

RELIGION AND THE BIBLE.

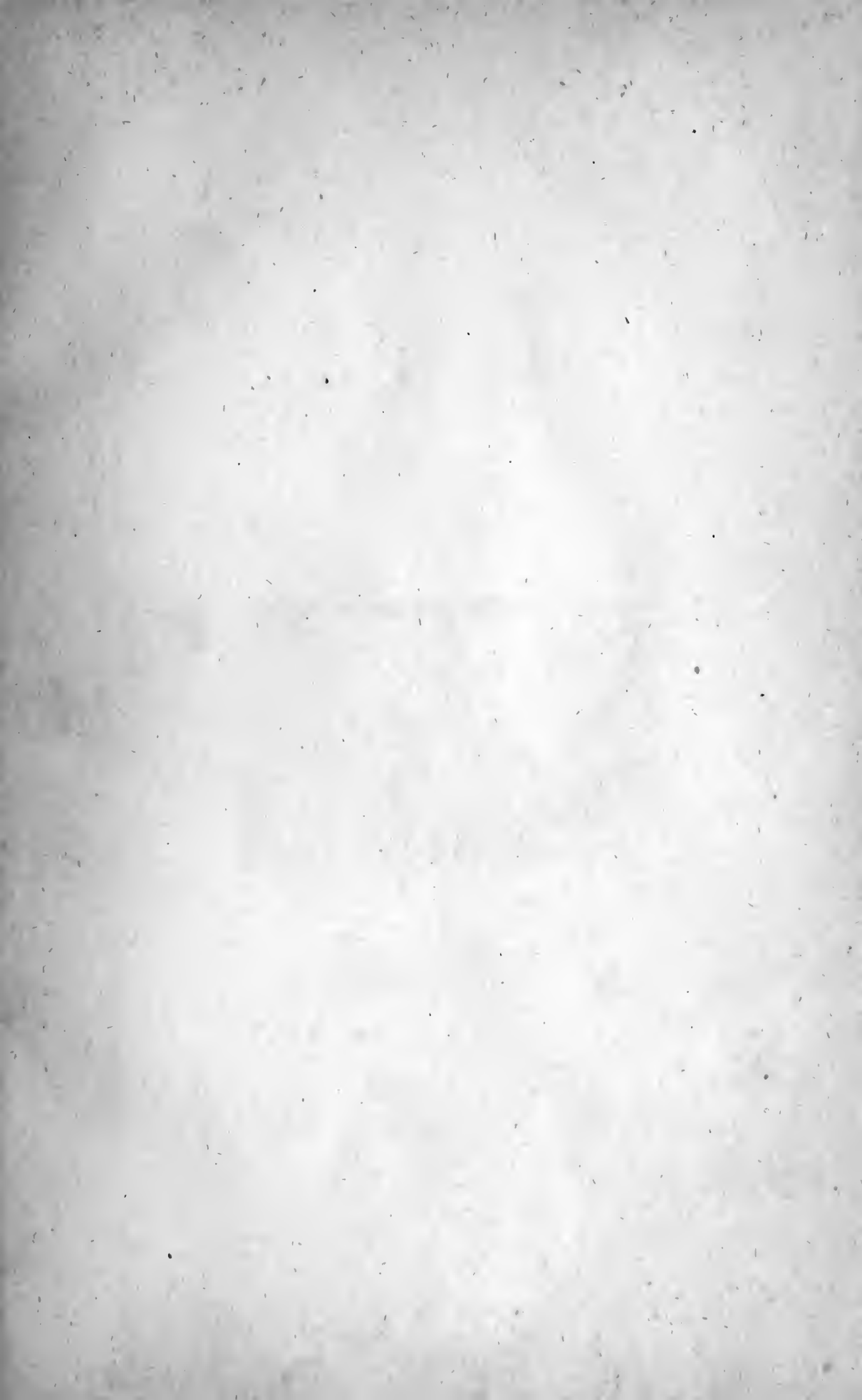
J. WILSON, A.M.

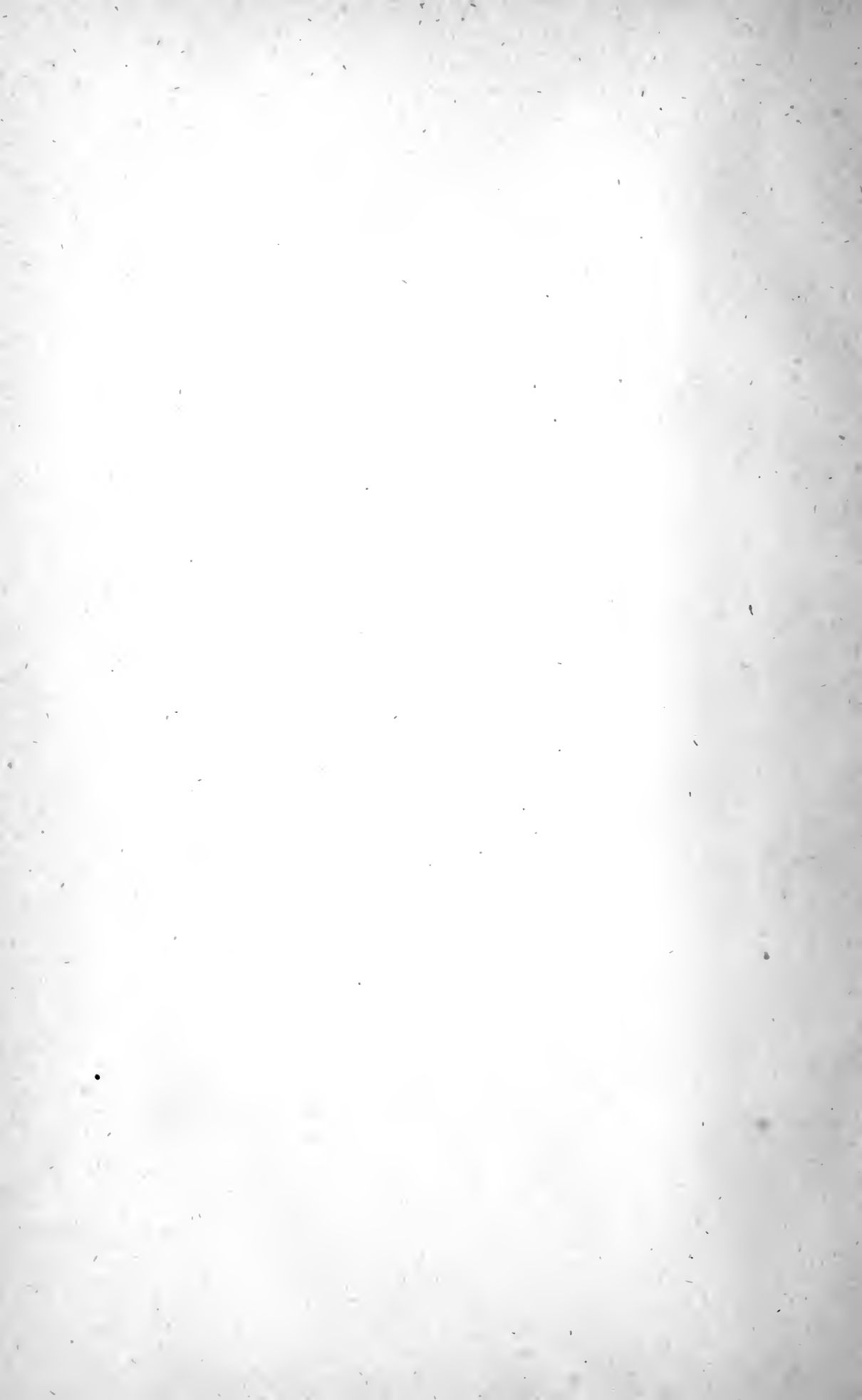
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THE TRUTHS
OF
RELIGION AND THE BIBLE!

AS SEEN BY THE
LIGHT OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY,

BY
J. ^{ack} WILSON, A. M.,

AUTHOR OF "PHRASIS," "ERRORS OF GRAMMAR," "CONDUCT
OF LIFE," ETC.

NEW YORK:
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INTRODUCTION.

The aims and purposes of the author, and his peculiar conceptions in matters of truth and religion, can be set forth in a very few words. To wade through the whole book to find them, would be quite unnecessary. They can be fairly developed in the brief pages of this simple introduction. After that has been digested, the reader can better decide whether the work would be apt to justify his perusal; and should he finally decide to follow the writer in his rough and devious ways, he will find the journey less monotonous, when he knows whither every step tends and just why it is taken. It is perhaps proper, in concluding this paragraph, to explain why the pronoun "I" is used, as the author proposes, instead of the more fashionable, and no doubt more modest, monosyllabic "we." This book is meant to be merely the plain talk of a candid inquirer with such thinking people as may be so kind as to listen to him. It is his intention to indicate merely what he himself thinks, and to state simply how things appear to his vision. To use the pronoun "we" might imply that he wishes to hold others responsible for such thoughts as he might utter, and that would be the farthest of all things from his intention. Hence the use of the only monosyllable that will place beyond all doubt this fact, that he wishes to compromise no other person by the strange things he may publish. The consideration of this subject lies solely, so far as this book is concerned, between the author and his readers. He brings forth his evidence and advances his assertions. His readers weigh both, and draw their own conclusions. There is no sense in trying to conceal these relations by any "set forms of speech," no matter how customary those forms may be.

My religious opinions, I am ready to confess in the outset, are not orthodox. And, indeed, who that reads and thinks to-day is orthodox, that is, as the term was understood fifty, or even ten years ago? The world moves; the race itself progresses. It is not possible for men to-day to see things as they saw them yesterday. Who believes the fables of the Old Testament; who sees and understands them in their literal sense? Who does not seek to explain

them by a resort to natural causes? Who believes in a personal God, or a personal Devil, or in angels that are as monstrous in form as the Centaur or Mermaids? I protest against the sin of teaching, even to little children, what we ourselves know to be false; I protest against even innocent and fashionable fibbing; I protest against stultifying ourselves; I protest against the vain attempts to have religion mould science, rather than science mould religion; I protest against all sprites, all elves, all patron saints, all Cupids, all Mercuries and Jupiters—of which we seem to have as many now as they ever had in Greece or Rome in their craziest days.

I beg to have it understood that I do not seek to depreciate or destroy religion. I will not admit that a person lives who places a higher estimate upon the value of religion than I do; no one feels its effects upon society more sensibly, and no one trusts in its power over the heart more implicitly than I do. But science has opened my eyes. I see God as revealed not alone in the Scriptures, but in all nature around us. I have the same faith now that I had formerly, but it is not founded upon the same basis, Formerly I trusted in tradition only; now I refuse to believe what reason abhors. So far from opposing that religion which I have all along defended, I seek merely to divest it of that false and fanciful covering which renders it disgusting and offensive to every honest and intelligent heart. No, I love the church, as I love every society that seeks to do good; I want to labor for it and work with it. But then it stands to-day, in my opinion, in a false light; it is clad in the borrowed mythological drapery of the ancients; *it is not the religion of to-day*. Following its present walks, Christianity is just as liable to do harm as to do good. It is merely behind the age. There has been no development in it. The earth has revolved, and returned upon its axis again and again. The sun has risen and set, and the planets have gone on in their courses. Yet religion, worth more to us than all the treasures of earth beside, moves not. It stands to-day where it stood two, perhaps six, thousand years ago. We believe what our fathers believed, and teach what our fathers taught. The sedate and cynic monks of the Dark Ages did nothing more nor less than we have done. But is it strange that a religion which the pious old Jews made for us twenty centuries ago should hardly fit us now? Is it strange that, as a tight-fitting and ill adapted garment, it leaves us naked in some places and draws tightly upon us in others? Finally, are we not capable, at this late day, of developing our own faith and seeking our own salvation?

I stand, as I conceive the matter, between two hostile and irreconcilable extremes, the scoffers and revilers of religion at the one

pole, and the unprogressive, unreasoning, immovable devotees of religion at the other. I represent that vast multitude of reflecting and feeling humanity who shun the touch of the atheist and the blasphemer as they would the plague, and at the same time pity the listless and thoughtless worshiper of mystery and ignorance as they would the child or the savage. I belong to that numerous class of individuals, in the church as well as out of it, who believe that religion is progressive; that it was not in the Old Testament what it is in the New; that it is not in the Reformation what it was out of it; that it is not to-day what it was yesterday, and that it will not be to-morrow what it was the day before. Religion is no monster. It had a natural birth; it has lived a natural life, and will die a natural death. Religion is no miracle. It was born in the nature of man. It lives with him; it grows with him, and as the race vanishes and is lost, it will finally decay and disappear with him. Religion is simply the reflex of man's character and position. In the very nature of things the heathens have one belief, the half civilized another, and the enlightened still another.

I look to religion as the true source of all good, all virtue, all truth; and upon the church as the proper defender and representative of this religion. But with all this, I believe that with the weight of some excrescences which now bear it down, it cannot go on successfully to the fulfilment of its mission. *I claim that the religion of to-day does not meet the wants of the hour. It is not doing for humanity what God intended it should do.* It is to-day what it was in Moses' time, *too much a religion of forms.* There is no heart in it; it is pulseless. The ministry mean to perform what is demanded of them, but they have, in my opinion, simply mistaken their duty. While humanity is dying for work, the pulpit gives us simply discussion and precept; while she begs for the substance, it is the shadow that is given her. But, is it with dazzle, and pomp, and glitter, and form, and pretence, and show, that we are going to appease a just and an unrelenting God? Oh, what would our good old Methodist fathers and mothers say to these things? Shall we go to heaven on church records, long praying, much fasting, liturgies well learned, and pew rents liberally paid? Ah, my good friends, is that what God demands? Is that what people are to do to be saved? Is there nothing in common between our religion and our morality? Is religion not the parent and pattern of morality? Is there nothing of true Christ left in us?

For myself these are the chief commandments, and surely "there is none other than these:" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,

and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this: THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF."

My mission, as I conceive it, is different from that of any man who has preceded me. I come neither to build up a church nor to gather in converts. I come merely to establish that which is founded already. I am opposed to no sect, or at least, am as much opposed to one sect as I am to another. It is the general truths of religion that I am discussing, rather than the imperfections and weaknesses of any particular sect. If they will only open their eyes and see, or their ears and hear, I am confident they may all profit by the lesson I am now attempting to give them.

I come to violate no law and to oppose no organization. I come not as Huss did, or Luther or Calvin, with fire in my eye and Satan in my heart. I come as the Summer breeze cometh, to soothe, strengthen and delight. I come in the interests of peace, to promote peace. I come to teach liberty of conscience and liberty of sentiment, the unrestricted right of all men and women to believe in those doctrines which the God of heaven, as well as the God of earth, impels them to believe. I come to teach the common brotherhood of the race, not in theory only, *but in practice*, not for any one sect, but *for all mankind*. I come to teach love, the love for all nature, as well as for Nature's God. I come to praise God, not because I fear him, but because I love him; not because I dread his mightiness, but because I adore his goodness.

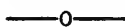
I hope in all things to show myself a man, but in no case more than in this important undertaking. I hope that no sort of persecution and no possible step on the part of my Christian opposers, will remove me from that calmness and forbearance which is proper for one who would preach *good will to all men*.

My motives in this matter let no man impugn. I may be misguided; harm may come where only good was intended, but let no man say that my purposes are not just, and that the objects I have aimed at are not those becoming to one who claims to be in the fullest sense of the term a follower of Christ. What is here written and published is not to gratify any spleen or satisfy any ambition. It is the simple performance of what I conceived to be my imperative duty. I have felt myself inspired in writing this, just as the writers of the Old and New Testament no doubt felt themselves inspired. I have felt, fatalist that I am, that God has preserved me unto this day to do this very work. It has been my resolve from my youth onward to do what I am now doing. I have never lost sight of it for one moment. I have never doubted, never

hesitated; I have never lost confidence in God, never distrusted either his wisdom or his power. I acknowledge his supremacy in all things. I feel my own nothingness; I feel that I am merely an instrument in his hands, simply "a reed shaken by the wind". I seek no glory, I ask no applause. I want no triumphs but the triumphs of light and reason.

Finally, I come to utter what has been suppressed for more than a century. I come to breathe aloud sentiments and remonstrances which have lain smothering in the heart since the day that Luther was born. I come to speak for intelligent manhood, to publish to the world what thinking men feel, but which they do not find it policy to utter. I come to protest against the bigotry, the selfishness, the intolerance, and the hypocrisy which prevail too largely to-day among those who claim to be followers of Christ.

THE BIBLE.



CHAPTER I.

ITS VALUE.

The Christian religion is founded upon the Bible, and it is this book that we will make our first subject for consideration. As a book of records, there are none more sacred; as a collection of moral and religious teachings, there are none so holy. What intelligent man is there who will not reverence it for its antiquity? Who is there that will not hold it in tender regard for its piety and its wisdom? If in the pride of our self-sufficiency, we cast that aside, what better code or constitution shall we take in its stead? I venerate that blessed book; I love its holy teachings, I humbly bow to its divine authority, but after all, I do not worship it, at least I do not worship it as the blind heathens worship their deities, their relics, and their heroes. I cannot consent that it shall be veiled from our sight, or carefully concealed in the adytum of the temple, while its oracles are, as it were, handed down to us from the lips of some venerated priestess. For me at least the age of wild and senseless devotion is past. If I confess the power of the Bible, it must be simply because I feel that power. If I recognize its authority, it is only because I perceive that recognition to be due.

ITS CHARACTER.

I acknowledge that the Bible is sacred, but not that it is beyond the limits of human intelligence and inquiry. If it claims our submission and support, I have a right to ask for the basis upon which those claims are founded, and it is in this connection that I now proceed to seek after the true character of the Bible.

The question in which we are most concerned is this: is the Bible infallible; is it a direct revelation from God, in the sense commonly understood; is it essentially different from other books, at least from similar books among other people? Our answer to these questions is, unhesitatingly, no. The Bible does indeed differ

from all other books, but only as one book differs from, or is above, another. The Bible writers were no doubt divinely inspired; they were men who drew near unto God and held close communion with him, but I do not believe they were the last ones or the only ones who ever felt that divine inspiration. All true christian and good men who write or speak what they feel impelled to utter are, I believe, even to-day, in like manner inspired of God,—with an inspiration like the prophets in kind, but far less, probably, in degree.

But when you insist that I shall receive as gospel truth the saying that God left his high throne in heaven to aid in preparing or compiling this holy book, that he prepared tables of stone, that “the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God” (Ex., 23, 16), you are going altogether too far back into the the regions of superstition and myth to permit me to put any reliance in the truth of such a story. However, it is not claimed that anything more than an insignificant portion of this great book came thus direct from the hand of God—a little in the books of Moses, and that is all. So far as relates to anything godlike in the appearance of these accounts, the writers of the Bible relate, just as other historians or narrators do, simply what they have seen, heard, or believe.

The leading error in the religious notions of Christian people seems to be this: that no such book can be found in the world, none so good, none so great, none so divine. And yet it is a fact that there is no enlightened people upon the earth that has not just such a book of its own, a bible. There is none without its traditions, none without its records, none without its accounts of a world created, of a deluge, of wicked men and their punishments, of Devils and Gods, their wondrous workings and their interminable conflicts. There is none without its code of morals, none without its well defined rules of conduct, none without certain prescribed conditions by which they are to be governed in this world and saved in the the world to come.

The Mahometans have their Koran; there is the Zendavesta of Zoroaster, and the sacred Vedas of the Hindoos, the writings of Confucius and the Shu-King, the book par excellence of the Chinese. These holy writings were not only believed and adopted each by a race more numerous than our own, but even we ourselves are forced to confess that they bear upon their face abundant marks of wisdom, of goodness, and of great moral excellence. We might also name the Mythology of the Greeks and Romans; we might speak of their fables, their traditions, their aphorisms, their philosophy. We affect to ridicule and despise these chapters in the history of an

ancient people, and yet we know them to have been our equals at least in all that makes a race learned and intelligent, in all that gives it grandeur and renown, in all that makes it at the same time powerful and permanent.

We descant with great confidence upon the sparse literary remains of an extinct people. There is no uncertainty in our minds about their character. We assign to them a natural origin, and give them a natural history. But in what essential elements do these documents differ from our own holy scriptures? We worship our writings as sacred, and so do other people worship as sacred the writings that they have inherited. We consider ours as affording the supreme law and direction in life, and so they consider theirs. We consider theirs a mere collection of holy traditions handed down from generation to generation, embellished with such additions as the imagination of commentators could supply. We find woven in these writings the thoughts and philosophy of certain devout and reflective individuals, men who have felt impelled by a power unseen to themselves, and who have been urged forward to sacrifice both their happiness and life in order that a world might be saved. And when you add to this the codes of certain moral lawgivers, what have we more or less than our own Bible affords?

Christians assume, in the sufficiency of their own conceit, not only that theirs is the only Bible extant, but that theirs is the only true religion. No other people, if we may believe what they pretend, have a true God, none have a true Savior, none others have reliable prophets, none others afford a veritable Satan and a true purgatory. Now, this is the same old story repeated over and over again in the history of every nation on the globe, and we need not except even the nomads of Asia or the savages of the New World. Wrapped up and concentrated as it were in self, they are all equally certain in their own hearts that they are the only reliable and important people on earth, and, as a matter of course, that theirs is the only true religion and philosophy of the world. The creeds of the Turks and Chinese are disgusting to us, and the Turks and Chinese again are astonished at our ignorance and conceit. It requires a great deal of effort, much concentrated mental power and some intelligence, to enable us to break open the crust that envelopes us, and cast off the covering that dims our reason and blunts our senses. We have only to look about us and use the light that nature gives us, to perceive that as a people we are only one among thousands, that we are neither the only one nor the first one, and that in all probability we shall not be the last one, in the world.

As it is with us as a people, so it is with ours as a religion. It is only one unit in a vast collection of units, all of them alike in

character and kind, and each performing its own useful and important office in the development and direction of the heart. They are all true in themselves, true from a certain stand-point, true for a certain time and in a certain place. All start upon a career more or less lasting, and all are destined to give place to something more vigorous and youthful in the end.

I concede most cheerfully that our religion is founded in truth, but I consider it a mark both of vanity and weakness to imagine that no other religion has a foundation so good. Ours is truth for us ; it is good for us ; it corresponds to our conditions and answers to our wants ; it is in harmony with our thoughts and purposes, and that is why we adopt it. It is truth as we view it, truth as seen reflected in ourselves. But it is no truth for the Hindoo, or the Arab, or the followers of Fot, for the reason that they have different conditions, and they must have different doctrines to meet them. Our religion would be worthless to them, nay more, it would be positively ruinous. They want something different, something born of their own nature, something that satisfies their own needs and meets their own requirements.

In the character of religion as we have just described it, behold the picture of truth in general. In my humble judgment, the nature of truth has been, and is even now, most sadly misunderstood. It is not a single indivisible and undeveloped thing, fitted for all times and for all people, and remaining to eternity without modification or change. Of that which is received as true now most of it was not so accepted a thousand years ago, and will not, in all probability, be so accepted a few centuries hence. It is a well known fact that what we believe to be true other people equally intelligent and equally honest, believe to be false ; and we deny as absurd and pernicious what others draw to their bosoms as both beautiful and just.

It is the height of folly to assume that what we believe must always and of necessity be true. Let us rather see and believe that what is truth from one stand-point cannot be truth from some other ; that truth is not everlasting nor unchangeable ; that it grows and develops, and in the end will decay. Let us not be counted among the number of those who are wont to claim that because one thing is true every other thing in the same direction must be false. There is a great deal of truth in this world, much more than people commonly suppose. Truth has its fashions, truth has its changes, truth has its times. I beg to assure my readers that truth has no royal road, no constant and invariable standard by which to measure either justice or virtue. Under some circumstances it is a great crime to have killed a man, and again under other conditions, it may be

either excusable or glorious. Robbery and thieving pass for great offenses with us, while other people encourage them as tending to develop both dexterity and sharpness. Here it is a grave charge to have killed a child; elsewhere, for different reasons, the murder of infants is not only permitted but encouraged. And so we might go on through the whole list of what we have been taught to consider as imperative duties, but which, every one, we find elsewhere condemned and discarded.

ITS AUTHENTICITY.

As we turn now to consider briefly the authenticity of the scriptures, it will be necessary first to determine what we mean by the term authentic. We speak of an ordinary history as authentic, when we are assured that it is written by some one who has had peculiar sources of positive and reliable information. When we speak of the scriptures as authentic records, however, we mean this and something more. The essential point in the authenticity of these writings lies in the question whether they are, as assumed and believed to be by Christians, laws, records and revelations *coming directly from God*. It is upon this fact of divine origin that Christians wish to found the supreme authority of the scriptures, rather than upon any power inherent in the scriptures themselves. In other words, the Bible contains histories, laws and precepts coming directly from the hand of God, as opposed to every other book which can contain only that which fallible man can write. This is the main point of authenticity that I come to discuss.

But where is the evidence, in those writings or out of them, that they were prepared directly or indirectly by the hand of God? Have the several parts of the Bible anything in themselves which would indicate a divine or an extraordinary origin? There is nothing in them, not one word, that might not have been written, as similar writings have been written over and over again, by some one who was really an impostor, or by one who, as seems most probable in this case, conceived himself to be sent of heaven to instruct and direct mankind.

Where, again I ask, is the impress of the divine hand in this book? In matters of such grave importance, must we take the unaided, uncorroborated, word of him who renders the account, and who claims to be both prophet and messenger? There is not, I venture to say, within the lids of that book one single attempt to prove by external or additional evidence, or to demonstrate in *any way*, that God did ever dictate or write one single word therein contained. We read indeed of a multitude of things which "the Lord said unto Moses" and unto others, as if it was the most ordinary

thing in the world for the Lord to hold special converse with men ! For us, this would be an extraordinary event, requiring some more proof than the mere *ipse dixit* of any one. But what have we in the Bible beyond the mere impression of one who may have been mistaken as to the personage whom he conceived to be the Lord, or who may have either misunderstood or not faithfully remembered the language that he heard ? What single thing do we know of the character of the writer to entitle him to our confidence in matters of such grave importance ? Perhaps too when he uses the formula "the Lord said", he does not mean that the Lord really talked aloud in this manner, but rather that the Lord impressed certain things upon his heart, or showed him certain things in a vision. It is evident besides that a large portion of the Bible must have been written upon the merest hearsay, for no single person could have witnessed all the things which we find related there ; for example is it not rather doubtful that Moses was present when God created the heavens and the earth ?

Again, we are wont to speak of the Bible, as if it was one complete book, uniform and homogeneous, as indeed it would be, if it all came from the hands of the great Creator, God. But in fact we know it to be a heterogeneous mass, a mere pile of detached and disconnected pieces, of every conceivable character, from the wildest romance down to the most serious disquisition in poetry and prose, a book prepared confessedly by a multitude of persons, various in their rank, in learning and in piety ; with chapters, some of them written in the darkest and most uncertain ages of the world, and others again of much later date than some of our profane history. Where, again we ask, is the evidence that God wrote or dictated the whole of that book, down to and including the epistles of Paul and Peter, as he must have done, if it is *the Bible, the book of God* ?

