually. In my view, prayer should not be occasional

and spasmodic supplication, but the constant and unceasing dedication of one's whole life—every thought and every action—to the highest that is in one and the best one can conceive. This is much more difficult, because it requires sustained vigilance and protracted effort. But it is not liable to reactions. There can be no sense of relief that you have done with it, and are free to pursue what course you like till the next interval for prayer comes round. Repentance, contrition, and morbid humility are all eliminated. Praise and glory, and all other forms of ecclesiastical flattery towards a jealous overlord do not enter into it. It is the self-reliant determination to allow the good you know to be in you to have, so far as lies in your power, constant opportunity to emerge. Not the confession of weakness and despair at sinfulness, but the confidence in strength and the recognition of your own power to reach towards perfection.

THE PARSON. At last I am getting some of your own views. Certainly they are interesting. But I must hear more.

THE DOCTOR. Very well, you shall; but we had better reserve that till to-morrow, as it will take me some time to elaborate my argument. Let us have a walk together to-morrow afternoon.

V

FRIDAY

SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION 1

THE DOCTOR. Let us go through the woods, and round up over the common.

THE PARSON. Do you know, I could not help being amused when I reflected on my way home last night that I originally came over to you last Monday to ascertain *your* position on the subject of religion, and I have now spent four days defending my own against a critical, not to say violent, onslaught from you.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, I am afraid I have been rather aggressive. But that is my method. It seems to me best always to clear the ground first negatively, and to be perfectly definite as to what I do not like, what I do not believe, and what I do not want, so that there may be no misunderstanding. Seeing that you were

- Extracts from *Spiritual Perfection*, a booklet published by the author in 1908, are incorporated in this chapter.

ready to converse with me in a spirit of fairness and tolerance, it would have been a poor return had I allowed you, just for the sake of pleasing you, to go away with the idea that I approved and accepted things which, in reality, I neither approve nor accept.

THE PARSON. Quite so. Well, we were dealing with prayer, and you gave your definition of it. Dedication is a fine idea, but it does not anything like cover the whole ground in the idea of prayer in its commonly accepted sense. Further, I gather you do not believe in a personal God, nor in the Unity of God with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, nor in Christ's divine mission, nor in the subsidiary doctrines which emanate from these basic doctrines. On the other hand you have expressed admiration for the precepts of Christ, and you have referred frequently to the spiritual forces and the spiritual nature in man. Now I would ask you to leave the negative side of your conception of religion, and be rather more explicit with regard to the positive side.

THE DOCTOR. I will try, though I shall find it difficult. I cannot be dogmatic like you. I cannot reinforce my opinions by showing you a long historical line of support, or pointing to large congregations of people

who think as I do. On the negative side I know I am by no means alone. But on the more positive side, or let me call it the tentatively constructive side, I prefer to speak for myself alone, because I have not thought myself justified in pressing on others what is perhaps only the outcome of individual experience. I certainly should not be attempting to explain myself to you now, had you not urged me to do so.

THE PARSON. I understand, but I am impatient to clear up what appears to me the anomalous and paradoxical position you seem to hold. Perhaps I may ask you some leading questions. Do you believe in any God? do you believe in the immortality of the soul? do you believe in a future life?

THE DOCTOR. I would prefer, if I may, to set about my explanation in my own way. The doctrine that we are born in sin is the keynote of dogmatic Christianity because it gives us the reason of the purpose and design of God, and for His intervention through Jesus Christ for our salvation. My entire repudiation of that idea necessarily prevents me from having any belief in the circumstances which arose, according to the teaching of the Church, out of it. Now I am inclined to think—no, I will be more positive here—I firmly

believe that in man, as he is constituted, there exists a spiritual element. That is to say, after taking into account all the component parts of our nature which can be scientifically capable of reduction to physical elements, everything would not be accounted for ; there would still remain some unknown quantity. As to whether this is consciousness, vitality or individuality cannot be determined, as to whether it can be detached from the physical and have existence apart from it we cannot say.

THE PARSON. The soul, in fact.

THE DOCTOR. Perhaps it may be simpler to call it that. But our definitions would not coincide. I believe this essence to be nothing short of the spirit of perfection, which is in us when we are born, making us the very opposite of children of wrath, and which, when we die, is untainted, unpolled, as absolutely perfect as ever.

THE PARSON. You mean to say the soul is not contaminated by sin. Do you mean to imply that the soul is not injured by a gross and sinful life ?

THE DOCTOR. That is precisely my point, and that is where we shall find another important difference between us. Let me take an extreme instance, in order to illustrate what

I mean. I saw in the newspaper the other day the case of a woman of twenty-seven, who had been sentenced forty-two times for theft, assault, drunkenness, and attempted suicide. I will not enlarge upon the social and economic conditions or on our prison and reformatory systems which make that sort of thing possible. I only want to point out that when that unfortunate woman dies the soul that may still be in her will be as perfect as when she was born.

THE PARSON. I will take an opposite instance, also a woman, the most truly unselfish I ever met, who sacrificed her life in ministering to the poorest and most neglected and occupied all her time in the relief of suffering. Now is it your belief that the souls of these two women are equally pure?

THE DOCTOR. Yes, it is.

THE PARSON. I really think that is rather an extravagant notion. Mind you, I readily admit that circumstances and no doubt heredity were very much against the poor unfortunate. I pity her more than I would condemn her, and I fully believe that God, in His infinite mercy, will show pity to her soul. But I also believe that the Almighty will know what chastening is due to such a one, even as He will know what reward is to be allotted to

the other. You cannot avoid noticing the far-reaching consequences of evil. Like the sound from a bell, it vibrates far and wide, influencing in many directions where we cannot trace its course. Yet you pretend that the soul which has initiated the wickedness is spotless!

THE DOCTOR. I cannot see what reason you have for saying the soul initiates the wickedness.

THE PARSON. Because I consider we are all responsible beings and that the spiritual element being the stronger controls the physical and is the directing force and originating power. If that is bad, the whole is bad. But perhaps you do not admit that we are responsible for our actions?

THE DOCTOR. Although there is certainly no means of proving it, I am inclined to believe that we are to some extent relatively responsible.

THE PARSON. And yet in the next world we are neither to suffer because of the evil we do, nor derive any eventual benefit from our good actions?

THE DOCTOR. Those alternative fates in store for us are just what I do not recognize. I think it is degrading the object and meaning of life to a very low level if we perform our duty looking forward to compensation and

reward elsewhere, or if we only avoid evil for fear of punishment hereafter. Surely we have got beyond those elementary notions, and if we are conscious that the spirit of perfection is within us it raises our motives and ideals on to a higher plane.

THE PARSON. What you speak of there I should call the Holy Spirit.

THE DOCTOR. I think some confusion might arise if we call it that. What exactly do you mean by the Holy Spirit?

THE PARSON. The Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost which is shed upon those who can enter into communion with the Almighty, to the refreshment of their souls and the purification of their bodies.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, as I thought, there is an important difference between us here. The perfect spirit I am trying to define is not shed from without on the elect, but dwells within the individual and works through his faculties. But perfect it is essentially. In fact, what you call the Holy Spirit is what I call the spiritual perfection in man.

THE PARSON. It is certainly the opposite pole from the self-abasement and humility to which you object to assume that we ourselves are divine, are in fact conscious parts of the Deity.

THE DOCTOR. I purposely avoid the word divine, by calling it spiritual perfection. I do not claim to be part of any Deity because I am not aware of any detached dominant outside power.

THE PARSON. How did you arrive at this conclusion of yours?

THE DOCTOR. Not from books, nor from instruction. I am sure it is not in the least original. But my inward reflections and general observations of life in a very large number of different strata of society led me to something which seemed to me to be a rational explanation of some of the baffling social phenomena and at the same time a moral stimulus for the direction of one's life. The evolution of man, which the discoveries of science allow us dimly to apprehend, shows the progressive development and adjustment to environment first of body, and then of mind. I should say self-consciousness is what first began to differentiate us from animals. It would be manifestly impossible to point to any particular moment when our intelligence became sufficiently developed to create self-consciousness. In the same way, as man has further progressed, always admitting the curious reactions to which the human race has been subjected, the process of spiritual

evolution began consequent on the growth of a finer intelligence and bringing with it the first birth of the moral perceptions.

