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The law of likeness

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THE LAW OF LIKENESS



THE
LAW OF LIKENESS

BY
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PROLOGUE

THE LAW OF LIKENESS

SECTION I

THE CREED

NATURALLY, because my parents were very good and lovable, their creed—which was of the Calvinistic type of Christianity—was, through all the years of my youth and early manhood, the creed of my absolute belief. And though I do not believe in its dogma now, and though I feel compelled to write this book with purpose to expose its error, I write sorely against my own inclination, and in a spirit most anxious to avoid offence to any who may hold its tenets in sincerity and charity.

The creed premised the absolute truth of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. On that authority it declared that the God of Israel—a God of a peculiar and chosen people—was also, in the same sense, the God of the Elect in Christ, all of whom would certainly inherit eternal life in heaven; while for all the rest of mankind there remained but outer darkness and despair, the fires of hell, and the company of the damned for ever.

It declared that God, being inexorably righteous, could not forgive unrighteousness; that Man, through the disobedience of Adam, was born in sin, and incapable of holiness; and that therefore all the world was under hopeless condemnation by the divine law. That in this deadlock the only possible way of mercy was by the sacrifice of a substitute, who himself without sin, should be also mighty to make full atonement for the sins of many. That for this end God gave His only-begotten Son, who was born into the world, and dwelt for a space among men; and who then, by a death of shame upon the cross, and a descent into hell in fulfilment of the sentence against the wicked, once for all reconciled the divine justice with the divine mercy, and by his blood washed away all the sins of his chosen in the sight of God for ever! And after the passing of Christ, God sent the Holy Ghost to inspire the hearts of the Elect with saving faith in their Redeemer, and to gather them into his fold from the uttermost ends of the earth; wherefore none of them can be lost, but all, born again of the Spirit, become in the fulness of time possessed of eternal life, and the love of God, and the desire of purity of heart, and the sure hope of perfection and felicity in the presence of the glory of God in heaven for ever and ever!

It is a logical creed, and its plan of salvation, within the limit of its purpose, is perfect. Despite the loose tenure of its arbitrary dogma by

many Christian Churches, it is essentially the creed of Christianity. Behind all the gloss of human charity with which the pulpits cover its inhumanity; behind the gracious presence of Jesus of Nazareth which they uplift before its dreadful statement; behind all the indefinite interpretation which seeks to enlarge the plan of salvation and to fit it to the extreme limit of human necessity, it remains rigid and unchangeable—the Creed of the Apostles and of Christianity. It is authoritative. It is either truth or error. If it is true, it is most terrible; and absolutely believed, it would be quite intolerable to poor humanity. If it is false, then we ought no longer to tolerate it as a matter of make-believe.

MY EXPERIENCE

A child of many prayers, I was early “converted” —came to feel the overwhelming burden of my sinfulness, and an intense desire for conscious reconciliation with God—and in due course I believed myself to be possessed of a living faith in Christ, was accepted of the elders, and baptized into the Church. Zealous for the faith, and sensitive to its operation upon the heart, I soon afterwards began to preach, and was approved of a congregation who were severe judges both of sound doctrine and of spiritual experience.

But it presently happened that in mind and heart I discerned myself to be unfit for the office

of a minister of the Gospel; for both alike, with equal force, questioned the righteousness of the Creed which I had to expound, and questioned in vain.

It would be of no service to write at length of my sore perplexity and deep distress. A like experience of doubt and heart-searching in matters of faith and conduct is recorded in many books, and is known to all sincere souls whose religion is a living verity. But in no record of such experience have I found an answer to my questioning, or an indication of any solid ground whereon I could rest. While many have recorded answers which they have declared were of approved sufficiency for their peace of mind and satisfaction of heart, it always seemed to me that they were content with phrases rather than with ideas, and that they succeeded only in suppressing doubt, and not in attaining to knowledge.

I could not reconcile the dogma of my belief with my innate sense of justice, still less with my sense of mercy and divine love. Nor could I live up to, or anywhere near to, its standard of holy living and aspiration. The generous covenant of God with the saved was of no avail for my contentment alongside with the inexorable exclusion of the lost; and although my faith might be a true and even a saving faith, I could not live by it happily.

Apart from the hard dogma of the atonement, it would have been easy to love God. The person of

Christ, the story of his life and death, his revelation of God as the Father, and his command to "love one another," all appealed directly and powerfully to my heart. But the plan of salvation—the doctrine of original sin and the alienation of the world from goodness, the redemption of the Elect, and the regeneration of the soul by the Holy Ghost—was impossible to me. The new birth, gifted with power for renunciation of the world on the one hand, and on the other with faculty of love and desire for the Kingdom of Heaven, was absolutely unknown to me as a living truth. The renunciation of the world seemed to me to be no less than renunciation of my very self—a negation, not of sin, but of being. I loved the life that coursed through my veins with my blood, and I did not, and could not, love an intangible life that demanded the suppression of all that which I felt to be actual and human in the present, for the sake of a future which presented nothing that commended itself to me as fitting to any faculty of desire or hope in my nature.

The consideration that my unhappiness might be accounted for by a failure in conduct—failure not of an impossible standard of perfection, but of a possible standard of rectitude and discipline, of which every one fails more or less—and that by prayer and endeavour I might yet win to a tenure of trust in the divine goodness and of desire for the promises of the Christian faith, availed me nothing. That was not to live, but

only to hope to live ; and it seemed to me more and more certain that I was still unregenerate. I did not then question the truth of my creed. I firmly believed that the Bible was literally the Word of God, and I had no shadow of doubt as to the meaning of its revelation. But against its dogma my whole soul revolted ; and to its anticipation of eternal life my whole being was without response ; and in my heart I said in my despair, that I would rather be damned with the lost, than saved by a grace that was denied to them. I have no words to tell of my distress when at length I came to acknowledge myself in revolt against what I believed to be the essential and eternal truth of God's will and order. I was for a time as one already outcast from hope. The earth was as iron beneath my feet, and the heavens as brass above my head.

Left to myself, I might in course of time have become indifferent to these things, as most people are ; but I was not left to myself. I held my belief in the truth of my creed to be beyond the possibility of change ; in myself alone I deemed a change might be possible, and of that I was hopeless. Yet there came a change, not in myself, fitting me for a living tenure of my faith, but in the article of faith itself ; by which it became mine to me ; life of my life ; a faith, clear as the sun at noonday, sure as the order of the stars, and lovely as love's own self.

THE CHANGE

The beginning of change was by an occurrence of a sort that we call supernatural; but as the actual change cannot be told without mention of the seeming fact that assuredly led to it, I must record it as briefly as I may.

It happened upon an occasion when I was in the very extremity of my perplexity, that suddenly, and without apparent cause, I felt that my distress had fallen from me as a garment; my trouble was stilled, and I was conscious only of a great peace. Presently it seemed to me that I saw a light, not of this world, and heard a voice full of comfort and assurance—that in very truth I heard words which satisfied me of the goodness of God, and promised me enlightenment of understanding in time to come.

Now it may be that there was nothing in this experience beyond the possibilities of the human mind, which is apt in moments of excessive emotion to snap like an overstrained bow, and spring to the opposite; so that the instant and unreasoning peace may have been no more than the consequence of a natural recoil from the extremity of distress and perplexity; and all the rest—as doubtless many will account it—but mere illusion; imaginative effluvia of a brain in the crisis of a sudden release from intolerable pain. And looking back to the event across more than thirty

years, I cannot for myself distinguish between its reality and its seeming. It seemed to me to be real, and my apprehension of a spiritual presence was beyond questioning; but more than that I cannot affirm, and I refrain from telling it in detail for that reason.

I *believe* that it was an interposition on the part of the divine Mind, whose continuous operation upon the minds of men is approved to me beyond all doubt, for my help and guidance on occasion of my extreme necessity. The method of the interposition does not matter, since the result was good and lasting; for beyond any question of seeming is the fact that from that time I was set free from the old bondage of Creed. I ceased to preach, because I had come to know that I had nothing to teach, but everything to learn. I was content to wait, convinced that I had been hasty in my judgment of matters too high for my understanding. I was no nearer to the solution of the problem that had so perplexed me, but I was no longer in a hurry to solve it, since the distress of its mystery had passed away. I was not conscious of even the beginning of doubt of the truth of my Creed, until long afterwards; and I was not indifferent to the supreme matters with which it dealt; but I had been made willing to wait with entire confidence for the further enlightenment which the voice had seemed to promise.

There was no revelation of new things, or con-

firmation of the old, on this occasion. I do not myself believe any doctrine whatever on the authority of the supernatural; and I trust that no reader of this book will imagine that my conclusions have been in the slightest degree influenced by that experience of mine. It was the beginning of a change in my beliefs, but, of itself, it affected those beliefs so little, that I was unconscious of any change in them at all for some years afterwards.

SECTION II

WEST AFRICA

THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

CURIOUS to see something of the world beyond the seas, and compelled to abandon the hope I had entertained of going out as a missionary, I eagerly closed with an offer made to me to go as a clerk for a company trading on the West Coast of Africa. Of all countries Africa had taken the strongest hold of my imagination; and truly it is a place where life is most strange and wonderful, and where death is very near and very easy.

My new quarters were on a "hulk" of some three hundred tons, roofed from stem to stern with a thatch of palm leaves, moored in the tideway of a river, at that spot about half a mile wide. The nearer bank had an average elevation of perhaps a hundred feet; the farther shore was a mangrove swamp, which fettered for a mile or more between us and a wider branch of the river, which, like most African rivers, had made itself uninviting to the alien by the formation of a wide delta of poisonous black mud and rotting vegetation, through which it made its way to

the sea by several channels. On the nearer bank was a clearing fenced with bamboos, enclosing our cask-houses; behind which stood a vast wall of glorious forest, with densest tangle of undergrowth, vocal with innumerable notes from birds, reptiles, and insects, which reached the ear blent into one incessant thrilling chorus that, especially at nightfall, was most striking and remarkable. Crowning the height over against our station was a mission house; and two miles away down the river were some dozen or so trading hulks moored opposite to a populous native town.

I shall give no account of the West African trading life, as that has nothing to do with the purpose of this book; but will confine myself to the interests of my leisure time, and to matters which led more or less directly to the growth of new ideas in my mind—which changed much of the thought that I had received from my teachers into other thought that was really my own, forced upon me by what I saw myself, and which gradually but surely approved itself as true.

In this connection also, I think that the mere change of environment must be taken into account. The responsibility of new duties naturally developed a new independence and self-reliance; and the severance from familiar scenes and associations, the power of the sea, and the strange aspects of tropical nature, all tended to fit the mind for change of belief, to give

it another standpoint of vision, and to compel it to the exercise of individual judgment.

I was placed where everything had an aspect of novelty, and where much was so beautiful, strange, and interesting, that no day seemed ever too long, and no hour was void of surprise. It was a liberal education of itself to stand under the stupendous roof of the larger forest trees, whose buttressed trunks bore aloft a whole world of greenery, only beginning at a height above that of our tallest oaks, and blending, confused and distant, almost with the very sky itself—a wonder-world of great ferns and curious orchids, of vines and multitudinous creepers and pendent mosses; humming like a hive with a myriad of tiny wings, and joyous with strange and far-away songs from invisible birds; a world of pushing, battling life, of intense energy and hurry, and infinite separate struggles; and yet the whole so still and solemn, so steadfastly sustained was all by those grand columns which had won their own victory in the battle long years ago. Not far from our position there was a gorge down which a little clear stream ran into the river from the higher ground at the back; and as it had long been held in superstitious dread by the natives as the abode of a very evil spirit, it was a genuine bit of primitive forest, quite secure from the intrusion of any Calabar man, and indeed almost impenetrable by any one. Seen from the river there was no appearance of any depression in the ground, for in the hollow there stood

several trees so gigantic, that their heads were uplifted quite to the average level of the giants that stood on the higher ground of the sides. And here, after one had broken, with no little difficulty, through the surrounding tangle, it was like being present during an act of the earlier life-drama of the earth. For conceit of comedy and very real tragedy were there, all the more exciting that so little of it all could be seen, while so much could be heard. Now the place would be amusing with the antics of a troop of monkeys, or the start and indignation of a squirrel surprised by the discovery of a strange intrusion in its neighbourhood; then tragic with the pounce of a tiger-cat and the scream of its victim; and all the time it held the attention strained to catch the meaning of a thousand mysterious sounds which could hardly ever be traced to their source. The stir of soft footfalls stealthily approaching and as stealthily receding; the snapping of twigs under the weight of some great python, and the startled rush of porcupine or guinea-fowl before its dangerous advance; the rustle and patter and scratching of tiny feet all about; notes of alarm or contentment or complaint from a vast host of invisible performers; while all that could be seen was now and again the flash and glitter of blue and crimson and gold as a bird or burnished insect gleamed for a moment in a shaft of blinding sunlight, to be instantly lost in the background of complex shadow.

Of the splendour of the nights on the river

no words could tell. Above, a sky of deepest purple, where the crescent moon or "Hesperus rode brightest" amid strange constellations; below, the broad stream, gemmed like another sky, in which the steadfast fires of the stars blent with a haze of tiny lamps carried by thousands of dancing fireflies, and withal, a silence that could be felt, and was only more perfect because the fine notes of the bats and the thin trill from the black line of forest seemed but to make silence audible. There were other nights when, about sunset, a small cloud would lift itself above the seaward horizon, and, rapidly enlarging and calling to itself other clouds, would sweep grandly up the river, a visible terror; its head crowned with gold, its base black as midnight, resting upon a pallid grey line of foam speeding under it like a charge of cavalry under the dreadful smoke-cloud of some tremendous battle. An ominous stillness came before it, the cicadæ ceased their song, and every living thing sought shelter and hiding, except only the sandpipers, which would flit uneasily over the surface of the water with warning and melancholy cry. Then a shudder would stir the river and a sobbing would run along the shore; there would be a sullen heave into long rolling waves, a noise like the rush of an express train, and in a moment the full fury of the tornado would be upon us in a smother of blinding spray and shriek and roar of maddest wind. For a brief dis-

tracting space the river would be tossed like a stormy sea, only, a minute later, to be beaten flat again, a level mistiness, under the lashing of intolerable rain. Then for a while all would be bright as day in the glare of the incessant lightning, and the hulk would tremble in all her timbers to the deafening artillery of the rearguard of the storm, which, passing as quickly as it came, would presently be faintly heard muttering and growling far away in the hinterland. A delicious freshness would be in the air, the stars would sparkle with exquisite purity and brilliancy, and the frogs, bats, and crickets would break out into a loud chorus of rejoicing, only to be soon again suppressed when the tornado came hurrying back on the way to its abiding place in the sea.

I could multiply descriptions; but I wish only to record enough to distinctly mark the novelty of my environment, and to confine myself to facts which in the aggregate tended to change my point of view of many things with which I shall presently deal.

The picturesqueness of the human life of the place was beyond imagining. In the towns and on the plantations; in the market-places and on the river; the movement and colour, always seen in an incomparable setting, were a continual delight. I have seen nothing anywhere to equal or even approach the spectacle on the occasion of a grand

palaver of chiefs on the river. The grouping of the great canoes into masses of intense and splendid colour; of richest yellows, reds, and oranges; the sparkle of the water vexed by a thousand paddles, in a sunlight brilliant yet soft; the glorious vegetation of the banks, all green and gold in the lights and purple and blue in the shadows; gradated and softened as it receded to where the river broadened into a distance like an opal, where the beflagged ships and the crowd of canoes hung like a dream between earth and sky; combined into a very "wilderness of harmony," which I would not willingly forget.

What of the people themselves? "Half animal, half children, wholly savage and wholly heathen," as Drummond describes the people of the Central African plateau? Well, no. All of us are half animal, and but children in the better half of our being; but I question if "wholly savage and wholly heathen" would properly apply to any people on the earth. I should not call the people of Old Calabar uncivilised; and if their civilisation and conventions were less complex than ours, they yet embraced all the prime factors of our social life, and were perhaps all the more noteworthy because of their simplicity. In reality there was no savagery among them worse than ours, even in high places; and there was no vulgarity whatever to compare with the hideous vulgarity of the slums of our great cities; and no heathenism so shameful and debased.

They had a king over them, and they were composed of an aristocracy, a priesthood, and a commons; but, broadly speaking, they were of two classes only—masters and slaves, for the king had hardly any authority over the nobles, all of whom were initiated into the mysteries of the priesthood. Apart from the customs of superstition—the black man's "fashion"—the government was not to be called cruel; it was patriarchal rather; the relations between master and slave being somewhat similar to those which used to exist between a Highland chieftain and the clan. A man's belongings worked for him on his plantations, traded for him between the up-country markets and the ships, obeyed him, and generally were at his disposal even to the extent of life or death; yet they regarded him rather as a protector than as a tyrant, and there was no hard and fast rule to hinder an exceptionally able slave from becoming a more important and influential person than his nominal master. The slave trade with the "civilised" world had been long suppressed in the river, and with it the most revolting particulars of African slavery had disappeared from the neighbourhood. The "fashion" which had been the curse and terror of the domestic slavery, had been driven into hiding by the persistent efforts of the missionaries; and though only scotched, and not killed, it did not dare to commit the open atrocities of the time before their advent. This was the sacrifice of slaves on occasion

of the death of a king or other person of consequence, so that the dead chief might not find himself without followers to do him service in the land of ghosts. This superstition ever dogged the steps of the common folk with fear; and as it was a "fashion" rooted in a feeling of honour for the dead, and more deeply still in natural selfishness—for by its observance a man did as he hoped to be done by, and sent off his chief or relative with a fitting retinue, so that in his turn he himself might not be left to go into the dark alone—it was hard to kill outright. In that fashion the black man laid up for himself treasure in the world to come; and in my time the custom still claimed its victims, if not so openly as formerly, yet in places that were not beyond a day's walk, by means of a charge of witchcraft, followed by the ordeal of the poison bean (*éséré*), which was just as fatal in the result as the old style by club or spear.

But it would be a mistake to take this superstitious custom as conclusive proof that the people were "wholly savage" and uncivilised. It would be easy to make out a strong case against any civilisation by presenting only its dark side for judgment. And because that method *is* easy and, moreover, effective with the majority, it is the method commonly adopted in platform appeals on behalf of missionary enterprise. The dark and childish superstition, the evil and bloody custom, are alone set

forth on the one side; and on the other not only the good work really done by the Mission, but also much of the good which was before its time, and for which it can properly claim no credit. Not that I think little of what the Missions really do, or that I have not a very high regard for the spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to noble ideals in which much of it is done: but, after all, work of a like nature and equally good is done by thousands of Englishmen in India, Africa, and other places, without advertisement or recognition as Christian; and the only thing by which the endeavour of Christian missionaries is to be properly distinguished from that of the others, and by which it must be judged apart, is the preaching of the Gospel, and the success or failure of that.

In Old Calabar I may premise that the Gospel was preached in spirit and in truth; and was exemplified by purity of life and charitable works on the part of the missionaries. There was no sectarian difference—like to that in Uganda, for example, of which we read—fruitful of bitter jealousy and strife between the French Catholic and the English Protestant native churches; and from which the mind recoils in amazement at the utter folly and treason of it; for it is more than childish, it is simian; and worse than simian, devilish! This is to feed the little ones of the Master, not with the milk of human kindness and the manna of divine com-

passion; but with a devil's broth of pride, enmity, and all uncharitableness. But here, on the side of Christianity, all were of one faith and one spirit united and helpful; and on the other hand, while the people were heathen, they were not so low in the human scale, so brutal of heart, and so void of understanding as to be beyond hope of conversion and regeneration. On the contrary, they were a kindly folk, affectionate in their domestic relations, just in their dealings with each other, well disposed and friendly towards the white man. They were intelligent, quick to apprehend new things, keen and energetic traders, and were skilled somewhat in metal working, dyeing and weaving, building and agriculture. Their canoes were of noble size and shapely proportion; their houses were not mere beehive huts, but were squarely built, enclosing a courtyard much after the manner of a modern Egyptian village. Decorous in behaviour, courteous in greeting, dignified and grave, with a classified society, an industrial life that recognised the value of division of labour, and a system of exchange including equivalents for barter, they seemed to me to have a good claim to be considered a civilised people.

Therefore I think the condition of things here, both on the Christian and the heathen side, could hardly have been more favourable for judgment of the Christian claims. The situation embraced all the factors essential to an impartial conclusion. Here

was the Gospel in direct contact with its declared purpose—what of its power? And at the outset of our essay we may be assured of this, that while we must rejoice in all the success of the Mission, nothing of its failure will need apology.

THE MISSION

Upon a site aforesaid overgrown by dense and unwholesome bush, overlooking the populous native town, the church, manse, and school-house of the Mission stand in the midst of a spacious garden which is beautiful and profuse beyond description. The noble bread-fruit, brought from afar, casts its intense shadow upon the broad and well-kept paths alongside of the native orange and lime, plantain and banana; and high above all the regal cocoa-palm waves its graceful crown. It is all in striking contrast to the foul fringe of bush which encloses the town on every other side; and the change has been wrought by patient and persistent labour during long years of trial and discouragement. But there is a greater change here than what is apparent in the visible contrast: for this place is veritably a city of the Levites, a city of refuge—not for the man-slayer, but from the man-slayer and the oppressor. Where once the headless bodies of many victims used to be flung to the hyænas, vultures, and ants, is now a sanctuary. With their whole heart and

strength the dwellers in this place have unweariedly striven against the cruelty of superstition, and have pleaded with the blood-thirsty master for justice and mercy for the slave. They have ministered to rich and poor impartially, alleviating their bodily ailments, and endeavouring to inculcate in their minds the law of charity, in the name and for the sake of Christ. A city of refuge to the poor black slave, the Mission is moreover a haven of rest, a hospital and a home, to the fever-stricken white trader—a house to be remembered all his life after with grateful appreciation of its kindly welcome and gracious entertainment.

Visit it on a Sunday afternoon. There is no stir of trading on the river down below; Duke Town seems asleep, and an air of quiet and peace is over the whole scene. Entering the church we find a decently dressed and orderly congregation of natives, men, women, and children, together with perhaps half-a-dozen white men from the ships. There is a service similar to what we have been familiar with at home; a short sensible sermon, in English, followed by the administration of the Lord's supper, and a brief address in Efik to the native communicants.

I have no record of the number of converts who were counted as members of the church; and I do not know that they were persecuted because of their faith. I think there was really no religion in the neighbourhood to take offence at any innovation in

respect of dogma; and so far as I am aware there was no prejudice against Christianity, on the part of the ruling caste among the people, strong enough to induce them to keep their children away from the Mission school. On the contrary, they appreciated the advantage of its teaching, inasmuch as it was a good thing to “sabe trade palaver”—they had no objection to the loaves and fishes, and apprehended no serious harm from the sermon.

Let us now leave the Mission, and return to our quarters by a way leading through a part of the native town, and then for two miles or so along a path through the bush, noting only such things as may seem to indicate the actual spiritual condition of the general mass of the people.

In the town we are surprised by its unusual quiet and apparent emptiness. There is not a soul to be seen, and even the fowls and goats are in hiding in the courtyards. Suddenly a grotesque figure, disguised beyond the possibility of recognition—a sort of Jack-in-the-Green or bogle—comes running round a corner upon us, hesitates for a moment as though disconcerted by the meeting, and then hastily rushes past us without greeting. He is followed by other runners without disguise, who seem equally surprised, and even alarmed on seeing us, and cry out in warning—“Egbo live! Egbo live there!” as they dash past in pursuit of the leader. But there is no help for it; the mischief is done! We have come across Egbo, who

should never be seen by a white man or a native woman, and we must take the consequences of the mishap!

Clear of the town we come upon numbers of signs of a prevailing superstition, scattered here and there by the wayside. Jujus of sorts, but all mean and paltry in the extreme—only a broken calabash placed upside down on the ground, with a few rags arranged round it; or a little platform of sticks garnished with broken calabashes, skulls of animals, egg-shells, and worthless bits of cloth; or a Juju house, with a thatched roof, but no better furniture, unless some human skulls among the other rubbish are to be regarded as a superior offering to the evil spirits of the locality. For all these things are propitiatory offerings, indicating nothing which can be dignified by the name of worship, but only a vague belief in the existence of malicious hobgoblins and vengeful ghosts which haunt the dark forest. Poor miserable ghosts, obviously of contemptible intelligence, yet maybe with power for mischief not so contemptible; easily propitiated by an offering of egg-shells or broken bottles, yet not safely to be neglected, for even the meanest may do injury. “Suppose no calabash live for debil-debil, that time leopard come and catch goat, woman cut her foot with hoe,” or some other misfortune would be likely to happen. How else should mischief come? The negro traces all evil and accident to some malign agency, and this is his

method of dealing with an invisible and intangible enemy. He would make short work of him—as he does with witch or wizard—if only he could lay hands on him; but as he cannot come at him to kill him, he does his best to cheat him. For in only one instance during our walk do we see any offering of the slightest value—a tiny chicken crying in the path before one of the Jujū houses. Its mouth was bleeding from a cut, but whether the injury was done with some idea of a blood-offering, or simply to spite the ghosts, or, as is most likely, as a precaution against theft by the first passer-by from a distance outside the range of this particular set of ghosts, there is no telling. But enough! We need only note that these things are not antiquities. But for frequent renewal they would swiftly disappear and leave no trace. They are really indicative of the ideas dominating the everyday life of the mass of people.

UP THE RIVER

I was invited to pay a visit to an outlying station of the Mission at Ikorofiong, some sixty or seventy miles up the Cross River. Called at four in the morning we had breakfast, and went down to the boat, which with awning set up and the krumen waiting, was ready for us on the beach. By daybreak we had passed Creek Town and were in the Cross River,

where we made rapid progress on the flood up to Ikunitu, which place we reached about nine. Here we were met by the missionary from Ikorofiong, and we went up with him to the Mission premises for a rest and some "chop," in course of which there was some talk in Efik between the missionaries and the native teacher of the place, which plainly related to some matter of trouble. It appeared that only a day or two before Ikunitu had been the scene of a tragedy—new style. A chief's daughter had died, and consequently a charge of witchcraft had been brought against some of the people; two women and a man had been tried by the ordeal of *éséré* and poisoned, and their heads taken away to one of the plantations far back in the bush. By this round-about way of murder there was less risk of collision with the missionaries, who moreover could be met with the plea of an old and just law, and an indignant denial of superstitious custom. And in any case it would be very difficult to bring the affair to judgment, or even remonstrance; for all concerned would take good care to keep out of the way for a time: and while we were in Ikunitu none of the headmen were to be seen—they "live for" some place far away in the bush.

When we were again on the way the character of the scenery exhibited a striking and welcome change. The mangrove occurred only rarely and presently disappeared, and in its stead there was a richer and

more varied vegetation. All along the margin of the river there stretched a border of cleared ground, mostly under cultivation, but in places covered only by a thick growth of tall grasses. Behind the border stood an unbroken wall of forest, above the average level of which towered now and again a gigantic silk cotton tree: and on the narrow stage in front of this glorious curtain—a velvety mist of green—there was an ever-changing panorama of infinite charm and interest.

In the shadow of a noble group of cocoa-palms we could see a little village of clay huts, and on the river near it fishermen in canoes busy with their nets, or readjusting lines of stakes set in the water, forming fish-traps enclosing small creeks and backwaters. There would follow plantations of maize and yams, amid groves of plantains and oil-palms. At the water's edge grew a palm whose lower fronds were covered with the pendent nests of a colony of weaver-birds, enlivening the scene with the noise and bustle of their family affairs. The time of year, December, seems to be equivalent to our spring, for the maize is just coming up, and all the birds appear to have paired and to be engaged in the business of nidification. I examined several nests of a beautiful little swallow, of a steely purplish blue, with a small white patch on the throat, which attaches its shallow cup-shaped clay nest to sheltered projections on the tree trunks stranded on the river-bed; nearly all of them

were in process of building, and only one contained eggs. I noticed also one of the common black and white fish-hawks fly to a nest among the topmost branches of a huge bombax which had been left standing, solitary sentinel over a patch of cleared ground; because it was too big to be easily cut down, and too grand not to have impressed the negro mind with the idea that "Juju live there." Presently we pass a small savannah overgrown with *ésantem* grass eight or ten feet high, and there in the dried mud at its edge we see the deep slots of *Ésantem* (the hippopotamus) himself, made during his nightly visits to his feeding grounds; and soon we are favoured with a sight of a pair of the huge beasts quite near the boat, and have a good view of the neat ears, prodigious muzzle, and knowing eyes, while they take a leisurely look at us before quietly sinking out of sight. The savannah merges into a sandbank, sparsely overgrown with grass and scrub, above which the river opens out into a wide lake-like expanse of shallow water; and now I discover that so far we have not been on the main stream, but have come up a comparatively narrow channel running between a long island and the eastern bank. Looking back, there is to be seen on the other side of the island a much wider branch of the river, which is again divided, a mile below, by the island of Isonginyong, a great place for hippos, and the habitat of that curious bird, the Scissors-bill. Going on we soon

come to another island, at the upper end of which there is an extensive shoal which compels us to make a wide detour before crossing over to Ikorofiong, which is situated on the western bank. During the rains the flooded river brings down a vast quantity of earthy matter and débris of all sorts from the interior, much of which will be arrested by that shoal, so that by this time next year probably the greater part of it will be above water and overgrown by grass and bush, and a few years hence the island will be nearly double its present size. At Isonginyong ten years ago there was a similar shoal, where now there is an extensive savannah, parts of which are under cultivation.

IKOROFIONG

After the long day in the boats we were glad to stretch our cramped limbs on shore; and making no stay in the town—a straggling collection of untidy huts, about which were many oil-casks, for Ikorofiong is an oil market—we went at once up to the Mission, which is situated upon high ground, lying back from the river about a quarter of a mile.

There, after tea, a service was held for the boys of the household. A hymn, reading from the Bible by each of the boys in turn, and prayer, all in the Efik language; and so far as I could tell, the boys read easily and well.

The next morning I went with my friends to one of the villages in the neighbourhood. The Ibibio towns are less compact than those of Old Calabar; as each homestead is surrounded by a garden or plantation, so that the extent of a town or village cannot be readily made out. We entered by a narrow pathway between high fences, and soon came to a little cluster of buildings, and then on by a winding path to another cluster, and after a while we came to an open space surrounded by houses, which was the public square and market-place. A building somewhat better than the rest, which stood at the far end, was the Mission school, wherein a native teacher was engaged with about a dozen children, or maybe more. At the opposite end of the square—or rather parallelogram—stood the Juju house, a low hovel with open gable-end, exposing to view a raised platform of earth in the middle, on which stood a rudely carved post, above a heap of human and other skulls.

We went into one of the houses and seated ourselves upon a mat which was spread for us upon a sort of sofa of hardened clay; the fire burning upon the floor was carried outside, as the smoke of it had no way of escape except by the door; and the word having gone round, the chief man of the place presently arrived with some of his people and soon crowded the little room, while a knot of women and children closed up round the doorway outside. Each

of the missionaries spoke briefly in the native, in turn; being listened to with attention, and nods and hums of assent; and then some mimbo—palm wine—was brought in, and we drank to each other with the customary “micomfi”! There seemed great goodwill between the parties, but, all the same, there remained the Juju house.

On Sunday there was the usual service in the morning, in the church at Ikorofiong; but very few natives of the town were present, most of the people being away at their plantations, or trading up the river, at this time of year. After the service we walked through the bush to a village at some distance; it was an assemblage of wretched huts, enclosing on three sides a small space of bare ground, fenced off at one end from a little plantation of bananas. Here we sat down in the shade of a rude verandah projecting from one of the hovels, near to which grew two or three ragged oil-palms. The folk of the place soon collected, squatting round us on the ground, and a group of children in the shade of the palms repeated a form of catechism after the native teacher. Then the missionary addressed the adults at some length and with obvious feeling.

But I despair of giving the reader an idea of the impression made on me by that congregation; for words must altogether fail to picture its abject misery. The impress of a cruel past and the dread of a hopeless future could be seen on every melancholy face

young and old, and were distressingly apparent in every angular line and listless movement of their diseased and ill-nourished frames. I had been used to meet chiefs and head-men of easy and confident bearing among people who, while dependent on them, at the same time shared in their security and consequence, and looked happy and contented. But this gathering had no strong man left to them. Their chief had been slain some time before by the people of Ikorofiong, who had surprised and looted the place in the night. Their best men had been killed, the younger women carried off, and the miserable remnant before us was a broken folk, without courage, energy, or hope; with no assurance that they would be suffered to reap the fruits of their labour, haunted by memory of recent wrong, and scared by the expectation of evil to come.

“There was a listening fear in ‘their’ regard;
As if calamity had but begun,
As if the vanward clouds of evil days
Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear
Was with its storèd thunder labouring up.”

They were no longer worth harrying, and they would be safe only for so long as they were useless and harmless.

The group of children presented a pitiable sight beyond despair of description. Intelligent but unsmiling faces, which seemed to be all eyes, intensely pathetic and wistful; emaciated bodies, pitiable only

in their naked deformity, but oh, how pitiable! clad as some of them were in a dreadful garment of sores! One poor little creature about six months old had its whole face masked and eyes closed up by kraw-kraw, an infectious and irritating skin disease; and was a mere unhappy blotch, alive only to suffering, nursed by a little girl who tried to hush it into an uneasy slumber that broke ever and again into a low moaning. Orphaned victims of a brutal raid, friendless but for a few in like evil case with themselves, that miserable group presented a picture so distressing and woe-begone, that to sit there and look on it in the bright sunshine, without purpose to help, seemed a crime. It took me suddenly by the throat, and pierced the heart with a sharp sting of infinite pity—with conviction that all the common interests and ambitions of life are beneath contempt compared with the devotion of those who give their lives freely to do all that they may to comfort and lift up such unhappy and oppressed souls—with enlightenment of understanding even of the passionate compassion for an erring and suffering world that overflowed the heart of Jesus of Nazareth, and with new apprehension of the tender love of his saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me; forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." For to all who know the East, that scene "on the borders of Judæa and beyond Jordan" must be conceived as very different from the conventional pretty pictorial representations.

which satisfy the popular idea of it. Surely those little ones were even as these; poorest of the poor, naked and sick, brought by anxious and importunate mothers to Jesus in the extremity of their necessity and distress—a scandal and an offence to the disciples, who rebuked the poor creatures, stirring even the gentle Master with indignation by their inhumanity. “And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.”

A PALAVER

Let us listen now to what the missionary has to say for himself—a true man, speaking to a friend with some understanding of the case.

It was evening, and we sat smoking in the verandah of the mission-house, enjoying the tranquil beauty of the twilight. For there is twilight in the tropics, notwithstanding the impression that many writers combine to give of the suddenness of the change from day to night, and the oft-quoted—

“At one stride comes the dark.”

Anyway, it is rather a long stride, nearly or quite as long as the twilight of a fine winter evening at home, and certainly I never observed anything strikingly sudden about it. There is, even on the equator, half-an-hour or more of twilight. We sat watching the veil of mist which hid the river down below gradually

drawn here and there across the forest on either side, until presently one by one the stars ventured out above. Not until after it was quite dark did we care to go in and turn up the lamp.

The night was very still; the faint murmur of the cricket tribe and the thin chirp of the bats but lulled the ear into drowsy unconsciousness of sound, as the ticking of a clock will do. A little cloud of moths fluttered round the lamp, while a few larger ones sailed about overhead; and every now and then a bat drifted in like a shadow, gave a quick snap among them, and was gone, leaving behind a trail of mottled wings fluttering to the floor.

My host, seeing my interest in a moth, which to my surprise I found to be identical, so far as I could tell, with our own Death's-Head Moth, told me some things about a naturalist who had died shortly before my arrival in the river, which caused me to remark:

“Well, it is a strange story, that seems to suggest another story not less strange and sad, behind it. A man must be very desolate of friends one would think, or have one in particular too many, to drive him into an asylum of that sort. Four years' knocking about here, only just waiting for the end!”

“Maybe so, but he was an inoffensive soul, and every one here was friendly and helped him along.”

“Yes, no doubt; but apart from some very strong reason, I should take it as of course that any one here

collecting, would try to get done and be off with his spoils at his best speed. I can understand him putting off going more than once in the hope of securing some special prize, and putting it off once too often. But this man seems to have been satisfied to stay on here without the wish to escape, or ambition of any reward."

"*You* won't be sorry, then, to leave the river?"

"Why, no! rather not. Of course it has been wonderfully interesting, and the novelty is not quite worn off yet, but—well, you know! *Is* the game worth the candle?"

"Which is burning at both ends."

"Something like that. Of course it is different with you. Your game *is* good enough; and when you have done your share of the work here, you may always feel that it was good work, the best of your life maybe. Yet, do you know, I wonder how you can for so long endure the monotony and isolation of it. I know I should find it quite impossible after two or three years."

"Ay, laddie, but you see there's something else. You have 'the sad heart, sick for home.' But I have the goodwife here with me, and so I am at home. Not that I'm saying it's not hard enough at times for both of us. Not so much the isolation as the discouragement—when all our work goes back on us, and we begin to think that after all we are doing no real good in the place. It's something like that bit of

meadow outside round the house. We go to a lot of trouble to get a little ground cleared, and it's very refreshing to the eye wearied of the everlasting bush to look on the bonny bit of green field ; and it's good for us who live in the middle of it to be in the open. But it doesn't spread of itself, and the folk round us see no use in it and make no clearings like it. And if we let it alone, the bush would just ramp across it and smother it all in six months."

"Well, I used to think I would be a missionary ; but my notion of the life was not much like the real thing."

"Sure not to be—but in what particularly?"

"Oh, to begin with, I had naturally a lot of crude and absurd ideas of adventure and discovery—the usual nonsense. A year's experience would have cleared the air of them, and no harm done. But I had other ideas as well—ideas in common with those of the pious people at home, which now seem to me to have been just as visionary. I take it that the main reason for the support given to missions by the people in England, is the belief that they convert the heathen. They pay their money, persuaded that they are, in a way by proxy, fulfilling the command of Christ to his disciples, to go unto all the world and preach the Gospel—and they think they get their money's worth in conversions. The spread of the Gospel, for the salvation of souls, is the idea that keeps the enterprise going at home—and, well, honestly, it seems to me

that the real good done—and I don't think it a little—is hardly at all represented by such conversions."

"Is it the number or the quality of our converts that strikes you as a poor return for the outlay?"

"Well, as you know, I can't judge of the quality—and if you are satisfied of that, why, I should not say that you may not have good reason for satisfaction with your work, even if the converts are few, as, compared with the number of those who are still obviously heathen, they must be. In fact I can't help being struck by the evidence of the little change, if any, in the old superstitious notions of the people, that crops up everywhere just outside the bounds of the mission houses and schools. There seems no general change of the sort that the churches at home expect and talk about. And—if I caught the meaning of your illustration about the clearing and the bush—you don't reckon the change in the few thorough enough to stand very long by itself? You don't think there is a real change of nature in any of these people? Though, of course, I don't suppose you meant quite that?"

"Well, as to conversion, in the original sense, in the sense you mean, I must say that we meet with nothing of the sort here. In that sense you may take it that I did mean all that my illustration implied, absolutely. No, we have no experiences here like the accounts we get from the South Seas

and other places. I do know one man who is, I believe, as good a Christian as is to be found anywhere. But he is in every way an exception, a naturally superior man in mind and heart: a man who would have infallibly grasped the best which came in his way, whatever it might have been—Mohammed or Christ: as it happened it was Christ, and he is a Christian of the best.”

“I was rather surprised at the intelligence and good-heartedness of the Calabar men generally, but perhaps the negro is naturally a bad subject for Christianity?”

“No, I should not say that: look at the American negro. If it is a question of temperament, he would seem to be remarkably sensitive to religious emotion, to be of abounding and ecstatic faith. Look at the fervid spirit of their camp-meetings. And better than that, there are numberless instances of true Christian devotion among them; of self-sacrifice, and patient endurance of wrong in the true spirit of forgiveness, genuine beyond question. No, it is not *that*, though it may be a question of time—say, of a few generations—before they become fitted to take good hold of Christianity.”

“Well then, why not adapt the teaching of it to their present condition? Seeing that they are children, suppose you gave them pictures, and made your worship more picturesque and impressive to children, as the Roman Church does, say? or if you invested

it with more outward and visible observance, like Islam?"

"Ah, no doubt something more showy might be accomplished on those lines, but you see we have no authority for such change in our method. And, to go back to our starting-point—the question of conversion—let us suppose that we did impress their imaginations by striking ceremonies and visible observances, by a sort of grand palaver every Sunday, would the impression made in that way be worth making? Or be even on the way to true conversion? I rather think it would block the way afterwards of the spiritual change we hope for."

"And in the meantime, you save no souls, except your own—and are content?"

"In the meantime"—with some asperity, not quite undeserved I confess—"we try to live among these people somewhat as the Master lived. We don't read that he went about saving souls, so much as ministering to bodies, doing good, and comforting the oppressed and unhappy. And, man, I have come to know that God's way is not always according to our expectation of it, and to be satisfied with His as the better way! You saw the people at that village we went to on Sunday afternoon?"

"Yes, I saw."

"Well then. It's little we can do for them, poor wretches! and others like them, more's the pity; but we can do something, and feel it worth the doing."

“Indeed, so I think. I did not mean to imply that it was not. It seems to me that what you really do is all the more worthy because it has so little to boast about of the sort that gets applause and makes a show at home. The number of your church members, say. Why, *that* may mean something, or next to nothing at all, or so I gather; but the rescue of one of those poor children means something considerable to God and man, it seems to me.”

“We have several children from that place now in the house, and hope to make room for more. In fact our best hope is in the children; though, of course, teaching them to read and write does not amount to much by way of Christianising the people; for when they leave our hands we can hardly help them being swallowed up by the old life of superstition and evil fashions. I have no doubt you have heard said on the river that the sum of our teaching is the making of hypocrites? Sharpening tools for rascally traders to use? Yes? that is of course! But it is not our doing, the sharp practice; nor do they learn lying from us. And we hope and believe that the result is better than that; at least that we prepare the way to something better for those who shall come after us. The work is ours, the result is in other hands—and better! But, tell me now, what did you think of our congregation at that village?”

“I thought it just the unhappiest sight I ever saw.”

“Yes, yes, but what else? what did you think about it—and round about it?”

“Why, to tell the truth I am hardly prepared to say in a moment. It was a revelation. For one thing, I saw that true practical Christianity is living such a life as you missionaries live here. You are followers of Christ beyond a doubt, and, doing what you do among these people, you would be his followers in fact, though you never attempted to teach anything of Christian dogma. Now forgive me if I offend you—I don’t mean to—I didn’t feel the least concern for the souls of those poor creatures. Surely *they* were safe enough with God, if He indeed is worshipful! But I did feel that a mere man might well give his life to help them with the help within his compass. And in so doing, would he not fulfil the uttermost requirement of God—Love, by which alone our souls can be sustained and grow into His likeness?”