So little evidence is there to be found to enlighten us, so very delicate is the shade that separates the sacred from the profane, that no two sects, nor two communities, nor even two men, agree exactly upon what should and what should not be considered scriptural. Contrary to the commonly received opinion, that the Bible writings have marks peculiar to themselves by which they are easily distinguished from those which are not sacred, it has been found one of the most embarrassing questions in the world to decide what are scriptures and what are not. Some, as the Jews, receive the Old Testament and reject the New ; some books that are rejected as apocryphal by us, the Catholics adopt as sound and sacred. The question as to what books are genuine and what are spurious is not yet decided even among Protestants. Of those that are cast out, no

one would say that they are not as holy in character as some of those accepted, and no one would say that they have not as much evidence to corroborate their stories and substantiate their claims.

Perhaps some may really suppose that the Bible was a book handed down to some of the prophets and preserved carefully for thousands of years. Yet this is not the case; it is merely a collection of records gathered together at various epochs in the world, derived from various sources and compiled by various authors. A certain Ezra, in the time of the Babylonish captivity, seems to have taken upon himself to collect, improve, and prepare the sacred writings of his time and make a Bible. We are not informed what particular standard he applied, or what particular talent he had above other men which enabled him thus to separate the dross from the gold, and set upon one side the scriptural and upon the other the profane. He had a large mass for selection, and his task was no light one. However, the Bible has been growing since his day, and many parts now taken as sound were not known or received in his time. Others have tried their ability in the same work of collecting, copying and correcting the manuscripts of the Bible, and they have left their imprint, too, upon every one of its pages.

Besides, have we any idea of the number of times those various manuscripts have been copied, in how many places they have been revised and interlined, and how much they have been changed and improved by translators? We do know that much has been left out, that much has been altered, and that many portions have been embellished by the copyists. We know that many accounts are given one way in one of the Old Testament books, and in a very different way in another, so different that it is impossible for both of them to be true. And still the Bible, all of it, is a book fresh from the hands of God! It has passed down through a great many different languages, with the likelihood each time of having its meaning misunderstood by the translator, or if understood, of having it misrepresented. And still the meaning in many places has been left in the gravest doubt. Nevertheless, we are asked to believe that it is the book of God, a work come directly from his pen, or at least, prepared strictly under his dictation.

It will not answer to admit, and we believe it is not so admitted, that it is a joint production of God and man, for that would destroy its claim to being a book of God, to say nothing of the utter impossibility of deciding which part was the work of one and which of the other. But we do know, and no one will deny it for one moment, that men, common, fallible men, have had *very much* to do in giving the character and form to the Bible which it is now found to assume.

Nor must it be overlooked as a fact to be taken into consideration in this connexion, that we have not even the slightest evidence to prove that the men, such as Moses and Joshua, whose names stand at the head of certain portions of the Bible, are really the authors as claimed. Next to Christ, yea hardly next to him in the minds of the Christian world, is Moses. His is the very highest authority, and could we put our finger upon that which we know came from him, we would ascribe to it the most inestimable value. But how difficult is this task! There are the celebrated five books which bear his name, worth all the rest of the Old Testament together, and more. But how little, if indeed there be any, of all this can we believe that Moses wrote of his own knowledge, if he ever wrote it at all. The great events spoken of in Genesis, more momentous than any known to have take place in the world before or since, and upon the truth of which all our religion is founded, must have occurred long before Moses was born; and the accounts contained in this book must either have come from tradition or must have taken rise in the fruitful imagination of the writer himself. But worse than this, so far as regards the authority of these books, is the concluding chapter of Deuteronomy, where Moses gives an account of his own death and burial, and even tells us his age when he died. When we come down to the still later writings of the New Testament, we are just as much puzzled to decide whether such men as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, did or did not write the Gospels, as we are in regard to the books of the Old Testament.

But the proof that the Bible is not a miracle, that it is not a book from God, as Christians have so far understood it to be, does by no means end here. It is evident that an allwise being, such as we conceive God to be, would easily see that to send into the world what his people could not interpret, or which with every show of fairness and justice, they could construe in a manner suited to their own interests and tastes, he might as well not have sent at all. Indeed, if he desired to have it a revelation of his heavenly will and a collection of rules and precepts to direct us in life, how easy would it have been for him to make it plain and unmistakable. As it is, no one is so wise as to be able to decide with certainty just what is commanded in this great book, and what is forbidden. That we can find authority there for almost anything that we wish, is evident from the multitude of different sects, with various beliefs, all of which lay their foundation on the Bible, and claim to take its precepts as their guide. The many ponderous volumes of commentaries may be taken as further evidence of the exceeding uncertainty of scripture teachings and the painful mystery of *revealed* law.

But we must remark in this connexion that the Bible has no character of its own, no fixedness, so far as its meaning is concerned. It is one of the best attested facts in history, that it grows, develops, changes. The Bible has no such meaning, it is no such book for us, as it was in the days of Christ. Its interpretation grows through regular stages of development, marked and measured by the culture of the age in which the interpretation is made. The Bible for us and the Bible for those who lived 200 years ago reads very differently. Men will not repudiate it, they will not deny its authenticity, but they will give it that version which accords with their scientific notions and their own general faith. This very same result we notice in the history of every constitution, whether political or religious. The American people are treating their constitution to-day in this very manner. Written as it was for other times, it is adapted to our altered circumstances by the apt version which we give it. This course is particularly noticeable in the case of all religious codes. They all have their interpreters, and all interpret them in different ways. We find an excellent illustration of this principle in the mythological or religious records of the Greek and Romans. At first they were believed to read what the words literally meant. As time wore along and such a version seemed absurd, it was softened down by explanations and qualifications. The facts recorded were not believed to be literally true, but nevertheless they were supposed to be *founded* in truth and to be only somewhat exaggerated in the details. Further on, they were treated as allegory; finally, they were discarded entirely as the palpable fictions of a poetic imagination, and thus their religion went to the ground. It will not require any great penetration to enable one to perceive that some of these stages are in common with our own. What their good sense will not allow them to accept, Christians now receive under protest, or they satisfy their conscience with an easy interpretation. They give it what the college boys call "a free translation".

To this we must add that if the Bible is a divine revelation, we have a right to expect that at least it should contain thoughts and doctrines suitable and appropriate to a Supreme Being. But who will claim that the Bible, the Old Testament at least, contains such matter? Who will deny for one moment that there is much in that book that is every way revolting to our tastes, our judgment and our sense; much that we would be ashamed to read even in any decent company? If God really wrote the Old Testament, and if he gives such a picture of himself, his character and actions as that record contains, should we not despise him rather than revere him? If God wrote or dictated that book, he must have had a purpose in

view, he must have intended some good, some benefit to his children. But of what earthly good, pray tell us, can it be to read the most that is written there? Why so far from its being a revelation of divine will, and a holy code for our direction, it is mostly taken up with the ancient records of a vain and conceited people and the account of a weak, jealous and vacillating God. And for what good, I ask? We have in it an account of much more vice than virtue, and the vice that is noticed there is rather approved than condemned. I confess my surprise at finding any one who could believe that such thoughts and such words could come direct from a God, the God of a civilized people.

The Bible is a revelation from God, for what purpose? To improve us? How much of that which it contains tends to produce that result? How much that is recounted there would not rather produce the opposite result? How dare we call it an especial revelation from God? It embodies too many of the dogmas, the subtleties and the absurdities that characterize the writings of man, to admit of our calling it the work of a divine being.

ITS HISTORY.

The common understanding is, as intimated before, that Ezra settled the question of the books of the Old Testament. But who was Ezra? No one knows much about him, save that his name was Ezra. Who gave him his charter authorizing him to fix up the Bible? We would like to know, but no one tells us. He did it, but did it when? A great while ago—nobody knows exactly when. But he was a bold reformer. He took the whole responsibility on his own shoulders. What books he liked he accepted; those that did not please him he rejected as trash, and even those that he accepted, he corrected and embellished to suit either his own fancy or the emergency of the case.

It is a most annoying circumstance to people who believe in the infallibility of the Scriptures, that there are so many *apocryphal books*, both in the Old Testament and in the New. It is perfectly well known that people before Christ, and a long time after Christ, were in the habit of writing scriptures on their own account. And so admirably executed were these "divine writings", it was absolutely impossible to distinguish the counterfeit from the genuine—and so the question hangs even unto the present day. We are absolutely at a loss to tell exactly how many books belong in the Bible; we do not know how many that are in it ought to be out, and how many that are out ought still to be in.

A person would think that devout people like the Jews would have been very careful to preserve a faithful catalogue of the Sacred

Books. But none such has ever been found. Melito made one for himself two hundred years, not B. C., but after Christ. But he leaves out Esther, and includes the apocryphal Book of Wisdom. In the 3d century, Origen made another list.

Again, we are told that the Scriptures were lost during the Babylonish captivity, and never appeared again till Ezra found them 400 years B. C. These writings were lost 800 years. What a regard those devout Jews must have had for the Scriptures ! But they also lost their language, and spoke only Chaldaic. So the Scriptures had to be interpreted by the priests who might, and no doubt did, add certain improvements of their own. A person would have supposed that the "Children of God" would have preserved the instructions handed down by their father with the most scrupulous care. But no, they lost them, and they found them, and they lost them again, and finally when they found them again, they were not sure whether they had the right ones or not—and so the matter remains in doubt even to the present day.

Hilkiah we are told in Chronicles (287 B. C.), found a book of the law. This was rather late in the day to find such a document, and then heaven only knows whether he got the right book even then. And the Jews were astonished. I do not doubt it. Though they were "Children of God," they did not know what a book of the law was—they had never seen one before. Joe Smith's people were also astonished when he found a book of the law. Hilkiah found the book of the law ! And who was Hilkiah ? Let those who know tell ; and while they are about it, let them also inform us how he came to find it. We know who Joe Smith was, and where he found his book of the law, but Hilkiah's history is not so well written.

People have been cheated, humbugged and imposed upon over and over again in these religious matters, among other people, why may it not be so with us ? To arouse our suspicions, we every year see some new ism arise, some new dogma prevail, growing up as it does on the audacity of some infatuated and designing creature. There are the Spiritualists, the Mormons, the Quakers, &c. How do we know that the custodians of the Scriptures for say 4,000 or more long years have not been a little remiss in their duty, and let some knave slip in the wrong book ? That has been done more than once, and we have nothing to prove that it has not been done in this case.

We cannot rely much on Hilkiah, and it is better to start, as most writers do, with Ezra as the founder of the Bible. Some writers say that he not only found the Scriptures, but that he fabricated them. This is quite possible, for we know that many Scriptures have been fabricated. But if we date only from Ezra, the

Bible is not a very old book, not so old as many books that do not claim to have a divine origin. For a book of the law, 400 B. C. is comparatively a recent date.

Others again say that up to Maccabees, and that was 200 B. C., there was no book of scriptures. There were only scattered fragments, and in such a condition as to render them extremely liable to all sorts of changes and spurious insertions. But how did Maccabees come to be authorized to collect and arrange these fragments ?

It is evident, moreover, that we have *not the whole of it*. That everybody admits. The Jews lost some of their books and actually burnt others. It seems strange to me that God did not see to it that these writings were better cared for ; and as he knows everything, he also knows where these scriptures were lost, and hence could tell the Jews just where they could find them. But they were lost, and are still lost, some of the most divine writings that man has ever known !

THE SEPTUAGINT.

But the Bible to which we now date back as the original is the Septuagint, a Greek translation. And how can a Greek translation of a Hebrew text give anything more than an approximation to the true word ? So we do not have the true word, not the original word, not the real stuff, but only a translation to stand on ! And when we consider all the changes and additions and omissions and amendments that have been made by man for the last 2,000 years, what shall we think or say of the *authenticity* of the Bible ? Our Hebrew Bible turns out to be really a Greek one. The best Christian critics we have admit that many words in the original Hebrew could not be translated into Greek at all. Hence it is not strange that no two translators ever have agreed, or ever will agree, on the proper version of the Scriptures. An eminent Christian professor, Du Pin, has well said : " It is mere superstition to assert that the Hebrew text we have is not corrupted in any place, and that there is no fault, nor anything left out."

To bring greater obscurity on the subject, it is even now asserted by good Christian doctors, that our Septuagint version is a spurious one, the true copy being lost at the burning of the Alexandrian Library. The Christian father, St. Jerome, says, alluding to the Old Testament version : " If they say that the Latin copies are to be credited, let them tell me which ; for there are almost as many different copies as there are manuscripts."

NEW TESTAMENT.

So much for the authenticity of the Old Testament. Now let us see how much better we are off with the New. The New Testa-

ment claims to give the teachings of Christ, but there is this unfortunate circumstance, in this connexion, to begin with: Christ himself never wrote a word of the New Testament. We have no evidence that he could write at all. So we have all his sayings handed down in the crudest and most unreliable manner possible. We are told again and again what Christ said. But here we must depend upon tradition, the most unsafe of all kinds of evidence, where everything should be exact. Where not a word should be added or subtracted and none substituted, we have to depend on the poorest of all kinds of evidence, hearsay—and that hearsay nearly 2,000 years old. We have no reason to believe that any one ever made a single note or memorandum of Christ's sayings, during his life time. The writings of Paul, and others who wrote epistles, were those of an earnest and devoted preacher, a follower of Christ, giving up his life in the service of his master. As such they are of the highest authority, but they are no more.

Joe Smith got his bible mostly in a lump, and Mahomet got his from time to time, but it came, in both cases, direct from God himself (so it is pretended at least). There was no confusion among copyists, no quarrelling among commentators. But ours was written by Saints, and Prophets, and Disciples, 200 or 300 years after Christ was dead and gone. Scarcely a chapter of the New Testament is even pretended to have been written less than 100 years after Christ.

There is not the slightest proof that those whose names are placed at the head of the gospels were in any way concerned in their production. It is simply mentioned that they are gospels according to certain men whose names are given. It is not known by whom the heading *according to* was added. That the authors of these gospels were divine, or had peculiar sources of information, has never been shown by any one. Strange as it may seem to some, THERE IS NOT AN ORIGINAL COPY EXTANT OF ANY OF THE BIBLE WRITINGS, EITHER OF THE OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT.

The foundation and body of the New Testament structure is the Four Gospels. But on what evidence do they rest? These were not written till 150 years after Christ. On their very face they are mere collections of sayings and common reports. Not one of the gospel writers was a companion of Christ. "From the era of Christ until the latter end of the fourth century, there was no authorized collection of the writings of the New Testament. All was doubt and dispute for the first 300 years, during the very time when everything should have been certain and satisfactory. If it was all doubt 1,500 years ago, can it be all certainty now?"

Again, the gospels are not the only histories of the kind, and hence their genuineness is not an easy question to decide. There

happens to be many other gospels apparently just as authentic as these are. Why they should have been crowded out, no one can possibly tell. On their face they are just as sound, most of them, as any of the Four, and they are supported by just as good evidence. They were rejected simply because they did not happen to suit the fancy of the council which decided the question.

FALSE GOSPELS.

Many of these spurious gospels were for a long time considered sound, and they still are by some writers. Many of them contain just as true doctrines, just as noble precepts, as any of the Four. They contain, I admit, many heathenish ideas and conceptions, but how much less can be said of the Four? In the earlier centuries, when people would be more able and more apt to distinguish the counterfeit gospels from the pure than we would at this late day, what are now denominated false gospels, were then held in high regard as perfectly good ones.

If these apocryphal gospels were spurious, or magnified accounts, as Christians believe them to be, it demonstrates this leading fact: that men did write, and that there are still in existence gospels which are wholly or partially founded on error. Now then, it being conceded that it is possible for men to write gospels which are not authentic, not written by the Divine Hand, and hence not reliable, it must be proved that our four gospels do not belong to this class, that is, are not spurious. But no such proof has been given. No one has proved, or attempted to prove, that these four gospels are any more *authentic* than the hundred or less that have been rejected.

It is to be regretted that these false gospels, so considered, have been, and still are, so carefully suppressed, and that it is so difficult to obtain a copy of them. They could do no harm, even if they could do no good. Those who examine them will find that they contain many points in common with our gospels. Many things are told there substantially as they are told in the Four, but besides, they contain many things that are new. In the gospel entitled the "Birth of Mary," there is a long story of Mary's early days—how she was divinely born, and divinely reared; made a virgin and married to Joseph, an old man, against his own choice—the arrangement being brought about by means of a sign. The writer evidently felt that whoever should be born of God should have something more than an ordinary mother. This, of course, is new to our gospels. The story of her pregnancy, however, and Gabriel's imparting the surprising information to her, is substantially as we find it in the Testament.

The book called "Protevangelion" was once considered high authority, and is certainly an interesting work. It relates fabulous and exaggerated stories, but so do our own gospels. It differs from some, or even all of the Four, but so do each of these differ among themselves. If it tells its story strangely, so does John tell his. He too has much that is new, much that you will fail to find in the other three. What can be more fabulous in appearance than the story which John alone tells so carefully, that of the raising of Lazarus?

The main points of the "Protevangelion" are these: That Joseph was a widower with children, an old man (as indeed all the old fathers and saints believed him to be, his assumed youngerly character being a modern idea); also the account of Anna, who in the end bore Mary, the mother of Jesus, and of Mary being fed by angels. The last chapters agree with portions of Matthew. The wise men came to worship. Herod is alarmed and wants to see Jesus to worship him. He orders all children to be destroyed, and (here comes the variation) the mother of Jesus hides him in an ox-manger. John's mother is also alarmed and flees, but can find no place of security. John's mother, Elizabeth, could not climb the mountain: she called for the mountain to open and receive her, and it did as she wished. The star was one in heaven which outshone all the rest. It also tells the story how Zaccharias, the father of John, thus escaping, was murdered by the orders of Herod, who was angry because he could not find the son.

The gospel of the Infancy of Jesus is peculiar. In the 1st verse of the 1st chapter, we read: "The following accounts we found in the book of Joseph, the high priest Caiphaz." 2d. He relates that Jesus spoke even when he was in the cradle, and said to his mother: "Mary, I am Jesus, the son of God, which thou didst bring forth," &c. According to this gospel, Christ's whole infancy was glorious and marvellous. He caused wonderful cures, even while still an infant, by the sight of him or by his touch. In one case he causes a well to spring out, in which his mother washes his coat. He continued to perform wonderful cures. While yet a boy he formed clay figures and made them walk. He made clay birds fly, besides doing many other miracles, but withal he is said to have been a poor carpenter. At another time he transformed his play-fellows into kids. He becomes the king of his companions. At school he is disobedient, but the hand of the schoolmaster who is about to punish him withers. He is said to have studied law till his thirtieth year.

Thomas' gospel of the Infancy of Jesus is about in the same strain. He kills a boy, causes blindness on his accusers, and has his ears pulled by his father.

The gospel of Nicodemus, which is long, gives a full account of Christ's descent into hell. Death and the Devil are in great horror at his coming. He tramples on Death, seizes the Prince of Hell, and takes Adam with him to heaven.

Observe, thus, what men have been capable of writing of Christ.

THE FOUR GOSPELS.

Extensive and searching investigations by devout and Christian men have demonstrated that the gospels are collections merely, and their contradictions between themselves, and their inconsistencies, arise from the fact that their authors derived their information from different sources.

They were first spoken of in the year 182. Not one of the apostolic fathers allude to them, as they would have done, had they been current. They refer to others, but not to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If so, these books could not have been composed by the apostles whose names they bear.

We must draw the inference that *these gospels were composed long after Christ's time, by men who followed hearsay and idle traditions, and who personally knew nothing either of Christ or his sayings.* It is not strange then that we find in them so many things that sound very unlike the acknowledged doctrines and teachings of Christ.

If we chose to pursue the inquiry, we could show by internal evidence that the gospels could not have been written by the men named, and at the time mentioned.

THE EVANGELISTS.

The Evangelists were simple historians. They give things as they saw or heard them, or at least as they understood them. They do not pretend to expound the laws which were given them, nor do they assume to increase the number of these laws by giving others which are new. They do not pretend to be divine men, or to have divine sources of information.

Among the four Evangelists there seems to be this difference: Matthew seems to be the more original. He seems to have been something more than a transcriber. Mark, and Luke in particular, seem to have Matthew, or some other author, before them, and by this they seem to have been guided. It is even conjectured that Luke had both Matthew and Mark before him. He is certainly little more than a commentator and a copyist. John seems to have been a philosopher on his own account, an assumed improvement on his master. He is evidently later than all the others. There is

much that is original with him, much, it is claimed, that he never inherited from Christ, and for which it is hardly proper that Christ should be held responsible. There are many words and ideas found in his book which are not found in those of the other evangelists.

There are the strongest reasons, facts that almost lead to a forced conclusion, that there have been made, in the different ages through which the New Testament has come down to us, various changes and amendments in its writings. Those who have copied these writings, or who edited them, have seen fit to interpolate them with explanations of their own, to add some portions and cast out others, merely to satisfy their notions as to what the Bible should contain.

It is impossible that the evangelists have given all these long sayings of Christ, those sermons of his, upon anything like authentic information. It is generally conceded that all the evangelists got their information second, if not fourth, hand, and it is no wonder that we find serious discrepancies. Renan well remarks: "If Jesus spoke as Matthew has it, he could not have spoken as John has it," and further on, "I dare any person to compose a consistent life of Jesus if he makes account of the discourses which John attributes to him. Surely the Christ of John and the Christ of the other gospels are not the same person."

How could Matthew and Mark record what they had not heard? How did the evangelists arrive at facts, of which they speak so calmly and so positively, but of which they could not have been personally cognizant, the shadowing of the Holy Ghost for instance? Only by tradition, and so we have simply tradition and reports clear through.

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY.

In the middle of the third century, Origen thought proper to make a selection of gospels on his own responsibility. Being a man of influence as well as of erudition, he succeeded in having his selection endorsed and his canon adopted.

The Council of Laodicea declared that this was the true canon. But who authorized the Council of Laodicea to decide a matter so momentous? How much better right had they to decide what was "law and gospel" than you, my reader, or I? They voted on it, and the eyes had it. But what if the noses had had it? Why then, then—*there is no telling what then*. I have never yet seen a council that was infallible, and I have not the slightest reason for believing that the Council of Laodicea was any exception to the rule. So far as deciding the matter by vote goes, I would have been full as well satisfied if they had chosen to flip a penny, with the understanding

that "heads I win, tails you lose." Who knows that the leading spirits of this assembly were not, as often happens in Christian assemblies, an obstinate, conceited and bigoted set of ministers? Who does not know that, as a matter of history, they were so? They have been spoken of as members of "a contentious and babbling assembly."

And the Council of Nice—— was not a whit *nicer*. The disorder and irreligion of this gathering was so great that some of them even came to blows, and one pious bishop kicked and cuffed another poor bishop so badly that he died in less than three days. Fine gospel people these were to make Bibles for us here in the year 1874! Tindal speaks of them as being "most obstinate as to power, but *flexible as to faith*."

Of three councils, that of 406 rejected several books adopted by that of 363, but the Council of 680 restored them as they are—and that is the way we get the Bible as we find it.

Many parts of the New Testament are still rejected by the most eminent and most Christian divines. The learned Evanson would include in his Testament only Luke, Acts, Paul and Revelations. Matthew, Mark and John he denominates "spurious fictions of the second century." The Swedenborgians take only the four gospels and Revelations. Luther rejected the Epistle of James. Erasmus and Calvin doubted Revelations, and so we might go on quoting high Christian authority *till there would not be a chapter of the holy book left!*

Up to the fifteenth century, when printing was invented, the pious monks had charge of the Scriptures, and who knows how much the good book may have suffered by such keeping? That they would occasionally be guilty of some little trick seems to be generally conceded.

How is it to-day? Do all our various sects agree upon just how the Bible should read, and what it should contain? *Not by any means!* One thing is very certain, and that is, *no matter how divine may be the origin of the Bible, its character is fixed and its fate is decided entirely by a human tribunal*, and we should dread to be held responsible for all the hard usage it has received from some of its most devout worshipers.

HOLY FATHERS.

To get get a perfectly clear idea of the Scriptures and their value, we should become acquainted with the Fathers, those holy men who had charge of the sacred book for several hundred years, and who have made the Bible very much what we find it now. It is well known and universally admitted that the originals of the Old

Testament, if originals they were, never made their appearance till 300 or 400 years before Christ; and the originals of the New Testament, if originals they were, cannot date back to an earlier day than 400 or 600 years after Christ and his apostles; and since these writings were from the first in the hands of the saints, or fathers of the earlier centuries, men who had the power, if they had not the will, to add their own corrections and additions to the Scriptures, it becomes us to inquire here what sort of folks those Holy Fathers were.

We begin by saying that it is easily enough demonstrated that these Christian fathers were a set of deceivers and imposters, no better than the saints of the Old Testament, probably not so good. We happen to know, unfortunately for Bible infallibility, that they were not a Geo. Washington set of people who could not *tell a lie*. A small fib was as honey to their lips. We have the authority of so good a Christian as Mosheim, in his church history, that "it was in the earlier centuries an act of virtue to deceive and lie when by that means the interests of the church might be promoted;" and "errors in religion were punished with civil penalties and corporeal tortures." He says it must be frankly confessed that the greatest men and most eminent saints were tainted with this corrupt principle that lying for the good of the church was all right and proper, and those who made it their business to deceive with the view to promote the cause of truth "were deserving of commendation rather than censure." We might, if we thought it necessary, give a whole volume of proof to show that this lying and cheating for the good of religion was the *prevailing* disease of the first twelve centuries of Christian era, and that while there is less of it in later times, *it has not wholly disappeared yet*.

It was one of the most common things imaginable in the earlier ages, for pious people to believe that they were inspired, and to feel authorized themselves to write Scriptures, thus making the number of spurious documents of sacred history far greater than the number of pure ones.

Considering then how the work began, and to whose hands the business was first entrusted, we need not wonder that, even down to the present day, the main business of Christian sects has been to revise and correct the Holy Scriptures, so as to enable them to meet the demands of their own liturgy. *There are as many different readings and renderings of the Bible as there are verses in the book.*

BIBLE WRITERS.

That no such man as Moses ever wrote the Pentateuch is easy enough to prove. The book of Genesis bears evidence upon its

face that it was written by two, if not by more, authors. In Genesis there are two different stories placed side by side or interwoven together. One speaks of God, and the other of the Lord God. One says that God created man and woman at one time, and the other at different times, and so on.

It is curious, too, that the books after the Pentateuch until II. Kings, which was written after Kings, make no mention of Moses' book, and this is nearly 1,000 years after the good father's time.

Many ascribe the Pentateuch to Ezra. Another important fact is this, that the account which Moses gives is so nearly identical with similar books found among other people, it has evidently been copied. Thus comparing the Pentateuch with the Persian Scriptures, the Deluge, the Fall, the Serpent, the Six Days, are all to be found in the older writings of Zoroaster.