THE PARSON. Are people, then, who are in a very low state of civilization devoid of the perfect spirit?

THE DOCTOR. I have said that it is not possible to discover at what particular stage man's intellectual capacities become sufficiently high to cause the presence of a spiritual element. Nor can I say when man ceases to act on instinct alone and develops the power of reasoning. Perhaps the two, the rational and psychic faculties, began to emerge simultaneously. It is quite possible that races now existing have not reached this stage.

THE PARSON. You believe, then, that soulless human beings may exist?

THE DOCTOR. That is better than believing that some men have souls destined to eternal torment. But I will go further and say that those who have lost self-consciousness through acute disease, failing faculties or madness are for these causes devoid of the spirit I speak of. It is difficult to make this point clear because I keep on referring to what we have agreed to call the soul as if it were something apart and detached. It is not an entity but an emanation, and if the condi-

tions necessary for its production are absent it cannot exist. The perfect spirit cannot be killed or entirely suppressed. The more it is exercised and the better chance it has the stronger it becomes. Even in the wretched woman I mentioned, there were no doubt intervals when her better self was struggling to pierce. Its presence, in fact, depends on its capacity to be active. If there is absolutely no scope for it, it simply is not there. But this can only happen in very extreme cases, where people are to all intents and purposes dead.

THE PARSON. Here is metaphysics for you. You talked the other day of being out of your depth. I am near drowning. Just fancy my attempting to explain this to Mrs. Berry.

THE DOCTOR. I really do not think the idea of spiritual evolution is in any way absurd.

THE PARSON. Come now. I never said it was absurd. As a matter of fact I am very much interested. Please go on.

THE DOCTOR. I think I could explain to Mrs. Berry that she had the spirit of perfection within her far more easily than I could explain the doctrine of the Trinity. But I do not want to force my views on other people, though I think they would be more beneficial than the beliefs which are being forced upon

them now with so little result. But let me try and make my point clearer. The perfect spiritual element in us is struggling with the imperfection of our mind and body, in some cases with slight success, and in others with little or no success. Sometimes the perfect soul shines through, and directs and influences our whole being towards righteousness. At other times it is cramped by the foulness of inherited vice and of corrupt environment, and struggles in vain to restrain the physical elements from vicious tendencies and from what would seem to be their natural bent towards materialism and animalism. But the perpetual struggle is not between antagonistic forces but of one would-be dominant indefinable power ever striving to gain ascendancy over a materially imperfect composition, which is the outcome of the natural development of physical matter. Apparent injustices are hereby explained and the idea of our equality is justified, which in the theory of the soul being reacted upon and actually affected by the faults in our physical nature could never be the case. With this knowledge the contradictions in human nature, often startling, can more satisfactorily be accounted for: the saint-like action of the most vicious criminal, or the criminal action of the worthiest saint.

Men require to be reminded of life's true meaning, and to have a frequent realization of the even adjustment of the balance in the seemingly unequal and incomprehensible arrangement of human affairs. And here a reasonable and intelligible explanation of the problem is offered to them in the knowledge that we are all equal, not only in the eyes of God, as we have been taught without understanding, but actually and in a way comprehensible to us all, for we have each of us a similar treasure in the possession of an ever-perfect spirit. I consider that the Christian with eyes cast heavenward and thoughts turned towards a world to come does not in any way account satisfactorily for the divergent lots of mankind in this world by teaching the lesson of compensation and retaliation in a life hereafter.

THE PARSON. But in the next world what is to be the fate of these perfect spirits? This life cannot be everything. It is on far too small a scale.

THE DOCTOR. That is because you make people regard it as merely preparatory, a sort of ante-chamber; and so you prevent them from seeing the tremendous scope for spiritual development. It is not on a small scale: it is on as large a scale as we like to make it.

As to the next world I make no conjecture. But I would say that the insurmountable difficulties presented by the idea of the resurrection of the body and by mutual recognition in a perfected state do not present themselves in my idea.

THE PARSON. You speak of perfection, but what is it? Does such a thing exist in this world?

THE DOCTOR. Yes, I consider that it does exist in the way I have explained, stimulating and inspiring the highest form of organism, which is the human, and urging it gradually towards higher aspirations.

THE PARSON. That is what I call the Divine Spirit, not the soul.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, you believe in several spirits—God the Father, who is a spirit, God the Son, who is a separate spirit to whom prayers can be addressed, God the Holy Ghost, and the human soul which is also a spiritual element. I believe in only one, which is in us and probably outside us too.

THE PARSON. But the spirit within us, then, has no individuality apart from the body, and has no impress of personality on it when it leaves the body?

THE DOCTOR. We cannot tell. But a gigantic, and to us quite incomprehensible,

movement for the development of humanity towards a higher state would not seem to necessitate the conservation of every individual who, by living, has partaken in that movement. Indeed, the desire for the perpetuation of our own individuality seems to me presumptuous. Even the satisfaction that we imagine we should feel in after-life, if our souls could retain a recollection of having inhabited our own particular bodies, appears to me a short-sighted view. Life, humanity, and our little world itself, though all important to us, are in their relation to the whole universe and all time so far more insignificant, fleeting and ephemeral than we in our acute consciousness of self would care to admit. Our individuality, it is true, is all we have that is really our own, and having used it here to the best of our ability we are reluctant to lose it hereafter. The more so if we are taught that this life is only preparatory. We cannot see the influence which our own lives exercise on posterity but we can observe it in the case of those who have gone before. The influence of a great and dominant personality obviously does not cease with his death. In such a case we can trace visibly the effect of his example, his words, or his work for generations, or may be for centuries. In like manner the

personalities who do not in the same way command public attention have, notwithstanding our incapacity to detect the channels, also a wide and long-lasting influence. This earthly immortality is not sufficiently grasped because we are unable to realize its full scope.

If we think about it at all we at once begin to understand the supreme importance of our lives here; and having grasped its tremendous significance we shall be far less disposed to yearn for the perpetuation of consciousness in a completely different form of existence. Anyhow, we shall greatly benefit by not relying on eventualities the nature of which is to be for ever an unfathomable mystery. The idea of the individuality of each one of us continuing to exist is very naturally fostered by human love and the consequent desire to meet those we part from in this world again in a life after death. But it is difficult to conceive how in altered circumstances such meetings could either be expedient or happy.

THE PARSON. Surely you are not so old-fashioned as to think that people are headed back from a belief in the next world by difficulties and doubts about age, period and relationships founded on our present earthly standards and methods of calculation? We know that will all be adjusted by the divine wisdom.

THE DOCTOR. It is not I that am old-fashioned: it is your creed, which tells people to believe in the resurrection of the body; and the hope of literal recognitions and reunions is the consolation you give to those in bereavement.

THE PARSON. Yes, recognition and reunion, but not in our earthly sense but in a divine and spiritual sense. Ties are formed here of a sort which I am perfectly convinced will not be cut by death, which is not a termination but a transition. I think the highest forms of human love are sublime; they are pleasing in God's sight, and they knit the souls of mortals here with bonds which death itself cannot break.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, but you must remember that, according to your belief, hatred will also be converted into love if all our evil passions are to be taken from us in your heaven.

THE PARSON. That is to say the causes of our dislikes, whether in us or in the object of our dislike, will have vanished.

THE DOCTOR. And with them all the character that distinguished us. No. Do not let us try and define after-life, either by making it attractive or repellent. Let us rather try and discover what our natures are capable of in this life. And it seems to me

that were every one conscious that they were in themselves potentially capable of the highest good, though perhaps not practically, it would lead to a far more rapid emergence of the good that lies in the worst of us than is possible now.

THE PARSON. I cannot reconcile myself to the idea that our future life will not make good the huge differences existing in this world: that justice will not be meted out to those who have sinned and to those who have suffered for righteousness' sake.