“‘If I speak with the tongues of men or of angels, and if I have all faith,’ eh? Well, I won’t quarrel with you on that score—for it is the practical side of Christianity that is blessed to us, when all expectation of fruition on the side of belief comes to naught.”

“Why, what *is* God, if the souls of such as those are in danger from Him?”

“Ah, there you go beyond our proper limit—yet, you may be sure, I think that He is no worse than you are!”

“That’s a fair hit; but you know it doesn’t hit my thought so hard as it does that very dogma which seems to me to count for so very little. But I’ve got to think these things out—and anyway, you have given me plenty to go on with.”

“Well, don’t bother much about belief—try to *do* the best you can—and the rest will arrange itself.”

THE SPIRIT OF AFRICA

It was worth the time and the hazard to know something of Africa, the weird Cinderella of old-world continents. The traditional slave, sitting in the gateway of the civilisations; yet remaining always at heart unchanged, mysterious, impenetrable, the unsubdued child of nature, the enigma of all time.

Yet in olden days she was a Queen of Queens, so glorious and great, that although her crown of ancient Egypt has been buried for tens of centuries beneath the desert sands, the ruins of her empire still stand ineffaceable and incomparable among the wonders of the world. Pyramids and temples, colossal statues and rock-hewn tombs, attest her olden grandeur to a meaner age; and still the awful Sphinx who saw her in her prime, remains couchant sentinel in his ancient place, faithful and watchful, looking ever with sad and unfathomable eyes over the wide grey plain to the dim distance beyond, where now she sits, desolate Queen and bereaved Mother, brooding

darkly over her departed glory in hidden fastnesses of forest and morass.

For Egypt was her own!—her very own!—her one heroic Son—Demigod, born of the Sun and the Nile mud, without equal on the earth. And magnificent and bounteous mother though she was, she will adopt no alien child. Strangers have time and again invaded her coasts, and possessed themselves of her treasures; but their tenure has ever been short and calamitous, and the history of the world's advance since the downfall of Egypt has been made in other lands.

And of that advance, Africa, by the splendour of her ancient civilisation, by her isolation and her difference, and by the nakedness of her humiliation and primitive strength, is to-day the supreme touchstone of values, the loudest insistent note of interrogation in the world.

We magnify ourselves because we live: forgetting the great dead. But, remembering them, dare we say that we are greater and better than they were? or of our self-complacent civilisation that in true worth it has advanced one step beyond the first and noblest of the civilisations of the ancient world?

When we remember that Egypt—seemingly of itself—evolved a religion rich in faith, reverence, and restraint; a government which was strong, just, and humane: when we consider how great it was in science, art, and letters; how noble was its aspira-

tion, and how stupendous and impressive its achievement; how happily adjusted was its social life, and refined and amiable the domestic—we can hardly avoid the humiliating conclusion that we, who are the heirs of all the treasures of its civilisation and of others, are unworthy of the heritage garnered for us—are but spendthrifts, wasting our substance in frivolities, and bowing ourselves down in the very dust before an idol which is meaner than the meanest of the old gods.

From another standpoint, Africa strikes the same note. Intimacy with its wonderland of tropical life and naked humanity seems inevitably to provoke the mind to a revision of parental and magisterial doctrine, and to a new and independent examination of the economy of our modern civilisation. There is a notable passage in Drummond's "Tropical Africa" which well expresses his perception of the peculiar genius of the land. "It is an education," he writes, "to see this sight—an education in the meaning and history of man. To have been here is to have lived before Menes. It is to have watched the dawn of evolution. It is to have the great moral and social problems of life, of anthropology, of ethnology, and even of theology, brought home to the imagination in the most new and startling light."

It would seem, then, that when I was sent to Africa, unwitting of any impulse above my own inclination, I was sent to the most fitting of all

schools. All the same, it is a school of fairyland, far hidden from the general in the depths of an enchanted wood, undiscoverable to any except the Seers. "It is an education to *see* this sight!" To matriculate here a man must be able to see; and then there will be presented to him many an object-lesson, stripped of the veneer of phrase and custom which elsewhere disguises the reality, that shall be rich in revelation of elemental truth.

It is good for the Seer to be set down in some place apart from his early schools; to be happily guided out of the current upon which he was launched into some eddy at the side, where he may see and judge for himself. Better so than that he should come to know himself a stranger amidst his familiar friends, and have to struggle to the shore against their entreaty or scorn; for so by rare good fortune he may escape the sorrow which might make him afraid of truth, and the antagonism which might drive him beyond it.

PART I

CHAPTER I

ON NATURAL HISTORY

IN a broad sense, the antiquity of Man may be said to be contemporaneous with the antiquity of life on the Earth; and in actual fact we know nothing of his ancestral history, more than we know of it in common with that of the whole animal world.

But since we are assured by the later discoveries of science, that the animal Man is of one blood with every animal that lives and that ever did live on the Earth, what has been discovered to us of the ancient history of his brethren we may take to have been also *his* history; and we may accept as truth, that his beginning was identical with theirs, and that he evolved, up to a comparatively recent period, in the same order as that in which they evolved, in obedience to the laws which governed their evolution.

We may believe that he was once a simple cell, a microscopic mollusk among myriads of like sort in the waters of the ancient sea, a lowly worm inhabiting some primitive mud-bank, a vertebrate, a fish, or frog, or lizard (?), and at long last, a mammal.

We cannot surely follow all the change in any particular organism, but we do know that change

was by the way; and we know also that as in early days the human race climbed slowly up the steep of time, so even now does every individual man, within the womb, repeat the history of his unknown progenitors, and from the same beginning in the cell climb all their scale of change up to his birth.

But while we can therefore trace in rough outline, and even fill in with some completeness of detail, the evolution of human life up to its mammalian climax, we can nowhere, in that far distance, distinguish the animal Man from the rest, or mark his singular course along the way.

Looking back upon the wondrous march of life, the track presents itself to us, not as it really was, but rather as a succession of separate broad steppes or plateaus, while the way of ascent by which each was attained in turn is partially or wholly hidden from our sight. We behold, on the level nearest to us, vast numbers of mammals of great variety and perfection of form. Then beyond, upon a lower plain, we can see again a great multitude, not so varied and admirable, and further off, at a still lower level, we discern only a few small representatives of the class, which are probably all marsupials. And at this point there is a great drop, and we can only guess at the long and toilsome way by which the reptile, say, climbed to the level of the marsupial. Not that we can suppose there was any abrupt passage in the actual ascent, which must have been one of almost imperceptible

gradation from beginning to end. The faults are but in our imperfect vision of the past, and how imperfect that vision is we only begin to realise, as little by little portions of the immense expanse are brought within its range.

Yet, imperfect as it is, what has so far been discovered to us of this ancestral history of ours, is of surpassing and most fascinating interest. Let us look for a moment at one of those old-world marsupials. How seemingly insignificant! This small insectivorous quadruped, living in fear and hiding in a world peopled with fierce and prodigious reptiles, which by their strength and numbers would seem to be secure of the possession and lordship of the earth to the end of time—this little paltry rat! of what account can it be in the large eternal scheme of things? But, in truth, the great triumph of all the long life-struggle of the past, and the whole purpose of the unimaginable future, meet here embodied in this little creature's frame. Think from what far distances, and through what infinite vicissitude of fortune it has come, and to what a stupendous height it has climbed above its starting-point! To follow its footsteps along the dim vistas of prehistoric time is to be ever on the trail of miracle, which leads us to a point of new departure here, indicating far ahead the supreme miracle of all, the miracle of the coming Man!

For if we might hope to be able to single out the mere animal man from the rest, anywhere between

his beginning in the primordial cell and his ending some time before the Stone Age, the most likely place would seem to be here, where the representatives of his class are few and much alike. That he was once a small marsupial we may regard as almost certain; yet, since the few remains, hitherto discovered, of the earliest marsupials known are found to be specialised in a very remarkable degree, we cannot pretend, even at this point, to fix upon the type of highest destiny. And here we come upon a great gap; a whole chapter is missing from the record, and for all we know we might conjecture that the mammal began life too soon, and found the world too hard a world to live in. As the callow brood of some bird that is betrayed by early promise of spring is sometimes presently destroyed by an unkindly frost, so the whole of the first instalment of mammals would appear to have perished from an inhospitable earth, where hideous reptiles, fierce and insatiable, held savage sway over all the land and waters.

Such a catastrophe was certainly not impossible, and it is, of course, as easy to believe in a second appearance of a higher form of life on the earth as in a first; yet it is far more likely that there was no actual break, but that mammals maintained a precarious existence, and even increased in number and variety, all through the last great reptilian epoch, though as yet, no remains of them have been unearthed from its astonishing and crowded graveyard. And

this probability becomes almost certainty, when in a subsequent age we find abundant evidence of a great advance, rather than of a new beginning. For here we see the reptile, in every province, dispossessed of its supremacy by the mammal and the bird. The monstrous Ichthyosaurus and Plesiosaurus have disappeared from the seas, to be succeeded by the even more gigantic whale. The Pterodactyl, which had only half attained to flight, yields up the region of the air to the more accomplished bat and bird. And the place of the Iguanodon and other mighty saurians upon the land is filled by Pachyderms; a most important family of animals, whose predominance at the beginning of what we may term the great mammalian epoch, is one of the most striking and significant facts revealed to us by geological research.

This stupendous change could have come about only in the passing of a vast period of time. Many thousands of centuries must have run their unrecorded course, long ages, hidden from our ken, must have rolled away, in order to account for the extinction of so many powerful and predaceous species, and for the establishment in their stead of the innumerable host of inoffensive creatures now presented to our view.

And at this point let us imagine ourselves back in the day of the Pachyderm, and that we are ignorant of all that which has come to pass since. Let us imagine that we have no part in the drama on the stage, but are spectators of it only, curious to watch

its development and eager to discover its meaning. Let us suppose that we appreciate difference, and progression, and degrees of excellence; and that we are possessed of intelligence of that simple sort, which, capable of deducing immutable law from the continuity of the operation within its knowledge, deduces also, as of course, a purpose beyond the law—and let us look for a while upon the slow unfolding of the action, and think what meanings we might possibly have almost grasped behind the ceaseless change of life.

We have already learnt that the change is progressive; that it is change from the simple to the complex, and from the dull and grotesque in nature and shape to the lively and the elegant. We see now a more beautiful and bounteous earth, inhabited by countless creatures of a more advanced type, admirably fitted to enjoy its improved conditions. Immense herds of harmless Pachyderms feed peacefully upon its plains, seemingly with none to make them afraid or to threaten their continuance. They browse in the forests, disport in the rivers, and roam about the marshes in great companies; and they are of infinite variety in form and size. Some species of Palæotherium and of Lophiodon are as huge and unwieldy as the rhinoceros, while others are light and swift, and no larger than the hare. Species of Anoplotherium range in size from that of the ass to that of the water-rat; and the Ziphodon, very unlike any

Pachyderm of the present day, is as agile and elegant as is the gazelle.

We have seen this specialisation before, and have marked its tendency towards greater perfection; and excellent as all this is we inevitably suspect in it the promise of something more excellent still; and though we cannot in the least imagine what it may be like—for the gift of true invention is not ours—let us suppose that from a beginning so lavish in material and rich in design we venture to expect the evolution, on the lines of some form among these Pachyderms, of an animal which shall be greatly superior to any of them. And let us say that we recognise certain conditions of environment which must of necessity govern the structure of the animal, in order that it may be securely established in the peaceful and happy possession of its life. We are aware that destructive reptiles still exist, and also that there are mammalian carnivora which may hereafter become powerful to terrorise even the larger of their gentler brethren, and obviously, first of all, the ideal beast must be made strong above the rest. In actual fact it is in this direction, at the outset, that the most striking development takes place. For at a comparatively early period arrives the *Dinotherium*, which would seem to have attained to the very extreme in size and strength. Then, still excessive in those particulars, follow the *Mastodon* and the *Mammoth*, in both of which forms, moreover, we see structural

advantages which elevate them above their unwieldy predecessor. And when, in the course of time, the necessities of the environment can be more nearly measured, when the limit of danger to be apprehended from beasts of prey is apparently fixed, then we see the element of size diminished by one half, while yet it is enough for safety.

The method of all this is very human; so much so, that in the sole particular of size we might almost have anticipated the order of the evolution and its end. Although no human intelligence could have anticipated such a noble animal as the elephant, yet I think that we cannot fail to see that its evolution was strikingly in accordance with the working of the human mind, and the triumphant result strikingly in accordance with the expectation and appreciation of human intelligence, from the point of view I have imagined. Fanciful as that point of view may appear to many, it may be true vision all the same; and if we continue to regard the Pachyderm as an experiment in evolution on the part of the great Designer, I think we shall be not only profoundly impressed by the thoroughness and magnificence of the essay, but also in the right way to understand its meaning. For the Pachyderm would seem to have been formed of the most plastic clay, and to have been the model among the mammalia, of which the Designer had, in that early time, the greatest hope, and on which was expended the greatest

energy. And while many forms then existing were laid aside, or with a turn of the hand moulded into new and various shapes which delight us now by their admirable proportions and qualities, we yet see the original idea retained always, and in the end wrought up to the extreme degree of perfection as the incomparable masterpiece of mere animal organisms—for truly the elephant-folk are strong and wise above all the beasts to this day!

Let us now imagine that we are watching a herd of elephants, many tens of centuries ago, in some open glade of an old African forest. In just such a glade as we might chance upon to-day, with a clear, purling stream winding along it, sparkling over a pebbly bed, and with here and there a few scattered trees—baobabs, flowering mimosæ, and palms—outstanding from the forest fringe. It is apparently a favourite camping-place, for the bark of the larger trees is worn smooth where elephants have been used to lean against them while standing at rest; and probably the frequent presence of the herd accounts for the preservation of the glade itself from the persistent encroachment of the surrounding bush.

Let us watch for a while the noble creatures at their ease. They are a family party, and range in size and age from the superb tusker well beyond the half century down to the little calf of six months old; and although they number altogether less than a score, yet they seem to fill the extensive clearing

full with serene and happy life. Standing singly in the open, or in groups of two or three beneath the trees, flecked with sunshine and shadow, their huge forms quietly rocking or swaying—for they are hardly ever quite still; while, except for the gambolling of one or two frolicsome little ones round about their sedate mothers, there is no abrupt or violent movement anywhere among them—they harmonise delightfully with the exquisite natural beauties of the scene, and accentuate its peacefulness by their apparent gentleness and security. Nor is there any sign of jealousy of harmless trespassers upon their preserve, for timid antelope feed unconcerned about the glade, as though conscious of protection from their special foes, in this good neighbourhood.

But now we see a stir throughout the herd. Some noise, of broken twig maybe, within the bush, has reached their ears, and several turn about to face the point from whence it came, attentive, but without alarm. A magnificent matron moves forward a few steps, and with extended trunk utters a toot of welcome, as, silent as a shadow, the patriarch of them all swings out from the forest into the open, with an ease and grandeur of motion which is not devoid of a large and lordly sort of grace. The meeting is a caress, and before we are aware, so silently and unobtrusively have others drifted near, there is a group of friendly creatures gathered round their leader, which seems to us to present traits of

such kindness and contentment, of such sufficiency in bodily organism and mental disposition for the untroubled enjoyment of long life, as is not to be found elsewhere upon the earth. Fear is unknown to them, for man as yet is not, and in all the land and waters there is no menace against their well-being.

What other quadruped can boast of any special gift for which the elephant is not fully compensated? If it is not as swift as some are, it is too strong for need of flight, and too inoffensive to have occasion for pursuit. Yet it is so far from being slow, that considering the ease with which it can traverse difficult ground, and transport its great bulk without hurry or fatigue over twenty or thirty miles of broken country in a single night, its powers of locomotion may be fairly considered to be unequalled. Steep rise and precipitous descent are alike easy to the splendid mechanism of its mighty frame, and the tangled jungle presents no obstacle to stay its march. In the cool depths of the forest, out on the open plain, or crossing the crocodile-haunted river, it is equally safe from attack; for it is a strong beast, armed against great and small, and is as careless of the ferocious lion as of the vexatious gnat.

Moreover, taking into account its great size, it can gather its food with astonishing facility compared with most other animals—for in its trunk it possesses what is no less than a dexterous and untiring body-

servant to its needs, approving it the very aristocrat it is. The elephant is a gentleman—waited upon at his meals, and valeted at his toilet—a gentleman, leisured, dignified, refined—unique of his kind! While he stands perfectly at his ease, his trunk will gather for him all that may be edible within its reach; selecting the ripest fruits and most tender shoots with the nicest discrimination, and dusting each tuft of grass before presenting it to the quiet mouth. It will lift and carry, pull up succulent canes, and break down small trees; it will fan him with a broken branch, and provide him with a refreshing shower-bath; for it is a strong, snake-like arm, an adroit hand, and a powerful syringe, all in one. Indeed, so sensitive is it of touch and smell, so knowing and so deft, that we might almost fancy it could see.

Here then, we may ask, is not such expectation as we have imagined fulfilled to the utmost? Have we not here, at last, the true king? Surely no better can be than this majestic beast, long-lived, social, wise? How can strength and activity be more admirably proportioned, or security and happiness more perfectly combined, than they are in this well-disposed creature, so fitly established in peace and plenty? Only from our present point of view, overlooking a subsequent and higher evolution, could we possibly question its supremacy, or wonder why its design was carried no further. Why was not its wise brain made wisest?

And why was not its proboscis developed so that it would—as we may imagine that it easily might—have surpassed even the human hand as an instrument of the highest ingenuity. We know, as a fact, that it has not gone any further. It is pre-eminently the best of its class, and we can imagine no better!

Taking into account only such purpose as the evolution of life had manifested up to this point, we might conclude that it had here attained its end; for the elephant would seem to perfectly fulfil all expectation within the limits warranted by the operation of the laws of life so far revealed.

But as the same conclusion would have presented itself with equal force at the close of the preceding epoch, when the forces of life seemed to have culminated in a host of reptiles, supremely strong, rapacious, and terrible, when might and fierceness were magnified as excellent, and there seemed no indication of delight in gentleness and grace, it is obvious that we must expect the evolution in the future, from some existing form, of a creature as superior to the mammal and the bird, as they are superior to the reptile. Epoch after epoch the animal life of the earth has increased and changed. Class has followed class, and design has succeeded to design, and each in its turn has had its day of supremacy, in which it attained to the highest level of its kind. The energy that wrought the change aforetime is not dormant, and the law of its past operation points with certainty to some great elevation

in the condition and attributes of life in the time to come.

Even as out of the stress of reptilian rapacity there emerged a more gentle and gracious life, the beginnings of which we cannot trace, the later struggle of which we but partly recognise, but the triumph of which is manifest over all the earth; so out of the excellence of the present hour—even though all things may seem to be adjusted for the best; though the earth itself is in its summer or fruitful autumn, and the close of its year in wintry cold is not beyond calculation—we must inevitably expect the upspringing of a higher life of unimaginable excellence and grace.

With us, to-day, this is no mere matter of expectation, but is matter of fact, for every one of us is witness of the new and nobler birth; and is intimately concerned, consciously or unconsciously, in its striving to attain a perfection of its own, far exceeding any perfection of the mere animal, that has been or now is.

Aware of the attainment and aspiration of Man, we look back into the past, and we know that far hidden in the heart of the operation which we have traced so far—veiled in impenetrable mystery, as the beginning of all life is veiled—there slept the germ of a new and better life. In what obscure and insignificant being that germ was implanted, or when it was first awakened from its sleep, we cannot tell. The earliest authentic records which we can identify as human, are records of

a being very like the man of the present day, distinguished above the rest of the animal world mainly by his very superior intelligence and ingenuity, evidences of which serve primarily to establish the fact of his existence long before the time of any history or tradition. The weapons which he made to aid him against his foes have outlasted the bony skeleton of his frame, and attest the dawn of a new epoch of mind; but all the links are wanting which connect the man of the Stone Age with the first mammalian form of his ascent.

We can only vaguely guess at the likeness of that unknown ancestor of ours. In all probability it was quadrumanous, and it may be that among the early mammals there was some transitory form which was the common ancestor of man and ape, though between them now there is apparent such wide and significant difference as to suggest, at least, a point of divergence infinitely remote in time, and a variation potential in essentially higher tendencies than are to be discovered in any ape; and though we may take for granted a common starting-point, it seems to me quite impossible to believe that man and ape could have travelled far along the same path. Rather let us believe that the ways parted at a right angle, and that while the mere animal evolved—according to the recognised forces which govern animal life in the struggle for existence—into the ape and all its tribe, the chosen form, in obedience to a new and distinct inspiration, travelled

by a steeper and harder way up to the threshold of quite another world. The mere animal would seem to have arrived at its goal quickly, for at a comparatively early period the ape appears rather as a permanent form than as one in a transitory stage. It would seem to have been then much as it is now, the ape, a strong and active beast, well fitted to its environment, and well able to maintain itself against its foes. By what recognised law of progress can we account for the imagined evolution from such a beast of a being vastly inferior to it in the physical qualities essential to its preservation? The sudden acquisition of very superior intelligence might perhaps have brought about a gradual change of structure in the direction of the difference now existing; but then, we know of no suddenness in the progress of life, and it is hardly conceivable how a very gradual increase of intelligence could have wrought such a change, and could have compensated, and more than compensated, for a gradual loss of bodily strength and activity. It is surely more reasonable to believe that the superior intelligence of man was evolved of hard necessity from weakness, rather than by any chance from strength—that it was born of fear, and stimulated by danger, and triumphed in the end through mere oppression and unhappiness.

The man of the Dark Age has no history which we can trace. His slight skeleton would seem everywhere to have become indistinguishable dust, and although even slighter forms, owing to some fortuitous

circumstance, have been here and there preserved, yet in all probability the proportion of such survivals to the number of the once living originals is so small, that it is not at all surprising that no remains of the missing links of the human chain have as yet been discovered. We can hardly suppose that the primitive men were ever very numerous, for their life must have been too hard for rapid increase, and, doubtless, many other creatures, far more prolific in their day, have likewise altogether perished from our ken.

All the same, by what we know of the past and the present, we are compelled to believe that early in the mammalian epoch—perhaps at its very beginning—there was a parting of the ways, presaging the coming Man, in whose being we cannot but recognise the operation of a new factor in the evolution of life. We must believe, though we can but imagine how, that through those dark and silent ages he was watched over all the way, and in the end was brought safely to the confines of his kingdom. We can only conjecture how long and how hazardous his travail was, and how slight, yet how significant of promotion, was every change in his being. How at one time he may have been led gently along easy and flowery paths, and at another have been compelled by danger and privation—hoarse-voiced drovers from the rear—up a rough and difficult ascent. How he was forced into societies for mutual support, to

contrivance for protection against savage beasts, and for shelter against storm, and heat, and cold. How he had to exercise his wits to save his skin, and how his wit sufficed for strength and swiftness. And withal, how his bodily frame surely answered to the call of his intelligence, and lifted itself so far from the surface of the earth, as that he alone among the multitude of living creatures stood up at last erect upon his feet, with hands set free for conquest.

NOTE

The essays on Natural History and the Spiritual Epoch were written many years ago, and in the meantime many gaps in the geological record have been filled up by the discoveries of later research. I am aware that some of the details of my slight review of the history of the earth-life are not up to date—as, for example, where I write of a whole chapter missing from the record. Probably, even when I wrote, it was known to others better informed that there was evidence of the existence of mammals during the period, in whose strata I say that no remains of them had been discovered. Certainly the fact is well established now, as the following quotation will show.

“A single mammalian tooth (*Plagiaulax* ?) from the British Wealden is the only fossil certainly referable to the great class of the Mammalia yet obtained from

the Cretaceous strata on this side the Atlantic; but in North America (*Dakota*, &c.) the Upper Cretaceous have afforded many fragmentary mammalian remains, some apparently referable to the Monotremata, and others to the Marsupialia."—LAPWORTH, *Intermediate Text-Book of Geology*, Blackwood, 1899.

I have, however, decided to leave the essay as it was originally written, because such matters of detail do not in the least degree affect my conclusions, which are based entirely upon principles of operation manifest in the whole body of facts, revealed by geological research, that are beyond question. In the instance noted, my inference is but confirmed by facts of which I was then unaware, though it hardly needed confirmation, since it was inference that would be obvious to every one.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRITUAL EPOCH

THE discrepancy manifest between the supreme endowment of human nature, and the deplorable failure of human life, is a matter which has deeply concerned and perplexed men all the world over. It has been the true riddle of the sphinx to all the peoples; and the guesses at its answer, flung long ago into the stream of time, have become encrusted with ten thousand strange adornments, and in natural course have petrified into semblances of truth, which have come to be revered as divinely inspired religions.

The riddle is as old as the epoch—as old as Adam—for from the very beginning of man's consciousness of his superior gifts he has been confounded by the failure of their promise. Ever, more and more, in proportion to the evolution of his spiritual being, the gulf has widened between his desire and its fulfilment, between his aspiration and his attainment, between what he should be and what he is. And his case is unexampled on the earth, for the lower animals are wholly untroubled by the evils which are coincident with his supremacy. Their lowly needs are better satisfied, and in the conditions

of their more simple existence, there is apparent a happy adjustment, which is in striking contrast to the confusion and uncertainty which mar all man's endeavour. He alone of living organisms is a parcel of inconsistencies—the sole prey of excessive griefs, intangible apprehensions, and vain regrets; of restlessness, and insane greed, and immeasurable discontent—and in the distress of his isolation, he has asked, not in one time and place only, but everywhere and always: Why is all this? and how shall we overcome this evil, and how escape this fear?

There is nothing in the history of humanity more significant than this general consciousness of immaturity and insufficiency, this pathetic attitude as of a lost child asking its way home. There is no history that goes far enough back to tell of a time when it was not the most notable characteristic of the race. For the oldest historical religions clearly grew up out of yet older religions; and it is equally clear that all ideas of worship are rooted in man's deep and universal consciousness of his insufficiency, isolation, and dependence. And many and various as are the religions, they are all alike in this essential—they are all obviously guesses at the same riddle.

Take, for example, the series of ideas with which we are most familiar. The original perfection of creation, and the sinlessness and happiness of man. The fall of Adam, and the triumph of the spirit of evil over the original good. The continual con-

tention between good and evil, in and for the souls of men. The partial recovery of the human race from the effects of the primitive disaster by means of the atonement, intercession, and ministrations of other good spirits, with elaborate embroidery of the ideas by ritual and dogma, and endless argument over the embroidery.

What is all this but guessing at the *Why* of the incompatibility manifest between the magnificent endowment of humanity, and the miserable vanity and unworthiness of human life? What is it in sum but a guess in the dark, amounting to the sorry conclusion that man is no more than the shuttlecock of the gods? Yet it is a guess which has stood for absolute truth with a large portion of the human race, and which is even now honoured as the very oracle of God Himself. And since it was for many centuries the world's best guess, was truly believed, and was of noble service during perilous times of violence, change, and reconstruction, we can hardly call it error, though it may prove to be not wholly true. For error of such sort is as a stepping-stone on the way to higher truth—to the truth, shall we say, of to-day? to become perhaps, in its turn, the error of to-morrow.

The riddle of the Theban sphinx, who devoured all those who failed to guess the answer, was this: "What is that which is four-footed, and three-footed, and two-footed?" But when Œdipus came and

guessed correctly that it was Man, she flung herself headlong down the mountain side and destroyed herself; so that at last the Thebans were freed from the terror of her deadly grip. Surely one of the wisest of all the old wise myths. For in all times the peoples have been called upon to answer riddles of sorts—questions of life or death—called upon to slay the soul-destroying enigma with the true answer; or failing in that, to be themselves swept away to give place to other adventurers.

Even so at this time we are called upon to give our answer to this old, old riddle, which has evoked in the past so many answers, "and ne'er a true one." How, indeed, could any of them have been correct, since it is not possible to rightly understand the man of this epoch without some knowledge of his past evolution? For all our yesterdays are garnered in to-day, which is prophetic of all our to-morrows.

If we reverse the order of the Theban riddle, and ask: What is Man? the answer is so curiously suggestive of the answer given by recent discovery, that it would seem indeed that the old myth was truly oracular, having a larger meaning in it than then appeared, stored up for later times beneath its superficial wit. For if we ask now: What is Man? the answer of modern discovery is: He is that which aforetime was four-footed—which is a true answer, in a sense of infinitely greater consequence than that which was understood by the Thebans,

who apprehended it as applying only to every man's childhood, and who could not have known that it is actual fact of humanity itself.

For very many thousands of centuries man went upon four feet. For a few thousand years he has been trying to go upon two. That is the supreme discovery of the nineteenth century, the suggestion of which may perhaps be to us as a whisper of one of the Muses in the ear of Œdipus. Trying to walk, and as yet only trying—is not that the secret of his inconsistencies? Trying—with what stumbling, and incertitude, and misdirection of energy; with what partial attainment, and shameful failure, and ignoble grovelling; with what eager hope, and resignation of despair; with what complainings, resentments, complacencies; what beliefs, infidelities, revenges; with success how meanly disproportioned to the apparent potentialities of his nature—are not these things set down in all his chronicles, and true of his condition and attitude at this day? For man has left behind and lost the perfection which belonged to the four-footed stage of his existence, the assured command of the faculties which sufficed for, and were properly adjusted to, its simple and definite ends, without having yet attained to the perfection that is to come. So that he is confused, doubtful, and perplexed in the extreme, working out an intangible salvation half-heartedly, and in distress. That which was altogether good in his past often

presents now the appearance of evil, and the better to which he aspires seems hopelessly beyond the reach of his grasp.

This is the real man. A sun-portrait, faithful and unflattering, yet not devoid of promise. Modern research has discovered to us his common origin and long march onward in the ranks of the vast army of living creatures; and of his sole and uncertain advance beyond their halting-place humanity itself is witness. It was inevitable that men should have utterly failed to understand the bewildering phenomena of that advance, in their complete ignorance of the preceding operation of the forces of life. Founded on insufficient data, the ideas of the religions are crude and unconvincing; nor is the popular idea of human nature any nearer to the reality.

Putting aside the religious idea for future consideration, let us see what the popular idea amounts to. It is the common practice to speak of human nature in terms befitting only an eternal law; to regard it as something extremely old, and radically unalterable, something beyond hope of elevation above a certain dead level of compromise between good and evil. And the common sense of the time is used to silence the troublesome voice of its conscience in connection with all sorts of wrongs and follies, by the exhibition of this mere bogey of Human Nature. See now, once again—says common

sense—this old, old Human Nature, ever the same! Ancient, strong, grim giant, with golden head above the clouds, maybe? but, sure enough, with visible body of sounding brass and enduring iron, and with everlasting feet of clay, anchored deep down in the mud. Infinitely deplorable, that last, alas! but all the same, a fact—the fact, indeed, which is most urgent on our wills. So that, of all things, let us not forget the feet of clay, lest our affairs become confusion worse confounded. Have we not seen how this same Human Nature has been stirred up aforetime by vagrant enthusiasms; has been entreated by promises of heaven, and threatened with the fires of hell; and how, now and again, it has seemed to begin to change and to move somewhat, yet always in the end only to settle back again into its own proper place, immovable, unalterable, anchored as of yore in the old earth-mud?

It is a conception with sufficient foundation in the individual self-consciousness, the general practice, and the recorded history of the race, to commend itself as just and reasonable to practical and even to thoughtful minds in this utilitarian age. And, in fact, it is the conception of human nature that ever more and more dominates the life of the world—particularly of our Western world—though in very truth it is a conception of despair.

But the scientific discovery of the nineteenth century has given us another point of view, commanding

an incomparably wider horizon than was before visible ; a point of view from whence many familiar things must of necessity appear strange, so strange indeed, that until we become accustomed to their novel aspects, we may well doubt their truth. Yet we may be sure that from the loftier standpoint, the true places, and shapes, and proportions of things must be more certainly apparent ; and we ought not, without due consideration, to deny the truth we may discover, however widely it may differ from our stereotyped convictions. Let us only be careful to look well—assuring ourselves that what we may see is substantial, and not a mirage—and then, let us be entirely loyal to the new vision, heedless of clamour from the priests of discredited faiths which belong to an earlier and a darker time.

Taking, therefore, the operation of the past for guidance in our judgment of the phenomena of the present, and accepting the scientific revelation of the ancestral history of man as true beyond all reasonable question, then we know the “natural man” as of the number of those living beings, who from the simple primordial condition of life had attained, many thousands of years ago, through the continuous operation of the ordered forces of nature during vast periods of time, to that advanced stage of being which we esteem to be the most excellent and admirable among all the marvellous manifestations of the old earth-life. The Natural Man was one among many of

the various highly developed forms belonging to the great class of the Mammalia, not distinguishable from the rest, only as one species was different from another. In structure he was of them, as indeed he is now; a being of necessities, passions, and faculties, like unto all his brethren, who were at that period almost, if not altogether, identical in form and nature with the forms we behold living in the present time. But, antecedent to the period of man's attainment to a state of being in which we are able to distinctly recognise the primitive man as the ancestor of the civilised man, there must have occurred, in some natural man—to put it in terms of science—a variation in the faculties of the mind which, transmitted to the offspring of that individual and proving of essential service to its inheritors, increased according to the recognised laws of evolution, until it had wrought the mighty change that elevated even the Paleolithic man far above all his contemporaries.

For my part, I prefer to put it in the terms of prophecy. In the fulness of time God breathed into one chosen being the breath of His own Spirit, and Man became a living soul—the actual Adam or first man. I discern something more than variation of the general sort—something that was the cause of variation in the old life, and at the same time was the beginning of a quite new and nobler life. A germ of infinite potentiality, yet, of which its possessors were long unconscious, and all the rest of the world

was regardless; and doubtless for many centuries its manifestations were indistinguishable from those of the more ancient life in which it had its roots.

Scientists tell us that man has existed on the earth for 50,000 years or more; that is to say, man, as so far advanced beyond the condition of other animals as to be clearly distinguishable from them by his superior and peculiar attainment, for in a wider sense they are agreed as to his existence from the beginning of the earth-life, whose years must be reckoned in millions. And as this conclusion is founded mainly on evidence of man's mental differentiation from all other earth-dwellers, it amounts to something very like recognition on the part of science of a new inspiration of life, more than 50,000 years ago, potential with faculty far exceeding anything indicated by the old ordinance.

The earliest indications of the existence of the primitive man yet discovered are indications of his mental powers applied to the ends of self-preservation, rude weapons fashioned for defence and offence; and so far, they can hardly be regarded as evidence of a being governed by any new law. For self-preservation is a potent factor in the being of all animals, and the wonders wrought by its necessity among them—wonders of tooth and claw, of cunning and strength and deadly spring; of venomous fang, and fatal sting, and electric battery on the one side; against swiftness and exquisite perfection of sight and hearing; against

armour of bony plate, and sharp spine, and strange disguise; against the herd's watchful sentinel, and its united front of threatening horn and hoof on the other—far surpass the feeble efforts for mastery and security made by the primitive men. The notable difference is that the human methods indicate a more direct exercise of intelligence, capable of supplementing the native weakness of the human frame by extraneous aids. Yet if man had continued to concern himself only with what was necessary to his bodily welfare, we could hardly claim for him a higher place than that of the superior animal. But not only did his mind develop with amazing rapidity as compared with the extremely slow operation under the ancient régime, but its development is marked by manifestations of thought, which are altogether beyond the range of the laws which dominated the evolution of the preceding life of the world, and by which it was established in great variety of excellence, and seemingly in complete fulfilment of its desire.

If we cannot certainly identify the primitive armed man with the primitive spiritual man, we need not put off the recognition of the latter until we find him engaged in activities of mind such as have come to be arbitrarily classed as spiritual. I discern that the primitive spiritual man was long before the religious man; and I take the first rude sketch scratched upon a rock, by a man of the Palæolithic times, to be as certainly indicative of a new and

spiritual element in human life, as is the prophecy of Isaiah. It is equally incommensurable with the ancient law, and is not to be accounted for by the operation of any of the forces which account for the evolution of the natural life. And we may be sure that the very first rude naked savage, whose dull mind was struck by some chance resemblance such as we often notice in the clouds or in pictures in the fire, by some weather-stain, perhaps, upon the smooth surface of a rock, sufficiently like a mammoth, say, to arrest his attention; and who grinned with a new delight as he took thought to add a trunk, or tusks, to one end of it, and then a tail to the other; was not alone in appreciation of such a wonderful achievement. We may be sure that the rest of the tribe crowded round the marvel, excited and admiring, and that it was apprehended by them with an intelligence altogether different from that by which a dog recognises a deceptive representation of another dog. For the very crudity and bare suggestiveness of the design would call for appreciation of another sort, and would test it by a comparatively high, rather than by a low standard. The difference between man and all other animals must have been well established when that first sketch was made.

Now let us ask: Why did our far-away ancestor do this thing? He could not eat it, nor was it of any service as a weapon, or as a garment; he could not even hang it round his neck to make him

splendid in the eyes of the female of his species: for it would indeed postulate a very high appreciation of art in Palæolithic times, to think it possible that she might have been taken through pride in the superlative genius of her wooer; and these considerations really cover all the ground apportioned to the operation of the preceding impulses of life which might be supposed to apply to this new departure. Here was a thing which, at least at its inception, was of no earthly use, and to account for it we are compelled to look beyond the range of the tendency and necessity of the old law. The element of chance in it detracts nothing from its significance. There were the eyes to see the resemblance, the mind to apprehend, and, most significant of all, the impulse to fashion into more perfect shape, and men went on doing such things, and delighting in the doing; and the more we come to think about it, the more we shall be impressed by the fact that this was a very great thing, this remote beginning of "art for art's sake."

Change that last into form of broader, higher, and truer meaning—into art for God's sake—and it fits the occasion equally well, and better. The poor savage was unconscious of any sake except his own, unknowing of all except his own delight and pride; but looking back to him across the wonderful manifestation of the subsequent ages, we can apprehend significance in those rude outlines of his, which in-

vests them with supreme importance, since the effort demonstrates by itself alone, as certainly and conclusively as all the various phenomena of the spiritual life together, the relationship of the spirit of man with the spirit of God.

The primitive artist may have had no idea whatever of God; none even of a spiritual existence; certainly he could have had no conception of the God we apprehend and worship; but his very unconsciousness of his divine relationship makes the evidence of it all the more striking and forcible. We discern the intimate relationships of an embryo by manifestations of its life which are before all its consciousness; and this manifestation of the higher thought in Palæolithic time, I regard as positive proof of the existence then of a new and spiritual life in the human being—as a thing which assuredly happened *after* man became a living soul in God's likeness, and which could not have happened *before*. I discern it to be no less than an appreciation by the child of the handiwork of the Father, in which none of the essential elements of likeness are wanting. The attraction which the operation of the divine mind has over the human mind; the appreciation of mental phenomena which is found only in mind similarly constituted to the mind manifest in the phenomena; and the inherent impulse to do something of a like nature—to make a thing for the sole delight in the making. And feeble as was the first putting forth of the new life, there is no link

missing in the golden chain which, infinitely fine and far, connects it in assured relationship with the spirit of that Being who is the author of all design, and order, and excellence—who saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good. I discern, therefore, that man was, long before historical times, a being like-minded to that Intelligence who governs all things; distinguishable even then, as not only superior in mind to all other animals, but also as endowed with the whole of the primal elements of the spiritual life, of which all other animals are devoid.

The origin of this new life is hidden in mystery, as profound as that which veils from us the origin of all life. We only know that it *is*—a form of life as distinct from the earlier life of the world, as that is from dead matter, or as the animal is from the vegetable life. That it is not separable from the earlier life, but is closely interwoven with it, and in its lower operation is seemingly identical with it, does not lessen the force of the distinction, but simply sets it upon the same plane with the distinctions recognised between the other great natural kingdoms, whose manifest difference becomes more pronounced in divergent and sovereign characteristics in proportion to the advance in their condition.

In using the terms, the natural and the spiritual life, I do so only for convenience, and not with meaning that the latter is in any sense supernatural.

For if God is One, then there is no supernatural other than mere illusion of ignorance; or we may put it that most things are supernatural, if all things beyond our understanding are to be accounted as such. It appears to me that if we cannot deem the spiritual life to be altogether as truly natural as the animal life, we may forthwith abandon all hope of any assured belief founded on truth manifest in its phenomena. We may regard it as miraculous if we will, in the sense of miracle of divine operation whose inner mystery we cannot penetrate; but if we cannot take the operation to be governed by law proceeding from the same source, and directed with the same consistent inevitableness as all natural law, then we cannot hope to arrive at any assured conclusions, but must continue to be in a state of uncertainty, tossed about on a sea of conjecture, driven this way and that by sophisms, and enslaved by presumptions of arbitrary revelations of spiritual things; believing those nearest to the accident of our environment, or doubting them all where so much is proved untrue.

Therefore I am glad to be enabled to recognise the spiritual life as a thing of long ago, to know it as of like origin and history to the life which preceded it, to be able to trace its evolution, and to discern therein operation in all respects identical in method with the prevailing impulse and occasional accident apparent in the mere animal life. We see that its progress has been equally subject with that

last to the conditions of its environment. Where those conditions have been favourable, its growth has been continuous and rapid; where they have become adverse, there has been obvious retrogression: and in some human races, distinctly possessed of the primal elements of spirituality, there appears to have been no advance whatever beyond the stage attained in Palæolithic times. We may be, nay, we *must* be, very far yet from even a conception of the highest form of spiritual humanity that will be evolved in the future; we cannot imagine the spiritual analogue of the mammal, but I take it that in the aboriginal Australian or Fuegian of the present day, we see something not very far removed from the spiritual Protozoon.

