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OF

GERRIT SMITH

WITH

ALBERT BARNES.

1868.



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# A LETTER

FROM

## GERRIT SMITH TO ALBERT BARNES.

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PETERBORO, December 25, 1867.

REV. ALBERT BARNES, PHILADELPHIA :

MY DEAR SIR: If I remember rightly, I saw the following (perhaps in a book) years ago. I now see it in a newspaper, which ascribes it to your pen.

“I confess, for one, that I feel them, and feel them more sensibly and powerfully the more I look at them, and the longer I live. I do not understand these facts, and I make no advances toward understanding them. I do not know that I have a ray of light on this subject which I had not when the subject first flashed across my soul. I have read, to some extent, what wise and good men have written. I have looked at their theories and explanations. I have endeavored to weigh their arguments, for my whole soul pants for light and relief on these questions. But I get neither, and, in the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever. I see not one way to disclose to me why sin came into the world, why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead, and why men must suffer to all eternity. I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind, nor have I an explanation to offer, or a thought to suggest, which would be of relief to you. I trust other men, as they profess to do, understand this better than I do, and that they have not the anguish of spirit which I have. But I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and sufferers; upon death-beds and graveyards; upon the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer forever; when I see my friends, my parents, my family, my people, my

fellow-citizens—when I look upon a whole race all involved in this sin and danger; and when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned, and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet He does not do it, I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark to my soul, and I can not disguise it.”

You are a gifted and a good man, a learned and a just one; and yet you are a very unhappy one. “Anguish of spirit” is yours. Whence comes this? Confessedly from the violence which your theological creed does to your reason, and from your not daring to let your reason condemn your creed. Your reason sees not reason, but unreason, in that story of the forbidden fruit, which lies at the very basis of your theology. Nevertheless, you accept the story and its representation of a purely arbitrary and an utterly inexplicable dealing of God with man. It must be confessed that your creed corresponds with the story—the theological structure with its foundation. It must be confessed, too, that the more arbitrary and inexplicable a Theology of authority, the more suitable—especially so, because the more submissive, in that case, the superstitious disciples. Indeed, it has been held, that one of the strongest arguments for the truth of the Christian theology, and why it should be believed, is, that it is not understandable.

Instead of doubting the truth or wisdom of any part of your creed, you modestly suppose that, though *you* can not, others can, satisfactorily explain even the most revolting parts of it. So entire is your faith in your creed, and so meek is your spirit, that all the fault in the case you take to yourself, and never suspect that any (however small) share of it, is chargeable upon the creed. The creed—although it makes God the author of sin; the builder of an eternal hell; the one able to save men, and yet not saving them; in short, a monster of malignity—you, nevertheless, cling to. Why do you? It, surely, is not that you see any thing natural or reasonable in these horrible features of it, for there is nothing in all the realm of nature or reason to commend them to you; nothing in all the laws of evidence to justify you in regarding them as other than fancies and fictions. You know, indeed, that none of the Theologies, the Mohammedan, Christian, nor any other, can abide these laws. And, though you ought to know that a Theology should, above all other things, be tested

by them, you, nevertheless, accept yours upon mere authority—the mere authority too, of the ignorant, superstitious, benighted past. When I say that your Theology can not abide the laws of evidence, I do not fail to take into the account that the greater the intrinsic improbability of a statement (and how utterly improbable are some of the statements and stories in your Theology!) the more the evidence requisite to sustain the statement. But little evidence is necessary to prove that a man has died. That his breathless body went straightway into the sky could hardly be believed on any amount of evidence.

And why, too, will you cling to your creed when, notwithstanding the excellence of your head and heart, it makes you so very unhappy? The one answer to these questions is, that you have allowed authority to force the creed upon you. How abhorrent is a religion of authority, as illustrated by your unhappiness! Would that every religion of authority—that every such system of superstition and tyranny—were swept from the earth! Relieved of a creed which is so utterly defiant of nature and reason, you, with such a head and such a heart as are yours, could not fail to have large and happy views of the divine character and government. Do you turn upon me with the inquiry whether I, who am relieved of it, am favored with such views? I answer that I have neither your head nor your heart.

*God is not the author of sin.* You do not say directly that He is; and yet you seem to ascribe to sin a divine as well as mysterious origin. It is true that man is so made that he can sin; but, instead of complaining of this, we should be thankful for it. Instead of lamenting it, we should rejoice in it. How low a being would man be, were he of necessity sinless! How far inferior to what he now is, were he so constituted that he could not sin! He would be a mere machine, and his going right would no more argue wisdom and goodness in him than does the right-going of a clock argue wisdom and goodness in it. The brute, shut up to the direction of its instincts, can not err—can not wander from its nature. But Infinite Wisdom, instead of predetermining the steps of man, has left him to judge for himself. Great, indeed, is the hazard of his judging wrongly; but great, also, is the honor of being placed so high in the scale of creation as to be allowed to judge for one's self.

Blessed be God that He has made us capable of sinning; or, in other words, capable of transgressing the laws which He has written upon our being! It is not His fault if we transgress them; for He has written them so "plain, that he may run that readeth" the most essential of them; and honest and persistent study will compass the remainder. It is not His fault if we transgress them; for He has furnished us with abundant motives to keep them, and abundant dissuasives from breaking them. "Sin is the transgression of the law." This Bible definition of sin is the true one; and, therefore, it is not the Maker, but the breaker of the law who is the sinner, who is the author of sin, and who brings it into the world. By the way, this theological doctrine, that sin is a thing or entity, as is light or heat, and that God brought it, as well as them, into the world, is a great absurdity and a great blasphemy. Sin is simply a failure to obey law; and a failure for which man, and man alone, is responsible. I acknowledged the goodness of God in making us capable of sinning. I might have added, in making us capable of sinning so greatly. For to say that we can sin so greatly is, in effect, to say that we have great powers and advantages for learning and obeying law; it being only in the abuse of such powers and advantages that great sinning is possible. His nature, through the violation of whose laws man has become a great sinner, is the very same sublime nature through the keeping of whose laws he would have been a saint.

We ought not to be amazed at sin—either at frequent sin or even at great sin. That the wisest men should fall into sin is only because the wisest men may be ignorant of some of the laws of their being, physical or moral; and that the best men should fall into it is but that the virtue of the best men is not, as yet, proof against all temptations to violate the laws of their being. What wonder, then, that they who are neither wise nor virtuous should fall into it! Their exaggeration of the guilt or criminality of sin is not the least of the wrongs chargeable upon the Theologies. It not only tends to inspire the fear that we are abhorred instead of loved by God, but it, also, tends to make us less amiable and sacred in each other's eyes, and to make us coarse and cruel in our treatment of each other. The difference between our seeing each other to be small sinners or enormous

sinner can not fail of contributing to produce a corresponding difference in our conduct toward each other. That "God is angry with the wicked every day" was the fancy, not of those who knew the Loving Father of us all, but of those who pictured, in his stead, a revengeful and bloody Pagan deity! The stars, which shine sweetly upon all; the green earth, which, with its fruits and flowers, was made for all—these, and the impartial sun and rain, unitedly testify that God is Love, and that He never hates any one. Nothing can be more absurd than this ceaseless preaching that the least sin is, because committed against an infinitely great and good God, infinitely wicked, and, therefore, deserving of infinite punishment. The tendency of this preaching, as already intimated, is to make us look upon each other as monsters of wickedness; whereas we should, by considering the ignorance and temptations of men, regard their sins with all reasonable charitableness. The Just One, who knows our ignorance, and who saw fit, in appointing the first stage of our discipline, to put us into this world of temptations, pities us for our sufferings in this life; and, although these sufferings are mainly sin-induced, He, nevertheless, can have no heart to add to them punishment in the life to come. He has no curses for us. On the contrary, He does all that He can (compatibly with our freedom and power to thwart and counteract Him) to save us from cursing ourselves and cursing one another. Far am I from holding that there is no suffering in the next life. If there is sin there, (and I believe there is,) suffering is also there—for suffering necessarily attends sinning. All I mean to say, at this point, is, that God does not add punishment to this suffering; and that the only punishment in the case is that which is in this necessarily attendant suffering.

Doubtless, the day is coming when there will be comparatively little sin on the earth. Science, more than all other agencies, hastens the coming of this day. For we may reasonably hope that, when science shall have more fully revealed to men the laws of their being, obedience to these laws will be in greater proportion to the knowledge of them than it now is. Indeed, we may reasonably hope that men will not sin forever—that, if not in this life, nevertheless in the next, their increasing knowledge will conquer their ignorance, and their increasing virtue will

conquer their temptations. So far from falling in with the irrational and God-dishonoring doctrine, that the sinner will have no opportunities in the next life for reformation and improvement, we should allow reason and nature to inspire the expectation, that such opportunities will be far greater there than here.

That our views and treatment of one another are greatly modified by our conceptions of the Deity should not be doubted. Every people resembles its God. The justification of the Jew for hating the Gentiles was that his God hated them. The excessive punishments inflicted by the Jews did but harmonize with their conceptions of God. His cruelty was the warrant for theirs. We ought not to wonder that they put the man to death who "gathered sticks upon the Sabbath-day;" nor that they punished with death disobedience to parents. These enormities grew largely out of their belief in that vindictive, bloody, monstrous God, who, unhappily, became the God of the Christian nations also. But it may be asked why, if these nations adopted the God of the Jews, do they not inflict as unreasonable and merciless punishments as the Jews did. The answer is—that their God has been changing, for a very long time. A civilization, increasingly science-shaped by the progress of science, has, for centuries, been encroaching upon the superstition, intolerance, and cruelty of the Christian Church, and softening the repulsive features of her God. Such pictures of the Deity, as her pulpits were wont to draw, no longer ago than the beginning of the present century, they would hardly be allowed to draw now. There lies before me a sermon preached, less than forty years ago, by Rev. Dr. Alvan Hyde, of Massachusetts, to justify the doctrine of the eternal damnation of infants. A Massachusetts audience would not tolerate such a sermon now. The Church will, ere long, have to let these grotesque and abhorrent Theologies go down-stream, if science and common sense but continue their present successful war upon them.

*God has made no hell.* All the hells are made by men. God puts no one into them. Men put themselves and one another into them. God's part is to keep them out and pull them out, so far as they will let Him. All His laws are to this end; and were all men obedient to them, not only would no one be in hell, but there would be no hell. I said that not only nature

and reason, but, also, all the laws of evidence are against your horrible creed. What, for instance, is the evidence that there is an eternal hell? It is, chiefly, one word said to have been spoken by Jesus. But how far it is from certain, that he spoke it, and, especially, that he spoke it, intending it to have the meaning given to it in our translation, and by our ecclesiastical standards! Although we have satisfactory evidence that he spoke substantially as the New Testament says he did, we have no right to believe that his speeches were, word for word, as recorded in that book. Again, Jesus did not claim to know all the future. There is no proof of the existence of any but man-made hells. And, although there are many persons who still believe in a God-made hell, (some of them, however, only because they have enemies whom they wish to put into it,) it is, nevertheless, gratifying to know that the intelligent man is now very rare to whom such a hell is an object of delightful contemplation. Where, now, could be found a person of sufficiently satanic spirit to exclaim, as did Tertullian, one of the most eminent of the Church Fathers: "How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs and fancied gods groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness; so many magistrates, who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer fires than they ever kindled against the Christians; so many sage philosophers, blushing in red-hot flames with their deluded scholars!"

"*God only can save them, and yet He does not do it.*" This is another of your great mistakes. God tries to save all men from sinning. But He has not the ability to save any man without the help of that man. Had He intended to retain such ability, He would not have "created man in His own image," and invested him with free agency, and the power to choose his character and destiny. When God made man so great, as to "will and to do" for himself, He made him too great to be saved by the direct and unaided power of even God himself. Men must work with God in accomplishing this salvation, or it can not be accomplished. Hence, instead of your sorrowing over God's not saving men, it would be less unreasonable in you to sorrow that He made man so great; so much like Himself; and, in some vital respects, so far beyond even the Divine control.

That "*the earth is strewn with the dead*" is, also, mysterious

to you. But it should not be. For several reasons we should be glad that men die, when their bodies are worn out with old age. Amongst these reasons are—1st. This life has, then, become more of a burden than an enjoyment. 2d. We trust that, at its termination, a higher life awaits us. 3d. Our death makes room for others to live—for an endless succession of generations to have experience of earthly existence. In the distant future, when men shall live wisely here, earth-life will be far more precious than it now is. Had the life of man extended to thousands of years, the inhabitants of the earth would have been but a handful compared with the aggregate souls of those unending generations. And in that case, there would have been not only comparatively few to know this life, but, consequently, comparatively few to be translated from it to the nobler life.

But, perhaps, your lamentation is over premature deaths only. They, certainly, should not be charged upon God. They come not from His hand. When men shall have learned, as they yet will learn, the laws of life and health; and shall, as they yet will, faithfully keep them, there will not only be few or none of these premature deaths, but the ordinary length of this existence will, probably, be at least double its present three-score and ten years. We should be very careful not to charge upon the Great and Good Father the evils, which come from the unnecessary ignorance and wilful sins of His children.

This creed, which makes you so unhappy—would that you could throw it away, and thereby encourage thousands to throw away their similar creed! But, I fear, that you still confound your Theology with your Religion—or, that you, at least, regard this greatest of all hinderances to your Religion as a help to it. I fear that your eyes have never yet been opened to see that the heaviest of all Earth's curses is the confounding of Religion, here with one, and there with another, of the Theologies. I fear that you still suffer yourself to call the Bible all true—though, in doing so, you, none the less because unconscious of it, insult God and make yourself the enemy of man. It is, indeed, the best of books—a repository of the sublimest inspirations, principles, and precepts. Nevertheless, it abounds in foolish, false, and exceedingly pernicious things. Its silly, and some of them very revolting, stories about the Red Sea, the

Sun and Moon, the Whale and Jonah, Lot's wife turning into salt, the control of the skies by Elijah's prayers, God's sending "lying spirits" into His children, etc., etc., have ever continued to feed to fatness the superstition of Christendom. The Bible's wicked curse upon Caanan has been the prevailing plea with so-called Christians for carrying fire and sword into Africa, and robbing her of tens of millions of her children. Its causeless and cruel wars, charged on God Himself, justify every war and every murder. Its one short line: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," has cost the hanging and burning of many thousands of innocent women and not a few innocent men for the fanciful crime of witchcraft. Its making woman guilty of the first sin, and its charging chiefly upon that sin her pains in child-bearing, have gone far to justify man in stamping her with inferiority and in playing the tyrant over her. Its representing God to be the hater of men, and of some even before they were born, must go far toward making it impossible for those who believe in such a God, to have just minds and loving hearts. In its own words, "And what shall I say more?—for the time would fail me to tell of" all the foolish and abominable things in this book, which ecclesiastical authority commands us to gulp down entire, or, "without picking and culling," as one of my good old ministers required. I said the Bible was the best of books. It is such, when it is allowed to be read in freedom and with discrimination. But it is, perhaps, not too much to say that it is the worst of books, when read under authority, and with no liberty to call any of its words in question.

This belief that every word of the Bible is true—how much evil it has wrought! From this delusive belief has come the running to it to learn when the world will end. But for this superstitious use of the Bible, who, in Christendom, would have thought of the world's ever ending! "Millerism," however, and its frequent kindred predecessors in the past centuries, much as they have done, by their reliance on alleged Bible predictions, to agitate, unsettle, and afflict mankind, are but a faint illustration of the evil that has come from believing every word in the Bible to be true.

The longer I live, the more am I persuaded that wealth is what the world most needs for its redemption from ignorance, wickedness, and unhappiness. Enough of it is created by the

toiling poor, and, in point of fact, they are nearly all who do create it. Alas, that the misuse of much of it should be such, as to make the toiling poor poorer! War, intemperance, excessive luxury, and giddy, reckless fashion are great wasters of wealth; but no one of them wastes more than do the Theologies, directly and indirectly. For instance, if the Christian Theology had not so successfully passed itself off for the Christian Religion, these evils, which I have just now enumerated, would, so far as Christendom is concerned, have been far less extensive, and their waste of wealth correspondingly less. Then, look at the hundreds of millions, which it costs Christendom annually to build and support the churches and other establishments, which this Theology calls for! For, remember, that this expenditure is not to meet the demands of the simple Christ-Religion, but the demands of the various modifications and various sectarian shades of this mystic and miracle-stuffed Theology. It is the rivalry of the Theological sects, which calls for this vast expenditure. Plain halls would suffice for the assemblies of those, who seek to grow in this simple religion; and plain, loving-hearted men and women would be acceptable preachers in them, though the highest order of talent and culture should also be heard in them. Simple, as sweet, is the religion taught by the blessed Jesus—the one religion of nature and reason—the religion of doing as we would be done by—the babe-religion, (for He declares that even “babes” can understand it,) the religion, in short, which, according to Him, none need aid to understand, for He said to the people, to the promiscuous multitudes: “Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” Had Jesus believed that a Theology—a metaphysical system—was necessary to the elucidation of his religion, he would, at least, have said so; and, probably, would have furnished it. His simple religion, summed up in the obvious duty of loving our brother, and his, and our, common Father, it can hardly be said that He thought it necessary to explain. It is true that He often illustrated it, but it was by the simplest objects in nature, and in other ways scarcely less simple. Oh! how sad it is, that you and other wise and learned and good men should still persist in leading the people to look amongst metaphysics and mysteries for a religion so intelligible, as to be understood, the moment it is seen; and to look for it, too, amidst historical and

traditional uncertainties, when it is to be found, and found only, in the certainties of their consciousness! History and tradition suffice to inform us in matters where mistakes are not vital. But better is it to build our house upon the sand than to build our religion upon a foundation so uncertain as history and tradition. Nevertheless, upon this utterly untrustworthy foundation do nearly all men, in all lands, build their religion.

In this connection let me say how infinitely absurd is the doctrine, that a religion so simple and so obviously true as is the Christ-Religion, needs to be proved by miracles. The Theologies are not worth proving; and, therefore, no miracles are called for in their case.

After what I have said, it is hardly necessary to add, that men do not need to go to church to learn the Theologies, since the Theologies are far worse than merely worthless. Nor hardly necessary is it to add, that they need not go there to learn the Christ-Religion. Almost as superfluous is it to go there to learn this exceedingly simple Religion of nature, as it would be to go to school to learn how to breathe and swallow. The Christian preacher need spend very little time in teaching his hearers this Religion. They, already, know it. His work is to persuade them to love and practise it.

I spoke of the plain halls in which will be the future preaching of the plain Gospel. And how suitable, too, will they be for lecturers on natural science—for the geologist and astronomer! These lecturers will be immeasurably useful in clearing away the rubbish which ignorance has put in the way of religion. They will open books, and read from books, which can not deceive, and which go farther than all things else to save religion from sinking into superstition, sectarianism, and bigotry.

Very painful to me, and doubtless to you also, is the sight of so much of God's good earth, and so much of human industry, put to the production of tobacco and the materials for intoxicating drinks. But more painful it is to me, and I would it were also to you, to see wise and learned and good men at work to uphold these cracking and tottering structures of ignorance and superstition, which they should be at work, day and night, to demolish. It is even more desirable to see good heads and good hearts than good soils put to good uses.

The churches wonder at the rapid increase of what they

call "infidelity," but what is chiefly the casting off of the Theologies. They should not wonder at it. It is entirely unreasonable to expect that our science-enlightened age shall hold to the Theologies, constructed in an age of darkness—an age, when it was believed that the earth was a plane of only a few hundred miles in circumference, and, yet, of such paramount importance, that the sun, moon, and stars were made but to serve it—and an age, too, when it was believed that God's dealings with His children, instead of being directed by unvarying laws, were but the irregular and fitful impulses, now of His love and now of His hatred, now of His revenge and now of His repentance. How is it possible that Europe and America, having learned that the earth is but a speck in an illimitable universe, and that the unvarying laws, which govern both, leave no room for a passionate and changeful God, and no room for the working of miracles—how is it possible, I say, that they can much longer continue to have patience with these puerile Theologies? Europe and America will continue to go back to Asia for their Jesus Christ, since there has been but one Jesus Christ. But, they will cease to go back to her ignorance and superstition for materials out of which to construct their Theologies.

On the whole, my dear sir, I am glad, not only that you confess the extreme unhappiness, which this absurd creed of the "orthodox" gives you, but, (and I say it with all tenderness of heart toward your sufferings,) I am glad you are made so unhappy by this God-dishonoring and man-shriveling creed. That you are made so unhappy by it, will induce very many to forsake it, and will hold back still more from embracing it. Great as are your sufferings from your creed, even you will not regret them, if you shall come to see how many of your fellow-men have been enlightened and warned by them.

With warm desires that these fancies, which so afflict you, may soon leave you, and that these fictions, which you have so unhappily allowed to usurp the place of truths, may soon be seen by you to be but fictions,

I remain, with great regard, your friend,  
GERRIT SMITH.

# SIN AND SUFFERING IN THE UNIVERSE.

LETTERS ADDRESSED TO THE HON. GERRIT SMITH, OF PETERBORO, N. Y., BY ALBERT BARNES.

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## PREFATORY NOTICE.

THE following letters were written during the last winter, in reply to one, in pamphlet form, addressed to me by the Hon. Gerrit Smith, of Peterboro, New-York. Circumstances, not now necessary to be referred to, have prevented their being published until the present time. The title of Mr. Smith's letter was, *A Letter from Gerrit Smith to Albert Barnes*. 1868. It is not at all as a personal matter, with which the public could have no interest, or with any view to set myself right before the public, that these letters in reply to the one addressed to me by Mr. Smith are printed, but solely because the subject is of great importance to the world. It was for this reason, and this only, it may be presumed, that Mr. Smith had his letter to me printed, and that it was sent to me in that form only. For this reason, also, and no other, my reply to him is printed in the form which I think will be most useful. It is not improper, I trust, as it is not designed to be disrespectful, for me to say that it seemed to me that Mr. Smith's letter was not fitted to do as much harm, as a proper answer might do good. Hence these letters in reply to his.

In order that there might be no suspicion of unfairness in the reply, I have copied, without change or omission, the parts of his letter referring to the points under consideration, and have thus, in fact, reproduced his entire argument, and almost the whole of his pamphlet.

ALBERT BARNES.

PHILADELPHIA, June 20, 1868.

## LETTER I.

HON. GERRIT SMITH :

MY DEAR SIR: When, nearly forty-eight years ago, I became a student of Hamilton College, your name was more frequently referred to than that of any one who had graduated at that Institution. You had preceded me by two or three years. You had received the highest honor in your class, and your high social position, your warm and generous nature, and your acknowledged talents and scholarship, led to a universal expectation of a high career of honor and usefulness.

It has so happened, I believe, that although we were born in the same vicinity; though we graduated at the same college; though we have both been with some prominence before the public; and though we have taken a warm interest in the great questions which have been before the nation, and which have so deeply and permanently affected our national affairs, we have never met, nor do I remember to have seen you but once. In common, however, with thousands of others, I have rejoiced in your wide and noble philanthropy; in your ardent love of liberty; in your friendship for the oppressed and the wronged; in your opposition to the worst law that was ever enacted in a land of freedom—the “Fugitive Slave” law; and in all that you have done for suffering humanity, and for the happiness of men.

Now, as we are approaching the termination of our long course, you have been pleased to address me, in a printed pamphlet, on a subject which can not be denied to be the most important that can occupy the attention of man at any period of life, and which is eminently appropriate to those who are approaching, as we are, the invisible world. It can not be improper, especially as you have invited me to the task, to inquire whether the views which you have expressed in your letter to me, and which must be regarded as your mature opinions on the subject of religion, will be in the line of the benevolence of your long life, and will tend to promote the happiness of the world when we shall have passed away.

It is not improper for me to say that we have both arrived at

a period of life, when, so far as we are personally concerned, an unspeakable importance must be attached to the utterance of our opinions. In earlier life, we could hope to be able to recall and repair what we might find on maturer reflection to be erroneous or injurious. We can entertain no such hope now. For good or for evil, what we utter goes forth to the world, and escaping from our lips or our pen, it is beyond our reach forever. I do not say that this fact gives us any claim to the attention of our fellow-men, or that any special importance should be attached to our sentiments on that account; but no man approaching very near the eternal world can fail to desire that his last utterances should be in accordance with truth, and should be such as will promote the happiness of the world when he has gone to his grave. It is with this view, with the highest degree of respect for yourself personally, that I shall examine with freedom the letter which you have been pleased to address to me.

The passage on which your letter to me is founded, referring to the existing facts in this world in regard to sin and misery, and to the punishment of the wicked in the future world, is the following :

“I confess, for one, that I feel them, and feel them more sensibly and powerfully the more I look at them, and the longer I live. I do not understand these facts, and I make no advances toward understanding them. I do not know that I have a ray of light on this subject which I had not when the subject first flashed across my soul. I have read, to some extent, what wise and good men have written. I have looked at their theories and explanations. I have endeavored to weigh their arguments, for my whole soul pants for light and relief on these questions. But I get neither, and, in the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever. I see not one ray of light to disclose to me why sin came into the world, why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead, and why men must suffer to all eternity. I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind, nor have I an explanation to offer, or a thought to suggest, which would be of relief to you. I trust other men, as they profess to do, understand this better than I do, and that they have not the anguish of spirit which I have. But I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and sufferers; upon death-beds and grave-yards; upon the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer forever; when I see my friends, my parents, my family, my people, my fellow-citizens—when I look upon a whole race all involved in this sin and danger; and when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned, and when I feel that God only can save them and yet

He does not do it, I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark to my soul, and I can not disguise it."

This was written, if I remember right, more than twenty years ago. I have no doubt that it is correctly quoted. It expressed my feelings then; it expresses my feelings now. Time has done nothing to modify my views, nor have I as yet seen any explanation which has removed the difficulties to which I then referred.

Whether the explanations which you have offered will contribute to their removal, will be the main object of my inquiry now. I should welcome more cheerful views if they could be presented. I should hail with joy any explanation which would be a relief from these difficulties. I should then find what the wise and the good of all ages have hitherto longed for and sought in vain.

To a correct appreciation of the value of the solution which you have offered, it will be necessary to consider the following points:

- I. The difficulties as they lay in my own mind;
- II. The explanation which you have offered;
- III. The system of religion on which your explanation is founded; and
- IV. The question whether that system has greater advantages than my own, or is better fitted to confer happiness. If it is thus fitted to confer happiness, and to calm down the mind in reference to these difficulties, it would not be unreasonable in you to ask that I should abandon the system which I have so long held, and embrace yours.

Your first remark in reference to the passage on which your letter is founded is as follows:

"You are a gifted and a good man, a learned and a just one; and yet you are a very unhappy one. 'Anguish of spirit' is yours. Whence comes this? Confessedly from the violence which your theological creed does to your reason, and from your not daring to let your reason condemn your creed. Your reason sees not reason, but unreason, in that story of the forbidden fruit, which lies at the very basis of your theology. Nevertheless, you accept the story and its representation of a purely arbitrary and an utterly inexplicable dealing of God with man. It must be confessed that your creed corresponds with the story—the theological structure with its foundation."