Some say Solomon wrote the Pentateuch, and others say Samuel did it. The only thing that is clear is that the meek man himself had little or no hand in the business. The eminent Christian Du Pin assures us that: "we are not certainly assured of the true authors of the Old Testament books." What confidence, then, shall we place in the infallibility of books whose authors we do not even know by name, and of whose character and standing we know as little as we do of either Mercury or Mars?

BIBLE REVELATIONS.

The Bible is pronounced by Christian people a book of revelations. I do not doubt it. It is a revelation. It shows God as he revealed himself to the stiff-necked Jews. But is that the only revelation he has made? Would God, our God, be guilty of so small an act as to reveal himself only to an insignificant number of such ignorant and obstinate people as the Children of Israel? Must all the other people of the earth trudge along in the world without God's revelation? Certainly not. He has been revealing himself in various ways from the time the morning stars first sang their songs together. He has revealed himself one way to the Pagan, another way to the Hindoo, another to the Persian, and still another to the Chinese. He reveals himself to one as well as the other, but to no two alike. The Jews give us God only *as they look at him*, or in other words, *as they make him*. The Mahometans and the Pagans with different tastes, different interests and education, of course, present him in a different phase entirely.

BIBLE INDECENCIES.

But the worst to be said of the Old Testament I have not yet mentioned. The most devout Christian in the world, if he knows

enough to count ten, knows that the Old Testament is filled with most unconscionable lies, not only improbable but impossible things. But it is possible that he does not know that the Old Testament is a very indecent book, and a work not always proper to put into any person's hands. It is possible Christians do not generally understand this fact, for the simple reason that they have grown up in the faith, and believe that the Bible is a perfect book. But if they will take out certain passages to be found in the Old Testament and let them stand upon their own platform, aside from any surroundings, they will soon see that no more indecent language, no more gross, impure and pernicious sentiments ever appeared in print than can be found in the Old Testament. *Whoever denies this is qualified to deny anything.*

I will not quote. I should be ashamed to quote. I only refer. Let those who delight in such select reading hunt up the passages and satisfy themselves. Take Gen. ix. 20; xiv. 1; xvii. 9; xix. 1; xxx. 1; xxxi. 19; xxxiv. 1; xxxv. 22; xxxviii. 6; Lev. xv. 1; Lev. xx. 1; Num. xxv. 1; Num. v. 12; Deut. xxii. 13; xxiii. 12; Judges, xi. 22; xxi. 11; II. Sam. xi. 2; xiii. 1; xvi. 20; Psalms, xxxviii. 3; Ezek., xvi.

Let the reader examine these chapters and then say, if he can, that the evil of such passages does not do more harm to the young than all the good that surrounds them; let him say also, if he will, that the Old Testament is a suitable book for families to read. This is an unpleasant fact, as unpleasant to me as to anybody, but nobody, we hope, will undertake to deny it unless he feels able to refute it.

BIBLE INFALLIBILITY.

How should the Bible be infallible? How should its accounts be correct? How should its various parts correspond? Bishops and saints, councils and common people have all taken their turns at correcting, amending, and interpolating the Bible. From the time of Ezra down to the present time they have been busy—and how much before Ezra, Heaven only knows. Amend the book of God! What impudence and conceit! Have all the correctors and commentators been inspired? After century upon century of wrangling, interminable controversies and biblical changes, how shall we know what of all that is left is God's word, or what is the word of some of his saints? How shall we know where the word of fallible man begins, and where the word of infallible God ends?

Is the fact that the Bible contains so many good things a proof of its divine character? Are there not doctrines elsewhere as true, as pure and as noble as any you can find in the Bible? But if the Bible is divine because of its holy and righteous doctrines, what

inference shall we derive from the fact that it contains, the Old Testament particularly, some very wicked teachings, and sets forward as models of piety and morality some of the most immoral and heartless men that history speaks of?

What are the internal evidences that the Bible, as a book, is inspired and infallible? So far from being the work of some God, who is supremely wise, supremely just and good, it is a document just as wicked and misshapen as poor, mortal and feeble man is accustomed to prepare. So far from its being unique in its character and without a parallel, every civilized and book-writing people in the world has a similar holy book of its own, precisely like it in character, and no doubt similar to it in origin. The old Greeks have written of their wars, their rebellions, their lusts, their loves, their triumphs, their defeats, their troubles, their trials. So have the Egyptians, so have the Persians, so have the Hindoos and Chinese. They, too, have had their law-givers, their scribes, their reformers, their benefactors, their despots, their heroes. The Hebrews have given, in their Scriptures, their history just as any people might have given theirs. Their historians have rehearsed just what the historians of any other people might have rehearsed, with equal emphasis and propriety, concerning their fathers. No, there can be no infallibility in a book constructed as our Bible is. It is the work of as many hands as Argus had eyes. Each author's imprint is plain enough on the production he has contributed. There is no mistaking the fact that no one God wrote, nor did any one God dictate, such incongruous sentiments as these. What is affirmed in one place is denied in another, and what is put forth in one shape here, is set forth in a far different manner elsewhere.

CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.

The idea that the children of Israel are a chosen people, is a piece of the most astonishing vanity. Who believes, what devout Christian of intelligence believes in his heart, that the *children of Israel* are any more the chosen of God than are the children of any other man? And, by the way, if God is not able to do better by his favorite people than he has done by the poor despised Jews, I would rather join the hosts of some more powerful monarch.

The Children of Israel! What people ever treated their sovereign with greater indignity and contempt than the Jews treated God? Why they even killed his only son, the one whom he had sent into the world to save sinners! But a person would suppose by reading the Bible that the Jews were about the only people that God ever had much concern about. There may have been a few other wild men scattered about, but the Bible is very careful to tell us little or

nothing about them. It is the Jews only, the Jews. But if profane history may be believed, the Jews were never known as a separate people until they were subdued by the Romans. Though of course in existence long before, they had done nothing to entitle them to the consideration of other people. They lived a life, it would seem, somewhat akin to that of our wandering Gypsies.

As a model of disobedient and wayward children, the Jews are hard to beat. If they were raised up merely to demonstrate God's charity and forbearance, they were a first-class success. They were reared in rebellion, and they have played their part without missing a single step or line. They worshiped God when they got into difficulty, and only idols at other times. They lost a good portion of their Scriptures, and burnt the rest of them. Surely if any people ever did need God's care and direction, these miserable Jews did. I do not wonder at all that it took all of God's time to look after these unrepentant sinners of old. So it is not so strange after all that we read little of other people in the Bible besides the Jews.

MAHOMETANISM.

Nothing will so well serve to enable us to fix the true value to our own Scriptures and religion as to understand the history and character of Mahometanism, a religion which runs closer to ours and more nearly parallel with it than any other leading belief in the world. Some of its chief features we proceed to notice now.

Before the time of Mahomet, the Arabs, a people by no means so insignificant as we have been wont to consider them, had adopted principally the belief of the Sabians, though among them were also many Jews, Christians and followers of the Magi. The Sabians believed in a single God, but they adored stars, as do the East Indians and others now. They had a multitude of inferior deities, somewhat akin to our angels, saints and demons, and akin likewise to the heroes of the Greeks. They believed in praying much. They believed in future punishments. They believed in baptisms, pilgrimages and sacrifices. Of our Scriptures they adopted the Psalms only, but they had several books of their own, among them a work on morals, called the book of Seth. They claimed to be followers of John the Baptist. But the Arabs consider their religious state previous to Mahomet one of great ignorance.

Among these ancient Arabs there was a strange mixture of the worship of God and the worship of idols, household gods and planets. Some believed in a creation and final resurrection, and others did not. Christianity had made much progress among them before Mahomet. Many before him had rejected idolatry.

When we come to the doctrines of Mahomet we shall see that

he only embodied and put into shape what had been believed and adopted by many of his people for centuries. He created no religion. He only reformed, improved and established one. He established in his Koran the doctrines of many different sects living in his country. Perhaps we are not going far from the truth in saying, that his religion and that of the Jews had a common origin, and are based upon the same principles.

Mahomet considered himself the prophet of God, the prophet par excellence. Adam, Noah, Abraham and Christ were the remaining four. He adopted the Psalms, the books of Moses and the Gospels, but with a very great variation from the common Christian version. He claims that the Jews and Christians have shamefully falsified their book, and that they have left out much, notably that which tells of Mahomet. He took much from the Apocryphal books and much from tradition.

The main articles of belief set forth in his Koran are these: He believes in *God*, also in his *Angels*, his *Scriptures*, his *Prophets*, the *Resurrection and Day of Judgment*; and finally, he believes in the absolute decrees of God and *Predestination in full*. Prayer, alms, fastings and pilgrimages, are especially enjoined. The Mahometans also believe, as it would seem, in a resurrection not only of man, angels and genii, but also of animals. They believe not only in a Satan, but also in his fall for refusing to render homage to Adam. They believe in a hell with seven stages. God is pictured in the Koran as even more terrible than he is in our own Bible.

But above these there is another article of faith, more important than any yet mentioned. They are taught first of all that the Koran is, like our book, of *divine origin*, that the first copy has existed from all eternity near the throne of God, written upon a table of great dimensions; that a copy of this table, written in a volume of paper, was borne by the Angel Gabriel into the lowest heaven, and that from that heaven he has communicated it to Mahomet the Prophet—sometimes at Mecca, sometimes at Medina, and running through a space of twenty-three years. They regard the Koran as a real miracle, somewhat like the one found by Joe Smith, the Mormon. They worship the Koran. Like the Jews with their Scriptures, they handle the Koran with the tenderest care. They would not touch it with unclean hands. They are very careful that it does not fall into the hands of infidels. They carry it with them in war. It is their guardian angel, their God. How different they are from us in this respect! How little do we believe our Bible came from God, how little homage do we pay to it! It is no divine book for us. We see no difference between it and other

good books. It is true our ancestors had a holy regard for it, but modern Christians, unless very ignorant, have long since lost all such devotion.

Shall we not learn something from this brief *resume* of Mahometan creeds? The Mahometans, as a people, are not to be despised: They have numbers, they have strength, they have also intelligence and virtue. And yet they take as the basis of their religious belief the Koran, a work which we know was written by human hands not more than twelve centuries ago. They say it came from God, and they believe it, but they cannot prove it. But, have we any better evidence for the authenticity of *our* Scriptures? They take as next to God one who we know was clearly of mortal origin. While they believe many things in our religion, what is most important to us they reject, *the belief in Christ the Messiah*. To them he is only a prophet! How shall we prove that they are wrong in what they reject, and we are right in what we accept? They have before them as much evidence as we have, if not more. Moreover, they are not heathens.

In reviewing the history of their Koran, as well as the history of many similar books, we see how easy it is to make a numerous people believe that a book, or its contents, is direct from God! The only real advantage we have over the Mahometans lies in the fact that we have placed the foundations of our creed so far back in the darkness of antiquity that it is impossible to secure any evidence as to its true character and origin. We have asserted what no one can deny; and any one can deny what we cannot prove. But that of itself demonstrates *nothing*.

BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS.

Nothing can prove so incontrovertibly the human origin of the Bible, as opposed to a single divine source, as the immensity of its contradictions. It is a most wonderful aggregation of contrarities, a simple mass of strange and irreconcilable assumptions. The Bible is not only the work of a multitude of human authors, but they had no plan between them, no concert of action. The Bible, instead of being a book, is only a collection of books. Where the contradictions are so numerous and often so monstrous, a few of them here will suffice to illustrate the point and show what I mean by the charge.

Jeremiah tells us, God himself speaking, "I am weary with repenting."—xv; 1. But Isaiah informs us that God "fainteth not, neither is weary."—xi: 28. Proverbs say "the eyes of the Lord are in every place."—xv: 3. But in Genesis "the Lord *came down to see* the city and the tower."—xi. 5. In Acts we see that God "knows

the heart of men.”—i. 24. But in Deut. we are plainly told that he kept the children of Israel in the wilderness forty years chiefly “to know what was in their hearts.”—viii. 2. John tells us as plain as words can make it, that “no man hath seen God at any time.”—i. 18, but Genesis tells of repeated personal interviews between God and Moses and others.—Ex. xxxiii. 22 and 11, and Gen. xxxii. 30.

Matthew tells us that “with God all things are possible,” but if we read the Old Testament, we shall find hundreds of things that God could not possibly do. For instance, he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, *because they had chariots of iron.*—Judges i. 19. In some places we are told that “I am the Lord and change not,” and in another place we are told how sorry he felt for the mistakes he had made. Here we are told “the Lord is a man of war,” and there that “he is love,” “the God of peace;” here, “those that seek me early shall find me;” there, they shall seek me early but shall not find me;” here, we are told that “the Lord is upright” and it is “impossible for God to lie;” and there, “I frame evil and devise, a device against you.”

Christ tells us “not to resist evil,” “but he made a scourge of small cords and drove them all out of the temple.” In one place, “all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword;” and in another, “He that hath no sword, let him sell his garments and buy one.” He tells us to “be not afraid of them that kill the body,” but he “would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.”

We find all sorts of instruction in the Bible: Marriage is honorable—it is good for man not to touch a woman; let your light shine—you had better keep dark; be circumcised—be not circumcised; thou shalt make two cherubims of gold—you need do no such thing; use a little wine—wine is a mocker; servants, oblige your master in all things—be ye not the servants of men; this is Elias which was to come—this is not Elias at all; take no shoes or staves with you—take a staff only, and sandals too; they gave Christ vinegar to drink—no, they did not, they gave him wine; he went and hanged himself—no, he did not hang himself, he burst his bowels, and that’s the way Judas died; it was a young man in the sepulcher—or rather it was two angels in white; Abraham had two sons—but Isaac was the only son he ever had; the Lord gave the land to Abraham forever—but he would not allow him to put his foot on it; Jesus and his father are one—but the father is greater than Christ; all power is given unto Christ, in heaven and earth—but “he could there do no mighty work;” by the deeds of the law no people shall be justified—the doers of the law shall be justified; there is no man that sinneth not—whoever is born of God doth not commit sin; the dead

shall be raised—he that goeth down to the grave shall rise no more; there shall no evil happen to the just—but ye shall be hated for my name's sake; blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, wealth and riches shall be in his house—blessed be ye poor, lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth; wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness—in wisdom is much grief; Elijah went up into heaven—no, that's a mistake, for “no man hath ascended up to heaven but the Son of Man.”

We might go much further, but we have given enough to show that the Bible is *full of instruction*. If we want to know what to do, *we must read the Bible*. That will tell us. The Bible is the book of life. He that reads, understands and *follows it* shall have eternal life. Nothing can be safer than a promise like this.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

The Bible is no miracle. There is nothing unnatural in its history, nothing remarkable in its contents. It is simply a collection of sacred writings. It embodies the sentiments of devout men who lived in ages very remote. It is filled with lessons of instruction, is full of the teachings of God. The Bible is indeed a *revelation*. God is revealing himself to us every day. Nature unfolds itself like a scroll. Revelation never ceases. Bible revelation is only one phase of science. It is science that comes not from study and inquiry, but from thought and reflection. It is simply an outpouring of the soul. It embodies in itself the first, simplest, purest and best teachings of the heart.

In one sense, it is all the work of heaven; in another sense none of it is so. That all of its writers were impelled by an inward power which we may ascribe to God, I do not for a moment doubt. That any of its writers were more than ordinary men, born of this world, with this world's imperfections; that any of them had prerogatives never accorded to man since then, is what I do not for a moment believe.

The Bible has not made man what he is. It is rather the reverse of this that has happened. Man has made the Bible what it is, or perhaps the one has reacted upon the other. As I have hinted before, it is not a single, unchangeable whole. *It is a growing production*. From feeble beginnings it has come to be the great Bible that it is. Men of different generations have adopted only that which was in harmony with their own spirit, that which suited their purposes best. It is thus that the Jews have one Bible, the Protestants one, and the Catholics another. The principle of selection in Bible writings has operated from the most distant times. There has always been abundance of material to choose from, and abundance of objectionable writings to be rejected. So the Bible is a repre-

sentative book. It speaks to the heart; it comes from the heart. What is not in harmony with our soul we discard. The Bible needs constant revision, constant improving, constant correction and amendment. It never needed this more than it does now. Where there is so much pure gold to remain, why should the dross be left to encumber and conceal the true metal? It would be sad to lose the whole of the good book, merely because of the amount of antiquated trash it contains. How much better is it to remove an excrescence in season than to suffer it to outgrow and encumber the whole body.

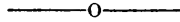
It is a curious fact that religion and religious practices are the offshoot of ignorance. The more intelligent and the more thoughtful people become, the more rapidly religion disappears and is lost. Religion at best is only a form of superstition. It springs out of the fears and doubts of those who know little of nature and less of themselves. What they fail to understand they readily imagine. We esteem it the mark of a savage to worship idols. But how much better than idolaters are we? What difference does it make about the precise number of our Gods? Suppose the Pagans had fifty Gods, do we not have three? Yea, and more than three. Is the Jewish God better than some heathen Gods?

It is impossible to show a religion that has not arisen in the lowest walks of life, the very dregs of society—oftentimes not only from among the most stupid, but the very worst of men. Certainly the saints of the Old and New Testaments are no exception to the rule. But this is one of God's mysterious ways of doing things. He has made wonderful instruments of the most ordinary men, but the fact remains still potent and uncontrovertible, that among all people religion at the outset is the work of ignorance. In the face of science, *religion, in its true sense, always tends to disappear.*

It is not surprising, then, to find religions always founded in mysteries and shrouded in darkness. The Pagans had their mysteries, their offerings and offices. Had not the Jews theirs, and have not also we? What is more mysterious than for us to drink the blood and eat the flesh of Christ four or five times a year without affecting his existence in the least? And then, a few drops of common cold water, what a mysterious effect that has!

No wonder then that the Jews, who it is agreed *found* our religion for us, were known through all time as the most ignorant, credulous, intolerant and wretched people of antiquity, about the only ones in the world who have left absolutely nothing behind them but a mere Greek Bible, an elaborate and apparently learned treatise on the subject of "getting to heaven made easy."

THE OLD TESTAMENT.



CHAPTER II.

ITS RECORDS.

We come now to discuss more especially the character of the Old Testament, the oldest, the most important, and the fundamental portion of the Holy Bible. It is not our purpose to deny or reject these records. The accounts are there, and the doctrines are there; and it is not in our province to contradict them. In ordinary records of this kind, it would be a matter of small consequence who wrote them; their authority would depend upon their intrinsic and inherent worth, rather than upon the source from which they came. But in this case it is different. Here the whole matter turns upon the question whether the authors of these scriptures were not blessed with a peculiar and divine inspiration. This question of the supernatural origin of the Bible, we have already sufficiently discussed in the preceding sections. It is the extraordinary doctrines which it contains, together with some strange accounts assumed to be matters of fact, that will now engage our attention.

THE CREATION.

The creation of the world out of nothing, if so we must interpret our Scriptures, is an abstraction reserved chiefly, if not solely, for the Jews and their followers. In the Cosmogony of other people it is a growth from a seed or an egg, a development, a metamorphosis. But in the Bible it is a creation. There is no forming here, no application of the plastic power. It goes back to the beginning of the world, to the time when the world had no beginning, when the world was nothing, when it was not a world, and when, of course, there could have been no God to make a world.

But, is it possible for us to conceive that a thing which never exists in some form, did not at one time exist in any form? Our ideas come from what we see in our experience; they are determined by the constitution of our minds. Is it then in the nature of things, is it in our experience, to see things start up, as the world did, out

of nothing, to see them begin without having a beginning, and without something on which transformation or creation might rest? All the creation of which we can have any just idea is the birth, development, and coming to light of that which was lost in darkness before. We trace the tree back to the acorn that was put in the ground. We never, however, think of the time when there were no acorns, nor trees to produce acorns.

Every intelligent man of the present day admits that nothing has been created since the world began, neither of force nor matter. Nothing begins in a time when it was not, nor ends in a time when it will not be. It is impossible for us to think of a body moving without having some other moving body to set it in motion. Nor can we think of the moving power itself acting unless impelled by some other acting power. Thus, when we see the seared and fallen leaf hurried along upon the earth, we know that there is a power behind it; and when we trace the origin of its action to the breeze, we are equally certain that some other disturbing force caused that breeze by setting the air in motion. Again, when the pebble breaks the surface of the smooth water, the disturbance is sent out in concentric whorls, which multiply and swell until they reach the very shore. Here they are lost to sight, but we cannot say that they have even there ceased to exist. They beat against the land and communicate to it their own vibrations. These waves travel over the earth with as much certainty as upon the water; they are only less perceptible. They lose their force, but not their existence or identity. The thunder wave beats from hill to hill, rolling forward and returning again, until it is finally lost to our ears. Who will say that weeks and years after this, its sounds might not still be detected by ears sufficiently sensitive and acute?

Beginning and end, and, of course, creation too, have, for the scientific world at least, come to have a different signification from what they once had. They are known to us now only as heathenish, nay, Jewish ideas. Whoever prepared the Scriptures understood no such ideas as these of the present day, and, of course, he could not build his superstructure upon them. For the world who never knew these truths, it was possible to accept the Hebrew Cosmogony, but how is it possible for us, with a different experience, and a different culture? We cannot, even with the help of faith, believe to be true that which all our life has taught us is not in the nature of things even possible. To believe in a God who does impossible things, is to believe in an impossible God. Those who wrote the Bible, as well as those who believe it, so far from finding this history of creation at variance with their ideas of nature and with

their education, found a remarkable harmony existing between the two. People never began to lose their faith in this Mosaic account, until they began to lose faith in the philosophy and science by which it was begotten.

We have thus far seen that the origin of the earth, as stated by Moses is, as a fact in nature, *entirely outside the region of human belief*. Let us now see on what slender evidence the assertion rests. Let us take up the book of Genesis. He that wrote that book, say it was Moses for the present, speaks of the most sublime phenomena within the range of human conception, as if they were the most ordinary things of every day life. The creation of the earth, nay, of the universe, the separation of darkness from light, the gathering of the mighty deep into its place, what could be more sublime than this? Yet this is all brought out as the most common-place story. There seems to have been, in the mind of the writer, nothing in this account that was strange, nothing demanding explanation, nothing doubtful. All was apparently, in his mind, plain, direct, probable! It is no mere hearsay, that awful work, those six days labor and the rest of the seventh! It is evidently the account of an eye witness.

Moses speaks of the creation as an eye witness, but we know he was not. Is not his very assurance here, in a matter of necessity so very dark, a most fatal circumstance? If his imagination was poetic here, may it not have been poetic in thousands of other places? If he relied on tradition and hearsay here without acknowledging it, might he not have relied upon them in many other cases? You see how fatal it must be to let go our hold on a single one of the accounts of Moses, or the Bible. It is all one book. It is all of God, or none. When once the door is open, it can never be closed. If you allow criticism to enter and cast out one passage, it can never be stopped till it is permitted to cast out the whole book.

We must be allowed to continue our examination of this Mosaic account of the creation. It is evident that the writer was only reciting his own fictions, the visions of his own fancy, or perhaps the unrecorded traditions of his fathers. He has given us, like so many before him and since, *his* theory, and no more; a theory based on principles unknown to the science of the present day, a theory built upon doctrines and assumed facts which only a child would now embrace.

We notice it is observed that the firmament separates the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens, the unfailing source from which rain was supposed to come. It was not dreamed by Moses even that rain fell from clouds which had risen to the upper regions of the air by the force of evaporation.

Is it not incomprehensible to us of this generation that there should have been darkness and light, evening and morning, that the earth should have brought forth grass and the herb given its seed three days before the sun, the great source to us of light and life, should have come into existence? And what strange trees those were which brought forth fruit before they or the earth itself was even three days old. It may be said these were all miracles. Yet we do not like to have things too miraculous. Everybody nowadays has a strong fancy for those miracles only which can be *sensibly* construed.

It is strange, too, we must confess, that the sun, moon and stars, some of them known to be prodigious bodies and many times as large as the earth, should be mere night-lamps set in the heavens to give us light and divide the day from the night! Moses evidently had no better conception of these "lamps" than the merest child. That they were habitable worlds like ours, having a course of existence and an aim wholly their own, was a thought which could never have entered his mind when he wrote, if he did write, those "five books of Moses." That great idea of a community of worlds was left to struggle on yet many thousand years before its final birth took place. It could not be, we know, that an omniscient being wrote in this manner.

Our earth and all the surrounding worlds, according to Moses, was created by God in six short days, at the end of which brief space of time, man himself was introduced as the climax to the whole. But Geology shows, and no one of ordinary intelligence denies it, that as many thousand years as Moses has named days, and perhaps many thousands more, this world must have gone through terrible changes and convulsions before the appearance of man. Here again is the conception of Moses child-like and characteristic of the mind in its feeblest infancy. Certainly here also he could have received no aid from an omniscient God. Why must we be forced to believe on faith what the good sense of every man pronounces fabulous?

Again, God rested on the seventh day. The six days' labors, to the mind of the writer, seem to have been for God in the highest degree exhaustive. He was evidently tired out, and so he rested on the Sabbath. Indeed, have we any account that God has done any hard labor since? Has he created a single thing, either force or matter, since that fatal sixth day? The Bible gives no account of it if he has. This work, as Moses would inform us, was a physical operation. His labors since have been strictly mental—unless perhaps we should take into account his frequent journeys from heaven

to earth to interview Moses and the Prophets. So Moses' idea of God was that of a mighty man, one who could be worn out with excessive exertion; a mighty man, but a man nevertheless. He was not that being of all wisdom, the beginning and its source, which we have usually considered him to be.

In closing this section we will notice, very briefly, the cosmogony of some other people. It is with a feeling of pride that a Christian writer informs us "that none of the ancient philosophers had the smallest idea of its being possible to produce a substance out of nothing, or that even the power of the deity himself could work without any materials to work upon." The Greeks and Romans believed the matter of the world to be eternal, and that God made and changed only its form. Men were not created; they grew from the sowing of dragon's teeth, or were formed out of clay.

According to the Puranas, one of the sacred books of India, the earth was buried from sight in the waters of a mighty ocean. The God, at the request of the Earth, raised it from its depths and placed it on the surface of the water, where it floated like a mighty ship. By meditation, that is by concentrated thought, Brama created animals. All creatures both great and small proceeded from his members.

The Laws of Manu, the title of another sacred book of India, contains writings perhaps much older than most of our Scriptures, and is supposed to be written from twelve to fifteen centuries before Christ. According to this record, "This world was plunged in an obscurity; it was imperceptible, deprived of every distinctive attribute. Not being able to be discovered by reasoning, nor to be revealed to the eye, it seemed entirely delivered over to sleep." "Then the Lord dissipated the obscurity and rendered the world perceptible, *i. e.* he developed its nature." "And having resolved to cause the different creatures to emanate from his substance, he produced first the waters in which he deposited a *germ*." "This germ became an egg shining as gold, bright as a star with a thousand rays, and in this the supreme being, Brama, was born," a being independent of the developing spirit above mentioned. He became the progenitor of all beings. By the separation of an egg into two parts the heavens and the earth were formed; between them were placed the atmosphere, the eight celestial regions and the permanent reservoir of waters. Among other things this God produced a multitude of other Gods, with an active soul, and besides this an irresistible horde of genii. Having divided his body into two parts he became male and female. Brama makes and destroys all things;

he is the beginning and the end. The world is assumed to be a wicked place, full of misery and evil. Manu tells us of not less than twenty-eight hells.