I can discern nothing in the divine operation, from the beginning of the earth-life, discordant with belief in the spirituality of the phenomena of this epoch—an independent belief which has grown up out of, and is part of, the phenomena of the epoch. On the contrary, it seems to me to confirm that belief, since the spiritual epoch is seen now to have come in natural succession to epochs which indicated a leading up to it. It may do no more than confirm the belief to that extent; but at least it is well to feel assured, that while recent discovery has made so many of our venerable beliefs untenable, there is nothing in all its revelation of the past that is not perfectly in correspondence with

the retrospective prophecy in Genesis: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

At the same time, if we believe that the new life was born in the old and has evolved, and is evolving, according to the ancient method; that it is part of the whole divine scheme, the latest earthly manifestation of the universal divine operation, then assuredly our increased knowledge of the method of the past should aid us to a far better understanding of the requirement and promise of our peculiar and exalted endowment than was aforesaid possible. For by the standard of the past we are compelled to believe that we see only the beginning of the new life, that its triumph is yet very far distant, and that the world has hitherto mistaken the beginning for the end, and the adumbration of a divine purpose for its complete realisation. We can almost number the years of the spiritual epoch—a few thousands at the most—and compared with the immeasurable periods of its predecessors, this latest born of epochs can be no more than a babe at the very gate of life. In actual fact, of all things known to us, human nature is the most obviously immature and imperfect—is in an early stage of change and transformation. In a sense, as we have seen, man is as old as any animal existing; but in the sense which concerns us here, he is the youngest

born on earth. The spiritual man is a new creature, human nature is a recent birth. The popular creed of the day as to this matter is as false as it is mean and despairing. It is not believable that the long travail of life should end in a dead level and a deadlock. The poetic idea is much more worthy and nearer to the truth; for the poet has always sung human nature, not as a grim and ancient giant—not as Polyphemus, nor even as Atlas—but rather as the infant Hercules, gripping strongly the necks of deadly serpents, with all his glorious life before him. Hardly yet begun is the arduous training which will fit him for heroic war. Very far off yet is the time of the putting forth of his mature and disciplined strength in the conquest of Nemean Lion, and Lernaean Hydra, and the sea-monsters; the time when he shall cleanse the Augean stables of their accumulated filth, shall liberate the chained Prometheus, share with the very gods in victory, and possess himself at the last of the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides.

This noble conception of humanity is not only in accordance with what we now recognise as the law of life, but much of its hope and expectation is not beyond the compass of mankind within measurable time. We know that the dream of the poet, the Utopia of the philosopher, and the Millennium of the prophet, do not forecast a state of things quite impossible for men to realise. The poetic life, the

universal brotherhood, the sane mind in the sane body, the righteous adjustment of humanity to its earthly environment, the tenure of a clean, active, and happy life in a spirit of reverence, admiration, and thanksgiving—what is there in all this that is beyond the attainment of the spirit and intelligence manifest in the best of mankind to-day? Even within the short span of a few generations there might be a near approach to its consummation, if only human affairs were governed in accordance with the methods indicated by human wisdom, and in obedience to the law of divine morality set forth in the simple message of Jesus of Nazareth.

In very truth, I discern that the world has no choice in the matter. Soon or late this dream *must* be realised, and a more righteous life *will* be established. Happily, through the fraternal goodwill and united endeavour of the best of the peoples; or terribly, after an Armageddon of unimaginable horror and licence, the dark shadow of which is already cast upon the earth. For it is not in the utmost of human folly and perversity to stay the onward rolling of the mighty wheel of the earth-life. Civilisations are weighed in the balance and found wanting, and barbarisms prevail for a time amid their ruins, to presently grow into new civilisations; great empires rise and fall; nations grow swiftly to high estate, and as swiftly dwindle into contempt and impotence; peoples instinct with fire

as from heaven are overwhelmed by force of seeming meaner sort, and utterly dispersed; yet still the whole moves on from gain to gain, from apparent loss in the particular to certain advantage in the mass. Though it may seem that in body and mind there has been no advance in human nature during two or three thousand years, though the athlete of to-day may be no stronger or swifter than the ancient Greek, though the modern poet, and artist, and philosopher may be no whit superior in native genius to the men of old, shall we be content to accept the ignoble and false conclusion that the innate faculty of man is incapable of increase? Let us remember that a thousand years are but as one day in this high calendar, and that there is neither retrogression nor standing still in the operation of the Infinite Designer, even though its infinite patience may seem to us as the end of all design.

Out of the excellent attainment of the preceding animal life we have seen the upspringing of a new life in man, vastly superior to the old in powers of mind, and moreover gifted with a new spirit, compelling the mind to activities of an order without example or indication even, in the activities of any other animal, either before or since man's advent. But, superior as the spiritual life is in its nature, it is obviously far inferior to the more ancient life in its development—in perfection after its kind. And it appears to me that we must believe in its eventual

attainment to that perfection, or else we must believe that Human Nature is stronger than God.

NOTE

My discernment of the spiritual life is purely prophetic, though it appears to me to be equally reasonable inference from the facts that distinguish man above all other earth-dwellers. I need hardly say that I have no sort of title to speak in the name of science. All the inference from such facts as I have been able to glean in moments of leisure is my own inference; and not until I had written the last word of this book did I read anything of what men of science, or others, had to say about the questions with which it deals. I had avoided all hypotheses, and had concerned myself only with facts, which I verified with the utmost possible care, by all means available to me.

And now, if I were not assured of prophecy, as of a thing above and distinct from human reason unaided by its inspiration, I should not venture to contend for the reasonableness of my conclusions against the judgment of some, whose equipment of learning and intellect is obviously greatly superior to mine. But I *see* what all the prophets saw, and cannot be convinced of its illusion, even though a great scientist—and true prophet of a sort—can be assured of no more than what appears in the following saying:—

“The results of the process of evolution in the case of man, and in that of his more nearly allied contemporaries, have been marvellously different. Yet it is easy to see that small primitive differences of a certain order must, in the long run, bring about a wide divergence of the human stock from others. It is a reasonable supposition that, in the earliest human organisms, an improved brain, a voice more capable of modulation and articulation, limbs which lent themselves better to gesture, a more perfect hand, capable among other things of imitating form in plastic and other material, were combined with the curiosity, the mimetic tendency, the strong family affection of the next lowest group, and that they were accompanied by exceptional length of life and a prolonged minority. The last two peculiarities are obviously calculated to strengthen the family organisation, and to give weight to its educative influences. The potentiality of language, as the vocal symbol of thought, lay in the faculty of modulating and articulating the voice. The potentiality of writing, as the visual symbol, lay in the hand that could draw, and the mimetic tendency which, as we know, was gratified by drawing, as far back as the days of Quaternary man. With speech as the record, in tradition, of the experience of more than one generation; with writing as the record of that of any number of generations, the experience of the race, tested and corrected generation after generation, could

be stored up and made the starting-point for fresh progress. Having these perfectly natural factors of the evolutionary process in man before us, it seems unnecessary to go farther afield in search of others.” —HUXLEY, *Science and Christian Tradition*, Prologue, page 51.

Now the inclusion of the art of writing among the factors of the difference in question appears to me to indicate some confusion of thought. For writing is a factor of civilisation: of difference between man and man, not of difference between man and the brutes. The illiterate man of the time before the invention of writing, was assuredly, in all the essentials of the difference, as unlike the rest of the earth-dwellers as is the civilised man; the gulf between him and them as unfathomable and impassable, if not, in a sense, as wide, as it is now. And to credit the earliest human organisms with an improved brain is, I think, merely to overleap the real difficulty of the problem of man's singular difference from his contemporaries. For given the brain—improved and improvable, not only in degree beyond the rest, but as no other brain was, in any degree—the structural advantages of voice and hand would follow naturally in response to its call upon those organs, for service commensurate with its growing requirement. What of all the other voices and hands, which surely were improvable, and had all man's time before them to improve in? We can hardly doubt that the

potentiality of language was in many voices, and the potentiality of writing in many hands; and that there was wanting only the potentiality of the higher thought in the many unspeculative brains. And assuming that the "small primitive differences of a certain order" were of the common order—resulting from variation and impulse, such as led to the differentiation of species all round—then it appears to me *not* easy to see how they could bring about a wide divergence of a sort without counterpart on the earth. Moreover, the initial difficulty of the problem is not lessened, but enormously increased, in proportion as one factor is added to another, so long as all of them are assumed to have fortuitously collected in one organism. Indeed, the difficulty becomes so great that, for my own part, I find it impossible to accept the conclusion that the singularity of man is satisfactorily accounted for by the enumerated "perfectly natural factors of the evolutionary process."

Why the birth of a new life—or say, of a tendency to thought of a more intimate likeness to, and correspondence with, the thought that informs all things—should not be recognised as a perfectly natural factor of the evolutionary process in man, I cannot understand. Among the factors recognised as such there is the mimetic tendency—purely an inference from phenomena—and why not a tendency to the higher thought, the phenomena of which are

beyond all comparison multitudinous and impressive? From the unexampled phenomena of human life we *must*, I think, infer an unexampled tendency in the primitive man—some impulse or faculty, bestowed upon him alone—which must be the main factor of the unique difference manifest in his descendants. Factors which in some shape and degree are common to many species—even if we set aside the difficulty of their combination by chance in one particular species—can hardly account for a difference of more than form and degree. However irregular the line of advance might become, it would still be an advance in line; for with all the wonderful difference in structure and modes of life, with corresponding difference in mental faculty, apparent in the mere animal life, there is also very remarkable and significant likeness and equality manifest in all its change and progress. There is an evenness of adjustment to the various conditions of living, a common level of attainment in relation to those conditions, and a common limit of energy to the ends of the preservation of the individual and the continuance of the species. And there is in the present time no certain indication of any impulse tending to an advance beyond the common bounds, in any denizen of the earth, except only in man.

It may be imagined that I appraise the difference manifest in humanity at a value above what the scientist is able to recognise as just. But the great

writer whose words I have quoted did clearly recognise the difference to be of such a nature as that which I contend fully warrants the prophetic inference, and condemns his own conclusion. In another essay, after remarking that there is "no absolute structural line of demarcation" between man and the next lowest group, and "the attempt to draw a psychical distinction is equally futile," he goes on to say: "At the same time, no one is more strongly convinced than I am of the vastness of the gulf between civilised man and the brutes; or is more certain that whether *from* them or not, he is assuredly not *of* them. No one is less disposed to think lightly of the present dignity, or despairingly of the future hopes, of the only consciously intelligent denizen of this world."

Strike out the word *civilised*, and this statement grants all the difference needed to sustain my contention. That the word is superfluous to the meaning of the writer is clear from the concluding sentence, since we can hardly suppose that he could regard conscious intelligence as belonging only to civilised man. Or if civilisation stands for the difference, then the inference is of a peculiar potentiality of civilisation; it is the same problem in other terms.

It is easy to understand the reluctance of the naturalist to infer a spiritual factor from the difference, vast though he may discern it to be. And if spiritual must mean supernatural—as unhappily it commonly does—he is absolutely justified in refusing to endorse

such an inference. For the supernatural, however it may be conceived, certainly cannot be reasonably inferred from natural phenomena. But if we take *psychical* to stand only for the lower faculties of the mind, and *spiritual* for the higher, then the prophetic revelation is confirmed by what I take to be entirely reasonable inference of a peculiar spiritual tendency, from peculiar spiritual phenomena in humanity which are readily distinguishable from all the phenomena of the mere animal life.

The only reasonable alternative to this conclusion appears to me to be the hypothesis that the difference between man and the mere animal is not a reality. We cannot certainly know that the brutes are not consciously intelligent; and if we need not look beyond the impulse to which all animals are subject, in order to account for man's supremacy, I cannot see why we should not credit the elephant with a quality of mind equal to our own, or even with a superior wisdom and philosophy, content to endure the evils of life in silence and patience, from a more assured understanding of the meaning of life? It appears to me that we must suppose that in reality there *is* no vast gulf between our thought and that of our blood-brethren—that we really are *of* the others—and that the difference between us is only of such sort as that which is manifest between the civilisation of the ant and the barbarism of the inconsiderate house-fly.

CHAPTER III

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

IF, as some maintain, we can be absolutely assured only of one thing—of the existence of mind—then clearly, a theory of the universe that presumes mind to be everything, that mind is the universe, and the universe is mind, is the only theory that is quite beyond challenge from the standpoint of absolute certainty. And if we dig down to the bed-rock of the noble religions, we come to that incontrovertible conception, expressed as—God is All in All, the beginning and the end.

What are all the phenomena of the universe but semblances of an unknown quantity presented to our minds, so far as we *know*? And while religion declares the unknown to be God, reason confirms the conception as essentially true. Religion presents the whole universe as the operation of Supreme Mind, and it appears to me that science can have no quarrel against this fundamental doctrine. For everything that is apparent to us through the senses, we are compelled to submit to the judgment of the mind which, by its understanding of the evidence, and by its native interest and delight in the problems submitted to it, satisfies itself as to the mental quality

of the whole. Moreover, the endowment of our minds is so obviously in perfect correlation with the manifest operation of the universe, that we must believe all things to be the operation of mind, like unto ours in kind, while immeasurably greater in power.

At the stage where the mind of man begins to concern itself with interests higher than those appertaining to the preservation of the individual, or of the race, it becomes a problem of itself which dominates all the other problems of our world—for at the outset of all inquiry, the mind must recognise itself as the most important, and the most certain fact of all. The self-conscious thought that sits enthroned within the circle of the senses cannot possibly regard itself as superfluous in the universal scheme—though the stars in their courses seem serenely unconscious of its existence; though the sun shines, and the seasons change, and life regenerates itself on the earth, to all seeming, in obedience to law which indicates no occasion or necessity for the higher intellectual activity of man.

But the fact of our intellectual and moral being is certain, and in correlation with the certainty is an intellectual and moral force dominating all that is. For all things that exist, approve themselves to us as things existing by the rule of an intelligence which we can recognise in them. We have therefore the idea of God, as the first reasonable certainty deducible from our absolute certainty. And taking

a wider range, it seems to me equally reasonable to believe that the inception of the idea of God in the human mind was due to the operation upon it of the divine mind; for we can hardly suppose that the higher thought came of itself, but must believe that it was born of the greater thought that is from everlasting to everlasting.

We may therefore, I think, accept the idea of God, and the idea of divine inspiration, as reasonable certainties. And from the premises of absolute certainty, reason can hardly deduce more. But from other data—from the discovery of the sovereignty of law over all things; of the continuity and universality of the operation of all elemental force in nature; and in particular from the evidence relating to the phenomena of inspiration recently brought to light, it would seem also to be certain that the divine inspiration is as continuous and universal in its operation as is any other manifestation of force known to us. But this conclusion brings us into direct antagonism with the presumptions of the religions. For they declare themselves to be possessed of arbitrary and exclusive revelation of divine truth, and demand our belief in it, solely on the ground of authority; as matter above our right to question. And there are many religions, and all make identical claims. They all herald their entry into the lists by the proclamation of signs and wonders: they all put forward evidence of their

right, identical in kind, and mainly of a kind that men have come to regard as utterly untrustworthy in all matters which lie outside their province. And when we admit reason to the council, we can but depose authority from its high seat, once for all. Reason can have no dealing with abstract authority; it must have a free hand. It does not follow that reason need premise the falsehood of authoritative doctrine; but assuredly, in this day, it is unable to recognise any authority as alone sufficient for belief in matters of religion. There is no authority on earth which is so entirely convincing, of itself, that we needs must take its declaration to be absolutely true. And if we insist upon our right to try such declaration by standards approved to us in other ways, then the belief consequent on the trial becomes essentially a reasonable, instead of a peremptory belief. Moreover, though we may be convinced, after due trial, of the truth of an authoritative doctrine, that is not enough to establish the infallibility of the authority. These sayings are true; therefore this is the Word of God; and this being the Word of God, therefore these other sayings are true; is an argument that reason cannot accept. In faithfulness to the talent entrusted to it, it must examine all things, in order that it may believe only the truth.

With the dawn of science there is born a new day—a day of Judgment. And though yesterday the noblest and best of mankind held fast by faith in

ecclesiastical doctrine as the one thing essential to salvation, to-day the noblest and best feel the power of another command as even more imperative; the command to try all things and hold fast that which is good. They could but believe, in the dark: they can but judge in the light. It was well to believe; and may we not hope that after judgment, we may come to believe, if other things, yet not less than of old, but more? For if religion is divine, it is assuredly not less human, and is to be judged by the standards of our humanity. We have no other standards; and while the authorities differ, and the juries can come to no agreement, there is forced upon us, with the freedom of choice, the necessity of a careful examination of the authoritative revelations of the mystery of God, compared with the scientific discovery of actual facts of the divine operation.

The difference between the revelation of science and that of the Christian religion is not confined to some discrepancy between actual fact and a few details of Holy Writ. If that were all it would be a matter of very slight importance. We might still believe the Bible to contain a divine revelation of truth that was beyond human discovery, and as not at all concerned with facts of an inferior order, which, in good time, men could discover for themselves. We might still hold the Biblical story of the creation to be a divine story, fitted to the understanding of the time of its utterance—to be but as a simple setting for precious

jewels of heavenly grace—to be a myth, yet embodying essential spiritual truth, which is not less worshipful though its presentment may not accord with fact, in mere detail extraneous to the real meaning and purpose of the myth. But the scientific revelation not only discredits the mere detail of the myth; it is irreconcilable with its meaning; and for my own part, I find it impossible to accept as divine revelation; myth whose meanings are untrue, and doctrine which is accordant only with the untruth.

The man who truly believes in Christianity because it satisfies the spirituality of his being; who is conscious of a spirit in common with Heaven, of longing and aspiration content with the articles of his faith; may afford to disregard all discrepancy, and will, inevitably, look upon religion and science as distinct and independent things, which belong to, and deal with, different worlds. But if I have not the same self-consciousness, my neighbour's assurance is no proof to me of the truth of his tenure of belief. It is proof of the verity of religion: in which I cannot but believe, on the testimony, not of one, but of many; not of a peculiar people only; but of all peoples; not of an age, but of all time. Yet in which of the religions I may believe; or whether I can believe in any one of them, is an open question.

It is an open question to the great majority, for not one in ten thousand is a true believer. There are many who are deeply interested in the question,

who yet find the cravings of their higher being unsatisfied by the old prescriptions; but the greater part are simply indifferent in the matter; they neither believe nor disbelieve, but merely acquiesce in the established order of their environment for the sake of ease, convenience, and good repute. And in that last particular a very notable change has taken place even within the time of my recollection. I can remember when—at least among the middle class in England—the acknowledged unbeliever in the absolute truth of the Bible was looked upon as a very dreadful and dangerous person, and was universally tabooed as an outcast. There was no sin so unpardonable as that of avowed infidelity. It was not respectable—for it was uncommon, an exception to the general rule and usage, therefore intolerable. But the thought that then was only whispered in the ear of an intimate friend, may now be openly spoken without loss of caste. The divine authority of the Bible and the Church is seriously questioned by men of the highest attainment in science and philosophy; and in the current literature of the time, the most sacred questions are discussed with the utmost freedom and irreverence, and none is dismayed. The average business or professional man is so far from being intolerant of freedom of thought on the part of his associates, that his common attitude is rather one of tolerance towards the Church, which in his heart of hearts he holds to be a kind of make-believe, more or less useful

and possibly even necessary, to the easy going of the social machine. For himself—he no longer lives in terror of the hell of his childhood, and he takes no thought to lay up for himself treasure in heaven; having no desire to go there. Yet he is disposed to regard a mild belief as a good thing for his wife and children, and he submits himself to a certain observance of the forms of religion, on the understanding that they do not become too importunate. Moreover, he is to some extent aware of the conflict between the new ideas and the old order of things, and he regards, as from outside and with a certain good-natured contempt of superior sanity, the internal excitement of the Church about details of ritual and other trivial matters, the while the rising tide of knowledge is obviously sapping its very foundations.

That this presentment of the state of religion generally in England is a true picture, and not a caricature, will, I think, hardly be disputed. The facts are notorious, obvious to all men. There is yet a considerable amount of formal observance, but there remains very little living faith; while the unfaith of the age is fearless and outspoken. In confirmation of which conclusion take the following from a daily paper—January 1, 1900. A distinguished layman, Sir Edward Clarke, writing under the date of December 26 upon the subject of a suggested day of humiliation, says: “I am very sorry to have to say that I think in the present temper of the public mind

the appointment of a day of public humiliation and prayer would only provoke a mischievous and most unseemly controversy. The mere suggestion has produced a correspondence in which those who minister in Christ's Church have repudiated their Master's plainest teaching, and laymen scoff at the idea of the divine government of the world. A day so set apart would be kept as a holiday, and pulpits would be used, as they are being used every Sunday, to inflame the pride and passion of our people, and to dull and sear their consciences. So far as any Christian spirit is felt in the Church, it can find expression in the prayers of the Liturgy better than in occasional prayers, in which much less of that spirit is to be found." My newspaper further reports that the Bishop of London, in the course of his New Year's message to his diocese, writes, "We cannot shut our ears to the voice of God, which is speaking to us as a nation. It rebukes our pride and our self-conceit; it warns us that we must strive, as we have not been striving of late, to show ourselves worthy of our place in the world. We must set ourselves to learn that lesson; to practise greater humility; to have less confidence in our own inherent wisdom; to have more sympathy for other peoples, and more charity towards all men. I wish that I could say that the Church had been doing its best to teach this needful lesson to the English people. Unfortunately, it has only been reproducing in its own quarrels the temper that

prevails. Just in the point where an example was most needed it has not been given. The Church has adopted the method of politics. It has presented the appearance of parties contending against one another. It has injured its spiritual influence by descending to trivial disputes. It has not shown the English people a higher spirit or a better way. I should not be true to my office if I did not say this. We of the clergy have need to humble ourselves before God, recognising our special responsibility for the popular temper. The Church is the one organisation that can deal faithfully with this temper. Instead of trying to educate it, the Church has adopted it, and has set before the public eye the familiar spectacle of bodies of Englishmen desperately determined to have their own way by every means in their power."

These are authorities above suspicion of ill-will towards religion, either within or without the Church; and though the white heat of passionate distress on a particular occasion may account for the uncommon candour of their words, they may yet be accepted as expressing no more than the assured and dispassionate convictions of the writers. The matters they deal with have nothing to do with the occasion, except in so far as they are forced by it into such high relief of light and shade as to call forth exceptional remark. We may, therefore, take for granted the fact of a recent notable development of general unbelief in the old articles of faith.

I venture to say that the cause of it is not far to seek. The endeavour to account for it in the familiar way of the Sunday sermon is so puerile and insincere, that it only serves to confirm the infidelity and to arm it with contempt. We are told that it comes of the inherent perversity of our nature; of neglect of prayer; of selfishness, greed, the worship of Mammon, and self-conceit, and the evil pride of intellect—which things, and their like, were equally in force in the ages of unquestioning belief. The pride of intellect only is more general and confident than aforetime—but it can hardly be classed among the causes of infidelity, since it is rather, along with infidelity itself, an effect of a new condition of things. The real cause is the increase of knowledge. That is the fact of supreme importance to the Christian Church, which hitherto it has not had the wisdom and courage to honestly confront.

But of itself the increase of knowledge must be a good thing; and even if it were not so, the Church of the present day is powerless to hinder it, and has no responsibility in that direction. Yet assuredly its first responsibility is for the belief of men, and the morality that depends on belief, let its other responsibilities be what they may. Therefore, of all organisations the Church is the most intimately concerned in the revelations of modern science; for it cannot but be aware of the fatal influence—so far as its own estate is concerned—of the new enlightenment upon the leading

intelligence of the time, which in its turn dominates the belief of the great body of the people. Even the true believer can only afford to ignore the challenge of science for himself; and to the Church it is a matter of life or death! Yet as a whole, the latter has contented itself with obstinate reiteration of the dogmas in question; and its individual endeavour has been confined to vain attempts to fit the new discovery to the stereotyped text of the old tradition.

On the other hand, the man of science, recognising that there can be no agreement between science and a Church whose invincible conservatism insists on the whole of its own presumption being absolute and final truth, turns away from the *non possumus*, and elects to concern himself only with his own affairs. So that we have here a deadlock between two of the greatest forces of the world: a deadlock which can have no possible ending, except through a change of attitude on the part of the Church! Its plain and supreme duty at this time is to reform itself in accordance with the overwhelming body of ascertained fact of recent discovery. For many centuries it has disputed over *words* of doubtful sense and various origin. Let it now take into account the revealed *works* of the Divine Mind. The great body of the congregation of God has the right to demand an impartial examination on the part of its nominal head, of all the questions vital to its well-being that have presented themselves in these latter days. It has the right to expect

of it a decision that shall resolve its present doubt, and be for approved guidance in the time to come.

It is not within the right of science or religion to agree to differ. As well might we propose to separate the interwoven interests of the body and the mind, as to draw a serviceable line of demarcation between scientific and religious truth. Yet it would seem to be quite beyond hope to expect of the near future anything in the nature of a conference between the heads of the Christian Churches and the masters of science, such as might tend towards the reconciliation that is so urgently required for the satisfaction and good government of the world. The Church as the repository of spiritual truth is unfaithful to its trust; since we know that truth is not dead but living, and moves as God moves, altogether and for ever. And the attitude of the new science is independent, and in part even contemptuous, of religion: a very youthful attitude, positive of much on the security of a little. It is either content with the facts of its own discovery, careless of their spiritual relations—a state of mind reminiscent of the inconsequent curiosity of the ape—or else, presuming the sufficiency of its finding, it inclines to question the very existence of the spiritual life, and catalogues all the phenomena of religion as no more than phenomena of mental and emotional activity, radically identical with the more sluggish working of the minds and passions of our four-footed progenitors; as phenomena of imagination

outrunning knowledge, and of emotion diverted from its legitimate course into by-paths of mere phantasy.

Of course I do not mean to say that all men of science are unbelievers, and all priests unfaithful. I say that the Church is unfaithful. And certain it is that the discipline of scientific research induces a habit of mind that is disinclined to faith in all such authority as that which is claimed by the religions; and moreover, since that habit of mind is admirable in itself, and fruitful of approved good work, that is so much the worse for the religions. The relation between knowledge and infidelity is a fixed idea in the popular mind, as natural cause and effect. We continually see the past ages of ignorance referred to as properly the ages of faith, and the present scepticism as the inevitable consequence of the present enlightenment. Yet in reality the foundation of all true faith is knowledge. It is a misuse of terms to speak of an age of faith as corresponding with an age of ignorance. Ignorance is a soil whose natural growth is superstition: assuredly not faith. In all ages the true believer really believes in what he knows; and the more we know, the more we believe. True faith is commensurate with true knowledge; and examining the revelation of the religions from the standpoint of what we actually know, it is not impossible that we may find the religions to be incredible; not so much for what they declare, as for what they deny; not so much because they claim to be inspired of God, as

because they limit the inspiration to the confines of their own boundaries, and proclaim the operation of God in that particular to be at an end; not so much because of their error, as because they insist that what they possess is absolute and final truth; not so much, it may be, because they demand too much of our faith, but too little.

For they not only demand our peremptory belief in their dogma, solely on the ground of divine revelation; but they declare the dogma to be unalterable and complete. And even though we should admit that they are possessed of matter of divine revelation, it would be impossible to admit its perfection and finality. For if we think, how can we believe that all spiritual truth necessary for the guidance of men to the end of time has already been clearly revealed? Or, that the absolute truth of God ever has been revealed? While we can believe that nothing is hidden from God, we may be equally sure that no truth can be known to us, perfectly, as all truth is known to Him. For revelation is measured by the faculty of man, not by the infinity of God: and the reality of revelation to us is not truth itself, but what we apprehend of truth. Do not let it be imagined that I question the power of God to reveal Himself; though in very truth we know nothing about that. We know, and can know only somewhat of the way in which His power is put forth and made manifest to us. We may believe, if there were any profit in so

believing, that He could have formed this earth in a moment of time, even as we behold it to-day. We *know* only that He did not do so. We may believe that He could have revealed the whole truth to Moses, or to whom He would; we know with certainty that there has been no such revelation at any time to any man; and speaking in terms of our general knowledge, we may say with perfect assurance, that there *can* be no revelation of spiritual truth independent of the condition of the world and the progress of the human mind.

There is a striking similarity between the state of our knowledge of the spiritual world to-day, and that of the knowledge of the material universe a few centuries ago. Before the discovery of the immutable laws that govern the universe, our knowledge of it was in a state of chaos. It was a mere collection of facts; at the best gathered into groups and ordered into systems, that were no more than conveniences. Attempts were not wanting, on the part of the great prophets of science, to solve the problems presented by the facts, to reduce the confusion to an ordered whole, and to account for the phenomena by fixed and universal principles of operation. There were many theories of the universe—fantastic, imaginative, absurd, sublime—conceived in laborious thought, and supported by most ingenious argument; there were many schools and many disciples, but there was no agreement. All the theories were alike tentative;

and though some were splendid and fascinating, none was entirely convincing.

So it is with the religious systems of the present time. They are arbitrary and unconvincing systems evolved from various inadequate collections of phenomena. There is no agreement among them, and no one religion is strong enough to persuade its neighbours. We are pleased to speak of the triumph of Christianity, but, in fact, it has had no successes whatever over any other of the great religions. It has made no sensible impression, during all its centuries of propagandism, upon Buddhism, Judaism, or Islam; nor is it in the least likely that it will ever do so, while it remains the petrification it now is.

Modern science challenges much more than the details of Scriptural myth. It discredits the whole body of doctrine that constitutes dogmatic Christianity. The idea of a Trinity; the dogma of original sin; salvation by faith in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ—these main points are beyond reconciliation with the recent discovery of the actual history and manifest laws of life. And while the Christian Church has taken no cognisance of an incompatibility between its dogma, and the truth that has rewarded the faithful pursuit of its legitimate ends by science, the latter, in its own way, has done other work of the utmost value, that was properly the work of the Church. For scientific research, within the last hundred years, has garnered a vast store of facts relating to the origin

and growth of religion all the world over. Learned men have studied the nature and history of the religions, have compared and classified them, have recorded their spread and influence, and are practically agreed as to certain general conditions and laws that govern the phenomena of religion among all peoples. So that we who seek after spiritual truth to-day have a much wider field to overlook than our forefathers had, and if it should come to pass that our finding may be somewhat different from theirs, we need be neither surprised nor dismayed. To truly desire the very truth is to be devoid of fear of its cost, and perfect faith in the truth of God can acknowledge no self-reproach of irreverence or presumption, in seeking after it in a spirit of sincerity and trustfulness.

The world of the old prophets was a very narrow and dark world compared with the wide expanse illuminated for us. Even the greatest of the prophets of Israel was but a prophet "unto a little clan," and was informed only of the ideas of religion embodied in the tradition and worship of his own people, and of kindred and neighbouring peoples; while far beyond the verge of his horizon there were other and great peoples, of whose very existence he was ignorant, and from whose enlightenment he could profit nothing.

To know, as now we know, that among those remote peoples there were evolved similar ideas; that identical forces were working to identical purpose in the minds of men far hidden from each other; that the pheno-

mena of religion are not confined to any one people or age, or portion of the globe, but are universal to mankind; that they can be traced back to the earliest dawn of history, and to beginnings which in their naturalness and simplicity are at one with the beginnings of all other things with which we are acquainted; is to be compelled to recognise religion as something inherent in human nature, dominated by law that is as universal and continuous in its operation as any law we know. And if we were assured that the evolution of spiritual truth was identical in its method with that of our knowledge of the material universe, we might reasonably expect at this time some new and important discovery of Spiritual Law—as distinct from moral precept and arbitrary dogma—by way of logical deduction from the facts discovered by the recent investigators of spiritual phenomena.

But at the same time it would seem that the testimony of the phenomena is emphatic against any such expectation. For the discovery of spiritual truth never was by way of logical deduction, but always by the inspiration of the Divine Thought; and was given, not to the philosopher or the scientist, but to the prophet, to the dreamer of dreams, to the Seer. And yet, considering that inspiration was never arbitrary, but was ever in accordance with the condition of the world, and with the human need and desire of the time, may we not venture to hope that at this time—when knowledge is so largely increased, and a man's

thought is carried swiftly to the ends of the earth without change or loss; when all the world is curious to know, and is asking of all things in heaven and earth for enlightenment; when it is conscious, as it never was before, of its need of more assured guidance; when with all its hurry and strife it is intently listening for a new and sufficient Word—there *will* be, nay, there *must* be, a revelation of Spiritual Law, commensurate with our desire and necessity? Though, in accordance with the past operation, we can hope for it to come only in the old way; by the influence of the Spirit of God upon the mind of the Seer.

The Supreme Authority that is behind all things is beyond the reach of our direct appeal. Its voice—to our hearing on earth, a still, small voice—is never silent, yet it is never so loud and distinct in the ear of any man, that he may be sure of all its meaning, or presume to tell all its wisdom and requirement. Yet it is upon such surety and presumption that the authority of the religions is based. It is to the crude conclusions from fragmentary and uncertain data, which men imagined ages long ago, that the religions would limit our faith and hope, and chain down the conduct of our life for all time. The religions are peremptory—but the Voice never was peremptory. The Creeds are emphatic—but the Vision never was sun-clear. Alas! very far indeed from that!

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIANITY

THE FOUNDATIONS

IN all reasonable probability the beginning of ideas of religion was as a dim spark of thought kindled in some primitive mind by the dreams of night; dreams of dead relatives or intimate friends, giving rise in natural course to the idea of their continued existence; which idea, it is easy to see, would readily crystallise into a fixed belief in spirits or ghosts of the departed. And such an idea, once it came to be entertained, would probably evolve into various shapes through the awe and wonder inspired by the more striking of the phenomena of nature—by the splendour and power of the Sun; by tempest, and flood, and famine; and by a thousand mysterious things and events influencing human life. So that obviously we require no supernatural agency in order to account for the beginnings of religion, or for the nature-gods of primitive worship—that is to say, no agency beyond the universal and continuous influences in operation upon the human mind. We need not trouble to consider other more or less probable

suggestions as to the origin of the religions, nor the evidence in support of them which is to be found in the condition of the barbarous peoples of the present time. The divinity of the beginning is in no degree discredited by evidence of its naturalness and universality, but is all the more approved as divine by the correspondence of its method with all else that we know of the method of the divine operation in other fields.

At this early stage we can surmise nothing suggestive of Christianity. So far all is common to humanity and to all religions. But presently, emerging from the general, we may dimly discern a gathering of ideas more advanced and characterised, whose connection with the religion of the Western, or civilised world, as we are pleased to call it, can be to some extent traced. It is still prehistoric and hypothetical, but it may be fairly postulated from what we know of a group of ancient historical religions, which, having a striking family likeness, a local limit, and a character more or less distinct from other groups, indicate the existence of a yet more ancient root religion from which they must have sprung; which parent religion has for convenience' sake been named the Old Semitic religion, though whether it was of Semitic origin is perhaps more than doubtful.

At the very heart of the Old World, midway between Europe, Africa, and Indo-Chinese Asia, and practically separated from the rest by natural barriers

of mountain ranges, deserts, and seas—where lies the region fertilised by the two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, with a common outlet into the Persian Gulf—there grew up, of very old time, a great civilisation, the records of which remain to this day. And contemporaneous with the central civilisation of Babylonia, there were on either hand, in the East and in the West, other great civilisations, seemingly of independent origin, and undoubtedly of great antiquity—of an age, in actual fact, that takes us back to a time long before the date assigned to Adam in the chronology of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We are told by the learned that a great Babylonian library, especially famous for its works on Astronomy, was founded in the reign of Sargon of Akkad, 3800 B.C. There was, therefore, at that distant date, a civilisation which even then must have been extremely old. For in the particulars of time and rate of growth, civilisation *per se* must be sharply distinguished from the civilisations which have rapidly quickened into vigorous life out of the ashes of their predecessors. The traditions which attribute the attainment in Art and Science of the early civilisations, directly to a few heroic teachers, had doubtless some groundwork in fact; but they are greatly misleading in respect of the essential importance of such particulars, and in the impression they give of the time required to bring about any great change in the condition of humanity. The

forces we now see at work in effecting such change are vastly more numerous, and more rapid in their action, than the elementary forces that slowly raised the primitive men into the men of the early civilisations. If the British Isles had been absolutely estranged from the rest of the world since prehistoric times, their present inhabitants would in all probability be very little advanced beyond the state of the Ancient Briton of the Stone Age. All the rapid change which has occurred has come from without, from civilisation flowing from civilisation, which, if we follow it back to the time when all its growth must have been from within, must have evolved with extreme slowness, by almost imperceptible degrees. Man has this property in common with his ancestry, that the early stages of his advance must have been incomparably the longest, and to justly appreciate their duration, we must reckon not by centuries, but by periods approximating rather to the geological idea of time.

It is significant that an idea of time in connection with man's existence on the earth, which is somewhat like the geological idea, is to be found in the early Babylonian tradition. Nearer to the beginning of the earth-life by some thousands of years than we are, the men of that time believed the beginning to have been far more distant from them, than we have been used to think it distant from us. The fact is notable, and may be accounted for by

the reflection that they were nearer, geographically, to the original source of the civilisations, and may therefore be presumed to have inherited, century after century, tradition of old time which led back, without any absolute break, into a past beyond calculation. The Babylonian tradition records a dynasty of antediluvian kings which endured for no less than 430,000 years — which reduces the geologist's 50,000 to very modest proportions—and the first Chaldean dynasty, after the Deluge, is set down as lasting for 34,080 years. We cannot of course regard these figures as being in any sense historical — the post-diluvian tradition ascribes an average reign of nearly 400 years to each of the kings of the dynasty—but they may be fairly regarded as good evidence of the long descent of a body of ancient tradition through countless generations preceding the time of the earliest cuneiform writings.

Let us now review briefly the ideas of religion current in Babylon in the time of Abraham. Evolved from very crude conceptions — from belief in a swarm of spirits appertaining to natural objects and phenomena; spirits of good and bad luck; demons of disease and death, and the like—they developed in course of time into an organised Akkadian mythology, which afterwards, in fusion with later Semitic conceptions, was reformed into a religion, the stamp of which is deeply impressed upon the

religion of Christianity. The old magician had been gradually transformed into the priest, the official lawgiver in divine affairs. And possessed of all the learning of the time, the Babylonian priesthood built up, out of old things and new, a very wonderful and enduring edifice; for though its material form was presently destroyed, and its records were buried out of sight for 3000 years or more, its spiritual form continued, its traditions lived on, and its ideas are with us to-day.

The chief gods of the old Akkadian mythology were three in number—Na, Ea, and Mulge; lords of the sky, the earth, and the under-world. At the time of the great reform they were adopted into a new order, by the names of Anu, Nea, and Bel the Demiurge, as the children of Zieu or Zicara (the sky); and after these four came the trinity of the Moon-god, the Sun-god, and the Air-god. These were regarded as the seven magnificent deities, to whom were afterwards added five planetary deities, making all together, the twelve chiefs of the gods. There were fifty other great gods, a host of lesser spirits of heaven, and a yet larger host of spirits of earth.

The cosmogony of Babylonia has been preserved in a long poem, which describes the beginning as all a chaos of waters, called the deep “(*Tiamat*, the Heb. *Tehom*). Then the Upper and Lower Firmaments were created, and the gods came into existence. After that comes a long account of the struggle

between Bel-Merodach and the 'dragon' of chaos, or Tiamat, 'the serpent of evil,' with her allies, the forces of anarchy and darkness. It ended in the victory of the god of light, who thereupon created the present world by the power of his 'word.' The fifth tablet or book of the poem describes the appointment of the heavenly bodies for signs and seasons, and the sixth (or perhaps the seventh) the creation of animals and reptiles. The latter part of the poem, in which the creation of man was doubtless described, has not yet been recovered. But we learn from other texts that man was regarded as having been formed out of the 'dust' of the ground."

"*Garden of Eden.*—The 'plain' of Babylonia was called Edin in the ancient Sumerian language of the country, and the word was adopted by the Semitic Babylonians in the form of Edina." "The early seaport of Babylonia was Eridu," which was also "the chief centre of primitive Babylonian religion and culture, and in its neighbourhood was a garden wherein, 'in a holy place,' according to an ancient poem, was a mysterious tree, whose roots were planted in the 'deep,' while its branches reached to heaven. The tree of life is often represented in Assyrian sculptures between two winged cherubim who have sometimes the heads of eagles, sometimes of men, and who sometimes stand, sometimes kneel."

"*The Deluge.*—In 1872 George Smith discovered the Babylonian account of the deluge, which strik-

ingly resembles that of Genesis. It is contained in a long poem which was composed in the age of Abraham, but the Chaldaean tradition of the deluge, of which the account in the poem is but one out of many, must go back to a very much earlier date. Xisuthros, the Chaldaean Noah, was rescued along with his family, servants, and goods, on account of his righteousness. The god Ea warned him in a dream of the coming flood, and ordered him to build a ship, into which he should take every kind of animal, so that 'the seed of life' might be preserved."

"The deluge lasted seven days, and all life perished except that which was in the ark. The ship or ark grounded on 'the mountain of Nizir,' to the north-east of Assyria. After seven days Xisuthros sent forth a dove, which 'found no rest and turned back.' Then he sent forth a swallow, which also returned. Lastly, he sent forth a raven, which 'waded, croaked, and did not turn back.' So he knew that the earth was dry, and after sending forth the animals, he built an altar on the summit of the mountain and offered sacrifice. Then 'the gods smelt the sweet savour,' the goddess Istar lifted up the bow of Anu, and Bel agreed never again to send a deluge and destroy all mankind. Henceforth 'the sinner' was to 'bear his own sin,' 'the evil-doer his own iniquity.' Xisuthros and his wife were translated, like Enoch, and did not see death. The 'bow of the deluge' is referred

to in an old Babylonian hymn, the word for 'bow' being the same as that used in Hebrew."

"*The Sabbath.*—The Babylonians observed a day of rest, which is called Sabattu and described as 'a day of rest for the heart.' On it, it was forbidden to eat cooked meat, to put on fresh clothes, to offer sacrifice, to ride in a chariot, &c. The Sabattu fell on the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, and 28th days of the month. As the months were lunar, the 19th day was the 49th day, or the seventh week, from the 1st of the preceding month. In the fifth book of the Babylonian account of the creation, the Creator is made to say to the moon, 'on the seventh day halve thy disk; stand upright on the Sabbath (*Sabattu*) with the first half of it.'"

The Babylonians believed in the life of the soul after the death of the body, in a drear and sunless world where dust was the only food; though some favoured souls were admitted into a state of blessed existence in "the land with the silver sky," and fared happily with the gods who know no evil.

From old Akkadian hymns to the gods—a collection of which was made at a later date, and regarded as an inspired volume—I take the following lines as illustrating the religious feeling of that early time:—

"May God, my Creator, take mine hands;
 Guide Thou the breath of my mouth;
 Guide Thou mine hands, O Lord of Light!"
 "In heaven who is high? Thou alone, Thou art high:

In the earth who is high? Thou alone, Thou art high.
As for Thee, Thy word in heaven is declared—
The gods bow their faces to the ground.
As for Thee, Thy word in earth is declared;
The spirits of earth kiss the ground.”
“O Lord, my transgressions are many;
Great are my sins.
The Lord in the anger of His heart has confounded me;
God in the strength of His heart has set Himself against me.”

Nearly the whole of the foregoing facts relating to Babylon I have taken from various papers by Professor A. H. Sayce, the literal quotations being from an essay contributed to “The Illustrated Bible Treasury,” under the heading of “Monumental Testimony to the Old Testament”—a charmingly impartial heading, which commits the writer to nothing by way of inference from his facts, which are beyond dispute. For all these things were recorded on clay tablets, by which the contemporary cuneiform writings of Babylon have been preserved to us absolutely unaltered through all the intermediate years; and therefore our knowledge of the ideas and observance of this period—one of very great importance in the matter of our inquiry—is, as far as it goes, incomparably certain. Of no subsequent period in the history of the ideas which are related with the religion of Christianity, can we be so assured that the literature appertaining to it truly represents the actual thought and custom of the time.