Now, it is proper for me to ask, by *whom* is this “*confessed*”? It seems to be implied that *I* “*confessed*” or avowed this. Yet this is in no manner true. I neither confessed nor avowed this in the extract which you have made; nor have I done it anywhere else; nor do I now do it; nor do I now admit it to be true in any sense whatever. I had reference solely to *facts*; not to any theory in regard to those facts. My difficulty consisted not at all in reconciling these things to any system of philosophy or theology which I hold, but to the fact that we are under a divine administration—to the character of a holy, a just, an almighty, and a benevolent Creator. The matter referred to lay in my mind in the following form:

(1.) The facts could not be called in question.

(2.) Those facts had no necessary connection with any theory of philosophy or religion.

(3.) I had seen no sufficient or satisfactory explanation of those facts.

(1.) The facts, I supposed, could not be called in question.

I still suppose this to be true. The facts referred to are, that this is a world of sinners and sufferers—of death-beds and grave-yards; that there is danger that large numbers will suffer forever; that the whole race is involved in this sin and danger; that the great majority of men are unconcerned in regard to this danger; that God only can save them, and yet that He does not interpose by His power to do it.

It certainly will not be denied by you that a part of these things at least is true—that part which relates to the existence of sin and suffering now on the earth; which have existed for thousands of years; and which have existed in all lands and under all forms of government, and in connection with all systems of philosophy and religion. You yourself do not refer to any lands, or to any period of history, in which there has been exemption from these things, nor could you do it. As I believe in God, it seems plain to me that this is *somehow* connected with His administration; as you believe in God, you must admit this also. My difficulty as to this fact was to understand why the Creator had suffered this to occur under His administration. The difficulty may be expressed in a word. If it might be supposed for a moment that you and I had been con-

sulted as to what kind of a world a Being of infinite power and perfect benevolence would make, I think we should have said, without hesitation, that He would *not* have made such a world as this is in this respect. I only add here, that if you will furnish any satisfactory explanation of this fact—of the reason why sin and misery have been allowed to come into the universe at all, and to exist for six thousand years, and how *this* is to be reconciled with the power, the justice, and the benevolence of God, I think it would not be difficult to advance with the same mode of reasoning which would explain this, and to show that it would not be inconsistent with the same power, justice, and goodness, that it should be allowed to exist, under the same administration, in some form, forever.

The other part of my difficulty related to the fact that suffering and sin will exist in the future world.

The main difficulty here is not peculiarly mine, but it presses on you as really as it does on me. This is apparent, I think, from the following considerations: (*a.*) On your theory, man, *as man*, is liable to sin, and, *as such*, must be liable to it in the future world as well as in this. Indeed, in your apprehension, this constitutes the true, the real dignity of his nature; and if this exalted dignity of his nature is manifested in this world, it would be difficult to show any reason why it should not also be done in the world to come, and if at all in the world to come, *at any period* in the world to come—that is, forever. Thus you say (p. 5):

“It is true that man is so made that he can sin; but, instead of complaining of this, we should be thankful for it. Instead of lamenting it, we should rejoice in it. How low a being would man be, were he of necessity sinless! How far inferior to what he now is, were he so constituted that he could not sin! He would be a mere machine, and his going right would no more argue wisdom and goodness in him than does the right going of a clock argue wisdom and goodness in it.”

And again you say (p. 6):

“Blessed be God that He has made us capable of sinning; or, in other words, capable of transgressing the laws which He has written upon our being! . . . I acknowledged the goodness of God in making us capable of sinning. I might have added, in making us capable of sinning so greatly. For to say that we can sin so greatly is, in effect, to say that we have great powers and advantages for learning and obeying law; it being only in the abuse of such pow-

ers and advantages that great sinning is possible. His nature, through the violation of whose laws man has become a great sinner, is the very same sublime nature through the keeping of whose laws he would have been a saint."

From this I infer that it is the real exaltation of man that he *can* sin, and consequently that he *does* sin; for to act out his nature is his proper exaltation, and it is this which distinguishes him from the brute. You have shown no reason why this exaltation of his nature should not manifest itself in a future world as well as in this, and forever.

(b.) It is, if I understand you, a part of your theory that God saves all in this world that He can—implying that there are some whom He can not save; that is, who will be lost, (p. 9.) If this is so in the present life, it may follow that such as are not saved in the present life will not be in the life to come, for it is fairly implied in your language that the power of God in this respect is *exhausted* in the present life, or, so to speak, that God would have no better chance of success in the life to come; and that if He can not save such incorrigible sinners here, no hope can be entertained of His being able to do it there. If, as you say, "God has made man too great to be saved by the direct and unaided power of God Himself" here, is it not probable that, with expanded faculties in the future world, man will be found "*too great*" to be saved by that power there?

(c.) According to your theory, (p. 14,) as I shall more fully quote hereafter, the universe is governed by unvarying and established laws, not permitting any direct intervention of the divine power. The fixedness of those laws must extend over all worlds, and embrace all time, and must, therefore, comprehend the regions beyond the grave as well as the affairs of this world. The principle implies, too, that this is eternal. It must, therefore, operate as a limitation of the divine power in the future world as well as in this.

(d.) You expressly admit that there may be sin and suffering in the future world; that is, that men may be lost: a number made up, according to the statement just referred to, of those whom God *can not* save. Thus you say:

"Far am I from holding that there is no suffering in the next life. If there is sin there, (and I believe there is,) suffering is also there—for suffering necessarily attends sinning."

What will be the *extent* of this sin and suffering in the future world, you do not, indeed, state, but if the evidence in the case is to be derived from the fewness of those who *appear* to be converted in this life, and to be prepared for heaven, the number can not be small. So far, however, as the *principle* is involved, it can make no difference whether it is small or great. The essential point of difficulty is, that *any* should be lost in the future world.

(e.) There is one other remark to be made here: one other point on which we can not differ, for there is not any ground for a difference of opinion in regard to it. It is, that there is a very general *fear* or *apprehension* of future punishment among men, and that that punishment, unless something can be done to avert it, will be unending. This is somehow laid permanently in the human mind. I need not remind you that this universal fear—this “dread of something after death,” as expressed by Hamlet, exists everywhere. It is found in the consciences of all men. It is laid at the foundation of all the heathen religions of the world. It enters into the Mohammedan system. It constitutes the foundation of the faith of more than nine tenths of the Christian world. It may be doubted whether a single human mind exists that would be exempt from it on the commission of a great crime. Now, this occurs under the government of God, and in the human mind *as He has made it*. The difficulty is, if there *is*, as you say, no “Hell,” to understand *why* He has so made man that he everywhere dreads the future under the belief that there *is* a “Hell.” If there is, as I believe there is, such a world of woe, I can easily understand why man has been so made as to dread it, that is, to act as *if* this were true. But what if there *is* no such world of woe; if there is nothing, in fact, to be dreaded when the sinner dies? Assuredly this must be known to God, and yet, knowing this, He has filled the world with fear and alarm—on your theory, with false and needless alarm, and, therefore, *deceptive* alarm.

Are we, then, to believe that God governs the world with false alarms; with unreal fears; with unfounded apprehensions? Are we to believe that the divine administration is founded on a stupendous falsehood? Are we to believe that God controls men, as weak and foolish parents do their children,

by bugbears; by delusions; by frightful stories of bears and wolves; of ghosts and hobgoblins? I confess, for one, that I could not, and would not, honor such a God. And yet, so far as I can see, such *must* be the character of God unless there is real punishment to be feared in the future world. I think it is incumbent on you to explain this fact on the theory which you hold.

Such are some of the *facts* on which my difficulty was founded.

(2.) My next remark is, that these facts have no necessary connection with my theory of religion; with my creed or any other creed; with my theology or any other theology.

You have been pleased to say, as already remarked, that these difficulties pertain to *my* theory of religion—to *my* system of theology. But if the facts are as I have now stated them, they have no particular and exclusive reference to any one theory of religion or theology. They pertain to one system as really as to another; to yours as much as to mine; to you as much as to me. The real difficulty is not in the Calvinistic system, or in the Arminian system; in the Trinitarian theology, or the Socinian theology; in the system of him who believes in the doctrine of future punishment, or the system of the Universalist; in the belief of the Christian, or the want of belief in the Infidel; in the Buddhist system of religion, or the system of the Brahmin; in the religion of Confucius, or the religion of Zoroaster; in the Koran, the Zendavesta, the Shaster, the Bible, or the Book of Mormon; in the Mythology of the Greeks and Romans, or in the system of the Hottentot or the Fejee Islander; in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Des Cartes, Malebranche, Leibnitz, Locke—of Kant, Hobbes, Hume, Cousin, or Comte. The difficulty is *in the facts themselves*; in reconciling these facts to the ideas of justice, goodness, and mercy with which we find our nature endowed. The real difficulty is to understand how an almighty, a pure, a holy, and a benevolent God—the Creator of the world—should *allow* these things to come into His system; how they should be suffered to continue from age to age; how they should be permitted to spread desolation, woe, and sorrow over our world in all its history; how they should extend into the future world at all; how there should be either

a *certainty* or a *possibility* that they should continue forever. I need not say to you that this has been eminently *the* great problem to be solved in all ages, and how the problem has entered into every system of theology and philosophy. For one, I felt the greatness of the difficulty, only as millions have done before me, and I gave utterance to my own feelings in the strong language which you have quoted, as human nature has done in all ages.

In my next letter, I shall consider the various explanations which have been made of these facts, with reference to the inquiry whether they are adapted to calm down the anxieties of a troubled mind. In the third letter, I shall examine the peculiar explanation which you have offered. I am, with great respect, truly yours,

ALBERT BARNES.

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## LETTER II.

HON. GERRIT SMITH:

MY DEAR SIR: In my former letter, in reference to the extract which you had quoted from me, as expressive of my difficulties respecting the existence of sin and suffering in the universe, I made two remarks: (1.) That the facts can not be called in question; and (2.) That these facts have no necessary connection with any theory of philosophy or religion.

I proceed now to say, (3.) That no sufficient or satisfactory solution of these facts had been presented to my mind.

(a.) It did not seem to me to be a sufficient explanation to refer these things to *Chance*. I believe in a God. Besides, there are too many marks of plan, of system, of design, in the arrangement, to make that explanation allowable. Moreover, there is a *remedial* system existing, which is not easily traceable to chance. The arrangements, for example, for healing diseases—lying at the foundation of the whole science of medicine, as well as the plan of redemption, seem to me to be any thing rather than the production of chance.

(b.) In like manner, it did not seem to me to be a proper and satisfactory explanation of these things to refer them to *Fate*.

As in regard to the former solution, so it is in regard to this. I believe in a God, and the idea of a God is as incompatible with the idea of *Fate*, as it is with the idea of *Chance*. Besides, there are evidences of human freedom or liberty in the world, which are not reconcilable with the notion of *Fate*; for nothing is plainer than that the state of things on earth is everywhere connected with voluntary human agency.

(c.) I could not find an explanation of these difficulties in the supposition that God *could* not prevent sin and suffering, or that He *could* not create an order of free agents so that they would not sin. I see no reason to doubt that He has done so in the case of unfallen angels, and I would hope and believe that He has done so in regard to the inhabitants of far distant worlds. I can not believe that angelic beings are kept from sin by physical force, or that they are not properly free; nor can I doubt that the redeemed in heaven will be forever secure from all danger of apostasy, and that their security from sin will be in entire consistency with their freedom. I know not why the same thing might not occur on earth. At any rate, it can not be denied or doubted, that God, when He made man, must have foreseen all that would occur, and must have known that *if* He created him, he *would* fall and would bring this woe, and ruin, and danger, into the world. But it must be admitted that there was no *necessity* laid on God to create at all, and, therefore, no *necessity* for the introduction of sin and misery into the world. Yet, under these circumstances, God chose to create man with the certainty that he would fall into sin; that He chose to permit the introduction and prevalence of sin and woe on the earth, rather than not create at all.

(d.) The idea that God resolved to introduce sin and misery as a mere act of will and sovereignty—by an arbitrary decree—ordaining His own creatures to sorrow and death simply to show His power, and because He *chose* that it should be so, did not seem to me to be an admissible explanation. I am so made that I could not embrace such a view of God. I see nothing in the Bible to demand such a solution. I could not reconcile this with my ideas of God. I could see no explanation of the difficulty if this were so. I could see, I thought, that the real difficulty could be augmented by such a supposition, for

such a God could be neither adored, honored, worshiped, nor loved.

(e.) The theory that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good—a theory adopted by many—did not seem to me to remove the difficulty, nor to be true in itself. What good, if any, could come out of the permission of evil which could not have been secured in another manner, has never been shown. But if it be alleged that there have been displays of the divine character, as the result of sin, which could not otherwise have been made, still it is not easy to see how it was consistent with benevolence, or with any proper view of that character, to permit or to introduce the crimes and woes of this world and of the world to come, *in order* that that character should be displayed. It would be difficult, and I think impossible, to show that it would be proper for a sovereign to allow designedly the existence of murder, treason, and rebellion, with all the woes consequent on them, to spring up under his reign when he could easily have prevented them, *in order* that his own character might be displayed either in pardon or in punishment; still more difficult might it be to see how it would be proper for a father to allow his own child to fall into habits of vice or to experience suffering, *in order* the better to display his own character, either of clemency or of justice. It is easy, indeed, to understand how, when sin, treason, murder, or rebellion *have* been committed, the character of a just and benevolent sovereign may be exhibited by the infliction of punishment or by an act of pardon; or how, when a fault has been committed by a child, the character of a parent may be displayed in a manner in which it could not have been, if no such fault had been committed; but the difficulty is to see how all this could have been permitted or introduced when it might have been easily prevented, or how arrangements could have been made for it as a part of a plan, *in order* that the character might thus be displayed.

(f.) I could not find an explanation of the difficulty in the supposition that this has been suffered to come into the system, because God *prefers* sin to holiness, evil to good, misery to happiness. I think that all men are so made that they *can not* believe this. At least, I am so made, and there is evidence

that this has been the general judgment of mankind. It is clear, moreover, that whatever might be the *fact* in such a case, even if it should be true that God *does* prefer sin to holiness, man would not have been made with this conviction on his mind, and true also, that the world would not have been made as it has been—for there are innumerable proofs in the facts that are constantly occurring that God hates sin; that He seeks to check and restrain it; and that He intends to punish it, and not to bestow His favor on those who persevere in committing it. This theory, therefore, I think, no one could adopt. I am not aware that any class of men, however much perplexed they may have been on the subject, or however wicked they may have been, have in fact adopted it.

(g.) The theory that moral evil is inevitable from free agency, as friction is unavoidable in a machine, and that it is better to create a world of free agents, even with this inevitable result, than not to create a world at all—as it is better to make a watch, a locomotive, a steam-engine, or a wagon, *with* this inevitable result, than not to make them at all, seems to me to be as little satisfactory in explaining the difficulty. I was aware, as you doubtless are, that this theory has been held, and that it has been most ingeniously defended by one, at least, of the master minds of this country. Yet it is difficult, after all, to see how the divine power is *necessarily* limited in this manner. For there have been minds created, in great numbers, with great powers, and with perfect freedom, where this result did not follow, as the unfallen angels of light, and, as I believe, the inhabitants of far distant worlds are; and it is not easy to see why this might not have occurred in our world as well as elsewhere, or why, if this end could be attained, so to speak, without *friction* in other worlds, it might not have been secured in our own. Besides, if a watch or a locomotive can not be made without friction, it does not follow that God could not make a *mind* that would not go wrong, and that without any violation of the principles of liberty.

(h.) In like manner, it did not appear to me that it furnished a solution of the difficulty, to refer it, as you have done, to the free-will of man. I shall have occasion to allude to this again, when I come to examine the solution which you propose, and

which you ask me to adopt. I need not say to you that this is neither a new nor a modern solution of the difficulty. It is found in all the old theological writings of a certain school, and enters largely into systems of modern philosophy and theology, and is probably that which is entertained by the mass of men, so far as they have any opinion on the subject. I need not remind *you* of the beautiful form in which it has been expressed by Milton :

“ They therefore as to right belonged,  
 So were created, nor can justly accuse  
 Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,  
 As if predestination overruled  
 Their will, disposed by absolute decree  
 Or high foreknowledge ; they themselves decreed  
 Their own revolt, not I : if I foreknew,  
 Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,  
 Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.  
 So without least impulse or shadow of fate,  
 Or aught by me immutably foreseen,  
 They trespass, authors to themselves in all  
 Both what they judge and what they choose ; for so  
 I formed them free, and free they must remain,  
 Till they intrall themselves ; I else must change  
 Their nature, and revoke the high decree,  
 Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained  
 Their freedom ; they themselves ordained their fall.”

*Paradise Lost, Book III.*

It is sufficient now for my purpose to remark in regard to this solution, that it can not be shown to be a necessary violation of freedom to exert such an influence as to keep beings thus endowed from sin, since there *are* numberless such beings who are thus preserved, and since such beings are entirely conscious of liberty, and the more so, the more holy they are. Moreover, unless we admit this principle, it is impossible to see how those who shall be saved can have any *security* of permanent happiness or holiness in heaven. If to restrain them there, so as to make it certain that they will not fall into sin, is necessarily a violation of freedom, it is impossible to conceive how there can be any *security* of holiness or happiness there, or how God can promise it to men. Besides, if the certainty that one will not sin is a violation of freedom, it is impossible to con-

ceive that God Himself can be free; for it must enter into all our conceptions of the divine character that He is unchangeably holy. Why may not creatures in this respect, as in other respects, be made in the "image of God"?

(i.) A solution of the difficulty is not to be found in the ancient Persian system of religion, subsequently assuming the form of Manicheism: in the idea that there are two original and independent principles—good and evil—in the universe struggling with each other. This system was, as you know, at one time embraced by Augustine to relieve the difficulties in regard to the introduction of evil into the world, which pressed on his mind—the difficulties to which I have already referred, and which he felt, perhaps, as keenly as any man that has ever lived. I will confess to you that this system has more plausibility to my mind than most of those to which I have referred, and I have often looked at it in my perplexities, with anxious inquiry whether there *might* not be in it an element of truth which would relieve the subject from embarrassment; and even now, if I were compelled to abandon the Bible and its teachings, I should be more likely to embrace this than any form of infidel philosophy to which my attention has been directed. I would embrace this system rather than that of Spinoza. I would sooner be a Manichean than a Pantheist; I would sooner follow Zoroaster than Comte.

(j.) It remains to say that I have not been able to find a solution of my difficulties in the doctrine of Universal Salvation. I could not embrace that system, with my views of the proper rules of interpreting language, without giving up the Bible altogether. *The Bible does not teach the doctrine of the salvation of all men.* It can never be made to teach that doctrine by a proper interpretation of language. If the Bible teaches any thing clearly; if words have any meaning; if there are any proper rules of interpreting language, the Bible teaches the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked, and it can not be made to teach otherwise. You have referred to *my* creed, as if I held some peculiar views on the subject. But I have no peculiar creed. I hold just what the mass of men have held; what ninety-nine men out of every hundred have held; what all men—Christians and infidels—except the small class who call

themselves Universalists, have held, that the Bible *teaches* that the wicked will be punished forever in the future world. I take the liberty of saying that the doctrine of the future eternal punishment of the wicked is not expressed in stronger or plainer language in the creed to which I have expressed my assent, *or in any creed held by any Christian church*, Catholic, Greek, or Protestant—in the Heidelberg Catechism, in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, in the Westminster Confession, or in any particular creed of any Congregational church, than it is in the Bible. Nay, in almost all these creeds, the doctrine is stated in the very words of the Bible; and if you could convince me that the doctrine is not taught in the Bible, you would at the same time, and by the very same process of reasoning, convince me that it is not taught in any creed in Christendom, and that it is, in fact, held by no class of mankind. If I were, therefore, to reject the doctrine of the future punishment of the wicked, I should not be a Universalist trying to hold on to the Bible. I would become at once an honest infidel, and would reject the Bible altogether. The infidel is the only consistent man. I think, in the view which I take of the fair interpretation of the Bible, that I see the reason why there are so few avowed Universalists as compared with the actual number of infidels in our country, and why it is so difficult to keep up the system of Universalism as an organization. The number of persons in any community who can be made to believe that the Bible inculcates the doctrine of universal salvation *must* always be small; the number of those who, for various causes, reject the Bible altogether, may be and probably will be much larger. Of the two I would be one of the latter, and so the mass of men *do* judge, and always *will* judge. Whether I should obtain any relief in this respect, in such a course, or by adopting the views which you counsel me to embrace, may perhaps be seen in what I have yet to say.

Such were, and are, the difficulties in my mind on this great subject.

In my next letter, I shall consider the explanation which you have offered in regard to these difficulties. I am, with great respect, truly yours,

ALBERT BARNES.

## LETTER III.

HON. GERRIT SMITH:

MY DEAR SIR: In my last letter to you, I noticed the various explanations which have been suggested of the existence of sin and misery in the universe, with reference to the question whether those explanations are adapted to calm down the anxieties of a troubled mind. In this letter, I propose to enter on an examination of your solution of those facts.

Respecting your theory of explanation, it is proper to inquire, *first*, What it is? and *second*, Whether the explanation removes the difficulty?

*First*. Your explanation of the difficulty, embracing also your views of the manner in which the evils are to be removed, is comprised in the following specifications:

1. That man is so made of necessity that he can sin, and could not have been made otherwise if he was a free agent, and that the whole evil is therefore to be traced to the freedom of man; or, in other words, that the existence of sin follows inevitably from the notion of free agency, and that this is a matter for thankfulness and of rejoicing. (Pp. 6, 7.)

2. That God saves all that He can. (P. 9.)

3. That death is an advantage, or that the arrangement is to be regarded as one of benevolence. (P. 11.)

4. That the representation that sin is a great evil, deserving of infinite punishment, tends to make men hate one another, or to judge men contrary to what God does. (P. 7.)

5. That science is doing something to mitigate the evil, and that it may be hoped that it will do more. (P. 7.)

6. That the grand remedy for the evils of the world is wealth, (p. 11;) and

7. That it may be hoped and expected that man will be in a more favorable condition in the future world, or that though the wicked may suffer there, yet that there will be a more desirable system of probation, so that all evil may there come to an end. (Pp. 7, 8.)

I propose now to make some general remarks on this solution, and then to examine these points in detail.

In general, then, I remark that your theory does not deny the existence of the main *facts* which constitute the difficulty, and which I said did so much to perplex my own mind, and which made the subject to me, as it has to thousands of others, so dark—the present so dark—the future so dark. You can not, and you do not attempt to deny, the existence of evil. You do not deny—you could not do it—that this is a world of sinners and sufferers—of death-beds and grave-yards. You do not deny—you could not do it—that the race is involved in sin and danger; you do not deny that men may suffer in the future world. All these things are either admitted in express terms in your letter, or are implied in your theory of explanation. These are the main, the essential facts which have given me so much perplexity.

In like manner, you do not deny—you could not deny—that these things occur under a divine administration; that they constitute a part of a plan; that they actually take place under the government of the world under which we live, and by which we and our friends, and all our fellow-creatures, are, and must be, deeply affected. You do not deny—and you can not deny—that they *seem* to conflict with the essential elements of a just and benevolent divine administration, and with the character of an almighty, a just, and a merciful God; for you attempt to explain them, and to show how they *are* consistent with such a character; or, in other words, you aim to show *how* they, in fact, constitute the best system—a better system than one would be if these things had not been permitted to occur. In regard to the material *facts*, then, I think we do not differ. I do not see how we could differ, unless one of us should deny the existence of what is constantly occurring before our own eyes. Do *you* doubt that there are evils, crimes, woes, sorrows, in this world? Do *you* doubt that a system of *slavery* fraught with tremendous evils has been allowed to exist in our own country? Do *you* doubt that a war most fearful and bloody has been allowed to occur as the consequence of the existence of slavery? Do you doubt that this has somehow been permitted to take place under the administration of an almighty, a just, and a benevolent God? And do you doubt that the world is now filled with error, superstition,

and crime, and is strewed with sick-beds and graves; that the earth itself is "a vast revolving grave," and has been for many thousands of years?

Now, I had these *facts* before my mind, and not any theory in regard to them. The *facts themselves* gave me trouble, not any theory on the subject. I saw no way in which to relieve my mind from perplexity. You have proposed to me a way of explanation and relief. I shall now proceed to examine that with some minuteness of detail.

(1.) The first point which you rely upon is that man is so made necessarily that he can sin, and that the origin of evil is to be traced wholly to the freedom of man, or to the freedom of the will; or, in other words, that sin is inseparable from the notion of free agency, and that this constitutes the true nobleness of man, and is a matter for thankfulness and rejoicing.

I have referred to the passage in which you affirm this before, but it is so remarkable, and enters so vitally into your theory of explanation, that I will copy it again.

The statement is in the following words:

"It is true that man is so made that he can sin; but, instead of complaining of this, we should be thankful for it. Instead of lamenting it, we should rejoice in it. How low a being would man be, were he of necessity sinless! How far inferior to what he now is, were he so constituted that he could not sin! He would be a mere machine, and his going right would no more argue wisdom and goodness in him than does the right going of a clock argue wisdom and goodness in it. The brute, shut up to the direction of its instincts, can not err—can not wander from its nature. But Infinite Wisdom, instead of predetermining the steps of man, has left him to judge for himself. Great, indeed, is the hazard of his judging wrongly; but great, also, is the honor of being placed so high in the scale of creation as to be allowed to judge for one's self.

"Blessed be God that He has made us capable of sinning; or, in other words, capable of transgressing the laws which He has written upon our being! It is not His fault if we transgress them; for He has written them so plain, that 'He may run that readeth' the most essential of them; and honest and persistent study will compass the remainder.

"I acknowledged the goodness of God in making us capable of sinning. I might have added, in making us capable of sinning so greatly. For to say that we can sin so greatly is, in effect, to say that we have great powers and advantages for learning and obeying law; it being only in the abuse of such powers and advantages that great sinning is possible." (Pp. 6, 7.)

I have already remarked on this passage, so far as it relates

to the question whether it is possible for God to make a free agent, and yet secure his perfect and continued holiness, consistently with the idea that the agent would still be free, or consistently with the idea of liberty. I have nothing more to add on that point than to observe that we do not connect the idea of stern and unbending virtue—virtue so unbending and so stern that we feel assured that it will not do wrong—with the idea of slavery, or with the violation of personal liberty. An honest man; a man thoroughly and always honest—honest without wavering through the longest life—is not less free than a dishonest man; a sincere and incorruptible patriot is not less a freeman than a traitor. The community never suspected that your being an upright and a benevolent man was any proof that you were not free; nor, in the highest conception in which those qualities have been justly ascribed to you, was there any idea that you did not, and do not, exercise perfect liberty. If there was in your case such a foundation of virtue and benevolence as to constitute a ground of moral certainty—as I doubt not there was—that this would characterize you through the whole of a long life, no one would suppose that this would be incompatible with the highest consciousness of personal liberty in your own mind. From any thing that appears, General Washington was as really a freeman as Benedict Arnold, nor was that incorruptible patriotism and integrity which was so great in the one that his country confided in it always, any more a proof of slavery than was the love of gold in the other. Nay, it has been commonly held that vice and sin constitute servitude, and that virtue is true freedom. There was more of truth than of poetry in the remark of Cowper: “He is a freeman whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves besides.” And it is not merely the authority of inspiration that makes the declaration of the Saviour true: “Whosoever committeth sin is the *servant*—*δουλός*—of sin,” (John 8: 34;) or of the declaration of Paul: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?” (Romans 6: 16.) Can it be doubted that the Redeemer of the world was invested with perfect freedom, and yet that it was certain that He would never sin? Can it be doubted that God is free, and yet that it is “impossible that He should lie”?