The cosmogony of Buddha is not essentially different from that of Brama. The details are different, but the thought and plan is nearly the same.

In the Zend Avesta of Zoroaster there is a good spirit, Ormuzd, to create, and an evil one to destroy and vitiate, Ahriman. So the former is the author of day and light, and the latter of shades and darkness.

We have noticed these features of other scripture history to show that the idea of the world's having a beginning or a birth was by no means peculiar to the Israelites. Perhaps no people who have scriptures have not also an account of the creation of the world, or its first appearance. In all, too, the plan is the same, the details only are different. These accounts we are almost inclined to laugh at as ridiculous; we are certain at least that they are only flights of a lively imagination. But wherein consists the superiority of our own account?

When we come to the creation of man, we find a little of what we might call "inextricable confusion." The first chapter of Genesis runs along smoothly and satisfactorily, but when we come to the second we get into trouble. Is it a mere useless repetition of facts mentioned in the first, or is it an amendment, or an improvement by some other author? The first ends and the second begins with the work all done; "the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them." We would think in the fourth verse of the second chapter that we could begin Monday of the second week. But we are told further along, that man, who had been created male and female, a compound being, a hermaphrodite, is again created from the dust of the ground. So the beasts of the field and the fowls were created a second time. The conclusion is certain and fixed, either the whole history of the affair was confused in the mind of the writer, or we have two separate accounts from different authors.

The story of the creation, or rather the birth, of man, we will not dwell on. We would simply refer to the curiosity which we feel to know how many intelligent creatures in the world would believe this monstrous story to-day. But we know some people have believed it so far as to think that men must have one rib less upon one side than upon the other. You will observe, by the way, that

the story is quite different in the first chapter, twenty-seventh verse: "Male and female he created them," and blessed them, and said "*be fruitful and multiply,*" which implies the existence of women as early as the sixth day.

THE FALL OF MAN.

Do men believe in the fall of Adam and the occasion of it, or do they not? They believe it literally, or they do not believe it at all. To say that the tree spoken of was a fiction, is to say the whole story was a fable. The tree spoken of was a real one, a tree bearing fruit; there are no trees but real ones. So when we say that their story, which was told with such apparent fairness and simplicity, was a mere figment of the brain, a pretense and no more, we must let go our hold on the Scriptures forever. If this tree is only a figure, then every fact spoken of in the Bible may contain only a figure also.

We must dwell at length upon this unhappy tree. It brought sin into the world—it is the beginning and source of all our miseries, the starting point of all our woes. God planted this tree in the Garden of Eden; he placed it in a prominent place, and even called Adam's serious attention to it. He did more; he placed on it most tempting fruit, fruit that made Adam's heart ache and yearn more than all the other fruits put together, and then told him if he touched it, he would *surely die!* Nay, more; he had created Adam himself, as he had wished him to be created, no doubt, but he had made him of such a weak nature that he knew, if he knew anything, it was impossible for him to resist temptation, at least such temptation as this. And all this God did for what?

The tree was there for an awful, a wicked purpose. God knoweth all things, those that are past and those to come, and he knew from the beginning this tree and its necessary results. He knew the fruit was tempting, and that our first parent could not resist the temptation. In placing that tree there, under all these circumstances, God's act was simply sinful and malicious. We cannot call it anything else; there is no misunderstanding the motive, and no one does misunderstand it. We have no assurance that it was necessary. It was voluntary. God willed it, or he was certainly not the Supreme Being. For what did he do this? We can only conjecture that it was to gratify his curiosity. It was a cruel act, the first of a great series of cruel acts, running through all the Old Testament. So God is pictured there.

Is it possible that all this mystery of a serpent carrying on a lengthy conversation with Eve, and assuming to set up his authority as surpassing that of the Lord, and prevailing in the end over him,

does not a little arouse our suspicions about the correctness of the narrative? If this story is true, is it possible for us to conceive of anything so monstrous or absurd that we may not believe that true also?

But they did eat of the tree, Eve first and afterward Adam; and they excused themselves by saying the serpent told them to do so. It seems the Lord was absent when all this happened, and he never had even suspected that such things could or would come to pass. It was a matter of surprise to him that they had happened. Adam hid away, but the Lord found him for all that. After his apprehension, Adam confessed the whole crime; he turned state's evidence to save his own neck, as so many a culprit has done. He told the Lord the whole story. The Lord knew nothing about the affair, so Adam told him all about it, without concealing the least thing.

There are many things in this rehearsal that are incomprehensible to us. For example, we cannot see how Eve should (Genesis iii: 2d and 3d.) assume to know all about God's orders in reference to the tree, while in fact they had been given to Adam alone some time before Eve herself came into being. It is strange, too, that Adam, who had thus partaken of the forbidden fruit, should not, in accordance with the promise, and long before the arrival of the Lord, have been "surely dead." So it seems the serpent (in the 4th verse,) told Eve the truth after all. We are shocked in the outset at the want of courage, or want of faithfulness, in a being in whose conduct we should expect such qualities to shine pre-eminent. Adam and Eve, so far from dying a prompt and miserable death, as we had been led to expect, both lived to excuse and defend themselves. Not one word is said about death or any substitute for it. Adam lived yet 930 years. And God made clothes for him, and set him up in business again.

Upon the wicked serpent the blow falls the hardest. It falls with a terrible crushing weight upon him. What a curse upon that miserable creature! This serpent and all his seed are to be eternally wretched, far above all the other created beings of the earth. Such, in reference to the serpent, was the idea of ancients, and of the moderns after them. But the light of science is not able to-day to give one single distinguishing mark by which to separate the serpent from its class. It creeps upon the ground, and so do other creatures. It secretes a poison for its protection, and so do others. It is detested and avoided, and so are others.

Many suppose the serpent to have been Satan; but where and who was Satan? We have not had the slightest mention of him thus far—he is not even named till many, many pages after this.

Before the eating of this fruit evil was not abroad; it was the cause of evil and its birth. There could have been no Satan at that time and in that place. That was paradise. No, it was a serpent; the Bible says so. We will admit no pictures or figures like this into the great book of truth, for there would be no end to it when we once began.

In the 20th verse, Adam called his wife Eve, "because she was the mother of all," when in fact Adam had no means of knowing, as yet, that she was or would be the mother of anybody.

The figure in the 21st verse, which represents the Lord making coats for Adam and his wife, is, to say the least, undignified. Besides, we see him a tender-hearted parent, who has already forgotten, if not forgiven, the trespasses of his disobedient children. He is a model parent.

In the 22d verse, it seems that man became "as one of us," as a God, by this simple act of disobedience. But in the 1st chapter it is said that man was *made* in God's own image, as one of us, in the first place. How shall we reconcile this?

The reasons for turning man out of paradise are various and unsatisfactory. The whole thing here is much confused. What can it mean when it says, in the 22d verse, "and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and *live forever*." (Live forever! Why, that is just what man was originally intended to do, and what he would have done, had he not eaten the fruit so foolishly.) Therefore, God sent him out of the Garden of Eden *to till* the ground! Why, man was created in the first place to till the ground.—Genesis ii:5. In the 19th verse, 3d chapter, the eating of bread by the sweat of the brow, seems to have been a new thing, and part of the punishment. But in the 15th verse, 2d chapter, God put Adam into the Garden of Eden to dress and keep it "and take care of it," and how Adam could do this without starting the perspiration (especially on a hot July day), we fail to see. Who kept and dressed the garden after Adam left?

Is the "tree of life" (22d verse, 3d chapter,) different from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil," spoken of in the 17th verse, 2d chapter? But of *every* tree except this latter, he is expressly permitted (16th verse) to eat. So there could not have been two trees of forbidden fruit. Moreover, in the 29th verse, 1st chapter, *every* tree, without any exception, was given to man for meat.

It is at least certain, from the account, that man was not turned out of Eden for disobedience, but for some sin which he might be induced to commit if he remained. He was made in the beginning to be like God in every respect, and yet he was punished by the Lord for trying to realize that equality.

For a single act of disobedience, and not willful at that, what a terrible retribution! An awful penalty for the loss of an apple or two! Such is the God of the Old Testament. Upon the precise character of that tree we cannot decide. It was a tree of knowledge of good or evil. That was a strange tree, and yet it bore fruit like other trees, and so tempting that Eve put forth her hand and ate. We are almost tempted to believe that this tree is allegorical; but if it was, so might be the fall of man and the creation of the world, and the whole Bible besides. Why not? No, it must have been some unaccountable tree, of which, however, no vestige remains. It was a tree "to be desired to make one wise." The great sin after all of Adam and Eve seems to have been their desire to get wisdom. No wonder that Christians, for so many hundred years after this, were opposed to every advance in science, remembering as they did the fate of their unfortunate ancestors.

But must we believe that this unfortunate little accident, for it is all related as an accident, that this accident, we say, should have brought about a change in the entire realms of nature? Let us dwell here awhile upon this supposed origin of all evil and the cause of it.

The whole teachings of the Christian world, and how far the Old Testament warrants them, we will not now stop to enquire, is upon the idea that sin came into the world through the disobedience of Adam, the immediate cause of which way the lying serpent which in the end prevailed over the weakness of man's nature. This unfortunate, and, of course, unforeseen, accident seems to have deranged and reversed the whole of God's plans. He seems to have made no provision for such a calamity, and he was hence obliged to adopt an entirely new line of policy. He is, as we understand him, an all-wise and all-seeing being, and yet here we find him quite undone at the very outset, and overreached, by one of the feeblest and most repulsive of earth's creatures! What wonderful weakness for such assumed wisdom!

But must we believe indeed that this accident brought about a change in the entire realms of nature? If it was a fall of man, and a complete revolution in his nature, there must have arisen an equal change and an equal revolution in the entire animal and vegetable kingdom in the whole creation, for everything in nature, every animal, is constructed upon the same plan as man, has the same preverseness of character, meets with the same antagonism in the world about, is subject to the same laws, and is heir to the same sufferings. The great globe itself is constructed upon a plan in harmony with the nature of man as he is now, and not as he was in

the days of Paradise. Are we to suppose that if Adam had not sinned, fire would not have burned and water would not have drowned us? Would gravity not have been present with all its fatal consequences, and would the storm, with its crushing force and wide-spread desolation, never have appeared? It is evident that the world was made for just such a sinful creature as Adam was, and that it could not support any other. It was made for a progressive man, a man of action, and not for the drowsy life of Paradise.

Again, the Paradise of Eden was but the minutest spot on the face of the globe. But the Bible would have us believe that God, if he had not been foiled in his purpose, would have set apart this garden to be the sole abode of man. And was the great earth, may I ask, to be a desolate, unproductive waste, giving nothing and receiving nothing in return?

The Bible clearly intimates, in its account, that but for this catastrophe, the human race would never have increased in its numbers; that God intended all for our first parents, and for them alone (though according to the 1st chapter, an entirely different account, they were to be fruitful and *multiply*). "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children;" that was part of the punishment—Genesis iii: 16. Eve was to be a mere help-meet—some one to do housework and dispel the loneliness of Adam, for he was lonely; she was not to be considered as the mother of a race which was to people and subdue the earth. But if this were the true and only object, why make Eve feminine instead of masculine? Is there any one who believes that Eve was created, as the Bible seems to tell us, simply because "it was not good for man to be alone?"

Let me ask further, if the fall of man had not occurred, do you suppose that the earth would not have brought forth any thorns and thistles, and would Adam and his offspring have had no need to eat their bread by the sweat of their brow?

I need hardly urge in concluding this part of our inquiry, that the book of nature, on all its pages, pronounces this early scriptural account false, fanciful and paganish in all its bearings. That such things did not happen, is rendered certain by the fact that they are impossible, to say nothing of the discredit thrown upon the whole thing by the looseness of the story and the antagonism of its various statements.

But who presumes to write this account? Who heard what the serpent said, and who made a record of his precise language? God himself, it seems was not present, for if he had been, he would have closed the serpent's harangue and made him smart for his rashness.

Indeed, it does not seem that God is to be held responsible for the historical part of the Bible. None of it can we suppose was written upon the two tables. Whence then comes the minute accounts of particular facts and secret conversations noted in Genesis and elsewhere? There is only one possible supposition, and that is that Adam kept a diary, like some of our young people of the present time. But there is no foundation for such a theory, save its possibility.

We are taught that through this fall of Adam not only sin but death came into the world. This thought, we must say again, has its birth in the rudest ignorance of nature's laws and works. Can we have birth and growth, without also having decay and death? Or were we to have, as seems somewhat intended, no birth and growth before God changed his plan? Does not the very plan of creation involve the idea of death as a matter of necessity? Did Adam's fate subject all the rest of the living creation to the laws of decay and death?

What would have become of the earth, if animals should have increased upon the face of the earth, and there had been no diminution by death? How was it with vegetation, was there no decay here? Animals are so made that to live they must destroy, they must kill. But animals did live before Adam sinned; so they must have killed; and the idea of their continuing to live implied the continued necessity for them to kill. Or did they swallow alive what they ate, as the whale did Jonah?

And what does Geology teach as certain more than anything else? It is this: that animals, great and small, lived and died upon this globe many, many ages before man was thought of, or at least before he appeared on the earth.

We conclude then that this whole history, so far, bears upon its face the impress of lively fiction and poetic fancy, just such an impress precisely as we find placed upon the early writings of every nation of the earth.

I must add, finally, that Christ and his disciples knew nothing of this story of the fall of man. It had even then become an obsolete idea.

CAIN.

The character of God, as Moses understood him, is pretty well fixed in our minds already, and we are not surprised to see God maintain that cruel character to the end. Let us see how he treated Cain.

Without assigning any reason, he treats Cain, bringing, as he does, his first fruits for an offering, the best he has, with disdain. But Cain's brother, for aught we know no better man than Cain

was, and with no better offering, he treats with the highest favor. Do we wonder that Cain was "very wroth," and that he lost control over himself? Do we wonder that Cain was a little impertinent and inconsiderate in his answers to God?

What wretched trifling it was to ask Cain where Abel was. Did God not know where Abel was, and what Cain had done? If he did not, a poor God he was surely.

THE DELUGE.

We turn from the picture of a God trifling and unjust, to a weak and vacillating one. In the the 6th chapter, it seems, God began to see he had made a serious mistake, not to say blunder. It repented him, it grieved him to his heart, that he had made man, and the world simply for man. Now are we taught how revengful he is. Because some of them had done wrong, he resolved to sweep the whole race of them from the face of the earth, and every created and creeping thing beside.

But he changed his mind directly, not the first nor the last time, however, and concluded to save Noah for seed. He not only proposed to save Noah, and did save him in the end, but he allowed the race to go on multiplying, so that things went on very much as before, or worse. What an unfortunate and unhappy God he proved to be!

He told Noah, in the 13th verse, "that the end of all flesh is come before me." But his word turned out to be good for nothing, for the end of all flesh did not come. It was rather a good beginning of flesh. What can the Lord mean, in the 17th verse, when he says: "to destroy *all flesh, and everything in the earth shall die?*" Were not Noah and his family flesh? And did they die? He evidently had not the slightest intention to quite destroy all living beings; he only wished to deplete their number and retard their growth, that was all.

In the 4th verse, 7th chapter, he says he would destroy every living substance from off the face of the earth; and yet there seems to have been plenty to eat for all the animals which the ark contained, when they were finally let loose.

In the 8th verse, 7th chapter, there went in of clean beasts two and two, instead of by sevens, as stated in the 2d verse. It cannot be seven of the sort by twos, for, in the 19th verse, 6th chapter, he says: "*two* of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark; they shall be male and female."

We cannot but remark how precise is the accounts in the 7th verse, about the time of this deluge. Noah was just 600 years old; it was in the 2d month and on the 17th day, the hour and minute

alone being wanting. As we read along in the account, we shall find that the year even thus early in the world's history was divided into one of twelve months like ours, and that those months had just thirty days each! We had supposed before that our present system of years and months was of a rather later date than the age of Noah.

The flood rose over the high hills; not a peak escaped, and every living creeping thing was drowned. But how with the fish? Were there none, or were they drowned in the much water? However, we find them all alive in the 2d verse of the 9th chapter.

There was evidently a confused idea in the mind of the author (there certainly must be in the mind of the reader) about the exact or approximate time during which the overflowing continued. In the 12th verse, "the *rain* was upon the earth forty days and forty nights." In the 17th, "the *flood* was forty days upon the earth." Was it other forty days? In the 24th, "the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days," *i. e.* five months. In the 2d verse of the 8th chapter, "and after the end of the 150 days, the waters were abated," *i. e.*, the old status was restored. The ark rested at the end of this time, five months, on Mount Ararat. (Why Ararat? Was it the topmost peak of the world?). But this resting on Mount Ararat was only the beginning of the end, for, though we had been told that the waters were abated at the end of the 150 days, we are, in the 5th verse, told that the waters decreased continually until the tenth month, first day. Then the tops of the mountains were first seen, 73 days after the ark had struck. By so much was Ararat higher than all the other peaks!

In the 6th verse we come back to forty days. At the end of forty days, when the rain had ceased, Noah sent forth a raven "which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth." He must have had a sorry time of it indeed, for he must have kept flying about, the Lord knows where, for not less than 183 days before he could so much as rest his foot on the mountain tops. This is all a miracle! Some may say it was forty days after the 10th month of the 5th verse. But that could not be, for we are told the dove could not find a place to rest the sole of her foot, though going forth after the raven, the waters being not abated, *i. e.*, on the whole face of the earth. In the 11th verse, 8th chapter, the dove brought in an olive leaf, which must surprise any one, since every "living substance," 23d verse, 7th chapter, had been destroyed, and all the trees must have drowned out entirely in so many months of flood. But why, after all this, must Noah send out these birds, when he might as well have put his head out of the window as his hand or the raven, and thus have *seen* how things looked? And

who ever had a better point of observation than he, being, as he was, on the topmost peak of the world? But, in the 13th verse, he did, after a while, take a look, but it was only after he had removed the whole roof of the ark.

Who shall relieve us from the difficulties which we experience with regard to the time this flood lasted? We have forty days, one hundred and fifty days, and other times named, and finally the earth does not seem to have dried after all till very nearly a year from the time the flood began.

It is needless to dwell at length upon the impossibility, in the nature of things, that such a deluge could have happened. The heavens, we now know, are not made solely of waters, as Moses supposed. Again, the water covered the whole earth, the highest mountain tops, a vast shell of water around all the earth, not less than five miles deep. Now, when it abated, where did the water go to? We have learned that water can only sink in one place by its rising in another. Or is nothing too absurd for a miracle? They supposed that the small region of country round about Ararat was all there was of the mighty globe. Or why flood the whole earth to drown this insignificant spot upon its face, why this mighty commotion to waft a feather or drown a fly? One thing is at least certain, if all this story is true, then science is unavailing.

We have dwelt so long on this, not only to show that it must be a fiction, a fabrication, or a dream, but that the Bible writers are *fond of such fictions*. In this case, they have either magnified a partial flood into a universal deluge, or they have seen the whole in a vision.

We come next to the 21st verse. Here the Lord smelled a sweet savor, and it pleased him very much, and he said, in the joy of his heart, "I will not again curse the ground for man's sake, for the imagination of man's heart is *evil from his youth*." He now begins to feel sorry evidently for what he had done, not the first or the last time, however. He now sees, for the first time, that men are *born* wicked, and they cannot help being so.

The first thing God says in the next chapter is, "Be faithful and multiply and *replenish the earth*." This is curious, seeing that he had just drowned the whole earth, and it had repented him that he had made man at all. Now he wants the earth replenished with the same stock, with people full as wicked as any he had drowned, if not more so! God's ways, if this be true, are surely incomprehensible!

Now we come to the strangest thing of all (13th verse, 19th chapter): Although the earth had existed for many hundred years,

and it had rained repeatedly, forty days even at one time, yet there had been no rainbow. Here is mythology for you! The writer of course knew nothing of the origin or the nature of the rainbow. He says it was put in the heavens, after the deluge for the first, so that the Lord might see it occasionally, and not forget that covenant of his. He will "look upon it and remember" (16th verse). God, you will observe here and after, did not ask man to take his own bare word, for it could not be relied on. So he makes his mark some way, or puts it in writing, as men do with their deeds and covenants, or he gives some other pledge of fulfillment. Here it is the rainbow; with Moses it was in writing, or on tables of stone.

The Jews are by no means alone in their account of a deluge. All people have floods; we have them occasionally in our own day. There was the Deluge of Deucalion. He also built a ship and saved himself and wife. He was tossed about for nine days, and landed at last on Mount Parnassus. But in his case the earth was replenished by him and his wife throwing stones behind them, which became men and women.

In the Parana, a sacred book of the Hindoos, older by far than our own Bible, we have an account like this: Vishnu, the God, appeared before a certain prince in the form of a little fish, and said, "in seven days all creatures who have offended me shall be destroyed by a deluge, but thou shalt be saved in a vessel, strangely formed. Take therefore supplies of all kinds, seven holy men and their wives, and pairs of animals and enter into this vessel."

It is clear enough that other people had their picture as well as the Jews.

BABEL.

That story of Babel is a very pretty, not to say amusing, fable, invented to account for what was before enveloped in darkness, the diversity of tongues. This is one of the very many things in the Bible which will put all science to shame. The diversity of tongues, we know as well as we know any fact, arises in the very nature of things, and we need not refer it to any tower of Babel for explanation. This diversity takes its origin in circumstances which were at work as well before the confusion of tongues as ever it was after that. There is not, we venture to affirm, in the wide world a single philologist of any note who does not ignore this whole history of Babel, so far, at least, as it concerns any question of language. But it goes very far to illustrate the nature of the whole Mosaic record, showing that it is merely a collection of theories to account for things of whose nature people in remote ages were ignorant, but in the history of which they felt a deep concern.

It is generally conceded that the Lord confounded their language as a punishment for their assuming to build a tower to lead up to heaven, and so escape another deluge, but we can hardly see that the text sustains this rendering. They proposed (4th verse) to build not a tower only, but a *city*, "lest they be *scattered* abroad upon the face of the earth." The building went along smoothly we may suppose for a while, but finally the Lord, who evidently had had his attention turned elsewhere all the while, "came down to see the city and the town which the children of men builded." To whom did the Lord address these words, and why? The Lord confused their tongues and scattered them abroad, "and they left off to build the city." The main offense seems to be that they were building a city. The remedy, we must say, was a strange one, and the whole thing is curious and wonderful. Why did he not promptly stop the thing in its inception? More mythology!

The ancient Latins have a similar story, but with more variations. Otos and Ephialtes, when only nine years old, great giants as they were, endeavored to ascend into heaven, and for this purpose they piled Ossa upon Pelion, and other mountains beside. But they were slain by the arrows of Apollo—they did not have their language confused at all. The great God of the ancients put a stop to the business without ceremony.

There are a great many questions about this dark and "confounded" subject, but we have only time to notice this: Is it conceivable that those who built this city and the tower were all there were on the earth? Notice the chapter starts with the remark, "And the *whole earth* was of one language and of one speech." So you see the whole earth is spoken of. But it was only this wicked people who were building a city that had their language changed. Besides, if all the people of the earth were so affected that one could by no means understand the other, as we see in the 7th verse, how could communication ever be re-established? Indeed, the Lord must have been overreached in some way, for the people have ever since, contrary to the Lord's desire, found ample means of understanding each other, and they have gone on building towers and cities at a fearful rate. We observe the Bible states theories and never minds about the difficulties and the questions which we poor mortals are forced to raise and discuss.

THE GOD OF THE JEWS.

There is enough said and done by God, in the Old Testament, to admit of our forming a fair estimate of his character. And now the question comes up before us in all its force, do we believe there ever was such a God as represented in that holy book? Do we

believe there ever will be? Can we trust in such a Supreme Being, can we love him, can we worship him? No. He is the God of the heathens, he is a heathen God, described in a book written by heathens and for heathens, 6,000 years ago.

Has the God of the Old Testament a single quality of head or heart that would ennoble or dignify any creature? With all due reverence, I declare a simple and well-known fact, when I say that, if we knew nothing of this being but what is said of him by Moses and the prophets, we would feel safe in denouncing him as a knave and a tyrant, a weak man with wicked desires, a doer simply of terrible deeds. Or is it the special prerogative of a Lord to do what would be a crime with his creatures? No, we do not believe in such a God, we do not believe there ever was such a being. He has no one single quality to recommend him to our considerate regard. He has nothing in common with Christ whom he claims as his own begotten son. Christ we can adore, him we can trust and love, *but not the God of the Jews*. Christ is humble, Christ is gentle, Christ is merciful, Christ is good. He is our God, our hope and our salvation.

The God of the Jews seems to be about as wicked and disreputable as his power will permit him to be. He does not keep his promises; he has no fixed plans, and such as he has, can easily be deranged. He is vain, jealous, envious, conceited, boastful. He is subject to the most violent fits of rage, and again to a relapse into the most pitiable sorrow and remorse for his wrong doings. He is tyrannical and vindictive, unmerciful and proud.

What is the whole history of the Old Testament but a history of the Israelites? The chosen people of God, his children! And why the chosen people of God? Because, as it appears, they were so much like God himself. They were not righteous, neither was God himself. They were vacillating, dishonest, crafty, uncharitable, ferocious, proud, unenviable in all things, and so was he. Then, why should they not be the elect of God?

What would stamp a father as base and dishonorable, if not that which God himself did in selecting a miserable people for his especial care and protection, fighting their battles and feeding them with manna, while he cast from him all the rest of the world as mere stubble and chaff? Now is not this a Jew story the whole of it? By the way, they are not the only people on the earth nor one among a few that have believed themselves the especial object of care to the gods. All mythology is full of just such tales as these.

That God's word, though so freely and so frequently given was worth nothing, and his promises utterly unreliable, is demonstrated

so often in the Bible that we certainly need not refer to texts. What indeed can be more ridiculous, not to say sickening, than his weak vacillating course with those rebellious children of his? Over and over again he promised, pledged, swore, put it in writing, put it on stone, put up his rainbow, *and then failed to perform after all!*

Anger, spasmodic and violent as it was, became chronic with him. His fits were frequent, and when they came on he would rave like a madman. He cast his people down to the lowest depths of misery and suffering, and "nevertheless he raised up judges" to deliver them, simply because it "repented the Lord of their groanings." He could not bear to hear them groan! (Judges ii: 16.) Here we see he repented, as usual, but it was only for a few days. Soon "the anger of the Lord was hot, again, against Israel," and he was ready to deliver the poor miserable creatures into the hands of their enemies once more. At least he refused to keep the enemies away. As late as Hosea xiii: 11, when the Lord ought to have become old enough to have his temper somewhat softened, we still find him saying "I gave thee a king in my anger, and took him away in my wrath." Any one could tell what sort of a king he would be, selected under such circumstances.