THE DOCTOR. Just so; in other words rewards and penalties. You will excuse my saying so, but that is the primitive desire to obtain satisfaction by witnessing the application of what is considered to be justice. It is founded more or less on a reverence for the law which regulates human affairs. But if we are foolish enough to insist on following up the fate of immortal souls, we should look to the possible existence of some larger, more appropriate, and more comprehensive scheme for the adjustment of divergencies than that which can be supplied by a giant court of justice regulated by an even more crude and revengeful code than our own inadequate system of justice here on earth. But all this is dispensed with if the soul is unalterably

perfect, and a far broader and more charitable point of view is substituted.

THE PARSON. I must return to what I said as to the immeasurable harm which I am sure the wickedness of some people causes in this world. We have dealt with extreme examples, the drunkard and the saint. In my experience brutality is by no means the greatest influence for evil. There exists a cowardly meanness, a cruel heartlessness, a diabolical depravity which has a disastrously deteriorating influence in human society. There is a wickedness which seems almost bred of the person, of the individual himself, and nothing will persuade me that he, though he may escape in this world, will not be made fully conscious hereafter of the wrong he has done here, which consciousness in itself might constitute an adequate punishment; that is to say if he were really faced with the evil consequences of his acts under conditions which would cause him to realize them to the full.

THE DOCTOR. And with what object? For if he does not return to earth it cannot be to teach him not to behave like that again. Why are you so bent on the punishment of your fellow-creatures?

THE PARSON. Not more than I am on

their reward. In fact, the sense of justice though you may call it primitive, is engrained in me, and I think in most of us.

THE DOCTOR. The type you have just mentioned does not, I am sure, escape as you think in this world. If we could follow accurately and consecutively human thought and action, we should find that an inexorable retribution overtakes every deviation from the right path ; that is to say the path towards our highest ideal, however low that may be. And, in fact, if we could only observe our lives closely enough, not confining ourselves to noting what we consider to be cause and effect, aspiration and achievement, but noting to what degree we derive the right sort of happiness, the happiness that really satisfies, from our actions and intentions, and to what extent we fail and suffer, we should, I think, come to the conclusion that a future life of reward and punishment is entirely superfluous. Moreover, if we were able to disentangle all the intricate network of original causes out of which emanated the worst actions of men, we should be astonished to find how small a part was played by the direct responsibility of the individual.

THE PARSON. I do not see how you can talk of individual responsibility at all when

you attribute all evil to our physical natures and to environment.

THE DOCTOR. That may seem a contradiction on my part. It comes from my endeavour to define the spiritual apart from the physical, whereas I really regard the two natures as one. And that is why I am prepared to concede that the individual, taken as a whole, is relatively responsible but far less directly than you would make out. In any case, you will agree with me that the knowledge that we are the spiritual equals of those whom we regard with the highest respect and admiration is most encouraging to ourselves; while on the other hand the knowledge that those we consider to be the meanest of our fellow-creatures are also spiritually our equals will instil a far more charitable and more tolerant view of them in us. I want service, altruism, and mutual respect to take the place of the selfishness, prejudice and mistrust which the Church entirely fails to eradicate.

THE PARSON. Altruism, after all, is the basis of Christianity. I do not see how it is possible to improve on Christ's injunctions in that direction. His supreme sacrifice is the zenith of altruism and to follow His example is our constant endeavour. The cross, which has become the Church's chief emblem, is the con-

stant announcement and reminder of that glorious self-sacrifice.

THE DOCTOR. And what deeds of selfish violence have been perpetrated under the sign of the cross, just because ecclesiasticism has become supreme at the expense of Christianity! Ecclesiasticism is not an adjunct of Christianity, it is its enemy. No. Christ's teaching in that connection has come to be regarded as a counsel of perfection, wonderful but unattainable. There are too many who look on the salvation of their own souls as the main object of life. There are a few, however, I think an increasing number, who realize that true progress and the best means of encouraging the expansion of the endless possibilities in the individual is for that individual to lose and absorb himself in, and sacrifice himself to, the common good. You may call this the unattainable ideal of Socialism, or you may call it the highest conceivable form of individualism. But until this lesson is learnt by us all we cannot be alive to injury produced by wrongdoing on humanity at large quite apart from ourselves. We cannot yet rightly comprehend that though we may not suffer ourselves in the way we might expect there are nevertheless inevitable consequences of bad actions in this life, and the

harm inflicted on the community is as grave, and should strike us as forcibly, as any selfish fear of eventual punishment can disturb us now. We are very important, but let us try to forget ourselves a little more. Complete altruism is impossible and indeed undesirable. It must be accompanied by intelligent self-interest. Self-mastery becomes easier if service and altruism and not personal salvation form the motion at the back. I think most of us endeavour to avoid injuring our neighbours, but we do so only in so far as with a cursory glance and from our own point of view we follow up the consequences of an evil action. Our incapacity for tracing the ultimate vibrations of evil does not occur to us, and we take no thought therefore of that which is not absolutely obvious and is beyond our line of vision. But I think that it is possible for our perceptions in this respect to be more fully expanded and rendered more acute as time goes on. You will say it is extravagant to look forward to a day when self will be so much repressed and when so keen a sensitiveness to the obligations toward the community will have grown, but it is a time which I am not without hope will come nevertheless, as the advances that have already been made tend

to show by the direction they have taken. Justice, tolerance, and the human feelings are all branches of altruism. And when the artificial and inequitable contrasts of social life are further levelled, the inevitable divergencies due to heredity and circumstances will no longer appear so oppressive once the knowledge of the possession of a perfect spirit by each one of us is generally admitted.

THE PARSON. I have no fault to find with your admirable ethical precepts, but I only wish you would link them to the great divine mystery which surrounds us, though you refuse to regard it. It seems to me, however, that the tendency of your theory of recognizing perfection in everybody would be to make us over-tolerant, which is a great snare.

THE DOCTOR. It is not a snare into which the majority of people are in danger of being entrapped. But I dispute that it would make us over-tolerant. Knowledge that a man has a great inherent capacity for good in him will in no way make us tolerant of the wrong he does, but will give us true compassion for him, and strengthen our resolve to remove obstacles from his path, and it will render his awakening to a sense of better things infinitely more hopeful. According to your

view there are, roughly speaking, two classes of beings—those who are to be rewarded and those who are to be punished, with many very near the border line.

THE PARSON. I should put it this way. The righteous are those who have striven and who, having humbled themselves in this world, shall enter the kingdom of heaven trusting in God to give them peace. While those who have sinned against God's law and wilfully broken His commandments shall incur the wrath of the Almighty and be chastened as it seems best to His infinite wisdom.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, that amounts to the same thing. The bait you offer for living a good life is the fear of punishment and the hope of reward.

THE PARSON. There must be a simple foundation. We dwell, too, on the love of righteousness for righteousness' sake and on the beauty of holiness. I must say I think the hope of heaven is a nobler prospect to hold out than annihilation.

THE DOCTOR. No, not necessarily annihilation. I would rather call it absorption, but I purposely refrain from being dogmatic. Consciousness not having been explained in the present, I do not presume to explain it away from the future.

THE PARSON. But if the spirit retains no trace of individuality it amounts to annihilation.

THE DOCTOR. Not more than by the process by which we are rendered perfect in heaven. I cannot see that an eternal life of intercourse together in a perfected state, in which I maintain we should be unrecognizable, is a noble doctrine. The idea of a perfect human being, without the light and shade, the relief and the contrast of his imperfections, is quite inconceivable.

THE PARSON. There is no reason why this perfect surviving spirit should not be clothed in recognizable form. The seed is very different from the flower, and yet it is potentially the same. May we not be seeds here and flowers hereafter? Remember heaven is not a place but a state, wherein perhaps our nature will be enriched by a new faculty, namely, that of spiritual recognition.

THE DOCTOR. It is beyond my powers of imagination. Such speculations are vain, and not very helpful. The purpose for which the countless myriads of beings who have existed and will exist on this specklike planet in the universe should continue to exist eternally after death cannot possibly ever come within the range of our comprehension.

But with the aid of the hypothesis I have set forth the analysis of the elements that go to make up our natures while we live produces a theory that seems to lead to more satisfactory conclusions.

THE PARSON. I gather you do not attach much importance to our eventual fate.