Nearly the whole of the Old Testament has come down to us through manifold change. The Bible,

in its present form, takes hold of the popular imagination as a splendid unity: a thing of inspiration all compact. In reality it is a collection of records differing very widely in the degree of their value and authenticity. Such unity as it possesses is due in great measure to the fact, that finally the whole mass of material which had been garnered among the Jews during many centuries, and which had undergone all the time more or less reformation, proportioned to the antiquity and nature of its parts; was gathered together, arranged, and welded into its present shape, by men who stood near the high-water mark of the peculiar and noble genius of the Israelitish people.

It must not be supposed that the scribes of Ezra's time had merely to edit written records handed down carefully through the generations from the time of Moses. It is in the highest degree improbable that there ever were any written records of the traditional history, the laws and religion, and the customary life of the Hebrews, of an earlier date than about 500 years before the time of Ezra. It is just possible that the art of writing was known to Moses, and it is even probable that some time after the conquest of Canaan it was practised, on stone, to record in brief important events and formal transactions. But there was no contemporary literature until long afterwards. All was transmitted by word of mouth—the folk-lore and tradition among

the common people; the law and its observance among the priests; and matters relating to lineage and the like among particular families. There was no contemporary literature in the times of David and Solomon; nor did the prophet Elijah, at a later date, leave any written record of his prophecy. But about that time there commenced a period of literary activity, during which scribes committed to writing all that could be gathered together, from various sources, bearing upon the history of the Israelites; and after this time the prophets were authors as well as preachers, and we may regard their books as having come down to us nearly in their original form.

If we put these facts—which are assured to us by the comprehensive agreement of impartial and competent authorities—alongside of the facts of recent Babylonian discovery; it appears to me that the latter, very far from being testimony to the *truth* of the Bible, must be regarded rather as quite conclusive evidence against the crude belief in the direct and independent inspiration of its cosmogony and early tradition. As evidence, indeed, sustaining the contrary expressed in the fine saying of our own seer, Blake: “The antiquities of every nation under heaven are no less sacred than those of the Jews.”

We are told in the Bible that Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees, and it is undoubted that in

his time there were colonies of Canaanites—people of his kindred—resident in Chaldaea. In all probability he was the head of a family or horde of pastoral nomads; a man of some importance, of the best of the kindreds; an Oriental sheikh; who for some reason which can only be conjectured—a blood feud? or oppression of taxation?—trekked, with all his belongings, westward from the Babylonian plain toward Canaan. We need not attempt to follow the account of his wanderings and adventures, which must be in great part mythical, and which for our purpose are of no consequence. We are concerned only with the connection between the Babylonian ideas and those of Israel. That many of the latter were derived from Babylon is obvious; and the Hebrew tradition which tells of a tribal emigration from the certain source of much which characterised the descendants of the tribe, may fairly be accounted good history. It is also extremely probable that the forefathers of Abraham had been resident in Chaldaea for several generations, subject to Babylonian influence; nor are we quite without data to guide us as to the method and extent of that influence. For the tribe belonged to a pastoral people—they were shepherds and goat-herds, dwellers in tents, wanderers—and rarely came into contact with the life of the great cities. They were probably quite outside the sphere of the Babylonian priesthood; but would be largely dependent upon the Babylonian

singer and story-teller for intellectual entertainment. The Eastern story-teller is ever welcomed in the tent; and the story is retained in primitive minds with a tenacity like that of a child's memory of a fairy tale. It is a most delightful thing, which in course of time comes to be regarded as sacred and inviolate; the slightest deviation or omission is instantly detected and resented; and the tale is handed down from father to son, from generation to generation, with wonderful fidelity to its original form. And a comparison of the early Hebrew myths of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, the Deluge, &c., with the treasure-trove of recent Babylonian discovery, leaves little room for doubt as to the ideas which Abraham and his folk actually did carry away with them from Chaldaea. They were very ancient ideas, which had taken just such shape of poem and story as best fitted them to be readily received and strongly held in the minds of a simple and half-civilised clan.

If we reject this hypothesis, it appears to me that we can only suppose that the cosmogony and the myths—which were certainly current in Babylonia very many centuries before the time of Moses—were included among the sacred writings of the Jews, by the scribes after the Babylonian exile. The later connection is certain, but the earlier connection can hardly be doubted; for the manifest good faith of the scribes precludes belief that they would include

in their work any quite new and foreign matter, though it is probable that they might avail themselves of the knowledge acquired during the exile, to somewhat amend the old tradition.

But in the more important matter of the idea of God, I can find nothing in the early history of the Israelites to indicate that their idea was derived from the more advanced ideas current in Babylonia at the time of their emigration. It does not appear that Abraham knew anything whatever of the subtleties of Chaldean mythology, and if he did know a little thereof, it would be knowledge of a sort that would be quickly forgotten by a simple people. We must go a long way further back for the origin of the God of Abraham; back to very primitive times, to the times of the family and the tribal gods. Happily, in the essential particular of the central idea of religion, the Israelites had nothing to unlearn. They started *de novo* from the ancient starting-point; and the God of Abraham was a very different conception from that of the One Only God of the Universe. He is not spoken of even as a national God; for Israel was not yet a nation. El was simply the god of the kindred; a powerful spirit, well disposed in the main towards the family and tribe; not always perhaps in a favourable mood, but requiring occasional propitiation by sacrifice. In fact, a very primitive deity, probably roughly imaged in wood or stone, and given an honourable place among the other household treasures. For long

afterwards the Jews adored images of their god ; and the brazen serpent set up by Moses was worshipped at Jerusalem as an emblem of Jehovah down to the time of Hezekiah. Neither is it apparent that, in ordinary peaceful and plenteous times, the tribe of Abraham had any customary religious observance, except possibly that of the day of rest. In such times their god El remained almost entirely unhonoured and unthought of. But, as is universal custom among semi-barbarous peoples, in time of sickness or death, he was remembered and propitiated ; and in time of stress and danger, and especially before battle, he was ceremoniously consulted, and appealed to for help ; and then, confiding in his favour, and in the strength of his arm, the warriors of the tribe went out to meet the foe, and rushed upon them with a shout of " Israel " (El does battle).

Occasionally also the patriarchs built altars to their God, probably for thanksgiving offerings ; as, for instance, Jacob, after his reconciliation with Esau, bought a parcel of ground near to the city of Shechem, and " erected there an altar, and called it El-elo'he-Israel " (God, the God of Israel).

Led in the course of their wanderings into Egypt, the Israelites appear to have settled down there for a considerable time, retaining their own language and tribal characteristics, and living their old pastoral and nomadic life, until their increasing numbers caused them to be looked upon with suspicion and alarm by

the reigning Pharaoh, who began to treat them as a people inimical to the state, reduced them to a condition of slavery, and by long-continued oppression welded a number of scattered families or tribes into the beginning of a great nation. For the Israelites were a noble and gifted race. A folk both impassioned and tenacious, with the love of freedom in their hearts as a birthright inherited from many generations of the most independent wanderers under heaven. A folk who, tried in the fire of suffering and wrong, would be most likely to come out of the trial purified from paltry jealousies and divided interests, and possessed of the supreme gain of solidarity in the essentials of national unity.

They were a people closely bound together by the ties of kindred, and after the exodus, even more closely by the memory of a common oppression and miraculous deliverance. Not yet fully equipped in the matters of outward organisation, they had the essential qualification of inner unity; and—what their subsequent history proved to be most important of all—they possessed a common sense of intimate dependence upon a God who was above all *their* God. as they were above all His people.

THE HEBREW PROPHETS

At the time of the sojourn of Israel in Egypt there was, behind the many popular and debased forms of

the Egyptian worship, a conception of God which was far in advance of that of the Israelites. A conception of One Supreme Being, whose abode was the heavenly abyss—in one gloss of the *Ritual* it is said that He was the abyss; an expression which seems to me on a level with the latest conception of God in the Highest—who was a dual being, self-existent, of Himself producing all things, the creator of heaven and earth. Moreover, the Egyptians believed in the divine origin and immortality of the soul, and in its accountability to God for the actions of its mortal life; and in a judgment after death, when the good were awarded unending happiness, and the wicked were condemned to eternal misery.

If, as we are told, Moses “was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” then we must suppose either that he thought it foolishness, or that he kept it to himself, as knowledge beyond the understanding of his people, and unsuitable to their condition and needs. For there is no indication in the early history of Israel, of the incorporation of any of those great ideas with the ideas of religion which the Israelites carried with them into the wilderness. They retained somewhat of the cosmogony and myth derived from Babylon; but from Egypt, so far as I can discover, they seem to have taken nothing whatever that influenced the evolution of their religion.

In looking back upon these three great religions—of Babylon, Egypt, and Israel—two of which

had then attained to the final stage of development after their kind, while the other was but little advanced beyond its primitive starting-point, I cannot but note a striking analogy between the evolution which we have traced in the animal world and that which is here apparent in the world of thought. In both worlds the method of operation seems to be identical; to be the work of the One Supreme Mind, and as such must surely be accounted worshipful after its kind in every instance. For my own part, I could as readily believe that all the lower animals were the work of an evil spirit, and man alone the work of God, as that all the great religions of the world were of evil origin and increase, except only the religions of Judaism and Christianity. We may properly regard Christianity as the highest manifestation of religious thought; but to regard all other belief as damnable heresy, is to deny the divine source of religion itself, and to be ignorant of the divine influence which has assuredly been exercised upon the minds and hearts of every people under heaven. There has been no religious reformation ever, which has not been inspired by a spirit of revolt against all such deadly bigotry and fossilisation of belief; and if we may hope to understand the true place of Christianity in the world's advance, what is good in it, and what is past service, and how it may be reformed into righteous accordance with the later needs of humanity, we must pursue our inquiry on the broad lines of a

more generous faith, and with a regard commensurate with the scientific revelation of the divine procedure throughout the whole universe.

In this regard it is inconceivable that the noble ideas which were embodied in the belief of Egypt were born of ignoble inspiration, and fostered only by selfish motives of individual or caste advantage. A great nation—and Egypt was exceedingly great—is not reared to its full stature on lies and shadows. The immortality of the soul, and its accountability to an eternal and just God, in whom is righteous judgment and the gift of everlasting happiness, are supreme ideas which we profess to believe now, and beyond which Christianity itself has no practical revelation, they are perennial ideas of living truth among the nations; archaic ideas which are discoverable at the core of all the great religions; ideas whose native soil is the human heart of the world, which, without their shelter, knows itself to be hopeless and desolate. Surely ancient Egypt was not without its prophets; men of earnest minds and deep hearts, who sought help in their extremity and consolation in their bereavements, where alone man has ever found help and uplifting—at the mercy-seat of the Most High God.

When we discover behind the veil of the Egyptian temple an elevation of thought on a level with the sublime utterance of Isaiah, and in the old Akkadian hymns a spirit of adoration and contrition identical

with that of the noblest of the Hebrew psalms, we cannot but recognise the unity of the living principle of truth informing all three of these great manifestations of religious thought and feeling. Yet we are agreed that the earlier manifestations were not perfect, and as we have seen, they were not destined to endure. The Babylonian and the Egyptian religions have passed completely away. The living principle which animated them still lives in other forms, but the ancient organisms are as extinct as the *Dinotherium*. Are we, therefore, to regard them as mistakes? as examples of wasted spiritual energy? Or had we not better, in following the growth of the Christian idea, keep them in mind as object-lessons for comparison, believing that they also grew up, flourished, and decayed under the same governance as that by which Christianity has grown up, and now is what it is?

Moses.—We have seen how, with the growth of the Israelites as a people, their God had grown in their midst from a tribal into a national God. Elohim (or Jehovah) had become the God of Israel, and remained ever afterwards the firm foundation of the national unity. It does not appear that the essential divine idea was in any degree enlarged by the circumstantial change, but only was in the right way of enlargement. To Moses, endowed with the true prophetic spirit, Jehovah, the God of his fathers, was a living reality—the greatest of all realities—

and in this profound conviction, conjoined with an intense patriotism, was the germ of the religion of Israel, and the beginning of an intimate, practical relationship between God and this people, without parallel for directness and efficiency.

It was in the name of Jehovah that Moses had urged upon the Israelites the necessity of their departure from the land of their bondage, assuring them of His active concern for their welfare and of His power to protect them from all the evil of other gods. And the circumstance of their deliverance both established their faith in the divine authority of their prophetic leader and broadened their conception of the being of Jehovah Himself. For the passage of the Red Sea, together with the destruction of the host of the Egyptians, must have presented to their minds a more majestic and worshipful figure than that of their warrior-god El of old time. They would know Him thenceforward as an awful and almighty God, whom even the very winds and seas obeyed.

Whatever may have been his own conception of the Divine Being, it seems to have been no part of the mission of Moses to instruct the Israelites in any matter beyond the immediate requirement of their circumstances. He had no new revelation to proclaim, no peculiar prescription for the soul's salvation, no *system* of religion whatever to impose upon his people. Prophet; in the true meaning of one

inspired with a profound sense of contact and co-operation with the Divinity that governs all things, not in the delusive meaning of one gifted with prescience over and above the legitimate foresight which comes of true insight and wise deduction from the signs of the times; and priest—altogether in the simple patriarchal way, not at all in the way of priestcraft, which multiplies formalities and tends constantly to enshroud the living truth in the deadly trappings of ritualism—the inspiration of Moses found expression in action rather than words. His life-work was as deliverer and law-giver; yet to justly estimate its quality and consequence we must not lose sight of the fact that it was all done in the spirit of prophecy, so that all his leading and legislation was essentially religious, and was understood and accepted as such by his people. Behind Moses the Israelites apprehended a very real Jehovah, an ever-present help in time of trouble, and the last court of appeal in case of disagreement.

Read now the account given in Exodus xviii. of the meeting between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, priest of Midian, who came unto Moses into the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mount of God:—

“And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other after their welfare, and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father in law all that

the Lord had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them. And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh; who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods; yea, in the thing wherein they dealt proudly against them. And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood about Moses from the morning unto the evening. And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand about thee from morning unto even? And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to inquire of God: when they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between a man and his neighbour, and I make them know the statutes of God, and his laws. And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest

is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for the thing is too heavy for thee: thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God be with thee; be thou for the people to God-ward, and bring thou the causes unto God: and thou shalt teach them the statutes and the laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens; and let them judge the people at all seasons; and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge themselves: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear *the burden* with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people also shall go to their place in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons; the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves. And Moses

let his father in law depart; and he went his way into his own land."

I think we cannot but recognise in this passage, an account which is beautifully human, and entirely credible. It is as a rift in thick and hurrying clouds, which reveals for a moment the eternal blue beyond. There appears the very soul of truth in the grand simplicity of its comprehensive story. The real man, the true God, the actual relationship between them; all show in true colours and proportions, in a setting altogether faithful to the environment and the time, without artifice of mystery or miracle. Here are no mere stage effects, no thunderings of Sinai, or mystic conference of forty days and forty nights' duration with a God solemnly concerned about patterns of furniture, candle-sticks, tongs, and snuff-dishes, loops and clasps of curtains, and such-like trinketry. Which things belong to a later time, and to a meaner inspiration than that which wrought in Moses.

It is altogether beyond belief that the Israelites—a simple and ignorant people, only recently delivered from servitude, and whose spiritual and intellectual life was yet in its infancy—were suddenly transformed into a religious community; having received through Moses, by word of mouth from Jehovah, an elaborate system of worship, completely equipped in even the most trivial matters of ceremonial appointment; in all those things indeed, which universally inform, not

the creative period of a religion, but the period of its decline. The supernatural atmosphere that surrounds the origin of the Torah, the sacred law of Israel, is not only obviously unreal; but the existence of the law itself at that early time, in anything like the shape set forth in the Pentateuch, is absolutely irreconcilable with the facts of the contemporary and subsequent history of the Israelites.

What the law of Moses actually was cannot now be determined. Even the Decalogue, as a whole, was fashioned in a later time, in accordance with broader conceptions and sympathies than those which animated and united the tribes under their great leader. It is to the historical tradition, weeded of the supernatural embellishment and of such particulars as are plainly anachronisms, that we must look, to discover the real Moses, and to understand his actual work and message. And in the historical tradition, it appears to me that Moses stands out as the greatest of all the great prophets of Israel, mainly because of the strength and completeness of his humanity. He was supremely *the Man* of the time; the wise leader and just judge; judging righteously by the inspiration of the divine righteousness that wrought in him most perfectly through his great love for the people who looked to him for guidance. A man of God in very truth, who impressed indelibly upon Israel the spirit and faith by which he himself lived. There is nothing of the fanatic or ecstatic

apparent in the Moses who welcomed Jethro. There was no presumption of miraculous knowledge, and no pride of supernatural powers, or of wisdom above that of other men, but rather a beautiful humility, and a readiness to profit by the wisdom of the more experienced man. Is it not probable that the beginning of the Hebrew Torah was just in the natural way here described? That its foundations were laid by Moses in a series of magisterial decisions upon the more weighty matters in dispute among the people; which were remembered in the courts of the elders which he afterwards established, and were supplemented by their own judgments in new instances?

If Moses had not "an enlightened conception of God," he had what was better and more to the purpose. Enlightened conceptions seem to have counted for very little in the world's history; but profound convictions for almost everything. And the conviction of Moses is fairly set forth by Jethro in the saying, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods!" Not yet the One Only God; but, a greater than all the gods of the Egyptians; greater even than Baal, the god of the earth's increase, whom probably Jethro worshipped, and who in after time came to be worshipped now and again by the Israelites co-ordinately with Jehovah.

The God of Moses was, therefore, God the Helper of Israel; a righteous God who punished evil and rewarded good in this world, not in the world to come.

Who was not looked to for salvation in the modern sense; but for guidance and succour in the affairs of this mortal life, yet, shall we not say, in very truth, to this people a living God? All-sufficient for the needs of those who believed in Him, and whose worship of Him, though but one degree in advance of the primitive worship of fear, was yet immeasurably above it, since it was almost altogether a worship of thanksgiving. They believed that Jehovah accompanied them in all their wanderings, and wherever they rested there was the place of His sanctuary and altar—an altar of unhewn stones, quickly built up, and readily dispersed at the time of their departure, whereon they offered to the Lord the first-fruits of the seasons, and once a year, at the feast of the Passover, the firstlings of their flocks and herds.

It was a most simple faith, springing directly from the heart, and growing by the daily necessities and experiences of life. A most simple worship, rooted in the soil of the beneficent earth which sustains us, and takes us to rest in its kindly bosom when we are worn out; a worship whose natural and noble elements were gladness and praise; thanksgiving for the rain and the sunshine, and the open hand giving increase; for the green pasture, and the unfailing spring; for the flocks of sheep and goats, and generous herds of lowing kine. Truly the religion of Israel was then a religion which was natural, human, and divine; uniting God and man, heaven and earth, in

relationship so truly accordant with the eternal laws of the universe that, no matter how our conceptions may be enlarged by the increase of our knowledge, its simple elements of faith and worship must ever remain essential elements of true religion among all peoples.

It does not come within my purpose to tell how this simple and natural religion degenerated into an elaborate and artificial system; how the primitive altars of its worship were finally discredited, and only one altar, at Jerusalem, came to be regarded as the holy place of Jehovah; and how there, transplanted from their native soil, the thanksgiving feasts of the people before the Lord lost their original spirit and meaning, and were transformed into machinery of taxation for the support of the priestly order, while at the same time the righteous law of Moses and the elders of Israel was degraded into a ritualistic priestly code. In order to discover the real advance in the ideas of religion in Israel, we must look not to the priests, but to the prophets. We must look to the true seers—to those great men who from time to time appeared among this people, to save the Faith by the exposure and denunciation of the false and formal—men whose supreme characteristic was sincerity of heart; whose faith in Jehovah as a righteous God was absolute; and whose mission was ever the same appeal to the people—to worship Him, not in formalities, but in spirit and in truth.

Elijah.—That the leading commandment of the Decalogue: “Thou shalt have none other gods beside me!” came of a prophetic inspiration which was much later than that of Moses would seem to be certain; and I think we may with some confidence regard the time of the prophet Elijah as the time when the religious conceptions of the Israelites had become elevated, in degree fitting them for the reception of the new revelation of law. As a result of the conquest of Canaan they had adopted, along with the higher civilisation of the conquered peoples, somewhat also of their worship; and as they were further brought into contact with the surrounding nations, the gods worshipped near and far were accorded places of honour beside Jehovah. It was only natural that with the change in their habits of life, from the pastoral to the agricultural conditions, and with their fusion with the peoples whom they had dispossessed, and who probably greatly outnumbered them, they should take over ideas of religion which would seem to them to belong as properly to the new conditions of their existence, as their own ideas were natural and proper to their old nomadic pastoral life. Jehovah still retained his place in their regard as their Helper in battle, and as the God who presided over the welfare and increase of their flocks and herds; and to Him they continued to make offerings of the firstlings. But they had come to know Baal also as a giver of good things—of the wine and oil which crown the

harvest of the year with joy and blessing—and quite in the old good spirit they took over his “high places,” and worshipped him there unconscious of wrong-doing, in the manner of the people who had become one with themselves. Only in time of stress, and when the national existence was endangered, did the tribes turn to Jehovah with a single heart. Content with Baal in periods of ease and plenty, they had not proved him as protector against their foes; and with every appeal to arms Jehovah and Israel were reunited; and with every victory the ancient faith in Him took deeper root in the nation’s heart.

There was therefore a very great and important difference between the spirit of the worship of Baal and that of the worship of Jehovah; a difference which was not limited to occasion, but which distinguished Jehovah as incomparably the stronger and worthier God. Baal was no more than a god of the hours of ease and sensual pleasure, and in his worship there was little inspiration that promised a spiritual advance. But whenever Israel turned for help to Jehovah, it was with a high heart beating with the nobler emotions; with the love of the kindreds and the ancient institutions; with courage and self-renunciation; with a revived faith and a loftier resolve. And of these high things there grew up, slowly but surely in some earnest souls, the idea that the activities of Jehovah were not confined only to times of emergency, and to the blessing of only a part of the

possessions of Israel, but that they were over all and in all things. There were those who could not forget Him when the danger was past, but who presently came to regard Him as the one only true God, whose sanctuary was the heart, which He informed with truth and righteousness.

Compared with this conception, what were all the splendours of Solomon's Temple? Of what account was the importation of gold and precious stones, of timber of cedar and timber of fir, and Zidonian artificers and cunning workmen of the Egyptians? Though he built a visible sanctuary for Jehovah which was the wonder of his time, Solomon, in all his glory, and with all his wisdom, cannot be credited with any part of the building up of the true religion of Israel. He but overlaid its ancient simplicity with ornament of misleading magnificence; with Phœnician and Egyptian elements which were foreign to its inspiration in both spirit and form. His ruling passion was display, and his life was devoted to the ends of self-aggrandisement and sensual gratification. He built for his harem a citadel or palace, which took thirteen years to finish—a temple adorned with idolatrous images, which was completed in seven—and he cared so little for the honour of Israel that he suffered province after province, which the might of his father David had won, to slip from his nerveless grasp, and called the shameful resignation peace! No true prophet, this king, of a religion which was almost

identical with patriotism! I can find nothing in his reign or work prophetic of the coming elevation in religious thought—nothing but mere formality and the magnifying of idolatry. The building of the temple was conceived in the same spirit as that which prompted the erection of altars near Jerusalem to the gods of Ammon and Egypt; and the “Oracle” which approved the appointments of the sanctuary had no condemnation for the other gods set up beside Jehovah. Not yet had any one come to regard the worship of other gods as an offence against the Lord; and it was no apostasy from the common practice of Israel, on the part of Ahab a century later, when he built a temple in Samaria in honour of the Tyrian Baal.

But in the meantime the higher conception of Jehovah had taken strong hold and a definite shape in many minds. The Rechabites repudiated the worship of all other gods than Jehovah, and would have no part even in the civilisation over which Baal was supposed to particularly preside. They would have none of his gifts; they planted no vineyards or olive groves, drank no wine, and sowed no seed in the ground. They continued to dwell in tents, and to depend only upon their flocks and herds, in the manner of ancient Israel; remaining at least faithful to the God of their fathers in a self-denying and eccentric fashion; though we can hardly tell if they were leaders of the new thought. But now a great leader and prophet appeared in the person of Elijah

the Tishbite; to whom it was clearly revealed that Jehovah was the very God, from whom came *all* good gifts to men; not only the sheep and cattle, but every good thing. That He was the only God, Holy, Almighty: and that Baal was altogether a lie. That to worship Baal, or any other of the false gods, on account of the good gifts of Jehovah, was to be guilty of deadly treason and idolatry. And in the name of the One just and holy God, Elijah protested against such idolatry, and against all injustice and unrighteousness in high places, all his life long. Through the mist of tradition which sadly confuses the facts with supernatural myth, we can yet distinguish the grand outline of a great prophet; whose noble message consecrates his time to us as for ever sacred and memorable. But things were not yet ripe for a practical reformation of the worship of Israel. Elijah was too far in advance of the mass of his contemporaries to secure a following sufficiently numerous and influential to enforce the reforms he advocated, and it remained for the next generation to reap the harvest of his sowing. Then the whole house of Ahab was cut off, the high places and the priests of Baal were utterly destroyed, and, once for all, Jehovah was established in Israel as the only worshipful God.

Many superstitions still survived, and many of the idolatrous forms belonging to heathen worship remained incorporate with the reformed religion; but, such as it was, it had become a religion of which the first

article of faith acknowledged only one God. Beyond that restriction, it can hardly be affirmed that the national religion was bettered by the reformation. But that of itself was a great thing, though at first sight it would seem to have been but a return to the primitive worship, in that particular, of the time of Moses. It is a very great thing for a religion to recover from any corruption of its essential truth, and in this instance the return to Jehovah carried with it inevitably a much enlarged conception of Him. His power and beneficence were conspicuously magnified before all the people. For though there was no more any sacrifice to Baal, yet had the earth not failed of its fruitfulness! The olive and the fig flourished as aforetime; and corn and wine in full measure rewarded the labour of the husbandman! In the eyes of the common people, Jehovah had overcome the lesser gods, and brought them to naught; had utterly despoiled them of their possessions and honours, and was therefore so much the more awful and worshipful. The chosen people rejoiced in their God, as a strong defence against other nations, and as the giver of all the good things of this life; and they believed that if they neglected Him by the omission of the ordained sacrifices, then, for a time, He might punish their transgression by the withdrawal of His favour—but, not for long. It was inconceivable to them that any other people could ever take their place in the divine regard; or

would be permitted to have rule over them, and the high places of the Lord. That there was no essential elevation of the thought or the spirit of the reformed worship, commensurate with the prophetic conception of Elijah, is affirmed by all the prophets who came after him; and the complacency of the Israelites on account of their formal righteousness, and the sense of security arising from their confidence in the entire approval of the Almighty Jehovah, were suddenly and rudely challenged. A prophet appeared among them proclaiming strange and astounding principles; prophesying evil and not good; declaring their transgressions to be many and grievous, and their sacrifices to be of no avail with the Lord for pardon; and preaching the absolute necessity of purity of heart and righteousness of living, for acceptance before God.

Amos.—Amos stands out from the dark background of an evil time, luminous with a spiritual inspiration, which reveals to us a seer of the noblest and purest type: a man of God, so gifted with apprehension of divine truth, that his testimony embraces nearly all that we know of the moral government of the world. And, of course, he stood alone: one true man and seer, against the belief and custom of a whole people united in wrong. But he stood in the assurance of a God above all; and with the vanward clouds of a threatening destruction, for witnesses to the verity of his tremendous indictment.

Amos, a simple herdsman and dresser of sycamore

trees, of Tekoa, had seen the gathering of the storm upon the borders of Judæa, with understanding of the signs of the times. He was no prophet, neither was he a prophet's son: but in the great heart and soul of him there grew up the assured conviction that the evil to come upon Israel, which he foresaw, would be not against the will of God, but in accordance with His ordinance. He saw that the Lord, who had been the Helper of Israel from the far time when He led the people forth out of Egypt; who had established them in a fruitful land, and had sustained them against the mighty for so long; had at last turned away from them, and was about to deliver them over, a prey unto their enemies. And he who deemed himself no prophet, questioned the heavens and the earth for the Why.

Taking into account the condition of the man, and the superstition and deadly formality of the time, this was an amazing question for Amos to ask: and the answer to it which he conceived was even more surprising and momentous. For the heavens declared the absolute righteousness of the God of Hosts; and the earth stank with the transgressions and iniquity of Israel! "How shall two walk together unless they have agreed? Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, saying: You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities." (!)

Not, therefore, I will forgive, and deliver you yet again from the heathen—which to all Israel would seem to be the certain and legitimate inference, supposing that they had indeed transgressed. But they were unconscious of wrong-doing against their God. For, was not the land swept clean of the altars of Baal? Were not the people even then gathered together at the great sanctuary of Beth-el to do honour to Jehovah with sacrifice and thanksgiving and songs of praise? What words were these, so utterly condemnatory and unendurable? It is not easy for us to realise how startling and intolerable the doctrine of Amos must have been to the Israelites of that time. It was revolutionary in the extreme—blasphemy against Jehovah, on the one hand, and deadly insult to the king, the priests and people, on the other! It was subversive of all old belief in the particular favour of God towards Israel as a nation; and it exalted, instead, an impartial Being whose government of the earth was a purely moral rule; who controlled all things, and raised up or cast down the nations, not for Israel's sake, nor for the sake of any ritual or observance, but for the establishment of truth and justice among men.

This is clearly an enlargement of the prophecy of Elijah: a more lofty conception of the One God, whose lordship, righteousness, and beneficence are set forth by Amos with splendid dignity and force.

“For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth to man what is in his thought,

that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; The Lord, The God of Hosts is his name." "Ye who turn judgment to worm-wood, and cast down righteousness to the earth; *seek him* that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth upon the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; The Lord is his name; that bringeth sudden destruction upon the strong, so that destruction cometh upon the fortress." "The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that lo, the days shall come upon you, that they shall take you away with hooks, and your residue with fish-hooks." This last to those who oppress the poor and crush the needy, to whom further: "Hear this. O ye that would swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat? making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit; that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the wheat. The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." For all these things—"I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head, and I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day."

That is the testimony of Amos against oppression and injustice—a testimony accordant with all noble prophecy, as also is his protest against the formalities of priestcraft, and the advertisement of self-righteousness. Hear also this, addressed to the great assemblage gathered to worship at the sanctuary of Jehovah:—

“Come to Beth-el, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days, and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, and publish them: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.” “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.” “Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel; I will not again pass them by any more; and the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

No wonder that “Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words.

For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land." Or that he said to Amos, "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el." The wonder is that the prophet was not there and then stoned to death by the outraged multitude! Yet Amos was not altogether a prophet of evil, but, like every true prophet, he foresaw the ultimate triumph and reward of the righteous:—

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall be no more plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God."

Truly it was a great prophesying! Not any of the noble prophets who followed Amos struck a loftier note. In good time—when the worship of Jehovah as a national God was threatened with extinction, because of the coming subjection and captivity of the nation—he had raised the Hebrew conception of God to a height above the reach of any national calamity.

He had prophesied of a God who governed the heavens and the earth by righteousness, and not by favour of any. Jehovah, who had aforetime been honoured in Israel for the favour He had shown to Israel, was magnified by Amos, as a holy God, unbribable; hating all observance and sacrifice which covered luxury and oppression; caring nothing whatever for the continuance of Israel among the nations, but only for the righteous remnant, the true Israel, of whom was every one who served Him in purity of heart and life. Obedience, to this God, was better than praise, and justice than burnt offerings. Truth and mercy were more excellent than thanksgiving; and quite surely, no false or evil thing should stand in the day of the Lord.

Isaiah.—A political leader and ardent patriot, Isaiah, while striving continuously for the material welfare and independence of Israel—to avert, or at least to put off the evil day—yet, in his prophesying, maintained the contention of Amos in all its purity; even though his patriotism somewhat confused his vision of the better future of the world; and caused him to cling to the hope of a regenerate national Israel, which would be re-established in its ancient seat, after sifting by adversity in exile. Not that his vision of the sovereignty of righteousness was narrowed to his own people; but that his patriotism more or less coloured his prophecy, and fathered the expectation that the seed of the world's regeneration would spring up in the midst of the

restored remnant of Israel, that they would be the first to obey; and that out of Zion would go forth the law, "And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between the nations, and shall reprove many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Which, unhappily, has not yet come to pass.

The whole of the prophecy of Isaiah is magnificent: but I purpose to deal only with so much of it as will suffice to demonstrate its absolute accordance with, and its happy enlargement of, the prophecy that came before it. Take the following as illustrating Isaiah's conception of God.

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who

hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring me no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath; the calling of assemblies; I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, and make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare with him? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."

In these high matters of the divine nature and requirement, Amos and Isaiah are identical in their conviction, and almost so in the terms of their prophesying. But in Isaiah there is an element of compassion for the poor and oppressed—a great sympathy, and tenderness of spirit—such as is hardly at all apparent in Amos. Amos is very bitter; fiercely impatient of opposition, even when allied with consideration of himself—as witness his terrible cursing of Amaziah the priest of Beth-el—full of a noble scorn

of wrong, of a fine indignation against oppression, of a courage most admirable: but with no word in him of sorrow or consolation for the oppressed; for "Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein?" With all the rest, and because of the sins of the rest, for the wrong which they had not wrought but had endured, the poor and needy also should mourn and become a sacrifice. Prophecy, true enough—yet not all the truth.

But while denouncing injustice and formality with equal energy and bitterness almost equal to that of Amos, and while declaring that for these things the hand of the Lord would be heavy upon the whole nation, Isaiah never forgets the lot of those who for the transgressions of others would be overwhelmed in the common calamity. The patient, dutious poor, and the pious few among the many riotous and masterful, were ever enshrined in his heart as the sacred remnant of Israel, beloved of God always. He is never weary of singing their ultimate triumph; his heart overflows with pity, and his message of consolation to them is conceived in a strain of infinite rejoicing and exultation.

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break; and the smoking flax shall he not

quench: he shall bring forth judgment in truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them forth; he that spread abroad the earth and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein. I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. I am the Lord; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise unto graven images."

How tenderly touched, and true to life, is the portrait that Isaiah gives us of the faithful, righteous, poor man—"my servant!"

"His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men": "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their face; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the

chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself, and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who among them considered that he was cut off from the land of the living? for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich, in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into

singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt spread abroad on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall possess the nations, and make desolate cities to be inhabited." "Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the fire of coals, and bringeth forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness which is of me, saith the Lord."

I cannot forbear quoting one more passage from Isaiah, which most clearly sets forth the essential principles of spiritual truth which informed the contention of the noble prophets of this period.

"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgressions, and to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways: as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God, they ask of me righteous ordinances, they delight to draw near unto God. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou

seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find your own pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and contention, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I have chosen? the day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. . . . Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. . . . And judgment is turned away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and upright-

ness cannot enter. Yea, truth is lacking; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it upheld him. And he put on righteousness as a breast-plate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he shall come as a rushing stream, which the breath of the Lord driveth. And a redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: my spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." "And thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy saviour, and thy redeemer, the Mighty one of Jacob."

"Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: what manner of house

will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? for all these things hath mine hand made, and so all these things came to be, saith the Lord: but to that man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word."

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

We have here arrived at a stage in the evolution of divine truth in prophecy beyond which I can distinguish no advance, until we come to the time of Jesus of Nazareth. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others came after Isaiah, whose prophecy was more or less accordant with that of their predecessors; but I cannot find in it any new truth, or any enlargement of the foregoing ideas. I will therefore quote only one passage from Micah, which sums up the essential result of the prophetic inspiration, in a very few words.

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit

of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

JESUS OF NAZARETH

After the passing of Malachi, the last of the literary prophets, there was no more prophecy in Israel for nearly five centuries. The evil time had come which the prophets had foretold. A time of subjection to many masters, and of ever-recurring revolt; a time of internal government by half-priest, half-king; of Persian and Hellenic influence upon the old faith and ritual, and of dominance by scribes who magnified the law as highest. A time during which the people were distracted by parties in politics and in religion, which people yet held, deep hidden in their hearts, the proud memory of their ancient kingdom; and turned ever more and more for consolation and hope to those passages in their sacred writings which seemed to promise a great restoration of Israel, and its re-establishment among the nations, with more than its ancient glory.

The people looked eagerly forward to the coming of a Redeemer, a king of the line of David, who would overcome their enemies, give to them unity and peace, and from Jerusalem would have rule over all the earth. With the prophets, the real

king of Israel had ever been Jehovah; and the true Israel, in the vision of the later prophets, consisted of all who obeyed and worshipped God in spirit and in truth. But with the people, who had never attained to the simple grandeur of this conception, expectation naturally gathered about a more tangible and immediate salvation, and they cherished the hope of a deliverance and triumph commensurate with their own desire and understanding: they looked for the coming of an actual king, who would lead them to victory, and be the visible representative of Jehovah for them, and before all the nations.

In the midst of their expectancy there arose among them not a leader and a king, but a prophet. Only another prophet! Their king never came; never has come: the very hope of such an one was presently destroyed, or at best removed far into the future by the destruction of Jerusalem; yet though the expectation certainly failed of fulfilment after its kind, it did not pass altogether away into the limbo of things well forgotten; but, uprooted from its native soil of illusion, it fastened upon the nearest living verity, and as a parasitic growth has flourished exceedingly even to the present day. Such expectations are very apt to fulfil themselves in one way or another, and having failed in the sense of its original meaning, this expectation, in many minds, changed its shape, and concentrated itself upon the prophet of the time, with very notable results. For

one thing, it has strangely confused and coloured all the record that has come down to us of the life and sayings of the prophet. It is a constant factor in the record for which we must make large allowance—over and above that which is recognised as required by all narrative founded on memory and report—if we would know what the prophecy of Jesus of Nazareth really was.

For while it is indeterminable when and under what precise conditions the Gospels were written, it is certain that they were *not* written until some considerable time after the latest of the events which they chronicle; that only two of the writers, St. Matthew and St. John, can be accredited as eye-witnesses of some of those events; and that the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke were compiled from hearsay and tradition. This I take to be the extreme claim on behalf of the authenticity of the record, from the external evidence, and I gladly admit it for all it is worth. For I discern Jesus to have been verily prophet of God, and I would therefore estimate everything that is recorded of his life and sayings at the highest possible value; while for the same reason I am compelled to weigh the value of all with the greatest possible care.

Let us then accept as sufficiently established for our purpose the supposition that the Gospels were written by the four evangelists sometime, say, between fifty and eighty years after the birth of Jesus. It is obvious

that all which they relate of his miraculous birth, and of his life up to the time of the beginning of his public career as prophet and teacher, is entirely unsupported by anything that can be properly regarded as evidence of fact. Moreover, the things related are of such a nature as to require the strongest possible evidence, in order that it may be possible for us to believe them. But there is nothing save uncertain tradition of impossibilities—of happenings contrary to all that science has discovered of the operation of natural law, and of all that prophecy declares of the operation of God—and tradition withal that is not only without support from that portion of the narrative which may have been written from the personal knowledge of the evangelists, but that can hardly be reconciled with the more authentic and credible portion. For there is no mention of any reference by Jesus himself, during the time of his public ministry, to the miraculous events which after his death informed the story of his early life. But it is told of him, that being in “his own country” where he and all his family were well known, the people were offended because he presumed to teach in the synagogue. “And Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.” A saying that appears to me to cast back upon his early life a gleam of actual light, illuminating a real experience—very like that of other prophets, and very unlike the marvellous tradition which after-

wards grew up in place of it. There is no sort of evidence even of the existence of the tradition in the lifetime of the prophet: and if the annunciation, the immaculate conception, the visitation, the adoration of the shepherds, the flight into Egypt, and all the other wonders of the Gospel narrative are to be credited, the belief in them must be widely different from an intelligent belief that is assured by good evidence of fact. There is nothing to indicate that these matters were known to Jesus himself, or to his family, or to his neighbours; there is no mention of them by Mark, who is supposed to have obtained his information mainly from St. Peter; and they are plainly part of the outcrop of a later misconception of the prophet and his prophecy.

When we come to examine the record of the prophecy of Jesus, we can but deplore the extreme uncertainty of its nature. We must perforce allow much for the inevitable change which a very few years bring about in the human memory of things; and much also for the prejudice of ideas matured long after the voice of the prophet had become silent. Moreover, the record must be incomplete and fragmentary. Not all the sayings were remembered—probably some of the best were forgotten—and of no single sentence attributed to Jesus can we be absolutely certain that it is his in spirit and in form. Certainly some sayings are recorded as having been uttered by him which are of no consequence, and some which

can hardly be considered true or wise. Yet he may have spoken them; for no man ever was *all* prophet, voicing only the very truth of God.

Here it may be asked: If the recorded sayings of Jesus are every one of them more or less doubtful; if we may choose, according to our apprehension of truth, what we may take for guidance, and what we may reject as inconsequent; if we cannot hold even that Jesus himself was all prophet; what assurance have we of his prophecy? It is a question that demands of us the most careful and impartial consideration; and, at the outset, I think we may credit the writers with entire good faith. They wrote what they believed to be true; and while their credulity in respect of some things is obvious, all that they tell us of the sayings of the Master is at least as credible as any account whatever of such matters, compiled from memories current among disciples after a considerable lapse of time. And behind all the accident of the record, there is discernible in the sayings, taken as a whole, and in connection with the historical facts of the time, the certainty that there was then proclaimed with power a doctrine of morality, which was absolutely in accordance with that of the great prophets of old, whose teaching had become neglected amidst the contentions of factions, and buried under an elaborate ecclesiastical formality: which doctrine was upraised as from the dead, and new life and shape given to it by Jesus of Nazareth.