(Heb. 6 : 18.) What would be the security of the universe, if the doctrine implied in your statement were correct, that immunity from sin, or the certainty that one will not sin, is incompatible with freedom; that one can not *be* so pure and virtuous that he could never do wrong, and yet be free? Is not all our security of every kind founded on the idea that the Creator and Governor of the universe is immutably holy; that we have the utmost assurance that He will never do wrong? Might not, then, a creature be so entirely created in the image of God that there would be a certainty that he would never sin, and yet be free? If he could *not* be so made, will you solve this problem: *Why he should be made at all?*

I have, therefore, said that this explanation does not meet my difficulties on the subject. But there is a more important aspect still, in which your solution of the difficulty is to be noticed. It is, that the fact that man is so made that he can sin, and that, under the circumstances of the case, he would sin, is, in your apprehension, a matter of thankfulness and rejoicing; that this, in fact, constitutes the true nobleness of his nature. "Blessed be God that He has made us capable of sinning; or, in other words, capable of transgressing the laws which He has written upon our being." "I acknowledged the goodness of God in making us capable of sinning. I might have added, in making us capable of sinning so greatly. For to say that we can sin so greatly is, in effect, to say that we have great powers and advantages for learning and obeying law." That is to say, the real greatness, the dignity, the true nobleness of man, is manifested in the fact that he is capable of committing enormous crimes; his real greatness and nobleness *would* not and *could* not have been manifested if he had been so made that it would have been certain that he would never sin. In other words, the real greatness and nobleness of man is to be measured by the greatness of his sin; or by the fact that he does sin "*so greatly.*" He could not have manifested his true greatness if he had not shown it in this manner, or if he had been so made, or if such an influence had been exerted on him, that it would have been certain that he would *not* have sinned; that is, if he had been made, as it is commonly supposed the redeemed will be in heaven, secure in their holiness; or as the

holy angels are ; or as the Saviour was ; or if He himself had been made, in this respect, perfectly in the "image of God."

According to this view, therefore, the measure of the greatness and nobleness of Adam was not his capacity to worship God, or his disposition to do so, but his capacity to apostatize, and to "bring death into the world and all our woe," and this measure of greatness is to be found in the extent of death and the amount of woe that he has brought upon the earth. The nobleness of Cain was not in his capability to worship God, and could not have been in any certainty that he would do this, but in his capability to murder his brother ; the nobleness and greatness of Noah was not that he was a "preacher of righteousness," standing as an unshaken monument of piety in a wicked world, but in his capability to be made drunk after he had been saved from the deluge ; the nobleness of Lot was not that he set an example of piety to the guilty inhabitants of the cities of the Plain, and that "his righteous soul was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked," but that he was capable of being intoxicated and of committing incest ; the nobleness of David was not in his valor in war, in his sweet poetry, in the wisdom of his administration, in his humble piety, but in his ability to violate the sixth and the seventh commandments of the Decalogue ; the nobleness of Judas was not in any power to love and serve his master as John did, but in his power to betray him ; the nobleness of Benedict Arnold was not in any power which he had to serve his country as Washington did, but in the fact that he could act under the influence of British gold, and attempt to ruin the cause of liberty ; the nobleness received from his Maker by Jefferson Davis was not in the fact that he might have exerted his talents for the good of his country, and in the cause of liberty, but that he was capable of plotting the ruin of both, and of putting himself at the head of the most formidable rebellion that ever occurred in any age—a man who would have fastened the chains of slavery on the limbs of millions of his fellow-men forever.

For such "greatness"—for these high endowments—you say : "Blessed be God that He has made us capable of transgressing the laws which He has written upon our being." "I acknowledged the goodness of God in making us capable of sin-

ning. I might have added, in making us capable of sinning so GREATLY." Verily, the world owes a debt of gratitude to the great and benevolent Creator which has not yet been rendered to Him.

(2.) Your second principle in explaining the facts to which I referred is, that God saves all that He can, and that, consequently, the fact that men are lost, if they are lost, is because God *can not* save them. This idea you express in the following language (p. 9):

"God tries to save all men from sinning. But He has not the ability to save any man without the help of that man. Had He intended to retain such ability, He would not have 'created man in His own image,' and invested him with free agency, and the power to choose his character and destiny. When God made a man so great as 'to will and to do' for himself, He made him too great to be saved by the direct and unaided power of even God Himself. Men must work with God in accomplishing this salvation, or it can not be accomplished."

This is evidently a limitation of the *power* of God, and according to this, we are under an administration in which, whatever benevolent feelings there may be on the part of our Maker, there is no power or ability to carry them out, or to execute them. But, the *omniscience* of God is not yet denied, and the problem to be solved is: How would it be consistent with benevolence, to bring creatures in great number into existence when He who made them knew at the time that they would fall into ruin, and that He, whatever might be His benevolent feelings, *could not help it*? It is a problem of difficult solution how such a God could be honored, or how He could deserve to be adored.

It is to be remembered, too, that, according to your theory on the point to which I have just referred, God could not interpose in the case without violating their freedom, and that the very greatness and nobleness of their nature consists in the fact that they were so made that God *could not* prevent it if they chose to sin.

It is natural to ask here, how far this view would tend to promote the "happiness" of mankind, or to prevent the feeling of gloom and sadness which you think spring out of the system which I hold? The idea which you entertain, if I understand

it, is, that God *would* save these sinners if He could, but that He has so made them of design that He *could* not help them if they fell into this condition; that they could of themselves easily reach a point where they would be beyond His power for good, and where they could bring the direst evils on themselves, in this world and the next, in spite of all that their Creator could do to prevent it; for if their necessary freedom involved this in the present life, the same necessary freedom would involve it in the life to come. Nay, the same idea would involve the want of all security even in heaven; for if it enters *essentially* into the idea of *freedom*, it would apply to heaven as well as to earth or hell. How one could find happiness in this idea, it is difficult to conceive. The idea is, God has made me; He knew when He made me not only that I was liable to fall into a hopeless condition, where not even He Himself could save me, and that I would actually fall into this condition, and yet, notwithstanding this, He launched me upon this dark and tempestuous sea; He lost His power to save me the moment I chose to sin, and He has no means of regaining that power over me; and, although He may have a benevolent heart, He has no means whatever of accomplishing His benevolent desire. How far would such a view tend to promote the *happiness* of the world, or to calm down the troubled feelings of the human soul in its present condition?

For one, I should not wish to live in such a world—a world in which, when God “made man so great as to will and to do for himself, He at the same time made him too great to be saved by the direct and unaided power of even God Himself.”

But how, let me ask, is it known that there are sinners so great that God can not save them? How do you know that He tries to save all that He can? How can it be known that to save a great sinner necessarily violates His freedom? Are there any greater sinners now on the earth than many of those were who have been saved? Are there now those whom it would be more difficult to save than was Saul of Tarsus, or Augustine, or John Bunyan, or John Newton? And was there any violation of the *freedom* of those men in what God did to turn them from the errors of their ways? Certainly those men never felt that “God had not the ability to save any man with-

out the help of the man." Certainly, Saul of Tarsus never supposed that *he* "had been made too great to be saved by the direct and unaided power of God Himself." Certainly, if we way judge from their own recorded views of themselves, or from the freedom, the voluntariness, the zeal, with which those men engaged in the service of God after their conversion, they never supposed that there had been any violation of liberty in the power which had been put forth by God to turn them to Himself. Why should that power stop just where it has done, and not embrace other great sinners also?

(3.) Your third solution is, that death is an advantage—a thing not to be regretted or mourned over, but to be rejoiced in as an arrangement of benevolence.

This idea you have expressed in the following language :

"For several reasons we should be glad that men die when their bodies are worn out with old age. Among these reasons are : 1st. This life has then become more of a burden than an enjoyment. 2d. We trust that, at its termination, a higher life awaits us. 3d. Our death makes room for others to live, for an endless succession of generations to have experience of earthly existence. In the distant future, when men shall live wisely here, earth-life will be far more precious than it now is. Had the life of man extended to thousands of years, the inhabitants of the earth would have been but a handful compared with the aggregate souls of those unending generations. And in that case, there would have been not only comparatively few to know this life, but, consequently, comparatively few to be translated from it to the nobler life.

"But, perhaps, your lamentation is over premature deaths only. They, certainly, should not be charged upon God. They come not from His hand. When men shall have learned, as they yet will learn, the laws of life and health, and shall, as they yet will, faithfully keep them, there will not only be few or none of these premature deaths, but the ordinary length of this existence will probably be at least double its present threescore and ten years. We should be very careful not to charge upon the great and good Father the evils which come from the unnecessary ignorance and willful sins of His children."

It can not be denied, I think, that a removal from earth—a removal from one world to another—may be desirable; that it may be a part of the bliss of the redeemed hereafter to pass from world to world; and that in the eternity before them they may have an abode in all these worlds which God has made, in order that they may learn in each one the peculiar manifestation of his glory there. The universe—so vast, so

grand—seems thus to have been made to give occupation to immortal minds, as it can not be doubted that in each world there *is* some peculiar manifestation of the glory of an infinite God. But the question now is, Why should this passage from earth to another world—from one world to another—be accompanied with pain, dread, and sorrow—the fearful pain, the dread, and the sorrow of *death*? Why is this necessary? Why is it adopted? What exact good comes out of it? Why might not men pass from this world to another as we may suppose the angels pass from heaven to earth, without pain, or as Enoch and Elijah passed from earth to heaven, “without seeing death”? Assuredly it is conceivable that God *might* have made men so; assuredly it would have seemed probable that He *would* have made them so. How much would it render a passage from world to world in the future state, if it is to occur, a subject of *dread* and not of joyful anticipation, to be told that each and every such removal must be attended with the pain of dying, and that all those worlds must be constantly and forever filled with dread and sorrow and pain, with sick-beds and graves! I think, therefore, that there must be some other reason for death than the mere necessity that the inhabitants of earth should pass away to make room for others—lest there should be but “few comparatively to be translated from earth to the nobler life.”

It is to be remarked, also, that the question is not whether this life may not be, in fact, so much more “a burden than an enjoyment;” whether it may not be desirable to be removed from the infirmities of old age when “these bodies are worn out;” whether death may not even be desirable as a relief from intolerable suffering; but *why the race is placed in such circumstances that death ever could be desirable*; why these infirmities, pains, and sorrows have come upon the race; why, under the administration of a wise and benevolent God, the world is *made* full of sufferers, so that it would be *desirable* for them to die? This, and not the point which you have proposed, is the difficult one to be solved. Why are things allowed to exist under God’s government which would *ever* make death, with all its forms of pain and horror and dread, *desirable*?

Suffer me to ask a few questions here :

Grant that it may be benevolence that human beings should be removed to other worlds; why is it done in this manner?

Grant that it may be desirable that the sick, the infirm, the broken-down, should be removed, or that men may be actually in such a state as to make death desirable; why should they *be* in that state at all?

Grant that this might be proper for hardened offenders; why should the righteous and the good leave the world in the manner in which they actually do—under slow torture, torn by wild beasts, burned at the stake, or under loathsome and protracted forms of disease?

Grant that it may be proper for adults thus to die; why should children who have not yet “done good or evil” leave the world under all forms of suffering?

Grant that the arrangement is a good one in this world; would it not be as good in any other world—in heaven—and why may it not then exist forever?

Your explanation of the difficulty in regard to death does not, therefore, seem to me to meet the case. Whatever it may do for you, it does not relieve the perplexities of my mind.

I have thus examined at some length a portion of your methods of solving the difficulty in regard to the existence of sin and suffering in this world and the world to come.

I shall complete the examination in my next letter.

I am, with great respect, truly yours,

ALBERT BARNES.

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#### LETTER IV.

HON. GERRIT SMITH:

MY DEAR SIR: In my last letter I entered on an examination of your solution of the difficulties involved in the existence of sin and suffering in the universe. I shall complete the examination in this letter:

(4) Your fourth remark in explanation of the difficulties, or in attempting to remove them, is, that the representation that man is a great sinner, and is deserving of infinite punishment, tends to make men hate one another, and to judge men contrary to what God does. (P. 7.)

This idea you have expressed in the following language :

“ It not only tends to inspire the fear that we are abhorred instead of loved by God, but it also tends to make us less amiable and sacred in each other's eyes, and to make us coarse and cruel in our treatment of each other. The difference between our seeing each other to be small sinners or enormous sinners can not fail of contributing to produce a corresponding difference in our conduct toward each other. That ‘ God is angry with the wicked every day,’ was the fancy, not of those who knew the Loving Father of us all, but of those who pictured, in His stead, a revengeful and bloody pagan deity ! The stars, which shine sweetly upon all ; the green earth, which, with its fruits and flowers, was made for all—these, and the impartial sun and rain, unitedly testify that God is love, and that He never hates any one. Nothing can be more absurd than this ceaseless preaching that the least sin is, because committed against an infinitely great and good God, infinitely wicked, and therefore deserving of infinite punishment. The tendency of this preaching, as already intimated, is to make us look upon each other as monsters of wickedness ; whereas we should, by considering the ignorance and temptations of men, regard their sins with all reasonable charitableness. The Just One, who knows our ignorance, and who saw fit, in appointing the first stage of our discipline, to put us into this world of temptation, pities us for our sufferings in this life ; and although these sufferings are mainly sin-induced, He, nevertheless, can have no heart to add to them punishment in the life to come. He has no curses for us. On the contrary, He does all that He can (compatibly with our freedom and power to thwart and counteract Him) to save us from cursing ourselves and cursing one another.”

I have myself never maintained or affirmed that sin is an infinite evil, and that it therefore deserves infinite punishment, and I have never seen any force in the argument when it has been so presented. I do not find that sin is ever spoken of in the Bible as an “ infinite ” evil, or that the doctrine of future punishment is ever represented in the Bible as founded on that idea. That it has been so represented by a certain class of theologians I do not deny ; but you could not hold *me* responsible for that view, as you seem to do, from any thing that I have ever said or written. I confess to you that the phrase, “ sin is an *infinite evil*,” conveys no idea whatever to my mind. Any argument, therefore, based on that idea, in favor of the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked, makes not the slightest impression on me. I acknowledge that *I* could not demonstrate the justice of eternal punishment from any view which *I* could take of the evil of sin ; just as there are very many things occurring, in fact, under the divine administration on earth of which I can not understand the cause, or which I can not vindicate by any process

of reasoning of my own, or any view which I could take of them, and in relation to which, I should have said *beforehand*, that such things *would* not have occurred under the government of God. I could not, for example, by any reasoning of my own, vindicate the sufferings which come upon infants; nor, in thousands of similar cases, could I show how the sufferings which are experienced in this life are exactly *measured* by the guilt of the sufferer. The whole subject is quite too high for me, and I have never attempted to *reason* on the one case or the other. I am content to take the one as a *fact* actually occurring under the government of God, and the other as the undoubted affirmation of the Bible, and to leave the whole matter of the *reasons* in the one case and the other with God; the one being no more difficult to my mind than the other. In fact, the one is as inexplicable to me as the other, and, for aught that I know, the reasons which would explain the one would make the other plain also. Until I understand why sin and woe came into the universe at all, *I am content to leave the whole matter of their continuance with God.*

But as to the immediate point—the question whether this view of the depravity and danger of man tends to make us “hate our fellow-men.” Few men have ever had a deeper conviction of the depravity of the human race than the Apostle Paul. Did that lead him to “hate” mankind? What man has ever shown a warmer love for the race than he, or has been willing to make more sacrifices in behalf of sinners? The Saviour of the world had a deep conviction of the depravity and danger of men, and yet where has there been such love? The heart of a parent, who has any right feeling, is deeply affected by the conduct of a son or a daughter if they go astray—not with hatred, but with the warm affection of love, and with a willingness to make sacrifices for their welfare. Did the father of the Prodigal Son “*hate*” his erring and guilty son? And who are the men or the women who are willing to make the most sacrifices, or to practice the most self-denial, for the good of others? Are they not those who are most deeply impressed with the sins of the world, and with the danger of those who are sunk in the depths of idolatry, superstition, and crime? Was it true that David Brainerd was a hater of mankind, or

that he had no love—no compassion—for men? Did he subject himself to the sacrifices and self-denials of a life among wretched savages, because he thought they were *good* and *safe*? Had Henry Martyn no love for men; no kind feelings toward them; no sympathy for them? Had Schwartz? Had Vanderkemp? Have they who go now among the heathen as missionaries of the cross none? And do those who take a different view of human nature, and who regard the race as virtuous, and as safe from danger, show any special love for mankind, or evince any special willingness to make sacrifices for the good of the world? Do skeptics and infidels evince any such zeal? Do they practice any special self-denial for the good of others? Did the British deists in the seventeenth century do this; did the actors in the French Revolution do it? Have Unitarians shown any special willingness to make sacrifices for the heathen? Have Universalists any missions involving self-denial?

But, after all, the question is not one respecting our *feelings* toward others, but it is whether the race is *in fact* sinful, and whether sinners are *in fact* in danger? The *facts* in the case are in no manner affected or changed by our *feelings*, whatever they may be. If we are led to hate men *because* they are sinful and in danger, it is only by the perverted feelings of our own hearts, and is only a deeper proof of our own, and, therefore, of human depravity. It has *not* this effect in the bosom of the Universal Father—the God of all the race; for the conviction of the fall and ruin and danger of man has only led Him to give His Son—His only Son—to die. It had *not* this effect on the Son of God who came to save men; for it was this very view which made Him willing to become incarnate, and to suffer on the cross. Has there ever been a greater love for mankind than this?

(5.) Your fifth solution of the difficulty is, that science is doing much to mitigate the evils referred to, and that it may be hoped that it will do much more—particularly that it may be hoped that it will materially prolong human life.

These thoughts you express in the following language:

“Doubtless the day is coming when there will be comparatively little sin on the earth. Science, more than all other agencies, hastens the coming of

this day. For we may reasonably hope that, when science shall have more fully revealed to men the laws of their being, obedience to these laws will be in greater proportion to the knowledge of them than it now is.

“When men shall have learned, as they yet will learn, the laws of life and health, and shall, as they yet will, faithfully keep them, there will not only be few or none of these premature deaths, but the ordinary length of this existence will probably be at least double its present threescore and ten years.” (Pp. 7, 10.)

Respecting this theory I have only to remark :

(a.) That thus far science has not done very much to diminish the actual amount of sin on the earth, or to reform mankind, nor have scientific men been the most zealous, as they certainly have not been the most successful reformers.

(b.) That the progress of science has not as yet tended materially to lengthen human life. You are pleased to express the hope that, “when men shall have better learned the laws of life and health,” the “ordinary length of their existence will probably be at least double its threescore and ten years.” Yet it is a fact that since the time of Moses, a period of more than three thousand years, no perceptible progress has been made in that direction, nor are there any indications that any material progress is likely to be made, at least in our time. In the age of Moses, the regular limit of human life was “threescore years and ten,” (Psalm 90 : 10;) the same is the regular limitation of human life now, nor does it appear from any statistics with which I am acquainted, that more persons exceed that period now than there were of the same character in the time of Moses. On what evidence you rely in proof that there will be a material change in this respect, you have not been pleased to state.

(c.) It is obvious to remark that, even if this *should* occur, the facts in the case would not be materially varied, nor would the difficulty be essentially diminished. *Death*, the great source of the difficulty, would still exist as really, and to the same extent, as now; and, so far as appears, in as varied and as trying forms. That a man dies when he is old does not change the nature of death, nor did the fact that Methuselah lived nearly a thousand years do any thing to explain the fact that sin and death were allowed to come into the world.

It *might* still be, also, that young persons would die; it would

be certain that all would ultimately die ; and, so far as appears, there would be as many and as varied forms of suffering upon the earth as there are now.

I do not perceive, therefore, that the difficulty is explained or diminished by this gratuitous supposition.

(6.) Your sixth statement is, that the grand remedy for the evils in the world is *wealth*. This remarkable statement is in the following words:

“The longer I live, the more am I persuaded that wealth is what the world most needs for its redemption from ignorance, wickedness, and unhappiness. Enough of it is created by the toiling poor, and, in point of fact, they are nearly all who do create it. Alas! that the misuse of much of it should be such as to make the toiling poor poorer. War, intemperance, excessive luxury, and giddy, reckless fashion are great wasters of wealth ; but no one of them wastes more than do the theologies, directly and indirectly. For instance, if the Christian theology had not so successfully passed itself off for the Christian religion, these evils, which I have just now enumerated, would, so far as Christendom is concerned, have been far less extensive, and their waste of wealth correspondingly less. Then, look at the hundreds of millions which it costs Christendom annually to build and support the churches and other establishments which this theology calls for !” (Pp. 11, 12.

On this I have to observe :

(a.) That if the correctness of this statement should be admitted, it would not explain the main difficulty ; that is, *why* the sin and misery *to be remedied by wealth* have been permitted to come into the world.

(b.) This would add another item to the difficulty itself, to wit, *Why*, under the divine administration, so much of that which, it would seem, is to remove all these evils, has been *suffered to be wasted* by the crimes of men ; by “ war, intemperance, excessive luxury, and giddy, reckless fashion.”

(c.) I am not sure that I correctly understand you, nor do I profess to be able to comprehend how the possession of “ wealth ” is to remove the evils of the world ; that is, to reform and save wicked men. It is certain that hitherto its influence has not been particularly marked in this respect, nor has it commonly been supposed that the fact that a man was becoming rich was essentially connected with the idea that he was becoming a good man ; or, that if he had been addicted to habits of vice, the accumulation of wealth would necessarily reform him. It has been commonly supposed that the accumulation of wealth had

*something* to do with the corruption and fall of the Roman empire, nor has it been plain that since the fall of that empire the most wealthy nations, or the most wealthy individuals, have been necessarily the most virtuous. Nor has it been commonly supposed that the accumulation of wealth has had a tendency either to convert a bad man, or to make a good man better. It is undoubtedly true that a rich man *may* "inherit the kingdom of God;" but it has been generally believed that this result would be likely to occur *in spite* of his wealth, and not as *the effect* of it. The Saviour said (Luke 18 : 24): "How hardly—*δυσκόλως*—shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God;" implying that, although it *might* be done, there were some peculiar difficulties to overcome in the case, rather than that there was any peculiar advantage, as you seem to suppose, in wealth as a means of reform, or as a "means of grace." How far the building of "plain halls" for the "plain, loving-hearted men and women" that might choose to "assemble" in them would promote the salvation of the great mass of mankind, or would remove the evils of the world, I should not feel myself competent to determine by any *data* in my possession. I apprehend, however, that there are evils in human society which the mere building of "plain halls" for such purposes would not be likely to remove. At all events, wealth is not so generally diffused in the world as to make it a universal agent in the work of reformation and salvation, nor has a state of society yet arisen where it could be. I treat this as a grave matter because *you* have done so.

(7.) Your seventh mode of meeting the difficulty is, that it may be hoped and expected that men will be in a more favorable condition in the future world than they are here, and that, although the wicked may suffer there, yet there will be a better system of probation, so that all evil may come to an end.

This, which is evidently your main reliance, you express in the following language :

"Far am I from holding that there is no suffering in the next life. If there is sin there, (and I believe there is,) suffering is also there—for suffering necessarily attends sinning.

"Indeed, we may reasonably hope that men will not sin forever—that, if not in this life, nevertheless in the next, their increasing knowledge will conquer their ignorance, and their increasing virtue will conquer their tempta-

tions. So far from falling in with the irrational and God-dishonoring doctrine that the sinner will have no opportunities in the next life for reformation and improvement, we should allow reason and nature to inspire the expectation that such opportunities will be far greater there than here."

On this solution I make the following remarks :

(a.) It does not meet, and does not profess to meet, the main—the primary difficulty—the fact that sin and woe have been allowed to come into the system under the government of God, and that death and sorrow have been permitted to spread desolation over this world, and to extend and perpetuate their dominion from age to age. These things are undoubtedly in the world; they exist under the government of God; they are unexplained. Whatever may occur hereafter, it is difficult to see how, if the facts *should be* as you suppose they *will be* in the future world, such an arrangement would throw any light on the question why sin and suffering were allowed to come into the universe at all. Even if it is supposed that there will be a *better* system in the future world under which all these evils will come to an end, still, it may be asked, Why should not that "*better system*" have been enjoyed in this life? Why should the "*not better*" one have existed at all? Why should man be doomed to go through all the sorrows, the dangers, the calamities of this life in order to reach that "better" system? Why should he have been allowed to sin here with the vague hope that in a future world there *might* be some "*better system*" where "increasing knowledge would conquer his ignorance, and increasing virtue conquer his temptations"?

(b.) The doctrine of future punishment is admitted by you. Thus you say: "Far am I from holding that there is no suffering in the next life. If there is sin there, as I believe there is, suffering is also there—for suffering necessarily attends sinning." With your views of man's free-agency, and of the inability of God to control a free-agent so as to restrain him from sin without violating his essential freedom, it was a logical consequence that you should admit that there might be sin in the future world, and, so far as it appears, *at any period in that world*—since the principle applies to one period there as well as to another: that is, at any period in the future world there may be sin and suffering; or, in other words, it may exist forever.

But in the concession which you have thus made, you have yielded the main point in the difficulty.

(c.) What, then, is the ground of your hope that the "opportunities for information and improvement will be far greater there than here" ?

You refer to no *evidence* or *proof* on the subject.

You do not even suggest *how* it may be done.

You allude to no *Saviour* to interpose and modify the condition of the sinner and the sufferer there.

You adduce no *promise* that there will be such an improved condition of things there.

You have such ideas of *freedom* that there can be no *security* that man will not sin and suffer there, and sin and suffer *forever*.

You have affirmed that God does all that He *can* do to save men here ; that "He has not the *ability* to save any man without the help of that man."

It may be presumed, therefore, that God will have *exhausted* his power of saving before men reach the future world, certainly that He will have no *greater* power to save there than He has here.

You hold, also, that the universe is governed by fixed laws, and that those laws "leave no room for a passionate and *change-ful* God, and no room for the working of miracles," (p. 14;) and, from the nature of the case, those unvarying and unchangeable laws must exist there as well as here, in order to produce harmony, or to prevent disturbance in the general system.