We could expect a Supreme Being, guided by infinite wisdom and sustained by a power which was also infinite, always to be found to be as immovable as the mountain, and as inflexible as truth itself. But such is not the God of the Old Testament. There is nothing stable known of him. Why, even the Children of Israel could and did thwart him in his purposes to the very last. He could not compel them to do anything; he could only punish them for what they did do. Old Satan was always a match for him in anything he undertook. His whole dealing with the Israelites is a simple compound of trifling and tyranny. Hezekiah, by prayer, had his life lengthened fifteen years, after the Lord had assured him he must die without either reserve or delay. No wonder Jonah was angry with God for the childlike part which he played. What trifling between God and Gideon (Judges vi: 36.)!

His want of principle we cannot sufficiently abhor. As we read along and find instances rushing along in such overwhelming proportion, we are forced to exclaim, good heavens, do they set this creature up as a God for us to worship, here in the 19th century? Why, Satan himself was never worse. God, according to his own statement, was a lying spirit in the mouth of prophets.—I. Kings xxii: 22. He it was that hardened Pharaoh's heart, and then punished him for having it hardened. He made man himself wicked, and then punished him for being so. How it did delight

him to tease and tantalize good old father Abraham. He pretended to him, so dishonestly, that he really wished him to sacrifice his son, his only son Isaac. For what? To try him. Then God is not so wise after all; he must experiment, like an apothecary or chemist, to understand us poor mortals. Paul had evidently read the Bible, and understood God's character well when he represents him thus (II. Thess. ii:11): "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth." There was no trick that he hesitated to adopt to overreach either his enemies or those dear Jews of his. Unto Solomon "the Lord stirred up an adversary," I. Kings xi: 14. Those three conditions of David (II. Samuel xxiv:13.) were terrible. But for what? For numbering the people as God himself had moved him to do, 1st verse, 24th chapter. But the Lord soon repented, as we have seen him do so often—not, however, till 70,000 poor devils were slain and were dead past all recovery. David may well ask, "these sheep what have they done?" He it was who told the Israelites to borrow jewels from the Egyptians, and afterwards steal them. God's vengeance was terrible; there was no bound to it. But is vengeance a necessary element in the character of a sovereign? Does it tend to elevate him in our esteem? Does it improve or reform the sufferer? Be this as it may, Christians yet think vengeance par excellence belongs to God before all. Let us hear what the divine being says. Here is the inducement which he offers for obedience, Lev. xxvi:27: "And if ye will not for all this hearken to me, then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins; I will bring a sword upon you; I will send pestilence among you; ye shall eat and not be satisfied; ye shall eat the flesh of your sons; and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat." That is inducement enough! "I will destroy your high places, make your cities waste; I will scatter you among the heathens; *I will not smell the savor of your sweet odors*, my soul shall abhor you." Deuteronomy (iv:24) may well say, "the Lord thy God is a jealous God, *a consuming fire*." Look in Deut. vii:10, "God repayeth them that hate him to their face, he will not be slack to him that hateth him; he will repay him to his face." And what is it to hate God? Why, not to obey his weak and wicked mandates, or reverence him in some especial manner. Surely he is, as he says, a very jealous God. "But the Lord thy God," says Moses (Deut. vii:23), "shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction." Whom? Why these poor aborigines, the Canaanites, who happened to have good land and God's good people wanted it. That was all. The Lord God

“had chosen this people to be an especial people unto himself above all other people upon the face of the earth.” For “they were a holy people.” So we see! It is true they rebelled sometimes, and were a little idolatrous, and they made God provoked by so doing, but he always repented in the end, and the children were taken back. After all we must confess we cannot see but that he did his chosen people as much harm as good. He made them brilliant promises, but they never amounted to much. He promised them Canaan, but I guess they never have had much of it, and here they are wandering about all over the earth like so many lost sheep. They have the title deeds in their pockets, but they fail to get possession.

His vanity was beyond all measure. Indeed, next to revenge, there is nothing so prominent in his heart as vanity. Does he ask, as we expect a good king or father to do, because it is necessary, or right, or proper? These three elements never enter into the conditions of the problem. He is a tyrant, a conceited tyrant, puffed up with his own authority. He delights to amuse himself with his own whims; and the pains and tortures which he can cause to man afford him inexpressible satisfaction. The most of his commands are the result of idle fancies and strange conceits. He says a thing must be done, not because it will do you or me good, but because “*I tell you to do so*”—and that is reason enough. His vanity is shown in nearly all of his laws. He punishes not because their transgression would injure him or anybody else, but because punishments delight him. Most of the troubles of the Israelites come from their not showing God that reverence which he thought was due to himself. He demands that they shall not worship any other gods, not take his name in vain, keep the Sabbath day holy, and such things. All this arises from vanity.

We see him doing so many things that are out of all character for a God, or for anybody else, that we lose all respect for him. He took off the chariot wheels of the Egyptians (Ex. xiv: 25). He wrestled with Jacob a whole night, and by the by, came near getting the worst of it. He chased the enemies of Joshua, and as he could not catch them, he smote them with stones from heaven. And many other things he did that we do not wish to mention here.

Finally, we find him destitute of all real power. He could punish, but he could not compel. He seems to have had no power over the wicked, not even over the poor Israelites. He is a strange man deified, he is the poor miserable God of idolaters, a God not unlike, in many respects, the worst gods of the heathen. We believe, everybody now believes, in a God who is a Supreme Being, omniscient, omnipresent, and all powerful.

God is represented in the whole of the Old Testament as a man, a mighty, terrible, and awful man. He was simply the hero of the Jews; he was their general-in-chief. There is nothing divine, or spiritual, or heavenly about him. Nothing is said particularly about where his dwelling was, but it certainly was not in heaven. Indeed most of his time was occupied upon the earth, in punishing the Israelites and their enemies. He was no such God as men believe in now; he was no spirit; he dwelt with men in his own bodily shape. He met with Moses face to face, like a friend, notwithstanding it is said in other places that "no man hath seen God at any time," and notwithstanding, at another time, the Lord said no man should see his face and live.

A man may be known by the company he keeps, and we have a right to judge of the Jewish God by the same rule. We have said enough already of the Israelites in general. Now what kind of men were the patriarchs? Were they as we might expect God's holy representatives to be, models of purity, excellence and virtue? We could not, I am sorry to say, predicate any such thing of Jacob, David, Sampson, Solomon, and many others of God's elect. Even old Abraham, better than some of the rest, would not hesitate to lie and cheat. But how about Moses, the one who staid forty days with God; Moses, the Messiah of the old dispensation? About the first thing we hear of him was his assassinating an Egyptian: "And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" (Ex. ii: 12). His vindictiveness he inherited from God: "Have ye saved all the women alive—kill every male among the little ones" (Num. xxxi: 15). "Thou shalt smite them (those heathens whose lands he was after), and absolutely destroy them, thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them" (Deut. vii:2). Lord deliver us from such a Messiah! And yet Moses, if we may believe his own story, was a very meek man. Elijah, who next to Moses and hardly next to him, stood nearer to God than any man that ever lived; who was he, what manner of man? In the I Kings, xviii: 40, we hear him say: "Take the prophets of Baal, *let not one of them escape*, and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, *and slew them there.*" In II Kings, i:12: "Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down." And Elisha, who was identical with Elijah, or nearly as good as he, prayed unto the Lord and said: "Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness" (II Kings vi:18). Of such stuff were the blessed old patriarchs of old!

SATAN AND HELL.

What were the ideas of hell and Satan only a few years ago? A real furnace, brimstone, &c. This is what the Testament says. It needs no very great penetration to perceive that God, even in the Old Testament, is progressive. He is not in Judges what he was in Genesis. It is a well established fact that the character of a people's God changes with its own transformations. In Genesis, God dwells among men; he assumes the form of men. Over and over again does an angel, or a man of God, turn out to be God himself. He delighted to have holy converse with Moses, face to face, as a friend. Farther on, we see repeated cases of where "the Lord said," but God is more chary with his person, and he keeps himself more closely veiled. Even to Elijah he appears as "a still, small voice" (Kings xix: 1). Indeed, we are assured at the end of the five books that Israel never after raised up a prophet whom the Lord knew face to face. He now appeared more in dreams and visions, *i. e.* he became more *visionary*. No more wrestling, no more weak argumentative discourses, no more taking off of chariot-wheels. He assumes now more or less of the spiritual form.

But we come now to the most important element in his progressive character. In the early books of the Bible, he is a union of two antagonistic beings into one; he is God and the Devil together. He is himself the lying, deceiving one, the destroying spirit, the consuming fire. You will observe that the Devil is not thought of, invented or discovered, till long after Moses' time. Such an absolute change had the Jewish mind undergone in time, on this subject, the very acts that God is assumed to have done, in one part of the Bible, in another part are said to be the work of Satan himself. Compare David's numbering in I Chron. xxi: 1, and II Sam. xxiv: 1.

Who was Satan, what was he? According to the current tradition of the Christian world, he is a second God, the Ahriman of Zoroaster, having the power to undo all that God himself can do, and the desire to subvert him in all his undertakings. He is emphatically the God of Evil, the Pluto and the Mercury of the ancients. He is a very terrible God, one that we must fear and respect, even if we do not love and reverence him.

Cruden says that it is *collected* from different passages that the Devil was cast down from heaven, with all his company, like Apollo and Vulcan of old. This outbreak came from his proud and rebellious spirit. But this, if true, would be wonderful indeed. How could God, an all wise being, all seeing, have such a wicked rabble about him! Did he not know their character from the beginning? Were they wicked from the first, or were they not? If not

from the first, how came they changed? *They must* in the first place have been as imperfect and vulnerable, those holy angels, as we poor mortals can be; and in the second place, the influence about them, in heaven as they were, must have been of that wicked nature which produces apostacy and rebellion. These have fallen; will not others still fall? This subject of fallen angels is a new one in the Bible. All mythological history, however, is full of just such apostacy, and rebellion of gods against other gods. But it is impossible for us to conceive how such a detestable being, such an evil genius, could ever have found access to heaven or a seat near God's throne. He belongs in hell, and he belonged there from the beginning. He was at first either a bad spirit in a place where only good ones can be found, or the nature both of heaven and the Devil must have undergone a total revolution. There must have been a time when there was either no real heaven, a Devil being in it, or a time when there was no true Devil, because there was no place for him to locate. The latter hypothesis is usually supposed to represent the truth of the case. But we must see that this cannot be true, when we appreciate the fact that evil, and the power of the Devil, *is inborn in the very nature of things*. The Bible certainly gives account of evil enough which occurred before the appearance of Satan, to justify the existence of a Devil, and a very hot place to put him in too.

How inconsistent are our ideas of Heaven, Hell, God and the Devil, and hence how false some of them must be! The Dutch have a Dutch heaven, and everything in it is Dutch; so with the French, the Yankees, the Hindoos.

Hell is a terrible place, but whence it came or where it is located, is the great question. Where hell and the Devil are, there God certainly cannot be, certainly there he cannot be sovereign. But God is everywhere and supreme in all places. But notwithstanding this character which we connect with God, we still believe in a separate kingdom, in the bowels of the earth perhaps, like Pluto's, where the Devil reigns and God does not. This is surely heathen mythology come again.

Hell is a place where a large amount of brimstone used to be consumed by fire. But this idea is not very popular now, as it is seen that it is impossible to keep up the supply of brimstone, and there is no good place to burn so large a quantity of sulphurous material. But with the brimstone vanishes also our ideas of a real hell. It is now simply a spiritual fire, the more so as spirits alone are to be burned in it, and brimstone would not meet their case. By and by we shall see that it was no fire at all. And then the idea of an eternal fire, one that does not go out, strikes us strangely.

Hell has at different times been located in the sun, in the moon, in comets, in the center of the earth; but as we need all these places for other purposes, and as they do not answer the conditions of the problem, we are obliged to abandon them and confess that there is no hell at all, or if there is, *there is no place to put it.*

It will be observed that hell, like Satan, hardly belongs to the Old Testament; it is a creation of the New. Moses understood nothing about such a place. It was created with the world and the heavens. It will be observed too that Moses did not teach punishments after death, or even any existence after death. God then visited the sinner with prompt and present punishment in this world, and acted with no reference to another.

If people do not mean, if the New Testament writers do not mean, *literally*, what they say of heaven and hell, how shall we understand when they are in earnest about what they assert, and when they are, as the child expresses it, ONLY FOOLING.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

I have thus passed rapidly over a few of the many strange features of the Old Testament. I have only made a mere beginning towards a critical examination of that work, but I have perhaps gone far enough to meet the purposes I have in view. I proposed to show that however good authority it might have been for the age in which it was written, it is not good authority for us of the present generation. It was not prepared for us. What was good sense in the days of Moses, is not quite as good sense now.

I have not wished to deny that there is in the books of the Old Testament much that is good sound philosophy to-day. I could not deny that there is much in it that is grand, beautiful, and even sublime. But every one knows that such matter constitutes not the greatest part of the whole work. If there is much to praise, there is more to condemn; if there is much that is good, there is also much that is intolerably bad. It would never answer to take its precepts as affording a standard by which to measure our morality to-day.

I have desired to show what I hope no one will doubt, that it is not so much a book on religion, as the history of a nation, a vain, conceited and ignorant nation. We shall search in vain in these books for true Christian sentiments, as we have sought in vain among its fathers for true Christian examples. What is the moral influence of the Old Testament? Is it not in strict antagonism with what Christ taught and practiced? Did not Christ, in the plainest terms, abrogate some portions of it at least? Does he teach the doctrine of an eye for an eye, the doctrine of revenge, the doctrine

of a relentless and unforgiving heart? Would he subscribe to the immoralities and the base conduct of the patriarchs?

But taken as a whole, we must add that no Christian believes the Old Testament; no one accepts and yields to its authority. A few things we observe because only, however, that it is agreeable to our tastes, and not because it is the word of God himself. But how much more is there that we reject as useless and contemptible! God places great stress upon sacrifices. Like the deities of the Heathen, nothing pleases him so well as a good fat sheep, or a nice young bullock. The smoke of the altar and its savor was grateful unto him. He says distinctly, "thou shalt make an altar to burn incense on," but we do not make any such thing. And then, too, he had some strange fancies about circumcision. He considered that a matter of first rate importance. (Joshua understood the Lord's wishes so well that he had the children of Israel circumcised twice.) He orders us to be circumcised without delay, *and yet we refuse*. Is this obeying the Lord and keeping his commandments holy? We are told not to eat pork, and not to build fires on Sunday, and yet we pass all these mandates by unnoticed. And we are told to make an ark of shittim-wood, and this is left undone also. Indeed, what regard do we pay to all the precepts and laws of the xx, xxi, xxii, xxiii and xxv chapters of Exodus, to say nothing of many other places? Oh, but these things were meant only for the Jews! Tell us then, I pray thee, *what was not meant for the Jews only?*

No one believes the miracles of the Old Testament. No one believes that the sun stood still for Joshua, or that it returned ten degrees for Hezekiah. No one believes that any people ever lived forty years on manna sent from heaven by the Lord. No one believes that God wrestled with Jacob all night. No one believes that Moses dwelt with the Lord forty days and forty nights, without eating and drinking, or that he ever saw him face to face. No one believes that Sampson lost his strength by losing his hair, or that Jonah lived in the belly of a fish three days, being vomited on the land when the Lord spake to it.

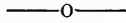
THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN IN AN AGE WHEN PEOPLE BELIEVED IN SIGNS AND WONDERS, IN WITCHES AND WIZARDS, SEA-SERPENTS AND DRAGONS. Why should we of another era be forced to believe in them too? The Old Testament was written in an age when it was believed that the Lord was God only of the Jews, and it has now come down to us who believe and know that he is THE GOD OF ALL MANKIND.

I have aimed my attack chiefly upon the historical part of the Old Testament, or rather upon the theoretical and traditional part

of it. It is only a portion of its moral teachings that I cannot endorse. There are besides these, many doctrines that are sound, even sublime. I have great respect for the Old Testament, as the holy record of an important people; but I could hardly be induced to live by it now. So I respect, even venerate, the mythological traditions of the ancients, but could hardly be induced to accept them as containing sound and good doctrines for the people of to-day.

The Old Testament shall never be without my tender regard; I always venerate age. But it is now too old and decrepit for me to think for one moment that it will be able to lead us safely through the struggles and trials of this life. It must go the way of all that is aged, to the grave, leaving its place to be supplied by that which is younger and stronger, that which is even with the times.

THE NEW TESTAMENT.



CHAPTER III.

THE CHANGE.

After laboring so long in the darkness and desolation of the Old Testament, shuddering the while under the mutterings of its vengeful ire, it is a relief to us poor mortals to emerge at last into the full and glorious light of the New. We do not, it is true, leave entirely the region of miracles, of wonderful and impossible things, but they are not so monstrous as before. God appears no more in his proper person, in his own form, or rather in his absence of form. He does not even appear as a pillar of cloud, or as a shining light, or burning bush. We do not hear him in the clouds. He walks no more the earth, like Hercules, no more does he fight the battles of the Israelites, no more does he cause the stones to rain down upon his enemies and thus overwhelm them in his wrath. He vows no more, neither does he curse, nor swear, nor repent. Rarely does he appear in visions, rarely is he represented by angels; still more rarely does he take it upon himself, as of old, to render barren women fruitful.

It is another God entirely that we meet with here. He is quite a new being. Still, however, he is the especial God of the Jews. He sent his only son into the world to be their particular Savior and King. For them this son lost his life, for them he suffered unspeakable woes. It is not till we reach Paul that Gentiles begin to be taken into the fold to share in God's blessings. Nevertheless God is more of a spirit and less of a man. He is now located in heaven, and there is his throne and his kingdom. He resides no more, as in days of old, with the stiff-necked and idolatrous Jews. He has a care now for lilies and sparrows, and moreover, somewhat for the Gentiles.

In the Old Testament we have nothing but the struggles of a people against monotheism, the unceasing effort to unite the belief

in a single God with the worshiping of idols. Everything there partakes of polytheism, nay, of heathenism. Even with the prophets the belief in a Supreme Being was a mere word of mouth matter. Instead of being a sovereign and a god, he was merely an apology for one. He was simply a hero, and a very poor hero at that. The most conspicuous weaknesses in his character were his shortsightedness and want of decision. To these we may add his terrible vengeance and the tardiness with which his promises were performed. In a word, we find him the prototype of all heathen gods. He must have just so much honor, so much reverence, so much humility. He must cause just so much suffering and pain, just so much anguish, or his wrath would grow hot and he himself run mad. He must have, like other gods, just so much blood spilled, just so much wood must be burnt, he must smell just so much savor and this savor must be just so sweet. To disregard these whims and fancies of God, would be likely to incur his most wrathful displeasure, and war, pestilence and famine would soon be the inevitable result.

In the New Testament, the character of God is somewhat toned down. He is not the barbarous and unmerciful master that we find him in the Old. Nevertheless, we find him occasionally revengeful, jealous, unjust—if indeed, we may believe his biographers, for of himself he says nothing, does nothing, is nothing. We only know him through his prophets, and how well they understood him we dare not affirm. In the account that is given of him and his doings it is impossible to separate that which is from God from that which is from man. But we observe this particularly in the New Testament, that the struggle against idolatry and polytheism has substantially ended.

There is this important point of difference also between the two divisions of the Bible. Up to this time all punishments were visited promptly upon the sinner in the present world, without any thought or reference to the world to come. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul and that of future rewards and punishments, has no existence, certainly no prominence, in the Old Testament. Under the new dispensation the wicked thrive as well as the good. Their fields are watered, their trees are fruitful, and their flocks multiply. *But eternal vengeance awaits the unbeliever in the world to come.* Here Satan for the first time, that evil genius, with his legions, begins to play a part on his own responsibility. In the Old Testament, Satan is scarcely mentioned; his influence is not recognized. God there is himself the evil genius, the origin of wickedness and the cause of suffering. In the New Testament Satan has a kingdom of his own.

Into his hands unbelievers are cast for eternal punishment. He delights in the miseries of the wretched. God in the New, though not yet entirely the good spirit, being yet represented as doing many things that a good spirit would never do, still does not, as before, stand out pre-eminently as the bad one. The good and bad elements of his character, once united in one individual, are now represented by two characters. So heaven and hell, which before were combined and undistinguishable, without either an existence or a name, have each in the New Testament their own appropriate location and office.

CHRIST.

Let us now seek to understand the true character of Christ, and in order to do this it will be necessary first to consider his *origin*.

The conception of Christ as it is commonly received by the Christian world, is in the highest degree miraculous. It is not simply anomalous, it is more than that, it is *impossible, monstrous*. It is not simply changing water into wine, or healing the sick, or even raising the dead. It is something besides this; it is far more wonderful. Mary, the mother of Jesus, according to Matthew, "was found with child of the Holy Ghost." And Luke in still more elaborate terms, remarks that "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the highest *shall* overshadow thee, therefore that *thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." God is a spirit, formless, limitless, infinite, and Mary an ordinary human being, a woman. How could such a spirit be concerned directly in the conception of any mortal? We hesitate not, if we are to take it in its *literal* sense, as Christians affect to do, to pronounce this the most shocking and absurd story in the whole Bible, and we are glad that the New Testament has no more such. It is evidently a stray chapter from the Old Testament; the God here thought of is merely the God of Moses, whom you will remember we found to be only an extraordinary, unapproachable and an unimaginable man.

We must be permitted to dwell at some length on this subject; it is the turning point of our whole religious system. If Christ was not born thus directly from God, he was not the Son of God in its literal sense, and it must turn out that our religion is, like that of every other people, merely the work of man. It must also follow that we are not to be distinguished from all other people by having the Son of God born from among us and for us alone, while other people are left to die without a Savior.

This being an extraordinary, and to us an impossible circumstance, we have a right to demand more than ordinary evidence to

substantiate this strange assumption. Now let us see what evidence has come down to this generation. We must first observe that neither Matthew nor Luke pretended, even in this very important matter, to give the source of this astonishing information. Matthew begins his story with the plain remark that "the birth of Christ was in this wise." Luke begins his gospel with the remark that he sets forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely *believed* among us, even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word." But who was the "eye-witness" of this affair of Mary, or who heard and reported faithfully the address of the angels to Mary, according to Luke, and to Joseph, according to Matthew? Both of these writers speak of the whole matter as if it were ordinary and commonplace. They evidently speak what is "surely believed among us;" their authority, however, is only *tradition* and common report. No one would think that such a story should be founded on the mere statement of Mary, who was so vitally interested in the matter.

We have a right to ask that there be no great discrepancies in this account as given by the two writers. We have a right to ask that the whole story shall be told in a direct and plain manner, and that it may stand the closest criticism in all its bearings and relations. But do we have this satisfaction here? We have not the time to pass over the discrepancies and the defects of each of these narratives. Suffice it to say there are many of them, but we will only notice a few. We have already noticed, in passing, that according to one, the *angel*, or *Gabriel*, as Luke has it, discoursed with Mary, and according to the other, with Joseph. We add now that in Matthew the messenger appeared in a dream; in Luke it reads: "he came in unto her and said." The time of appearance is also different. Look, too, at the point in the address; in Matthew, it is to prevent Joseph from turning Mary away for an offence now apparent enough; in Luke, it is that Mary may "Fear not." The Protevangelion, apochryphal, gives still another version. When questioned by Joseph (who had been absent) about this strange matter, Mary became confused and answered that she "did not know whence this is." She had forgotten the words of the angel.

To add no more, there are here three different accounts of the conception of Jesus, and in many of the essential particulars they do not agree. Shall we believe any of them? Or which shall we believe? Two of them at least *must* be false. We repeat again, have we not a right to ask for a plain, unvarying statement in such a peculiar and unnatural case as this?

For us the story is a monstrous one; we believe in a God who is a spirit, who resides everywhere in general, but never is anywhere

in particular; one who cannot and who does not come down from heaven, even on such occasions as this. But for the Jews of the Old Testament, and for the Greeks, and the Romans, and the heathens, who believe in wooden gods, this was a most natural and sensible thing. Christ was not the first nor by any means the only one born of a God. Just in the same manner, a Roman virgin in olden time became pregnant, or at least thought she did, by Mars; and so Romulus was born. Alexander the Great was divinely conceived. Æneas had Venus for his mother, and Plato was begat by Apollo. Nothing was more certain than that men such as Alexander and Plato, who exhibited divine qualities, should be able to trace their origin to the deity. That this same tendency to make gods of god-like men prevailed with the Jews, will be found evident to any one who reads the Old Testament. It was a most common thing for God to be interested in the birth of their great men. Samuel was brought forth by a barren woman, and was so named because "she had asked him of the Lord." We are told in Genesis that "the Lord visited Sarah (who was barren of course), as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." So in Judges, "the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now thou art barren, and bearest not; but thou shalt conceive and bare a son" (Samson). Now if to this we add the account of the miraculous conception of John the Baptist also, it must be confessed we have given sufficient instances of accounts which run parallel with this. Nothing could be more natural and pleasing to Jesus than such a story.

It is an important fact too, in this connection, that nowhere else in the New Testament, not even in Mark or John, do we find any reference to this assumed miraculous conception.

Besides this negative evidence in opposition to the claim that Christ was born of the Holy Ghost, we must add some which is more positive. It is admitted on all hands, and it is easily enough shown if not admitted, that Christ grew up in the family of Joseph as one of his children, and that he was considered by all his contemporaries as simply and plainly "the carpenter's son." Joseph is perhaps as frequently referred to as his father, as Mary is as his mother. And be it observed Christ never undertakes to prove that he is the Son of God by virtue of his conception. He never says a word about it, while that alone, if demonstrated, would have settled the whole question. He proves his claim by his miraculous power and his resurrection. His disciples seem to know nothing of

his descent. He is called the Son of God occasionally, but that proves nothing, as it is a term used in applications other than its literal one. He is also frequently called the Son of Man, and the Son of David. Indeed, that longest of genealogies in Matthew and Luke would have been false and also worthless, if not to prove that Christ was of the line of David, through Joseph his father. Perhaps also we may show hereafter that it was some time in Christ's later years before even he began to think he was really the Son of God.

Again, we must consider that though there is an attempt to make out that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born and never was anything else, the evidence that Mary was but an ordinary woman is proved beyond controversy by the fact that Jesus had brethren and sisters, *i. e.*, that his mother had children besides Jesus, younger than he, and possibly some older. We are taught to consider Mary an ordinary woman, but the Catholics very properly treat her as divine, as the mother of God.

So we conclude that the story of Christ's anomalous birth was one which grew up after his death, to make it compare with his life and death.

We are repeatedly and triumphantly, as it were, assured that Christ was the Son of David, and that long genealogy is to demonstrate the fact. But wherein lies the particular glory, if it were true? Who was David, that we should expect a Savior from his house? History, even the Bible, tells us that he was a blood-thirsty warrior, a rakish, abandoned sort of fellow, like Solomon. It is no wonder that the Ebionites held him in absolute abhorrence. And who was Mary, that we should expect the King of Glory to be born of her? We hear nothing astonishing of her, either before his birth or after it.