For the testimony of the Gospels, in the particular of the prophecy of Jesus, is strong and credible for the very reasons which in other matters make it more than doubtful. The Messianic expectation, that on the appearance of the prophet, naturally questioned whether he was not perhaps the Christ, had taken definite form in the minds of his followers some time before the Gospels were written, and had given birth to a doctrine of morality—or perhaps I should say to a method of salvation—widely different from that of the prophets. Therefore, though (while crediting the evangelists with sincerity throughout), we cannot but regard a large part of their testimony with suspicion, and even as certainly prejudiced: we may at the same time take all that is recorded of the prophecy of Jesus that is accordant with the prophecy of old, as not only set down in sincerity, but as possessed of a strong presumption of truth, since it is set down not only without prejudice, but in spite of the prejudice of ideas diametrically opposed to its statement. Not that even so can we be quite certain of any particular phrase uttered by Jesus in the terms given. We must still take account of the change in the tradition that must have taken effect before the spoken words were written down from memory or report. But happily our knowledge of this prophecy is not dependent on testimony as to any particular phrase or discourse. The essential fact of its likeness to the noble prophecy that preceded it is sufficiently apparent in all the

various accounts that have come down to us. They demonstrate the same prophetic contempt of merely formal religion; the same insistence upon the requirement of justice, righteousness, and mercy; the same exaltation of the oppressed, and condemnation of the oppressor, and an infinitely tender compassion for the poor and the afflicted, that is on a level with the utterance of Isaiah himself. And while the prophecy of Jesus, in the disconnected and fragmentary condition known to us, imperfectly remembered, and transmitted through far inferior minds, cannot compare with the magnificent legacy left to the world by Isaiah; while there is no discourse in the Gospels equal, for nobility of style and terrible energy of denunciation, to the earlier prophet's indictment against false religion and evil living; no delineation of the oppressed servant of God comparable with Isaiah's wonderful portrait of him—so perfect in its exquisite sympathy with his patient endurance of wrong, and so supreme in its grandeur of rejoicing over his ultimate justification and triumph—yet there is no essential element of the old prophetic revelation that is found wanting in the recorded prophecy of Jesus. What was its original force and grandeur we can but surmise, since we know it only according to St. Matthew, and the others, who were too weak to record its strength, and too confused to record its purity.

There is no need for me to quote at length from the Gospels in support of this conception of Jesus

as a revivalist of the prophetic morality. His moral teaching is a matter on which all are agreed. Yet it may not be superfluous to quote here a few notable sayings which strikingly illustrate its spirit, and those, still more notable, which enlarge all precedent revelation.

As we have already seen, Jesus declared of himself that he was a prophet, and his conception of his mission to the world is plainly set forth by St. John in his account of the examination before Pilate. Jesus was accused of making himself the equal of God, and of claiming to be the King of the Jews; for the first of which offences he would have been justly condemned to death by the Jewish law, and for the second, he would have been in danger of condemnation by the Roman Government. All the writers, except St. John, say that Jesus made no other answer to Pilate's question: "Art thou the King of the Jews?" than "Thou sayest"; and that to other charges urged against him, he answered nothing, not one word, which is hardly to be reconciled with Pilate's judgment, "I find no fault in this man," for if "Thou sayest" means anything at all, it consents to the truth of the accusation. But St. John, who possibly was present on the occasion, tells more than this, and, moreover, that which he tells is much more probable. To the question, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee concerning me?" Pilate

answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?" And then he went out again unto the Jews, and said, "I find no crime in him."

It is hardly to be supposed that we have here all that passed, but it is perfectly clear that Pilate was satisfied that Jesus had made no unlawful claim of kingship, and that he was innocent of any blasphemy. It is remarkable that we should receive this sane and credible account from St. John, because his gospel, as a whole, is really a doctrinal discourse in the disguise of a narration of fact, and is notable mainly as an extreme example of the transmutation of fact in the alembic of a mind prepossessed by transcendental ideas. And taking into account the conspicuous bias of the writer, together with the fact that he wrote many years after the event, I cannot but believe that in the actual reply of Jesus there was no ambiguity, and that it was almost certainly

to the effect that: "My accusers say that I am a king, but I say that I came into the world to bear witness unto the truth, which I have spoken not in secret, but openly before all men." Hence a certain sympathy which I read behind Pilate's saying: "What *is* truth?" which seems to me to be no jest, but rather the sad reflection of one who also was a seeker; and hence his judgment: "I find no crime in this man."

It was as a prophet that Jesus was generally regarded by the people of his own time, for "when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, Who is this? And the multitudes said, This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." And, assuredly, he did not make himself the equal of God, for when one came to him and asked, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, &c.;" and these observed, but one thing more was necessary, "Go sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." As in all true prophecy, there was no dogmatic requirement, only the essential righteous, and the essential charitable. Again, according to St. Mark, there came to Jesus a certain scribe, who asked, "What commandment is first of all? Jesus answered, The first is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,

and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Of a truth, Master, thou hast well said that he is one, and there is none other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is much more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And Jesus said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

I have quoted this, apart from the comment of the evangelist, which is, "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said, &c.," in order to earmark the latter as a sample of many comments of a like nature, which are to be found in the Gospels—as pure disciple—obviously void of understanding on a level with the occasion. Compare the "discreetly" of the writer with the prophet's own frank recognition of the truth that was in the man. In St. Matthew the scribe is said to have asked the question, "tempting him." The reply is almost identical with that in St. Mark, with this comprehensive addition, "On these two commandments hangeth the whole law, and the prophets."

I could multiply instances, but, as I have said, all are agreed that Jesus was a preacher of righteousness and mercy, as being the essential requirement

of God. A prophet therefore, in legitimate succession to, and in absolute agreement with, the great Hebrew prophets before him. And while the Christian believes that he was much more than a prophet, the Jew and the Mohammedan readily acknowledge that he was no less: a rare agreement of discordant elements in this one particular, which indicates that there must be something singularly powerful and convincing in his message to the world, that is independent of religious creed: some vital disclosure of truth, of universal and irresistible appeal to humanity itself. And if we seek, without prejudice, for the cause of this general recognition of Jesus as truly a prophet of God, we shall find it, I believe, in that fact. His prophetic revelation is for all mankind, for Jew and Gentile alike, and it has no more intimate relationship to Christianity than it has to the Jewish and Mohammedan creeds. Manifestly in accordance with the prophecy of Amos and Isaiah, in its conception of God as the ruler of all mankind impartially; it is, moreover, supremely great in its enlargement of their revelation, since it sets forth God and man in relationship more blessed and worshipful than any that had been declared aforesaid. It takes up the record of the prophetic testimony, at the point where the vision of Isaiah failed, and it adds to it the one supreme word, **Father!** For to Jesus, God was even more than the just and merciful Master of Isaiah, though He was a Master

ever mindful of all the sorrows of His servant. He was, in very truth, "Our Father in heaven." A Father infinitely loving and compassionate, to whom our love and obedience belong, naturally and inevitably, by the spiritual law of our being.

How certainly this conception follows the high conception attained by preceding prophecy, and how beautifully and gloriously it crowns it all, "every one that is of the truth" cannot help but see and know. The pity is, that the world does not recognise it as all-sufficient for its redemption! As embracing the whole truth of divine righteousness and love, and the whole truth of human obligation and hope!

"What man is there of you, who if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets."

"After this manner therefore pray ye, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but

deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever."

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you."

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also."

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

THE FALSE PROPHECY

Alongside with the noble and true Hebrew prophecy, and out of the conditions that stimulated it, there grew up certain base and false prophecy which must here be very briefly noticed. It is of two sorts; the predictive, and the visionary. Prediction of the future—of a sort that is quite independent of wise deduction from the signs of the present and the experience of the past—is commonly supposed to be peculiarly the characteristic of prophecy. According to the dictionaries, a prophet is “one who foretells.” In Scripture, “one illuminated or instructed by God to foretell future events,”—a definition that could hardly be worse, in its misapprehension of the mission of the true prophet.

If the prophets had no better claim upon our attention than what belongs to their predictions, I, for one, would leave them severely alone; for in all the predictions recorded in the Bible, I doubt whether any can be pointed out in which a future event has been certainly and plainly foretold; and I am quite sure that none can be pointed out which has ever been of service to humanity, though, beyond all question, much has proved to be altogether misleading, and more or less injurious. True and great prophets have often been conspicuously in error when they have ventured, beyond the legitimate bounds of their devoir, into prediction of the imminent triumph of the right-

eousness which they were commissioned to proclaim; timing it by their own desire and eagerness of hope, and forgetting that the seasons of the divine accomplishment are wisely hidden from every one. And in actual fact, there is nothing of which we are better assured than that we cannot tell what awaits us in the future, and that no wise man would wish to know.

Of the visionary prophecy of the Bible, I venture to say that nothing can be found in it that manifestly distinguishes it as matter of divine illumination. Take, for example, the visions of such men as Ezekiel, Daniel, and John. Ezekiel was a priest, and naturally, therefore, the word of the Lord to him is full of priestcraft: of details of measurement, observance, and priestly privilege, of a thousand matters of no real service, but impertinent to the great problem which is the proper theme of prophecy; and all very ancient matters, such as priests had dealt with and elaborated, elsewhere than in Israel, for thousands of years. For though Ezekiel and his like pretend to supernatural vision, and see visions of sorts, they never—and this is the fact of essential significance—they never see anything *new*! The human mind is incapable of true invention. We discover, apprehend, and combine with great ingenuity, but we do not invent. Our most imaginative work is no more than fine joinery; and all the visions of the Bible are plainly subject to this

human limitation: there is in them no revelation of any new thing.

Ezekiel beholds a great cloud, storm and fire, and four living creatures, which "had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings. As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they had the face of an ox on the left side; and they four had also the face of an eagle. And their faces and their wings were separate above: two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies."

Is this not obviously pure joinery, and incredible as an actual vision of divine things? It is not even good art, for the theme is too high for ornament. Only by perfect simplicity of statement may the prophet of God attain to sublimity. The vision is no more than a priestly artifice to give impressiveness to the priestly message, and, as such, appears to me to be both insincere and irreverent. There is undoubtedly some imaginative power evidenced in the action of the figures, introductory to "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." but assuredly not of such supreme quality as to mark it as divine, or to distinguish it from the imaginative power manifest in the work of Dante or Blake.

But it is in the Revelation of St. John the Divine that we have an example of this false visionary

prophecy at its worst. Its details are entirely commonplace, while its spirit is intolerant and cruel. It begins with the common error of the prediction of the immediate happening of the writer's hopes, and it ends in the extreme of presumption.

“I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.” (!)

I have no concern with its merit as apocalyptic literature. I am concerned only with its claim to be an inspired vision of real things—true prophecy of actual events—which claim, after some hesitation at first, the Christian Church has endorsed as genuine. I am concerned with its truth, or falsehood; and with the incorporation of its conceptions in the canonical scriptures of Christianity. For those conceptions are not only without tangible foundation, but they overflow with all uncharitableness. No fanaticism, or bigotry, or ignorance, or self-righteousness, or intolerance, or abomination of cruelty, or persecution, or oppression of the poor, or exaltation of the powerful, ever was in Christendom that could not readily and aptly quote this scripture for its evil purpose; that could not find authority

for any mad conceit of faith, and any dreadful inhumanity of rule, in its misconception of the gracious spirit of the divine government. Of what use can it be to this present world, which has its own work to do with its own tools, to seek here for comparisons with the teachings of St. Paul? Of what avail to calculate how much or how little of the difference between the two men may be fairly ascribed to the dominance in John of the old tenacious Judaism? It is as clear as the sun that Paul—right or wrong in his beliefs—was a true man, and that this man John was not. Time has given the lie direct to his mundane prediction, and his pretended heavenly vision is contradicted by all that we have come to know and love as worshipful in God, and most divine in man.

As one believing in God as the supreme ruler over all; and believing, moreover, that such good as there is in me is by His grace and ordinance; is divine, and not of the devil; I venture to declare that I have no more desire or hope for such eternal beatitudes as those “written in this book,” than I have dread of the eternal torments in which it revels. There is no choice for a *man* between such blessing and such cursing. And if any one is minded to condemn this saying, let him first read John’s conception of Christ triumphant!

“And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshippeth the beast

and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night."

CONCLUSIONS

In Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, I believe that we behold the last of the great Hebrew prophets; and in his prophecy we have the sum of the ideas of religion which may be properly called the prophetic ideas. I have followed the growth of those ideas along the main line of prophetic inspiration in Israel—a line ruled straight, all the way from Moses to Jesus—taking no account of the mundane building of kings and priests, for the reason that I discern all their achievement to be impertinent to an inquiry which is entirely serious and purposeful. And in this judgment I am assuredly at one with the prophets themselves, who did not bless the oppression, and formalities, and righteous ordinances (?) of the rulers and ecclesiastical guides of the people, but, on the contrary, cursed them altogether.

I find throughout the prophetic line a continuity of inspired thought that is everywhere consistent

with the grand conclusions of Isaiah and Jesus. It is prophecy which ever deals with realities, in a spirit that is reasonable and just; prophecy whose volume increased in proportion to the increase of knowledge of ascertained fact, and yet whose latest word is in entire agreement with its first. For the noble Hebrew prophets promulgated no arbitrary theories of good and evil, and no dogmatic methods of salvation, but confined themselves to what they discerned to be manifest in the facts of life which they knew. They recognised in those facts the righteous government of a God, whose thoughts are as high above ours as the heavens are high above the earth; and the requirement of conformity on our part to the law of that government, in order for us to overcome the manifest evil of the world, and to secure all the blessings in the gift of our almighty and gracious Overlord. They condemned no man before God for failure through human imperfection, but uplifted the divine righteousness as ever ready to pardon transgression, and to reward good endeavour. And with one accord they were contemptuous of dependence on observances which the priesthood insisted upon as imperative.

In accordance with the growth of the idea of God in the prophetic mind, in proportion as it was enlarged and ennobled, so was the apprehension of the divine requirement ennobled and purified from the dross of formality, until at the last piety was conceived as a service of heart and soul, a devotion to righteousness,

a seeking after truth, a constant endeavour to do well; and prophecy declared that it was not necessary for a man's well-being with God that he should be happy and honoured upon earth; but it *was* inexorably required of him to be noble and true. To this end were all things constrained by the God of Hosts—to establish righteousness, to set up judgment, to make obedience known as the heart's delight and satisfaction, and to cause strength to become the glad servant of love.

This I take to be legitimate prophecy—no more and no less than the proper conclusion of an assured belief in the goodness and holiness of a supreme Ruler of the universe. It is a prophetic conception of righteousness, which is based upon a prophetic vision of the manifest operation of the divine energy in the material world, and in the heart of man. Prophetic, I say, because the vision and apprehension of these men are distinguishable from the diverse manifestations of human genius, by an absolute accordance that indicates a different and loftier inspiration. Distance in time and place, difference in race, temperament, attainment, and environment, may separate these men very widely one from another; but whether learned or unlearned; honoured and powerful, or without esteem or influence; whether belonging to simple and primitive peoples, or to states of complex civilisation possessed of elaborate religions, the true prophets see always the same things, and are

compelled to declare the same to the world. And they are always certain of their tenure of truth. That which they have seen, that they *know*. So that the profound impressions of childhood; the universal belief of their kindred; the ancient and revered records of the national religion; the solemnity of the sacred ritual, and the dignity and authority of the priest; the trustfulness and thanksgiving of simple and kindly neighbours—all, things terribly strong in appeal to noble natures, and in restraint of careless offence—are but as chaff before the wind to the prophet who has seen somewhat of the very truth, which he cannot reconcile with the common practice of life or recognise in the formalities of ecclesiastical worship.

Let us now consider the conditions which prevailed in Israel in the time of the prophets. The whole history of the Israelites is a record of a continuous advance in enlightenment; of change from a simple pastoral life to one embracing agriculture and the arts; of fresh ideas and new knowledge, increasing among them century after century. And this advance was not dependent upon the national prosperity, but was even promoted by the national disasters; for in captivity the Jews were brought into contact with new learning, of which their scribes did not fail to avail themselves. From the time of Abraham, up to the time of Jesus of Nazareth, they were surrounded by, and more or less intimately in touch with, more advanced peoples and more ancient civilisations, whose

constant stimulating influence upon their thought was, I think, an important factor in the evolution of their own peculiar product of noblest prophecy.

Again, prophecy was known among them as a familiar thing; a reality, an actual manifestation of spiritual force; even as a quite natural phenomenon, entirely credible and worthy of respect. There were organised bands of prophets; doubtless as commonplace as common for the most part, yet nevertheless of consequence to the natural development of the greater prophecy; for in all matters of human attainment, no great thing stands quite alone and unlike all else. The supreme masters do but stand head and shoulders above the level of a crowd of workers in like things, and it is only by the toil of many that the mastery of a few is assured. And in Israel prophecy was a current element of the national life, corresponding in its method with the no less spiritual manifestations of the arts and sciences. It was an integral part of the whole life of the people, and it dealt with the matters of its own special province, on the same terms and under the same general conditions as those which governed all other endeavour. Its greatness was naturally and broadly based upon a considerable body of trained mediocrity of identical aspiration, and the great prophets appeared from time to time, just as men of genius, men of superior insight and intellect, rise now and again above the common level in apprehension and understanding of other matters of human

interest and aspiration. We can draw no hard and fast line between the method of the inspiration of prophecy and that of other provinces of human thought; and the special characteristics of its manifestation are no more arbitrary and eccentric than such as naturally inform each one of them and distinguish it from the rest.

I discern in this prophecy an inspiration whose method is really accordant with the divine operation in all things. Inspiration which is continuous and progressive, the manifestation of a constant spiritual force, which must therefore be as potential now as it ever was; although it may seem that the due occasion for its activity is wanting, or, that it manifests itself in other ways.

If there has been no great prophecy upon the old lines since Jesus, it must be remembered that the Christian era has been dominated by circumstance—over and above Christianity's fatal verdict of finality in matters of faith—than which we can hardly conceive of any, more adverse to the development of prophetic revelation. Christendom has throughout, until quite recently, been the theatre of change, which has been very different from a steady advance in enlightenment. The great civilisations of its early times were overwhelmed by barbarisms that brought about conditions of ignorance, from which Europe is even now but beginning to shake itself free. The Middle Ages expected no prophet, and could have

produced none; for prophecy is born of light, and what little light there was then was in the jealous keeping of a Church which cursed all independent thought as damnable.

If the recent discovery in "Natural Law" is to be recognised at all in connection with the ideas of religion; and if vain attempts to demonstrate its correspondence with the theories of apostolic Christianity are looked upon with approval by very many Christian believers, then I can hardly be accused of degrading prophecy from its rightful eminence, though I place it on the same level of operation with other things that are commonly regarded as distinctly natural, mundane, and human. The truth of a thing only is honourable, and prophecy is not less divine because it is governed by natural law, but, as we have come to know, all the more certainly approved as divine. I do not degrade the one thing, but I elevate the others, discerning the same divinity in all things. The prophets themselves saw the spirit of prophecy to be a constant force, stimulating and illuminating the prophetic mind in all times. The true prophet respected the prophecy of the past, and expected prophecy—both true and false—of the future. It is only in false prophecy that we find presumption of finality, and denunciation of addition.

I recognise in the nobler Hebrew prophecy the operation of the divine spirit upon superior minds informed with more or less knowledge of necessary

fact. As though the very truth of God were written across the infinite abyss, impenetrably veiled from common sight, and only now and again is there found one man among his fellows possessed of the high gift of spiritual vision. For him the veil is partly drawn aside, and upon him is laid an inexorable commission to declare that which he has seen. Slowly but surely is the inscription disclosed, line after line, to prophet after prophet. The earlier men see but the beginning of the revelation, they may even not clearly understand the message they deliver; yet when in the fulness of time, more is unveiled, it is ever found to be in accordance with the earlier disclosure. There is no discrepancy discoverable in the prophetic reading. There is absolute agreement in the conclusions of the nobler Hebrew prophets, in the highest matters of their revelation, from beginning to end. The vision of each is perfectly clear up to the verge of his horizon; and while the later prophets enlarge the conceptions of their predecessors, they never invalidate them.

It appears to me that in the union of agreement and enlargement we have the certain test of true and great prophecy. If there are verily prophets of God, then assuredly their testimony must agree, and assuredly also it must increase in accordance with the divine law of progress. Yet its most comprehensive reading is simple in the extreme. Of God, the Hebrew prophets declare that He is One, and beside

Him there is none other. That He is almighty, eternal, holy—ruling over all in righteousness, and for righteousness! The law of the prophets to all the peoples is the inevitable deduction from this conception—that it is inexorably required of all men, that they walk uprightly before the Lord. Who hath required more than this at your hands, in God's name? demands Isaiah. And it is here that we find the prophetic ideas of religion always in opposition to the ecclesiastical ideas. The religions begin in prophecy, and end in formality. The prophetic vision of spiritual truth dies with the prophet, and the truth lives on only in his sayings and a few true hearts. But then begins the making of a religion fitting the popular requirement, and to the making of a religion many strange elements contribute, displacing and adulterating the original revelation. Old-world fable, tradition of miraculous events, tags from neighbouring idolatrous worship, form, becoming ever more ornate policy, ambition, greed—but no more prophecy.

When again a true prophet appears, it is always to find himself estranged from the Church, and compelled to denounce it as a false and deadly invention—clothing lies with dignity, and shame with solemn observance. And again he uplifts the divine righteousness as an impartial and generous government; not implacable or vengeful, but of its nature and law divinely merciful. There is no forgiveness of sin, for sacrifice or burnt offerings; there

is no unconditional pardon, and there is no possibility of doubt as to what is the divine requirement. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well. . . . Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him."

Which prophetic conception of truth, I take to be entirely in accordance with all that we know of the government of the universe. To be at one with the eternal principles of right and justice, of compassion and mercy, which are God's own attributes, and which the spirit of God maketh known to the human understanding, and impresseth upon the human conscience and heart, as righteous, imperative, and supremely lovely.

THE RELIGION

In accordance with the verdict of all the world cognisant of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth—a grand jury not confined to the Christian world, but including it—I discern him to have been true prophet of God; the legitimate heir of ancient Hebrew prophecy, whose neglected precepts he revived and enlarged, and whose conception of God he hallowed and exalted into infinite graciousness by his own most intimate tenure of Him as the Father in heaven.

That last indeed, comprised the whole burden of his prophecy. It was the central, sovereign truth

to which he came to bear witness, and from which, by natural and inevitable inference, proceeded all the precept of his utterance. It was not a new conception, for aforesaid it had been written that man was born of God, a living soul like unto Him. But in Jesus there was a quite new *tenure* of the truth. In degree, in intensity of loving realisation, and in living force of guidance, his tenure of God as our Father was unexampled before his time, and, we may well believe, has been unequalled since. In this regard he was pre-eminently the beloved son of God: no nearer than any other to understanding of the eternal Mystery, yet nearer, it may be, than any other to its Divine Heart of Love. And as a supreme example of the divine Sonship, and of the righteousness of human life, in the spirit of obedience to the Father? That also is possible, but it is by no means clear, for the prophet can hardly be as it is best for the average man to be, and the world at large could hardly live by the rule and after the manner of its most rare exceptions.

It is most important for us to distinguish between what is assuredly prophetic—the absolute truth revealed—and what is no more than the prophet's own application of its principles to the practice of the world. The part of the prophet is to bear witness to the truth: to discover it again, and yet again, under the heap of error ever accumulating upon it; to exalt it afresh in the sunlight; and to proclaim

aloud the obligation of obedience to its law. And with that his truly prophetic mission ends. The world has to find out for itself how it can deal with the matter revealed to it, and no prophet has ever anticipated that discovery, nor may any prophet hope to do so. How the world is to become convinced of the very truth, and to be made willing to conform itself to its requirement—how it shall attain to the understanding of mind, and the integrity of heart, which are absolutely necessary for its redemption from evil, and for its righteous atonement (concord, at-one-ment) with God—are very great matters, that lie far ahead for fulfilment, though near every man's hand for endeavour. No prophecy has revealed the time or method of the glorious consummation, but only the principles of righteousness and love on which it depends; and the true prophetic vision of the future is inexorably limited to the conclusion, based upon its vision of the past and present, that in the fulness of time, the triumph of obedience will surely come to pass.

Now it happened that after the death of Jesus, his disciples not only found a profusion of material for his apotheosis ready to their hands, but that it was in a manner forced upon them by reason of their misunderstanding of his doctrine, and their individual unfitness to uphold it in its original integrity. That which had been possible to the Master was impossible to his followers. They could

not hold for themselves, nor make attractive to others, a doctrine which was so simple, and at the same time so independent of support from "the things of men." For it was not embodied in any prescribed formality or observance, such as might help the multitude to grasp somewhat of its spirit, but was left by Jesus, simply as the very truth: that naked Truth, from before whose face the world has ever drawn back abashed and confounded. The disciples were commissioned to go forth and preach the gospel. To tell all men that God the Lord was the Father of all; that it was required of every one to love Him with all his heart and soul, and his neighbour as himself, for his neighbour was his brother! And that in obedience to this truth was salvation, and the regeneration of the world, and life eternal.

This was doctrine that would be tenable only by the best of mankind, and acceptable only to an enlightened world in deadly earnest for its redemption from evil. The disciples had altogether failed to apprehend its perfection, and the apostles now proved to be unequal to the work of its dissemination. In its place they set up again the old stumbling-block of "The Messiah," shaping it anew, and investing it with more extravagant hopes. They began to believe that Jesus would presently appear again upon the earth, not as before, pleading with men for the truth's sake; but as manifest Lord, clothed in

irresistible power and majesty, and surrounded by the angels of heaven, to sit in judgment upon his enemies, and to reward his faithful followers with high place and authority. They deified their dead Master, as was but matter of course in the time and circumstance; and then, out of the apotheosis, there grew up that amazing body of doctrine which constitutes the "saving" creed of Christianity. For it was not commensurate with the idea of a God, to believe that he was born into the world only to teach a very simple truth and to suffer martyrdom for his testimony. That would have been a part befitting a man; a prophet and martyr, noblest order of man; but not befitting a God: having no requirement in it for a God. Therefore, when the apostles came to believe that Jesus was "very God," they had to presume some superhuman purpose to account for the phenomenon of his death, nor did they fail to imagine a purpose accordant with their idolatry.

It would indeed have been a miracle if the followers of Jesus, out of the abyss of dismay and confusion into which they were plunged by his martyrdom, had plucked the perfect flower of his thought. It was inevitable that the misconception which undoubtedly obtained among them in his lifetime, should afterwards—wanting the restraint and guidance of his presence—expand into extravagant conceits and vain imaginings, commensurate with their own ignorance and superstition, and with

the troubled thought of their time. The wonder—one might say the miracle—is, that in such circumstances, and from such men, we should yet have a record of the prophesying of Jesus, in which there can be clearly discovered the true spirit and meaning of his testimony.

Plainly, the religion of Christianity is not founded on the teaching of the prophet, but is wholly the outcrop of transcendental ideas which grew up out of the memory of his life and death. And the makers of the religion make no allowance whatever for error in the record. They not only accept the whole story, with all its commentary, but they take everything emanating from the early followers of Jesus, as of equal authority with, and of far more importance than the utterances of the Master himself.

Of course, if we accept the New Testament as absolutely authoritative on the presumption that it was all inspired by the Holy Ghost, there is no more to be said. But this is a great presumption indeed—requiring proof infallible and undeniable—and for my own part, I can discover no vestige of proof of it, of any sort whatever. I do not know even of anything pretending to the nature of proof, that is put forward in support of the presumption, unless the miracles that are accredited to the apostles are supposed to prove the divine authority of their doctrines. And assuredly in the present day we should not accept an

entirely new and strange religion, on the authority of a report of miracles among a semi-civilised and credulous people, such as might compare with the people of the apostles' time. Even if we were assured of the phenomena, we should not believe in any strange conceptions inconsistent with the things we know, merely because they were the conceptions of the miracle workers. But the record of miracle in the New Testament is a very far-away report, which we cannot put to the test of careful examination; and even in the present time, "Miracles grow apace in the East, and a few years suffice to mature them."¹

Jesus lived in a generation whose understanding may be not unfairly measured by its clamour for a sign. But surely *we* may dismiss the miracles, and the belief in authority founded on them from our minds, esteeming them even as the Master did for, however little we may credit the account of the phenomena, I think we may reasonably credit the disapproval of the popular clamour evidenced by the recorded fact that Jesus again and again commanded, in respect of miracles, "See thou tell no man." The demand on the part of the ignorant for signs and wonders has troubled all prophets, always; and it is to be noted as very significant, that despite the ignorance and prejudice of the writers of the Gospels, they record of Jesus that he desired that all such matters should be suppressed, and not published abroad, and

¹ Sir Richard Burton

moreover, that he charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ. To me it appears significant of persistent misapprehension on the part of the disciples, which gave such frequent occasion for the Master's correction and reproof, that even after many years during which the misapprehension had grown apace, the condemnation of it could not be entirely forgotten, and was therefore simply and truly recorded along with all the rest, with the native inconsequence of the Oriental narrator. And there is a clean and wholesome breath of sanity in such portions of the record, which blows aside somewhat of the atmosphere of enchantment and illusion that has gathered and thickened for so long about the memory of a great prophet. We, who were born in that atmosphere, can but very hardly escape from its magic; yet it may be possible even for us to discern the assured veracities of the actual prophesying; and, in the liberty of that discernment, to estimate at its proper value and proportions the Christianity that has hindered and overshadowed its revelation.

I say in the liberty of discernment, which is far from being the same thing as mere hardihood of unbelief. Indeed, I mean something the very opposite to unbelief, which of itself can never dispel illusion. The present age is free from some of the grosser superstitions of the past, not by reason of its greater hardihood and incredulity, but because of its greater

discernment of true things, and its more certain belief in them. I do not propose, therefore, to question the doctrines of Christianity from the standpoint of doubt—of mere infidelity—nor with an “open mind”; but on the contrary, I purpose to examine them from the standpoint of assured belief; to test them by the principles of truth which were before and will be after them; by the doctrines of righteousness which were declared by the prophets and are approved by the broad facts of human life.

The creed of Christianity declares: That the Creator and Overlord of the Universe is a Triune God, three persons in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

That God created Adam a sinless and perfect being, who through disobedience fell from his happy estate, was expelled from the Garden of Eden, and became thenceforth outcast from God’s favour, and subject to death and everlasting damnation. That all the seed of Adam are included in this condemnation, being born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and beyond redemption by their own endeavour.

But that God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son to be a sacrifice for its sin. That the Son of God was born into the world of the Virgin Mary, who conceived him of the Holy Ghost, and that by his death and the mystery that was in his tenancy of the grave, he fulfilled all the requirement of divine justice, paid the infinite debt that humanity had incurred, and made reconciliation between God and Man.

That he rose again from the dead, after lying for three days in the tomb, and ascended into heaven, there to reign until the time of his second coming to judge the world at the last day. That in that day all the dead will arise in the flesh—"the resurrection of the body"—and stand before him for final judgment, when the saved will be received into eternal life, and the lost be driven away into outer darkness.

That the only way of salvation is by faith in these doctrines: that whosoever believeth and is baptized will be saved, and whosoever believeth not will be condemned.

Now all these tenets are gathered from the writings of the apostles, and from those parts of the Gospels which lie outside the account of the public ministry and prophecy of Jesus. Taking that account as it stands they are not to be found in it, except by inference from very insufficient data: and when we bear in mind that the Gospels were written many years after the prophet's death by enthusiasts who were wholly possessed with the new ideas, we cannot but regard the record as most conclusive evidence that Jesus himself never proclaimed them. He was publicly accused of having done so, but by false witnesses; and an impartial judge, after hearing his answer to the accusation, could find no fault in him. These tenets, therefore, had no place in the revelation of truth which informed the popular teaching of Jesus, and it is hardly possible to believe that he should have kept

these matters secret in the years when he daily taught openly before men, and should have let the momentous occasion of his trial and condemnation to death pass by without declaring them positively and definitely, if he had conceived them to be the Very Truth which he had come into the world to fulfil.

The creed of Christianity is the Apostles' creed, and its prophet is Saul of Tarsus, who was a fanatic always, before and after his conversion. Before, he devoted all his energies to the duty of stamping out the new religion: after, to its advocacy and propagandism. A man of keen intellect and strong will—logical, eloquent, single-hearted, and enthusiastic—he would have been very great, if only he could have been right. He was everything except profound: a thinker, but not a seer. His mind revelled on the surfaces presented by the new doctrines, but never questioned the stability of their foundations. It was sufficient for his belief that those surfaces reflected the ecstasies of thought and feeling that were native to his fanatical temperament. All his conceptions had their source in the emotional experience of his own inner life, and all his vision was introspective. His failure to perfectly fulfil the requirement of the law had overwhelmed him with a sense of sinfulness before God; and it is out of his conception of sin that his later beliefs sprung up and established themselves in his heart as the very truth. Self-condemned, he

could discover no help in God, whose holiness confounded him, or in his own utmost endeavour; and he grasped as a drowning man at the arbitrary doctrine of a vicarious atonement—of justification by faith—as presenting the only conceivable way of escape from an intolerable despair.

But before we examine the Pauline conceptions, let us compare the main tenets of Christianity with the testimony of Jesus.

Of *God*, it is recorded that Jesus, himself a Jew, speaking to a Jew, said, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” And the scribe said unto him, “Of a truth, Master, thou hast well said that he is one; and there is none other but he.” Now this is positive testimony that cannot be explained away. The circumstance of its utterance does not admit of misunderstanding, for if we *could* suppose reservation on the one side, there was assuredly only one plain meaning and understanding on the other—the understanding of a believer in the Unity, in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel, the God of Hosts. Nor is it possible to suppose that Jesus did not recognise that plain meaning when he said to the scribe, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” And again, when one called him “Good Master,” he said, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, even God.” A saying of unmistakable meaning, and one which it would seem that Jesus even sought occa-

sion to deliver by way of reproof to any who were disposed to attribute to *him* qualities that belonged to God alone.

Here, then, we have distinct and emphatic declaration of the Unity of God on the part of Jesus, confirmed by reproof of the slightest presumption that he himself was on an equality with Him, even in the matter of moral perfection. The difference between this conception and that of Christianity could hardly be more strikingly manifest than it is in the ending of the Lord's prayer: "For *thine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory," set against a common form of the Christian churches: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost."

Moreover, this record certainly requires no allowance to be made for the prejudice of the writers, since its statement is irreconcilable with what they had come to believe. May we not, therefore, fairly regard it as statement embodying principles which were so constantly upheld in the Master's discourse that the disciples could not altogether forget them?

On the other hand, with all the bias of the evangelists, I can find no record in the Synoptic Gospels of any saying by Jesus that can, even by straining its extreme possible meaning, be taken as a revelation of a Triune God.

Take, for example, the passage in St. Matthew,

that perhaps more than any other seems to sustain such an inference. After his disciples had told Jesus that some men said he was John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets, he asked them, "But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon, Bar-Jonah; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Now we know that the Jewish expectation of "the Christ" was expectation of a leader and king—not a God—and there is nothing here to indicate that Peter recognised in Jesus anything more than the fulfilment of the Jewish hope. And Jesus, knowing that it was illusory, and that for him to be named among them as the Christ would but mislead the multitude and occasion tumult and disaster, charged his disciples to tell no man that he was the Christ. Clearly, when Peter said, "Thou art the son of the living God," he no more than echoed the Master's teaching, the great theme of which was our sonship to the Divine Father. And "from that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go into Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up." Foreseeing the consequence of the enmity which his teaching had stirred up

against him, and aware of the misconception of his disciples, he sought to prepare them for a conclusion that would probably be very different from their expectation, so that if he should be taken away from them, they might not be utterly cast down, and lose all faith. "And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying: Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall never be unto thee; but he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumblingblock unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." Is it possible to see in this any confirmation of the Christian doctrine of the Godhead of Jesus Christ? Can we suppose that Peter would have the audacity to rebuke One whom he held to be Very God? To me it seems obvious that the account is informed considerably by what happened, and was imagined after the occasion—the prediction of the death and resurrection, for instance—but even as given it is but as filmy gossamer, compared with the weight of the tremendous dogma it is presumed to support. And, by St. Mark—who, so we are told, gathered his knowledge mainly from St. Peter himself—there is no mention of any recognition of Jesus as "the son of the living God"; nor is there any blessing or congratulation because of Peter's enlightenment by the Father. "Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him (or, *that* of him?). And

he began to teach them, that the Son of Man must suffer many things," and so on, as in the account by St. Matthew. There is not, in this, any consent even to "Thou art the Christ," but—reading between the lines—something akin to condemnation. And beyond doubt the Master saw his disciples to be greatly in need of instruction! *That* is apparent in both accounts.

While the dogma of the Trinity has unquestionably the seal of apostolic authority, it is no less certain that it was altogether unknown to Jesus, and was unimagined by any one in his lifetime. It is either an interpretation of his prophecy on the part of the apostles, which discovers new and strange meanings in sayings that are plainly in accordance with the ancient prophetic revelation of the One Only God; or else it is a presumption which goes beyond the proper bounds of interpretation, and takes upon itself the burden of an authority over-riding that of the Master. For the reasonable interpretation of the sayings is limited to the conclusion that when Jesus speaks of the Father, it is but with an enlarged apprehension of the love of God; and when of the Holy Ghost, with but prophetic understanding of the prevailing influence of the Divine Spirit upon the minds and hearts of men.

In this regard his prophecy was an advancement of prophetic truth and morality beyond the prophesying of his forerunners. But the dogma of the Trinity was

a retrogression to primitive ideas: a return to the Stone Age of belief. It cannot be regarded as a conception of God at all. It is only a presumption whose idolatry marks it as the conceit of men who could have had no conception of the eternal mystery and majesty that must clothe the Divine Being, and no understanding of the revelation of those noble prophets whose words they so often inaptly quote in support of their own puerile contentions. For Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah worshipped the God of their fathers—the “I am, that I am”—as Jesus did; with but new discernment that His throne was more glorious, and His government wider, holier, and more gracious, than was known in the earlier time. The separation of that awful Unity into parts—into personalities particularly and minutely defined—and the apportionment of qualities and operations among them, in set terms befitting human beings and human affairs; constituted a most amazing backsliding, and was a recrudescence of thought whose acceptance by the Jews would have been a phenomenon without parallel in the history of humanity. For it was a conceit that was not only irreconcilable with that tenure of belief in Jehovah which had so distinguished their worship from others throughout their whole history; but it was foreign to the very spirit of the evolution of that belief, which tended at least, in all their prophecy, to magnify their original conception and to purify it from all dross of idolatry. It was a conceit on the part of the makers

of Christianity that assuredly never grew up out of the Hebrew ideas of God, but that most probably came of the influence of Hellenism—there is a striking resemblance between the Christian idea of the only-begotten Son of God, and the Greek myth of Athena, the goddess of light and wisdom, who sprang into being from the brain of the All Father, Zeus; a myth of more intelligent construction than the dogma, since it does no violence to our apprehension of the sequence of existences—and the fatal leaven of idolatry, once admitted, presently, after its nature, generated a multitude of semi-divine characters, distinguishable in nothing except in their adaptation to the superstition of the new religion, from the demi-gods and deified heroes of Greece and Rome.

“The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Ghost eternal!” It may be said that it is a mystery; but if we take eternal to mean from as well as to everlasting, it is an absurdity; the words mean nothing. The Holy Ghost—proceeding only from the Father, according to the Greek Church, from both the Father and the Son, according to the other Churches—as a *person* in the Trinity of Gods, is an idea so intangible, that the Church has altogether failed to invest it with any semblance of reality. It has represented it as a tongue, a flame of fire, a dove; but as a divine person it has remained inconceivable, and has never yet obtained from poor human souls any reverence or heart-worship such as has

been accorded to the Virgin Mary, or even to the saints.

I discern the dogma of the Trinity to be a deadly error. The religion founded upon it can never become a world-religion. For there is this sovereign quality in divine truth, that it cannot be overcome by error; and when men boast of the triumph of Christianity, they forget that it has won no victory over the belief in the Unity of God. It has been in close contact with Judaism for well-nigh two thousand years, and with every advantage of outward circumstance in its favour, it has utterly failed either to coerce or persuade it into agreement with its inspired (?) interpretations of Hebrew prophecy, and into acceptance of its dogmatic adulteration of the fundamental principle of the grand old Hebrew faith. And Islam long ago despoiled the Christian Church of some of its fairest provinces, and has established itself far and wide in the hearts of peoples who have remained deaf to the voice of the Christian missionary. Many Jews, we are told, followed after *Jesus*: but where are the Jewish converts to *Christ*? It is absolute and indisputable matter of fact, that Christianity has triumphed only over heathendom and barbarism. It has possessed itself, by right of conquest, only of one quarter of the globe—Europe—for its dominance elsewhere is the result of colonisation, and not of conversion. And Europe, at the time of the invasion of the Christian ideas, was altogether heathen, and in great part bar-

barian. The Church triumphed over the Pantheon: the Trinity, over the gods of Olympus and Asgard. For Zeus and Odin were inferior conceptions of the supreme deity, compared with the God whom Christianity had received from the Hebrews and worshipped as the Father; and the Son and the Holy Ghost, operating in concord with the Father, in mercy to the world; were conceptions far in advance of the many and various gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome and the nations of the North. Therefore, in Europe, Christianity triumphed, as the better ever will over the worse, when in contact with it over large areas for a considerable period of time. It was indeed a great triumph of its kind, and pregnant with great consequence; yet, in seeking after the *best*, I cannot give it the high place that is claimed for it, or see in it any promise of universal victory.

At the foundation of the apostolic plan of salvation we find the doctrine of original sin: the inherent corruption of human nature in the sight of God, whose righteousness is presumed to be a quality of infinite condemnation of unrighteousness. But that is assuredly not the righteousness that is manifest in the operation of the laws of life. The reign of law is invariable, and in a sense inexorable, yet withal, it is a reign of mercy; of forgiveness almost without limit. It does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Disease is not always unto death, and the broken plant will heal itself, and put forth new

shoots, and flourish in happy forgetfulness of injury. A man is not utterly given over to evil for one transgression, nor for ten thousand such as are accounted sins by the standard of a mathematical perfection; but on the contrary, men do overcome evil with good; nor is it beyond hope that humanity may in the end attain to a righteousness of being altogether in accord with the divine spirit of the universe. To the prophetic vision this righteousness is written all across the heavens and the earth. It is seen in the orderly procession of the stars, in the alternation of day and night, and in all the beneficent phenomena of the seasons; is manifest in the history of mankind; in the rise and fall of nations; and in all the energies that make for good or ill in human life. Over all, the prophets discern the Supreme Ruler, and in all, the eternal principles of his government; and the sum of their prophesying is a revelation of God, our Almighty Father, whose law is not for condemnation, but for blessing.

The doctrine of original sin, and of justification only by faith in a vicarious sacrifice, appears to me to be not less retrogressive than the dogma of the Trinity. The standpoint of St. Paul is a very ancient standpoint, overlooking a field of ideas of religion that is limited in the extreme. He looks always within himself: and while the life and death of Jesus, as interpreted by his followers, presented new points of attachment for ideas born of such introspection

and self-abasement, there is, apart from the accident of the occasion, nothing whatever to distinguish his inspiration from that which informed the old Akkadian hymns to the gods. I think we may safely neglect all argument for the dogma of Christianity that is based upon self-condemnation by the standard of an arbitrary conception of inexorable righteousness; as argument from the standpoint of a narrow, untrue, and very immature idea of God, which would, moreover, apply with equal force to any other conceivable scheme of adjustment of the imaginary difference between heaven and earth.