THE DOCTOR. Not exactly that. I am, perhaps, rather inclined to avoid dwelling on something of which we know literally and absolutely nothing and which lends itself to rather fantastic surmise. It appears to me there is nothing in our corporeal appearance which has any claim to immortality, and as for our individuality it derives its colour from our faults and failings.

THE PARSON. And not from our virtues?

THE DOCTOR. No, not if, as I maintain, goodness is the basis of our nature. Mine is an exceedingly optimistic belief. I take perfection as the basis. You take some unknown quantity given by God which is susceptible to exterior influences. With me righteousness is the real essence and iniquity an at present indestructible barrier which circumscribes it.

THE PARSON. You say that this barrier is formed by the physical elements in our composition, and that they have gradually

been built up by a relentless heredity mitigated or accentuated by environment.

THE DOCTOR. Heredity may be regarded as the strongest factor; and in addition to environment there is the combination of evil elements in our nature which produces fresh evil, and there is the surviving influence of evil perpetrated in the past. But of course there is no such thing as an evil spirit.

THE PARSON. I differ from you there very emphatically. I fully believe that a spirit of evil is continually warring in us with the spirit of good, and too often gets the upper hand. The natural tendency of man is to sin, and to listen to the voice of the evil one, and unless assistance be sought from God through Christ, who has overcome sin and death, we shall surely fail.

THE DOCTOR. I have been terribly inclined to believe in the devil at times, when I have seen the exultant triumph of all that is low, mean, sinister and pernicious. But I know such triumphs are not real or lasting, and that the idea of the devil being behind them is of course ridiculous. There are other far simpler and more rational ways of accounting for wrong. Where in the order of things can a spirit of evil be admitted? If God is omnipotent why did He not start His work by

destroying the devil? Surely He has not allowed this force to exist with the sole purpose of disturbing us.

THE PARSON. It is through conflict that we enrich and purify our nature. According to you there is no struggle.

THE DOCTOR. But there is a struggle, the struggle of good gradually overcoming physical, which includes mental, deficiencies which constitute evil; but no possibility of the evil defeating or even disfiguring the good. For the good is perfection, and in perfection there is no degree, it is absolute. Analyze your own feelings; doesn't it seem to you that the essence of your nature is good? That all that is inspired in you is good, and that, however strong the evil may be, it is never inspired; it is as it were foreign to your spiritual nature? Overpowering though it often may be, it can invariably be resolved into physical elements or traced to a physical origin.

THE PARSON. Whatever crime we commit, it matters not: our soul is perfect. Our neighbour offends us, we kill him; our own life is unendurable, we commit suicide; it matters not, no punishment awaits us, our soul is perfect.

THE DOCTOR. But it does matter quite

enormously if we understand that this life is for us all-important.

THE PARSON. The acceptance of your idea might possibly act as an incentive to good, but it would never serve as a deterrent from evil. But what have you in view? Is it merely the present welfare of society, or is it the progressive advance of humanity towards some sublime destiny?

THE DOCTOR. I am as unwilling to speculate as to the future of the human race in this world as I am to make conjectures on the subject of an after-life.

THE PARSON. But do you believe in Progress?

THE DOCTOR. If it means the attainment of greater happiness for human beings, no. Happiness is elusive. It is probable, indeed, that men in a lower state of civilization than ourselves can be happier than we are. If it means the continuous improvement of the objective world, and the conditions which surround us, and the institutions and organizations we create, again no. All these things only change. We are continually adapting them to suit altered circumstances, and while there may be more suitable adaptation there need not be necessarily any real improvement. If it means fresh discoveries and inventions,

yet again no. They may widen our scope of knowledge and activity, but like machinery they may themselves create new conditions which in the long run satisfy us less than the previous state we were in. The continued imperfections of the material world and of our institutions are the grindstone against which human faculties become sharpened. In fact, the absence of these imperfections would have a deteriorating effect on man's character. The soil never becomes perfect, however much you may cultivate it. Were you able to get it into a condition in which no labour needed to be expended on it the result might appear convenient, but it would be utterly demoralizing to man. If, on the other hand, progress means the gradual development of man's spiritual nature in the continuous struggle against adverse circumstances, the consequent enlargement of human capacity and an increased control by man over his own destiny, then I am inclined to think that unquestionably an advance has been made. And it is because I think the advance might become more rapid, and draw humanity forward and upward more surely, that I desire the influences that act on his spiritual nature to be strengthened and enriched. You ask me for my definition of

progress, I suppose, because you conclude that without progress the existence of the perfect spirits I speak of, and their incessant operation towards a culminating point, would be quite objectless.

THE PARSON. Yes, but it appears to be your desire to excuse the evil that exists and to disprove the idea of any suffering befalling us in another life as a consequence of that evil. A true Christian can have no particular wish to agree with you on these points, for they are satisfactorily accounted for in his creed.

THE DOCTOR. To him, possibly, but not to me. Apart from the one I have offered, I know of no satisfactory explanation of the presence of evil in the world. What I want to show is that without exercising any great effort of faith, of which many of us may be incapable, and without any deep analysis of the comparative validity or fallaciousness of all the various doctrines which treat of life after death, those who believe as I do are afforded great comfort and peace of mind by the conviction that the present is all-important quite apart from the past and the future, for in every moment that we live our inmost spirit can be given constant opportunities of dominating over our rough, unfinished and faulty nature.

THE PARSON. That may be, but the human being has yet to be created who, if he has any mind at all, has not speculated on his eventual fate. In the hope and comfort that Christianity affords there is an amply sufficient explanation to satisfy the interrogations of the most restless spirit. You speak disparagingly of comforts and consolations, but you must remember that the soothing of sorrowing hearts and the consolation of the afflicted in the presence of death, through a belief in the resurrection and a life to come, is one of the noblest works that the Christian Church achieves.

THE DOCTOR. I do not wish to speak disparagingly of consolation in the great tragic moments of life, and I would not say a word to trouble those who find relief in the belief you hold. But you must face the fact that more and more people are ceasing to find comfort in such a belief because their reason refuses to accept it.

THE PARSON. But what help are you going to give the sorrowing and the desolate? What are you going to say to those who have led unhappy and miserable lives? It is hard to die without ever having lived.

THE DOCTOR. Tragic it is, though I am not sure that we can always gauge other

people's misfortunes rightly. We are apt to make mistakes both ways by applying our own standard of values. I mean, what appear to us great misfortunes and great unhappiness may not be so regarded by the person in question, whereas what seem to us trivial or what we even fail to notice at all may be the source of poignant unhappiness. However that may be, I think you will find that when the moment of death approaches those who believe in immortality quit life with fully as much, if not more, reluctance than those who have no such expectations.

THE PARSON. But would you hold out no hope to the unfortunate?

THE DOCTOR. I would not be justified in telling them anything I believe to be false. I could not speak to them of another world, nor would I close the door absolutely on the survival of consciousness, because my view as to that is purely individual. But I would tell them to expect something far better, far more merciful, far more wisely designed than anything we can possibly conceive. I would say "Put your whole trust in God."

THE PARSON. But do you believe in any sort of God?

THE DOCTOR. The very word is so inextricably mixed up with the hideous conception

of Jehovah which I have already denounced that I feel almost inclined to answer *No*. But that would not really be true. While I cannot conceive any Director, Creator, Controller, King, Governor, Protector or Father, nor do I think we ought to feel the need of such a person, I am certainly aware that there is contact between the spirit of perfection within us and the spirit of perfection outside of us. I welcome, therefore, many of the varying definitions, especially God is Love; and even the personal conception, because it is simple and convenient, which help men to fortify the one through the consciousness of harmony with the other. While at one time in my life I thought I felt guidance from outside I found ultimately that consciousness only gave me a feeling of dependence and encouraged a tendency towards resignation which was weakening. When at last I came to be aware that the guide was in me, and of me, I felt greatly strengthened, stimulated and encouraged. I quite recognize, however, that dispositions vary, and you cannot make some men self-reliant by just telling them to be so. That is why I sympathize with and by no means despise any deistic conceptions so long as they do not entail self-abasement and supplication. At the same time I feel myself that my

undivided attention should be turned to the God within me, who is ever present and with whose operations I am intimately and perpetually concerned, and to the corresponding spirit in my neighbour, rather than exert myself to imagine the quite inexplicable nature of the God outside who, directly one begins to describe Him, becomes unreal and a mere subject of speculation and controversy. So I prefer not to make any definition, although others may be able to formulate their ideas more clearly than I can. I am concerned with the process of which I seem to form a part, but not with the culmination which must for ever remain beyond our grasp. As spiritual evolution proceeds, we may conceivably in time succeed in creating God more definitely.