Of the truth of the opinion which you have thus expressed, there is not the slightest hint in the Bible. Indeed, you do not refer to the Bible as making any intimation on the subject, or as laying the foundation of any such hope ; and whether, if the Bible *did* do this, it would have any value in your view, or afford any ground of probability that it will be so, may be better understood from the views which you express in regard to the Bible, to which I shall refer in the next letter.

Such, then, are your dim and shadowy, and I may say, *dark* views in regard to the future world ; such are your hopes that sin and woe will find an end in the universe ; such is the prospect which arises before your mind in reference to the condition of man as he enters on the future state. I ask now, are these

sufficient for a philosopher to rest upon? Are they fitted to dissipate all gloom, and to dispel all anxiety? Are they adapted to answer the questions which we may ask, and to give peace and calmness to one who is soon to enter the dark world?

I have thus examined your solution of the difficulties in the case. In my next and closing letter I shall consider the views of religion which you have expressed as lying at the foundation of your solution of the difficulties referred to, and the question whether your system has greater advantages than my own, or is better fitted to make the mind calm in a world like ours.

I am, with great respect, truly yours,

ALBERT BARNES.

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#### LETTER V.

HON. GERRIT SMITH:

DEAR SIR: In my last two letters to you, I have considered your solution of the difficulties involved in the existence of sin and suffering in the universe. In this my closing letter, I propose to consider the views of religion which you have expressed as lying at the foundation of your explanation of these difficulties, and the question whether your system is better fitted than my own to confer happiness, and to make the mind calm in a world like ours.

I am not at liberty, nor am I disposed, nor am I sufficiently informed as to your views on that subject, to go *outside* of your letter. I know nothing on that point, and if I did, it would not be courteous in an argument like this to refer to those views.

*Within* that limit, however, courtesy requires nothing but a fair interpretation of your language. I shall make use of a proper freedom, not inconsistent with courtesy, in a brief but fair examination of your views of religion, as you have expressed them, as bearing on the subject.

(1.) *Your views of man:*

Man, according to your view, is not only made free—a point on which *we* should not differ—but is so made that he can not, even by moral influence exerted even by his Maker, be restrain-

ed effectually from sin without violating his freedom, and so made that *if* he sins he can not be recovered, even by divine power, except by his own agency: "He (God) has not *the ability* to save any man without the help of that man." "When God made man so great as 'to will and to do' for himself, He made him too great to be saved by the direct and unaided power even of God Himself." (P. 9.)

This essential condition must be the same, from the necessity of the case, in the future world, whether in the world of happiness or the world of woe, for it is, according to your view, the necessary condition of true liberty. There can be, therefore, no certainty of continued, much less of eternal happiness, in the heavenly state, for all such restraint there as to make obedience to the divine will *certain*, would be a violation of freedom; nor can there be any deliverance from the world of woe, into which men may fall by divine power, since—(a.) the divine power in this respect is *exhausted* in the present world; and (b.) man will be "too great" there—greater there than here—to "be saved by the direct and unaided power of God Himself." God has thus, according to this view, made the mistake, or committed the absurdity, of bringing powers and faculties into existence which He can not control; of making a being whom He can not himself restrain or govern; of forming an intelligent and responsible agent, necessarily immortal, who can destroy himself, and make himself forever miserable, *in spite of all that God can do*. Dark prospect, this, for you and me, and for the numberless millions that God has chosen to create upon the earth, and, so far as appears, for the inhabitants of all worlds. One would *prefer* at least *not* to live in such a universe as this—in the unavoidable anarchy where a powerless God attempts to reign over His own creatures, but attempts it in vain.

(2.) *Your views of God:*

I have already, in part, noticed your idea of God, that He does all that He *can* to save men; that His power over them is exhausted in this life; that He has made man "too great" for His control; that, as all this pertains to Him essentially, it must extend to the future world as well as to this; and that, consequently, He would be unable to save men there, since man, "too great" for Him here, must, *a fortiori*, be much more so there;

that is, if the human faculties expand and develop themselves there in any proportion to what is done here.

I have now only to add, that, according to your view of God, He is either absolutely unable, or indisposed, to interfere in any case in the affairs of the universe by an act of intervention that could be properly called a "miracle:" that is, *where His own will and power would be the only antecedent or cause of an event.* The universe, according to your view, is controlled by fixed and unchangeable laws—by laws that are in no case to be interrupted or set aside by the power of God.

This view of God you have expressed in the following language:

"It is entirely unreasonable to expect that our science-enlightened ages shall hold to the theologies constructed in an age of darkness—an age when it was believed that the earth was a plane of only a few hundred miles in circumference, and yet of such paramount importance that the sun, moon, and stars were made but to serve it—and an age, too, when it was believed that God's dealings with His children, instead of being directed by unvarying laws, were but the irregular and fitful impulses, now of His love and now of His hatred, now of His revenge and now of His repentance. How is it possible that Europe and America, having learned that the earth is but a speck in an illimitable universe, and that the unvarying laws which govern both leave no room for a passionate and changeable God, and no room for the working of miracles—how is it possible, I say, that they can much longer continue to have patience with these puerile theologies?" (P. 14.)

From the *power* of God, therefore, there can be no hope for the sinner and the sufferer in the future world, and as you admit that man may sin and suffer there, (page 7,) it follows that, so far as God is concerned, the sinner and the sufferer there must be absolutely helpless. How far does this differ in regard to what is *dark* and *inscrutable* from the common representations, among those who believe in the Bible, of the condition of the wicked in the future world?

But my concern with this statement now is merely as a representation of your view of God as a Being of limited powers; as having, by misfortune or accident, made men "*too great*" for Himself to govern; as being incapable of converting man, if he should go astray, by any power of His own; and as being so bound, fettered, and compelled, by the physical and fixed laws of the universe, that He can not, either in this world or the next, interpose by "miracle," or by the direct operation of His own power, to save

a sinner: a part of the "puerile theologies" with which the world can not "much longer continue to have patience."

If this is a correct view of God, then it will become the duty of the Christian world forthwith to change one article at least of the "Apostles' Creed"—and that the very first article: "I believe in God, the Father ALMIGHTY."

(3.) *Your views of Christ:*

As I have already observed, I am not at liberty, and have no desire to inquire into your views *outside* of your statements in your letter to me. But it must be evident that a man's views on the whole subject of religion, and especially on that subject considered in your letter to me, must be greatly modified by his views of the Saviour.

I do not find in your letter any distinct statement that you regard the salvation of men, either from sin in the present world, or from suffering in the world to come, as in any respect dependent on the work of Christ, or as in any way connected with an atonement for sin. But I am not authorized—as I am not disposed—by this fact to infer that you hold that there *is* no such dependence; but I may be permitted to express my surprise that, if you *do* cherish such a belief, there should have been no allusion to it in a letter on such a subject as the salvation of men, especially since you have made "science" and "wealth" here, and the hope of a more "favorable condition" in the future world, so prominent.

What I *do* find on the subject in your letter is embraced in the following items:

(a.) That Christ did not pretend to know all the future. (P. 9.)

(b.) That the only proof that there is "an eternal hell" is "one word, *said* to have been spoken by Jesus," (p. 9,) implying that *one* word from Him, even if ascertained to have been uttered by Him, would *not* have been sufficient to establish a doctrine. On what ground you have said that He spoke only "*one* word" on the subject you have not informed the world. The New Testament certainly represents Him as having spoken *many* words on that subject; as *very frequently* referring to it; as expressing His views in the most decided and unambiguous language.

(c.) According to your view, we have no certain evidence that Christ spoke even that "*one* word." You refer to it as a word "*said* to have been spoken by Jesus," (p. 9.) You then proceed to remark :

"But how far it is from certain, that He spoke it, and, especially, that He spoke it, intending it to have the meaning given to it in our translation, and by our ecclesiastical standards! Although we have satisfactory evidence that He spoke substantially as the New Testament says He did, we have no right to believe that His speeches were, word for word, as recorded in that book."

According to this representation, we have no evidence that we possess *any* thing that He spoke. It is true that you say that "we have satisfactory evidence that He spoke *substantially* as the New Testament says He did;" yet if there is uncertainty in regard to *this* "one word," it is plain that there may be a like uncertainty in regard to any *other* "word" said to have been spoken by Him; that is, there is an entire *uncertainty* as to what He spoke on *any* subject; or, in other words, His recorded speeches in the New Testament are of no authority whatever, and it would be wrong to found *any* doctrine on what Christ is reported to have said. If I am not to believe this "one word" about hell, why am I to believe His "one word" about heaven? He referred to the former quite as frequently as He did to the latter.

(d.) His religion, according to you, was so simple that it was not necessary to attempt to prove it by miracles. Thus you say :

"In this connection, let me say how infinitely absurd is the doctrine, that a religion so simple and so obviously true as is the Christ religion, needs to be proved by miracles. The theologies are not worth proving; and, therefore, no miracles are called for in their case." (P. 13.)

That is, all His claims to the power of working miracles were false, and all that He did in this respect was to be traced to jugglery or deception. It was in no sense true that He healed the sick, or opened the eyes of the blind, or made the deaf to hear, or raised the dead; and the whole story about Lazarus was a fabrication—an imposture—a delusion. Yet no one that ever lived in our world, if the records about Christ are "*substantially*" true, ever professed or pretended to work so many miracles

as He did; no one, therefore, stands before mankind as so stupendous an impostor.

(e.) It is, according to your view, if I understand you, wholly uncertain what became of Jesus. If the account in the New Testament is even "*substantially*" true, it may be assumed that He was put to death on the cross—although this is not more directly or positively affirmed than it is that He raised Lazarus from the grave. But according to your view, it *is* certain that there can be no proof that He ascended to heaven—though this is more than "*substantially*" affirmed in the New Testament. Thus you say (p. 5):

"But little evidence is necessary to prove that a man has died. That his breathless body went straightway into the sky could hardly be believed on any amount of evidence."

He must, therefore, either have remained in the grave, or, if He rose from the dead, He must have died again at some time, and in some place, and in some manner, not even "*substantially*" recorded. Which of these is the true statement in regard to Him you have not informed us.

(4.) *Your views of the Bible:*

Your views on that subject are very unequivocally expressed in the following language:

"It is, indeed, the best of books—a repository of the sublimest inspirations, principles, and precepts. Nevertheless, it abounds in foolish, false, and exceedingly pernicious things. Its silly, and some of them very revolting stories about the Red Sea, the sun and moon, the whale and Jonah, Lot's wife turning into salt, the control of the skies by Elijah's prayer, God's sending 'lying spirits' into his children, etc., etc., have ever continued to feed to fatness the superstition of Christendom. The Bible's wicked curse upon Canaan has been the prevailing plea with so-called Christians for carrying fire and sword into Africa, and robbing her of tens of millions of her children. Its causeless and cruel wars, charged on God Himself, justify every war and every murder. Its one short line, 'Thou shall not suffer a witch to live,' has cost the hanging and burning of many thousands of innocent women, and not a few innocent men, for the fanciful crime of witchcraft. Its making woman guilty of the first sin, and its charging chiefly upon that sin her pains in child-bearing, have gone far to justify man in stamping her with inferiority and in playing the tyrant over her. Its representing God to be the hater of men, and of some even before they were born, must go far toward making it impossible for those who believe in such a God to have just minds and loving hearts. In its own words, 'And what shall I say more? for the time would fail me to tell of' all the foolish and abominable things in this book, which ecclesiastical author-

ity commands us to gulp down, or, 'without picking and culling,' as one of my good old ministers required. I said the Bible was the best of books. It is such, when it is allowed to be read in freedom and with discrimination. But it is, perhaps, not too much to say that it is the worst of books, when read under authority, and with no liberty to call any of its words in question.

"This belief that every word of the Bible is true—how much evil it has wrought!" (Pp. 10, 11.)

There are several particulars here that deserve special attention. My object in noticing them will not be at all to inquire into the truth or correctness of your representations of the Bible—which is a point not before us now—but to look at the book as, with this view, adapted to help us out of our difficulties in regard to the state of things actually existing in the world: the fact of the introduction of sin and misery, and the probability of the continuance of sin and suffering beyond the grave—as a book adapted to clear up the darkness that rests on the subject, and to make the mind calm. The particular things in the Bible, according to your view of the book, which seem to claim special attention, are the following:

(a.) "It *is* the best of books—a repository of the sublimest inspirations, principles, and precepts."

(b.) "It *abounds* in foolish, false, and *exceedingly pernicious* things."

(c.) It has been the cause of all the wrongs done to Africa: in your estimation, and in mine, not trivial or small.

(d.) It has been the main support and cause of all the persecutions against witchcraft, and of the crimes connected with such persecution.

(e.) It has revealed a "MONSTROUS GOD." Thus you say, (p. 8,) of certain things which occurred among the Hebrew people, "Their enormities grew largely out of their belief in that *vindictive, bloody, and MONSTROUS GOD, who, unhappily, became the God of the Christian nations also.*"

(f.) It prevents men, by its instructions and doctrines, from "having just minds and loving hearts."

(g.) There is nothing certain about it. Thus you say, (p. 9,) of the Saviour, that "it is far from certain that He spoke what is recorded of Him." And again you say: "We have no right to believe that His speeches were, word for word, as recorded in that book."

(h.) The Bible is, according to your view, full of falsehoods. It undoubtedly affirms that Christ, after His resurrection from the dead, ascended to heaven. But you say, (p. 5,) "But little evidence is necessary to prove that a man has died. That his breathless body went straightway into the sky *could hardly be believed on any amount of evidence.*" And thus you say, (p. 14,) that, in the divine administration, under the unvarying laws which govern the universe, there is "*no room for the working of miracles,*" and that the world can not much longer "have patience with the puerile theologies" which teach these things. But the Bible is *full* of miracles. They are its very warp and woof. They enter into its very structure. They are found on almost every page. Yet, according to your view, *all these, from beginning to end, are falsehoods*; the account of the creation of the world, and of man; the account of the deluge, and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the account of miracles in Egypt, and of the deliverance of the Israelites, and of the passing through the Red Sea; the account of the incarnation of the Redeemer, and of His healing the sick, and restoring the blind, the lame, and the deaf; the account of the raising of Lazarus, and of His own resurrection and ascension. No book is so full of marvels and miracles as the Bible. Not Herodotus or Livy; not even the Iliad or the Æneid; not the Inferno of Dante, or the Paradise Lost; and, *therefore*, on your theory, no book is so full of falsehoods as the Bible. Is this, then, the "*best of books*"? Is there, for benighted man, no better guide to a future world; no better, safer instructor than this? Yes: the works of Seneca and Cicero are better, for there are not so many falsehoods in them. The Koran is better, for it does not pretend to record the working of miracles by the prophet. There *are many* books that are *not* full of foolish things; that do *not* sustain the wrongs against Africa; that do *not* reveal a "monstrous" God; that do *not* record "foolish and abominable things;" that do *not* on almost every page record a falsehood. Such a book as the Bible is, according to your view, is wholly unreliable as a history; wholly unworthy of God as a revelation; wholly valueless to man as a traveler to another world; wholly undesirable in its influences on the morals and the happiness of mankind. How this book can be called the "*best of*

books," is a mystery which I shall not attempt to explain. If this is the "*best*" of books, which is the *worst* of books?

Such, then, are your views of man, of God, of Christ, of the Bible. I do not now say that they are *erroneous* views, for that is not the point before us; I only say that they are *your* views. You ask me to exchange my own long-cherished opinions for these, in order that I may obtain light and peace in regard to the dark things on earth which perplex men; in regard to the unsolved mysteries of the future world. It will probably occur to your own mind at this stage of the inquiry, that I shall not be likely to embrace your suggestion. Whether your views will be more satisfactory to other men than they are to me, is not for me to judge.

I have now gone over the main points in your letter, and have finished what I intended to say. I have endeavored to be courteous, but at the same time I have desired to write you such a letter that you would not be likely to write me another. You will, at least, I think, give me credit for not having given you occasion to do this by any designed misrepresentation of your views.

Thus we pass on—you and I toward the end of our journey—an end to either of us not now far distant. You, if I have correctly understood your views, with a belief that man is so made that there can be no security that he will not sin while in this world, or in any future condition; that no power can be properly exerted to prevent his sinning without violating his freedom; that by his being so endowed as thus to sin, and thus to set his Maker at defiance, he shows his real greatness; that he can so sin that his Creator can not recover him except by his own agency, or, in other words, can do nothing to effect this without violating his freedom; and that all this is essential to just views of moral agency, and must exist in the future world as well as in this, and consequently that there can never be a state in which man can be secure from sin, and therefore from suffering. Thus, too, you hold in regard to God, that His power is limited by the human will, He having made man so "*great*" that He can not control him; that He does all that He can to save him from ruining himself, but in vain; that He exhausts His power in this respect in the present life, and that man enters the

eternal world with no hope of help from his Maker ; and that God Himself is so bound and controlled by the fixed and inexorable laws of the universe, that He can not interpose even by a miracle to aid and save man. Thus, too, in regard to Christ, you hold that we have no certain knowledge of what He said at any time ; that even if we were assured that He *had* made an affirmation on any subject, His word would not establish its truth ; and that it is impossible to prove that He ascended to heaven in a bodily form. What *became* of that Saviour, whose existence you do not deny, but assume, you do not say ; what He *did* for man you have not informed us ; what He *taught* we have no means of ascertaining. Thus, also, in regard to the Bible. You profess to consider it as the "best of books," but at the same time describe it as a book of no practical value ; a book that reveals a God that can not possibly be loved, honored, or adored ; a book full of puerilities and trifles ; a book not reliable as a history, and full of falsehoods ; a book in relation to which we have no possible means of determining what is false and what is true ; a book that has been the occasion of numberless crimes, wars, persecutions, and acts of tyranny and oppression in the world ; a book, therefore, wholly worthless and valueless as a guide to another world.

I, on the other hand, cherish the belief that man, though free, may be restrained, converted from sin, and made secure in holiness consistently with his freedom ; that God has the power to convert and save the most hardened offenders, and to sanctify the vilest of the race ; that He rules the universe with infinite wisdom and goodness, though we may not be able now to comprehend the reason of His doings ; that there is an all-sufficient Saviour provided for man, and that, through Him, salvation, on easy and reasonable terms, is sincerely offered to all mankind ; that God has given to man a revelation—not foolish, puerile, unreliable, contradictory, and absurd, but a safe and reliable guide in all that is necessary or desirable for man to know or to believe in order to salvation ; that a sinner *may* be saved, and that *when* saved his salvation will be secure forever and ever.

In the main *facts* in regard to the introduction of sin and woe into our world, we do not—we can not—differ. The facts are

before our eyes, and we can not deny them. In regard also to the existence of sin and woe beyond the grave we do not differ essentially, for you have expressly admitted that they will exist there. For myself I confess that all this is dark. I do not understand it now; I do not hope to be able to understand it in this present life. But I entertain no doubt that it *may* be understood, and that it is consistent with the idea, that God is just, and wise, and good; that He is worthy of universal confidence, adoration, affection, and praise: and such a God, I believe, presides over all. Your system seems to me not only to offer no explanation of these facts, but to involve the whole subject in deeper darkness and gloom—in worse than Egyptian darkness—a darkness which, if you will allow me to quote from a book which you say is full of “puerilities” and “absurdities,” is as “the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.” (Job 10 : 21, 22.)

It is not probable that at my time of life I shall materially change my views in regard to subjects the study of which has constituted my main employment for more than forty years; nor can I suppose that you will materially change yours. We shall probably both of us leave the world cherishing the opinions which we now hold on the most vital points which can occupy the attention of the human mind.

We shall leave to our friends and to the world, so far as the world may feel any interest in knowing what we believed, these two very different systems as the result of the studies, the reflections, the observations, of our somewhat protracted lives. For myself, while living, and as a legacy to my friends when I am dead, I wish some better system than that which you have proposed, and which I have so freely examined; and I desire to leave to the world, so far as the world shall care any thing about what I believed, when I shall pass away from among the living, my deep and unalterable conviction that every sinner under the divine government is in danger; that there is beyond the grave a world of just and eternal retribution; that there will be a judgment of all mankind: but that there is a way of salvation from the wrath to come for all men; that Christ has died as the great atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world;

that the benefits of that sacrifice are freely offered to every man on terms simple, reasonable, and easily complied with ; and that God has given to mankind a revelation, not puerile, trifling, and absurd—not deepening the darkness of our condition—but *full of light, a safe and sufficient guide to another and a better world.*

I am, with great respect, truly yours,

ALBERT BARNES.

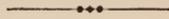
# REJOINDER.



## SECOND LETTER

FROM

GERRIT SMITH TO ALBERT BARNES.



PETERBORO, August 15, 1868.

REV. ALBERT BARNES:

MY DEAR SIR: Had I, when writing my letter to you, foreseen that it would be thoroughly reviewed, and this, too, by a master hand, I should, doubtless, have written it more cautiously. Nevertheless, I do not regret having written it. For whether it stand or fall before your elaborate and searching criticism, it serves the cause of truth by having furnished an occasion for this criticism. Be my letter sound or unsound, it has done good—the great good of bringing out your Reply.

Your Reply has much value: First, because of its argument, which is ingenious, lucid, scholarly; Second, because of its spirit, which is patient, gentle, lovely; Third, because it is a reply to a heretic. It is the wont of Orthodoxy, when approached by heresy, to wrap itself up in its imagined infallibility, and to make either silent or outspoken contempt its only answer. That you, than whom Orthodoxy boasts no nobler advocate, should respect the rights and dignity of manhood even in a heretic, and should consent both to hear and answer him, is an instance of liberality and manliness, of freedom from arrogance and sanctimoniousness, that is truly refreshing, and that can not fail to extend its happy influence far beyond the limits of a single na-

tion. In this you have made Orthodoxy your great debtor by vindicating it from the charge that *every one* upon its roll is necessarily narrow, conceited, and contemptuous. Since, however, you deny that "sin is an infinite evil," and that the stealing of a pin "deserves infinite punishment," I am not entirely sure that you can be properly enrolled among the Orthodox. But I must use no more words before proceeding to criticise your criticism. For I must be so fair to you, as not to occupy more space with both my Letter and Rejoinder than you have occupied. I will take up in their order the five Letters which constitute your Reply.

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### LETTER I.

YOUR objecting to my use of "confessedly," is entirely just. "Obviously," or some other word not involving your assent, would have been the proper one.

I see that, like other theologians, you still puzzle your brain with the problem of the introduction of sin into the world. A problem as purely fanciful as is any other part of the fanciful theology with which it is connected, your intelligence should have discarded, long ago. A striking instance this, how hard it is for even the wisest men to escape from a life-long notion, be it ever so absurd. Nothing can be more groundless than the idea so generally entertained, that sin is a something sent into the world, and sent into it, too, by God—ay, an ingredient or constituent in the world's make up. Sin is simply the refusal or neglect of a man to abide by the laws of his being. As well might it be said that God sent into the world the mistake a man falls into in adding up a column of figures, as that He sent into it the sin of refusing to pay a just debt, or to respect the value of human life. God has made man a free agent, and capable of choosing between right and wrong, between the sin and the no-sin; and to the eye whose vision is still natural, instead of being distorted and deceived by these theological glasses, here is all there is of this famed sending of sin into the world. Blessed be God, that He made man capable of this choice! For had He made him any thing less, He must neces-

sarily have made him a comparatively mean creature and a mere machine.

*You* can not conceive why God should have made man capable of this choice. Pardon my conceit and its boldness, when I say that *I* can. It is only in the exercise of this choice that man can build up for himself that beautiful and sublime character to which he has already attained in part, and which will be increasingly his, as he moves onward and upward through the ages. Do you say that he is not advanced from his beginning? In this you reckon from his fancied state before his fancied Fall. I prefer the more rational and more fact-sustained theory, which makes the original man far inferior to his present successors. I look upon man as still in his infancy, and in the ignorance of infancy. What is more, I *know* him to be still in the bonds of theological superstitions. These bonds have begun to loosen, and he has, therefore, entered upon a more rapid elevation. Wait but a few generations longer, and science will have gotten a firm hold of his hand, and will be leading him up her glorious steeps to planes of life higher than he can now descry, and where his enlightened religion will be as ennobling as his present superstitions are degrading.

I confess my belief that there will be suffering in the next life. He, who ends this life a sinner, will begin the next a sinner. For the death of his body can not change his moral character. Suffering must ever accompany sinning. I can not say but there are persons who will sin forever. If there are, they will suffer forever. Strong, however, as are the inducements in this life to stop sinning, I trust that there will be stronger in the next; and that, in the end, all will become so *truly* enlightened, as no longer to resist, but freely and fully to fall in with, the laws of their being. Then there will be none to remain unhappy.

No, I do not believe it is man's nature to sin. It is his nature not to sin. It is his nature to obey the laws of his nature. It is the perversion of his nature that violates them.

Yes, I believe that God works with man to save him from sinning. He furnishes to man the laws of his being; and man is saved from sinning just so far as he obeys these laws. I do not hold that "the power of God in this respect is exhausted in

the present life." I hope that it extends with undiminished vigor into the next; and I hope, too, (I say *hope*, for I *know* nothing of the future life,) that, as I have already virtually said, man will there be more disposed than he is here to do his part in saving himself from sin.

You are right in saying that I believe God governs "by unvarying and established laws." I see no room for the doctrine of "special providence." Whence, then, says the objector, the fitness of prayer? But he is effectually answered by the inquiry how he knows that prayer is not among these laws, that prayer is not among the "conditions precedent" to the bestowal of some of the Divine blessings.

I do not agree with you, that the popular fear of future punishment is "laid permanently in the human mind," and that God has filled the world with fear and alarm "in regard to the future." This is all the work of superstition and priestcraft. But for this, churches of the present type, whether in Heathendom or Christendom, could not be sustained. Priestcraft keeps up the superstitions. The superstitions keep up the dread; and the dread keeps up the churches. Withdraw from them that "dread of something after death," of which you say Hamlet speaks, and the churches in America, as well as elsewhere, would fall flat. Oh! no, the fear that shrivels up man, and makes him a coward and a liar, is not the gift of God. The children of men have, in all ages, been the subjects of superstitious fears. No wonder! For the gods in their religions are full of wrath. Even the Christian's God is represented as having "vials full of the wrath of God." And no wonder that the peoples are wrathful as well as cowardly. Let them exchange their wrathful Gods for loving ones, and soon would they be loving peoples. Soon would they cease to oppress and make war, and soon would the earth cease to be a hell of hate, and become a heaven of love.

When I say that priestcraft keeps up the superstitions, I do not mean that all priests, or ministers of religion, aim at this. No small share of them scorn priestcraft, and labor to perpetuate the superstitions only because they honestly identify them with the true religion. Nevertheless, it remains true, as a general proposition, that priestcraft working back of the honest priests,

and in ways and with designs of which these honest priests are unconscious and even unsuspecting, set the ecclesiastical wheels in motion, and keep them in motion. And so, also, it is true that when priestcraft shall stop, these wheels will stop.

Oh! no, it is not fear, but love, which is "laid permanently in the human mind;" and the world, when science shall have expelled superstition from it, will be filled, not with fear, but with love. Pulpits there will still be; but they will no longer preach "the terrors of the Lord." They will preach only of His love.