The special interposition of God was invoked that Christ might be born without sin. Yet he was born of a sinful mother and in a sinful way. If he did not inherit all the penalties of Adam's transgression, who then ever did? He suffered pain, experienced hunger, and in the end died as a friendless and forsaken mortal dies, in poverty and distress.

HIS BIRTH.

Christ was born like a God. It is no wonder then that his birth was something more than an ordinary occurrence. However, we must feel some surprise that a mother, a virgin, who was pregnant of the Holy Ghost, should be delivered in the ordinary way. Christ, for all we are informed, came into the world not only born of humble parents, but born in the most common way. We

hear of nothing strange or unusual that occurred at his birth. Indeed, is it not inexplicable that one who was conceived in that miraculous, god-like manner, should from that moment forward have had, even to the day of his death, the simple career of the most ordinary mortal? Or, again, is it not strange that one who during every moment of his wordly history we know only as a mortal being, eating, drinking and dying as a mortal being, should still have had God for his natural father?

It was only after Christ was born, how long we know not, that the miracles begin to develop, and the external world begins to be disturbed. Let us see what happened. Matthew says, wise men came from the east and inquired, "where is he that is born king of the Jews?" And why ask this? On what evidence did they come? Simply this: they had seen a star in the east. A star! What star? His star? An extra planet, shall we say, or a meteor? They seem to have known all about this star, its history and what it meant. They were expecting it, and it had now come. But the sequel proved they were mistaken in all their wisdom, for Christ was not then, and never did become, at any time, King of the Jews.

Besides, they were strangers from the East. Why so interested in a Jewish King?

There is a mystery about all this that no one can unravel. These wise men, why should they come to Jerusalem? Did they expect to find wiser men than themselves? We are not so informed. They evidently went to Jerusalem because in the popular mind it was a necessary link in the chain. The star, in the end, nothing else, the same star they had seen in the east, pointed out the very thing they came to inquire about, viz.: where the young child was. Again we ask, why must they first go to Jerusalem?

The chief priests and scribes were all expecting the Messiah. Even if they had not seen the star, they knew where he "should be born." They knew the prophecies. But mark this particularly: it was a Governor that they expected, it was no Savior. It was for this reason that Herod trembled for his head. So ran the prophecy.

This is Matthew's version. But Luke has his account a little different. Indeed, it is another story entirely, and if one is right, the other must be wrong. Luke says it was an angel, and not a star, as Matthew says, that directed the way to the new-born child; and those directed were poor shepherds who knew nothing of the coming Messiah, and not wise men who had been expecting him all the while. The matter was all new to the shepherds, as you may see by the particular and full manner in which the angel unfolds

the mystery. There was not only an angel, but "suddenly there was with him a multitude of the heavenly host praising God," &c. Matthew had not heard this, and hence makes no mention of it.

Observe, too, that Luke has nothing to say about Herod and his wicked deed in killing so many innocent little boys. It is too important for Luke to omit, if he knew the fact, as a divine writer would. Besides, Matthew's story is very improbable, it hardly hangs together. Thus Jesus was an infant just born—nowhere near two years of age. Why then destroy all under two years of age? Why have recourse to so terrible a remedy, when an easier one was at his command? He seems not to have made the slightest attempt to find the child, farther than entrusting this all-important mission to strangers who he might have known would betray him, just as they did. It is a feeble story. It is merely a revised edition of some of the Old Testament accounts; for example, Pharaoh, and Moses, and Nimrod, and Abraham. It was in harmony with the common idea of ancient times, that promising men should find many obstacles, that enemies should seek to destroy them in their infancy, but that after all they should be saved by some miracle. So we have the story of Cyrus, and of Augustus; also of Romulus. In the case of Augustus it was announced by a prodigy that one destined to be a king of the Romans is born. So the Senate, frightened like Herod, decreed that no children born in that year should be reared up or educated. In those days, as well as long before and long after, it was not only believed that great men had their stars, but also that stars gave warning or premonition of things soon to happen. We often read of such stars in the Bible. Hence we see a star here in Matthew just as we see an angel in Luke, the usual medium through which unusual information was communicated.

In concluding this part of Christ's history, how shall we reconcile the smooth and easy boyhood of Christ in Luke, with the stormy time he has in Matthew?

HIS NATIVITY.

It is not a well settled point where Christ was born. He was always known and spoken of as Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew evidently intends to convey the idea, though he does not precisely say so, that Christ was born at Bethlehem. But even this author brings Joseph in the end back to Nazareth, and there at least, Jesus was brought up. According to Luke, the family lived at *Nazareth* at the time, and the birth of Christ at Bethlehem is a pure accident, and besides an accident that we can hardly account for. He is

nowhere else in the Testament spoken of as being from Bethlehem, but always from Galilee or Nazareth. We can see no adequate reason why Joseph and his wife, in her condition, should go up to Bethlehem to be taxed.

It is evident that this happened, as so many other things happened, "that the prophecy might be fulfilled." You will observe that Christ and his followers found this claim first of all upon prophecy, that Christ was foretold again and again, in different parts of the Bible, and in the most particular manner. There is then a strong motive in the historian to *make* the story correspond with the prediction. There is an evident effort in that direction here, as in so many other places. But it is incontrovertible that Jesus was a Nazarene and did not come out of Bethlehem, and so did not fulfill the conditions of the prophecy.

HIS YOUTH AND EDUCATION.

If we follow our accepted Gospels and them alone, we shall find that, with very few exceptions, Christ's boyhood was not marked by anything peculiar. He grew up it seems as other boys, with but very few things, to say the most, to distinguish him from those of his age. Indeed, you will mark that in his whole early life, even to manhood, he was characterised by nothing that marked him a God.

Matthew has not a word to say on his early history; the first we hear of him is his coming to John for baptism. We are hence left to infer that up to the time of his manhood and the beginning of his ministry, nothing had occurred worthy of mention. But Luke as usual is more elaborate; he has had better sources of information, or has inserted what Matthew did not consider authentic. A striking incident occurred, while he was still an infant, at the time of his presentation in the temple. Simeon was an old man, "waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon him," and it was revealed to him that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, "and he came by the spirit into the temple," at the time Christ was brought there to be done for "after the custom of the law." As soon as he saw the child he recognized him as "the light to lighten the *Gentiles*, and the glory of thy people, Israel." And in continuance of the wonder, a certain Anna, too, "a widow of about four score and four years," "came in at that instant," and gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, "and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." These were miracles, and strange ones they were too. And for what purpose? Only to *prove* that Jesus was the Messiah, and to substantiate his claim. But there are some things which do not

match with some other things which we know. Simeon said Jesus was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles. This must have been shocking to the Jews of that day, for according to the prophecy, on which Christ also lays his foundation, he was to be their king, and not the Savior of mankind. "And Joseph and his mother marveled at these things which were spoken of him." This part of the story plainly supposes that nothing had been said or heard of in reference to Christ's new kind of conception. Joseph and Mary marveled! Why? Because they did not dream that a child whom they had taken for an ordinary one, should be such an one as Simeon had described. Simeon had given evidently the *first* intimation of his true or prospective character.

It is natural that a person who became so distinguished a person as Christ should have marvelous things told of his childhood days, and that we do not find them, as we should expect, in the gospel life of Christ, is because they have been suppressed. They had become so magnified and so discredited, that even the Christian world refused to receive them. The character of some of these stories has been indicated under the heading of "False Gospels." But we must add that there is no more reason in retaining those accounts which we have than there would be in retaining those that are told in the Gospels which are Apochryphal.

Jesus, according to Luke, increased in wisdom and stature (like any youth), and in favor with God and men. When he was twelve years old, a curious incident occurred. His parents had gone to Jerusalem to the feast, as they did every year, taking their child with them. He was a child of great promise, and one would think they would have watched over him with the utmost care, and yet they allowed him to run at large, and never troubled themselves to look for him till he had been gone a whole day. Of course, they had some trouble in finding him. And when they found him "sitting in the midst of the doctors," and inquired why he had dealt with them so, he answered thus: "How is it that ye sought me; wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?" Of course they understood not his saying, because they had entirely forgotten what Simeon and Anna had said a few years before, and this was a sudden, strange and unexpected turn in his conduct. But he seems to have neglected his father's business unaccountably after that, for we hear of nothing of the kind of him again for eighteen whole years.

Finally, we ask what did Christ do up to the time of his ministry that might not have been done by any ordinary man? What evidence did he give, up to the time he was thirty years old, that he was a god born of a God?

HIS CHARACTER.

We have now examined the subject of the conception of Christ by or through the Holy Ghost, and we find the story neither plausible, probable nor possible. There is, it must be confessed, no reliable evidence to show that Christ was born a God. From infancy up to the age of maturity, or more precisely up to the age of thirty years, (when he is supposed to begin his ministry), we know nothing of him to prove that he was anything more than a mortal man.

All the real history of Christ and his acts is confined to the period of time which began with his ministry and ended with his death. We must examine that history in order to ascertain his true character and see how or where he has established his claims to being the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

It should first of all be noticed that Christ did not all at once break forth as the King of Glory and the Son of God. He had a history like any other prophet. It required time and proof to demonstrate that he was anything else than Joseph the carpenter's son, and in the end only a small few believed it. He developed himself gradually. It took a long time before even Christ himself began to think that he was, as some called him, really the Son of God.

Before referring to the particular accounts of Christ's Messiahship as given in the four gospels, it may be proper to get a clear idea of who and what a Messiah was to be. It is a well understood fact that the Jews, for many years before the appearance of Christ, had been expecting a Messiah, and that that expectation was at its height when Christ was born; but, be it ever borne in mind, they did not expect any such Messiah as Christ proved to be in the end, and that is the reason why the Jews rejected him almost to a man. The Jews were oppressed; they expected God would send some one to deliver and save them, as he had so often done before. They expected one who would save not the whole world, but the Jews alone. They expected that some one would be sent from God, but this did not imply the necessity that the one sent should be literally and especially the Son of God, any more than in the case of the many Saviors or deliverers that had been sent to Israel in the days of the Old Testament, such as Moses, David and Joshua. The term Son of God in the New Testament is not new. It is used many times in the Old, in reference to kings and others of Israel. We are all sons of God, and especially were they such whom God took under his especial care, and whom he made his especial minis-

ters and servants. God can mean no more nor less than that when he is assumed to have said of David's seed: "I will be his father and he shall be my son."

A careful examination of the prophecies must lead to the conclusion that no such personage as Christ proved to be was ever foretold by any prophet or in any writing of the Old Testament. Isaiah is most relied on, and let us hear what he says. Isaiah was himself a preacher as well as a prophet. He joined in the common lamentation of all good men, from Moses down, for the wickedness and idolatry of the Jews. He entreats them to repent; he makes them bright promises to encourage and cheer them in their sufferings. "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord." (ii: 5). "Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen." (iii: 8). He foretells the extremity of their evils, (iii) but a few shall be left, and they shall be holy. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give thee a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good." (vii: 14-15). If this did refer to Christ, it is no proof that he was the Son of God. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called wonderful, counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." (ix: 6-7). This evidently indicates a natural son who is to become a king, not a Savior. The terms used are mere epithets, more proper for God himself than for his son. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine *elect*, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him." (xlii: 1). He was evidently to be one whom God had elected, not procreated.

The prophecy of Micah evidently looks forward to a *ruler* of Israel, not to a Messiah. "And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land; thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian," &c. (Micah v:5-6). He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of *Israel*. (Matthew xv: 24).

The conclusion that we come to is one which is irresistible: that no such Savior as Christ became was ever prophesied, and we are thus able to account for the Jews rejecting him. He did not correspond with the image they had formed of him. They expected one like David, a deliverer, and hence from David. Again, prophecies were in those days very uncertain, and very undefinable things. People were given to prophecy then as now. Prophecy always has been natural to man, and what is foretold sometimes

comes to pass and sometimes does not. Allowed to give your own construction, you can find almost anything foretold in the Bible. Now then, such men as Isaiah and Micah had in view have never yet made their appearance. And the followers of Christ cannot prove that he corresponds to the deliverers referred to in those books, any more than they could prove it was John the Baptist, or Mahomet, or Paul, or the many false Christs that arose after Jesus. Jesus assumed to be the one foretold, but he never gave the first item of evidence to prove that claim.

We are now prepared to follow out the different accounts of Christ's development as the Messiah. In Matthew the first intimation which we have, after the account of the conception, that Christ is the Son of God, is at the time of Christ's baptism, when a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He was then thirty years old. This would seem to settle the whole question, and we should expect that Christ and his followers, if not the world besides, would continually adhere to that character now so well established. But we will see that that evidence must have all passed away like a fleeting and deceitful dream. The devil had evidently heard of this, and hence he prefaces his remarks with, *if thou be the Son of God*. Nothing more is said about Christ's being the Son of God for a long distance; he is a mere preacher, like Jonah and many prophets of old, calling the erring children of Israel to repentance, and saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. In the 27th verse of the eighth chapter, the Devil calls him "Son of God," but not much attention seems to be paid to it. In the 27th verse of the ninth chapter, he is called "Son of David," and no objection seems to be made by anybody. In the 27th verse of the eleventh chapter, he first uses the term "Son" specially in reference to God his father. But all the people were amazed, in the 23d verse of the eleventh chapter, and said: "Is not this the Son of David?" He had, it seems, so far been only known as Joseph's son. Even so late in his ministry as the sixteenth chapter, his character is not yet understood. He is obliged to ask his disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" In the 20th verse of the same chapter, he seems to assume plainly that he is Jesus the Christ, but he charges all to keep the fact suppressed.

In this gospel we see that Christ is generally called the Son of Man, and sometimes the Son of David, sometimes the prophet of Nazereth, and very rarely, Son of God.

The term Son of Man is common in the Old Testament, and seems to have no special significance as applied to Christ, or if it has, that significance has not yet been determined. We see that

little stress is laid upon the fact that he was born of God. His main aim and concern is to prove that he was the Messiah who had been foretold, and whom the Jews were expecting. Such a Messiah, as we have indicated before, was not to have a monstrous or anomalous conception, and was not to be in any new sense the Son of God.

Mark passes over the childhood of Christ; but he starts in the beginning with the assumption that Christ is the Son of God. He gives him about the same character that Matthew does. In the 35th verse of the twelfth chapter, however, we are surprised to find Christ trying to prove himself the Son of God, and denying that he is the Son of David, as he was commonly understood to be.

In Luke we find the same want of fixedness that we have found in the others. He is assumed to be the Son of God in one place, and again, the gravest doubts are thrown upon this character by what is said in another place. In John there is more of fixedness. John evidently wrote later, and in his day Christ was accepted by his followers as the Son of God.

We thus see that Christ did, some time after his baptism, when he had become a man, occasionally assume to be the Son of God. But as to the sense in which he used that term we are left still in the dark. Certain it is, neither he nor his advocates ever referred to his conception. It is eminently probable that he never had any idea that God was his father, except in the spiritual sense. That identical question never seems to have amounted to much in his time. The whole question was whether he was the Messiah, the one who had been prophesied before. Even as such he was doubted by his own disciples to the very last; that is to say, their minds seemed not to be easy on that point. The term Son of God, for people such as followed him in his day, and for one who lived and died as he did, was, in its spiritual sense, one of the most natural ones in the world.

Again, if Christ was truly a God, and not a man divine, he should hardly date his existence from the time of his birth or conception. If he merely came down temporarily, to assume mortal shape, we feel that he ought to have indicated some consciousness on his part of his pre-existence in some other form. But we have nothing from him to indicate that he knew anything more of his previous history than could an ordinary mortal under the same circumstances. John, indeed, refers to such a pre-existence, but it is in the vaguest terms. Even John can give us no assurance that Christ was conscious of his having existed, before his birth, in heaven. Besides, John is a later writer, just as this idea of pre-existence is a later conception.

Among other inferences which we form from a careful comparison of the words of the Four Gospels, is this one, that Christ was a *gradual* and slow growth to himself. Nothing can be more undoubted than that he did not start out with a clear and fixed idea of what he was and what he was to perform. He was developed and directed by circumstances. The ecstasies of his followers in the end transported him. He enlarged his own dimensions to keep pace with the extravagant conceptions which the people had of him. He came to believe in the end that he was something more than a preacher, that he was a prophet, *nay, more than a prophet.*

We think we are now prepared to form a fair estimate of the character of Christ. He was not the son of God in the sense commonly understood. No matter how many wonders he may have performed, he was himself no miracle at all. He was born naturally, lived naturally, and died as other men die. He was a minister, devoted to the salvation first of his own people, and next to that of the Gentile world. He was emphatically the great teacher, and as such the world must recognize and receive him.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

But he was something more than a teacher; he was besides an extraordinary personage. He had a knowledge of the human heart, and a power over it such as perhaps no one ever had before him nor since. He had, it is evident in a strange degree, that magnetic power which has characterized other great men. It is upon this principle that we must explain his miracles, for that he had a miraculous power, miraculous at least for the age in which he lived, is too well attested to admit of our doubting in full. He evidently did many things which other men could not do. But there can be no doubt that the popular imagination of his time and the uncertainty of manuscripts and the transcripts from them have contributed much towards giving them a coloring which they never had at the time of their inception.

We must bear in mind, too, that Christ lived in an age when everything unusual or inexplicable to the people was certain to be considered a miracle, an age when devilry, witchcraft, soothsayings, clairvoyance and mesmerism perhaps were prevalent and popular. It is evident that Christ possessed some such power as this under consideration. In his time the secrets of nature were but little understood; medicine, too, as an art, was still unborn. People were then healed not by pills and pectorals, but by the touch of some holy person, or of some sacred relic or tomb, by faith, vows, sacrifices and charms. It is no wonder that sorcery and incantation occupied so high and firm a position in those days. We hardly appreciate

the difference between his age and ours in this respect. With our beliefs and our doubts on these arts of divination, of witchery and legerdemain, we would have been considered in those days, all of us, the greatest heretics, the veriest infidels, in the world.

Christ was by no means the only one presumed to have this magic power of healing. The touch of kings was believed to have this mysterious influence over disease. Long after Christ the Christian world, particularly the Catholics, believed largely in this wonderful influence which holy persons especially had over others. It will be noticed that a large portion of Christ's care was bestowed upon those who were possessed with devils. These were no doubt persons who in a later age would have been considered bewitched or maniacs, and the spell that bound them could only be removed by certain kinds of charms and kindred performances.

But the age of miracles has not yet passed, and probably never will pass away entirely. Look at the well attested miracles on the tomb of Abbe de Paris of a late day. These miracles were tested in every possible way, and never were disproved by anybody. It is only a short time since the papers gave an account of a nun near Quebec who, just ready to die of consumption, was cured in one short night. And how? Why, she and the other nuns prayed for a cure on the next New Year's day, addressing themselves to the Immaculate Mary, and keeping a certain number of lamps burning. Any day and anywhere we can hear of instances of persons cured most miraculously, or of persons whose lives have been saved in some providential manner. You will remember that most of Christ's miracles were performed by him in the art of healing and bringing the dead to life, just the very department where we have miracles to-day.

And have we not also spiritualism, magnetism, psychology and feats of legerdemain which are miracles to us? We are apt to call everything a miracle the cause or reason of which we are not apt to comprehend. Do we not hear, too, of miracles of conversion, and the wonderful effects of prayer? All Christians still believe in miracles, though they may not know them by that name.

Scarcely a thing is there which Christ is reported to have done for a miracle which has not been done many times since his day. The blind have received their sight after losing it for many years, those who were bewitched have had the spell broken, maniacs have been restored to soundness, even the dead, or those believed to be dead, have been brought back to life again.

We regret to see a tendency on the part of all the New Testament writers to represent Christ as performing these miracles, not

because he loved to heal the sick and raise the dead, but simply to *prove*, what a real son of God would have no need to prove, that he was the Messiah. Even if everything that was claimed to have been done by him was really done as is believed, it would not prove that he was either a God or the Messiah. Very many besides him have performed miracles, and many do yet. Indeed, as if it were no God-like attribute at all, he gave the same power to his disciples; and many others who were not his disciples seem also to have mastered the art.

Miracles are too common to prove anything. What man sent from God ever yet did not do miracles in abundance? Mahomet had his, and Joe Smith had his, just as Paul had his. Every sect in the world can tell of the wonderful and impossible things done by its fathers. Miracles prove nothing, and yet for Christ they are expected to prove everything.

We must remark further that though there were some miracles that Christ could do, there were some also that he could not do. He could do much. He could raise the dead, make himself invisible, and many other things to prove his doctrines true; he could not, nevertheless, save himself from the premature end which plainly he would have averted if he could. He could make bread and fish for others, but what he ate himself he was compelled to get in the natural way. He was, indeed, once fed by angels, but he never tried to feed himself. He did once walk on the water, but usually, like other men, he was compelled to go by row boat or sail.

We are compelled to wonder why Christ should have lived as other men, obeyed all nature's laws as other men, and still should have had the power of a God. We notice in all these stories of miracles a continual tendency to get back to the natural course of things. Besides Christ never attempted to create anything, but he had a wonderful power of magnifying and expanding what was already made. He did not create wine, he only changed water into wine. He did not create the loaves and fishes, he multiplied them. We must add finally that Christ was evidently not fond of miracles. He only submitted to his part in their performance in deference to public opinion and its extravagant expectations. Miracles do violence to the present day; the most earnest believer seeks to explain them in some natural and sensible way.

In conclusion, I believe in miracles, and of course that Christ did miracles, but not as many people believe. I do not believe that anything supernatural or extra-natural can ever happen, because I believe in a Supreme Being who has power to control and direct all things. Nothing can happen contrary to his will or

purpose. Everything must be in harmony with his established and invariable character. Things which happen contrary to the laws of nature, happen contrary to the laws which God has made. We believe in the fixedness of God's eternal nature, and it is on this alone that we rely. It will not answer for us to believe that God will do miracles, do impossible things, and act contrary to himself. Indeed it is not God that is assumed to do miracles, it is others who assume to do them in his name. But with all this, I do believe that miracles have happened and will happen again, things which to us are really wonderful and incomprehensible. I believe especially that some men have the power to do such miracles, such wonderful and incomprehensible things. Christ was pre-eminently one of these persons.

It may not be unimportant to bear in mind that several persons after Christ, claimed that they were prophesied of old and were the true Messiah. One in particular, in 1666, had an immense success. He was styled and believed to be the only and the first born son of God, the Messiah, the *Savior of Israel*. It was in the latter view that he was most welcome to the Jews. He was proved by various miracles. The most wonderful signs marked his progress—all the work of the Devil, as his enemies believe. No one denies the signs, so easy is it for the most enlightened and honest to be imposed upon.

ELIJAH.

To form a correct idea of Christ's character, we must take into account the history of Elijah, or Elias, as he is sometimes called. If we look at the history of Elijah as it is found in the 1st Book of Kings, we shall be forced to the conclusion that he was more emphatically the Son of God, that he was in every respect nearer to God, than Christ himself. He is called there pre-eminently the man of God, which is probably not of lighter importance than the expression, the Son of God. He performed miracles in comparison with which those of Christ were but moderate affairs. And in the end, when he came to die, instead of being left to be sacrificed by his enemies, he was seized by a whirlwind and carried to heaven in triumph. There are many points in common between Elijah's history and that of Christ. Like Christ, Elijah foreknew his departure from earth and prepared for it. Like Christ, he not only raised the dead, but he raised them in very much the same manner. Indeed, we shall constantly have occasion to call attention to the fact that nearly all the features of Christ's life are pre-figured in the different histories of the Old Testament. He is merely an old picture retouched by a new hand. He was merely a new prophet,

with all the powers and properties usually belonging to the prophets of older days. He came, like so many prophets before him, merely to call the Jews to repentance, deliver prophecies, perform miracles, and suffer in the end for the faith that was in him.

CONCLUSION.

I have been endeavoring so far to give Christ a natural history, as opposed to any character he might get by virtue of witchcraft, demonology, sorcery, and miracles in general. We have seen that just such personages have risen before him, and just such personages after him, though none have in any respect equaled him. It may be, perhaps, by this close and critical examination, that he becomes less a God, but he is, nevertheless, a higher, holier man.

Let no man say I do not believe in Christ, and that I do not worship him. I feel that I am doing him infinitely more credit by believing that born a man, he became a God, than that born a God, he became a man. I believe that spiritually, Christ was indeed born of God, born as no man ever before him was born or since. I believe that the spirit of God pervaded and penetrated his inmost soul. Though I may not be willing, with others, to credit the miraculous conception as a physiological fact, I nevertheless believe *in the divinity of Christ. As a God, I love him, I adore him, with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my might.* I worship all those sublime qualities which Christ possessed, his tenderness, his love, his humility, his mercy, his goodness, and his whole self-sacrificing character. Why should I not worship that Christ in whom these qualities are all combined?

And still he was for all this a man. We never see him in any other shape or habit than that of a mortal. It was as a mortal that he died for us. You believe and know him to be a man; the Bible tells you he was a man. You speak of him as a man, you think of him as a man, you have not the power within you to conceive him to be anything else than a man. Nevertheless, you believe him to be a God, and so do I. I come in the end to the same terminus that you do, but by routes that differ from yours very materially.

Let us not think it strange that a man should become a God. Do we not know that all people who believe in God as a being, conceive him or fashion him to themselves as either a man or an animal? We cannot take ourselves out of our own natures, our own surroundings. It is impossible for us to think of a being essentially different from those with which we are acquainted. It is for this reason that all living gods are either brutes or men. Besides the instances in history where men, common perishable mortals, have been deified or made into Gods, are certainly numerous enough.

It is not a matter of the slightest moment or concern to us whether Christ was precisely such a being as history has pictured him to be, or not. The history of no man comes down to us unaffected by the touches of imagination. The character of every hero, the moment it passes into the hands of posterity, is as a seed planted in the ground to grow. Its development is certain, and is subject to fixed and invariable laws. All history has in it more or less of fiction, more or less of exaggeration, more or less of deviation from the facts in the case. Is it strange then that Christ, who grew up on the very verge of the historic era, buffeted by the storm and warmed by the sun of nineteen centuries, should come down to this day with a character more or less distorted and fictitious? And how does it affect our case? It is no concern to us what things are, but how they appear and what they are believed to be. If we believe that Christ was the Son of God, it would have precisely the same effect upon us as if it were absolutely so. This is a strange fact in the nature of truth, but it is a fact nevertheless, and is beyond the reach of controversy.

No matter what Christ was in his inception, whether he was or was not what he was represented to be, he has now proved to be for us the Savior of the world, *one who came to redeem and save that which was lost*. He has given us his example, he has left us his precepts. *He has given to the succeeding generations a new life and a new direction. He has, it may be said, regenerated the world, created it anew. He alone has taught us how to live in the worship of the one living God, and die in the hope of a blessed immortality.*

THE MISSION OF CHRIST.

The mission of Christ is the subject we come now more particularly to consider. What was his plan, or the plan of the Creator? What did he come to accomplish, and what did he finally achieve? Since Christ was the great teacher of the world, it is eminently proper for us to determine precisely what he taught.