THE PARSON. That is a strange idea. I should have thought the belief in Divine Providence was almost inherent in the nature of man and the realization of His guiding hand the most universal sentiment that exists. Why you yourself, I expect, use the expression "Thank God" instinctively when events over which you have no control take the right direction. I do not mean just from force of habit, but because in your innermost consciousness you feel the element of control

though you cannot formulate it. The beautiful expression "God bless you" is another instance of what I mean.

THE DOCTOR. Such expressions as those do illustrate, I agree, the instinctive belief in God, and if I say "Thank God" it is because I am subject to the irrational impulses of my race and age and not because I recognize any providential interference; a moment's thought will dispel any such idea.

THE PARSON. Do not call it interference, call it purpose. Manifestly in evolution itself a wonderful design is displayed. It seems to me to demonstrate the presence of an Almighty Creator and a divine intention.

THE DOCTOR. However that may be—and I for one have no desire whatever to plunge so deep into the unknowable in an attempt to reach the first cause of all creation—however that may be, I say, it is the recognition of the spirit of God within us that ought to take the place of the dependence on the spirit of God outside. I see the whole of life stretching away into the two eternities as one whole, one even development, one gradual expansion, subject, of course, to periodic reactions, one sustained and increasing striving, one steady growth permeated by one spirit towards one unimaginable end, to be reached by one

purpose. I do not see abrupt divisions, I do not acknowledge any sudden change, I do not believe in a chosen people, a sudden revelation, a special dispensation, a break in continuity or a specific divine interference. You believe in one isolated and historical revelation manifested through a number of miracles. I believe in one continuous ever-present and unending revelation manifested through the one ceaseless miracle of life and nature.

THE PARSON. Yes. There is nothing in the least objectionable in your view, and I think I understand the theory you have propounded more or less. You are certainly not a monist or a materialist. In some ways I should have found it easier if you had been, because we should have been in direct conflict all along the line. But you adopt a position in which you value a great deal that I value and at the same time omit a great deal that I value. So my criticism would be that your views, while satisfactory to yourself, are inadequate as a scheme to teach others. Religious theories and systems, whatever you may think of them, have not really been imposed upon peoples but have been created by the peoples themselves because they correspond to their needs and requirements. It

is no good deploring that people are credulous and superstitious. The human mind is so constituted that it craves for a more or less specific manifestation of an outside controlling Power, and if you do not give it that it will not be satisfied. That instinctive craving is, in my opinion, one of the proofs that the Power sought exists. Codes of ethics are all very well, but they will never carry you very far for they lack the warmth and intimacy of religious doctrine. Your idealism, good in itself, is insufficient ; it wants to be hinged on to a more definite creed. In order to follow the teaching of Christ we require the inspiring influence of the divine personality behind it. We want Christ as well as Christianity.

THE DOCTOR. I do not pretend to have solved any mystery. The path I am treading has no doubt often been trodden before. I do not claim that my ideas are completely satisfactory even to myself, although they are a vast improvement on anything I have clung to before. But I am anxious to prune away all that appears to me to be interfering with spiritual development and to retain the essential that signifies. I want to bring many more people to think about the meaning and significance of life than do now. I want them not to shuffle through life as the sports of

circumstances, dwelling only on their animal pleasures, but to realize the infinite force that exists actually in their nature, however much the world may despise them, however low they may have sunk—a force which is responsible for all the good there is in humanity, a force which, if freed and enlarged, might transform the whole character of civilization, a force always operating in one direction—upward, onward, forward, towards the refinement and enlightenment of our natures and towards an ideal which comprises the highest and best possible that our poor minds can conceive. I want an idea that is simple, easily understood and devoid of all elements which discredit man's increasing intelligence.

THE PARSON. Theoretically I have nothing to say against all that. But if you had your way, and could inculcate the whole Church with your views, your failure, I fear, would be far worse than ours has been. Well, here we are at my gate. I should like to think over all you have said. Let us meet once more to-morrow and try and see if we can pull together the different threads of our week's discussion.

THE DOCTOR. Very well, come over to me in the afternoon and if it is fine we will sit in the garden.

VI

SATURDAY

THE UNBRIDGEABLE GULF

THE PARSON. What a lovely walk we had yesterday! Engrossed as I was in our talk, I was conscious all the time of the transcendent beauty of the woods, the winding river, the sunny meadows and the far distant hills. I almost interrupted you several times just to say "Look at that! Is not God there?"

THE DOCTOR. The beauty was not lost on me, I assure you. Often I go out alone and drink it in and feel refreshed and invigorated by the mere contemplation. When I hear your bell ringing on Sunday morning I feel I am better occupied in the woods than those who are with you in Church. But your God was not there. He was up in His Heaven. If you saw Him in the trees and hills, the clouds and the river then you are a pantheist and deserve to be burnt like

Giordano Bruno. I should not mind if you accused me of being one. The all-pervading spirit of perfection was certainly in the scenery yesterday, and the perfect spirit in us both seems to have felt the great affinity and vibrated and responded in complete harmony. But how about our daily talks? What do our discussions amount to, anything or nothing?

THE PARSON. I have been thinking it all over very carefully. I want, if I possibly can, to take a dispassionate point of view to-day. The opinions I have expressed are representative of a great religious body. Your opinions, so far as they are critical, you claim also to be representative perhaps of a small but by no means of a negligible set of people. So far as they are constructive you put them forward as individual. I have not sufficiently elaborated what I feel to be the wonderful impulse and overwhelming reality of Christianity, but you no doubt understand that I feel it more than I have been able to express in the course of argument in which I have been more or less on the defensive. I wish I were a worthier exponent of the great verities which I feel so profoundly, but which I fear in an argumentative defence may have suffered from my want of debating powers. While I have

not been shocked by your views, I thought some of your denunciations were exaggerated, and I must admit that it fills me with profound sadness that anyone should find it possible to disregard truths and reject beliefs which I consider vital and essential. But I recognize that what you have said is the sincere view of people whom I have no desire to ignore. It appears to me, therefore, that we should try and consider to-day how the ultimate aim which each of us has in view can best be served and furthered. Broadly speaking, there is no very great divergence of opinion between us as to that aim.

THE DOCTOR. We are both convinced of the supreme importance of developing in the best way possible the spiritual nature of man.

THE PARSON. Precisely. You as a layman have not the same responsibility as I have. But I want you now not to adopt the position that it is no business of yours; but to try with me to see what actual steps might be taken upon which we might agree with the object of making some advance in the right direction.

THE DOCTOR. Very well, I will do that.

THE PARSON. Now, I should like to consider two points. Firstly, the eventual ideal—that is to say what we should like to see estab-

lished in the far future, disregarding for the moment the present condition of affairs. And secondly, the next actual steps to be taken, in which, of course, present conditions must be taken fully into account. Without going too much into detail will you give me on the first point a general description of the ideal organization, if any, which you consider would meet the need you perceive?

THE DOCTOR. This is rather difficult, because, of course, I must presuppose drastic changes in our whole social system. For instance, the moral as well as the physical welfare of the community is suffering seriously and increasingly from our abominable large town system, only to mention one blot.

THE PARSON. I agree. But clearly we cannot define our political, social and economic Utopias. That would take us several weeks more. We must confine ourselves to religion and the Church.

THE DOCTOR. That is just where my difficulty comes in, because real religion cannot be, and ought not to be, a detached watertight compartment. That is one of the reasons of the failure of to-day.

THE PARSON. What do you mean by watertight compartments?