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## LETTER II.

I ENTIRELY agree with you :

First. That sin and suffering are facts.

Second. That they come not of Chance.

Third. That they come not of Fate.

Fourth. That "the supposition that God could not prevent sin" is to be rejected.

Fifth. That the "idea that God resolved to introduce sin and misery . . . simply to show His power . . . and for displays of the divine character" should not be entertained.

Sixth. That, accounting for sin and suffering, "on the supposition that . . . God prefers sin to holiness, evil to good, misery to happiness," is absurd.

Seventh. That no value should attach to the fancy of "two original and independent principles—good and evil—in the universe, struggling with each other."

Eighth. That the doctrine of "Universal Salvation" does not help to explain the existence of sin and suffering.

But, when you hold that "God could create an order of free agents so that they would not sin," I answer that you are right, provided that they shall be under no temptation to sin, under no motive nor influence to depart from the laws of their being. If, however, you mean that He could create them so that they *could* not sin, you are wrong, unless you allow that, in such case, they must be created infinite in knowledge and goodness—in knowledge as well as goodness—since the least ignorance

of a law of our being may lead to its transgression. That such transgression, committed however ignorantly, and therefore with however little criminality, is nevertheless sin, you doubtless believe. "Sin is the transgression of the law." That there are free agents, who do not sin, you believe to be true in the case of the inhabitants of far-distant worlds. But uncertain as is the help, which the Bible affords in any such matters, it certainly affords none in that case; for when the Bible was written the existence of those worlds was not so much as suspected. You, also, argue the compatibility of sinlessness with free agency, by referring to "unfallen angels." I know nothing either of "unfallen angels" or of fallen angels. It is true that both kinds are spoken of in the Bible. But not even the Bible is free from mistakes.

"The theory that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good," does not suit you. Whether it is a true or false theory I do not know, and have no means of knowing. But I do know that, when you add, "What good, if any, could come out of the permission of evil, which could not have been secured in another manner, has never been shown," you, improperly, throw off the burden of proof from your own shoulders to mine. I refer you to the great good there is, and to the much greater good there might be, where men are made capable of sinning. It is for you to show me an instance of still greater good where men are made incapable of sinning. It is not for me to show that there is not, but for you to show that there is, such an instance. It is not for me to prove the negative, but for you to prove the affirmative. Fancies about angels or about dwellers in the stars, you, of course, do not offer as proof.

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### LETTER III.

I PASS over all that part of your Third Letter which precedes your taking up in numerical order what you regard as my positions. I am justified in doing so by my belief that what I have said, and what I shall say, will answer the part passed over.

Your entering upon this numerical order is as follows:

"(1.) The first point which you rely upon is, that man is so made necessarily that he can sin, and that the origin of evil is to be traced wholly to the freedom of man, or to the freedom of the will ; or, in other words, that sin is inseparable from the notion of free agency, and that this constitutes the true nobleness of man, and is a matter for thankfulness and rejoicing."

Pardon me for saying that I do not recognize this to be my position. I do not see that you were authorized to bring in the word "necessarily;" nor that you were authorized to interpret me as holding that "sin is inseparable from the notion of free agency;" nor as holding that such inseparableness "constitutes the true nobleness of man, and is a matter for thankfulness and rejoicing."

Misapprehending my position as you did, it is not strange that you proceed to involve me in so long a detail of glaring absurdities ; not strange that you make me virtually say that the "nobleness" of Adam, Cain, Noah, Lot, Judas, etc., etc., was not in their capacity to do good, but in their capacity to do evil. You go even beyond the scope of my position, as you had unconsciously modified that position, when you add that I proportion a man's "nobleness" to the greatness of his actual sinning, and that I measure "the real greatness and nobleness of man by the greatness of his sin; or by the fact that he does sin greatly."

I wish you had quoted the whole, instead of a part of the paragraph on the sixth page of my Letter. In the light of the whole paragraph I am not as great an admirer of sin as I am in the light of your comments upon a part of it.

All you have said at this point (and this makes up a large part of your third Letter) falls to the ground because of your misapprehension of my position; and, hence, what you have said at this point calls for no reply. Surely, my pleasure in God's having made man capable of choosing between righteousness and wickedness is not the same as my pleasure in his choosing wickedness. Surely, surely, my pleasure in man's being made capable of the commission of very great wickedness, because I argue from it his capability of bringing forth as great goodness, is not all one with my taking pleasure in such commission. The great powers with which a highly gifted man is working vast evil are the same powers, now abused and perverted, which were given him to work vast good with.

I pass on to your version of my next position. You say :

“(2.) Your second principle in explaining the facts to which I referred is, that God saves all that He can, and that, consequently, the fact, that men are lost, if they are lost, is because God *can not* save them.”

You should have added, “against their will,” or, “without their help.”

You refer to Saul, Augustine, and John Newton: and I reply that even they, great sinners as they were, were not saved independently of their own agency. I fully agree with you, that there was no “violation of liberty in the power, which had been put forth by God to turn them to Himself;” and I have never supposed that there was such violation in the case of any man’s turning from evil to good—from sin to holiness. You ask: “How is it known that there are sinners so great that God can not save them?” You, of course, mean without their consent or agency. I answer that I know it from what I witness of the nature of men and of their necessarily being “workers together with God” in all the changes wrought in their moral character.

You ask too: “How do you know that God tries to save all that He can?” I answer that, to speak of nothing else, He is ever trying to save all men through the laws of their being—the operation of these laws being simply but ways in which God works. For instance, He is ever trying to turn the drunkards from their vice, by force of that law of their being which enjoins temperance.

In answer to your reference to heaven, I say that, be they in heaven or on earth, God can not save from sinning those who persist in choosing to sin. Their choosing sin is sin. We are to praise God that, through what He has done for them, there are some on earth, who seldom, if ever, choose to sin: and we are to praise Him for the hope we may cherish that, in the life beyond this, the influences against such an evil choice will be far stronger than they are here. We must not forget that God can, (to say nothing of other ways,) by changing the circumstances of the unrighteous man, and subjecting him to the sway of happier influences, bring him to cease from choosing to sin.

Your next head is as follows :

"(3.) Your third solution is, that death is an advantage—a thing not to be regretted or mourned over, but to be rejoiced in as an arrangement of benevolence."

I admit the cogency of the argument under this head, as well as the beauty and sublimity of the sentiments. I do not know that I can add much to what in my Letter to you I said in defense of the position you here criticise. Before adding any thing, let me step aside to thank you for what you say so beautifully of the numberless worlds of the universe and of their being the successive homes of the righteous.

Science, and fidelity to her teachings, may yet be carried so far as to leave man to suffer very little physical pain. In that day of far greater than our present knowledge of the laws of our nature and of corresponding obedience to them, sickness and premature deaths will be rare, and the body, worn for a hundred or a hundred and fifty years, will sink in a well-nigh painless death. You refer to instances of being "under slow torture, torn by wild beasts, burned at the stake." But you, certainly, do not believe that these sufferings are a part of the divine "arrangement." These, like most of our physical sufferings, result from human violations of the divine arrangement."

What, however, if there shall always be a measure of sufferings on the earth? They may be indispensable contributors to human improvement. The very "Captain of our Salvation" was made "perfect" through them. You would not have been as wise and useful as you are, had you not suffered in your own person, and in your sympathy with the sufferings of others. Samuel J. May, of Syracuse, whose exclusion from her pulpits would be very ludicrous, were it not very wicked, would not have been the eminently wise and lovely servant of God and man that he is, were not the world he lives in a world of "sufferers, death-beds, and grave yards."

Perhaps there may be an endless succession of lives beyond this life, and pain in more than the first of them. In more than the first of them, pain may be not only a contributor to human improvement, but also to human happiness. Far am I from saying that this beneficent office of pain will be needed in every stage of the future. I trust that man is to rise to heights where

neither the suffering of pain, nor sympathy with it, will be needed for his growth in knowledge, goodness, and happiness.

Oh! why should you regard the sufferings of this life as dark and mysterious? If men would but listen to the voice of their nature and live rightly, certainly but a small share of these sufferings would remain. As to this small share, which men could, perhaps, neither prevent nor remove, and for which, therefore, God would himself be responsible, why should you not believe that He has ordained it in wisdom and love, and for the promotion of human welfare?

I notice how repeatedly you affirm that your theological creed has nothing to do with your gloomy and painful views of man's present miseries and of "the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer forever." But, with all deference to your self-knowledge, I must believe it has much to do with them. All unconscious as you are of it, these views are, nevertheless, because of this creed. That "world of woe" is a fancy in your religion of authority, of which you would be quickly relieved were you to exchange that religion of fancies for the fact-religion of reason.

"If but one beam of sober reason play,  
Lo! fancy's fairy frost-work melts away!"

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#### LETTER IV.

CONTINUING to comment on my positions, you begin your argument in this Letter as follows:

"(4.) Your fourth remark in explanation of the difficulties, or in attempting to remove them, is, that the representation that man is a great sinner, and is deserving of infinite punishment, tends to make men hate one another, and to judge men contrary to what God does."

You do me the justice to quote in this connection nearly all my paragraph beginning with the words, "We ought not." This paragraph does not say that there are not great, and even very great, sinners on the earth. It says that "the *exaggeration* of the guilt or criminality of sin," and the preaching of such exaggeration, tend to sink us in each other's esteem; to make us "monsters" in each other's sight; and to render us "coarse and

cruel in our treatment of each other." You take issue with me and cite Jesus, Paul, Father of the Prodigal Son, Brainerd, Newton, Schwartz, and Vanderkempt as instances where men had great hatred of sin and yet loved the sinner. I do not know that any of them exaggerated human wickedness. But, allowing that they are, in some or other points of view, instances to the contrary of my position, nevertheless, a general position such as mine is, is not to be disposed of by arguing against it from a few exceptional cases. You, surely, can not fail to agree with me that men's looking upon one another as hell-bound monsters of wickedness is unfavorable to their esteem of each other, and, as a general proposition, unfavorable to their kind and loving treatment of each other. This is the way that the authority-religions teach men to look upon one another—and to do so not only in the case of enormous, outbreaking sins, but for a simple difference in respect to creed, ay, even in respect to a single dogma. Hence, the exterminating anger of the Jews—sparing from their wholesale murders not even women nor infants—and manufacturing for themselves, and, unhappily, bequeathing to Christians, but too willing to accept the bequest, a wrath-and-blood God. Hence, too, the slaughter of each other by Trinitarians and anti-Trinitarians, and even where there were only the tweedledum and tweedledee differences between the Homooousians and Homoiousians. Hence, too, the Bartholomew Massacre. Hence, too, the Inquisition, with its hundreds of thousands of victims. Hence, too, the burning of Servetus by Calvin, and the approval of it by even the mild Melancthon. Hence, too, the burning of Joan of Kent by Cranmer. Hence, too, the burning of thousands of women for the imaginary sin of witchcraft, and a deep regret that a more tormenting death for such preëminent sinners could not be discovered. This authority-religion! this book-religion! this religion based on history and tradition! alas, how it has cursed mankind in all ages, and all around the world! It claims to be the salt and savor of the world—but is its destroyer. Nothing but the civilization and power outside of this religion—outside of the churches, holds back this religion and its churches from shedding blood to-day, even in England and America. Corner a Roman Catholic, and he will confess that all which Roman Catholicism lacks in

order to compel conformity to herself, is the physical power to compel it. The breaking up of Protestantism into sects might possibly save, but it is all that could save, it from wielding physical force after its ascendancy was complete. When a Protestant informs me that he has burnt my writings against a religion of authority, don't I know that the spirit which prompted him is the very same spirit which, when and where the intolerance, of that religion is unrestrained, would swell into a demand for the burning of myself? Surely, the intolerant and merciless spirit of the Roman Catholic Church—of that church, whose boast is that she changeth not—is not dead. It but sleepeth. Her Inquisition—her delight in the day of her unchecked power—but sleepeth; and nothing short of the progress of science can keep the bloody monster from waking. So, too, with the spirit of Protestantism, which is, as well as that of Roman Catholicism, the spirit of a religion of authority. This Protestant spirit, also, is not dead—it but sleepeth. Only give it the favoring circumstances, and the "time agreeing," which would be given to it, were the wheels of science and civilization to be turned back—and it would be found as capable as ever of generating another Calvin to burn another man, and another Cranmer to burn another woman. A religion of authority, be it Catholic, Protestant, or Mohammedan, inasmuch as it renders its disciples entirely sure that they are entirely right, makes them always intolerant toward dissent, and bloodily so in a dark age and among an uncivilized people. The religion of reason, on the contrary, is tolerant and patient, because men are conscious that reason, mixed up as it is in the human breast with ignorance, prejudice, and passion, is not to be relied on as an entirely infallible guide. Imperfect human reason, sensible that it may misjudge others, is not in haste to condemn and punish them.

Do not think that I forget how charitable to all and how self-sacrificing for all are tens of thousands of the believers in a religion of authority. The question is, not what they, now and here, are—but what would they have been had they not been in such circumstances and under such influences as serve to hold in check an essentially intolerant religion.

I could leave the world more pleasantly, could I first see it delivered from the few crimes and vices against which my life

has earnestly, but quite too feebly, testified. How much more pleasantly, however, could I close my eyes upon it, were I first allowed to witness the overthrow of its authority-religions! These religions will never rid the world of those crimes and vices. The religion of reason, with science for her helper, is to do that work. Alas these religions of authority, which shut out reason! Alas these superstitions, which ignore and defy science! What floods of misery have ever been poured out upon all mankind from these ever-overflowing fountains!

You proceed:

“(5.) Your fifth solution of the difficulty is, that science is doing much to mitigate the evils referred to, and that it may be hoped that it will do much more—particularly that it may be hoped that it will materially prolong human life.”

And so you hope for no good in these respects from science!—and, of course, the friends of science are not to have your help in their endeavor to extend its boundaries and blessings in this direction. How strange that you should believe that your theological creed has nothing to do with the matters in controversy between us! It is this creed which makes you hold that, let science attempt what improvement it may in these matters, it will attempt them in vain. Nay, so tight does this creed shut you up to a Book, as to make you believe that science can not change the limits of human life as they are given in that Book. If consistent, you can hardly believe that, should the people of a state observe, for a hundred successive centuries, the laws of life and health, their years would be more, or their health better, than if they should neglect such observance.

You pronounce my expectation of good to the human family from science to be a “gratuitous supposition”! And yet you speak of “the *fact* that Methuselah lived nearly a thousand years”! You see no basis of *fact* for my expectation; but the extravagant fancy about the age of this antediluvian, of whose *existence* even there is no proof, you do not hesitate to call a “*fact*.”

Paul was one of the learned and excellent men in his day. You are one of them in ours. Another resemblance between you is, that you both allow yourselves to be bound hand and foot by certain traditions. Of course, he would have repelled the at-

tempts of science to reduce the pains of maternity, because, in his judgment, such attempts would be derogatory to the divine decree, that these pains are the penalty for being "in the transgression." It is at the expense of your consistency, if you do not stand by his side at this point. So, too, consistency forbids your sympathizing with the endeavors of Harvey, Jenner, the Temperance Reformers, the Dietetists, and many others to lengthen the life of man—a Book having, in advance and for all time, determined its limits.

You next say :

"(6.) Your sixth statement is, that the grand remedy for the evils in the world is wealth."

I was unfortunate in using the word "wealth," since you suppose me to mean by it the riches of a rich man—the accumulation of much property in the hands of an individual. I am confident that, when writing the part of my Letter, which you here criticise, I never thought of a rich man. I no more used "wealth" in the sense of large possessions of an individual, than did the author of the "*Wealth of Nations*," when putting this word in the title of his book. I referred to the general wealth of a people, of a nation, of the world. I referred to the masses, and to the importance of there being more property in the hands of the "toiling poor," that, thereby, they might not need to toil so much; might have a large supply of material comforts, and greater advantages for enlightening their ignorance and escaping from their peace-destroying and shrivelling superstitions.

You refer to the fall of the Roman empire. I can not think that it was hastened by the great amount of its collective wealth, but rather by individual accumulations and the impoverishment of the masses. I am aware that philosophers have been wont to regard national poverty as more favorable than national riches to the virtue and welfare of the people; the laws of Lycurgus against the circulation of the precious metals as more favorable to it than laws to the contrary. But an entirely opposite view is now coming to obtain. If a rich man is an evil, so is a poor one. Emphatically true is the Bible when it says: "The destruction of the poor is their poverty."

Would that the prayer of Agur for "neither riches nor poverty" were upon all lips!

Seldom do I look at a magnificent church or cathedral without thinking that the cost of them (hundreds of thousands in the one case, and, perhaps, even millions in the other) was wrung from the toiling poor—and that their sad return for what they could so ill spare from their penury was but to be sunk deeper in poverty and superstition, and to be more enslaved to the priesthood.

You close your fourth letter with stating and commenting on what you call my "seventh mode."

You say:

"(7.) Your seventh mode of meeting the difficulty is, that it may be hoped and expected that men will be in a more favorable condition in the future world than they are here, and that although the wicked may suffer there, yet there will be a better system of probation, so that all evil may come to an end."

I do not see that, after what I have said in my Letter and thus far in my Rejoinder, bearing on this point, I need add any thing. I confess that you are right in saying to me: "You refer to no evidence or proof on the subject." I have none to refer to. I am as lame in this respect as you and all other men are. I know of no man who has, or ever had, "evidence or proof on the subject." My supposition is, that our Heavenly Father would not have us occupied, while here, with this "subject." He knows that our earthly interests press their claims upon every moment of our brief earthly existence; and, moreover, that, in a constant and hearty response to these claims, we are making our best preparation for another and a higher life. If, by means of a broken back or some other calamity, a man is forever laid aside from his earthly work, let him console himself and cheer his weary hours with sweet and sustaining thoughts of the heaven he longs to enter. But the man who is still competent to the tasks of this life—let him be absorbed in them, though ever aiming in them to glorify God and benefit and bless mankind.

## LETTER V.

You begin your argument in this Letter by examining, first, my "views of man;" second, "my views of God."

Pardon me for saying, that you attempt to make quite too much out of my words respecting the coöperation of the man with God in the work of turning him from his sins. I think that I have already shown your extravagance at this point. I was not aware that I am singular in holding to the necessity of such coöperation. Indeed, I supposed that Christians generally hold to it. It is true that, in my view of man, he can not be saved from sinning until he is first made willing to be saved from it. But, surely, there are innumerable ways, without suspending the laws of nature, and working miracles, and without reducing man to a machine, in which God can make him willing. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." All that you say about God's power being "exhausted," according to my theory, and about His ceasing to be "The Father Almighty," I can not forbear to regard as unauthorized by that theory.

You are right. I do not believe in miracles and in occasional interruptions by God of what you call "fixed laws." You do. You believe that the constitution which He made for the world did not provide for every possible occurrence and exigency in it. On the contrary, I believe that it was made with that infinite and all-comprehensive foresight from which nothing, however distant or however small, can be hid; that no part of it can ever need to be blocked, modified, or suspended, but that every part of it is steadily, unchangeably, eternally operative. You think that I limit God's power. I think that I magnify it by acknowledging the immutableness and sufficiency of His laws, and that He is dishonored, instead of honored, by the theory of eking out His laws with miracles. Is it not rather you who limit God's power by your fancy that there are particular cases for which His laws do not provide, and for the relief of which miracles need to be performed?

In the third place, you take up my "views of Christ." Be assured, my dear sir, that I appreciate the delicacy with which you deal with me at this point. But so accustomed am I to

express my convictions at whatever expense to my reputation, that, hated as are my "views of Christ," I do not shrink from stating them, when, as now, there is an occasion which requires me to state them.

It is as you apprehend—I do not believe in the Atonement. The reputed bargain between God and Jesus concerning the Atonement to be made by the one, and the recompense to be made by the other, is, I am aware, the most cherished and comforting belief of millions of hearts. Nevertheless, as there is no proof of this bargain, which can, for even one moment, stand the test of the laws of evidence; and, moreover, as the Atonement finds nothing in nature analogous to itself, and nothing in our sense of natural justice to countenance it, or, indeed, that does not abhor it, so I am compelled to disbelieve that there was such a bargain, and to let the Atonement drop. An interesting and widely credited story is that of the garden of Eden. To many this wondrous garden is an entirely certain and a very precious fact. To me, as there is no proof of its being a fact, it is only a groundless fancy. The speaking of Baalam's ass would be a very interesting fact in natural history, were it really a fact.

That many of the earliest Christians should, by force of their Jewish education, be prepared to welcome this doctrine of an Atonement by Jesus, is but what might be expected. Their faith in an atoning animal sacrifice opened the way for their faith in an atoning human sacrifice. For instance, how entirely natural for John, a Jew, to say of Jesus: "Behold"—not the literal lamb, which taketh away the sin of a few, but—"Behold the *lamb of God*, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Infinitely sad is it that this Jewish fancy respecting animal sacrifices should have been allowed to fasten upon the Christian world this pernicious doctrine of an Atonement by Jesus. I call it a Jewish fancy—for it was made none the less such by the fact that the Jews were deluded into the belief that God ordained those sacrifices. By the way, it is quite probable that not a few of the most enlightened Jews believed that with sacrifices, so full of cruelty to the victims, and which, moreover, robbed the mouths of the poor, God had nothing to do but loathe them. A part even of the Epistle to the Hebrews (10: 6)

represents God to be displeased with such sacrifices; and Jeremiah has it (7 : 21, 22) that they are neither Heaven-appointed nor Heaven-approved. I spoke of the Christian doctrine of Atonement as pernicious. Such must every doctrine be, which induces a reliance for the Divine acceptance on the character of another, instead of on our own character. The character of no other, not even of Jesus, can help us, in any degree or in any wise, except as the study of it serves to improve our own. The precious men, who are, perhaps, made better by their trust in an atoning sacrifice, though they may be quite numerous, constitute, nevertheless, but an exception. The mass, who depend upon such a sacrifice, do so at the cost of relaxing their morality and lowering their character.

I need not say that you see I do not believe Jesus to be God. I believe him to be simply a man—nevertheless, a man “filled with all the fullness of God.” I believe that all men should live “looking unto Jesus”—looking unto him as their greatest teacher, their greatest example, and their greatest saviour. Taking him out of the category of men and deifying him, is not to help, but to harm mankind. In only a limited sense can God be an example to men; but Jesus, being simply a man, teaches us the high moral and spiritual possibilities of our own manhood, and thereby encourages us to cultivate a morality after the pattern of his own, which is the wisest, purest, sublimest ever taught on earth; and which, also, encourages our endeavors to live a life after the pattern of his, the loveliest life ever lived among men. The deification of Jesus, although so unreasonable, is, after all, not strange. It was common in ancient times to trace back the parentage of remarkable men to gods and goddesses. Then, to the Jews as well as to people of other religions, God was essentially a man. And why, if they made God to be a man, could they not as well make a man to be God? The transmutation one way is as easy as it is the other. Had the histories of Jesus been written in his day, or immediately after his death, the world would, probably, have been saved from the delusion of his deityship. For who in his day believed him to be God? Not even his disciples.

A long, long time, however, will it probably be before Jesus, relieved of the fancies and fictions in which superstition and

craft have dressed him, will stand before all men as simply their brother, and in no wise their God. For by far the greater share of his disciples his Atonement is made the central doctrine of Christianity, and were his deityship surrendered, that doctrine would necessarily fall.

I proceed to your next criticism. You were right in inferring that I am not certain that Jesus said any thing in the precise words in which the histories of him state that he said it. Even the proofs that he lived can hardly be called perfect and conclusive. That he lived, and lived and died for the whole world, and was the noblest sacrifice ever offered upon the altar of humanity, I have no doubt. But the laws of evidence require me to doubt whether pages written, no one knows when, nor where, nor by whom, and abounding in declarations extravagant and unnatural, contain, in any instance, the exact utterance of Jesus. I have no right to believe that the words ascribed by ancient historians to any man are the very words the man used. And why should I believe that the words of Jesus, not written until after they had floated for many years in uncertain and disagreeing memories, were, at last, written, word for word, just as they were spoken? Of course, you would not yourself believe it, did you not assume that it was by miracles that all change and error in the case were prevented. But you are a logician, and you, therefore, know that it is for you to prove, and not for me to disprove, that there were such miracles. You orthodox men require more in these matters from us unorthodox men than is reasonable. You ought to be content with our admission that the New Testament report of the words and conduct of Jesus is, in the main, substantially correct. We could not admit so much as this in all cases, particularly in the account of his treatment of the fig-tree and of the swine, and in the account of his anger in the temple.

You are right, too, in inferring that I hold that "his recorded speeches in the New Testament are of no authority whatever." Nothing in the whole realm of morality is authority with me but what I do myself see or feel to be truth. I believe in the Sermon on the Mount, but not at all because it came from the lips of Jesus. I so readily believe in it, because it is so obvi-

ously true. Truth so certain and truth so precious, at once, carry away captive both my understanding and my heart.

You close your remarks under the head of "my views of Christ," with the virtual inquiry whether I believe he performed miracles. I have already, in answer to what you elsewhere say of miracles, declared my disbelief of them. I as well disbelieve that Jesus, as that any other person, ever performed a miracle. Reason teaches, and science confirms it, that all nature is under unchangeable laws, and that, hence, there was no room for a miracle, even at the hands of Jesus. Jesus had no power to perform a miracle; God Himself has not, for He has no power to go against His own laws—in other words, to go against Himself. No security have His children, save in the certainty of His laws. He requires them to abide in His laws as their only safety. How unreasonable, then, to suppose that He can be guilty of the perfidy of introducing uncertainty into these laws! Because men have told of Jesus' miracles, you would have men believe them. But there is no right to believe any thing upon the simple testimony of human lips. Such testimony must be rejected, unless nature and reason concur with it.

But even if Jesus had possessed the power of working miracles, what occasion had he to exercise it? The supposable answer to this question is—That he might thereby prove the truth of his religion. But this religion is so simple as to need no proof. Jesus tells us that even "babes" can understand it. The Christ-religion has but one rule; and this rule, "Do as you would be done by," is so simple, that all can understand it, and so reasonable, that all can see its reasonableness. It is the priests, who created in the popular mind the sense of the necessity of miracles to prove that religion. They succeeded in doing this by putting in the place of the plain, matter-of-fact Christ-religion a large bundle of marvellous superstitions and unfathomable mysteries.

You suppose that I look upon Jesus as guilty of deception and jugglery. I do not. I do not believe, with Renan, that Jesus entered into a collusion with Lazarus. I do not believe that he, whom I regard as the very personification of truth and candor and dignity, ever attempted a miracle.