In pursuing this investigation, we shall before the end of our journey find ourselves in just the same dilemma that we should find ourselves in investigating every other important question of the Bible. We shall find here, as we find everywhere else, that what is taught in one place is not taught in another; or rather, that what is affirmed in one place, is flatly contradicted in another.

Let us first endeavor to understand the true position of Christ as determined in Matthew.

In Matthew he is merely a preacher; he is like one of the prophets of old, one who has come to call the Jews to repentance. In the 24th verse of the fifteenth chapter, we learn that "he was not

sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," indicating that he came to awaken sinners to a sense of their condition. In the 11th verse of the eighteenth chapter, "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost," and then he tells about the lost sheep indicating that his main aim is to recall the wandering. In the 17th verse of the nineteenth chapter he says there is none good but God, and then adds, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." In the 24th verse of the same chapter he intimates that riches may prevent an entrance into heaven; and in the 29th verse, those who have left all and followed him, adopting his faith, "shall inherit everlasting life." In the 28th verse of the twentieth chapter, he speaks of giving his life as "a ransom for many," but probably only as a martyr does. "He that endures to the end shall be saved." (xxiv:13.)

It is evident, as we cast our eye over Matthew, that Christ talked and taught substantially as other prophets before him, and many preachers after him, taught. He has nothing materially new; certain it is, he does *not* teach that men could only be saved by believing that Christ died for them. Indeed, he had not yet died, nor, so far as we can gather, even thought of dying for them till near the close of his ministry, and after he had long taught another doctrine of redemption. Finally, it is fixed that Matthew does not teach that we can only be saved by Christ's blood.

Now then, read Mark. In the 38th verse of the first chapter, he came forth to *preach*. Most assuredly! If he came simply to be born and die for men's sins, he need not have tarried on earth here thirty years, accomplishing nothing so far as we can learn, and three years or more in preaching, when men were not by any means to be saved by preaching. In the 5th verse of the second chapter, and other places, he *forgave* their sins when he saw their *faith*. So he had power to forgive sins aside from the virtue of his blood, and *faith* was one of the conditions.

In the 17th verse of the second chapter, as in Luke fifth chapter and 32d verse, he came "not to call the righteous, but sinners," and this is repeated more than once in the Testament. From this we must infer that there were some righteous and saved without his interposition or salvation. He sent his disciples to preach that men should *repent*, and they did repent, both under Jesus and his disciples and under John, without a single drop of Christ's redeeming blood being spilled for them. Men were to be saved as usual, we see, *by repentance*. In the 17th verse of the tenth chapter, the plain question is asked, what shall a man do to inherit eternal life? And Christ tells us; but, mark, he does not tell us it is to be done by his death and blood.

In the 18th verse of the fourth chapter of Luke, he says he was sent to *preach the Gospel* to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, relieve the distressed. In the 43d verse of the fourth chapter, we see he is sent to *preach* the kingdom of God, like Jonah and many others. The 20th verse of the sixth chapter informs us that men are to be saved by being poor.

In the thirteenth chapter, men are informed they will perish, or be lost, if they do not repent. In the eighteenth chapter, as in Mark, men are to be saved by suffering and sacrifice.

It is only when we come to John that we find something really original, something of which none of the other gospels can boast. We have here a new picture. He wrote at a later day. He saw Christ through a different medium. Besides, John is a philosopher; the others are mere historians. In the thirteenth verse of the third chapter, whosoever believeth on him shall not perish. In the 16th and 17th verses, God so loved the world that he sent his son that those who believe in *him* shall have everlasting life; also, that the world through *him* might be saved. Now here is an open question, which we cannot decide, whether he was to be saved by Christ's blood, or by faith in Christ's doctrine. In John he is no more the minister, the servant; he is "the light of the world." He is "the door." But all this is new. Still we have no right to assume that even John meant to assume that men were to be saved in any way except by the *righteousness* of Christ's *doctrines*. So we read in the 24th verse of the fifth chapter, that those who hear (and believe) his word, his teachings, *shall be saved*; and in the 29th verse, they are to be saved by *doing good*, and to be lost by *doing evil*.

The conclusion we come to is, that *nowhere in the first three gospels is it taught in any direct manner that the world is to be redeemed through the blood of Christ and his sufferings*. They teach a way of redemption entirely foreign to this method. They have not, like John, something strikingly new. And even John, while he is thus original, can only be said to teach this doctrine in a very unsatisfactory and ambiguous manner, if at all. We do not refer to the other writers of the Testament, for the reason that they are later and could have no authority for what they have written, save the Gospels, and tradition. The former we have noticed, and the latter is not reliable.

There is then no adequate and reliable evidence, we infer, which tends to show that there is any foundation for the literal truth of the leading proposition, that the world is to be saved by the blood of Christ, and that those not saved in that way cannot be saved at

all. So we are thrown back upon our old position, that Christ was a minister and a teacher, pre-eminent above all as such, but nothing more.

Christ taught, in the line of salvation, no doctrine essentially new. There is plainly no way of redemption opened by him that had not been opened from the foundation of the world. We could not think that God would be so unjust, so unmerciful, as to leave the world so many thousand years before Christ without a redeeming son or any adequate means of grace. It is more in accordance with our ideas of God that he careth for *all men*, at *all times*, and in *all ages*. Besides, must we, may we for one moment, think that that small speck of the human race, the Christian world, are to be saved and go to heaven, and the poor heathen who has never heard of Christ, and the Mahometans, and the Chinese, and the Buddhists, and so many others who have heard of him but still trust in others, are to be lost and damned forever? God forbid! The idea is as monstrous as it is wicked. *It sounds too much like the egotistic and idolatrous Jew.*

CHRIST A REFORMER.

Christ was a reformer. If we may judge by what he accomplished and the impress which he left upon succeeding ages, he has never had an equal. Viewed in this light, he is plain and intelligible; viewed in any other, he is an impenetrable mystery, a myth, a monster.

We know indeed that we are informed that he did say that he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Now, if by fulfill is meant to carry out and observe, we venture to doubt that Christ ever made any such declaration. As this could only have been said for effect, and as besides Christ was no politician, we suggest that this clause has come from the hand of the commentator.

Christ was not a combative person, he was simply a minister and a teacher. He does not find it in harmony with his nature to put himself in direct antagonism with any party. He is not fond of condemning so much those who are vicious, as vice in the abstract. He teaches, he warns, he exhorts, he moralizes, but he has none of the bitterness of the partisan. This being his character, we do not wonder that he does not carry on an open war with the Jews and set himself up as an opponent to their doctrines.

It is not certain that Christ at first had any fixed notions of his purposes or plans. Those things developed themselves as he passed along. But it is certain that there was no harmony between his spirit and that of the old Mosaic law. No matter what he or others

may have conceived he came for, he did prove in the end to be a reformer of Jewish rules and rites, and in so far at least he became a destroyer of the law. He holds the same relation to the Jewish law as a reformer, that Luther does to popery, only in a more enlarged sense. He came to preach a new law, a new salvation. Like all great men, like Luther and Mahomet, he came in his due time. The age was prepared for his reception. He was the representative of its progress. He taught as the expounder of a new faith, but he was really the exponent of doctrines every one of which had arisen and been gaining ground two or three centuries before his own appearance.

Does not Christ over and over again repudiate the cherished doctrines of the Old Testament? Why, in the very chapter (the fifth) where he is said not to come to destroy the law, he does go on to destroy it, by giving first the sayings of Moses and the prophets and then entering his own protest against them with that emphatic, "*but I say unto you.*"

What are the conditions upon which mortals are to enter the kingdom? Does Christ ever insist upon the forms, the ritual of the old Mosaic law, or has he a means of grace peculiarly his own? What regard does Christ pay to fasting, feasting, circumcision, to washing of hands and cups, almsgiving, sacrifices, and even prayer and the keeping of the Sabbath? He slightes all of them; with the exception of prayer, to which he attaches some little value, *he tramples them all under foot.* The Jews expected to get to heaven by the observance of forms; Christ would have us get there *by the regeneration of the soul.* Christ's faith is religion proper; that of the Jews is simply idolatry. What of all that was sacred to the Jews was sacred to Jesus also? Their temple, worth more to them than all else, he seemed to desire to destroy. Not one stone should be left on the other. There was no harmony between the two; there was even open war. Crucifixion was an act of vengeance, and simply a matter of natural consequence.

Paul seems to have understood Christ's position in this regard, and he appears in his writings with an able defence for Christ's abolishing the law.

We thus know what Christ has proved to be, a destroyer of the law, an innovator, a reformer. He desired to overturn the temple. He said he would do so, and he has effectually done it. There is, to mark the place where it stood, only the stones that have fallen from it, and these lie piled up now a vast and disorderly mass of debris. The building has fallen, the structure of the Jewish law

has tumbled to the earth, but we still preserve too strongly its impression upon our Christian hearts to say that it has been totally and forever annihilated.

But we must not forget that everywhere the life of Christ, as we have it, is full of contradiction. He was born a Jew, and he was never able to divest himself entirely of his Jewish nationality. In the earliest days of his ministry at least, he taught for the Jews alone; indeed, he came only to the *lost* sheep of *Israel*. It is through the workings of this spirit that he was impelled to observe, even to the end of his days, more or less of the Jewish formalities, things in which he does not seem to have put the slightest trust, and in which he had not the slightest sympathy.

No system was ever invented that had not in it as much dross as pure metal. Christ's is certainly not an exception.

THE ORTHODOX CHRIST.

What monstrous ideas orthodoxy has of the character of Christ! He is a man and a God—half man and half God—all man, all God. What a mysterious commingling of incongruous sentiments! Some consider him simply a God; others think him the God, the only God there is; some think he is merely an angel, the chief of angels; some think he is only a man; some think he existed from the beginning of the world. "A divine nature, a natural soul and a human body." Did the Hindoos or savages of the Polynesian islands ever discover a God with a more monstrous make up than that of Christ? A compound of flesh and spirit, born of a woman but in a most remarkable way. Created when the world was made, and then re-generated 4,000 years afterward. He came down to this world and then went back again. He came a spirit and returned a man. Was there ever such a prodigy before! And where is the evidence that one single phase of this story is true? *It is all the work of fancy.* And with what assurance it is set down before us as fact! Now the whole truth is, Christ was only a man, and nobody ever pretended in his time that he was anything else but a man. His godliness was an after-thought, a development of the Dark Ages. We know him as a man, we see him as a man, *he never did anything but as a man.*

Again, here is this absurdity. If he was a god, he was a god, that is one of several gods, or the God, the great God. But shall we suppose that it was God *himself* that came down to atone for man's sins? No, God would not do that. And that is not the story. The story is, we all know, that God gave *his son, his only son* at that, to save us from the penalty we had incurred. Is it not

strange that God had a son, and only one son, and that not by some heavenly creature, but by a poor deluded woman of earth? What can be a more outrageous story than that, if we take the story literally, as we must take it, if we take it at all? Only one son, and yet it is said over and over again that we are his children and he is our father, and yet Christ is the only son he ever had, and him the Jews crucified!

No, Christ is a God, one of two at least, if not more. Do the orthodox men concede that there are two Gods, when the Bible tells us over and over again that there is only one? Or was Christ only half a God? Or is he an angel, or what is he? Inextricable and shameful confusion of ideas! We might posit every one of these things on the character of any great and good man that ever lived.

CHRIST THE SON OF GOD.

Christ is the son of God just as every righteous man is the son of God. As he was supremely good, he was supremely godlike. Practically considered, he is divine, and as such deserves the worship of all lovers of the race. We have no occasion at all for the "miraculous conception," with all its accompanying heathenisms. Christ's life was so godlike and corresponded so nearly in idea with the deliverer that was expected, that it is not to be wondered at that a superstitious and devotional people should have ascribed to him a divine origin. It has been done in other cases and will no doubt be done again. It is impossible not to believe that some men are more nearly connected with God than others are. Christ is God; that is, God as he develops himself in the human form.

Of the eight witnesses who testify in the New Testament, six of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke, James, Peter and Jude *do not identify Jesus with God*. Of these, Matthew, Mark and Luke advocate his human character only. John and Paul alone seem to suspect that he may be a God—but even they, Paul especially, seem to have *grave doubts in the matter*. On what slender evidence does the divinity of Christ rest!

THE DOCTRINES OF CHRIST.

It is a remarkable and important fact that the teachings of Christ have all at some time or other been cast in the mould of tradition. It is perhaps absolutely certain that not one word of his doctrines was ever put in writing during his day; he neither wrote a book himself nor commissioned any one to write one for him. We have his words then as they came by hearsay and report. We have them as men understood them and as they remembered them. But what is more striking than the difference with which men understand things and remember them?

Is it strange then that Christ has various characters and ever changing positions in the different writings of the New Testament? Is it to be wondered at that he says things in Matthew which he does not say at all in Mark, Luke and John, or if he does, says in a manner and with a plan very different? That disagreement exists, sometimes in matters of detail, and sometimes on points of the greatest importance, and we must make the most of it.

Christ taught many things. In some instances he may have erred, according to our conceptions. It is impossible to invent any scheme of morality or religion that shall not have some falsehood coupled with much truth. Again, Christ must have been misrepresented in many things. How is it possible that any one, even those associated with him, to say nothing of those who wrote after him, should ever have fully comprehended him? Such a thing never has happened and never will happen.

We cannot know precisely what Christ said and what he taught, but we do know the direction and effect of his doctrines. There is no question but that the teachings of Christ were holy and righteous, the doctrines of a holy and righteous being. Those Christians who for seventeen centuries claimed to represent him, we are not willing to take as faithful exponents of his doctrines. They either did not understand him or did not choose to follow his instructions. The spirit of intolerance and persecution which characterised them never found a place in the heart of our Savior. The fierce men of the middle and earlier ages were Christians merely in name, and *could in no sense be fairly termed followers of Christ*. We suspect that much of the barbarous conduct of these men may justly be laid at the door of the Old Testament, certainly not at that of the New. He that blessed his enemies on the cross could not have had the spirit which actuated the leaders of the inquisition.

Christ is indeed represented to have said, "I bring not peace but a sword;" but it is evident that he spoke of this as the inevitable result of the doctrines which he taught, doctrines whose success implied a revolution in the worship and the religion of the day and age in which he lived. He that counseled not only forgiveness but love toward enemies, should not, we are sure, be brought forward as being responsible for the acts of those who seem to consider resistance a grace and intolerance a virtue. And there is besides, the cursing of the fig tree because it did not bear fruit, even out of its own time. These and a few other like instances, such as his rough conduct in the temple, are either stories fabricated or facts misstated, or they may belong to those strange divergencies which we find sometimes in the history of all great men.

None of the doctrines which Christ taught were really original with him. But though they had been taught before by others, they had never prevailed with the Jews. It was the office of Christ not to originate, but to impress and enforce. He collected into one great embodiment all that in morals seemed to him beautiful and true. He has taught us how to live and how to die; and above all he has given up his own life to advance the success and ensure the triumph of his own glorious teachings.

Christ taught for a better and brighter age than the one in which he lived. Nearly eighteen centuries have passed since his ministry, yet even to-day his doctrines find an echo in the heart of every man who is just and true. If we would live happy in this world, if we would be truly successful, if we would inherit a glorious immortality, and live in the memory of those who come after us, we must take Christ for our Savior, our teacher, our sovereign, and our guide.

Christ teaches eternal salvation not by means of any such forms and formalities as we find prescribed in the Old Testament. He enters immediately upon the essence of the question. He teaches salvation by becoming better men, by obeying the laws of God, which are the laws of nature, by having faith in God's wisdom and his works, faith in his own teaching, faith in the virtue of repentance and in the need of doing good.

It is very evident that Christ had an idea of God very different from that which was possessed by the prophets of old. He teaches obedience to God as the first and the last, the beginning and the end of all law, and that is sound and good doctrine even to-day. He who obeys not God and fears not his commandments, he who does not stop to inquire what God wills, must surely in the end suffer the penalty, just such a penalty, and one just as certain, as that which all pay who transgress the laws of nature. Christ does not distinguish God from nature and place him somewhere outside the world.

With Christ, God is not a monstrous man, he is a spirit, the living and moving principles embodied all in one. He is supremacy personified. With Christ, God is the Supreme Being, our Heavenly Father, infinite in wisdom and power, and as infinite in mercy and goodness; but at the same time he is inflexible, impartial, unchangeable. He is no more the weak and despicable tyrant of the Old. He is no more a god of melted brass or hewn stone, a wrathful and selfish being, to be appeased or persuaded by heathen mummery or useless declamation. He punishes, as nature punishes, not to satisfy

his spleen but to remedy evils. He is ever just, ever kind, ever true. Finally, he teaches us that man hath need of God, but not that God hath need of man.

You will mark this important advance also: he lays down certain conditions which are to be fulfilled not to please God simply and gratify his vanity, but that through them we may be happy, and finally may be saved. He has continually before him as his aim, *our own good and our own salvation*. It is assumed that God can do without us, that when we serve him, we are simply serving ourselves. Religion and morality with him are identical, inseparable; *to be a follower of Christ implies at the same time an honest man and a good citizen*.

Christ taught many hundred years ago, and of course, what might have been good doctrine then may not be so good now. Besides, no system of any kind ever was perfect; even nature itself seems scarcely ever to attain perfection complete. Every thing, even every idea or plan, has within it the seeds of its own destruction. Perhaps the system which Christ has given us hardly constitutes an exception. It, too, has its defects and weaknesses, but they are remarkably few. There is but little that is not wholesome to-day, though perhaps some things are carried to extremes, some things which it would not be advisable, not to say proper, for us to follow.

In this connection we may notice his doctrine upon riches. There is no kind of doubt that he was a consistent opponent to all worldly cares. But he went even far beyond that; he seems, if he is faithfully reported, to have despised all provision for our most ordinary daily wants, assuming that as God clothed the lilies of the field, he would also clothe us. "Take no thought of the morrow; take no thought; saying, what shall we eat?" Now, either Christ never said this, or we do not understand him, or he said what we cannot adopt as sound doctrine for us. We know very well that if we waited for God to clothe us as he does the lilies, we would be certain in the end to go naked. Nature teaches us a law full as valuable as any Christ has given, and that is *the law of labor*. We have learned in this age that if we would live, we must work. We *must* make some provision for the morrow, or the morrow will find us unprovided for. But Christ lived in another age, in a different country, a country where nature did more for man and left less for man to do for himself.

There is another thought in this connection. There is no doubt that Christ expected a speedy dissolution of the world, and that the kingdom would come presently, was what he confidently expected.

That idea he seems never to lose sight of; it gave its impress to all his plans, and measured and directed all his progress. Did it not have some influence on this labor problem? It was natural that if men were only to tarry here for a brief season, they would need but little subsistence.

But nevertheless the moral even here points in the right direction. "Men cannot serve God and Mammon;" that is true, for where their treasure is, there will their hearts be also. Men *devoted* to riches are selfish and ambitious men; they are not and cannot be *devoted* Christians also. Riches make us neither happier, nor wiser, nor better men. A competence is good, but that suffices. So also he evidently, in the sixth chapter of Matthew, means to urge upon us, when he speaks of our taking no thought of ourselves, the importance of relying upon God and of having less confidence in ourselves. This is needful.

Christ's whole doctrine is evidently directed against a life of pleasure, any course that shall indicate that we are wrapt up in the present and are become forgetful of the future. And no philosophy could be more sound. He who has lived long has certainly learned in the end that the pleasures of this world cannot satisfy us. They are vain, they are transitory. The heart yearns for something more, something lasting, a consciousness of duty well performed, a clear conscience, an approving God.

But after all, Christ was no stoic, no Roman Catholic friar. He never taught ascetic doctrines, never taught the necessity of pleasing a wicked being by torturing our own bodies. In this he seems to have differed materially from John the Baptist. Christ nowhere teaches that this life must necessarily be one of sin and suffering. He even condemns fasting and long prayers, as he condemns all unnecessary formalities. The objects of Christ, the necessary course of his life, and the labor which he had to perform, prevented him from turning aside to any of the enjoyments of this world. He was abstracted from the cares of this life, and devoted entirely to the service of God and his cause. Still, we read that he ate and drank as other men, and that the house of feasting and pleasure he was by no means accustomed to avoid.

It is evident, however, that Christ in his teaching carried his disregard of this world quite to extremes, as we have intimated before in reference to riches and labor. It will not answer for us to despise this world; it will not answer for us to count upon the speedy coming of the kingdom, as Christ and his disciples did. God has not made this world to render us miserable; it is as well adapted to our wants and condition as it well could be. It is only

miserable as we make it so by neglecting the will of God and refusing to obey the laws of nature. But even Christ, you will observe, never teaches that all men are damned of necessity through Adam. He says, indeed, there are none righteous, no, not one; and that we know is true. But that does not imply that all men are irretrievably lost. He came only to save that which was lost, implying, of course, that all were not so.

Again, when he teaches us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, and turn to them the one cheek when the other has been smitten, he is evidently carrying a good thought to impracticable limits. It is not in our hearts to love those who hate us; we must of necessity make some distinction between those who are our enemies and those who are our friends. But the spirit of the doctrine is right and leads to good results. It teaches us to be forgiving and merciful; it condemns revenge and malice. It is the mark of a noble mind and stout heart to be able to rise above the promptings of our animal nature and forgive our enemies. Our own happiness, our own success, will always be promoted by banishing forever from our hearts all feeling of enmity, hatred and *revenge*. We regard this spirit of forgiveness as the noblest attribute of the human heart, noble because it requires so great an effort and so great a sacrifice on our own part.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

What was his errand? He was a precursor. But why that? What did he do to *prepare* the way for Christ? He could not have done much in that direction when he was only six months older than Jesus, and when also the ministry of the two must have begun at the same time. It was an ill season to give such a notice after Christ had appeared, and it does not seem that he gave that notice before the appearance.

The more we examine the history of John, and the more light we get upon his character, the more shall we be impressed with the belief that he had a career of his own independent of any one; that he was not a mere forerunner, a blower of trumpets for Jesus, the coming Messiah. He had a birth almost as miraculous as that reputed to Christ himself. Even in the Testament, especially in Luke, we find that Elizabeth, John's mother, was a barren mother, indicating that if she had a child, it must be by a miracle, a child born of God. Indeed, both parents were too old to have children. He was even filled with the Holy Ghost from the time he was first conceived. An angel, the same one spoken of in connection with the history of Christ, came to his mother to announce his coming.

Indeed, he came into the world with honors almost equal to those of our Savior. The character given him in Luke, you will observe, is almost that of a Messiah. He is not there represented as one who is simply to give notice of Christ's coming, but rather to give light to them that sit in darkness, and "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." In Matthew, always much more original than Luke, we find nothing of his strange birth, nor of his connection with Jesus. He is merely announced as preaching in those days in the wilderness of Judea, and saying: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John, it is agreed on all sides, did not content himself with foretelling Christ. He was a minister with a philosophy of his own, and a very severe philosophy it was, too. He had a very rough manner of living, and was evidently a rough man, naturally taking to the wilderness, living upon locusts and wild honey, and having his raiment of camel's hair. "He preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."—Mark 1:4. He taught a very different doctrine, it is agreed, from that of Christ. Nor did he stop teaching and preaching after the appearance of the one whose coming he came to foretell. He had many disciples of his own. Indeed it is very plain that he was something else than a forerunner. His sect and that of Christ must have been rivals. He came neither eating nor drinking as Christ did, and that baptism which with him was evidently a "hobby," Christ did not seem to consider quite so important himself. So striking was his appearance, and so impressive his doctrines, he was even taken for the Messiah himself.

In this connection we must consider the various and conflicting accounts of the manner in which he fulfilled his mission of precursor. In the third chapter of Matthew, Jesus comes to John to be baptized as an ordinary disciple. In the fourteenth and fifteenth verses it appears that John was aware of the true character of the one who thus presented himself. But when we come to the sixteenth and seventeenth verses, Christ seems for the first time to be designated by the spirit of God descending upon him like a dove, and pointing him out as the beloved son of God. We read in profane history of kings and other great persons being designated in a similar manner while yet in their youth, undeveloped and unknown. It is evident then that Christ was quite unknown when he came to John for baptism, and the first intimation we have of his extraordinary character is the occurrence of this prodigy. This idea is demonstrated to be the true one when we come down as late as the eleventh chapter and find John enquiring, in the greatest uncertainty, whether "thou art he that should come, or do we look for another?"

It is further corroborated by Mark, first chapter, when Jesus came with the multitude, evidently *incognito*, and was pointed out for the first by the spirit in the likeness of a dove. By the way, is it not strange that if John and Jesus were related, as stated in Luke, and John had now become nearly thirty years old, that they should not recognize each other with less trouble? Nothing is said of their ever having known each other or being related, outside of the strange story of the conception. In Luke, also, he must have been baptized *incognito* among the multitude. This is curious, when Mary, knowing she was pregnant of the Lord, had abode three months with the mother of John. It is still more curious that John and Jesus being thus related, and the latter being pointed out in such a wonderful manner as the beloved son of God, John should still doubt and finally send two of his disciples to enquire: "Art thou he that should come?" Here John, the Evangelist, has a different story, as he usually has. The story, which is uncertain and preponderating between extremes in the other gospels, has, in the later days of John, become fixed and certain. John the Baptist here "bears witness of Christ and says: *This is he of whom I spake.*" John seeth Jesus coming unto him (i:29.) and exclaims: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." This, you will see, is all new. John, in his gospels, thus tells an entirely new tale.

The conclusions we must come to in this matter are inevitable. The accounts are conflicting and irreconcilable, simply because they have no single and well established basis. They have come from reports well or ill founded, reports carried along through different channels, and diverging continually as they advance. It is evident from the very accounts themselves that the different authors could have had no better authority for the relation they have given than rumors and reports. What have been stated as facts are merely the inferences, in many cases, which have found their conception in a fanciful brain. It is probable that Christ and John were both developed about the same time. There are many reasons to suppose that Christ was at first a mere disciple of John, and that when John came to a premature and violent end, Christ took up the subject in a new light, and developed himself into the extraordinary personage which we now find him to be.

Perhaps no better authority can be given for the position that John was the precursor, than the fact that he came shortly before Christ, and may have taught a doctrine having much in common with that of our Savior. The Jews, putting a false construction or a wrong application upon some chapters of the Old Testament

(Malachi, iv:5; Isaiah, xl:3; Malachi, iii:1), were led to expect such a forerunner. It was one of the most natural things in the world to apply it to John, with or without sufficient reason.

In order to have all the prophecies fulfilled, an attempt was made to identify John with Elijah or Elias, of whom Malachi speaks in the third chapter. But here we have those usual marks of weakness and vacillation which we find in so many other historical portions of the Bible. John declares positively that he is not the Elias, but Christ affirms as positively that he is, and between the two the matter hangs in doubt.

Here, as in almost every other essential feature of Christ's history, he runs parallel with individuals in the Old Testament. David was his ancestor. David had a precursor in Samuel (1 Sam. xvi); so it was natural that Christ, his son, should have one also in John the Baptist.

TRANSFIGURATION.