THE DOCTOR. At present religion is de-

tached from a man or woman's general normal activity. Domestic life, social life, business life, industrial life, national life, and further still international life are regulated by different standards and religious life is something apart, something irrelevant, which is generally confined to Churchgoing and certain ecclesiastical observances. The result is that the moral code of the individual shows often extraordinary variability and sometimes complete contradictions. The business code is frequently entirely different from the domestic code. National morality is often lower still, and in international affairs morality of any sort is hardly distinguishable. Now if religion permeated the whole field of man's occupation, and served him as a guide in every one of his pursuits and in the formation of all his opinions it would become a living force, raising the whole tone of all ethical values and bringing unity of purpose and a common standard into all forms of human activity. That is what I look forward to. It is largely because at present religion is shut off in this close preserve that the supernatural and transcendental is tolerated. Were it a serviceable guide on every occasion and in all circumstances he would find the irrational and abnormal of no more use to him than it would

be now in dealing with the business of his home or his occupation or in arriving at his decisions with regard to communal and national affairs.

THE PARSON. I understand what you mean, though again I do not agree with what you say as to the supernatural. But for the sake of the present argument we must limit ourselves to religious institutions.

THE DOCTOR. I do not believe in any exclusive religious institutions.

THE PARSON. Would you not allow for some sort of regulating organization, or would you just leave it all to the unregulated freedom of personal caprice?

THE DOCTOR. No, I agree there must be a directing body, but it must be comprehensive and fully representative. The actual churches, the buildings, should be recognized as the property of the people. They should be open under the supervision of elected committees of management to all classes and sects for the purposes of instruction and religious observance. All forms of religious faith—and there will always be a variety—should have access to them. For instance, one day you might conduct a service and preach; on other days Ebenezer Thankbold of the Free Church might hold his discourse accompanied by prayers; I might give a lecture, with readings

from the Bible and from other great books ; a scientific or historical lecture of a purely educational type might be given ; there might be a performance of really good music, choral and orchestral, which is an admirable way of bringing people together. I might say parenthetically in this connection that I believe music will gradually take the place of mechanical prayer. It penetrates much deeper, and has a wonderfully elevating and inspiring effect on the increasing number of people who appreciate it. This by the way. A discussion on some serious topic might be arranged from time to time, and there should be special days for children. Perhaps by that time we may have learnt how to teach them. On all of these occasions every one would be invited to come. I am not dealing with the fact that the Church building is now the property of the Church or rather of the State. Of course there would be no established and officially patronized form of religion. Those who adhered to any form of dogmatic religion would have as good, but no better, a chance of holding services and propagating their doctrines. But I am not sure that it is very profitable to consider what might be done in the very remote future, because everything depends on the all-important but

inscrutable factor of the particular direction which human thought is going to take.

THE PARSON. Perhaps you are right. So far as you have gone, however, while I do not see the future as you do I do not know that I have rooted objection to the sort of organization you sketch, except, of course, my natural bias in considering that consecrated buildings should not be devoted to secular purposes; and another bias, more unreasonable you will think, but natural for me as a Churchman, namely, that I do not want an equal chance to be given to opinions which are subversive of the only true message which lies in the Church's doctrine. How about the education of the young?

THE DOCTOR. There should be no such thing as compulsory attendance at Chapel in schools and colleges. Not a syllable of Bible teaching, scripture, theology or what is now called religious instruction should be breathed in State schools. I am afraid sects will still exist. My vision does not carry me to a time when men will have left off wrangling and dividing themselves off on religious questions. We may hope, perhaps, that there will be fewer of them. Anyhow, each one must be responsible for the special religious education of its own children. I, too, want to absorb all the others, because I believe

various simple services might be arranged which would be satisfactory to the religious-minded of all degrees.

THE PARSON. We must try and not slip back into old controversies by an insistence on our own particular prescriptions. But as you have given your view, let me give mine. I am as certain as I can be that the supreme exaltation of undenominationalism is not going to be the final solution. However rational it might appear to be it would be colourless, cold and lacking in the peculiar magnetism which the risen Messiah imparts to the message of the Church. My ideal would be a universal Church, simplified and reformed, but retaining the essential doctrines of Christianity—those which I have described as indispensable, and which by that time all men would have come to recognize as the most propitious and efficacious for their spiritual requirements. The present Church, in fact, broadened, strengthened, reformed, autonomous and independent, a vital organization appealing to all except the incorrigibly materialistic, a Church by whose agency a form of religious worship would be provided which would enhance and beautify the life of man.

THE DOCTOR. Well, there is not much agreement between us there.

THE PARSON. I am afraid not. But now let us consider the second point, the next actual steps. This is more practical. In this case we have got to take society as it is, people thinking as they do, the Church in the position in which it is. Do you think that bodies should be instituted to overturn the Church and destroy it, or do you think real reform and improvement can be brought about from within ?

THE DOCTOR. I think the first proposition neither desirable nor practicable. It would lead to unnecessary strife, strengthen the reactionaries and not accomplish any move in the right direction. There are very many who think it does not much signify one way or the other. The Church is hopeless and negligeable. I do not share that view because I attach importance to religion, and I believe the Church is doing great harm to its development. But of your second proposition I own I am not hopeful, because I do not see any disposition to make a real move either on the part of the clergy or of the laity. They appear to be apathetic. The institution is there, maintained for them, and not sustained by their own efforts and endeavours ; so they feel safe, comfortable, irresponsible, and self-complacent. This is very different

from the force of opinion which brought about the Reformation. With all their faults men seem to have had more courage in those days because they had stronger convictions. People to-day like having their emotions stirred—not too much—they enjoy being denounced, but any change that would entail self-sacrifice and action they studiously avoid.

THE PARSON. But what sort of change do you suggest?

THE DOCTOR. In addition to the administrative reforms which would make the Church autonomous and self-supporting I would alter radically the form of ordination by which the clergy are bound by explicit vows to the most extreme and literal interpretations of dogmatic theology, vows which some of them seem very conveniently to forget. I think it would be far better that they should feel their calling and be sincerely inclined for their ministration, but be perfectly free, rather than as at present they should be forced to subscribe to disciplinary vows which act as a continual strain on their conscience. There is almost as much difference between individual clergy within the Church as there is between you and me. Yet they have all taken these vows. The pretence is that they are all strictly orthodox in order that they may

present a united front to outsiders and so that no suspicion of their unorthodoxy may reach the uneducated. The position of those whose views are not very different from mine and yet remain in the Church is difficult. It would be splendid if they all declared outright what they thought. But they do not; they remain silent. There were notably unorthodox and eminent clergy in the later nineteenth century who did not remain silent but allowed their views to be known, and this, I believe, helped to bring into your circle men who put religion before dogma, although in those days people were far more acquiescent than they are now. There are very few now who speak out, yet to-day there must be many more in the rank and file who do not by any means subscribe to all your tenets. Until this external conformity and tacit compliance is abandoned—for it approaches very near to hypocrisy—there can be no advance towards either the renovation of one faith or the growth of another.

THE PARSON. If there are clergy who go to those extremes they should leave the Church.

THE DOCTOR. No. I do not agree. The hope for the future rests with them. I am certainly not advocating that the few courageous ones who are attempting to speak out

should leave the Church, because the founding of a new sect outside has never been attended with success. It is futile. But they ought to receive support and encouragement from the many there must be who inwardly agree with them, but who on disciplinary grounds remain quiet and submissive. Had they the backing they might make the Church a vital force instead of its being a moribund carcase.

THE PARSON. You must not class me with these schismatics, and I am only too thankful that there is sufficient regulation to keep them in check. Were they free to say and do what they liked there would be a hopeless confusion and disruption. It would mean revolution.

THE DOCTOR. Exactly. That is what is wanted. The Church ought to be, as I said last Monday, a revolutionary body, always up in arms disturbing the naturally phlegmatic tendencies in human nature and destroying spiritual indolence. That is the right line, and not the compromising, soothing, moderating, mollifying, damping, slackening, deadening method. The Church ought to be definitely both masculine and feminine, instead of that it is neuter.

THE PARSON. Do not let us get off on to a side issue. You will work yourself up. These recalcitrant clergy have lured you away

from the point. You were dealing with the actual changes it would be desirable to make. You say the ordination service should be altered. Now there is a specially sacred character attached to holy orders which it would be impossible for us to ignore, and a ministry cannot be founded on mere willingness to serve.