You think that, in my mind, it is "wholly uncertain what became of Jesus." I am not at all uncertain as to what became of his body. I believe that, like every other man's dead body, it returned to dust. I trust that in him and in every other man there is a life, which lives forever. Between God's character, as revealed in nature, and man's character, there are not a few points of resemblance—not a few proofs that man is made in the Divine image, and that somewhat of God Himself is incarnated in man. Herein is one of my grounds for hoping that not only the human race, but the individual man also, is immortal. But do not infer, from what I have here said, that I regard a religion and a life as worthless, which do not promise immortality to the individual. Each of us should so love Humanity, should be living so emphatically for others, or, as Comte would say, "*pour autrui*," as to be able to rejoice in the thought that the living-forever of the race infinitely overbalances the perishing of the individual. Rejoice, too, may the individual, in the thought that he can not wholly die. "*Non omnis moriar*." He shall live forever in his race. Moreover, aside from this consideration of his continuing to live in his race, the individual has abundant reason to be thankful for his existence on the earth, and for the advantages it has afforded him for blessing himself, for blessing his fellows, and for honoring his Maker.

I am aware it is deeply and widely feared that the tendency of the progress of science, which insists on fact-proof for whatever it accepts, is to efface from the minds of men the doctrine of their immortality. But it may be that, in some way or by some means, science will yet prove the truth of the doctrine. Spiritualism, which claims, and not without reason, to be a science, is accumulating facts which, it trusts, will make it irresistibly evident that there is another life.

You will ask me why, if Jesus performed no miracles, the New Testament should ascribe so many to him? I answer, that the books of every people, who believe in miracles, tell of miracles; and that the books of those, who do not believe in them, do not tell of them. Such wares are taken to the market as the market calls for. The Gospels would have been dry and dull reading to those for whom they were written, had they not

been interlarded and enlivened with miracles. I do not say that the writers of the Gospels fabricated any of the miracles, or doubted the truth of any which they adopted. Roman Catholics, believing that miracles do still occur, are, ever and anon, startling the public ear with fresh ones. Protestants, on the other hand, believing that no miracles have been performed during the last eighteen hundred years, have no new miracles to tell of.

Again, it is not as strange that the New Testament is stuffed with miracles as it is that, if these miracles did occur, other histories of that day, especially that of Josephus, should say nothing of them. Had Lazarus really been raised from the dead, the world would have rung with the wonder. The story of this resurrection may possibly have been started before the death of Jesus; but it was quite too absurd to travel far until all, or nearly all, the witnesses for disproving it had passed away. It can be widely believed now, when there are none who had personal knowledge of its falseness; but every enlightened man, in the day and locality of the alleged miracle, would have been ready to contradict it.

I have often thought that, if there can be miracles, it were far better to have them performed for the purpose of teaching us how to cure physical than how to cure moral diseases. We need much light in regard to the former, but very little in regard to the latter. If I am a liar, or a drunkard, or a thief, I know the remedy. It is to stop lying, to stop drinking alcohol, and to stop stealing. So, too, do I know the remedy if I am a selfish, and thus, an irreligious man. I am to be benevolent and religious, by doing as I would be done by—a sublimity of justice, by the way, of which I can not be capable without loving Him, who has made me capable of it. But, if the cholera or yellow fever come upon me, I know not what to do. Then, if ever, I need miraculous enlightenment.

You next take up my views of the Bible. In the main, you represent them correctly. Sometimes, however, you partly fail to arrive at my meaning. For instance, I do not charge the Bible with being the occasion of all the wrongs done to Africa. (By the way, I have never called the Bible a Pro-Slavery Book. It abounds in emphatic testimonies against op-

pression.) Nor would I say that it absolutely "prevents men, by its instructions and doctrines, from having just minds and loving hearts;" and very far am I from saying that "there is nothing certain about it." Its great principles and precepts are, certainly, right. It is rich in sentiments, which are certainly the most precious, that ever made their thrilling, melting mighty appeals to the human heart.

You wonder that, finding so much fault as I do with the Bible, I can, nevertheless, call it "the best of books." I would call it that, even if it contained nothing of value but its sketch of the wisest, grandest, loveliest man that ever walked the earth. But it elsewhere, also, contains instruction more valuable than is to be found in any other book. Your wondering that I regard a part of the Bible as good and a part as bad, comes from your holding it to be but one book. Perhaps, no man ever did so much harm to Christendom as did he, who gave the name of "The Bible"—"The Book"—to this collection of Jewish writings, which are the product not only of many minds, but of many ages. You are certain, as well you may be, that a large part of it is good, very good. Then, from your belief of its oneness, comes your belief that it is *all* good, very good, and that, in some way or other—by some or other solution of the mysterious problem—even that part of it, which makes God command the wholesale murder of women and children, and that part of it, which tells of his putting one man's numerous wives into another man's bosom, are also good, very good. You, of course, admit that it was at least a score or two of men who wrote the different parts of the Bible; and that some of them lived in one age of the world and some in another. Nevertheless, you accept the unity of the Book, because you accept the doctrine of the common inspiration of its writers. In your view, one and the same Spirit controlled them all; and thus, in the most important sense, made of them all one man. I, too, believe in inspiration; in Truth's inspiration. But, in my view, every man, of whatever land or times, is inspired in proportion to the goodness of his heart, to the nearness of his life to the Great Fountain of Truth—and in proportion, also, to the scope of his intellect. I love, too, to believe that the doctrine of "Divine Influences" is true; that they pervade the whole universe;

and that all, who will open their hearts to them, will be blessed with them. But I do not *know* that the doctrine is true. Nor do I *know* that even the doctrine of "Divine Providence" is true. It, sometimes, occurs to me that, possibly, it may not be; and that God, having given His children their grand nature, has left them to use it and all other of nature connected with it, just as they will. I can imagine His telling them that, in their high faculties and the abundant materials for those faculties to work upon, He has given them enough to enable them to make a heaven, both within and around themselves; and that it is most for their happiness and for His own honor that, in this life, He should help them no further. But, on the supposition that this doctrine of "Divine Providence," as generally understood, is not true, is there, in all this life, to be no answer to prayer?—no such help from God? In my remarks on your First Letter, I raised the question whether prayer and its answer are not among the everlasting and immutable laws. I will not so much as suppose, however faintly, such an exclusion of "Divine Providence." as shall exclude prayer.

No more need be said in answer to the specifications in your Fifth Letter: and I have said as much of the Bible as need be said of it in connection with those specifications. I may say more of it hereafter.

I have now reached the last of the nearly sixteen newspaper columns through which your Reply extends. I have read, and re-read, this final column. Its eloquence, beauty, gentleness, tenderness, and solemnity, all impress me; and, I trust, that they may serve to bring me to more self-examination and to a more enlightened and faithful inquiry whether in these important matters which divide us, I am right or wrong.

I see no evidence in this close of your Reply, that you cling less tenaciously to the position, that your great unhappiness springs, in no wise and in no degree, from your creed. Nevertheless, that it does spring from your interpretation of the Bible is manifest. For whence, but from that interpretation, do you learn of "the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer forever"? And, clearly, your belief in that world is the great element in your great unhappiness. Then, the arguments, which you pile

up against my counter creed—are they not, also, mainly drawn from this interpretation? Beyond all doubt, it is, chiefly because your creed accepts the absolute authority of the Bible, that you have no faith in my creed. I scarcely need add that your creed comes from this interpretation. But so surely as it does, so surely am I right in charging your “anguish of spirit” upon your creed. How, then, can it be otherwise than that your unhappiness comes from your creed?

It was to have you get rid of your great unhappiness, that I argued in my Letter, to which you have replied, the duty of your giving up the Bible as the basis of your religion. Can it be possible that our Heavenly Father drives us to the necessity of building our religion on a mass of old traditions and old histories? I admit that, with all their errors, they serve valuable purposes. But, to regard them as fit to be the foundation of our religion—to depend upon them as certainly and entirely true in a matter where certain and entire truth is of vital need—this all should see to be ruinously unwise. All intelligent persons are sensible of the great uncertainty of history. “History is a lie” is one of the world-wide proverbs. Said Sir Robert Walpole: “Do not read history to me, for that I *know* must be false.”

How very slender are the external evidences of the truth of the Bible! The internal evidences of the truth of much of it are, indeed, strong; but they are not stronger than are the internal evidences of the falseness of portions of it. If it abounds in what is self-evidently true, so also it is not lacking in what is self-evidently false. What more palpably absurd than are many of its absurdities? What more flatly contradicts both physical and moral nature, than many of its statements? It is said that we must believe the Bible to be all true and all of God, because of the fulfilment of its prophecies. But if such fulfilment verifies and honors parts of it, it does not follow that it has such effect upon the remainder of this book, which is, in fact, many books, the character of each of which is entirely independent of the character of most of the others. What certainty, however, have we that the prophecies were not written, or, in some respects modified, after the events? And what certainty have we that the events are rightly interpreted to be

the fulfilment of the prophecies? As we have never seen that this foretelling gift belongs to the human constitution, but have ever seen the reverse, we should be very slow to believe that any man ever possessed it. Predictions, fulfilled only one time in a hundred, or only one time in a thousand, nevertheless pass with some marvel-loving and credulous ones for proof of the possession of this foretelling gift. But for persons of the stamp of the "Millerites" and "Fifth Monarchy Men," little stress would have been laid upon these Bible prophecies. Such persons, limiting, as they do, the earthly existence of the human race to a few thousand years, very naturally pore upon these prophecies, and cluster upon a comparatively short period all, or nearly all, the fulfilling events. Dark days, falling stars, wars and wonders, are among these events. Not a few prying minds found fulfilment of Bible prophecies in our late war. They, however, who believe in the eternity of this earthly existence, would naturally believe that events which are to prove the truth of the Bible would be running all through that eternity.

Another and influential reason, which is assigned for our believing that the Bible is all of God, and is, therefore, all true, is our need of a book-revelation, in order that we may learn the true religion. But how much more reasonable is it for us to believe, and especially as we possess no evidence that we have such a revelation, that God has made us capable of discovering, without such help, the true religion—that, in a word, we need no other revelation than that which He has made in His Creation. No more in this than in other things has God given us a "royal road" to learning. He has not informed us, to the extent that we need to be informed, about Himself and ourselves, and thus superseded the necessity of our investigation and study. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honor of kings is to search out a matter." He has preferred to give us a being, in the exercise of whose great powers and faculties we can learn all we need to know in this life of our relations to Him and to each other, and of the duties growing out of these relations. How much nobler we may well suppose men can become, if left by their Creator to learn for themselves the true religion, its duties and applications, than they could possibly become if He had Himself unfolded all this knowledge

to their lazy, in that case emphatically lazy, minds! Would that the theologians believed this! Say you that they *do* study out their religion and its requirements? I answer that the vast majority of them study gross superstitions and groundless traditions, and make these their stock in trade. How happy when science shall have swept Christendom of these superstitions and traditions, and shall thus have prepared the way for the study of religion, not in the fancies of men, but in the works of God!

And another and influential reason, which is given, why it is our duty to believe that the Bible is all divine, and, hence, all perfect, is that all nations and peoples have similar beliefs in regard to the traditional facts respecting the Creation, Deluge, Earth, Heaven. But, allowing this to be so, and that astronomy and geology have not turned these facts into fancies—nevertheless, their far more numerous *dissimilar* beliefs regarding these fancy-facts do much more than balance the argument derived from those similar beliefs. Again, it is not strange that there should be those few similar beliefs, since, from the intercourse with each other of these peoples and nations, their creeds would be mutually modified, and would grow in resemblance to each other.

The great thing to be first done for Christendom is to teach her what is the Bible; how she came by this compilation; and how absurd it is to make it the authority, or even any authority. This being done, she will know that to believe every word in that book is not the way to honor, but the most effective way to dishonor God. The Bible stands between God and His worshiping children. It must be taken out of the way, for it shockingly misrepresents Him, and squarely gives the lie to what is taught of Him in unerring nature—in books written by His own finger. In these books of nature He is seen to be a loving Father—but in parts of the Bible He is seen to be a malignant and raging hater of His children.

When science shall have civilized Christendom, will the Bible have lost its place? No, it will then have found it—for it will then stand modestly and fairly upon its merits, and not, as now, arrogantly and impudently upon its authority. Like other books, it will then be read with the unlimited right of dis-

crimination. And let me, just here, venture the opinion that to postpone this right much longer, in the face of progressive science, will be to risk bringing the Bible into deep disfavor, and provoking, it may be, the rejection of the whole book. It has already become a very heavy tax upon the patience of an enlightened man, who has not swallowed the whole Bible, to see the priesthood requiring those parts of it, which are, some very foolish, some very absurd, and some very wicked, to be received as unqualifiedly and heartily as those parts, which abound in the highest wisdom, and in unequalled lessons of goodness. Such a man has no sympathy with the wretched policy of degrading the Sermon on the Mount into moral oneness with commands to prosecute the meanest, most merciless, and murderous wars; and no sympathy with the wretched policy of reducing the Bible law of entire purity to a level with the Bible license for concubinage. That this jumble should be called one book, and all its silly and disgusting parts should be held to be equally obligatory and authoritative with all its wise and precious ones, is, really, a gross insult to common sense, and a flagrant violation, not only of propriety, but of decency.

And when the authority of the Bible shall be given up, will the God of the Bible be also given up? Undoubtedly. They, who get their conceptions of God from all that is said of Him in the Bible, and they, who do not, have very different Gods. Mixed up in the Bible with the truest and highest views of God, are the falsest and lowest views of Him. It presents Him as being both infinite in power and limited in power; as both wise and foolish; both good and wicked; changeable and unchangeable; superhuman at one time, and of human infirmities at another.

And when the God of the Bible shall be given up, will Christendom go on without a God? So far from it, she will then, for the first time, be in circumstances to advance freely and rapidly in the knowledge of the true God. Now, she is held back by her faith in the grotesque God of the Bible. Then, freed from that false faith, she will study the true God in His works far more than in traditions; in His own Bibles far more than in man's; in the certainties of nature, rather than in the records of miracles and the tales of superstition. Quite mani-

festly, as we substantially said a little way back, it is His purpose that His children shall seek Him—"shall feel after Him and find Him." He could, it is true, have saved them this labor and delay, by more abundant and immediate revelations of Himself to them. But He has left them to learn of Him by study; and, in this wise, has He left them to learn whatever it is very important for them to learn. The necessity of study in such a case is one of the laws of their being.

I do not mean that every student of Nature aims to study God. A man may have learned much of Nature—much, for instance, of astronomy and geology, and yet have expended very little thought on "Nature's God." But his learning has helped him to a larger knowledge of the laws of evidence; has helped him to clear his path of the rubbish of ignorance and superstition; and has helped him to a fuller supply of the facts, which illustrate the wisdom, power, and goodness of God. Now, he is better prepared for the intelligent study of God—though he may still lack the heart for *any* study of Him. A man may have much science and but little sense of God. On the other hand, if scarcely a ray of science has reached him, he may, nevertheless, have a deep and sweet sense of God, largely mingled, however, as is most probable, with false and superstitious views of Him. As we can not begin to build the firmly-founded house until the rock is cleared of its superincumbent earth, so also is there a preliminary work to be done, when we would build up a religion which shall be rational, and not merely emotional; permanent, instead of evanescent. This preliminary work is the scattering by science of those fancies and fictions which ignorance and superstition work into spurious religions, and are also able to mix with the true religion. Vast numbers under the ministry of that dear Schwartz, to whom you refer, gave their hearts to God—but, by reason of their ignorance (enforced by oppression) almost all traces of his surprisingly successful labors had disappeared, in a generation or two.

If I recollect, Mr. Wasson, who, a few years, ago visited some parts of Greenland, came to the conclusion that the people of so rigorous a climate are too shrunken in intellect to grasp, and be established in, the true religion.

Since I reject the Bible as the basis of religion, you will in-

quire what I hold to be its basis. I answer that Nature, and Nature only, is. You build your religion on the Bible. I would build mine on Nature; and avail myself of every help, and especially of the Bible, in building it. You make the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, your authority. Nature only would I have to be mine. Ably and faithfully have you testified against slavery. But should you come to interpret so much as one line of the Bible to be for slavery—I do not say that you would, then, stand forth for slavery—but I do say that if you did not, you would be utterly inconsistent. It is possible that I, too, may yet be for slavery—but it will not be until I see Nature to be for it.

Alas! that you should be of the great number, who call the Bible—that mixture of good and evil—“God’s word.” Brought up, as I was, to believe in the whole Bible, I, too, until middle-life, often called it by that name. But I, now, see that I sinned in doing so—ay, that I insulted God in doing so. I, too, helped inculcate the Bible as an authority. But, now, I see that I sinned in telling my fellow-men that they are bound by the bad as well as by the good parts of it—the false as well as by the true.

My very simple theory of religion (and I must think that it is as just and sufficient as it is simple) is to treat all beings, whether God, man, or brute, in the way, not that a man-made and fallible book calls for, but that unerring Nature calls for. To illustrate this theory—I see you to be my fellow-man, and to have, therefore, essential rights and interests like my own. It follows that I am to be as regardful of these rights and interests as of my own—of you as of myself. All this is, of course, to be reciprocated by you. And then how plain it is that both of us in the light of the high being, which our Common Father has given us, and in grateful return for it, are to love Him supremely! Here, in these few lines, you have my theory of religion. It is the theory of the natural religion. Yours is the theory of a conventional religion. You believe that Jesus taught a conventional religion. I believe he taught the natural one. His injunction to love and bless our enemies he drew straight from Nature—from the fact that heat and light are given to both the evil and the good, and rain to both the just and the unjust. He, virtually, teaches that such

impartial and generous goodness on our part, as we see in Nature, will make us to be the children of our Father in heaven: nay, that it will not only make us to resemble Him, but to be perfect even as He is perfect. So, too, does he draw straight from Nature the reason for his injunction not to be anxious concerning the supplies of our wants. He instances the ravens, who, though "they neither sow nor reap, neither have storehouse nor barn," are, nevertheless, fed; and, as a proof that we need not be anxious about our clothing, he reminds us that the lilies, though they "toil not and spin not," are, nevertheless, more splendidly arrayed than was "Solomon in all his glory."

I said that Jesus taught the natural religion. He was pre-eminently a child of Nature. How familiar he was with her is proved by the frequent and beautiful illustrations he drew from her. Renan, although so wrongful to Jesus in some respects, does justice to him in describing his love of Nature and the natural simplicity and beauty of his character. Peculiarly and surpassingly fit expositor of the religion of Nature was Jesus! And where else could have been found a so peculiarly and surpassingly unfit expositor of a conventional and unnatural religion?

How sure is the basis of the religion of Nature! How unsure is the basis of every other religion! Trueness to the laws of our being—trueness to all Nature—this, and this only, is the one rational religion. How greatly the popular Christianity mistakes itself! Its exclusive and conceited spirit looks down contemptuously upon all other religions, and never suspects how much it resembles the most of them. This popular Christianity is not, as is believed by its disciples, an altogether peculiar tributary to the broad stream of religious history. Its waters are not so unlike those into which it flows. It is not a new thing. It is but a continuation of the past. There are, indeed, a few respects in which it is an improvement upon the past. 1st. Its mythological part is not so large nor extravagant as was that of the religions which preceded it. 2d. Its principles and precepts are far superior to theirs. 3d. Its great Incarnation (Jesus) is, incomparably, more attractive than such Incarnations as Krishna and Vishnu, and the Incarnations of other religions.

You think that you and I are too old to undergo much change

in our religion. You are mistaken. I desire, and expect, to keep on changing in mine—and I am somewhat older than you. It is not because of your age, but because you have, unhappily, shut yourself up to a religion of authority, that it is not probable you will change. It is only within the limits of this religion that you allow you reason to play. On the other hand, my religion has no sacred nor frowning boundaries, which stop my reason, and forbid it to cross into other and unexplored fields.

Your part in this Correspondence will be approved by the vast majority of its readers, and mine will only afford them fresh reason for denouncing me as an "Infidel." Nevertheless, I feel that a no-very-distant posterity will forsake your side, and come to mine. The battle between science and superstition has now fairly begun—and superstition is constantly losing ground. The disappearance of the great religions, which are, also, the great superstitions, is but a question of time. The Mohammedan believes that his religion will endure forever; and doubtless, its death is far distant, since far distant is the day when Mohammedan countries will be enlightened by science. The Hindoo foresees no end to his religion. Nevertheless, this too, though it may be many generations hence, will have to encounter the irresistible progress of science. Nor does Christendom believe that her religion is ever to die. Least of all is she aware that it is even now death-struck. Science has already riddled it: and astronomers and geologists keep on punching holes through it, as if it were no longer a sacred thing. But it is not mainly by proving the falseness of this, that, and another part of a superstitious religious system—not mainly by thus honey-combing it—that the system must fall. Far more effective to this end is the influence of science to train the people to require proof—down-right fact-proof—of the truth of what they are called on to believe. Before such a requirement such a system can not stand always. Science has done good in exposing the nonsense in the religion of Christendom respecting the Creation, Deluge, Red Sea, Sun, Moon, etc. But it has done more in bringing millions into the habit of demanding evidence of the truth of every part of that religion. Science has taught them the laws of evidence, and to insist on applying them to all claims to their credence. It is very true, and sadly true, that demagogues do much, by

their impositions upon the popular credulity, to unfit the people to reason, and to require adequate proof before believing. But immeasurably more to this bad end does the priesthood. To train a people to gulp down such stories as the Fish Story, and the Story of the power of Elijah's prayer over the rains of all the earth, is, in effect, to train them to gulp down any thing and every thing; to confound the wildest fancies with facts, and the most extravagant falsehoods with truth. It is, in a word, to spoil them.

I said that the great religions are all to disappear. Protestantism believes that Catholicism is to pass away—but that she herself will stand. The reverse, however, is more nearly true. Protestantism, being less bound up in a religion of authority than Catholicism, will be the first to break up. Some of its disciples will go one way, and some another. Most of the Protestants will espouse the Religion of Reason or Nature; and many of the remainder, including especially the ritualists, and all such, as love to stand with adoring and dreamy faces toward the benighted past, will join themselves to the Roman Catholics. TO REASON OR TO ROME. It is said that we should believe in the resurrection and other miracles of Jesus because some (I apprehend very few) wise and learned men of that day believed in them. I answer that even the wise and learned of that day had, necessarily, but a very imperfect knowledge of the laws of evidence, so far as they apply to Nature and the God of Nature. An extensive knowledge of them was hardly compatible with their belief that the earth was the chief thing in the universe, and all else but its servants; and what we, at the present day, see to be the action of general laws, was now special blessings and now special cursings. Modern science, sweeping aside ignorance and superstition, makes room for studying the laws of evidence. A superstitious people are credulous, and delight in the marvellous. Indeed, the more marvellous a thing is, the more eager are they to let their credulity be abused by it. Science stops all this; and causes facts, instead of fancies, to rule men.

My argument is ended. At almost all of the numerous points raised by you, I had, necessarily, to make it very brief. In the years 1866 and 1867, I published a couple of pamphlets: entitled

*The Theologies* and *Nature's Theology*, in which I examined some of these points at greater length. Permit me to ask you to read these pamphlets and to regard them as an Appendix or Supplement to this Letter.\*

Ere closing this Letter, let me confess that, all the way in writing it, as also all the way in writing my former Letter to you, I have been not a little embarrassed by the apprehension of my moral incompetence to arraign your religious errors. The contrast of my own feebly-religious life with your eminent life of love to God and love to man, has been ever before me. Then, too, I could not forbear apprehending that, if I look so unfavorably upon myself for having taken this liberty with you, others will look still more unfavorably upon me for it. In their eyes, this liberty will be like to savor far more of conceit than of modesty, if not, indeed, far more of hypocrisy than of sincerity.

Let me assure you that wherever, in these Letters, I have argued the superiority of my religion to yours, I have not had the least reference to our religious life or personal religion, but exclusive reference to the comparative merits of our theories of religion. I need not say that a man's experienced or actual religion is not, necessarily, identical with his theory of religion. It may be far better, it may be far worse than that theory. Confident as I am that my theory, rather than yours, is the just one, I, nevertheless, can not deny that it finds more approval in the conclusions of my understanding, than in the experience and state of my affections, or in my outward life. That this is so, tells not against my creed, but against myself; tells not that my religious theory is wrong, but that I am not religious enough to conform my practice to it. And, now, as the heart is more than the head, I trust that I shall not be accused, on the one hand, of exalting myself, or, on the other, of disparaging you, by ending this Letter with the opinion that, taking into view both our personal religion and our theological systems, my head is in advance of my heart, and your heart is in advance of your head.

With great regard, your friend,

GERRIT SMITH.

\* See Appendix, pp. 99 and 125.



APPENDIX.



THE THEOLOGIES.

NATURE THE BASIS OF A TRUE THEOLOGY.



# THE THEOLOGIES.

BY GERRIT SMITH.

THAT the living theologies will all fall into the tomb of the long-ago-dead ones, and will, like Greek and Roman mythology, be remembered but to illustrate superstition, to adorn a speech or enliven a page, is what no one should doubt. This is to be the fate not only of the rude and unsystematized theologies, which stand in the traditions of the barbarous and illiterate, but also of the widely-prevailing theological systems that are found, or claimed to be found, in the Bible, the Koran, and the other authoritative "Sacred Books." Whilst, however, we are sure that, in the progress of science and civilization, these heaviest of all the curses of earth will pass away, we nevertheless have abundant reason to fear that this joyful event will not be until after still more of long and weary ages. That the theologies are this preëminent infliction on the human family is but too obviously true. They do more than all things else to darken life, to shut out sweet sunshine from the soul, to fill it with trembling apprehension, and to sink it in agony and despair. Who but the Hindoo himself can tell what the Hindoo suffers from his horror of transmigration and from other horrors inspired by his theology? Does the Bible man suffer much less? As a general thing, he does. But it is not mainly because his theology is much less terrific—for it is not. It is mainly because, his intelligence being greater, his faith is less absolute and absorbing. Moreover, a considerable share of the Bible men flatter themselves that, by means of their technical or magic change, they will escape the common doom. The proportion of Hindoos who expect to escape it is probably far less. But the pain inflicted by the theologies is not all. What can more debase and shrivel the soul, as well as distress it, than

this "fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries?"—than this belief not only of living all one's life here and hereafter, but even of being *born*, under "the wrath of God?"

It is, indeed, encouraging to see so many of the wise and good at work to reform and improve the theologies. But far more encouraging is it to see others of this class at work to abolish them. Nothing of these hideous structures, which have for so many centuries cast their baleful shadows over the whole earth, should be left standing. There are, we confess, many great and precious truths scattered through these theologies. Nevertheless, nothing of all the superstitiously and cunningly-devised systems which contain them; not one shred of all the fabrics of fancy and fraud into which they are woven; nor of all the black pictures, broad caricatures, and abominable misrepresentations of God and man, which these theologies have imposed upon the credulity of their disciples, should be suffered to survive. We do not deny that these theologies can be somewhat reformed and improved. But they can not be made harmless, nor even less than mighty for evil, except by annihilating them.

That these theologies are not soon to disappear should, instead of being allowed to discourage us, but serve to make us more impatient to have the right and effectual blows struck at them. They, who are only pruning their branches, should be wielding axes upon their roots. They, who are at work to make them better, should be at work to overturn them from their lowest foundations. Some of these would, for conscience' sake, retain the theological systems, were they but modified here and there. Others, however, of these superficial workers, would be glad to be more thorough, could they believe that they would thereby hasten the overthrow of these systems. They *would* thereby hasten it. Going for a whole truth is more effective than going for a part of one—the whole one being the more obvious, the more commanding of approbation, and, every way, the more powerful and influential. On this principle the public mind is far better prepared for the entire flinging away than for the partial retention of the theologies.