It may appear to be superfluous to question the truth of the dogma of original sin, together with all the other dogmas that depend on it, on the ground that the Biblical account of the creation of Adam and his fall from a state of sinlessness is discredited by the discoveries of science. For we are so well assured that the account is *not* an inspired revelation of actual fact—we know so certainly that man was not created a perfect being, but far otherwise, and that he has attained to his present condition by way of a very gradual ascent from a *lower* state of being—that we might naturally suppose that the exposure of the untruth of the Biblical myth must be a matter of no consequence to the stability of the Christian dogma, which *must* surely have other and better revelation than *that* as its acknowledged foundation? But if it has, I confess that I

have utterly failed to discover it! It is not to be found in the prophecy of Jesus; and its great advocate, St. Paul, sets it up on the mythical foundation and on no other, declaring that "through one man sin entered into the world"; that "by the trespass of one the many died"; and that "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

We must, therefore, perforce regard the myth as really embodying the presumption of fact on which the dogma rests. And we know that it does not embody facts, but the very contrary to the fact! Myth may be fabulous in form, and yet be noble myth if true in spirit; but this fable, as adopted by Christianity, is ignoble and false throughout. It masquerades as history, and is untrue; and its untruth has spawned a poisonous brood of unrealities; arbitrary principles of divine and human action, arbitrary standards of right and wrong, and arbitrary articles of faith. So that it cannot be superfluous so long as men maintain these things and profess to believe in them, to gibbet the myth on every available occasion—to expose it on all commons and at all cross roads—for its error has only been scotched by the revelation of science, and the brood of it is lively in our midst. The great system of religion that is based upon its falsehood cannot be suffered to ignore the exposure of the falsehood; for Christianity stands not alongside the activities of the world,

diverting to itself only such as are of no consequence to the world's advance; but in the very middle of the track, blocking the way of progress and reformation, upholding illusions, condoning manifest unrighteousness, in alliance with forces of ancient evil, in maintenance of "the things of men," and in denial of the true things of God.

The Christian Church claims to have gathered unto itself the whole essential truth of Hebrew revelation and prophecy—to have apprehended Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ who was the fulfilment of prophecy—to be itself the spiritual Jerusalem of the kingdom of God, the habitation of the true Israel, and the visible instrument, by divine appointment, for the regeneration of the world through its conservation and preaching of the gospel of salvation, which it declares to be by faith in the redemption of mankind from the wrath of God by the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son upon the Cross.

But this gospel, to a believer in the God of the Hebrew prophets, and in the principles of righteousness declared by them, with one accord, from Moses to Jesus, is no less than heresy. For, far from exalting the God of Hosts, and rejoicing in the bond of our relationship with Him which is the glorious theme of the last great prophecy—far from magnifying the divine righteousness and setting it forth with more persuasive eloquence through better apprehen-

sion of its love—this gospel substitutes a belated idolatry in place of the prophetic worship, and in place of the prophetic precept, a plan of salvation utterly antagonistic to the principles of the prophetic morality. It denies “the whole law and the prophets,” the while it pretends to administer the fulfilment of the law, and to embody the last word of prophecy.

This is a grave indictment, since it is no less than a charge of immorality; and I am sorrowfully conscious that it will be shocking and grievous to very many sincere and good Christians to know that any one should deliberately venture to denounce the fundamental doctrine of Christianity—the doctrine of justification by faith—as an immoral doctrine.

But to those who may have followed my statement of most assured fact up to this stage of my review of the operation of God in the material and the spiritual worlds, I think it will be obvious that there is no escape from that conclusion.

In the whole body of revelation and precept which culminated in the prophecy of Jesus, righteousness is conceived as resting on a quite natural and reasonable basis; on a groundwork of manifest truth. The divine nature is apprehended from the visible divine government, and the divine requirement is conceived as commensurate with human endowment, and not as infinitely beyond human possibility. For a man to do his best, to strive after good, to cease to do

evil and to learn to do well, is for that man atonement with God, who will abundantly pardon transgression, and will reward obedience with exceeding blessing. On the other hand, though wrong-doing may prosper, and go for a while unchecked and unpunished, yet surely in the end will divine righteousness be vindicated; surely, even in the wrong-doing, there is a canker at the root of its prosperity, bitterness in all its satisfaction, and a hurrying to death and judgment in all its pride.

This is true morality—forcible appeal for righteousness addressed to universal qualities in human nature. It is on as natural a basis as is all human law and all human association. It embraces all the morality which is safeguarded and enforced by human laws; but it goes far beyond the scope of their action, holding every man accountable to God in his own conscience and private life, for endeavour after righteousness with his whole heart and soul and strength, lest, though he may be uncondemned by the statutes of the laws of men, he may be condemned before God, and utterly cast away. This is but the elevation of universal fact to the level of universal truth; the application of principles of approved excellence in human affairs to the supreme affair of every human soul—its standing before God when it shall go out of this visible world naked as it came into it. It is the translation of the common sense of right which is recognised as indispensable

for the general well-being of the natural man, into the holiness which the prophetic vision discerns to be indispensable for the welfare of the spiritual man. It is not a change but an enlargement of essential principles, accordant with the continuity of operation of a God who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and who is glorious and worshipful in all His works.

But the doctrine of justification by faith abrogates the moral law of the world altogether, in favour of what is nothing more than an ecclesiastical nostrum. In effect, it declares that whatever may be required of man by his fellow-man, it is required of him by God only that he shall believe; that before God he will not be approved for his righteousness nor condemned for his iniquity; but he will be judged solely by his belief or unbelief. No matter how selfish and evil a man may have been all his life long, if only in the hour of death he shall repent and believe in Christ as his saviour, all his sins will be forgiven him, and he will be received into eternal blessedness, a pure and perfect spirit, by the grace of God for Christ's sake.

Whether this doctrine, of itself, should be accounted more wicked or more insane, it is hard to say. For it is as manifestly baseless in fact as it is manifestly immoral in its tendencies.

All the facts of life indicate a moral law which is universal in its operation, and which is enforced by very obvious results following upon the observance

or rejection of its requirement. It governs the whole man, body and soul; is unto life or death for both. We can make no distinction between the morality of obedience in the matters pertaining to this mortal life and that of obedience in the things pertaining to eternal life; for here on earth they are verily joined together by God, and no man can separate them. Both are under one law, which if a man truly apprehend and take to heart, will be insistent upon him for righteousness, in thought, word, and deed. In the matters of the body, men do, of stern and immediate necessity, apprehend it much more than they do in the matters of the soul. For the mortal life is so short, its incident is so crowded, and its effect treads so closely upon the heels of its cause; its law is so efficiently policed, and the offender is so certainly arrested and so promptly punished, that men cannot possibly be in ignorance of its requirement, and dare not, nay, could not, live in defiance or carelessness of it.

But in the matters of the soul, the law is not so obvious. The advantage of obedience and the injury of transgression are not nearly so apparent. The conscience, hardly awakened in some, and indurated by years of carelessness in others, is but a very uncertain and imperfect monitor of danger; for the spiritual life of man is in its infancy, and all its faculty is immature; it has a long future before it, and in the present the average man does not realise

its necessity as he realises the necessity belonging to the mortal life, with its mature faculty, its accumulated experience, and its ancient wisdom. The average man does not at all recognise the health of the soul as a matter of continual and urgent consequence; only in so far as that he feels the necessity of maintaining a standard of personal honour of some sort, exigent upon his self-respect. Which, indeed, is an entirely right thing as far as it goes, and may even be regarded as the natural source and genuine foundation of all spiritual righteousness. Elevate that standard to its potential level, and it will be at the level of the divine requirement. And, as observed by the average man, this common creed of righteousness does constitute a very real religion; not formulated as such, not altogether conscious of its piety, contemptuous rather of any intention to safeguard the interests of the soul, and very shy of acknowledging concern in the matter; yet, all the same, religion it *is!* of the widest and most vital consequence to the world's spiritual well-being.

For if we ask—*how*, in very truth, shall a man lay up for himself treasure in heaven? what answer can there be but this? He can send nothing on in advance; he can take nothing along with him thither—nothing—save his very self! That which he has become, the thing which in great part he has made of himself, must be the measure of his exceeding riches, or of his most abject poverty.

Unwittingly men do educate themselves for the after life, according to the code of their private honour, of which they are not ashamed. Such as it may be, its righteousness is of indispensable obligation, and men resent to the utmost any accusation of default. In the main they are their own judges in the matter, and in the main they judge themselves fairly; and very hardly shall any man recover from the self-condemnation which mulcts him of his self-esteem. The tenure is for honour's sake only; the minimum of honour, maybe, but the indispensable minimum. The honourable man universally recognises the law of this as a true thing; it is verily a kind of religion to him, natural and true in its principles and effects, needing only enlargement and proper adjustment to become religion of the best. But the manly man *is* ashamed of concern for his soul on the ecclesiastical terms. He has no conception of the soul as something separate from himself, to be safeguarded by arbitrary methods which have no affinity with anything in his actual life. He does not *want* the ecclesiastical salvation; for though he would be better, he would not be other than he is. And it is a far cry to eternity; and—is there not the nostrum? the authorised panacea for all the soul's ills in reserve against the time when—when one shall perhaps really feel in need of medicine of that sort?

Such is the common modern attitude of mind

towards righteousness on the one hand, and the central doctrine of Christianity on the other. The latter, having no natural basis, is without real influence upon the conduct of a practical world; is a dead letter to the multitude. And for this inefficiency the Church accounts by affirming that "the natural man" cannot apprehend the things of the spirit, but must be born again of the Holy Ghost in order to become possessed of the salvation of the Gospel.

But if that is true, then is the "Gospel" *not* good news of salvation to the *world!* but, on the contrary, it is ill news of the judgment and condemnation of the world.

This actual world which we know, and better know as a world existing and progressing by the will and wisdom of Almighty God, is condemned utterly by Christianity as a failure from the beginning, and as now beyond redemption; and in its stead there is set up a new creation, visionary, intangible, governed by law which is commensurate only with the mania of a fanatic conscience, and with the insanity of a false conception of the divine nature and requirement.

The inherent insanity of the doctrine is significantly demonstrated by the disagreement and disputations which have continually distracted the Christian Church. By controversies whose spirit and method were accordant with the quality of the matters in question. Controversies in which the unreality of the premises fitly matched the presumption, violence, and

enmity of the parties. Disputations over articles of faith that obviously never can be determined—over intangible imaginings, having no location in space, or relationship with any point of actual existence—*ignes fatui*, mere exhalations of rottenness, which one declares to be here! and another, there! and which, in the daylight, are discoverable nowhere.

I would not have the reader imagine that I fail to recognise the great influence which these ideas have exercised over the Western World, or that I take that influence to have been in great part immoral. What I have written applies only to the dogma of the religion; to its presumption of exclusive authority; to its idolatrous conception of God, as a Trinity of persons; and to its fundamental doctrine of justification by faith in a vicarious fulfilment of the divine law.

It must be remembered that I have fully recognised the actual conquest of its idea of God over the more debased ideas previously dominant in Europe; though at the same time I indicated the actual limitation of that conquest. Both the conquest and the failure are matters of fact, undeniable; facts which I am glad to recognise equally, for the sake of their testimony to the very truth which I desire to know.

In the particular, therefore, of its conception of God, the new religion started with a distinct and great advantage over the religions which it overcame. Its idea was higher and more true than theirs, and was unquestionably an actual and potent element of

success in the struggle between them. Again, the idea of a God, in infinite love and mercy, laying aside for a time all His majesty and power, and as a man suffering all things in order to succour a lost world, to bring peace to the distracted earth, and to secure for the poor and unhappy an everlasting future of blissful rest, was an idea which, of its own loveliness and attractiveness, would appeal irresistibly to vast numbers of poor souls whose earthly horizon was cruelly limited to a prospect of oppression and hopeless slavery and penury all their lives, with a dog's death at the end. Nor would it fail of power in appeal to the more noble and generous minds among those in high place and authority; and it did, as we know, find acceptance not only with the poor, but with very many of all classes. Moreover, it can hardly be doubted that the many of the upper classes were of the best and most kindly of their time: not perhaps the most learned and intelligent, but assuredly the most righteous.

But while I do not undervalue the good influence which can be truly ascribed to the spread of Christianity, and while I even recognise that good as due in part to the dissemination of the very ideas which I discern to be intrinsically idolatrous and unrighteous, I see no reason in the inference that therefore those ideas must be true.

It would be equally reasonable to infer their falsehood from the licentiousness, cruelty, and worldliness

which characterised the period of the supreme dominance of the Church in the Middle Ages. The claim that all which is best in our modern civilisation is the result of the influence of the Christian ideas, is altogether untenable in face of the fact that Christianity itself owes quite as much to the native genius and virtues of the North, as ever the South of Europe owed to the influence of Christianity. The human virtues of courage, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and faithfulness unto death; the human institutions that recognised woman as the equal and honoured mate and friend of man, and that regarded the marriage tie as sacred and inviolable; were virtues and institutions that were established among the Northern peoples before they were Christianised; were manifestations of the universal divine inspiration of right, that were not at all changed in their essential nature, but only took softer outlines and more gracious shape under the rule of Christ. And in their turn, by the native force of their truth, honesty, and independence, they did much to rescue Christendom from the evil condition into which it lapsed in its time of most unquestioning faith. The early success of the Christian doctrines proves only that they fitted the necessity of the occasion, and exhibited the effectual medicine in a very sick time. It does not prove them to be wholesome for the everyday sustenance of a world better informed and better disposed.

The more we look into the facts of the question,

the more it becomes apparent that all that is best in Christianity is owing to the force of independent elements of righteousness. Protestantism was moulded into its present shape by the native genius and natural piety which revolted against the system of religion which really grew up out of the apostolic tenets, and which was their natural outcrop. The inevitable and actual consequence of the idolatry and immorality of the dogma, was the usurpation by the Church of the office which it accredited to Christ as the mediator between God and man, and the notorious abuses, immoralities, and superstitions that evolved from the usurpation. The Reformation did not cast out the original dogma, because the time was not ripe for that reform. But looking beyond the doctrinal contention to the essential inspiration of the revolt against Rome, it is obvious that it was, in its spirit and in its effects, a revolt of righteousness and reason against a presumption of authority that was wholly dogmatic. And the reformed religion was set up, in actual potential verity, not upon the false dogmatic basis, but upon the eternal principles of righteousness, which, exalted and hallowed by the prophecy of Jesus, constitute what is to-day the whole sum of living truth in Christianity—the very salt that has preserved the dead body of its dogma from becoming an intolerable offence in the nostrils of the world.

It must, I think, be admitted that the real moral influence and practical effect of Protestant

Christianity in the present time are totally independent of the apostolic dogma, and rest altogether upon the pre-apostolic law of righteousness. Its ministers mainly confine themselves to the matters set forth in the simple teaching of the prophet Jesus. They present the divine requirement even as he did; not as a rigid and inexorable law that we cannot fulfil, and that is weighted with infinite condemnation if we fail, but as a requirement commensurate with the human endowment, and full of gracious purpose for human well-being; as the law of our Heavenly Father, established in wisdom, and enforced in love. They preach the obligation of charity towards all, on the ground of the universal brotherhood, because all are the children of one Father. So that in its precept and practice Christianity is becoming more and more identical with Nazarenism, and the spirit and method of its attack upon worldliness have vastly changed. Its moral precept forms its whole fighting line—the centre and wing actually engaged—while its obsolete dogma is posted out of action; a left wing “refused.”

That many will object to this appreciation of fact is of course. The obvious objection will at once occur to them that, far from having declined into a mere exhortation to morality of life, the preaching of to-day maintains the whole of the earlier purpose; and that Christian ministers recognise more completely and unanimously than ever before, that the

beginning and end of their commission is to preach "Christ crucified"! Which is very true, in a sense, but not true in the sense contrary to my contention. Indeed the unanimity in this matter, and the growing tendency among those who recognise it as the great essential, to sink all minor differences, and to agree together as fellow-labourers for God ought to do, strongly supports my view. For it was always the dogma that divided,—the doctrine of justification by faith that condemned. While the churches insisted that the soul's salvation depended on the things a man believed, the importance of those things was supreme; the disputations concerning them were endless; and the most trifling differences were magnified into heresies entailing the most fatal consequence. The present agreement, therefore, would of itself alone suggest a change of base in the religious tenure of the Church, and indicate that its genius had become less arbitrary and dogmatic, and more righteous and humane. For, in proportion to the dogmatic or the sentimental apprehension of Christ crucified, the tenure has ever been fruitful of contention, uncharitableness, and spiritual pride; or of agreement, humility, and works of charity and mercy. I venture to say that in the almost universal popular preaching of Christ crucified, to-day he is presented not as the central figure in a plan of salvation limited to a very small proportion of mankind by arrangement with an inexorable creditor, but as a teacher

of the most exalted righteousness, an exemplar of the most unselfish life, a martyr willing to die for the truth he witnessed to, in love and compassion for a world most unhappy in its error. It is as a prophet who magnified the law and the prophets, who revealed the infinite love of the Heavenly Father—love caring for all things, great and small, even for the very sparrows, and how much more for the hard-trying and tempted children of men—it is as the highest manifestation of the intimate relationship existing between heaven and the human soul, that Christ is now uplifted before the congregations. As the Son of God, even as all are sons; as our elder brother in righteousness; as the captain of a salvation following upon obedience and good endeavour, whose sure hope is in judgment by a Father's love!

There is a Christ crucified of the Creed—a God who discharged an infinite debt incurred by humanity, for the sake of those who are born again of the Holy Ghost—who is a fiction of fanatical imagination. And that way mania lies! And illusions, and spiritual pride, and the denial of the All Father's love, and hatred, and hypocrisy, and doubt, and self-deceit, and unlimited presumptions.

There is the man Christ crucified, whose precept is accordant with the divine operation, and with the prophetic law. And although the Church retains the old form of belief, and uses the old phrase in its liturgy, and repeats the old fable as though it were

a true matter in its preaching, it *lives* now, and is tolerated only because it lives now by none of these things, but by the charitable requirement and the assured hope of the prophet Jesus. For in very truth the heaven and the earth apprehended of the apostles have passed away, but the words of Jesus have not passed away !

But let us test these matters by the realities of human experience. It is claimed that the doctrine of justification by faith can alone liberate the soul from the bondage of fear of the wrath to come. But the recorded experience of sincere believers in the doctrine gives very little support to the claim. For it is a record of continual doubt and distressful self-examination; of questioning heaven and earth for assurance of individual interest in the redemption. The real freedom from that dread bondage is to be found in the true presentment of the divine law by Jesus, who declares it to be a law, not for condemnation, but for healing; not unto destruction, but unto life eternal. It is to be found in the prophetic presentment of our indebtedness in the saying: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Although the "Christian life" is represented as though it were something distinct from the life of the rest of the world, for my own part I cannot distinguish that something in my past experience as a believer in the Christian doctrine; nor can I dis-

cover anything in the lives of Christians indicative of the operation of any force in them that is not common to all humanity. For if we consider the actuality of "conversion," according to the method of Christianity, it is brought about by the awakening of the conscience to the understanding and fear of the awful wrath of God against the sinfulness that condemns every man, and from whose consequence none may escape by his own effort. Then comes the love and gratitude, inspired through deliverance from that fear by belief in the vicarious atonement of Christ, and the resulting obedience to the moral precept, for love's sake. Fear, self-interest, belief, gratitude, and love constraining to righteousness—which are elements in human life that are common to all—are, therefore, the vital elements of "conversion," and make up the whole sum of reality in what is called the Christian "life." If Christianity alone possessed the power of calling them into being, and sustaining them at the level of devotion, its contention that the Christian life is by way of a supernatural regeneration could hardly be gainsaid. But all its elements are common and natural elements, which flourish as well without as within the Church. It can point to nothing new in human life in proof of its doctrine; and it offers no real test whatever by which the regenerate can be distinguished from the unregenerate. The things believed are no test, for belief may be quite independent of morality; and

morality of life is no test, for Christians have no monopoly of any single virtue. I am well aware that ten thousand matters of spiritual experience may be put forward as symptomatic of regeneration; but I am not cognisant of a solitary one that can be demonstrated to be beyond the native faculty of the life that was born of the breath of God ages long ago.

Again, of the *worship* of the Christian life, I would ask: Do we, or indeed *can* we, apprehend Christ as absolute God? We may think of him as divinely gracious, compassionate, and pitiful—even as dying for the world's redemption, and mediating between us and that mystery of God who is beyond our understanding and approach—and we may credit such tenure of his divinity with causing all the love and worship there is in us; but, in actual reality, does any one in his heart and understanding hold Christ as "Very God of Very God"? This is a question for every believer in the tenets of Christianity to put to himself—if he *can*! If he can, I say, because it is a very hard thing for a man who has all his life been used to think he believes in what he has been taught to believe, to ask a real question of himself in the matter, and to insist upon a true answer! For my own part I answer that I have no faculty in my being that enables me to apprehend the Godhead of Christ. I can apprehend in him no more than what appertains to a special and distinguished manifestation of the universal divine

operation. It is not only that I have come to the conclusion that the record of his ministry is a record of the life, sayings, and death of a prophet, but that I recognise the endowment of my understanding as being inexorably limited to that conception. Nor would belief in all the miracle of the evangelical narrative help me in the least. Miracle is all about us—the transformations of a dragon-fly are as miraculous as anything told in the Bible—yet is entirely helpless to us for understanding of the mystery of God.

In actual fact, it appears to me, there is no saying recorded as having been uttered by “Christ”; there is no act or event related of his life, or death, or resurrection, or ascension; and there is no conception of him imagined in after time; in which there is any revelation of a mystery of God, that can be grasped by the human mind. It is the man whom we apprehend and love and worship. The conception of his Godhead is an unreality, a matter of idle words, of no avail for real service to any human soul. We may believe in him as a blessed spirit who, though passed away from our visible world, is still within hearing of our cry, aware of our endeavour, and in sympathy with us, as an elder brother. We may believe him to be gifted beyond all others with help for us, and to be concerned now, even as he was in his mortal lifetime, for the world’s redemption from evil; to be an eager, strenuous soul,

rejoicing in doing the work of the All Father, in heaven as on earth. So much is possible to actual belief: it is really conceivable: but as Very God, any *person* is inconceivable by mortal man.

I believe, for my own part, in the conversion of St. Paul by an actual manifestation of the spirit of Jesus—which is curious? But I discern no discrepancy between that belief, and my appreciation of the subsequent career of the apostle as the great agent of a system of religion in which the very truth of the prophecy of Jesus was degraded and clothed upon with fiction. For I do not judge the work of the ministers of God, by any preconception of the nature of God Himself. I do not presume to distinguish between what He permits, and what He ordains. I see that all things are under the government of divine law, and are working together surely—if very slowly as we apprehend—for salvation. And it seems to me very possible that Jesus, with a wisdom beyond that of his mortal life, made choice of St. Paul, as better fitted for effectual service than those he had chosen before him. I recognise that the fictions of the religions have had their uses from time immemorial; and that the clothing of the simple and artless truth of Jesus with semblances and illusions, was not only accordant with old order, but was fitting to the then condition and necessity of the world. St. Paul approved himself a master weaver of the threads of fiction ready to his

hand, and he wove a serviceable garment, and not a shroud. Rather, a robe by which the living truth of the last great prophecy was, after all, preserved through centuries of violence and change: and while I cannot but declare the substance of his doctrine to be false, I discern the spirit of his tenure of it to be true; and I am very far from condemnation of the Pauline Christianity as an altogether evil and ungodly thing. All the same, the garment of that day does not fit the stature of this. It has worn very thin—and there are very many whose tenure of truth and endeavour after righteousness are but injured by its imposition.

False doctrine may be easily built up upon a foundation of true facts. But it is hardly conceivable that a true doctrine of the relationship existing between God and Man, should be evolved from conceptions of the divine operation in human life, which are absolutely contrary to the facts of that operation, and which are moreover irreconcilable with what we *know* of the laws that everywhere inform the divine rule. We know for a fact that the first man was *not* created some 6000 years ago a perfect being; and therefore that he could not have fallen from his high estate through disobedience, thereby entailing sin and death upon the whole human race. We know for a fact that the “natural man” is *not* the inherently corrupt and evil degenerate of Christian theory: but is a being who was fashioned

under the hand of God; was wrought upon during incalculable thousands of centuries—may we not say with infinite patience, solicitude, and wisdom?—until he had become fitted for a spiritual incarnation. We may, I think, reasonably presume a divine choice and purpose in this matter; not subject to mistake, or to any possibility of failure or disappointment. We may, I think, go further, and say that we know, since in a sense we have witnessed the wonderful ascent of Man, that there *was* no mistake in the choice, and no premature endowment of the chosen being with the germ of a higher life. That God had not failed to fulfil His purpose; that all things were ripe for the new departure; and that there was in it no haste or impatience, to be afterwards repented of; no breakdown to occasion disappointment and anger in the divine mind, resulting in the utter condemnation of the children of men; and no occasion for any method of partial recovery from mishap beyond our help, such as that which is set forth in the amazing apostolic doctrine of the redemption.

No glamour of sublime and pathetic story: no ingenuity of reasoning: no marshalling of imaginary facts of experience resulting from misconception of actual facts: no deduction from local, minor, and passing phenomena, can in this day sustain doctrine which traverses the primal universal and constant facts of the divine operation and law. To this test must

all religious belief submit at last. Is it accordant with the *truth* discovered, or say, revealed, in the later time? The present time is well assured of the truth of its own prophets; and the revelation of their labours is established. The present believes what it knows to be true, after due trial by methods which it holds to be correct and sufficient; and its methods of investigation and standards of veracity; its spirit of impartiality, and requirement of certainty; its patience and care in research, and readiness to accept correction; all unite to condemn the methods and authority of its religions as ignorant and presumptuous; and as the extreme of presumption, the claim of any man, or body of men, to declare the whole purpose of God in any matter, once for all, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. For the whole finding of modern time has established, as the guiding principle of scientific inquiry, the uniformity and continuity of operation of the forces that move the universe. The force that was, is the force that is. The God of yesterday is the God of today. The inspiration that was, must be in operation even now, uniform, continuous: commensurate with the world's progress and condition. So that there can be no closed book of revelation—no final word!

The ignorance and misapprehension of the makers of Christianity, is to be measured by the daring of their theories, and the monstrosity of their doctrine. They imagined the holiness of God to be a sort of Destiny, stronger than God's own will, exigent upon

the Creator, whose creature had failed in one particular, to condemn that creature and all his seed for ever! Destiny, denying the direct exercise of mercy, and requiring circumvention, or, at least, compromise, before it would allow of man's restoration to the divine favour! What could possibly come of such imagining except arbitrary articles of faith, and empirical rules of conduct? What is there in these ideas that is manifestly impossible to human invention, or beyond the very wide range of human misunderstanding?

One of our modern prophets has said that we play the game of life against an unseen adversary, who never fails to take advantage of every one of our mistakes. A wise and true saying, in the true prophetic spirit. If we amend it slightly by giving the unseen the name of Friend—one who infallibly corrects our mistakes for our good—it expresses the sum of all we really know of the holiness, or the righteousness of God. So much as that is surely manifest in the governance under which we live, and to which of necessity we more or less conform. And no more than what that indicates, is declared in the ancient prophecy of Israel, and is invested with supreme loveliness and hope in that of Jesus of Nazareth.

But where the prophets feared to tread, the apostles dared to rush in—and the Church founded on their conceptions pretends to be in the confidence of God in matters which are hidden from all other ken. It claims to know His pleasure in the most trivial affairs

of ritual—to hold of Him, the keys of heaven and hell—and to dispense salvation in return for faith in its dogma, and delegated authority from the Most High. It denies the possibility of salvation to all outside its communion; and condemns all inquiry into its tenets, from the standpoint of scientific investigation, as blasphemous. I take the Church of Rome as typical; because its attitude in this connection is the only correct attitude—consistent with the pretensions of apostolic Christianity. For however liberal and latitudinarian may be the tenure of some ministers of some Christian Churches, the Christian doctrine rests solely upon authority that admits of no freedom of interpretation. It must be believed absolutely as the infallible revelation of God, or it cannot be believed at all as authoritative. And for reasonable belief I know but of one veracity that can be put forward in support of the doctrine—the fact that there *is* in the more advanced spiritual man, a profound consciousness of unworthiness before God, and of dependence upon His goodness and mercy. But this of itself is obviously no proof of the truth of any set of doctrines which may seem to meet the case; and because men have derived relief of conscience, and a sense of atonement with God from belief in “Christ,” that is no more proof than is the self-condemnation. The consciousness of unworthiness is a matter quite independent of creed; and the experiences of belief are not confined to one creed, but are common to all. When

we consider that such consciousness existed, and found very perfect expression, long before the time of Abraham; and that it is the natural effect of a high appreciation of God as Eternal and Almighty, governing the world in righteousness; brought home to the heart of a man grievously troubled by his own insufficiency and helplessness in time of distress and affliction—the veracity is significant of a spiritual life which is inherent and universal in humanity, and cannot be reconciled with the narrow conception of spirituality that limits it to a “new birth in Christ.”

False doctrine and false prophecy are at the foundation of the ecclesiastical religion which for so long has imposed upon the world’s righteous thought and honest aspiration,

“ With a weight
Heavy as frost, and cold almost as death.”

Doctrine of a life that is not; of a salvation unreal and immoral; of a Divinity incredible and idolatrous—Prediction of a redemption which has not redeemed; of an age of righteousness which its own presumption of falsehood prevents—Prophecy of evil and not of good; of a devilish, rather than of a divine triumph.

Is not the time come, when these dead things may be buried out of sight and memory, so that the world may begin to conform itself to principles of approved truth? Verily righteousness is required of this time, according to the measure of its illumination; nor can the requirement be shifted or postponed with-

out entailing the certain vengeance of the law of the Almighty. Natural, or Spiritual—that law is one, as God is One: and it is our part to know it, and to obey. To *know!* To make quite sure; taking nothing of these high matters, only on the credit of our forefathers; but trying all things for ourselves, and holding fast only that which approves itself true and good. No prophecy ever was without alloy of mistake; and it is our part to endeavour to sift out the error. For the spirit of prophecy is with us now, gifted of God with discernment of His rule, as surely as it ever was in the past time. I believe, that in my appreciation of the essential truth of the past prophecy, and in my discernment of enlarged meaning in it, I see what I see through the same inspiration as that which informed all seers aforetime. I believe that the necessity laid upon me to write the things that I have seen—which has constrained me against my own will and inclination, to years of laborious nights following weary days of necessary toil—which compels me, though I am “no prophet, neither a prophet’s son,” to prophesy, is absolutely identical with the prophetic compulsion of old. I know that some of my prophecy is true, and will not pass away. I know that all of it is sincere: and I am content to know that God, in His own time and way, will make the truth of it manifest, and bring to naught its error.

PART II

THE NEW PROPHECY

“ Full hard it is (quoth he) to read aright
The course of heavenly cause, and understand
The secret meaning of th’ eternal might
That rules men’s waies, and rules the thoughts of living wight.”

—*The Faërie Queene.*

A PARABLE

THERE came a Messenger from the Most High, bearing in hand a mystery, and asking of the folk—Say now, what is this? And one answered him—It is a piece of money; and another—It is a weapon of war; and yet another—It is a jewel of price, such as fit king's crowns. But the more part cried—It is naught, trouble us not with thy folly!

But after many days, a necessitous man and an out-cast answered him—It is a loaf of bread, and I pray you give it to me, for I am in need thereof. And the Messenger said—Blessed art thou, O Seer! for it is thine! Take it therefore, and eat, and give to those who hunger; for it shall not fail thee or them for ever!

CHAPTER I

THE NEW PROPHECY

OF THE BEGINNING OF THE EARTH-LIFE—AND AFTER

FROM everlasting to everlasting there is God—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Who is Truth, and Life, and Law; the One only God, Almighty; whose way is holiness, and whose heart is love.

By His purpose and might the earth gathered itself together, enchaining its fires, and purifying itself in storms. Darkness was upon it, and a waste of waters; but over it was the spirit of God, of whose brooding came light, and the separate land, and the visible heavens, and day, and night; and the unveiling of the earth's face before the sun, and life, and death.

God gave life to the sea, and the naked desolation of the land He clothed with greenness. The flowering herb and seeded grass possessed the level places of the earth with loveliness; and mighty pines, outfacing angry winds, took hold upon the barren ridges of the mountains. And God fashioned living creatures of infinite design, and gifted each with joy of its own place.

To the lion He gave lordship in the darkness, and

to the eagle dominion of the day; cunning to the wolf, and swiftness to the antelope and the wild ass; the shrivelled rock and burning sand to the serpent; a lair to the strong, and burrow, and form, and watery retreat to the weak; to the bird a nest; to the bee the flower and the hive; and to all, fellowship.

And God multiplied His creatures, and changed them from strength to strength, and increased them in beauty and excellence; until all the earth was filled with the glory of His handiwork, and the marvel of His wisdom was manifest from pole to pole.

Then in the fulness of time God breathed into Man the breath of His own spirit, and Man became a living soul in the likeness and after the image of the All Father. And the soul of Man grew in stature and grace after its kind—Godlike—and made manifest the divinity of its life and likeness, by new desire, and new delight: even by desire to know and understand the things of God; and by delight in the beauty and excellence which it discerned in all His marvellous work.

So was the life of the world the gift of God, and all its order and increase by His governance and blessing, from whom all things come, and to whom all things progress. And by His latest gift, we are become verily the Sons of God, born of His spirit, and endowed with love and apprehension of His rule. We have come under a new law—the law of likeness—a law of spiritual relationship with the Master of Life, urgent upon us to honour and obey our Overlord and

Father: a law which is written not upon tables of stone, but upon every human soul: a law pulsing in every heart-beat; exigent upon every moment; compelling body, soul, and spirit to conformity, and penalising all waywardness and wrongdoing with most sure misfortune. It is the Spiritual Law for us, by whose operation we discern all things to be manifestations of our divine Father, and apprehend in all things the wisdom and joy of the Supreme Mind—infinite and wonderful, yet not unlike our own.

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” And the Sons of God echo: It *is* very good!

Like grows to like, and has understanding of its kind. We must be like, to apprehend; we must admire, to see; we must love, to know.

THE TRAVAIL OF YOUTH

Yet are the Sons of God but as babes born unto trouble and contention. For the wisdom that was in the dark womb of the past ages, is continually striving within them now for righteous adjustment with the desire of the new life of the Spirit, which is manifestly immature, uncertain, and unhappy.

All the things of prophecy—the prophet's isolation, and entranced vision, and intent listening; his questioning, and doubt, and assurance; his sincerity of soul, and the compelled utterance of his message: all

the things of the religions—creed, observance, ritual, charity, persecution, self-abasement, ecstasy of fanaticism, heroic and ignoble self-denial, devotion faithful unto death: all the things of the arts—the rejoicing in the harmony and beauty of the heavens and the earth, and the endeavour to combine in order and loveliness accordant with the principles of excellence manifest in the divine invention: all the things of the sciences—the noble curiosity of research, the unwearied interest of discovery, and the sublime satisfaction of knowledge: all things whatsoever distinguishable as human—all compassion, hope, and aspiration; all discontent, and sorrow, and consciousness of dependence; all seeking, waiting, morality, and sin; all heights of human longing, and depths of human despair—are but phenomena of that spiritual life whose law is the law of its divine likeness; phenomena of its travail, immaturity, and imperfection; growing pains of its adolescence; guesses at the meanings of its impulse; essays in worship; and gropings in the dark after conformity.

All these things have contributed to the codes by which the world loosely governs itself, and under whose shelter it is heaping up against itself a vast indebtedness, which now exacts an oppressive interest, and which must inexorably be presently paid in full—in blood and tears, and humiliation of degradation and delay. For the conservation of the world in matters of law and custom is not grounded upon assurance of

righteousness, but upon doubt of the wisdom of every effort at reformation. It is certain only of the uncertainty on which all its legislation is based; and it endures much that is notoriously wrong and wasteful, in its dread of greater evils. Its reforms are but as timid patchwork, or a pruning away of the most offensive excrescences; and it dares not strike home at the very roots of its unhappiness, lest its whole estate should be tumbled down in ruins. Therefore is all our government confessedly tentative, and all our laws are things of mere expediency—poor adaptations to circumstance and occasion; compromises between the ideal and the convenient; between the better and the worse—in default of information of a living law of conformity to the government of God, to give unity and certainty to all our endeavour.

Of this last, which is to us the eternal law of the Spirit—our master law of likeness—I venture to prophesy to a world void of understanding of its sovereignty. For in our likeness of spirit to the Spirit of God, I discern the supreme fact of our being, and the whole law of our life.

THE SPIRITUAL MAN

The immortal saying that enshrines our true religion—telling of our birth in the very likeness of the Spirit of God—was set long ago amid the gleaming phosphorescences of Babylonian myth in the Hebrew

“Book of the Creation”; where it has remained unrecognised and unhonoured; the while its setting has been magnified by priests as holy, and its self-consuming luminousness has been adored by men as true reflection of the Sun of Righteousness.

Only the Hebrew prophets discerned somewhat of the meanings of the saying, and only to the last of them was there given clear vision of its glory. But in these latter days it is becoming more and more apparent to common sight, that in very truth we are of one spirit with that of the Designer and Ruler of the universe.

It has moreover been discovered to us that in our mortal life we are of one blood and one history with all earth dwellers—with the beast of the field and the bird of the air; with the monsters of the deep, and the microscopic infusoria whose millions find a world of space for all their activities in a drop of stagnant water.

Even as the prophetic revelation of the origin and being of the spiritual man is a matter about which all the prophets are agreed; so also, all the sciences that are concerned directly or collaterally with the problems of the past and present life of the world, are agreed as to the truth of the recent revelation of the history and being of the natural man.

Therefore we are possessed to-day of two distinct revelations of Man. The one, prophetic, spiritual, and ancient; the other, scientific, natural, a disclosure of

yesterday. And each is approved as true by the absolute agreement of its witnesses. So that we know now, for the first time, the fundamental truth of our whole being and dual relationship. There is given into our hand the key of that mystery which has ever perplexed the wisest—the mystery of our own nature, whose working towards a better adjustment of its parts has hitherto been marked by extreme uncertainty, extravagance, and mishap, by reason of the blindness and immaturity of the nobler part. We have disclosed to us at long last the true manhood.

Of creation we know nothing whatever, either in the theological or any other sense. We know, and can know, nothing whatever of God, as the Creator. We know that “the great globe itself” and “all which it inherit” are what they are by the continuous operation through incalculable ages, of forces that inform and move all things now even as they have done from the beginning. Beyond that knowledge there is the impenetrable and incomprehensible mystery of God; of whom the heavens, with all their ordered hosts of incommunicative stars, are silent with a pitiless and awful silence, but the familiar Earth is eloquent in response to the questioning of her children, and in the wonderful manifestations of life discourses to them continually of the universal life that is God. We discern Him in the primordial living matter in which the earth-life began; and in the

change, and increase, and progress of the life—in all the attainment of its ancient nature, and in all the aspiration of its new spirit, there is manifest to us who inherit both estates the glory of the All Father in whose likeness we are fashioned. We have learned that the dawn of the earth-life was long after the Earth's separate existence as a planet swinging round the sun, and long before Man's endowment with a living soul in the divine likeness. We know that it was ordained that the Earth should attain to a certain maturity before it became the fruitful earth-mother: and that the same ordinance has governed the earth-life itself; which, only in its maturity, gave birth to that Spiritual Life, which distinguishes humanity above all that was aforesaid. The natural life, therefore, is a mature life, evolved and perfected during many millions of years according to the ordinance of God. In all its history, throughout all its vicissitude and struggle and splendid accomplishment, it is a thing of infinite delight and interest to every mind at one with the divine Mind, whose wisdom and love it manifests. For of a truth, the natural life of the world is even as the spiritual, in the likeness of God; fashioned after His thought, upheld throughout all its change by His providence, and established in all its variety of excellence in fulfilment of His purpose.

But the Spiritual Life is a recent birth. It is a life so immature and inexperienced, that while it is the dominant element of the present time, it is a most

disturbing and unhappy element, because of its very imperfect adjustment to its environment. Its desire is wayward and uncertain; its hope is but of escape from its perplexities; its vision is undiscerning of the pitfalls in its path; its knowledge is insufficient for its guidance; and its faith is a congeries of doubts. And we, with all the marvels of our civilisation, are of its beginning; and participate in its early travail and bewilderment. We are ambitious of its mature estate, with the natural impatience of childhood; and though, it may be, we can in some slight degree hasten or retard its advance, we cannot alter its ordinance or anticipate its consummation. We move as it moves, with the movement of the infinite whole; and for the moment it would appear that we are but compelled, by the insistence of its discontent, to laborious activities superfluous to the simple needs of the natural life, unwitting why we toil! Its evolution may be, and probably is, as slow as that of the natural life; and if so, then its fulfilment on the earth must be in a future that is yet immeasurably distant. But even now our eyes are open to see, while yet our hands are too feeble to grasp; and by the grace of God it is given to us to see, for our guidance in this our own day, the truth sufficient for the day, that we are of one blood and one history with all earth-dwellers, and of one spirit and one future with the Designer and Governor of the universe.

THE NEW RELIGION

Every time lives by its own light, is compelled by its own necessity, and is judged by its dealing with its own occasion. This time cannot rest on the labour of yesterday, or be bound within the horizon of yesterday's vision and wisdom ; neither can it mark out strict boundaries for to-morrow. But even as the prophets of old discerned God in the facts of their own time, and prophesied of Him to their own peoples in their own days, so we, by the ascertained facts of this present, must judge for ourselves the tenure of the present—whether it is of prophecy or priestcraft ? of history or myth ? of true religion or superstition ? of worship or idolatry ?

For this is a new day, and a different. A day of knowledge so swiftly and vastly increased, that we live in a new world of thought, and are possessed of new powers exceeding even the wildest dreams of our forefathers. The lightning has become our messenger, and mighty forces hitherto withheld from our ken and rule now obediently serve our common needs, and minister to our ambitions, whether they are good or evil. With the knowledge that is power there is given to us also a knowledge that is wisdom ; all-sufficient I believe, in the event, for the good guidance of the world in its dealing with its new endowment, yet whose immediate operation is to loosen the bands of old restraint, and to give greater liberty to the strong

thief to do that which seems right in his own eyes. If we might presume to judge the methods of the Almighty as we judge human affairs, we might well be doubtful of the graciousness of a gift of power in advance of the wisdom and righteousness required for its proper use. We ourselves are careful to safeguard our children against the fire, but that does not seem to be God's way of dealing with us; perhaps because we very hardly learn wisdom unless it is burnt into us over and over again? For, as I read the signs of the time, the fire we have to work or play with is fiercer than any that ever was before; while the old fire-screens are all more or less worn out and unserviceable, and no new ones have as yet been set up in their place; and in the present conjuncture of vastly increased power, with a licence of general unbelief in a judgment to come, I see, notwithstanding my assured good hope of the future, a threatening of imminent disaster in the present.