THE DOCTOR. You are a sacerdotalist.

THE PARSON. I am to the point of holding that the priestly office must be exalted and endowed for those who enter it with a special spiritual significance. It is not just a profession like any other. However, this may be a point that I cannot expect you to appreciate. What other changes would you recommend?

THE DOCTOR. I would take out the really objectionable parts of the regular services, including the whole litany, and the rest and the creeds should be used at the discretion of each parson. Any mortal soul who wanted to partake in any service should be allowed to, and should be considered a member of the fellowship if he so desired. I would put the thirty-nine articles in the hottest part of the nearest fire.

THE PARSON. Dear me, I knew you would work yourself up before long into a temper.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, it is inevitable. A

little plain speaking is essential. Remember that it is actually laid down in these articles which you carefully preserve in the Prayer Book that "before justification," that is for those who have not accepted the orthodox doctrine of the Atonement, "good works have the nature of sin." Was there ever anything so preposterous? You do not believe it. Why object to my saying the articles should be burnt? You have got such splendid chances and you deliberately throw them away just for the sake of preserving stale old traditions. Many of the best minds are ready to help you, the arts are at your service, the State supports you, your position is unique, and yet you won't rouse yourselves, you give no call, you let things drift, and allow your whole vitality to be sapped by a process of attrition and paralysis. It is really no use. I cannot expect you to accept my suggestions. We cannot agree to-day any more than we did on Monday. In fact I am not sure that our talk has not made the chasm between us seem wider and deeper.

THE PARSON. It is your fault as much as mine. You are really very intolerant.

THE DOCTOR. I have not been intolerant about personal religious beliefs however little they may appeal to me. Even though I may

think them wrong and mistaken, to attempt to disturb or undermine individual religious convictions would be, I am sure, the wrong line of approach. What I may be intolerant about is the attitude of those who are responsible for the governance of the Church, those who are responsible for teaching people what they should believe. Many of these men are far less orthodox than you are, but instead of saying so, instead of pointing to new interpretations of primitive beliefs which might broaden and so strengthen the Church's influence, they prefer, with their tongue in their cheek, to enjoin the acceptance of all the old orthodox formulas and doctrines. This is where the real trouble lies. Their action, or rather inaction, is what is spelling ruin not only to the institution, which I should not so much mind, but to the spiritual life of the nation which is so sadly in need of proper direction. There should be no deceit about religion.

THE PARSON. I doubt if many of our bishops are as unorthodox as you make out. Moreover, you must take into account that even the leading members of our hierarchy cannot act as isolated individuals. They are part of a great spiritual corporation which must be considered as a whole. While they may desire certain changes they must walk warily, lest

they should not carry with them a sufficient body of opinion to effect their purpose, and lest they should rouse so large a body of opposition as to break up the whole organization.

THE DOCTOR. That is exactly the case. It is a vicious circle. They teach one thing, and they cannot alter what they have taught because they have taught it. So they go on, losing their following and estranging the best minds. This want of courage for fear of disturbing tradition, this insincere proclamation of truths which are no longer held to be truths must inevitably be your undoing. Maybe they think they would lose their rich *clientèle* if the sayings of Christ were simply taken to be the opinions of a revolutionary village carpenter and not the pronouncements of a deity. It is only their supposed divine origin which preserves them. The rich governing classes, here and elsewhere, find them so unpalatable, so subversive of the capitalist order, that no attempt is made to carry them out practically. Were they placed on a par with principles enunciated by other reformers then no doubt they would be rejected, not only practically, but absolutely. Yes, your divines must walk warily indeed! You said just now that it was my fault as much as yours that the chasm between us seems so wide and

deep. That is quite true. But you are, so to speak, enthroned. I am down below among the multitude; while you cast your net as wide as possible to draw in the uneducated you refuse to receive me. You do not attempt to appeal to me in your efforts to indoctrinate the ignorant. You will not join in the awakening of modern thought, you refuse to speak the language of the present generation, you prefer to remain in irrational isolation. If it were only me you were offending I should not deserve to be considered. But as time passes it is clear that you are offending and alienating a growing number of religious-minded people, and that is why, without sacrificing what you revere as absolutely essential, you should make your call ring more truly and with a more effective note, so that you may attract the many hungry souls who are asking for spiritual food. It is not only the intellectual mind, it is the average mind that has moved beyond you, and you do not seem inclined to make any effort to follow.

THE PARSON. It is all very well your talking like that, but you are, in your way, even more uncompromising than I am. I do not reject wholesale your suggestions for the next moves which ought to be made. I am in

favour of expansion and the adoption of a less rigid disciplinary organization, though I may not go the lengths that you do.

THE DOCTOR. Do not let us delude ourselves. Our points of agreement amount to very little. As we are summing up we must face the points of difference squarely. You believe in a personal God ; on that I might compromise by admitting that, subjectively, it is a natural conception for man to take of any outside controlling power. But even of a personal God there are widely differing conceptions. You believe in the fact that we are born in sin, and that the Atonement through Jesus Christ, who himself was God, has brought about our salvation. This involves a belief in a host of subsidiary supernatural events, and explains why our attitude before God should be that of sinners craving for mercy. On all this I cannot compromise. I reject it utterly as untrue, unreal and irrelevant. But that is not all, and this is what widens the gulf. I believe these doctrines to be positively damaging to the growth of the religious spirit. I want to see the whole fabric of the supernatural destroyed. Let there be no misunderstanding on this point, because it is the underlying motive and basis of all my criticism and protests. It was

the differences of opinion about dogma that caused the wars, conflicts, disputes, cruelty, torture and disruption in the past, while all the time there was no difference of opinion as to the ethical value of Christ's teaching. It is doctrinal differences and disagreement with regard to ceremony, ritual and organization, mere formalism in fact, that continues to prevent the great union of religious teaching which might be of such incalculable value. Differences of opinion, of course, there must be, but if they were tolerated on questions which are obviously of minor importance while the vital subjects of agreement were emphasized and expanded a real change for the better would immediately supervene. But as long as authoritative supernatural dogmas continue to hold the pre-eminent place they do in your institution you will find an ever-growing inclination on the part of the people to avoid your ministrations and ignore your injunctions.

THE PARSON. Well, perhaps you are right to reiterate these points, because it is quite true that they constitute an impassable barrier between us. You are far too much inclined to talk as if belonging to the Church was a sort of moral contamination. This is very absurd, because you must know well enough

that many who have led lives of great beauty have clung with all the strength of their being to the doctrines we teach. I should like to make this aspect of the case clear to you. In your denunciations of dogma you fail to recognize that you cannot build a structure on flimsy idealism. No institution could exist on the vague metaphysical exposition of a theory of spiritual perfection. The ecclesiastical belief is necessary, because most men are unable to accept a purely moral belief unless it is materialized and embodied by more definite, even though cruder, conceptions; and mysticism prevents purely material considerations getting the upper hand. The religion which attempts to be rid of the bodily side of things spiritual sooner or later loses hold of all reality. Pure idealism, however noble the aspiration, however lively the energy with which it starts, always has ended at last, and always will end, in evanescence.

THE DOCTOR. There is an element of truth in that. Mind you, whatever my own views may be I am not proposing, so far as you are concerned, the immediate destruction of all your doctrines, creeds and prayers. That would be unreasonable. It would be very foolish to expect anything of the kind. I

am not sure, too, that I have not got rather an irrational affection for some of them out of association. Moreover, I do not want to mock at beliefs that were held by men in a lower state of human development. I am asking that you should consider whether many of them are not inconsistent, self-contradictory, and palpably false, and are acting to-day as stumbling blocks to people who have the religious spirit. I am therefore suggesting that you should use judgment and discrimination with regard to their use. Do not be so rigid. Be more fluid, because humanity is always moving. Do not bind men's minds with unbreakable chains. I would leave all the multiplicity of religious views alone and pursue my own course, leaving others to pursue theirs undisturbed; in fact that is what I am inclined to do. At the same time I am specially conscious in these days that the agencies which have undertaken the responsibility of guiding and inspiring religious ideas are in a state of practical atrophy. I think you fail to face the fact that the highest intelligence of the nation is not only not in harmony with the nation's creed, but is distinctly at issue with it; does not accept it; largely, indeed, repudiates it in the distinctest manner, or for peace and prudence'

sake discountenances it by silence, even when it does not demur to it in words; and that in this disharmony and divorce lies a grave and undeniable peril for the future. This disharmony is spreading, and is assuming a profound significance. Beware lest you get a savage reaction, not directed only against the Church but against Christianity and religion itself.