But why am I so utterly intolerant of the theologies? It is

chiefly because they not only stand in the way of religion, but are so confounded with it, as to be taken for it. The bloody worship of Juggernaut is religion in one part of the world. In another, belief in the marvels told by and of Mohammed is religion; and in another, belief in the unrivaled fish story, and that Balaam's ass did actually speak. This illustrates the power of the theologies to usurp the place of religion, and pass themselves off for it. Roman Catholicism allowed her theology to carry her so far away from religion, as to involve her in the measureless guilt of setting up the Inquisition. So, too, it was letting their theology become their religion, that led Roman Catholics and Protestants to the wholesale slaughter of each other. A few words in the Bible respecting a curse belched forth by a drunken man have been the justification of large portions of Christendom for sinking tens of millions of Africans in the pit of slavery. It is true that the Greeks and Romans were slaveholders, and that it was not because they had an authoritative "Sacred Book" to sanction it—for they did not have it. But it must be remembered that with them slavery was intended to be a step forward in humanity and civilization. It was consenting to let prisoners of war live. A few words in the Bible have sufficed to sink woman from her natural equality with man into his inferior and servant. She is beginning to complain of the extensive denial of her civil and the entire denial of her political rights. But in vain her complaint, so long as the theologies are an admitted authority. The first thing for woman to do toward regaining her freedom, is to free herself from the power of the theologies. This is the fountain-head of her oppressions. She will never succeed in throwing off her multiplied wrongs so long as she consents to let this great authoritative wrong, which lies back of them, and produces them, continue to exist. So long as it exists, she can gain but little by summoning to her help the pleas of reason and nature; for even reason and nature are powerless in the presence of a hostile and admitted authority. In proceeding under this head, I need not particularize the wars which have come from the theologies. I need not refer to the rivers of blood which have flowed from contentions about a single theological dogma — that, for instance, regarding the grade of

Christ's being. Gifted, learned, admired individuals have, as well as the masses, fallen under the misleading influences, and sometimes under the infernal sway, of these theologies. By giving the reins to theology instead of religion, the very intellectual and very conscientious Jonathan Edwards became a severe and persistent slaveholder. In this wise, too, the perhaps no less intellectual and conscientious Calvin consented to the burning of Servetus. In this connection, let me remark that the conscientious theologian, who makes his theology his religion, is the most striking of all the instances in which conscience, instead of restraining from crime, impels to it. An unconscientious man may have a creed, but he is comparatively unconcerned to enforce it. Beware, however, of the conscientious man whose judgment is perverted, and who is tempted to intolerance and persecution! Especially beware of the conscientious man, who makes one of these false theologies his religion! For both his theology and his moral sense—in other words, his idol and his conscience—command him to be unrelenting. Nor are the theologies, as the unreflecting might suppose, confined to their especial channels. Everywhere they overflow their banks. Everywhere they mingle their dark and turbid waters with the bright and gladdening streams of life. All our affections and all our affairs are exposed to their poisonous and perverting influences. The natural and therefore healthy loves and hates are modified and made morbid by these unnatural and monstrous theologies. Even Government itself is still called on to look to them as its authority, and to let them shape its policies and prompt its conduct. Amongst the noticeable recent instances of this are the sermons of Dr. Booth, of New-York, and Dr. Hall, of Northampton, in which our Government is virtually advised to look into a theology, especially into the doctrine of the atonement, for light and guidance in regard to its disposition of the Southern rebels. With such clergymen the paramount question is not what natural justice, but what theological justice, calls for—not what reason, but what the Book they assume to be revelation demands. And here let me say, that there is but one hope that the theologies, so long as they shall be authority in the Church, will not again rule in our civil courts and civil councils, as they once

did in a portion of our country. This hope is, that the counter-action outside of the Church will continue to be superior to the forces within it. Very true is it that the Church does, in many respects, benefit the world. But no less true is it that the world needs to protect itself from the Church; and that the protection will continue to be vitally needed so long as the theologies shall, by her recognition of their authority, make the Church a source of frightful peril to the world. Remember that Matthew Hale administered the law of witchcraft—the very witchcraft which the great and good but superstitious John Wesley made belief in to be essential to belief in the Bible.\* Let the Church again get the upper-hand of the world, and jurists as pure and wise as even Matthew Hale will administer the absurd laws of absurd theology. Nay, in that event, as bloody horrors as ever theology-inspired law-makers and judges were guilty of, will be perpetrated. This will be so, however, only as long as the Church shall continue to let theology stand in the place of religion. She will become a rich and unqualified blessing to the world just so soon as her religion shall cast out her theology. That the danger of our own Government's falling under theological sway is not yet past, is manifest from the present endeavor of very numerous theologians to get the Federal Constitution into their hands. To embody in that Paper some leading theological dogma—such, for instance, as that Jesus Christ is the ruler of nations—would, in the light of its broadening results, be a calamity, perhaps more to be deplored than our great rebellion.

I have spoken of these theologies as authoritative. It is true that they are not so, certainly not always so, upon the great ecclesiastical leaders. The Luthers, Swedenborgs, and other of these leaders stretch and shorten and shape them as they will. But the masses, on whom the theologies, however modified, are absolutely binding, have no appeal from them; no right to inquire into their claims to credence; no right to cast so much as one doubt upon those claims.

What I am writing will give offense, not only because it throws into one category all the theologies, but because, in doing so, it also throws into one category all the "Sacred Books" from which it is claimed they are derived—the Bible

\* What multitudes have been burnt or otherwise put to death, because of the wicked line in the Bible: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!"—Read Lecky on Rationalism.

as well as the Koran and the others. Are there not, however, respects enough in which these Books resemble each other, to justify the classing of them together for the purposes of my argument? The theologies drawn from them all are absurd and monstrous. The Books are all lacking in the amount of evidence necessary to establish their authenticity and genuineness. They all have but slender external evidences of the truth of their contents—so very slender that nothing in any of them should be received as certain truth, but what carries in itself the evidence that it is truth. Whilst the Sermon on the Mount is intrinsically and manifestly true—the truth of it shining by its own light—there is not only nothing in the ordinary histories and narratives of the Bible to make it certain that they are true, but next to nothing in the outward proofs and collateral testimonies to this end. In the case of its extraordinary histories and narratives, especially those which embody miracles, there, of course, lie both these objections to credibility and the additional one of the inherent improbability, not to say, in some instances, inherent impossibility, of the things related. And yet, strange to say, the miracles of the Bible are cited to prove the truth of the Bible, as well as their being in the Bible to prove the truth of themselves. But, however true the miracles, they can answer for themselves only—not for the other parts of the Bible. So, too, the prophecies, which also are claimed to prove the truth of the Bible, and in turn to be proved by the Bible, can, in no event, do more than prove themselves. Were the Bible one book, instead of scores of books of widely different ages stitched together—the production of one mind instead of many minds—there would be some plausibility in the claim, that one part of it goes to prove another. As it is, the claim is simply and utterly absurd. This vicious circular reasoning, which, in the present instance, allows naked assumptions to prove each other, would equally allow each in a company of detected rogues to swear his companions clear.

The simple fact is, that we have no moral right to believe the whole of the Bible. The man, who believes every thing in it to be true, believes it, not in obedience to the laws of evidence, which are also the laws of his being, and therefore the laws of

his God, but in defiance of them. He believes it, not rationally, but superstitiously; not because of what it is, but because it is in the Bible.

Have I made a poor book of the Bible? I have not meant to do so; for, although there are things in it which are foolish; and things in it which physical science shows to be false; and things in it condemned by moral science also—I, nevertheless, hold it to be the best book in the world. That it contains our earliest record of the words of the wisest, holiest, sublimest man that ever lived, is of itself enough to give it the preëminence amongst all books. Second, however, only to the words of Jesus, are the best words of the prophets and apostles, who speak to us in this book. But how can I know that Jesus was, if I do not know that all the Bible is true? I admit that I do not certainly know when nor where he was born, nor what was his name. But that such a man lived is proved by his words—words such as no other man had equaled. Is it said that they were the words of some other person? I answer that then this other person was himself the Jesus, and was only too modest or discreet to own it. He, from whom the wondrous words came—whenever he was, wherever he was, whoever he was, whatever his name—was the true Jesus. We assure ourselves that Jesus existed much in the way that we assure ourselves of the existence of some other very eminent person of the past. It is not from the scanty and uncertain materials which make up his biography that we are sure Shakespeare lived. But, in the light of certain compositions, which are evidently the coinage of the same brain, we are sure that there did live—we can not tell precisely when nor where, nor even know we under what name—an unequaled dramatic writer. Shakespeare is no myth: and by similar reasoning Jesus is no myth.

I have spoken highly of the Bible. That it abounds in the intensest national egotism and in the intensest national scorn and hatred, and in the falsest views of God, is only what might be expected from the narrow vision of most of its writers, and of the people to whom they belonged. For, remember, that the Jews regarded the earth as a plane of but a few thousand miles in circumference; the sun, moon, and stars as but candles

for it; and the one work of God to love and care for them, and to hate and destroy their neighbors. Alas! our folly in letting a people so ignorant and so mistaken make up our Bible! If we must have a Bible—that is, a binding “Sacred Book”—how much more rational to let the advanced physical and moral science of modern times furnish it! How irrational to turn our back upon the great light of the present, and to keep our face toward the thick darkness of the past!

With all its faults, the Bible, were it allowed to take its chance with other books, and be judged, as they are, simply by its merits, would be a blessing above all price. But so long as it is imposed upon us as an authority, and our faith in one part of it required to be as full as in every other—as unquestioning in the story of the standing still of the sun and moon as in the wisest words of Jesus—so long will it be like to do more harm than good. So long as the Bible is held to be a finality; a Procrustean bed to lop off and deter progress; a stereotyped and unchangeable religion—so long must it be of very evil influence upon those by whom it is thus held, and so long will they be liable to be prejudiced against it, who regard nothing as too good to be under the law of growth and progress, and nothing as so good that, in an age of great and general improvement, it can not become better.

By this time my readers may be ready to ask me, how we can learn religion, if neither the theologies, nor the “Sacred Books” from which they are derived, can be depended upon as infallible teachers? I answer, that we are to learn it just as we learn all other things—by the action of the understanding upon facts. Until we take this only way to learn it, superstition will continue to usurp the place of religion, and the miseries, which ever attend upon the one, will continue to shut out the blessedness which is ever united with the other. After saying this, I scarcely need add, that I do not regard religion as a mystery. I mean by it the knowledge of our duties and the discharge of them. In the last year (1865) has appeared in our country a very eloquent and brilliant book, a leading idea in which is that the understanding can not discover religion, and that it is by means of a spiritual intuition or some faculty other than the understanding that religion can be discovered. Is not a similar

idea found in the pages of Schleiermacher, and in the beautiful Quaker fancy of the "inner light?" No wonder that the author of this book says: "Religion needs mystery, and can not exist without it." But no theologies, that are largely made up of imagination and mystery—not even the refined theology of the book in question—can stand the increasingly severe tests of advancing science. A matter-of-fact theology—a theology, which, instead of cherishing mysteries, tends to dispel them—is the only one that can stand these tests. With the least possible delay then should the nations get rid of the existing theologies, and set up in their stead a rational and scientific explanation of religion. To postpone this duty is to postpone the day when religion shall rest on a sure foundation—on the rock of facts. It is to leave religion, which should ever be recognized as founded in and identified with unmistakable nature, to be confounded with speculations upon the supernatural, and dreams of the unknown.

I spoke of the necessity of learning religion from facts. But may they not be the facts of history?—of the Bible and other books? No, the facts even of modern histories, and even of our own enlightened times, are quite too uncertain to be confidently adopted even by the philosopher or statesman. How emphatically too uncertain, then, for the foundation of religion—(a foundation which needs to be the surest of all sure things)—must be the facts of those ancient histories, such as the Bible, written in unscientific and superstitious ages, and stuffed with grotesque and absurd myths and legends! Of all mistakes the most fatal is to take up with a historical religion. Even if it were the pure and true religion, when it came into the stream of history, what right have we to flatter ourselves that it has not, long since, become a corrupt and false one? For what is there which that stream leaves as it found it? Nay, what is there which even begins its historical character in its entirely true character? Surely, God has not left us to get our religion from a source so uncertain and so corrupt as history.

What, then, are the facts by its right action on which the understanding can discover religion? They are the earth and what—man preëminently included—pertains to it, with so much of the surrounding skies and worlds as science brings within

our knowledge. But are here *data* enough from which to learn religion? If not enough, they are, however, all we have. But they are enough. From them we can learn, amongst other things, our relations and duties to our fellow-men. And if we do not choose to stop here with the disciples of Comte, and to worship nothing higher than Humanity, we can go on to learn from the same *data* our relations and duties to God. Here is enough from which to infer the wisdom, power, and goodness of Him from whom have come the earth and the sky. And in this power, wisdom, and goodness, there is enough to teach us what love, gratitude, and worship we owe Him. It is emphatically true as the poet teaches, that we can look "through nature up to nature's God." He is known by His works.

"If such the sweetness of the streams,  
What must the fountain be!"

In this wise the studious and right-hearted can not fail to know much of Him, and to commune with Him. My understanding, which has convinced me of the qualities of my neighbor, has also convinced me of what I owe him. In like manner are my convictions of the character of God followed by my convictions of what I owe God. But, although we can learn much of God from His works—much of the supernatural from the natural—I, nevertheless, would refrain from going to supernaturalism for the solution of religious problems. We need not go to it, because nature is sufficient to this end; and we should not go to it because supernaturalism is but an inference, and inferences from inferences are to be more or less distrusted—at least, in matters of great moment.

Nature alone is the standpoint and standard in human reasonings. All admit it is in all things but religion. They should admit it is in that also. Nothing is more natural than love, which is so emphatically the chief exercise of religion that Paul resolves religion into the loving of one's neighbor as himself. But this is only loving naturally. For what can be more natural than to love, even as we love ourself, him who has rights and interests like to and equal to our own? To be religious, then, is simply to be natural. That a man, perplexed with problems in mathematics and mechanics, should invoke

supernatural knowledge would not be the strangest of things. But as well might we look above the nature of water to learn that its law is to run down hill, as to look above human nature to learn that religion or love is its law. The germs of religion, and the faculties for maturing and unfolding them, so far from being foreign to our nature, are born with us, and are, as much as our muscles, a part of our nature. The water may get dammed up and turned backward. So a man may pervert his nature, and stifle his love and the other affections of religion, and sink himself in selfishness. But if he will return to his nature, these affections will again be in exercise. He will again love; and, if he become entirely natural, he will love his neighbor even as himself.

I have now indicated the only true foundation of the only true religion. It is palpable, certain facts. Do I number God's Spirit amongst these facts? I do not—for I am not certain that it is amongst them. I believe it is. I believe that it, as much as matter, is a part of the eternal constitution of nature. I believe it pervades the universe; that all men can receive of it; and that its power is such as to work in him, who opens wide his mind and heart to it, a change so great as to be comparable to a new birth, and a resulting blessedness, which Jesus well calls "The Kingdom of God." I believe, too, that this being "born again," be it in this or in any coming stage of our existence, is the only door into this Kingdom. I speak less confidently of this regenerating power, because I speak from observation instead of experience; and can only say that I believe I have, in here and there a beautiful and sublime life, seen strong proof of it. Jesus was sure of the reality of this power; and he was sure of it because he felt that he had the witness of it in himself. But whether they be few or many who have experienced this power, certain it is that vast numbers have, from what has passed in their own bosoms, been sure, not only that God is a Spirit, but that he gives his Spirit to the children of men. Yes, I believe in this Divine gift, and that it is by its help that men have hitherto made so great progress, and will hereafter make so much greater, in the knowledge of Divine things.

And here, too, I may be asked whether I number God's

providence amongst these fundamental facts of religion. I answer that, on the one hand, I do, if His providence means His constant energizing of His laws, and His constant and changeless working through these constant and changeless laws; and that, on the other hand, I do not, if it means that He occasionally overturns them, and plants special providences upon their ruins. Such providences may bring present relief to this man, and temporary benefit to that man; but if they are at the expense of the steady operation of the great laws adapted to mankind, they must be at the expense of mankind. Moreover, what can be worse for men than their habit of presumptuous reliance on special providences to deliver them from the straits to which their folly and rashness have reduced them, and to save them in their sin of violating the laws of their being?

So, also, I may be asked whether I give "immortality" a place amongst these fundamental facts. I do not—for I am not certain that man is immortal. The arguments in favor of it, which, on one occasion and another I have made, satisfied myself. But neither did they satisfy all my hearers and readers, nor produce in myself the sense of entire certainty. But do I hold that men can love and worship God without being assured of their immortality? Certainly I do. So majestic is this being which He has given to us; so rich in its endowments; so large in its capacities for holiness, happiness, and usefulness, that even though we were sure it ends with this life, there would still remain abundant reason why we should love Him with the whole heart, and serve and honor Him with all our powers. Abundant, too, would be our reason for rejoicing with the "Positivist," that the individual man, though ceasing to exist, shall, nevertheless, live in his race. And, surely, if the "Positivist" can live for others (*pour autrui*) and worship humanity, we, with our more comprehensive faith, can also live for others, and worship the God of Humanity.

And what of Eternal Punishment? Do I place that amongst the facts on which Religion rests? I answer that I believe in no God-inflicted punishment. Punishment in the next life there doubtless will be; and I know not but it will, in some instances, be eternal. It will, however, be all self-inflicted. That is, it will all grow out of the character and conduct of the

sufferer ; and if that character and conduct can be bad forever, then must he suffer forever.

Alas, that Christendom went to the Jewish theology for her apprehensions and knowledge of God !—to that theology which teaches that he is but a big man !—the subject of human changes and caprices, now melted into sorrow, and now maddened into fury ! Alas, that she did not go straight to Nature, to God's own works and ways, for there she would have learned that He is our Friend and Father ; that He is never angry with even the worst of us ; that He curses none, and blesses all who will let Him bless them ! With what agonizing earnestness are men seeking the Divine forgiveness of their sins ! But, surely, it is in no common sense of the word, that God forgives His children. He has kept no account against them, and there is therefore nothing for Him to forgive. He but loves and pities all who are in the bondage of sin ; and He never ceases to hold out His delivering hand to them. Dear Morris Ketchum did not render due honor to the state of his own heart, when he told his unfortunate son that he forgave him. For the words might imply that there could have been a case in which he would not have forgiven him. But no such case could have been presented to such a father's heart. How much less would the Great Father be unforgiving to his child—even to his worst child ! Nay, the petition for His forgiveness, if offered in the common acceptance of the word, wrongs and dishonors Him.

The Old Testament, because abounding in these horrible views of God, has, notwithstanding the precious and sublime truths scattered through it, wrought immeasurable misery and debasement wherever ignorance and superstition have acknowledged its authority ; and even the New Testament is not so clear of these views as to leave its value half what it would have been without them. The Apostles were not entirely rid of them : and even in some of the words ascribed to Jesus, an indorsement of these views is not entirely wanting. But, whilst it is improbable that we have a large share of his best sayings, it is also improbable that he said all which is credited to him. Words entirely out of harmony with his general utterances and general character we should be unwilling to believe to be his words. And do I, then, make it simply a question

of human reason what of Jesus to believe, and what not? I do. And nothing can be more unreasonable than to bow to history with all the submission due to mathematical certainties. History has been said to be a lie; and what history is there so entirely free from falsehoods as to be able to look this saying full in the face?

By the way, this doctrine of Eternal Punishment is sustained mainly by one word, which is ascribed, no one knows whether rightly or wrongly, to Jesus—a word, moreover, that has come down to us through no one knows how many translations, and with what changes, therefore, of its sense; for scholars no more agree what language it was originally recorded in, than they do as to the number of the previous years in which it was a mere tradition, and was, as well as its context, subject to the uncertainties and variations of a mere tradition.

Is the Devil one of the facts on which the true religion rests? He is not. He is a mere myth. Nevertheless, no actual being has grown so fast as has this purely imaginary one. He has grown from a principle into a person; from a servant of God into a rival of God; from a force in the physical world into a co-ruler in the spiritual. In the earliest notices of the Devil, or rather of the germs of the Devil, he is but the principle of evil. Then he rises into an agent of evil—only, however, in the external world. For it was many ages before the ancients came to recognize a power for evil, or even a power for good, in the moral world. They saw the goodness of God only in the sunshine and rain, and other welcome phenomena of nature. They saw the malignity of the Devil only in the tornado and lightning and other destructive agencies of nature. But, during the last two or three thousand years, and especially in Christendom, the Devil has become a power in the moral and spiritual world—a greater actual power than even God Himself—with millions of followers where God has but hundreds. The only relief under his present sway is the promise that it shall have an end. But when that end is to come no mortal knows.

To the honor of the early Jews, there was no Devil in their theology. The Jews, who were carried to Babylon, appear to have learned and believed somewhat of him during their captivity. The early Jews needed no Devil, for they believed in

no Hell—no Hell, as the word is now popularly understood. The first Christians, had they drawn their creed from the Old Testament and old Jewish theology only, would have had in it neither Hell nor Devil. But they evidently blended with that theology Greek and Roman mythology. Even Christ himself gave proof of this. For the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is evidently constructed upon the classical mythological idea of the future life. According to this idea, only a river or gulf separates the blessed from the tormented. But, although it is impassable, it is not so wide as to prevent conversation between them.

That Christendom, with all its increasing light, should still believe in the Devil is, indeed, a very remarkable fact. It shows how mighty is the ecclesiastical power. Not to believe in the Devil would be not to believe in Hell; and the Devil and Hell are the foundation on which that power rests. Knock away this foundation, and the orthodox theology must fall, and also the churches built upon it. By the way, how much such forcible preachers as Jonathan Edwards and Nathaniel Emmons must have done to confirm and spread the most horrific ideas of Hell and the Devil! How many tens of thousands have been made wretched through life by their pictures of the torments of the damned and of the delights of the blessed in those torments! Emmons is careful to add that, in some instances, their delights will be in the torments “of their own children, parents, husbands, wives, and friends.” No wonder that the childhood of dear Horace Mann was made miserable by the sermons he heard from the lips of Emmons!

Nevertheless, this modern faith in the Devil is a great improvement upon that ancient faith from which the Devil was omitted. The hypothesis of a Devil is a great relief to the character of the theological God. If there is a Devil's work to do, then by all means let there be a Devil to do it. Do not let God's hands be dirtied and bloodied by it.

The theologies have a Devil's work to do; and therefore they have a Devil. Gratefully and gladly do I turn away from them to the religion of reason—a religion in which there is no Hell, no Devil, no co-ruler with God, no malignant rival of the loving Father.

Whether I make belief in the Trinity fundamental to a true religious faith, may be another inquiry. A three-headed serpent is a disgusting and abhorrent monster. So is a three-headed God. And what less than this is the Trinity, which is found in so many theologies? Why need we suppose that there are three persons in God? To explain what phenomena is this supposition necessary? What attributes or sympathies does the Great Father lack which makes it necessary to assume the existence of another Deity; or, if the expression be preferred, another person in the Godhead? How derogatory to Him is the hypothesis that there is not in Him all that is needed in God!—that if, for instance, He have the father's wisdom and strength, He nevertheless lacks the mother's tenderness and love!

Alas! how much the world has lost by the deifying of Christ! This incomparably best of all the specimens of manhood might ere this, had he been left in his manhood, have become the chosen and cited example of all the races of men. But by the lifting of him up out of manhood into Godhood, he comparatively ceases to be an example. On the supposition that he is God, his words and deeds, matchlessly sublime as many of them are, excite in us comparatively little interest and no wonder. But that they are the words and deeds of a mere man awakens all our admiration, and encourages us with the hope that we too, if we shall earnestly endeavor to live the Christ-life, will be enabled to speak Christ-words, and do Christ-deeds. That they are merely human words and human deeds proves what possibilities of wisdom and goodness lie in-folded in human nature; and that these possibilities were so developed in the life of one man is an example to inspire their development in the life of every other man. The theological view of Christ, by putting him hopelessly beyond human imitation, makes him well-nigh useless as our example.

That Jesus was both claimed and believed to be a God is not strange. The usage of thus accounting for and thus honoring extraordinary gifts and marked eminence had not yet ceased. The Greeks and Romans had long been wont to deify their idolized heroes and philosophers. The story of Christ's conception is but a substantial repetition of the story of Plato's.

I say that the deification of Christ and of thousands of others is not strange. But that the ignorant past should have power to drag down the enlightened present into this exceedingly low superstition is, indeed, strange.

Jesus is called the Incarnate God. But God has incarnated Himself in all men. So inherent and structural is He in them, that they are well said to be made in His image! It is true that, whilst some men are so spiritual as to be ever filling themselves with God, others are so depraved as to be ever emptying themselves of Him. Nevertheless, all men are made to be receptacles of God; and it is but their own fault if they are not filled with Him. That one so filled with the Divine Spirit as was Jesus, should feel and even declare himself to be one with God, is not to be wondered at. We too, were we so filled with it, would, probably, not think it presumptuous to feel and claim this oneness.

The fact that Jesus was so immeasurably above his fellow-men is often turned into a defiant argument for his Deityship by those who deny that such a fact could occur in the course of providence. There is, however, many a wondrous effect, the causes of which are hidden from us, but which we, nevertheless, do not doubt are causes in the course of providence. A wondrous effect, all the providential causes of which we are very far from knowing, was three such cotemporaries, in one little island, as Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton. Each of them was in his own way an unsurpassed genius. Jesus was a genius in morals; and, as such, stands without a rival. I have often thought, when inquiring into the causes of his preëminence, how highly probable it is that the conditions of a true marriage, and for the production of a pure, sublime, and God-like offspring, met remarkably in the parents of Jesus. The Catholic Church has, indeed, no little show of reason for claiming that Mary was immaculate; and no less would it have for the like claim in behalf of Joseph.

The next inquiry may be whether I put the Atonement amongst the things on which the true religion is built. Most emphatically not. This doctrine, that "without shedding of blood is no remission," and that with it there is—a doctrine which has come down to us through so many Pagan channels—

is quite too flatly in the face of nature and reason to find favor with those who feel themselves bound to bring all things to the tests of nature and reason. That every man must suffer for his own sins, be they against his physical or moral constitution, and that no other one can relieve him of the scars and consequences, is a truth lying quite too deep in nature and reason to be subverted by any thing to the contrary—least of all, by what is so uncertain as history, and so absurd as the theologies.

Furthermore, I can not believe in the Atonement, because I can not believe in any one of the three things, belief in all of which is essential to belief in it.