Judged by the standards of prophecy, modern civilisation is weighed in the balance and found wanting in the things of God. The faith of Christianity has ended in a Christendom armed to the teeth, not against the heathen and the savage, but against itself; each Christian nation scowling across its frontiers at its neighbours, and worshipping at home a fetish of Patriotism whose head and trunk, and legs and feet, are Self. The Religion of the time is wanting in the power to convince men of the truth of its teaching, and

in the wisdom to persuade them to conform themselves to the righteous requirement of the divine government. Yet it is only in Religion that I can discern a better hope of human life. That is to say, in the uprising of a Religion based upon the approved facts of life which are accordant with, and complementary to the revelation of true prophecy. A Religion acknowledging the actuality of the relationship between the human soul and that which it is able to apprehend in all things as God, and the relationship of every man to his fellow-man; and therefore urgent upon all men for reverence and worship towards God, and for justice, mercy, and entire sincerity of dealing towards Man. A simple, true, prophetic Religion; that in the beginning shall bind together true believers in one faith and one endeavour, and that in the end shall win all the world to a glad allegiance to its gracious Law of Likeness.

There is required of us absolute sincerity of dealing with the absolutely assured truth. With the passing of half truths that could be only half believed, there must pass also the half-hearted era of compromise and toleration which now marks the highest point of the world's attainment, but which is far below the level of its potential righteousness. For there is no crime forbidden in the Decalogue that may not be, and is not, openly committed with impunity within the area of restraint imposed by the present human laws; and if we disregard the

higher and more intimate law whose veto was in the past invested in the religious with visible and acknowledged authority over all the things of men, it will assuredly be brought home to us with many stripes. For God is yet above all, and all are under His law, within whose courts there is no cover for falsehood or excuse, and from whose judgments there is no escape.

Though the Religions are discredited and un-honoured, though the veils of their holy places are torn across and honest men point the finger of derision at the exposed figments of priestcraft that were sometime of real service to the commonweal, but that ever tended to obstruction, and are now notoriously false and of disservice, yet they stood for true things which are true always. Then, in a way, they were themselves true; but now they stand not for but against the true things, and uphold only manifest lies. How shall men deal sincerely with the facts of life, so long as they are born and trained up in an atmosphere of make-believe? For if they come later on to any real faith, it can only be at the cost of faith in the sincerity of almost all their fellows. They inevitably learn a lesson that only a very few may learn with impunity from terrible demoralisation. They learn that not only is the whole fabric of human society woven with lies—that of itself would not be necessarily demoralising—but that the lies are manifest, tolerated, and maintained

by the common consent of the world to a pretence of belief in them, in which iniquity they have been carefully trained to participate.

But it is the part of prophecy to insist upon sincerity of life as the first requirement of God. It has no toleration for pretences; it uplifts the truth on the one hand, and is unsparing of denunciation of lies on the other. For it *believes*, and therefore it dares to disbelieve and to call upon the world to regenerate itself in accordance with its convictions both of truth and falsehood.

Sincerity of soul is the divine in us made perfect.

He who dares tell the truth of himself to himself is not far from the kingdom of God.

The fool said in his pride, I have sinned against God, and behold, his anger is kindled against me! This he said, not of his exceeding folly, but of the greatness of his soul.

The fool of fools looked upon the good work of God and said, It is a snare of the Evil One. And he went and hid himself.

How shall man, whose dwelling-place is but a spark struck from the anvil of the sun, and all whose generations are rounded by the moment of its cooling, sin against the Most High God?

A man sins against himself, judges himself, and executes judgment upon himself, whether he will or not, according to the law of his being.

The naked truth is a magnet for the mean inventions of the undiscerning.

THE FACT OF LIKENESS

“I and the Father are one.”—ST. JOHN, x. 30.

While I take it to be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the account of the creation of things and after-happenings—the fall of Adam and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Deluge, and other like matters—given in the book of Genesis cannot be credited as divine revelation of actual fact, at the same time I recognise that it embodies a large part, and perhaps the best part, of the guessing at the problem of human life by the thinkers of the ancient world. It is myth, in which is recorded the thought of many generations of men who in their day did very great things, but who could not tell, any more than we can, the secret of the Beginning. And regarding it as a summary of human thought about the matters in question during a period of time much longer than that which separates to-day from the time when Genesis was written, may we not expect to find in it some discernment of eternal truth, some beginnings of thought not all astray? For the Biblical “revelation” is no mere haphazard collection of crude ideas from very ancient and barbarous sources. Its thought had come down to the time of the Hebrew scribes along noble channels running right through the heart of the world’s

greatest civilisations, and assuredly not without examination and speculation on the part of minds not less acute and earnest than the leading minds of the present time. Babylon and Egypt were not wrought by pigmies, but by men of supreme energy and genius. There were giants in those days!—workers, thinkers, and seers—and a revelation that undoubtedly embodies many of their conclusions was not unlikely to maintain itself against all challenge of reformation from the intelligence of Europe. The challenge even of the present time is not in the conceit of superior wisdom, but in the assurance of better knowledge. We can judge the value of the old-world ideas by standards unknown before, and in proportion to the new discovery is the requirement of impartial judgment from us.

Moreover, I regard this matter from the standpoint of an assured belief in the divine inspiration; that is to say, I believe in the illumination of the human mind by the influence of the divine universal Mind that informs all things—in inspiration as a part of the divine government of the universe, and therefore as corresponding in its method with the law of the whole; in a prophetic inspiration that was from the very beginning of the spiritual life, ministrant to its growth, and that is in operation now upon the minds of all sorts and conditions of men, stirring the dull soul of the existing savage with thought similar to the thought of our remote

ancestors as impartially as it illuminates the nations whose complacent faith has quite certainly grown up out of the preceding superstition. Obviously this inspiration must always have been commensurate with the knowledge and understanding of the people illuminated by it: with the suggestion of the things they knew. And the knowledge of the early civilisations, in respect of things which are suggestive of spiritual truth, was very little less than that of a century ago; which fact brings the earlier time, in this regard, very close upon our own, and makes it the less surprising that the discernment of the present, measured by the teaching of the Churches and the common belief, has hardly at all changed from what it was in the days of Ezra. Therefore, while I was sometime convinced of the mistake of a great part of the Biblical revelation, I could not think that it was all a mistake. Although, not content with such truth as was suggested and sustained by the actual facts of life, men had presumed to speculate beyond the range of legitimate inference from those facts, and had called their illusions inspired revelation, yet withal there must be, I thought, a vein of very truth running through the whole which, if one could but find it, would approve itself to be natural in the method of its evolution, consistent with itself from first to last—as truly inspired thought must be—and absolutely accordant with the suggestion of modern discovery. I have found that vein of truth

in certain Hebrew prophecy; and I believe that it is urgently required of the present time to distinguish the *presumption* of the Bible from the prophetic *truth* in it which was suggested to the seers of old by the things that they certainly knew.

For the time is rich in new knowledge, the gift of new freedom. The old bigotry and intolerance are muzzled, and wise and sincere men have been free to seek after God where He is most certainly to be found, in the manifest operation of His Spirit in the earth-life; and through their labours we do know quite certainly somewhat of the method of His working. They have looked for Him, not afar but near at hand; in the kingdom of God that is within us and all about us. They have sown in our own acre of His infinite domain, have weeded out many tares, and have reaped and harvested the season's yield of golden sheaves ready for our thrashing. Our very bread of life is in these things, a free gift to us, if only we also deal with them in the spirit of the harvesters, sincerely and in all humility; in the spirit of the new humility which has grown up alongside with the new certainty: which is diffident of all presumption, and is content with assured veracities.

Here by the way I would warn the reader against the idea that modern research is animated by what the pulpits denounce as the spirit of infidelity.

On the contrary, the prevailing and righteous ambition of the scientist is the discovery of what may be certainly believed, and the recent exposure of much that is incredible has been but incidental to such discovery. I do not understand the belief in God that looks with suspicion and disfavour upon the labours of those who have brought to light the things of God which were unknown aforetime. I do not understand the distinction between a "revealed" and a "natural" God in any real sense, for the true God is One. I see clearly that to prophetic discernment of the true God in the known facts of His work and rule, we owe all revelation of Him.

In the visible things of their own time: in birth and life and death; in the continuity of growth and decay and renewal; in the rhythmical procession of the heavens, unailing in gracious influence above the earth; in the infinite variety and beauty of living things, and the excellent fitness of them all to the conditions of their environment; the prophets discerned that unity of design and government which was to them revelation of the One God, beside whom there is none other.

In the fact of their own understanding of the excellence and appreciation of the loveliness of the work, they discerned their own likeness to its spirit, and they prophesied of the beginning, that when God made all these things He made man a living soul like unto Himself.

These two great conceptions animate the whole body of Hebrew prophecy, and the first is incorporated in the Hebrew religion as the supreme article of faith. But no religion intelligently recognises the meaning and consequence of the second, though its living principle informs all ideas of religion. Christianity, while degrading the conception of the unity of God, absolutely rejects the prophecy of man's divine likeness, except only as retrospective of the original condition of the first man.

But let us examine this retrospective prophecy for ourselves, and endeavour to estimate its own proper value as divinely inspired thought. It is written: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And again, further on: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Of itself this is plainly no less than a prophecy of our likeness of spirit to the Divinity that informs all things. But unhappily it is clothed upon with myth that gives occasion for doubt of its meaning in this exalted sense. In the same book it is also written that Adam begat a son "in his own image, and after his likeness;" and it has been argued that the meaning of the writer, or writers, is in both passages identical, and indicates no more than a conception of human likeness such as was the inevitable corollary of a conception of God evolved from human ideals. But I am not concerned

with the ideas of the *writers*; I am not contending for the authority of the *book*; but on the contrary, I am endeavouring to distinguish between its prophecy and its myth; and if, as is probable, Genesis was compiled at the close of the great prophetic era by men who were familiar with the prophesying of Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, it is not difficult to account for the inclusion among its fossil remains of ancient tradition of a prophecy that is not a fossil of extinct thought, but is a survival dominating the thought of all time. Obviously the prophecy and the myth do not correspond, for there is no divine likeness discoverable in Adam, who acts not as God does, or as the Creator would have him act, but very differently; and who becomes not only outcast from Eden, and estranged from God, but according to the interpretation of the New Testament, he loses such divine likeness as that interpretation may credit him with having possessed. *May* credit him with, I say, for I confess that I am unable to determine what the Apostolic idea of the original likeness amounts to. I can find only denial of the *fact* of our inherent likeness, which is at one with the misapprehension of the Old Testament scribe. That is the mischief of the myth. It smothers the inspired disclosure under rubbish of crude conjecture, that breeds denial of true prophecy. It sets forth our divine likeness in a disguise of falsehood, confounds it with all the rest of the incredible and misleading story, and makes of it a mere incident without after

consequence. But the prophecy declares a fact of the utmost consequence. It is revelation of the inherent divine likeness of the *race*—of the life principle of all its spiritual phenomena—and our acceptance of it need not be hindered by any circumstance of its mythical setting, for its truth does not depend upon the authority of any Scripture, or of any one prophecy. It is manifest in all true prophecy; and whether clearly discerned and held as an article of faith, or entertained unwittingly, it is to be found in all the ideas of worship which have informed the world's religions. There could be no religion without conscious or unconscious recognition of it as a fact; for ideas of requirement on the one side, and of obligation on the other; of sovereignty and service, beneficence and thanksgiving, offence and propitiation, judgment and punishment or reward—which are the elementary ideas of religion—must of necessity presuppose likeness between God and Man.

Admitting the remoteness and naturalness of its origin, the conception is thereby in no degree discredited as true prophecy, which accordant with the divinity of its inspiration moves altogether with the general advance and illumination of the world. Admitting that it was born of seeming mistake—of the primitive idea of a God, manlike—it yet was an inspired birth which survived the contradiction of the real mistake that followed: the presumption of a God whose being and working are utterly unlike our

own. For the conception of God in Genesis was essentially unlike the primitive idea, and its magnitude, and yet more its difference, are so far from being suggestive of likeness on the part of man, that they would seem to make the retention of the primitive idea of correlative likeness impossible: yet we see that it was retained, notwithstanding its incompatibility with the later misapprehension. God, as the creator of the heavens and the earth; whose work was done by a word; made perfect out of hand at once, and sustained in all its perfection by the good-will of its Almighty Author; was a conception that assuredly could not suggest our divine likeness but, on the contrary, since it was adopted by Christianity, it has been a fatal stumbling-block in the way of our apprehension of the reality and consequence of that likeness. All that the earlier seers knew, or thought that they knew, of God and the method of His working, was in striking contrast to man in every particular; and the comparison that suggests and confirms belief in the fact of likeness between them, is possible only to knowledge of which the prophets were not possessed. We must look therefore, not to any comparison which they could make between man and their conception of the Worker; but to their apprehension of the work itself as accomplished fact—apart from all misconception of the method of its accomplishment—for the true suggestion of their discernment of the intimate likeness of the Worker to themselves. In that

apprehension, it appears to me that the truth is self-evident. The spirit of the *work* corresponds with the spirit of Man, which must therefore be akin to the spirit of the Worker! What other evidence is required to establish the fact of Likeness? The comparison that we can make in this day, between the divine and the human operation, may serve to bring home the truth to the popular mind; but to the prophetic mind no comparison can add anything by way of proof to that which is manifest in the spiritual correspondence of Man with the accomplishment of God.

We can make no comparison of humanity with the Gods of the Creeds, that would be in any way convincing. They are heterogeneous compounds of inconceivable strangeness, and of incredible familiarity; nor does the God of our Western creed differ in these two main elements from the rest. The strangeness is a presumption of absolute ignorance, in a matter which is absolutely impenetrable; the familiarity belongs to an idolatrous conception evolved from human attributes—a conjunction of human qualities invested with superhuman magnitude. Nor can we compare the spirit of man with a presumed Creator of the universe, whose being is a mystery altogether beyond our understanding, and whose operation is autocratic and arbitrary; or with the familiar deity of Christianity; for we have no proof that the New Testament revelation of the Trinity is a revelation of fact. And it is imperative that all

comparison we make must be comparison of fact. I write, therefore, of things we know—things of the spirit of man; and things of the universal spirit, that is now even as it was before we were. For we *must* suppose that this life and thought of ours came, not of lifelessness and no-thought, but of life and thought that was before us. And though we know nothing of the origin of things, and may never know; though we can conceive no theory of a beginning; yet, it seems to me that we cannot but believe that the universal life and thought are that which is from everlasting to everlasting; and what better name can we give to it than the great name of God?

I write of God here, therefore, not in the sense of a preconceived idea of His being and attributes, but in the broad sense of an existence that all must recognise. For by our own native thought, we are able to discern in all things the operation of other thought. Call it what we may—force, or law; natural or spiritual; call it even by many names, for this or that manifestation of its energy—there is no man of thought who does not recognise as a fact, the existence of a supreme power that informs and orders all things that are, in a way corresponding with the thought with which we ourselves are endowed. I know that I think, and I am sufficiently assured of the fact of other men's thought by manifestations like unto those of my own. Just as surely, must we not discern the universal operation to be a manifestation of

thought? the universal force to be a spiritual force?—since we can apprehend the order, balance, and excellence of the universe, only by the spirit of us which is instinct with corresponding principles of order, proportion, and harmony. I write then of *facts* of God: facts of operation manifest in the whole known universe outside ourselves, in which thought is approved to us in the same way, and with the same certainty, as it is in the facts of our own being and activities.

We discern in all things great and small—in the wide universe of stars, and in every common thing on earth; in the immutable sea, and the gracious clouds and ever-changing rivers; in ourselves; in every whole, and in every part—the manifestations of a spirit working to ends which we understand, and in which our souls delight. Moreover, it has become clear to *us* that One Spirit governs all—that the universe thinks as a whole—and that the law which controls the life of the smallest earthly organism, and which holds the grain of sand in its place or lends it to the winds, is law that rules all space and all things that are.

Plainly the inference of modern discovery is in agreement with the prophetic revelation of the unity of God; and the modern discovery of the method of the divine operation will, I think, be found to be equally in agreement with the prophecy of the divine likeness of man.

Conceived as a miracle of days, the divine work in the accomplishment of the earth-life, forbids all thought

of comparison on our part. But when we learn that it is not a miracle of days, but of incalculable ages of progressive change; that at the outset it was a very small and simple thing, a something without form almost, or parts; something with—just life! and that its increase was imperceptibly slow and gradual; that the wonder of its infinite variety and complexity and vast difference, was attained only after experiment upon experiment, and essay upon essay; then, although it remains no less a miracle, we can discern in it method which is obviously suggestive of likeness to human thought and endeavour. It indicates Thought careful of its earliest attempt; rejoicing over it and multiplying it by millions, and presently making some slight addition to one or more of the millions: Thought taking advantage of accident suggestive of change and new developments; following the diverse suggestion along many channels, here approving the result and there setting it aside; testing the promise of all variation, and making choice of the best to be further wrought upon with infinite patience and delight; investing its work with new elements of grace, and adapting its inventions to circumstances and occasion; to the limitation of necessity, and to the scope of opportunity. There is indication of magnificent power and opulent design, but the power is not arbitrary, and the design is progressive and controlled.

Nor is the progress confined to manifestations of supreme intelligence; there is a gradual unfolding

of supreme goodness as well. In the condition of things in the middle Life-period of the earth—the Mesozoic period of geology—there is but very slight indication of the grace and gentleness of the subsequent evolution. Imagine a small community of human beings in the present stage of moral and æsthetic development put back into the Mesozoic time, and think how repellant to their good dispositions would be almost everything in their surroundings. A steamy atmosphere in which the lower forms of plant life flourish excessively—an “age of cycads”—a mad world of gigantic horsetails, rushes, and mosses, overwhelming with cruel luxuriance of growth the struggling promise of more varied grace of leaf and exquisite loveliness of flower; all the higher ground in the grip of gloomy forests of pines, yews, and cypresses, dark, oppressive, funereal; without charm of birds, or song more cheerful than the complaining of the lost winds in the endless maze of dismal umbrage. An age of reptiles! creatures that we instinctively abhor, and use the very name of as most expressive of evil. That reptile! “a reptile press!”—it is our last word of disgust and detestation. And reptiles, in the Mesozoic time, were the hideous tyrants of the earth. The seas swarmed with huge fish-lizards (*Ichthyosauri* and *Plesiosauri*) and with veritable sea-serpents, seventy or eighty feet long, terrible in strength, swiftness, and rapacity; the rivers and estuaries, with forms allied to the

existing crocodiles, but vastly larger, more active and dangerous—the Teleosaurus attaining to a length of thirty feet, with an opening of jaw that could have taken in a man at a mouthful. Fifty feet long and ten high, the Ceteosaurus thrust its huge bulk through the giant rushes and screw-pines of the marshes, withal its size maybe not altogether secure from fear of such a terrible neighbour as the Megalosaurus, a monster sixty or seventy feet long, with teeth like knife and saw combined. In the forests there roamed other rapacious Dinosaurs, and the herbivorous Iguanodon needed all its vastness and strength for protection against its carnivorous congeners.

Now here are facts beyond dispute, which seem to me of tremendous import. There was an incalculable period of time during which the whole earth was one dreadful arena of terror and carnage, during which it would seem that the Spirit of Life was not inclined to graciousness and mercy, but delighted in evolving to the extreme of perfection creatures endowed with powers and dispositions most destructive and revolting. We know that a more gentle and beautiful life was even then on the way: some reptiles were changing into bird-like forms, and a few small mammals indicated a happier age to come; but we cannot ignore the fact that the proem of the better time was prodigal of energy in evil; or say in what from our present standpoint we regard as such.

What are we to infer from these things? First

of all, can we determine whether the facts of the evolution of life are, one and all, facts of the divine operation—facts of the one God—or are they facts of a ceaseless strife between two mighty forces; a Spirit of Good, and a Spirit of Evil, very cunningly balanced? Christianity, taking account only of the “good” and “evil” of the present, is absolute for the hypothesis of antagonism, which it predicts will end in separation—with the balance practically level between heaven and hell! It is not the hypothesis of prophecy; and I venture to say that it can never be the inference of science.

Rapacity, cruelty, carnage, insecurity, fear, pain, and death—if these things are evil, then it is at least certain that evil was long before man’s advent on the earth. And far beyond! Do not the stars, which mark the limit of our utmost thought of time, tell of birth and death, of interchange, and gain, and loss, from everlasting? Good and evil, as we apprehend them, are in truth so closely interwoven in all things, that no human ingenuity can separate them, or conceive a workable theory of the universe based upon the severance. But the natural sciences do not recognise the Devil! They know nothing of any illegitimate force that ever in the slightest breaks in upon the operation of universal law with irresponsible and unaccountable confusion. Therefore we cannot take the phenomena of life in the Mesozoic time to be the work of an evil spirit,

against which the spirit of God was slowly, but surely, making headway. We must regard all such matters as facts of the divine operation, and we ought to confine our conclusions to the limit of legitimate inference from the facts.

For my own part, I confess that I am unable to discern in them any suggestion sufficient for assured belief in the transcendental attributes which theologians conceive as of necessity pertaining to God. There is a great gulf fixed between the infinite inconceivable whole, and the part which is our world, which no thought of ours can pass over; and I can discover no evidence for, or against, the theological ideas of a mathematical righteousness, eternal foreknowledge, foreordination, and the like, on our side of the gulf. Belief of that sort seems to me to be belief in we know not what, that amounts to nothing at all. It belongs to that inconceivable strangeness of "revealed religion" which has no foundation of actual fact, and nothing in it of human likeness; and which is outside the extreme limit of human concern. I do not presume to say, that in the divine thought there may not be perfect foreknowledge of the end from the beginning. I say that I cannot tell! It can be no more certainly inferred from the divine operation that is known to us, than human foreknowledge can be inferred from the human operation—no more, say, from the evolution of an Ichthyosaurus, than from that of an Atlantic liner. We know very well

that the complex mechanism, the art and exquisite adaptation of the latter, were altogether beyond the foreknowledge of the savage who, ages long ago, first adventured upon the water in a hollowed log. We know that the size of the present day ocean racer was deemed impossible by experts, even a few years back. Yet if we suppose an intelligent being, from another planet, investigating these things—premising the condition that men were invisible to him—it is obvious that he might just as reasonably deduce foreknowledge from the manifestations of thought apparent in the evolution of the steamship, as from what is manifest in that of the Ichthyosaurus. But supposing him to be a little more intelligent than the theologians, we may credit him with deductions of another sort. He might not unreasonably deduce absolute identity of mind from the operation manifest in both instances, for the intimate likeness apparent in the method of the evolution—notwithstanding the vast difference in the quality of the workmanship—could hardly fail of recognition. *That* conclusion would be at one with the deduction of prophecy from all that is certainly known of the things of God and Man.

Of course we can make no comparison of equality. But there may be likeness despite extreme inequality and most obvious difference. Nor is the likeness for which I contend, the remote likeness that is apparent in all things; for there is nothing that has not something in common with all else. Speak-

ing of God as the All in All—Life, Thought, and Matter of the Universe—why then, in a narrow sense, every animal that moves of its own will, may be said to be formed in the image of God. The question is one of degree—of *our* degree of likeness—and the comparison which I make in support of the prophecy of man's spiritual birth in the very likeness of the spirit of God, must not be confounded with such as indicates only remote and general likeness; but is comparison of likeness that is essential, intimate, and unique.

The patient research that has traced the operation of the earth-life from the time of its earliest manifestation, onwards to that of its great attainment immediately preceding the advent of Man; far from discrediting the retrospective prophecy of the spiritual birth, meets it with a great treasure of new suggestion that is in perfect correspondence with the inspired disclosure. It brings us to a stage—which we may put comprehensively as at the close of the Tertiary period—where the earth-life would appear to have fulfilled itself according to the old order, except in mere detail of adjustment. At the same time, all its long history up to that point, suggests a further advance of a very striking and noble sort. But there has been no such advance, except only in one species; which fact, of itself, indicates a new departure, and is without precedent example. And it is plain that no human intelligence

could have anticipated such an advance as that which actually occurred. The naturalist, given that he knew everything that is now known of the preceding history of the earth-life, and of the method and factors of its evolution; could not conceivably have deduced the possibility of humanity. He might, indeed, have reasonably expected the evolution, from some one or more of the existing forms, of a new class of vertebrates, far excelling any of the old, in structure and faculty, and admirably fitted to the conditions of a future in which the unseen balance of the spirit of life would be inclined yet more from the side of rapacity and terror, to that of gentleness and serenity. But there was no indication whatever, at that stage, of any evolution of life beyond the limits suggested by its previous amelioration. The close of the Tertiary period brings us to the verge of a vast gulf of difference, from the other side of which nothing can be discerned of what is upon the inconceivable height of this.

But standing upon the height, on this side the gulf; the prophets discerned the difference to be spiritual—the new departure to be no less than a new birth, manifest in the new interests, delights, and aspirations which belong only to the spirit of Man. From the same standpoint, while, moreover, we are possessed of knowledge of the preceding operation, which they had not, we apprehend in the new departure, the assurance of a more intimate

interest, a dearer love, and a will for the joy of a new and gracious companionship of spirit, on the part of the Infinite. That last I take to be purely prophetic inference, yet, all the same, it appears to me to be perfectly natural and reasonable inference from the new facts of the progressive operation of God in the earth-life. It is independent inference from the facts of God, which is nevertheless identical with the ancient prophetic inference from the facts of man. What the seers of old saw in the marvellous correspondence of our spirit with that which is manifest in the divine work; I see also to be plainly manifest in the method by which the work is done. The new discovery confirms the truth of the old prophecy, and enables us to fill in details of value to its essential greatness. It presents the truth to us in better perspective, in connection with other truth that was before its time. It reveals to us our proper place in the history of the earth-life, and gives promise that through its illumination we may presently come to a better understanding of the requirement belonging to our relationship with and likeness to the divine spirit that is in all things.

With the increase of our knowledge, may we not hope to see at least a decrease of presumption in matters beyond our knowing? More than ever before, it seems to me, it behoves us to walk humbly with our God. For all that we know demonstrates the more certainly that all around us there is a

vast gulf, beyond which is the unknown and the inconceivable. Even of what is and has been, we know only somewhat of the Divine Thought that is *like our own*. We can know nothing whatever of it that is unlike ours; nothing of its difference, except that there must be an immeasurable difference in degree. Yet assuredly there must be an inconceivable difference also, in the thought that of itself alone wrought the visible universe; and in this day who shall presume to limit God to the bounds of imaginings that can never soar beyond our own endowment of likeness to Him? Of all beyond the apprehension which comes of that likeness let us be content to say—we cannot tell—we do not know!

Standing on the edge of the world we know, we do imagine thoughts—ghosts of thoughts—in the void beyond. We imagine presences unseen, intangible, vast—thoughts of infinite power and consequence, luminous if only our eyes could see their light; not threatening but kindly, not dreadful but lovely—only, it would seem, the fulfilment of their love to us is not yet. But we cannot know that they are anything more than ghosts of our own thought drifting onward; whispers, echoing back to us our own longings. So certainly not yet is the face to face revelation that maybe awaits; so profoundly is the mystery of that other world of thought impressed upon us, whenever we try to grasp somewhat of its suggestion from the veil that

hides its glory, that when we turn from it, even to what is properly our own field of inquiry, we confront a host of doubts, and cannot but acknowledge how hardly we may distinguish between the real and the unreal; and between what we assuredly know, and what we only think we know.

But it is certain that we can know nothing of God except through our likeness of spirit to what He has revealed of Himself in "the things of God" which we can see and apprehend. The inspiration of prophecy, while illuminating that revelation, is strictly limited to its confines; and the God of Hebrew prophecy, from first to last, is God manifest in facts of likeness.

Warrior and Friend—Lawgiver and King—Teacher, righteous Ruler, and Benefactor—all these are conceptions of likeness; plain inference from plain revelation—and the last and noblest prophecy of all—the Divine Father of Jesus of Nazareth—is clearly no more than an enlargement of the idea of relationship that informed all the earlier prophecy of the One God.

THE LAW OF LIKENESS

The prophecy of this book is no more than an appreciation of the Truth of our relationship to God, which I discern to have been more clearly set forth in the prophecy of Israel than in that of any other people. There is no other prophecy that is so

consistent, so simple, and so pure—absolutely without taint of idolatry. The noble Hebrew prophets, from first to last, set forth the Divine Government of the world as a Unity; and exalted the way of God, as the only standard of Righteousness for us who are endowed with a Spirit in the Divine Likeness.

That is the sum and substance of their prophecy: the whole revelation of truth that is to be found in prophetic Judaism. I see it to be truth which all the later discovery of the things of God has confirmed and established. Quite surely the universe is God's, and the ordinance thereof. The earth is His, and all which it inherit; and no part of it has been filched out of His careless hand by another. The Spiritual part, which is ours—the last and most gracious gift of God to the world we know—is not as the gift to us of an apple of Sodom, full of bitter ashes; but is the gift of a spirit in His own likeness; of a most intimate relationship which has never been broken, but which, on the contrary, has more clearly revealed itself as unbreakable, as the Spirit of Man has grown towards its maturity.

A prophet is a witness to this truth! “To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” Clearly there is only one revelation of truth on the same plane as that which is distinguished in the saying of Jesus of Nazareth—the truth of One God: whose will and law are manifest to us through

our likeness of spirit to Him—through our Sonship—and in no other way. This is the beginning and the end of the prophetic testimony; for though a prophet may have much to say, he can have only this to tell. Often he can no more than repeat in the same terms the prophecy of a former time; dragging it out from beneath some rubbish-heap of centuries, dusting it a little, and uplifting it afresh in the brighter light of his own day. He may have nothing whatever to add to its essential truth, but it has been given to him to see that truth for himself, and it is required of him, as it was of the others before him, to represent it to the world, pure and without disguise. He is a witness—yet no less a prophet. While the truth has not changed and cannot change—since it is truth of the Eternal—the prophetic apprehension of it has time and again been enlarged, and the prophetic precept has always been subject to change; for though always noble, accordant with the nobility of its foundation, it has ever been partial and of uncertain authority in proportion to the prophet's ignorance of the purpose and method of the divine operation. As the prophets more and more clearly saw the supremacy and sufficiency of the truth of our relationship to God, so did their intolerance of the religious formalities that usurped the place of the plain requirement of the Law of Likeness, grow in intensity and bitterness. They saw that these things

were not aids but hindrances to conformity to the Law. That they were in truth idolatrous, and hateful to God: and the burden of the later prophecy is not more remarkable for its pure and righteous morality, than it is for its implacable antagonism of the priestly degradation of that morality into formal ceremonious observance of ecclesiastical worship. How unsparingly the prophets would have condemned the arbitrary dogma that denies the spiritual likeness, whose law was to them the whole requirement of God, we may readily imagine; but quite surely there was no such dogma in their day, and no prescience of its imposture in the future, in their wildest dreams. It was only after the last of them had sealed his testimony to the Truth "with the glory of martyrdom" that the apostolic dogma, which is absolutely contrary in all its presumptions to "the whole law and the prophets," was imposed upon an ignorant and credulous generation. And then again, as of old—but as I hope and believe, for the last time—was the naked Truth clothed upon with lies; overladen with idolatry and illusion; put away as a thing too hard to be endured; reviled as unrighteousness incarnate; and has so remained for nearly two thousand years, under a cloud of superstition and dissimulation. For the last time, I say, because I discern in the new revelation of our time, a power that is irresistible by the powers of darkness—the power of light, illuminating for the many,

things that aforetime were visible only to a very few—or to one. The solitary watch-tower of the old-time prophet has become the standpoint of an enlightened host, and the old-time presumption and imposture will never again be possible. I see a change, whose consequence must inevitably be fatal to all institutions based upon untruth: a change from the indifference and pretence of half-belief, to a sincerity of spirit upspringing in the new light that is at one with the prophetic sincerity; that must assuredly presently be victorious over dissimulation and injustice; and whose terms of peace will be the irreducible minimum of Righteousness. Verily the things of men have passed away, and the things of God have become new to us. The immutable prophetic truth is as a new revelation after long eclipse. It has put on dignity as a helmet, and power as a breastplate; and it stands no longer alone, pleading in vain to a heedless and purblind generation for acceptance; but it presents itself in the forefront of a mighty army of ascertained facts, the force of whose significance is not to be withstood. Its appeal is not to ignorance, but to knowledge; not to passion, but to reason; not to self-interest, but to charity, loyalty, and self-devotion. It convinces not of sin, but of the Truth: repudiating utterly the doctrine of our alienation from God, and acclaiming our likeness and good-will to Him. Its standard of Righteousness is not hidden behind the veil of a

sanctuary accessible only to the priest; but is disclosed in the open, visible to all—the standard of the Way of God, manifest in the things of God which were known aforetime, and yet more fully manifest in the new revelation of the things of God, which has rewarded the labours of those who have sought Him in spirit and in truth in these latter days.

Ours is a time of religions which, if not yet quite *in extremis*, are assuredly all mortally stricken by the lance of the Angel of Light. We behold the daybreak of a new civilisation which—as was required of all the civilisations of the past—is called upon to fit itself with a Faith equal to its estate. A new civilisation—and a world-wide! For even now when it is in its infancy, its strength is manifest as of a sort that cannot fail presently to break down the ancient barriers between the nations. Therefore its religion must be a world-wide religion; based on verities approved to its intelligence, and embodying precept that shall control its novel and vast energies with the authority of an indubitable Law.

For precept is an integrant part of all religions, and there must be a body of precept in the religion of the new civilisation. It need not be altogether new, or widely different from much of the old religious precept which, in the main, is righteous and charitable; but it must be invested with a new authority which can be recognised by all men as beyond question! It need not be set up on a new

foundation, for all the good precept of the past is really based on the sure foundation of our Likeness of spirit to God—and there is no other possible—but the Law of that Likeness must be acknowledged as the very Truth; and the Way of God, as manifest to our apprehension in His government of this world of ours, must be established in the minds of men, as the one only standard of human righteousness, to whose requirement of conformity is attached the whole divine promise of human progress and well-being. If we reflect, it is obvious that no religious precept whatever can possibly be set up on the basis of our alienation from God, but only on that of our likeness and good-will to Him. The law of this likeness was lived by men long before it was known to them; and it has been lived by men, just the same, since the prophetic truth of it was denied by them. Yet assuredly *not* lived in ignorance and denial, as it will come to be lived when all men shall see, even as the prophets saw, that it is indeed the Law of our life—the very Truth of our relationship to the Spirit of the universe—when it shall become known as truth so gracious, so honourable, and so glorious, as to be all-sufficient for us for ever, encompassing our whole desire, our loftiest aspiration, and our infinite hope; and when it shall claim, and be freely accorded, the loyal service of our whole heart and soul and strength.

From the beginning of Man, he has lived by the

spiritual law of his being—in unwitting and partial obedience to it—and because of his consciousness of failure to fulfil its requirements, to attain to the rare level of its goodness, and to grasp the full measure of its promise; he has ever been prone to entertain, in some shape or other, the idea of his own inherent difference from the supreme good; excusing himself before God in his religions, and inventing many methods of reconciliation; and justifying himself before men for the compromise with wrong that is manifest in all human affairs, by appealing to the necessity for such compromise, which he alleges to be inseparable from the very constitution of human nature.

But it was left to the religion of Christianity to magnify this lie and make it honourable. To take the noble discontent of the spirit of Man for proof of no less than his utter alienation from God—judging the whole matter of our relationship to Him by a very small part of the manifestations of His spirit in us; and misunderstanding the significance even of that small part. It was left to the religion of Christianity to set up this judgment as the Oracle of God, on the authority of a Myth whose origin is lost in the antiquities of “the heathen”—declaring the whole human race to be outcast from good, natural enemies of God, and absolutely incapable of a righteousness accordant with the divine righteousness, by which all are condemned and given over to evil for ever. It was left to the religion

of Christianity to give distinct shape to the misapprehension of all other religions; to utterly deny the truth of the divine likeness and good-will of the human spirit; to make the denial the foundation of a new and niggardly "covenant of salvation," whose terms violate our common sense of justice; to substitute a "justification by faith" in place of the prophetic requirement of good endeavour; and to set bounds, for time and eternity, to the operation of God and the progress of humanity, narrowed to the conceptions of a few fanatical enthusiasts who failed to apprehend the truth of the old time, and who could not know the revelation that was to come.

Since Christianity is established as the religion of a great part of the world, and retains at least the assent of that part—indeed, of *all* the world, it would seem, that is changing, and progressing, and compelling the remainder to obey its impulse and to follow its lead—the devoir of prophecy in this day is widely different from, and of vastly greater consequence than, that of the past. For it is no longer striking at intangible and elusory things—mere scum and froth, fretful and insubstantial matter whirling on the troubled surface of human life—but is face to face with untruth embodied in a dominant religion, whose foundation of faith in "original sin," and the inherited alienation of men from God, is as clearly defined as is its own

revelation of our blessed relationship to Him. Its contention is not against the formalities and impostures of a religion whose faith in the main was true, but against the first principle of a religion whose faith is wholly false. Moreover, if prophecy is true, its contention is for a principle that rules not only the religious belief and practice of the world, but all human thought and endeavour, and makes the whole worshipful. Nor is the prophecy of this time as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, with none to hearken and understand. It is voiced by an increasing host of the best of mankind, and already the triumphant issue of its contention is assured. For the new and approved revelation of the things of God, while it confirms and gloriously illuminates the prophetic Truth, at the same time exposes the baseless nature of the apostolic error, and leaves it without a rag of fact to cover its dry bones. To those who have eyes to see, it is obvious that the whole structure of the Christian dogma rested upon "the fall of man," and has crumbled into dust in the sunlight of the revelation of his gradual and providential ascent.

The new civilisation is already at work on the foundations of its world-wide religion: of a Temple to the Very God! Even as I write, come the tidings of the close of the greatest mortal life of our time, and the notable disclosure of the Law by which that life was ruled:—If there is a God, then a man's

part is to know what He is doing in this world of ours, and how He is doing it and, once assured of somewhat of these matters, to work with Him and for His Purpose, with the whole heart and soul and strength of a man! That was the religion lived by Cecil Rhodes—a prophet of the type of Moses; a leader of the people into new lands in obedience to what he saw to be the commandment of God to him. There has been no greater prophet than this man—no prophecy more true in spirit or more splendid in accomplishment than his. For his life was a prophecy uttered in noble and strenuous endeavour, whose larger fulfilment is in the future; a prophecy in deeds, among the least of which is that legacy to the world, that is as a Sermon on the Mount inculcating the most catholic good-will. Here is one who undoubtingly recognised the obligation of the Law of our Likeness to God—for the *if*, which seems to qualify his faith, is naught. Clearly there is no *if* in his faith in the divine government of things, and his “even chance that there might be a God” seems to me to imply doubt only of certain current conceptions of God, and to really mean, if we put into words the conviction that he expressed in deeds, that in his mind the impossibility of belief in the crude idea of God which belongs properly to an earlier and darker time, was compensated, or evenly balanced, by the plain inference from ascertained fact, of the exist-

ence of an overruling Intelligence and Purpose, whose way and requirement are not hidden from us, and are not uncertain. While he could not locate or define God, or accept the authoritative declarations of the religions in the matter—at the same time he could not but recognise the ordinance of all things, or do otherwise than obey its call upon himself. Quite surely his life was not see-sawed by an *if*, but was inspired and led onward by a certainty. He was the faithful servant of that Law of the spiritual life, which he discerned to be supreme and alone worthy of a man's service, and his religion was identical in essentials with the prophetic Judaism, which was the only religion that appealed convincingly to Huxley. The intellectual standpoint of both these men differed widely from that of the prophets of Israel, yet they both arrived at the same prophetic conclusions. They had to prophesy for themselves, *de novo*, for their greater knowledge of the things of God had so utterly discredited the greater part of the precedent "revelation" of Him, that they found themselves quite without support or guidance from the venerable institutions that had served the need of their forefathers. So that they were flung out naked into the desert, to prophesy there: and there they learned, in quite a new sense of reality, to walk beneath the stars humbly with their God; whom they could not know, or venture to explain; but whose requirement of right-

eousness—"to do justly, and to love mercy"—they clearly saw and heartily endeavoured to fulfil. Huxley appears to have confined himself to the examination of precedent thought, with the notable result that he endorsed the religion of prophetic Judaism, as at one with the reasonable inference from ascertained fact; while Rhodes, more adventurous and imaginative—a dreamer of dreams, a true, great, inarticulate prophet—dared to shape a religion for himself; discerning the very Law of Life for us to be enshrined in the supreme fact of our likeness of spirit to the One Eternal Spirit whose way and purpose we apprehend.

Surely the spirit of these men was a spirit of good-will, significant of the verity of the inherent good-will that is manifest throughout the whole history of humanity. To me there is nothing in that history so striking as the universal recognition by the civilisations, of our peculiar relation to the Spirit that is in and over all things, and the universal desire to be on good terms with it. The whole earth is a cemetery of dead religions: a place where forgotten civilisations sleep beneath the lasting monuments of their worship of the gods. Time has crumbled the work of their hands and scattered it to all the winds; has buried it under the desert sands, and overwhelmed it with silence in the green depths of tropical forests; has covered up almost every trace of what was wrought for their work-day life, and respected only

the offering of their holiday: for into that last they put the full strength of their hearts, and built not for a generation, or even for many generations, but so far as they could compass their good intent, in honour of that which is Eternal, for all time. Cromlech and temple, mosque and cathedral—places of worship all—bear eloquent testimony to the innate good-will of men to God: monumental testimony whose universality utterly discredits the parochial exclusiveness of every creed, and whose exposition of the supreme impulse of human endeavour gives the lie direct to the doctrine of Man's natural and total depravity.

Inheriting all the impulse and necessity of the past struggle for existence, it was of course that human life should have been, altogether at first, and in great part always, informed and compelled by that impulse and necessity. Suspicion, fear, cruelty, selfishness, natural affection, jealousy, craftiness, contention, and rapacity—were in the blood of men, and dominated their relations to each other, much as they had aforetime dominated their relations to their ancient congeners. These things are natural and essential factors of human life, and in alliance with vastly superior intelligence, they suffice to account for much of its performance. But there is manifest also another factor which dominates all the rest. A new and different fear—the Fear of God! A fear which began on the ancient level, as fear of injury from the unseen; but which presently approved itself

to be of nobler kind, by its evolution into fear of offence against a gracious Benefactor—a fear which grew into Worship—into a constraining good-will, universal and strenuous, that was lavish of its best without counting the cost, in its devotion to—what? To an idea? an illusion? a figment of man's imagining that had no foundation in reality? That appears to me to be an impossible conclusion, abhorrent to our common sense of the implication of universal fact. Think of it!—that all the civilisations of the world have been possessed by an illusion, and all by the same illusion in various shape, to which they have devoted the utmost strength of their hearts with unflinching faith and enduring delight. Undoubtedly all the shapes were but symbols, and in a sense illusory—but they were the outcrop of a living reality—of a spirit whose likeness is divine, and whose good-will towards God is manifest—notwithstanding much misapprehension—in a prevailing desire to honour Him and to win His approbation. After all, the world's religions are no more than garments for the natural piety of the Spirit of Man; worn-out and cast-off garments, most of them; and even those yet retained, but ill fitting its larger growth. And to-day, if we would judge the world's good-will, it must not be by the measure of its regard for its old clothes; but by the spirit of its freedom from their bondage; by the tendency of the new enlightenment.