THE PARSON. You are far more eloquent in your denunciations, and in pointing out dangers and drawbacks, than you are in your suggestions for help and reform.

THE DOCTOR. But do you honestly want my help? I said on Monday I would ask you that question again when you knew the full blackness of my thoughts on religion. Now do you?

THE PARSON. Yes, honestly I do.

THE DOCTOR. But how can I help? You obviously cannot admit me into your fellowship without shocking the other members of your congregation and making them suspect your own orthodoxy. They would not tolerate my presence. And as I could not be silent they would only condemn me as an obnoxious intruder. No, you only say you want my help out of personal friendliness. You are a great Chris-

tian filled with the true spirit of religion, tolerant, steadfast and convinced. I know the work you did before you came here—work that made your health break down. You have a great vision before you, which like a lodestar beckons you on. Your whole being is saturated with holiness and excellence. The spirit of perfection, if you will forgive me for alluding to it once more, shines through visibly and dominates your whole being. Unknown to you it is your example which draws people to you and fills the pews before your pulpit. It is not your services nor even your sermons. It is *you* that draws people in love and respect to follow you, and all the while in your humility you attribute it to your message. Yet while I am moved to admiration by your personality I am sorry such as you are in the Church. It is the good landlord who is the greatest obstacle to the reform of the land system. It is the good employer who keeps the subservience of the wage system still in being. This is where I feel baffled. But you do not really want me, with my arguments, my complaints, my criticisms and my disapproval. I should only stir up discord without convincing a single soul of what I believe. I must remain silent. Co-operation seems to me to be out of the

question. It is a great pity, because while you believe we are divided by fundamental differences I cannot help thinking that it is the superficial accessories that really constitute the dividing wall; and that is what exasperates me. However, I see no remedy. We must go on our separate ways and work along separate paths. My work gives me some opportunity, and I can tell you that whenever I can I use it.

THE PARSON. I am sure you do, and at the risk of appearing to make return for the far too generous estimate you have made of me by a *tu quoque* I frankly acknowledge that I consider you to be a great Christian. You are here only for a well-earned holiday, but I know all about your work; how you have devoted your life to it, not with a view to riches and fame which lay easily within your grasp, but simply out of the most exalted desire for service—a service I know you have often rendered while refusing any remuneration whatever for it. Probably your early religious training, while it may appear to you now as only leading you into a blind alley, roused in your youthful heart and mind the very feelings of reverence and confidence in the spiritual forces which are your standby now. Having secured what is valuable

to you out of the Church you now turn on her for not discarding things which may encourage the same valuable impulses in other people. That is how your position appears to me. But it is you and your record, not your arguments, that impress me and make me believe undoubtedly that something is radically wrong. It is deplorable that men and women who have parted from the old theology and yet retain a religious attitude towards life and the world should be kept outside in a state of what I might call spiritual destitution. Yes, there is something wrong that you and I should be kept apart as we are. But the effect of our discussion anyhow has been to bring the situation before me more vividly, even though I may have little or no idea as to how to cope with it and even though there may be no prospect of bridging the gulf between us. However, a certain spiritual contact that exists between us leaves me not entirely without an ultimate expectation that in the future those who think as we do may find the dividing gulf narrowing down and capable eventually of being bridged as they pass along on parallel paths on either side of its banks. An exchange of opinions such as we have had may be helpful. I for one shall always remember this week's talk,

and look back on it without a particle of regret. I wonder now if I can ask you this: will you come to Church to-morrow morning?

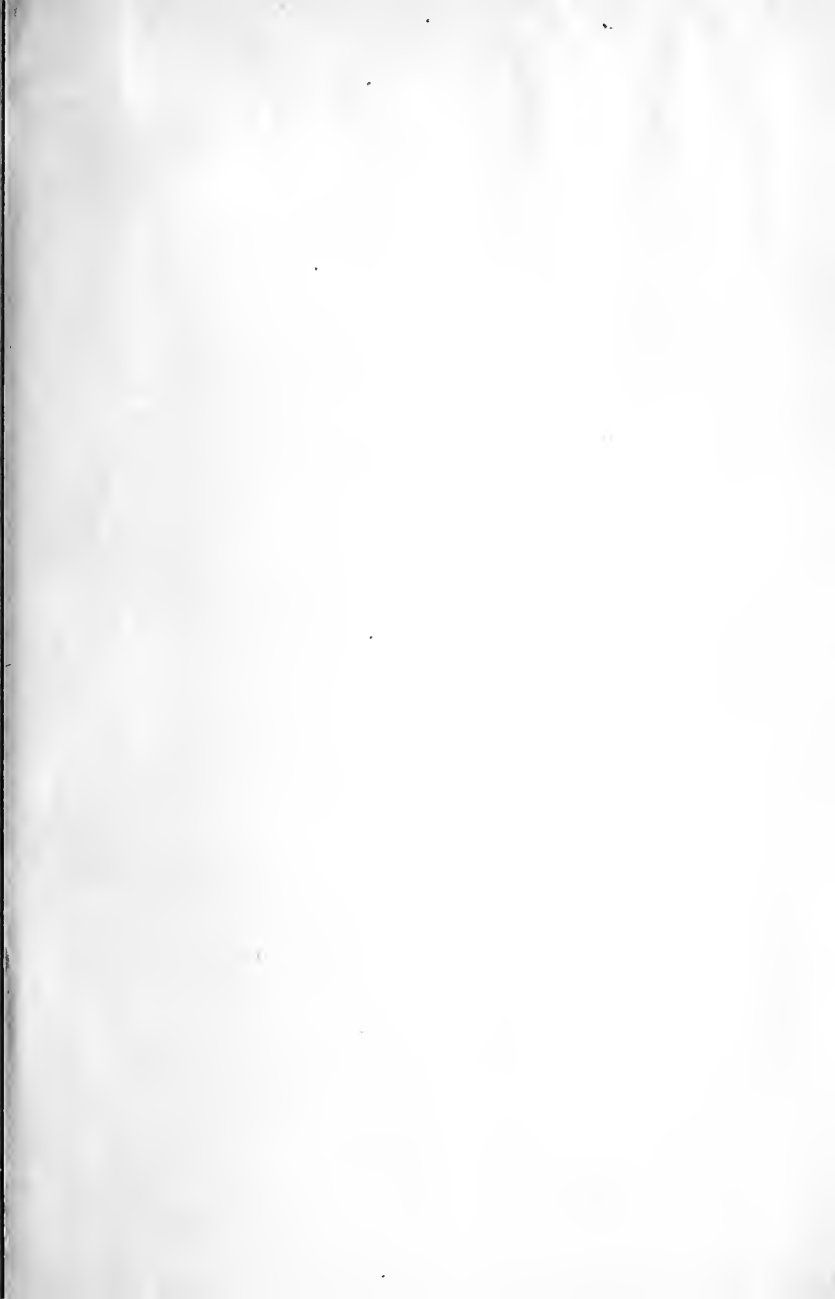
THE DOCTOR. No, really no, I could not—not even to please you.

THE PARSON. Very well. I won't press you, but I must be getting home as I have got my sermon to prepare for to-morrow. So good-bye.

THE DOCTOR. Good-bye. . . . Look here. I shall slip in by the South porch into that back pew just for the sermon.

THE PARSON. Oh! Dear me! Good. And yet you won't be able to argue, you know. Well, well, I must indeed hurry in to start work. See you again, then?

THE DOCTOR. Often, I hope.



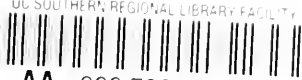
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