1st. I can not believe that God, in whose great loving heart there is nothing to be appeased, instituted those bloody sacrifices in which the doctrine of the Atonement is founded. It was mistaken and cruel Pagan superstition which instituted them. Alas! how mistaken in supposing God to be the enemy of the wicked, when their enemy is themselves, and He is their friend!—in supposing Him to pour out curses upon the wicked, when it is they who curse themselves, and He is working to withhold them from the self-infliction! And, alas! how cruel those abominable sacrifices which doomed the innocent animal to a premature slaughter, and wasted the food which belonged to the hungry poor!

2d. I do not believe that the Father has provided an eternal hell, nor, indeed, any hell for His children. Whatever hell they find here or hereafter, they make for themselves. He makes only heavens for them; and if they do not enter them, it is only because they will not.

3d. I do not believe that Christ is God. But, according to the theory of the Atonement, it requires the sacrifice of God to save sinners from an eternal hell. And here, by the way, we have another instance of the theological circular reasoning. The sacrificed God proves the eternal hell, and the eternity of the punishment proves that there could be no less sacrifice.

Whilst I do not believe that Christ's death has taken away the sin of any, be they believers or unbelievers in Him, I do, however, believe that He died for all. And I further believe that, by looking habitually and lovingly unto Him—unto this

preëminent Son and best representative of his Father—we come to hate the sins which he hated and to love the virtues which he loved. In a word, we come to love him and be like him, and to find that, through his teachings and examples, he has become our savior.

I pass on to speak of Prophecy. Do I believe it to be one of the necessary facts in the true religion? I do not believe it to be a fact at all. 1st. I do not know but the ancient prophecy was after the event. 2d. I do not know that the event was the very thing foretold. 3d. I do not know but the prophecy was generally the discernment of mere human foresight, instead of the inspired foretelling gift—which prophecy is claimed to be. As the modern world has never seen a prophet—a technical and inspired prophet—it should be very slow to believe that there ever was or, indeed, ever will be one. It is said that departed spirits can prophesy through us. I do not know how that is. But that men in the flesh have this gift or inspiration requires proof.

And now to the Miracles. Is faith in them essential to a true religious faith? For one, I believe that there never was, and that there never will be, a miracle—that is, an arrest or suspension of the laws of nature. And I not only believe in, but I am content with, the never-failing constancy of those laws. I would let water remain water always, though there are many who rejoice in the fancy that, for once, it was turned into wine. Her seals of death, wherever nature places them, I would leave honored and unbroken. But there are many who, desiring an occasional triumph over her, even at this point, would have her now and then thrust aside, and her dead men called to life.

I do not believe in miracles, for I have never seen any, and I know no man who says he has seen any. Persons are reported to have seen the Bible miracles, but I know neither them nor their reporters, nor how far any of them are entitled to confidence. What array, however, of human testimony should suffice to convince me of the truth of miracles?—of the truth of the claim that nature does sometimes escape from the control of her own laws? Nowhere in the world of facts—not in astronomy, nor in geology, nor elsewhere—is there the slightest proof of such escape. On the other hand, what is less to be relied on

than human testimony?—often deceiving others and often itself deceived? So, the least which can be said is, that if miracles were ever necessary to authenticate religion, they are necessary now. Nay, in that case, the perpetual performance of them is a necessity. Another reason why I object to belief in physical miracles is, that it opens the door for belief in moral miracles—for belief in the variation, and even the reversal, of the fundamental rules of morality. Denying that the body can die, or that when dead, it must remain dead, can consistently be followed by denying that, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” In other words, to deny certainty to nature in her moral laws is no less unreasonable than to deny it to her in her physical laws. Another objection to believing in the miracles is, that it virtually denies our capacity to learn the truth, which we need to learn, and which we were, therefore, made to learn. And such believing is to be objected to, not only because it is derogatory to the high powers of human nature, but because it implies that God is driven to violate His laws, in order to correct the blunder He fell into in His work of constructing it.

I notice, of late, that the more cultivated of those who cling to the Bible miracles resort, in increasing numbers, to an expedient for saving themselves from indorsing the monstrous and even blasphemous absurdity that God is, now and then, guilty of violating His own laws, in order to get Himself out of an occasional pinch. But they only make bad worse. “They jump out of the frying-pan into the fire.” Their expedient is to call the miracles but seeming, instead of real, violations of the fixed laws of the universe. They take the ground that the performers of the miracles had only more knowledge of these laws than the ignorant spectators had; and that the miracles, whilst appearing to the spectators to go counter to the laws, were, nevertheless, really concurrent with them. But this solution of the difficulty makes the performers, including Jesus himself, impostors, for they all knew that the wonders which they are said to have wrought, were fraught with conviction solely because the spectators believed that they were wrought in the very face of nature and against her laws and forces. Manifestly, the performers intended this belief, and rested their success upon it. Surely, if it were only by his superior knowledge of the laws

and forces of nature that Jesus turned the water into wine, the spectators, if they knew this to be so, would not, because of that knowledge and its wondrous products, have regarded him as God, or even as having a special commission from God. They would have regarded him as more learned than themselves—that is all.

Do I regard "Total Depravity" as one of the facts not to be omitted in making up the true religion? It is not a fact. It is but a doctrine. In a depravity which comes of a bad life, I, of course, believe. Perhaps it is quite reasonable to believe in an inborn depravity also. For if it is true that a parent can transmit his diseased physical constitution, why can he not transmit his depraved moral one also? But beside that the moral one is, probably, not, in any instance, totally depraved, this transmission of character from generation to generation is not what the believers in "Total Depravity" have in view when advocating it. With them the depravity is simply a deduction from the fancied "Fall of Man" in the fancied Garden of Eden. Nevertheless, this doctrine is much more than a fancy. It is an essential part of a horrible creed—of a theory which freezes and subdues by its matchless terrors. We have seen that the Atonement and the Eternal Hell are doctrines made for the purpose of fitting them into each other. Also, in constructing the doctrine of "Total Depravity" was mutual support aimed at. It fits into both the others, and they fit into it.

Do I hold that a religion to be sound, must comprise rites and ceremonies? I do not. I have, necessarily, lost my interest in these by losing my interest in the theologies. I know a little church, which gathers every other month around a table to commemorate the love of Christ. The bread is broken and the unintoxicating wine is poured and passed by one and another, women as well as men, and this ceremony is not because of its intrinsic value, but because it affords a surpassingly suitable occasion for conversing about Christ, his life and death, his principles, spirit, and aims. Prayer and singing are intermingled with the conversation, and the hour spent in this wise is felt to be a profitable as well as a pleasant season.

A few words in this connection regarding the Sabbath. It

may be right to give it up. It may be right to make the first day of the week a rest-day. But to say that the first day is the Sabbath is absurd; and to say that the Bible teaches that the Sabbath is transferred from the seventh to the first day is either delusion or disingenuousness. The simple truth is, that such transfer was a concession to very unworthy considerations. The conscientious and consistent Seventh-Day Baptists and some others cling to the Sabbath. They do so because they cling to the Bible—the whole Bible.

I pass on to say that, whilst the theological religion is a factitious as well as a fictitious religion, made up as well as false, the true religion is identified with nature and reason. It is owing to this distinction that, whilst the true religion obeys the law of progress, the theological religion prides itself in its unchangeableness; and that whilst the one lives in the present, the other burrows in the past. How boastful, for instance, is Roman Catholicism (and Protestantism is scarcely less so) of being, in this age of light, precisely what it was hundreds of years ago! In view of this fact, it is, of course, not at all strange that the theological churches oppose Reforms until they begin to be popular. And here we see why it is that the orthodox are obliged to contend for every line in the Bible. Instead of choosing the religion of nature and reason—a religion which they could trustingly and calmly leave to nature and reason to sustain—they have chosen a conventional and artificial religion, which is to be sustained by a body of external evidence. That body is the Bible, and, therefore, to give up a line of the Bible would be to suffer a breach—a perhaps fatal breach—in the evidence of the truth of their religion.

I need say no more in condemnation of the theologies. If the best of them—those which, to the dishonor of Christ, are called the Christian theologies—are, in the main, such bundles of naked assumptions and gross fallacies, any farther argument against them must be quite superfluous.

Why is it that men persist in believing in these preposterous theologies? It is, first, because they are trained, and this too by means of these theologies, to believe that they have need of a direct revelation from their God of their moral duties; and, second, because these theologies are at hand to impose on their

credulity, and to proffer themselves as the supply of this need. But all the analogies in the case deny that they have such need. Men have no revelation to teach them how to build a ship or railroad, or cure a bodily disease. God has given them the faculties and opportunities for learning how; and so, too, has He given them the faculties and opportunities, nothing more, for learning their moral duties. It should be added that these moral duties are far more easily learned than are the workmanship and cure referred to. Even childhood is capable of comprehending all that is essential in the one. But it requires a studious and laborious manhood to perform the other. It is often said that God would not leave us without specific and revealed instruction in theology. But He has so left us in the case of geology, astronomy, physiology, and, indeed, all things else. In every branch of knowledge, study, and toil, and not ignorant, indolent receptiveness, is the condition of needful progress.

Great stress is laid on the importance of having our knowledge in the sphere of morals and religion attain to certainty, and hence the argument for a direct revelation of the things of that sphere. But the mistake which lies at the bottom of all this is the underrating of human powers and human dignity. It is not man, but beings of an inferior grade, that need certainty in their knowledge. The beaver and the bee have it in their sure instincts. But man's high faculties supersede the necessity as well of instinctive as of revealed certainty. It is true that, instead of setting out in life, as does the brute, with all the knowledge he needs, he is to labor for it throughout his life. But it is also true that, with the help of those high faculties, he can labor successfully for it. He requires not the sure guidance of either instinct or revelation. Enough for him is it that, by means of those faculties, he can be ever approaching certainty. "The glorious uncertainty of the law," not in an ironical sense only, has become a proverb. But more glorious are the uncertainties in sublime moral and religious truth, through which man must ever be working his way up toward the distant and perhaps never attainable goal of entire certainty. Lessing was right in holding that it is the pursuit more than the possession of truth which ennobles and glorifies man.

But it is said that it is only by revelation that we can acquire certain knowledge of the life to come. Why, however, should we desire this certain knowledge, or, indeed, any knowledge of the life to come? Should we not have so much faith in God as to believe with the whole heart that, when we reach that life, we shall find it just such an one as we need?—a life of joy to the righteous and of improving discipline to the wicked? Moreover, have we, whilst in the earthly life, more than time enough to learn the things which belong to it? But must we not, whilst here, prepare for the next life?—and to this end do we not need a revelation of the things of that life? No. Whilst here, we are to live for this life; and that is our best and, indeed, our only way to prepare for the next. There are many who are habitually leaping over the duties of this life into the heaven they dream of and are impatient for. So, too, there are many who are unfitted for these duties by the hell they dread. But both classes should be absorbed in these duties, and then they would find a heaven, in this life, and be in no danger of finding a hell in another. He is wise and safe who toils to rid the earth of the hell there is upon earth, and to make, right here and even now, the “new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

I must close. A sad thing is it that men are bound up in these theologies. But a sadder thing is the so faint prospect that they will very soon be unbound. The good cling to the theologies for conscience' and also for salvation's sake; and it is but justice to admit that the great mass of the good believe in the theologies. The bad cling to them because, it being for their interest to go with the good, they will ever do so when they can do so cheaply. Moreover, a large share of them hope that by such clinging they will have a better chance to get to heaven. The bare fact that a man has received his theology on Divine authority makes his giving it up well-nigh hopeless. The door is shut against all argument, and whoever would presume to attempt to open it is guilty of the bold blasphemy of bringing forward mere human reasonings against God's unerring word. Even judges and statesmen will consent to let me argue before them. They, of course, see the flaws in my arguments. But, as they are conscious of the fallibility of human reasonings,

their own not excepted, they hear me kindly and respectfully. But I always notice that these orthodox theologians, who fancy that they have a "Thus saith the Lord" for their convictions, refuse me the hearing ear. From the proud eminence of their conscious infallibility they look down upon me with pity and scorn, and sometimes with manifest anger. They let me know, if not always by words, nevertheless by look and manner, that it does not become a *man* to argue against *God*.

How numerous and powerful the institutions and agencies for upholding the theologies and prolonging their existence! Not to look beyond our own country—see the scores of thousands of churches, whose life is in the theologies! See, too, the scores of thousands of their preachers, many of whom, it is true, would still remain faithful and effective preachers of righteousness, but the occupation of more of whom would be gone when the theologies were gone! See, too, the many great schools which represent and serve the theologies; and the Bible, Missionary, and other great societies, which also represent and sustain them! Then, too, our literature is deeply imbued with their spirit. Nay, they are incorporated in it. All their doctrines, even the wildest and worst, are embalmed in it and sanctified by it. Moreover, as men are the subjects of hopes and fears more than of all other affections, their theologies, which are the great fountains of their hopes and fears, must necessarily, more than all other influences, possess and sway them. To let go of the theologies is, in their apprehension, to fail of the heaven they hope for, and to fall into the hell they fear. And, then, to give up the theological religion, with all its poetry and pictures, its touching stories and frequent eloquence—to give it up for a matter-of-fact religion—to give up a religion so juicy and so decorated, in exchange for the dry, flowerless, leafless religion of reason—oh! the mere thought of it is unbearable!

I must not fail to add that the upholding of the theologies is regarded as an indispensable public policy. The terrors which they inspire are largely relied on to maintain society, and to maintain the State. The reliance is by no means misplaced.

"The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip  
To haud the wretch in order."

And yet how poor the society, composed of the superstitions-bound and fear-shriveled, compared with the society which will be, when reason shall have driven out superstition, and the courage which accompanies reason shall have taken the place of the present cowardice! And of how low and mean a type is the State, whose subjects are too far unmanned by theological horrors to be able to face either priest or politician, compared with what the State will be when its subjects, enlightened by science and swayed by reason, shall be self-poised and self-governing!

In view of all this, and of much more to the same end, the overthrow of the theologies seems to be not only difficult and distant, but well-nigh impossible. Nevertheless, as they are, in the main, fanciful and false, we are sure that they can not stand forever. Nay, we may hope that, should the very rapid progress of the last three or four generations in science and general intelligence continue three or four generations longer, the power of the theologies will be broken throughout our country, and, may be, throughout the world. But, be the day of deliverance from this burden of burdens, and this curse of curses, sooner or later, it will be then, and not till then, that Humanity will have fully entered upon a new life—a life of science instead of superstition, of fact instead of fancy, of wisdom instead of folly, of happiness instead of misery. One, and only one, religion will then be seen to have survived the wreck of the theological religions—of those religions in which so much that is false and evil blends with so much that is true and good; so much that is fanciful, grotesque, fanatical, horrible, with so much that is beautiful and sublime. This surviving religion is the manly and matter-of-fact religion of reason. It is the religion taught by Jesus. It is the religion which, he and his preëminent apostle taught, has but one rule, and this rule so simple that all can understand it, and so obviously true that all are convinced of the truth of it. DO AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY is this rule.

“Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.”—*Jesus*.

“For ALL the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”—*Paul*.

## NATURE THE BASIS OF A TRUE THEOLOGY.

BY GERRIT SMITH.

THE scientific study of nature, in her earth, sea, and sky, should be our chief mental employment; for then should we be kept in the sphere of facts and certainties, and from confounding fancies with facts and fictions with certainties. Thus kept, we should increase rapidly in the knowledge of God and man. The human family is still very low and very unhappy. But very high and very happy would it have been had progress in natural science been, in all ages, its leading aim. Even now, and this too in the most favored lands, such is the aim of but here and there an individual. The masses nowhere tax themselves with study. Hence their ignorance, and their liability to listen to the shallow and crafty more than to the wise and upright. Especially little do they study natural science—that science, which, more than all other knowledge, protects and redeems from superstition and from the designs and delusions of the priesthood. I say delusions as well as designs; for, designing as is a large part of the priesthood, a larger part is deluded.

How heaven-high above its present condition and character would humanity have been if, when Jesus began his ministry of light and love, there had been the present progress in astronomy and geology for that ministry to blend with! In unavoidable adaptation to their petty and fanciful universe, the early Christians adopted, and, in part, constructed, a petty and fanciful theology. The whole of their universe was the earth, with a not very large ball of fire, revolving around it, to light and warm it by day, and with candles, stuck here and there in the sky, to serve it at night. And what to them was the earth? A fixed plane, perhaps hardly exceeding Russia either in extent of

territory or population. And what, then, to them, must have been the God who was charged with no wider care than all this amounts to? Surely it is no wonder that He should have been, in their esteem, but little more than the Big Man that the Jews believed Him to be. Consistently, indeed, might they hold that He, like other men, was the subject of change, of burning revenge, and relenting sorrow; that He was capable of hating His own offspring—ay, and, as in the case of Esau, of hating them even before they were born. No effort did it require to believe that such a God had built a hell—even an eternal hell—for the mass of His children. Nothing was easier than for one race to believe, as did the Jews, that this poor, puny, passionate, prejudiced God hated the other races in His narrow dominions, and gave them all up to be despised, and some of them to be destroyed, by the favorite race. In a word, nothing was easier than for a bigoted and bloody people to claim the affinity and countenance of such a God and assure itself of His authority for the commission of its greatest crimes.

How different from this infinitesimal part of nature, which the early Christians took to be the whole of nature, are the wonders which astronomy has opened upon our vision! To say that one no more resembles the other than does a mole-hill a mountain, is to illustrate their difference very faintly. The earth, instead of being well-nigh the all of nature, proves to be but a very small part of the solar system, and scarce a speck in the universe. Even as yet astronomers know very little of that limitless universe. Nevertheless they know of stars whose light has to travel thousands of years before it reaches the earth. Well may Hawthorne say: "If the world were crumbled to the finest dust and scattered through the universe, there would not be an atom of the dust for each star."

But the difference between nature, as seen in the first century and as seen in the nineteenth, is no greater than the difference between a theology, constructed to harmonize with what is now known of nature, and, therefore, of the God of nature, and the theology current before Ptolemy's theory of the heavens and earth, or rather before the theory of Copernicus, since Ptolemy's was not important enough to modify a theology. And yet, alas! Christians still cling to the Christian theology of the

first centuries—a theology made up under the influence of that diminutive view of the Supreme Being which reduced Him to a godling whose sway was hardly wider than is that of the Emperor of Russia. Very sad is it, that a theological system should ever be built in an age of darkness respecting nature, and of consequent ignorance respecting her Author. But sadder still is it that, when an age of light has come, such a system of falsehood should be allowed to usurp the place of ascertained truth, and that such a creature of the benighted past should be forced upon the enlightened present.

What a deplorable and disgusting spectacle does the disingenuous Christian Church present! She claims to be, by force of her infallible traditions, her infallible Bible and its infallible interpretations, the infallible teacher of mankind. And yet she is busy in shutting out from her dark inclosures the constantly and every-where breaking light of natural science. Or, when she can not do this, she stoutly denies the existence of this light. Or, when she can do neither, but is compelled to let in and confess this light, she impudently claims that she always enjoyed it; that they, who wrote the Bible, or the Spirit that prompted them, enjoyed it; and that, even in her earliest days and when all else was in darkness, she was illumined with all the knowledge necessary to guide her in constructing a perfect system of theology—a system perfect for all ages. As an instance of this shutting out and of this denying the light, the Church prates much as she did a thousand years ago, about the universality of the deluge and about man's being a recent creation. In all this, she, of course, ignores the counter testimony of monuments and ruins and geology. Even the orthodox Hugh Miller's arguments against that universality have but little weight with persons who suffer a line here and a line there in the Bible to outweigh the certain and conclusive proofs of natural science. At the late anniversary, in Nottingham, of the British Scientific Association, it was found that every member of it, except Professor Owen, held Darwin's evolution hypothesis instead of the Bible or special-creation hypothesis. But Darwin, although fortified by such names as Spencer and Lyell, and by all the discovered proofs in the crust of the earth of the remote antiquity of the human race, avails nothing with the

creed-bound against the words of a book, written no one knows when, nor by whom; and which, by the way, is no more one book than a dozen pamphlets, written in a dozen different centuries, would become one book by being stitched together. As an instance of the other disingenuousness to which I have referred—her twisting of the Scriptures and of herself into an agreement with science when its teachings can no longer be resisted—the Church, in order to meet the facts and demonstrations of geology, now holds that the six days in which God created the world are no longer to be taken as literal days, but each one as an infinitely long period of time!—and that the Bible representation of the sun and moon's standing still, or of the earth's being a fixed plane and all the heavens revolving around it, is to be taken no longer as the statement of a fact, but only of an appearance!

How much longer must this theological trash be allowed to abuse our patience! How much longer must the darkness and the myths of the past be allowed to shut out the light and facts of the present! How much longer must men and women be required to get into children's clothes! These theologies, well enough suited to the days when they were invented, are as little suited to our day as is the infant's swaddling to bodily maturity. Even the great central myth of the Christian theology—that God sent His “only-begotten Son” on an errand to this world—was, after all, not so preposterous an invention as many take it to be. For the petty God, of whom this is affirmed, was believed, at the time of this invention, to have no other world to see to than a small part of the earth, on which was only a small part of the population of the whole earth. But how great the folly of adhering to this story after astronomers have proved that there are numberless worlds; and that God would, therefore, have needed not an “only-begotten Son,” but numberless sons, in order that each of these worlds might have its visitor—ay, and have him for thirty or forty years! The story in question does very well in connection with a petty God and his petty province; but how silly and sickening it is when associated with the true God and His boundless universe! It is due, however, to the priesthood to add that it will no more suffer itself, in this case than in others, to be cornered by the

astronomers. Its ingenuity opens two doors of escape. First, this is the only world in which there is sin, and, therefore, the only one which the "only-begotten Son" had need to visit. Second, it calls Jesus God, and can therefore admit, for the sake of the argument, that every one of the worlds is so sinful as to require a visit from him. For, if he is God, he could visit them all—ay, and simultaneously.

Oh! when will the theologies—these immeasurably greatest obstacles in all ages and nations to human progress—come to an end! When will the Christian theology, which, by force of its few foolish and wicked words about witches and witchcraft, is responsible for the murder of many thousands; which, by force of its cruel and causeless curse upon Canaan, made Africa the prey of Christendom, and enslaved scores of millions of her children; which, through its mean falsehoods about deeply wronged woman, was able to put her and to keep her under the foot of man; and which, by its terrors, as groundless as great, robs of peace and hope scores of millions of every generation—when, I ask, will even the Christian theology come to an end? Sooner, probably, than the other theologies, because more light is pouring into its darkness than into theirs. And, yet, it will not be very soon. Men know that they should be religious, and, therefore, they desire to be religious. But, for a long time, the priests will be able to uphold the popular belief that the Christian theology (though in fact the greatest hinderance to religion) is, with all its miracles and monstrosities, identical with religion. Hence, men are afraid to throw off this theology. Afraid are they to hear others say, or even to whisper it to their more than half-convinced selves, that this theology, as a whole, has no known foundation in truth. Men have not yet learned to believe with the beloved Jesus—that best of all men and wisest of all moral teachers—that religion consists simply in doing as we would be done by; or with Paul, that it consists solely in loving our neighbor as ourself.

When we see how numerous and mighty are the interests in which the Christian theology is intrenched, we may well despair of seeing it soon give place to a theology which shall be adjusted to what science teaches of nature. Were the theology of Christendom thus adjusted, down would go her theological

seminaries ; and, with very few exceptions, down would go her churches and priests. Down, too, would go her Bible societies, her tract and missionary societies, and, in short, all her institutions which are based on the recognition of the infallibility of the Bible. In respect to its principles, precepts, and inspirations, the Bible does, indeed, stand far ahead of all other books. Nevertheless, how can a man, whose eyes have been providentially turned to its absurdities and abominations, continue with a good conscience to help circulate it as an infallible authority? How can he longer call on men to believe, and to believe too for the life of their souls, in the nonsense about Jonah and the whale; the dry path through the Red Sea; and the reänimation of dead bodies! More than this, how can he longer call upon them to believe in the fitness of charging the Great Loving Father with putting lying spirits in His children; with putting all Saul's wives into David's bosom; with commanding the cruelest wars, and dooming the conquered men, women, and children to extermination; and with other such things, as only the worst of devils should be charged with!

I notice that orthodox preachers and writers are, of late, repeating with unusual frequency that the Bible is the "Word of God." Whether they do this to shut out from themselves, or from others, or from both, the fast-thickening doubts of the propriety of naming a book, in which there is so much nonsense and so much wickedness, the "Word of God," so it is that it forcibly recalls that similar expedient to save a sinking idolatry, when "all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'" But by no such nor by any other jugglery—no, nor by any means whatever—can the Bible be saved. The wise and truthful parts of it will save themselves. The remainder will perish. Science, in its progress, is winnowing the Bible as well as every thing else. This progress will continue until truth shall have completed her expulsion of falsehood, and until there shall not be left one shred of superstition with which to patch up a tattered theology. I do not forget the wide-spread fear that the casting away of the whole Bible will be one of the results of this progress. Perhaps there is some reason for the fear. But the responsibil-

ity for this calamity would not rest upon science. It would rest on those foolish priests and churches, who, by endeavoring to shut out from the Bible the searching light of science, raise an issue between the Bible and science, and, as far as in them lies, necessitate the alternative of accepting the whole Bible with all its folly and sin, or of rejecting it with all the priceless good there is in it. If the position, "The whole Bible or none of it," shall result in "none of it," then they, and they only, who take this bigoted and base position against discriminating science will be chargeable with having robbed the world of the wisest words, which have come down to it from the past.

A miserable world this has ever been because the theologies have ever kept religion under. A happy world will it be when a science-enlightened religion shall get these theologies under. The triumph is sure. The one true religion—the religion of nature and reason, the religion which Jesus loved and lived—will yet get these soul-shriveling and man-crushing theologies under her feet and out of the world.

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I have written these sheets with a deep and undoubting conviction that they contain but truth. I, however, foresee that the defender of the Christian theology will be as quick to say of these sheets, as of all I have written on this subject for ten years, that they contain little but falsehood. And yet, my brother, why should you persist in defending this theology? You are conscious that much of it is at war with your experience and observation, and with what you know of nature. But you will say that it comes from the Bible. I admit that part of it does. What proof, however, have you—such proof, I mean, as can abide the laws of evidence—that the Bible is infallible? Not a particle. Your most relied-on reason for saying that this theology is true, is that Jesus says it is. Where does he say so? In the Bible, is your answer. It is not admitted that the Bible says that Jesus recognizes the truth of this theology. But even if it does say so, where is the proof that it is authorized to say so? Nowhere. Again, even if he

did recognize it to be truth, where is the proof that he knew it to be truth? Did he know all things? Even the Bible says that he confessed he did not. Oh! cite not Jesus for your theology! He who taught his disciples to build their "house upon a rock," would be the last man to have them rest in these groundless theological assumptions.

Alas that enlightened men, and men too who are good as well as enlightened, should still continue to accept and circulate these absurd theologies! Sadder than all is it, that they should recognize as religion what is so largely and glaringly a compound of superstition, fraud, cruelty, and curses—and as that religion of reason, justice, and love, which Jesus taught in the years of his ministry, and which nature ever teaches.