What then is the spirit of the modern thought? Is the attitude of its leading men that of the fool who says in his heart—"There is no God, therefore let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die?" Or is it the attitude of one asking—"Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Is the spirit of those who in the course of their earnest seeking after Truth have been compelled to reject as false nearly all the presumptions of the religions, and who in all sincerity say—"We do not know God"; a spirit careless of Him and of the requirement of His Law?—a spirit retrograde; content to live by the rule of the primitive struggle; content *not* to know the more excellent Way? Is it a spirit rejoicing in its freedom from the bonds of old belief, for the sake of licence to pursue to the bitter end "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life"? The lives of the leaders of modern thought have answered so that Wisdom is plainly justified of all her children, who manifest a steadfast and noble goodwill that is far in advance of their assurance, and that is all the more admirable because it is independent of all assurance of reward other than that which is *in* good endeavour. They are *not* content with the exposure of the past misunderstanding, but are trying all things and questioning all things, in their desire to know and do the will of God. There is a *good* spirit in the time; sincere, earnest, and of a very notable humility commensurate with its

enlightenment. A spirit like unto the Divine Spirit of whom it came, and eager, as it never was before, to know the Law of its Likeness.

“And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

This is prophecy of the best: not prediction of the event, but prophetic understanding of it. It sets forth our actual relation to the other earth-dwellers, among whom there is none to dispute our mastery; and our true relation to the Sovereign Authority—a subjection that is not as the subjection of the brutes. For we have Dominion, and Understanding, and Freedom. We are given a share in the universal government; are inducted into a kind of vicerealty under the Supreme Ruler. In effect the gift of the spiritual life means no less than that: it amounts to a partnership with God, and that, not a sleeping but an active partnership. It is a vocation to participate, consciously and intelligently, in the unfolding of the divine purpose. We appear to possess a freedom of will, all our own, by which we may either avail ourselves of all that is in the gift of the divine operation, without wrong to those below us in the scale of life; or we may, as none of those can, reject the good placed within our reach, and oppose ourselves to the purpose manifest in the evolution of life. We may

either help or hinder the graciousness of the divine Thought towards us. Within the bounds of our vice-royalty we appear to be verily as gods, free to take our own course and strong to rule those below our level. And if we must regard the universal operation as no more than a vast current of phenomena—ordered indeed, yet without thought of us and concern for us—if we cannot recognise in the Sum of all things the Spirit of God; and in the wonderful and unique phenomena of humanity, an Almighty goodwill that is continually insistent upon our wills for righteousness; then, for my own part, I see no reason why every man should not be a law unto himself; a tyrant in proportion to his strength. But in very truth, the sum of the slow and patient unfolding of the world-life, with all its design and providence, is not put into our hands as a plaything into the hands of a child, to be petted, tormented, or destroyed as we will. Though we have dominion over it, we may not bring it all to naught. Though God has committed authority to us, He has not withdrawn Himself from the field of our government. The care that wrought this world of ours is over it still, and conspicuously over *us* who are the manifest heirs of its high Purpose.

For all the miracle of operation during the countless ages of the past leads up to, and gathers about, the event of our spiritual birth—is plainly a miracle of providence for *us*. It is evolution whose supreme

result according to the old order of life, was a form fitted to serve the godlike Spirit of Man; and whose purpose in recent time is obviously concentrated upon our advance. For together with the inspiration of the spiritual life in man, there was imposed on the more ancient life of the brutes somewhat in the nature of a great arrestment. Where the latter was then, there it has stayed—changed a little doubtless, and adjusted to change, after its kind—but at the same time manifesting no impulse significant of an advance beyond its kind such as is apparent in the advance of humanity. It may seem easy now to account for this arrestment by the dominance of man himself, for, if only because of our mastery, it is almost inconceivable that any other living thing that moveth upon the earth can possibly emulate our ascent: but in the earlier time, when man was a weakling among many stronger than he; when he was hunted as a prey, and unacknowledged as the master; in all the long period of *his* great progression the arrestment of the others was in force. I discern, even from the beginning, the operation of what may be called a law of arrestment in the evolution of life, which was imposed here and there, on this form and on that, the instrument of purpose which becomes manifest to us only in the great arrestment at the end of the old order and the beginning of the new. How else can we account for some existing forms?—for it is inconceivable that throughout all the immeasurable ages, circumstance

alone could have been altogether and constantly adverse to the progress of any form whatever. If then we have Dominion—if we have Understanding and Freedom—it is for a Purpose; as infallible as it must be worshipful. Is not the goal of our understanding the apprehension of its miracle? Is not the joy of our freedom in co-operation with its good-will? And is not the crown of our dominion in the service of its divine love and in obedience to its righteous requirement?

There is loss of Eden in the ancient myth, but there is no suggestion even, that I can find, of any loss of the divine spirit that was breathed into man. In reality there never was an Eden to be lost, or a disobedience of the sort that lost it. But there *was* a spiritual birth and an endowment with dominion over the earth-life and the earth forces—and these things remain; they are now, apparent facts both; complementary facts of a whole prophetic truth—and it would be no more unreasonable and futile to contend that the gift of dominion is lost to us, than it is to maintain the heresy of our loss of the spiritual life by which alone we are possessed of that dominion.

I have said that the prophecy of this book is no more than an appreciation of the prophetic truth that was aforesaid. Yet it is itself a prophecy; for its appreciation is urgently called for by the misinterpretation of the truth which has so long prevailed, and is, moreover, in accord with the new revelation of the

things of God of which we have become possessed in this present time. I see that this new revelation, which has discredited so much of what presumed to stand for the Word of God to us, is at the same time an invocation to our world to amend its passing strange and perverse choice of the *error* of ancient thought, and to take for itself only the prophetic truth of it as the sure foundation of its future faith and practice. I see that behind all the worshipful faith of the past—behind all the formal requirement, and symbolism, and moral teaching of the religions; behind all human aspiration, and human institutions—there was but one living principle of Truth: that of our likeness of spirit to God: which is all-sufficient for our hope and guidance, and which, with but our apprehension of it quickened and enlarged, should illuminate our way in the time to come, as a sun that has no setting. I see that we are called upon to believe that we are verily the Sons of God, and that the divine requirement is addressed to the good-will of our freedom, and is imperative because it is honourable and gracious. Sincerity is required of us because there is between us and God a covenant of good-will, and truth because we are free-born, and retain our birthright.

The appreciation of this prophecy uplifts afresh in an insincere, faithless, and idolatrous time, the belief of the prophets of Israel in one God Almighty, beside whom there is none other—a belief received and

maintained by them all, as the immutable Truth manifest in the government of the universe. It uplifts afresh their worshipful conception of the spirit of man, as a spirit born of the spirit of God, in His likeness; and therefore subject to the Law of its Likeness. It uplifts afresh their interpretation of the law, as an ordinance that is entirely reasonable and just; requiring of us no more than what we are able to perform; a gracious law, whose punishments are inflicted not in anger but in love, and whose rewards are immeasurably generous—infinite as God, from whom we came, and to whom we return.

This I discern to be the very Truth of God and man for all time, and moreover I apprehend in it a new urgency of practical application to the whole conduct of human life. I see that our knowledge of the Way of God, as manifest in His government of the world we know, has attained to such proportions and to such a degree of assurance, as suffice for our direct reference to that Way as our manifest standard of Righteousness. That we are called upon to revise the rules of conduct imposed by men who were no more in the secret of God than we are, and to recognise an authority in "the things of God," which is not only superior to the authority of any scripture—no matter how venerable its ignorance—but which is the only authority that the New Civilisation can possibly recognise as indubitable and supreme.

It is likely that to many this will appear to be most

blasphemous doctrine—a rushing in where angels fear to tread; an invocation to lay impious hands on the very sceptre of God—for, they will say, to Him alone belong the authority and wisdom which justify methods that for us to venture upon would be deadly sin. He can do no wrong! But what is man?—that he should dare to set up God’s way of dealing with the world, as the right way for himself! Did not a great prophet write—“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”?

Yes, he did so—in a spirit of prophecy that in its apprehension of the majesty of God, puts to unutterable shame the presumption of a later time in limiting the divine thought to mean human conceptions of its magnitude and mercy. But at the same time he apprehended no difference in the divine thought and way, other than that of magnitude. Inconceivably greater and higher than ours, yet the thought is that with which we are endowed: and the way is that which we are called upon to follow. “Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Let him turn to the Way of God! For the waywardness of men is not natural, unavoidable, and beyond amendment—but is most unnatural, eccen-

tric, and suicidal. If this is blasphemous, then is all prophecy so. And if we may not take the Way of God as our way; then whose are we to follow? The way of the Churches whose endeavour is always to explain away the plain requirement of the prophetic revelation, to overlay it with compromise and pretence, and to substitute for its living principle, inanimate and unserviceable trinketies? Or the way of the world, which the Churches condone and sustain? Which tolerates folly and unrighteousness unspeakable in the very heart of its great life; which magnifies injustice, and gilds oppression, and worships itself; which robs the poor without scruple, and publishes its benefactions to them without shame; which acclaims the *quantity* of its evil increase, and the stress of its selfish contention, and the slavery of its petty ambitions, as progress; which is regardless of the divine righteousness in the present, in its greed of pleasure, and hurry to be rich; and is careless of the menace of a future that its misgovernment is shaping into a legacy of intolerable wrong and hardship for its sons and their sons' sons?

I see that the intimate union of a Church which denies the prophetic truth and maintains manifest illusions, with the vainglory of a world careless of the prophetic requirement, is a most unholy alliance, against which all true men are called upon to band themselves together in a faithful brotherhood of the Sons of God—a glorious guild of freemen, all most

nobly born, and jealous of the honour of their birth-right. What pride of race, or family, or caste—what tradition of honour inherited from a long line of distinguished ancestors—can compare in urgency of appeal to men for righteousness, with the gracious appeal of an assured faith in our inheritance of a spirit in the likeness of God? Men have never failed to respond nobly to the imperative, if narrow, requirement of a code of honour based on what they believe to be verities honourable to them—they fulfil the expectation of their estate, if need be, at the cost of life—but in the matter of the greater and nobler requirement of their God and Father; in the matter of the supreme code of honour; it has been impressed on them, generation after generation, that they are base-born, degraded beings, inheriting evil dispositions, and incapable, even though they would, of doing well! The Church has given them a bad name, and, accepting it, they have gone to the dogs! But, if we resent any imputation of dishonour in the lesser matters of our family and race, and any innuendo of default in our fulfilment of their obligation, how much more sternly should we resent the ecclesiastical imputation of evil and dishonour which insults our noblest relationship, and which is so malignant in its nature, that it makes default inevitable?

The revelation of prophecy exalts human nature as the most gracious of all the manifestations of the love of God upon the earth. It tells that we are of like spirit

to Him ; endowed with apprehension of His operation, and with appreciation of His miracle. It proclaims our divine Sonship ; and calls upon us to follow our Father's Way, assured of its supreme excellence, and sufficiency for us ; to devote ourselves to our Father's service with love and gladness, confiding in Him for the fulfilment to us of all good. The appeal of prophecy is to the honourable, for honour—to the noble, for nobleness of life—to the free, for truth—and to the strong, for justice and mercy.

This I believe, with my whole heart and soul, to be for us the absolute Truth ; and moreover, the whole prophetic truth that has been revealed for our faith and guidance. This I clearly see, with full assurance of its sufficiency for our present need : and, whatever revelation there may be to humanity in the time to come, will assuredly be but an enlargement, and never a reversal, of the Truth of God and man which was revealed to the prophets of old time, and which is approved to the understanding and the heart of this present by all its new discovery of the veritable "things of God." I have no word to add to this by way of prophecy. I can but suggest precept—that may be unwise—and hope—that may be illusory—for, though the foundation of all righteous precept, and of all legitimate hope, is sure and acknowledged ; yet the mistakes of our building upon it cannot fail to be manifold and grievous. I can but leave it to others, wiser and better informed than I, to point

out and correct my mistakes; and to the experience of many generations of the noble, to amend theirs. This only I affirm with entire confidence—that, whatever may be our misapprehension of the Way of God, and whatever misapplication there may be of the principles manifest in the divine operation, to our government of the realm committed to us; it is the one only Way of Righteousness for us; to be followed in all sincerity to the utmost of our understanding and strength; without presumption of wisdom that can correct, or of charity that can enlarge, the wisdom and love of God.

THE PRECEPT AND HOPE OF LIKENESS

Premising that the New Civilisation will—as I believe it must—presently recognise, in the fact of our divine likeness, the plain requirement of conformity in all our endeavour to the method and purpose manifest in the divine operation—that it will become assured that the righteousness of the individual life, the justice of our dealings with each other, the direction of our aspirations, the wisdom of our knowledge, and the mercy of our dominion, are to be measured only by direct reference to the standard of the Way of God revealed to us in the things of God that are actually discovered to our understanding—then it cannot accept any precept whatever belonging to the past as beyond the present necessity of judgment by its own enlarged

apprehension of the very truth. It can esteem even the prophetic precept only as the outcrop of an apprehension of the requirement of likeness, which was limited by the contemporary ignorance, and more or less shaped by each prophet's idiosyncrasy of temperament and conscience.

"To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God," is indeed precept that cannot be distinguished from the truth on which it is based, and, in its presentation of justice in the first place, and of mercy in the second, it may be taken, I think, as the first course, truly laid, in the building of a precept of righteousness. For in the divine rule we can discover no mercy that is independent of justice: its mercy is the blessing consequent upon conformity to its inexorable requirement. And, taking this beginning of precept as truly prophetic; seeing that we are required first of all to do justly; we are left to determine for ourselves what just doing is, and how it may be possible for us to be just in all our relations. Judged by the new revelation of the Way of God, the precept of the Sermon on the Mount, lovely as it is, cannot be taken as an integrant part of the very truth that Jesus witnessed to, but only as partial inference from that truth such as was natural to one who knew no better standard of righteousness than that of his own tender and compassionate spirit. And always, to those of a like spirit, the precept of Jesus will appeal with supreme force—as, for instance,

it does to Tolstoy—and moreover, its appeal must be taken into account as of itself an important factor of that divine operation which is the true standard of right endeavour for us. For assuredly it also is a manifestation of the Way of God in the evolution of the spirit of Man: a precept, not alone sufficient for our guidance, yet significant in its graciousness, of the love of the Divine Spirit which its own love echoes. It is partial—precept of a perfection not yet attained—and the very Church which professes to believe in it as divinely peremptory, has always recognised its impracticability, and has never insisted upon it as the rule of life. “Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,” and so on; can hardly be accepted as prophecy, since it is plainly discordant with what we have come to know of the Way of God, and we can but regard it as an expression of individual sentiment which, deeply impressed though it may be by the generous spirit that is clearly manifest to us now in all the divine rule, cannot be permitted to override all our endeavour to deal justly with the world in its present condition.

Acknowledging in the ordinance of life a divine purpose devoted to the ultimate evolution of a righteous humanity; and that it is purpose which, by our endowment with a spirit in the divine likeness, we are called upon to help; our moral precept must encompass the whole field of our activities, which are

moral when they forward, and immoral when they hinder, the divine consummation. From this high standpoint, it is conceivable that a world regenerate in the narrow sense of entire devotion to charity and worship, would be of all worlds the most incapable of progress towards the perfection that is foreshadowed in the past and present ordinance of God. For the unfolding of the human spirit is not confined to a growth in charitableness and the disposition to worship, but embraces all the activities which are manifest to us in the Divine Government of the world. And since we are called upon to participate in that government, it follows that we can aid its purpose only by conformity to its method.

We have in very deed grasped the reins of the chariot of the Sun, taming the fierceness of its mighty steeds, and we are naturally proud of an adventure that approves our divine parentage; but it has yet to be seen whether we are driving along the appointed course or—on to the catastrophe of Phæton. We have changed War into a gentle and polite art; have put strong restraint on Pestilence, and set narrowing bounds to Famine; good work beyond question: to be bettered, we hope, later on—yet, in the naming of the old ruthless conqueror the “Scourge of God,” and in the acceptance of plague, famine, and the like as visitations of God; was there not somewhat of prophetic vision of a truth which must be taken into account in connection with the good work we are

doing, lest with the casting out of certain devils there may enter in others seven times worse than they? The old conditions of barbarism, which the sentiment of Christianity condemns as evil—were they in truth entirely evil? or, were they conditions of the evolution of the better, bearing the seal of an authority and the sanction of a wisdom that we may not venture to disregard, or presume to correct? Were they not factors of that natural selection which has wrought for the elevation of humanity as a whole, and which from the prophetic standpoint we must regard as an ordinance of righteous selection? And having ourselves contributed to the enlargement of the world's increase by our better sanitation and more humane government, have we not become at the same time answerable for its quality? We cannot sit with folded hands, merely deploring certain evils consequent upon our own civilised methods, and hope to be justified before God by the partial excellence of our endeavour, backed by a sentimental doctrine of non-resistance of the evil of it; for since we do work of this sort, we *must* do justly, or *do* evil. If the ordinance that wrought for the survival of the fittest was wise and righteous, the sentiment that devotes itself to the conservation and multiplication of the unfit is sentiment that has gone astray from the right way and allied itself with what is really cruel and ungodly. Sentiment that insists upon a conspiracy of silence in order to maintain a false morality

of ignorance, resulting in an involuntary and most insane multiplication greatly in excess of the means of society to insure for every one a life of the best possible, fosters a real immorality, whose notoriously evil and unhappy consequence in the present, and growing menace to the near future, can hardly be overstated. It is lax and invertebrate sentiment, whose authority is partial precept and not indubitable law; and whose endeavour but gratifies itself at the cost of the essential well-being and progress of humanity.

In one particular, in this matter of the world's increase, I am very happy to find myself in cordial agreement with the tradition of the Christian Church. For it does acknowledge the principle that the increase is a matter for control. The sacrament of marriage is either an institution for the control of the world's increase, or it is nothing; since it is certainly not an obligatory sacrament of the Christian communion. And, given that it is an institution of restraint upon immorality, not confined to true believers, but practically imposed on the whole civilised world, the Church can hardly question the common right to criticise the efficiency of its restraint, and to amend its shortcomings and mistakes. The New Civilisation will assuredly never abolish the institution of marriage, for it is an institution whose righteous adjustment to the condition of humanity guarantees the utmost possible happiness and well-being of our mortal life. But, for the very reason that the wisest

and best are agreed upon that head; because of all our institutions it is the most sacred; because it provides for and defends all that is most gracious, lovely, and helpful in this life; and because in a good marriage there is more suggestion of hope of human felicity in a life to come, than there is in all the creeds—it will assuredly see to its more righteous adjustment to the accident and error of human affairs, as to a matter of supreme urgency and importance, which can no longer be left to the incapacity of a fossil system whose sole effective control is confined to the enforcement of a condition of finality that in no way safeguards the good marriage, while it invests the bad with a most tragic sanctity that may be challenged only by death: penalising mistake and misfortune in this matter, and in this alone, as “the unpardonable sin.” Its inefficiency as an institution of restraint upon evil increase is obvious; for it simply covers every possible wrong against the progress of the race in this particular, with a mantle of conventional respectability. I believe, therefore, that the first sincere endeavour of the New Civilisation must be to supplement a reformed institution of marriage with practical measures prohibitory of all increase that is plainly immoral either in kind or quantity. Since it is made easier for the weak and the diseased to live, it must be made harder for them to increase. That is clearly the imperative duty of a superior race within its own borders: and further, where it is

dominant over an inferior race, and especially where its rule tends to the increase of the latter at a rate that was before impossible, it is bound to replace the savage restraint which it has suppressed, by more humane but not less efficient methods of its own. It has disturbed the balance of natural—that is, of righteous—selection, by the introduction of new factors of licence on one side; and it must restore the balance by new factors of restraint on the other. That is the great problem of Africa, where the rapid increase of the native population, and the tendency of the increase to idleness, mean nothing but mischief. It is a problem which, in terms of prophecy, is the burden of America, where the well-being of a great people is demoralised by a residue that is admitted to an equality of rule with the better part, whose common sense of right at the same time repudiates with abhorrence the blending of the residue with its nobler blood. The presence of a large and increasing number of an inferior race in the midst of a progressive people—of a residue that cannot, for a thousand good reasons, be assimilated by that people—must obviously be an immoral factor that ought to be eliminated. America is not the place of the African. His presence there is hurtful to both parties—then why should he not be deported? The strong restraint of evil increase, and the localisation and just government of inferior races, are duties of civilisation consequent upon the fact of its progress; and are all the more imperative

because of its larger and more benevolent control of the natural factors of restraint and limitation.

It is in the particular of quantity that the question of righteous increase becomes difficult with many complications. For it is interwoven with all the change which the higher thought, the nobler aspiration, and the wider and more exact knowledge of the time, will inevitably bring about in the whole conduct of human life. At the moment, it seems to be taken for granted that quantity, in a civilised nation, is the measure of its greatness. That the stronger the swarm, the better for the security of the hive, and the worse for the other hives! In plain terms, that is the gospel of Patriotism—a gospel acclaimed by the sweater and the knave—akin to other gospels on whose ignoble altars we offer daily human sacrifices. Gospels of supply and demand: of vested interests in ancient wrong: of the balance of power among the nations: of evil necessity, which every one knows to be a lie: gospels of hypocrisy become a fine art: which the growing prophetic sincerity will sweep out of the path of human progress with immeasurable contempt. For the patriotism of the future will surely be humanitarian instead of national; and the righteous endeavour of the future will be for the elevation of the race, and for the amelioration of the hard conditions of life which these gospels of the Underworld have brought about. I confess that I am myself patriotic—in the sense of pride in the triumphs of my own country, and jealousy of the triumphs of

others, in all matters of selfish competition between them. I cannot help it if I would, and am compelled to accept myself as the product of my environment, of a sort that the men of the better future will doubtless regard as a fossil of low development. But the limitations of this jealousy are worth noting, for it is virulent only in respect of matters of selfish competition. I am not conscious of its existence in connection with the things of the higher thought. Science, Art, Literature, Religion, are on a level quite above its reach; and my appreciation of human attainment in these high matters is not influenced by any prejudice of nationality whatever. Which I think is true of *all* appreciation of the better things. And are not these true things of the Spirit of Man, which are approved as in natural alliance with our noblest impulse, to be distinguished from the vainglories of life which spring from selfishness, and foster envy and jealousy, as the things which are plainly at one with the righteous purpose of our endeavour? Purpose devoted to the evolution of the best possible man, living, naturally and inevitably, the best possible life? The question of the greatest possible number may be determined afterwards, when the essential conditions of righteousness are fulfilled in the attainment of the greatest possible excellence.

The iniquity of selfish strife prevails now over all the civilised world, and the folly of it is as great as the sin. We are as a house divided against itself;

every one for his own hand, and only God for all; and so life is made harder for all. The evil contention for wealth, and power, and place, and the trinketies of honour, is universal, and becomes more strenuous and exacting and unscrupulous, year by year. The head and front of it are instinct with envy, greed, and malice; the ugly body of it is brute force, cased in hardened steel and draped with specious lies; and its venomous tail drags after it an ever-lengthening trail of disappointment, penury, and wretchedness. It is obvious to all that there is no regard whatever for the Purpose of God in the ruling impulse of these activities—and no sincere desire for noble association with that purpose is manifest in their belated and contemptible charities, which are, in very truth, of a morality on the level with that of a good bet—good, that is, when safely hedged. The civilised world does a vast amount of ostentatious hedging of this sort, but I do not see that it promotes the essential regeneration of the world in the slightest degree.

The progress of the race depends on our recognition of the spiritual likeness that makes humanity One; and it is to the elevation of the whole that all our endeavour should be devoted—in copartnership with the universal Spirit whose operation is significant of the future evolution of the Spirit of Man into such glory of likeness to itself as we cannot yet conceive. Assuredly the goal of that evolution was not attained 2000 years ago, nor can we believe that it is attained

now in the enlarged understanding and dominion that are of its later manifestation. For knowledge and power are not synonyms of the true progress; they are but the means of it and, devoted to insensate rivalries, they hinder it. Neither the strong who win in the struggle, nor the weak who lose, are in the way of the righteous advance, and thoughtful men anticipate a time not far ahead, when the native deadliness of the present contention must eventuate in a world-wide deadlock, when the stress of the struggle will have become intolerable, and when the uncontrolled increase of multitude will have no outlet save murder.

I recognise the surprising development of human knowledge and ingenuity, and the strength of the tendency of modern civilisation to the extreme of pace and excitement; but I do not see that the ingenuity is applied to righteous ends, or despair of the future in the belief that the tendency of the time is natural and irresistible, and its consequence inevitable. I can judge these things only by an ideal of high service to the physical and spiritual elevation of humanity as a whole, and in the main they may appear to me to be of no service to that end. The tendency apparent in the general desertion of the healthful serenities of the country life, for the hurry of contention, and as some conceive, the larger interests, of the over-crowded towns, seems to me a deplorable tendency, born of the dominant eagerness after wealth—the evil of the day, sufficient only for the strong thief of the day—for,

after all, we live by the sane activities of the country life; the vigour of the race is nourished in the fields; and the anticipation of a time when the harvests of the earth will be controlled by great syndicates, mainly by mechanical means, for the sustenance of a population gathered into enormous cities, and to the ignoble ends of the prevailing tyranny of Mammon, is an anticipation, not of progress, but of unutterable shame. The civilisation that condemns a great part of its estate to excessive toil under conditions that sap the reserve of health and strength inherited by it—to say nothing of failure to add to that reserve—is a civilisation run on the broad lines of self-destruction, and is by way of becoming a purblind, toothless, and insane whole, which no ingenuity of mechanical appliance can compensate for its immoral waste. For my own part, I am quite unable to appreciate the advantage of much of our ingenious appliance, since it but supplements our physical limitations in a way that is rather detrimental to our physical evolution—it but ministers to defect by external artifice, which does not in the least promote our elevation above the defect. But the inconsequent appreciation of the time acclaims the ingenuity as though it *must* be of the highest service, since—alas! the pity of it!—it serves a generation so assured of its tenure of all the virtues, so superior to all that ever was before, so sincere in its good endeavour—in a word, so righteous, as our generation! Take, for example, a choice specimen of high-falutin

reported the other day of a leading wiseacre, acclaiming the appliance of wireless telegraphy as "a grand development of the power of man, lifting him a little nearer to the angels"! The assumption that the power will, of course, be put to angelic service, is very beautiful—and, revealing. But, absurd as it is, the saying illustrates the general misapprehension of the reality of human progress, of which I can see no assurance whatever in the increase of power apart from a sincerity of purpose to use it righteously. We must look elsewhere for the promise of our elevation above the evil contention to which we are mainly devoted at present, and the tendency of which is mainly retrograde. I look to the increase and diffusion of that knowledge which has illuminated and made plain the better Way; to that noble sincerity of Doubt which has given birth to a nobler sincerity of Faith in ascertained veracities; which Faith, as it becomes more general, will not fail of the good-will and courage to insist upon the conduct of human affairs in accordance with essential principles of justice. The contemporary demoralisation is the inevitable consequence of the contemporary unbelief in that illusory *divine economy* which the authorities uphold as the only alternative of the ignoble "political economy" which is concerned only with the factors of a savage struggle; and the demoralisation is to be stayed only by sincere belief in the actual *divine economy* of the world, and in the certain requirement of our likeness of spirit to God, to

be helpful of His economy with our whole heart and soul and strength.

It may be that the tendencies of the present time are too strong to be turned aside by the utmost good endeavour of the better disposed; that the prevailing selfish contention must work itself out to the end, and that the world will be convinced of its error and iniquity only by fruits so bitter, that repentance and reformation will be enforced upon humanity with more terrible energy than ever before. But the Hope of Likeness is not limited to the few centuries that cannot fail to teach that lesson. The future *time* of our hope—apart from some mishap to our earth, the chance of which we need not speculate upon—can be measured only by an idea corresponding with the geological idea of time. It may be longer than the past time of the earth life, or not so long. The position of this generation may be more, or less, remote from the halfway-house of our travail—but that does not matter. Comprehensively, in anticipating the future evolution of humanity, we must reckon upon a time approximating somewhat to that which has gone before. But as the potential change of such a period would be practically inconceivable, let us look back only over the 50,000 years or so of the spiritual humanity, and looking as far ahead, endeavour to grasp a true idea of that elevation of human nature above its present level, which is not only indicated but assured, by its elevation in the long past above the

nature of the brutes. Speculation ranging only so far ahead may seem idle but, if it helps us to realise that the civilised man of to-day is, in actual fact, a being about midway between the earliest type of man of which we have any knowledge, and the type that will be 50,000 years hence, it ought to have some practical effect upon our conduct of present affairs. The error at the root of all our legislation, seems to me to be the presumption that human nature is a fixed quantity. There is no legislation which takes account of its evolution. Even the religions deal only—in much misunderstanding—with the contemporary man, and with his individual future as suggested by his present desire. They take no account whatever of the future elevation of the race yet, since we are no longer in ignorance of our past ascent from the brutal condition; since we must acknowledge that our present position is not at the summit of the ascent, but only on the way to it; since we have apprehension of a higher level of being to which we may assuredly attain; and since we know the good that promotes and the evil that hinders our potential attainment; the first requirement of our enlightenment must be to conform all our endeavour to the purpose, or say, tendency, that is plainly manifest in the new revelation of the actual operation of God. The world knows not only *more* than it did; but it is become possessed of Truth, in the stead of error and illusion. For the moment this may seem a small thing—a cloud on the

horizon of life, no larger than a man's hand—a matter of speculation only to a very few among the hurrying and inconsiderate crowd. But in truth it is a thing inconceivably great, pregnant with change, soon or late, of the very base of our consciously intelligent activities. Aiming at its highest mark,—and I apprehend that the spiritual humanity, as a whole, always has aimed at the highest plainly within its ken—I believe that the New Civilisation will presently ask, and not in vain: What is it that God is doing in our world—and how? So that it may in all sincerity ally itself with His purpose, and devote itself in deadly earnest to the establishment of institutions whose main intent will be at one with the divine operation which has wrought the miracle of our present estate, and which plainly indicates a better estate to come.

Whatever may be our conceivable duty in respect of the individual future of the soul; there can be no doubt of our duty in relation to the evolution of the sum of humanity on earth. The miracle of it can hardly be less than the miracle of that which has been accomplished, and which we have seen, and know. What may not be done, and what attained, in 50,000 years? May not the potentialities of our dual nature be unfolded so that our command over the forces of nature will be so intimate and direct that the mechanical means by which we now seek to enlarge our dominion, will then have become entirely superfluous? At least it is in this direction, rather than in that of the

multiplication of external appliances, that we must, I think, look for the true evolution of humanity. And even if we believe that the individual hope of our Likeness is limited to the share we have in the evolution during the brief span of our mortal life, it is a great and worthy hope. It is a living hope entertained by all good men, though many have no assurance of their own part in its ultimate triumph, and may have to content themselves with the reward belonging to their individual endeavour to bring it about. That, of itself, is no small reward. For, if death ends all, still there is a noble satisfaction in a life devoted to its best possible, such as is all unknown to a life of pleasure or of greed, even though the latter may console itself with a half-belief in an after life of a sort for which it has no real desire. It is not the good life that needs the *compensation* of a heaven, but the evil and wasted life. Say that I have only one life—that the few years allotted to me here are my all—then all the more, for that reason, I would live it worthily, for that is the only conclusion of sanity. Say further, that in its short span there is conscious possession of a spirit like unto the Spirit of All—of an endowment with apprehension of the delight of the infinite universe, with understanding of somewhat of its miracle, and with the will and the power to participate in somewhat of its high purpose—then, despite its brevity, it is a very great life; with more treasure of satisfaction in an hour of it truly lived,

than in all the years of a life of prodigality among the swine-troughs.

At the same time, I apprehend that the individual hope of Likeness is not confined to this mortal life. The hope of our absolute at-one-ment with God, and of an eternal life in the light of His countenance; which may seem to many to be entirely dependent upon belief in the authority of the Creeds; is in reality an inherent principle of our spiritual likeness to the Everlasting, that was before any of the Creeds, and that can stand alone without their support. If we consider the various forms of Hope uplifted by the religions, it is very clearly apparent that they are no more than embodiments of the various desire and hope of the peoples who have adopted them. The Nirvana of Buddhism—the blowing-out of the troubled flame of human desire and effort—is a conception of supreme felicity, as natural to the genius of the ancient and wearied race whose longing it symbolises, as the material Paradise of Islam is to the genius of a more vigorous and sensual people, or as the Heaven of the New Testament was to the confused and intangible desire of the early Christians. Of these three, the last appears to me to be incomparably the weakest in its appeal to our common humanity. It was, like the others, a product of the Eastern aspiration; but it was also a product of a chaotic time of dissolution—of the uprooting and scattering of a people—and is characterised by the uncertainty of hope natural to

such conditions. Its authors seem not to have known what they desired, and therefore to have been unable to invest desire with tangible form. But if they had been possessed of a clearly apprehended desire, and could have given distinct expression to it, I think the conception could never have been heartily adopted by the Western peoples, to whose native genius the Christian Heaven—such as it is, without form and void of noble and natural hope—is entirely foreign and undesirable. The Moslem Paradise is the everyday hope of the faithful. It stands for what they really desire. The death for the Faith that is the open door to its enjoyments, has no terror for them; and their daily observance of the prescribed forms of their worship, is stimulated by an actual longing after the definite reward promised to the obedient. So also Nirvana stands for something deeply felt and really desired, native to the temperament of the Hindu. Its appeal is present throughout the whole of a man's life; and long before his capacity for affairs is weakened, it often becomes all-absorbing and irresistible; so that all affairs are laid aside—wealth, honours, friends, are forsaken—and the closing years are devoted wholly to the longing of the spirit, to be gathered again into the embrace of the infinite, unchanging, passionless Spirit of All.

But the Heaven of Christianity presents no hope of a future existence that is welcome to the hearts of the Christian peoples. It is empty of the more

advanced spiritual desire of humanity. The hope of it is based, not on realities, but on tradition of an event, of whose truth we cannot possibly be assured. Consider for a moment the authoritative exposition of the origin and nature of the hope, given by St. Peter:—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The Christian hope, then, is begotten of a faith in the Resurrection, and, so begotten, what is it? Beyond the bare article of faith in an after life, there is nothing. It is hope of a salvation ready to be revealed—of an eternal inheritance of Naught—of vacuity incorruptible and undefiled!

But the foundation of the Hope of Likeness is deeply laid in the natural desire of the human spirit, which is approved to every advanced human being's own consciousness. Yet, a very doubtful foundation, say those who demand assurance of inevitable inference from a fact before they can believe; and, for my own part, though I find the fact of our desire, apprehended as the native desire of our spiritual being, sufficient to sustain *my* belief, I am very far from condemning their hesitation. For, helpful as the belief

is, it can hardly be regarded as an absolutely necessary factor of righteousness in our mortal life—if it were so, I think we should not be left in any doubt of it—and the righteous life that contents itself with its best endeavour; that holds the good work as everything, the man nothing; is very noble.

Much depends, in this connection, on the nature of the desire on which we build our hope. Every life is replete with experience of many desires unfulfilled; and the reasonable inference would seem to be that our desire for the future life may be, and probably is, illusory. But the elemental desire of this present life of ours *is* fulfilled in great part to all, and wholly to most of us; and it is only in particulars superfluous to that desire that we are often disappointed. We fail of many wishes and ambitions, but not, generally, of the primal necessities of our well-being, and complete life. Therefore, believing absolutely in our endowment with a spiritual life in the likeness of the Divine Spirit, and acknowledging our desire for the continuance of that life, to be its native desire, I regard the hope of its fulfilment, as a good and reasonable hope. What though it cannot be demonstrated? I do not see how that is possible, unless we are disposed to accept the manifestations related by modern "Spiritualists" as demonstration? For all else, they are obviously worthless; and to me they prove nothing except the weakness of the faith that seeks to confirm itself by such methods.

In reality we live, day by day, by faith in ten thousand matters that cannot be demonstrated; and even those whose sincerity of thought refuses belief in some things on those terms, constantly affirm other things, of the reality of which they can have no certain assurance. Huxley takes for granted that Man is the only consciously intelligent denizen of the earth, though at the same time he could not be assured of it, as he desired to be assured of some other matters of belief. But we may, I think, approach somewhat near to assurance when we consider the difference between man and man. We can clearly distinguish between the type which is mainly dominated by the brutal elements of our being, and the type of the more advanced spiritual life: and the desire for a life continued long after this present, is distinctly the peculiar desire of the higher thought. The condemned criminal of a low type, regrets the life he has forfeited, and he may fear a judgment to come, if he has been persuaded to believe in it, but of real desire for another and better existence, he has nothing. So also, in old age all of us relinquish the activities of this mortal life—so far as we can distinguish them from those of the higher thought—without regret, and often, after prolonged suffering, with thankfulness. The desire of the life has waned with the passing of its strength, and the weariness of its closing years is rounded in natural sleep. But the spiritual life knows nothing of weariness, of its own; its desire

grows more intense with the passing years; its interest increases with the accumulation of its treasure of knowledge of "the things of God"; and its regret on laying down the work that has been its supreme joy—when it has no assurance that the joy will be continued—is the greatest of all regret. Truly the work is everything; the man nothing. But the work *is* the man, in this high regard. The spiritual man knows nothing of himself apart from the work which is the impulse and delight of his being, and he does not regret the environment of the work, but the joy of it. Whether conscious or unconscious of its relationship to the universal Spirit, the spirit that is in him has laboured with It, and for It; has apprehended with supreme satisfaction the wonder and excellence of the divine operation; has rejoiced with the Infinite rejoicing, and has gloried in the Infinite triumph. The whole delight of life, to the spirit of Man, belongs to its correspondence and association with the Spirit of God. Nothing of the divine work is too small for our interest and admiration; and the infinite whole is not so great as to be hopelessly beyond the range of our desire to know its miracle. And this delight and desire of the spirit of Likeness—delight that never wearies, and desire without shadow of turning; delight in the manifestations of Eternal Wisdom and Omnipotence, and desire commensurate with the eternity and infinity of its interest—how shall we reckon this marvel, which is approved to us as native to our

spiritual life; as of no more account in the universe than the mortal body which it inhabits for so short a time; as of necessity subject, as the body and its impulses are to decay and death and dissolution? I apprehend that the individual hope of Likeness rests upon a tangible foundation which is the theme of prophecy that is found to be entirely accordant with all that we have come to know of the divine operation in all things. We are assured of the continuity of that operation; and, for my own part, I must believe that the Spirit manifest in it all is That which is from everlasting to everlasting. Withal the present limitations of my being, I know myself to be possessed of a like spirit—I know nothing else on the same plane of certainty—for the correlation of my spirit to the Spirit of the universe is approved to me in every conscious thought. The higher thought and feeling which I *know*, are akin to the Life and Thought Eternal.

If a man cannot distinguish between the lower and the higher—if he must measure the spirit that is in him by the rule of things visible and temporal—if he cannot acknowledge his soul's correspondence with the Eternal Soul of All, and the copartnership of his conscious life with That which lives and moves in all worlds; then inevitably he must deny himself the Hope of Likeness. And if he cannot accept the testimony of his own living, desiring, appreciative, and aspiring self—the witness of his divine nature—he can have none other hope, for, such an one would assuredly not

believe though one rose from the dead to testify to the truth. There is no miracle that can come so near to demonstration of that truth, as the miracle of the Kingdom of God that is within us. For the soul's salvation, the hope matters nothing; but for the gladness of its tenure of its great inheritance, it matters much: and for the sake of that gladness, which is the main-spring of worship and thanksgiving; I rejoice to believe that the growing sincerity of the spirit of Man—for the moment only, doubtful of its own estate—will presently acknowledge the living hope of its righteous desire, and will cast out for ever the fear which has taken possession of it, because of the misrepresentation of the spiritual life in the religions. For the hope remains a living factor of a living verity, unharmed, though the misunderstanding of the past clothed it with illusion and set it upon a foundation of insubstantial and inconsequent tradition.

Inconsequent—because it suggests no shape of the hope it deals with. The Heaven of its anticipation is an empty place, which every one may fill in with his own imaginings; as St. John the Divine did in the Revelation of his own uncharitableness. But the foundation of the Hope of Likeness lends itself to no eccentricities of architecture. It will sustain nothing save what is accordant with the labour and joy and desire of the spiritual life that is begotten in us of the Divine Spirit. Resting on the surety of a life possessed, the hope is as definite as it is infinite. It

is the native hope of the Sons of God—who apprehend their intimate relationship to the Father, whom they know; in whom is all Knowledge, and Wisdom, and Invention; all Beauty, and Excellence, and Honour, and Love, for ever. The desire that is in them reaches forward to all the promise of that relationship: to the fulfilment of the inheritance of their birth-right. We have outgrown the conception of the Father as a visible person—the many mansions of His house are known to us as the innumerable suns and worlds wherein His infinite Spirit reigns—and, approving our Likeness, there is no strangeness or terror in our enlarged conception of Him and His Kingdom. The strangeness was in the unreal familiarity of the earlier misconceptions of Him, and the shrinking of the human spirit was from a human person magnified into a Being overwhelmingly terrible and inhuman. The Father whom we hope to better know, is the gracious and wise Spirit, now manifest to us in all that miracle of the universe which is our increasing delight. From *His* righteousness, we stand in no need of salvation, for we are not condemned by it, but constrained by its operation to a conformity whose consequence is our everlasting satisfaction.

The Heaven of our Hope, therefore, is distinctly foreshadowed by the Kingdom of God that is within us. In what we know, even now, as the life of the Spirit—in our higher thought's appreciation of the manifest operation of God; in the untiring joy of our

seeking after Him, the ever-growing desire to know His Way, and to participate in the fulfilment of His Purpose—we have the certain revelation of the life to come. In our apprehension of the infinity of our inheritance in the Father's love; in the consciousness of our Spirit of the immaturity of its estate, and of its position as but on the threshold of the Father's home; in all the longing of the soul for conformity to the Divine Righteousness in all its activities, and for the fulfilment of its native desire for at-one-ment absolute with the Divine Rejoicing; we have manifest to us the sure hope of our Likeness.

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