We cannot have time to dwell upon all, or even nearly all, of the features of Christ's character, but the subject of his transfiguration is of special importance, and we give it a passing notice.

According to Matthew, Jesus took Peter, James and John and went up to a high mountain apart, "and was transfigured before them." But who shall tell us why he took but three of his disciples, and why he was transfigured, and what might be the meaning of transfiguration? We can no more answer this than tell why he was tempted of the Devil, when there was no sin in him, and why he fasted so much as forty days in the wilderness, when fasting would do no good to the son of God. He seems to have taken his disciples as witnesses, as he expected something unusual and desired to have corroborative evidence. It was not his custom thus to take his disciples with him for ordinary prayer.

But Mark tells another story. Jesus came to a certain place and "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy."—xiv:33. He told them to tarry there and watch. He went forward a little and fell to the ground, so great was his fear of death and his agony. He came back and found them asleep; three times he came back and each time found them asleep. For what were they to watch? That is left quite in the dark, and what their sleep had to do with their final sad fate, no one can tell us. He says expressly, in the thirty-eighth verse, fourteenth chapter, "Watch and pray, *lest ye enter into temptation.*" Still in other portions of the chapter there is a leaning to the idea that perhaps they were placed there to prevent Christ's arrest, which actually did take place shortly after. But they could do no more than watch, for they were not of sufficient strength for

defence. Had he apprehended an attack, he would have taken all his disciples. To tell the truth about it, the whole story in Mark is in inextricable confusion. It is unquestionable that this is the transfiguration story of Matthew, but put in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong object in view, and completely disjointed every way.

The version of Luke differs very materially from that of either of the others. Here Christ does not take a chosen three of his disciples, and go forward as if expecting some extraordinary occurrence. His disciples were near; he had simply gone forward a little to pray, as he had done before. They were to pray, as in Mark, that they *enter not into temptation*.

Matthew says it was Moses and Elias that were seen talking with him; but Luke has a more plausible rendering, by saying it was an *angel* strengthening Jesus in his agony. Nothing is said about coming three times to his disciples, or of his chiding them for not keeping the proper watch. But the connection appears again, as in Mark, by saying, "while he yet spake," Judas and the multitude came.

We look upon the whole of this account as arising from a desire to glorify Jesus and finish the parallel with his original, Moses, who also shone brightly on the mount. No material change could have been effected in the spirit or character of Jesus, for he was from the beginning the Son of God, and hence perfect in all respects.

There are many curious things about this story. To say nothing of the discrepancies in the different accounts, it is wonderful how those disciples should have been able to recognize Moses and Elias, after being dead so many hundred years, saying nothing about their appearing in the first place. We wonder why a voice should have come again from heaven, declaring that this is my beloved son, hear him, when we had heard this very evidence a long time before. We wonder, also, why he was so particular that they should tell no man of this vision, when it is plain that all they came with him for was to be able to recount what they had seen.

There is, you will observe, much in common between this story and that of Christ's going forward to pray and leaving his disciples to watch. Mark tells us that he took the very same disciples as those named in the transfiguration. In Luke we find an angel strengthening Jesus, the counterpart of Moses and Elias. There is too much similarity in these accounts for them not to have had the same origin.

CHRIST'S ARREST AND DEATH.

We now propose to show that Christ's execution was a natural and inevitable result, and no part of the original and divine plan. At least, we have this dilemma: If Christ could have saved himself and did not, there is nothing to excite our sympathy, for it is a clear case of deliberate self-destruction. But, on the other hand, if he was crucified in spite of all he could do to prevent it, we must have a very low estimate of his power as a divine being, otherwise he might and would have rescued himself. As is usual in so many other cases, we find him represented in the gospels as acting both parts, that of the voluntary and that of the unwilling victim.

We repeatedly read of his escaping from his enemies by various expedients, sometimes by fleeing and sometimes by rendering himself invisible. But we are compelled to think that he who could raise the dead and heal the sick, to say nothing of feeding several thousand with a few small loaves and some fishes, ought not to be compelled to resort to such petty artifices, and those too so indicative of weakness.

Again, he knew, we are told, that Judas would betray him. But if he thus knew that he was to die, and in that manner, and if that was the chief aim for which he came into the world, we cannot see why Judas should be esteemed such a terrible malefactor. He only did what Christ and God both intended and desired should be done. He might have been premature in his action, nothing more. Neither can we see why Christ should by various expedients seek to put off his execution, when it was determined from the beginning, and besides, was the object for which he came into the world.

But we have not time to notice all, nor even many of the discrepancies in the gospel accounts of Christ's arrest and death, nor to speak of the surprising things that occurred. We wish only to notice that he was betrayed by Judas, was pointed out by him (indeed, for that Judas was hired). Can we think that Christ was so obscure a character that he had to be pointed out by a hired malefactor? This circumstance seems to have been much embellished and to have been put in here to heighten the effect. There seems to have been a need felt for such a character, and he must be put somewhere, this Judas. Christ fell a victim to the basest treachery. He was betrayed, and thus he has a strong claim upon our sympathies. He could not thus have been a willing victim. But all this, like so many other things, was done "that the scriptures might be fulfilled." The type of the whole story is to be found in different parts of the Old Testament.

The whole history as given by Matthew goes to prove Christ a most unwilling victim. Did he not pray to God that the bitter cup might pass from him? He seems not for one moment to have thought of his mission of duty, that the world through him might be saved. "He was exceeding sorrowful unto death."

Matthew tells substantially the same story, and so does Luke. In John we find Jesus repeatedly escaping and by some means trying to evade detection. But when we come to the eighteenth chapter, the tactics begins to change. Jesus does not wait for Judas to betray him, but steps up boldly and says, "I am he." Judas merely stood with his adversaries!

So the conclusion we come to in this matter, is that Christ was an unwilling victim, that he died, like many a martyr, in defence of his cause. He had sought to undermine and destroy the old Jewish rites, and it is no wonder he was crucified in the end. The death of Christ was, like his birth, that of a pure mortal. That he died for the salvation of the world, is in a certain sense evidently true. His death and his sufferings have drawn his followers more closely to him than anything else could have effected. Had he not died upon the cross, he might perhaps have passed for an ordinary man, and the world have gone along without faith in his doctrines.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Had we the time and space, we would like to dwell upon the circumstantial and wonderful account of the crucifixion of Christ, as it is related in the gospels. We would like to consider how improbable, not to say impossible, that the *whole earth* should have been darkened for several hours before he died, the sun refusing to give its accustomed light; how when he died the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom most unaccountably; how the earth quaked and rocks were rent; how the graves were opened and saints walked out from their graves, with full manly forms, as in days of old. We would like to inquire also what ever became of those saints, those strangely resurrected beings of whom we hear not a word more, save that they appeared, only, as we suspect, that the effect might be heightened and the Scripture might be fulfilled. We would like to consider, besides all this, how strange it is that the four accounts of the four gospels should differ from each other in so many and such important particulars; how the fourth leaves out nearly all the wonderful things, the third and second speaking only of the darkness and the rending of the veil, and leaving Matthew to have an account peculiarly and surprisingly his own. We would like to consider finally how very probable it is, taking

into account all the circumstances of the case, that these were stories, diversified as we see them, and on the occasion of the death of God, developing as we might expect in the minds of a people so imaginative as the Jews. He was born of a God, and it was natural to expect that he should die like a God. But we hurry over all these things with the above passing notice, to dwell upon the matter of the Resurrection.

It is hardly necessary to intimate, in the beginning, that there are a great many strange and unaccountable things about this resurrection. It is useless here to point out in detail the many points of divergence in the several accounts of the Evangelists. Suffice it to say, they are very many, very great, and quite irreconcilable. They are there, and all can read for themselves. They cannot all be true, cannot all be well founded, cannot all be divine in their origin or conception. The impress of tradition and report is here *most evident and undeniable*.

The first thing that we would ask is, why that inevitable *three* days? Why would not two days, or one, or no time at all, answer all the ends? We suspect that, as usual, it was only to fulfill the Scriptures. Three days, you will remember, is a very sacred period of time in the Bible. Jonah remained precisely three days in the whale's belly before he was resurrected.

Again, we cannot help but think that possibly he that rose up after so short a time, was not really dead; that he was perhaps only in a trance. Then, too, it must be taken into account that Christ's returning to life so shortly after his death, completely withdraws from him all the merits of his dying for us. It was no dying at all. He did not give up his life for us; or if he did, he soon took it back again. He did not lose his life; what is soon found, is not really lost. No, surely, at the present stage of science, that death which is changed to life in three days, is merely suspended animation. No one can say that Christ died really for us; he did not *remain* dead. It was only a kind of sleep. What would we esteem death, if we felt sure, as Christ did, that we should rise on the third day? Only sleep.

We have then this dilemma. It will not answer to decide that Jesus did not die. But if he did really die, he really did not rise. Now comes the question, did he rise? What or where is the evidence? After a certain time stated, the grave was found empty. No mortal saw him rise from it, and it will not answer to rely too strongly on what angels say in such cases. The grave was found empty, that was all. But it is no uncommon circumstance now to

find graves empty after persons have been buried. Bodies, from various motives, may be and have been stolen from their resting places. How do we *know* that the common report among the Jews, that "his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept," was not the true one? But that is not all; he *appeared* unto his disciples and others. But even this is full as common now-a-days as to find graves empty. Men see, or believe they see, persons reappearing after death. They talk, these dead persons do; they act, they go and they return. They are mortal in shape, but spiritual in character. We call them ghosts. Perhaps it was the ghost of Christ that appeared. We know it *must* have been his ghost, if he were really dead.

Nor can it be claimed for Christ that his resurrection, which we consider so anomalous and to which we attach such an extreme value, was a matter of such vast importance after all? Surely, he was not the first, and perhaps he was not the last, who rose from the dead. The Bible gives us several instances of persons raised from the dead. No, if we must rely upon the Scriptures, there is nothing peculiar or godlike in Christ's being thus resurrected.

In Matthew and Mark, Christ's reappearance is treated about as an ordinary ghost story of the middle ages. But here Luke is, as usual, uncommonly diffuse. Christ appears to "two of them," strangely *incognito*. The part he plays here is very striking, we will not say absurd. He makes a long speech, he travels with them a long journey, talking all the while; he expounds all the scriptures concerning himself, beginning from Moses and bringing in all the prophets. And when they drew nigh unto the village, "he made as though he would have gone farther." But they constrained him. "And he went in to tarry with them." And it came to pass as they were all eating, and Christ with them also, their eyes were opened, and they now for the first recognized him. But to what purpose? "He vanished out of their sight" immediately. We are reminded of the deities in Virgil, who are wont to vanish into thin air. But again, at another time and in another place, he shows himself. Strange to say, though they had heard of his resurrection and some of them had seen him and supped with him, they were terrified and affrighted, and "supposed they had seen a spirit" (as they probably had). Then Christ enters into a long argument to prove that he is *not* a spirit. As further proof, he took broiled fish, and honeycomb, and did eat before them. Proof enough!

John, of course, has his own original account here as elsewhere. He tells us in one place (xxi:13) "this is now the third time that

Jesus *showed* himself." This proves to us conclusively that Christ only tarried on earth as long as he did, forty days, we believe, for the purpose of *proving* that he was really flesh and bones, and had risen from the dead. It is strange, is it not, that his ascension to heaven should have been delayed forty days for so simple a purpose as that. Is it not plain too, that when he had been resurrected he belonged in heaven, and appeared here only as a spirit? His residence here, we observe, was temporary, abnormal, and to us poor unintelligent mortals, absolutely inexplicable! When we thus see Christ performing such weak and miserable parts, only to prove that he was the Messiah, and hence risen from the dead, is it possible, we say, not to feel impressed with the belief that he is only an actor in a drama, and that he has his part *assigned* to him by the author of the piece? No, that is certain, the arguments are those of the people who constructed the story. Christ himself, we venture to affirm, would not condescend to things so low.

It is a fatal circumstance that Christ remained in this world after his death so few days only, just long enough to prove that he had really risen from the dead. It is fatal too, that he appeared only to his friends and followers, and never has been assumed to have lived in the world as an ordinary man and as he himself did before his crucifixion. His appearance was necessarily very secret, or his executioners would have crucified him again. He appeared, you will notice, and disappeared, at intervals, and finally failed to show himself at all. His habits were peculiarly those of the ghosts of the earlier ages.

Things that are possible or probable we can believe on slight evidence. Thus we can believe that Christ died. We know him only as a man: he lived as a man, and we are not surprised that he died as a man. His disciples had come to believe him a god, and it is no wonder that they were confounded to find that he could be brought even unto death. It is no wonder that their confidence in his Messiahship was somewhat shaken by his crucifixion. But we have no such difficulties, for we do not believe that he was so much a god as to be immortal.

Things that are impossible we cannot believe on any amount of evidence. But even if it were simply improbable, we do not come anywhere near having that amount of evidence that is required to prove that Christ, who was dead, came to life again. But we will not multiply words on this point. We conclude that Christ really died, died as the Bible said he did, to save us from the penalty of our transgressions. His resurrection had nothing to do with our

salvation. That was only to prove him a god, for it would not answer to believe that one who was a god could be brought to an everlasting and real, yea, an ignominious, death!

HIS ASCENSION.

That Christ should ascend into heaven, was for the Jewish mind a most natural thought. Enoch and Elijah had gone up before him, and probably Moses also. It was a natural consequence of the conception that Christ was divine. It was quite common in Roman and Grecian times for heroes to be thus taken up in a cloud.

We cannot believe in the ascension any more than we could in the resurrection, and for about the same reason. Both are equally impossible, and both equally destitute of demonstrative evidence. It is impossible, we say, that one who lived as flesh and bones, died, was resurrected, and who lived again as before, should be able to be in heaven, where spirits only can subsist. How flesh and bones could ascend, without wings or any apparent means by which to overcome gravity, how it could travel upward, how it could endure a journey of perhaps thousands of years before it reached that remote place where this heaven is to be found, all these are things quite incomprehensible to us. We venture to doubt that Christ ever did ascend in the manner assumed.

He went upward! It is an old and obsolete idea, we all know, that people must go upward to get to heaven. Anybody knows now that we would get to heaven just as quick by going off horizontally to the east or west, as by going upward or downward. There is either some serious mistake about this account, or science itself is blind and uncertain.

On what evidence must we believe that Christ ascended? On what evidence, rather, may we not believe that Christ never did ascend? It is remarkable that Matthew and John do not say anything about the ascension, and that in Mark and Luke, where it is mentioned, and where we should expect a careful and detailed account, all we have is that "he was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God," or "he was parted from them and carried up into heaven." Beyond this it is noticed in the Acts, but these are later writings, and here at least the account is evidently varnished. It is important also to bear in mind that the stories do not tally at all. They differ so much as to throw suspicion on the whole. So we are here, where we need the most conclusive evidence, destitute of every form or shadow of proof. All we have is a condensed statement of a belief more or less common, and very natural too, that Christ, who was a god, and who, after he had

risen, appeared for a while but finally could not be found, had really ascended into heaven as his final and appropriate resting place.

CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIANS.

The best exponents of Christ's doctrines, at the present day, are the Christian followers by whom our Savior is now represented. It is true, we may and often do mistake causes for effects. It may be in this case that men follow Christ because they are good, rather than become good by following Christ; yet it is certain that his teachings and his example do work an important change in the human heart. By turning our cares from the treasures of this world to that wealth which is more imperishable, we are removed from avarice and also from that selfishness which avarice generates. By teaching our dependence upon God, our pride is humbled, and self-sufficiency and conceit fast tend to disappear. We are taught to be charitable and kind, forgiving and abounding in love; we are taught to be just, to be fair, to be good; in a word, we are taught to shun all vices and to love all virtues, *to follow Christ and obey God*. Such are some of the distinguishing features in the life of the true Christian. As a sect it must be confessed that Christians compare favorably with any other on the globe in all things that go to make human nature impressible, in all that makes the race worthy and just, all that renders it faithful and devout. In all the virtues they are far in advance of the Jews, the Mahometans, the ancient Greeks and the Romans.

Of Christian ministers we wish to take especial notice. They are by no means perfect; and though they are Christians, they are nevertheless but men. With all their faults and their imperfections, they as a class do eminent credit to the whole human race. Taken in the aggregate, they are quite in advance of all other classes in the purity of their life, the sincerity of their motives, the excellence of their teachings, and their faithfulness in all that tends to render the character virtuous, devoted and proper. No class of men can compare with them in the extent of their sacrifices and the smallness of their returns. They are men who often cast aside the brilliant prospects of a promising life, to labor in the cause of humanity, and to promote the welfare and salvation of the race to which they belong.

We cannot say too much in their praise; we cannot pass too much to their credit. Let the errors of a few not be counted as the reproach of the whole. Dishonest and base men will creep into their number, as dishonest and base men will insinuate themselves

everywhere. Some are dishonest, some are unprincipled, some are bigoted, some are infatuated, some are unreasonable. All this we admit, but after all, where will you find less dross for the same amount of pure metal? No fair man will for a moment hold Christians responsible for the wrongs of an apostate few. But, we repeat it again, the Christian clergy in the aggregate are an honor to the race which they assume to teach and direct; they are in every respect the worthy followers of the Savior they represent.

Still, I think our ministers are somewhat misguided. The same talent which they possess and the same earnest effort which they put forth, might, I suspect, in some cases, be put to far better uses. I believe in preaching, but not exactly in the kind of preaching we usually hear from the pulpit. It does not enliven the soul. It neither appeals to the understanding nor moves the obdurate heart. It may be good enough in itself, *but it is not that kind of appeal which the age demands.* Personally, I do not like the basis upon which they stand, nor the point of view from which their observations are taken. I do not like the spirit of the religion which they preach. I PROTEST AGAINST ALL RELIGION WHICH DOES NOT MAKE MEN BETTER, MORE HONEST, LESS SELFISH, IN SHORT, ANY RELIGION THAT DOES NOT MAKE THE POSSESSOR A HOLIER AND MORE RIGHTEOUS MAN. To teach men to repent simply to be saved, is to teach them to be selfish, and nothing more. I would teach men to repent that they may be elevated and improved, of more use to themselves, and of more benefit to the world.

There is, it seems to me, too much of the selfish element in the appeal which the clergy make to us in order to induce us to embrace religion. They tell us to repent, that we may be saved, that we may rejoice hereafter. I would preach repentance, that we might become and remain better and nobler men; that we might the better subserve the interests of humanity and perform those duties which we owe to the race.

The religion of to-day is a religion of pretense and show. It has little to do with the regenerating of the soul, or the regenerating of mankind. What a dreadful parody our churches are to-day on the teachings of the meek and lowly Jesus of eighteen hundred years ago!

Let not religion be a reproach to those who profess it. Let Christians so live that the light of their countenances and the warmth of their hearts may compel men to believe in the truth of their doctrines and the power of the gospel. Let them show by their conduct and their intercourse with the world that they not

only do not believe as other men, but that they live not and die not as other men. None save those who are really Christians should ever denominate themselves followers of Christ. Let our religion be a religion of progress. If it is not what it should be, if it is not doing for humanity what it may do, let us make it what it ought to be.

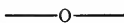
In this one thing at least I hope not to be misunderstood; I believe in Christ, and in Christ only; I believe in the church. I believe in the gospel. I would not have a Bible less, a church less, a minister less, a prayer less, or a Christian less than we have. No, not one. But had I the power, I would throw into all of these a new life, a new vigor, a new purpose. I detest pomp and show; I detest parade and pretense; I love truth and sincerity; I love reason and humanity. I love the true Christian, because I love those who are not wrapped up in self, those who feel it to be their highest aim to be charitable and just, forbearing and true.

I look upon the church and the doctrines of the church as the great lever which must in the end move mankind. It always has shaped the destinies of the world; it always will. The church must redeem mankind; the church must save the race. I have no sympathy with those who would destroy, or even weaken the church. No, the church is good. I only seek to make it better; I only seek to have it fulfill its true mission and accomplish its true ends. We may have religion without morality, but not morality without religion. Persons who do not love and fear God, who do not feel that there is a great and good being who is over all and owns all; persons who do not feel that we belong to one common brotherhood, and are linked together by common ties and common obligations, cannot be very just, very kind, very devoted, very good.

And after all we have said, what shall be our conclusion as to the use and value of Christianity? We are happy to give in our testimony, after a long life of experience in the ways and workings of this world, that Christianity is deserving of every man's attention, and its blessings are worth every man's effort to obtain. No man can live truly happy in this world without it. Christ has beyond all doubt taught us the true doctrine; he has set before us the only true example for enlightened and good men to follow.

Men may be honest without being really Christians; they may be charitable, but they cannot be truly good. Christianity gives the soft and tender tone to the heart which reason nor philosophy can never give. Christianity makes us at peace with ourselves, because we are at peace with all others. We live happy, feel happy, die happy, and in the end, we hope, are saved.

BIBLE TOPICS!



CHAPTER IV.

GOD AND HIS CHARACTER.

Who God is, what he is, and where he is, are questions we cannot, and do not care to answer. It is impossible to give a satisfactory solution to any of these questions. We see God only in his works; beyond them God is to us an unfathomable mystery, an impenetrable darkness.

But that there is a God, that there is a power which controls all, directs all, and is all, it is impossible for any intelligent person not to believe. Our impotence is plain enough; the impotence of all around us is still plainer. We are borne into this world without our knowledge, certainly without our effort; we are carried along with the current while living, and are brushed away as by a mere breath of air when finally we die. There is a power over us, there is a power within us, there is a power beyond us, and that power is God.

I do believe in God, I avow it. I do believe in a power that is universal and everlasting, one that has never ceased to act, and one that assuredly never will cease to act. Infidels call this principle destiny, fate. That is only their view of God. Others embody him in shape, and address him as a thinking, reasoning, sympathizing mortal. That is only their view of God. But both extremes must bow to God as the author of all things, and the preserver of all creatures. Our conceptions of him will not alter his character, neither will they remove from us our obligations to reverence and adore him.

While I do not fashion God to my own mind as some created being, some monster, I still look up to him as the embodiment of reason, justice, and wisdom. He rules this world as a reasoning, just, and wise person would, and I can very easily appreciate how and why the very best of minds conceive him as such.

God is in nature. He pervades nature in all its forms, in all its parts. He is nothing apart from nature; he is in no sense independent of it, no more at least than the mind or soul is independent of the body. He is an attribute, and an attribute can have no separate existence. I believe in the reality of God and the infinitude of his power, just as much as those do who give him a monstrous form, assign to him a monstrous state of existence and fix him finally in some monstrous place of abode. I do not look upon him as a man, and so I cannot conceive that he has the weaknesses and shortcomings of a man. He has none of man's passions, none of man's vices. He is inflexible, and hence is just. He is always one and the same, ever unchangeable, always reasonable, always right. God has no sense, and hence has no feeling. The terms merciful and kind cannot properly apply to him. For us to be merciful we must feel. Kindness implies favor, and favor implies partiality and consequent injustice. Would we say the sun was kind, would we say the earth was kind, or that water or air was kind? No. Neither is God kind.

I fear God just as I fear the winds and the storms. I fear him as a being whom nothing can control, nothing can divert, nothing can appease; a being who is good and just, not at one time, but at all times, not to one man but to all men, under all circumstances and in all places. I love and adore nature which feeds and clothes me, adds to my enjoyments and ministers to my wants. *So, and not otherwise, do I adore God.*

This power of God was established from the beginning. All things conspire to carry out the common plan. As far back as thought can carry us, all things are found to be pre-arranged, fore-ordered. God is not an intelligence continually working, continually active, but simply that which gave the first impulse to created things. GOD IS LAW. He cannot even himself depart from the prescribed order, the established plan.

PROVIDENCE.

God never departs from a line once taken, from an order once given. It is hardly necessary to say that I do not believe in special providences, in real miracles, or in any irregularities whatever. I believe that the laws of nature are supreme and cannot be annulled. Things may appear monstrous and miraculous to us, which to wiser beings would be perfectly plain and intelligible.

To regard God as provident, as having a care for things, is to regard him as a finite being, a being subject to all the embarrassments, weaknesses and vicissitudes of short-sighted and feeble

creatures. God as providence becomes a mere man. If he cares for some, he must neglect others. If he showed special favors to some, he would be an unjust God, he would be, what the Bible declares him not to be, *a respecter of persons*.

I believe in a God that provides for all equally and alike. I believe that he has laid down certain universal conditions, and those must be obeyed or the penalty suffered. Of course this makes no Providence of God.

But here is a serious question: Are there not some things in this world that happen without God's care and attention? Does he sit down and exert himself every time an acorn is put in the ground to grow? Does he remain till it becomes a tree, and even till the tree falls to the ground? Do you really believe that not a sparrow falls without his notice? Do you not rather believe that not a sparrow falls with his notice? Is not the force of gravity of itself sufficient to bring the sparrow down without God's help? When the mechanic builds an engine and puts water in the boiler and the fire under it, does it not regularly do its work without the slightest care or interposition on the part of the maker? All nature is God's machinery, doing its work continually and without deviation, because of the active principle within and the perfect adaption of every part to all the others. Just as much as the contriver is present with his machines whenever and wherever they work, just so much is God present with this world, and not otherwise.

It must be observed, finally, that the idea of providence is founded on the supremest selfishness. Providence, special interposition to save one, often at the expense of another, from the just demands of nature's laws, is not accorded to all beings nor to all things. It is not accorded to any of the highest order of animals not human. Who ever heard of an elephant, or a lion, or an eagle, noble creatures of the forest or the skies, being saved from their impending fate, the plunge of a spear for instance? No, animals have nothing but their mere wits, their strength, their limbs, to save them from destruction. Here is where reason and religion oppose each other. Reason says that the merest insect is of as much worth to God as the noblest man, but religion affirms that man is of supreme value, and that all other creatures are worthless.

THE SOUL.

The soul is such an invisible and intangible essence that our ideas of it must from the very nature of the case be the merest matter of speculation. No one has ever seen the soul, no one is sure

that such a thing as the soul exists. People have their own ideas of it, and no two of them are alike. All but one of them must be wrong.

We can get some idea of the original meaning of soul by considering the meaning of the word. In Latin *animus*, French *ame*, Greek *anemos* (wind), means soul, spirit, breath; while Latin *anima*, the feminine form of *animus*, means life. So our *spirit* is simply breath; and the Semitic *ruch*, Slavic *duch*, has a similar application. And the word *ghost*, German *gheist*, is merely gas, that is, vapor or wind. All these things show that mankind conceive the soul to be merely life, as life again is simply breath; and the departure of the soul from the body is identical with the departure of the breath of life. So *expire* is to breathe out, to give up the ghost (breath), to die; while *inspire* is to breathe in, in spirit, to bring to life, to cause to live.

* The prevailing ideas of the nature of the soul must be more or less erroneous. The soul is believed to have all the qualities of substances, as durability and extent, and yet it is claimed that it is no substance. Where does the soul reside? If all over the body, a part of it must be lost when the arm is amputated. Where does the soul come from when it comes, whither does it go when it departs? On what does it subsist? What gender is the soul? What shape does it have? What are its limits? Does it go upward when it leaves the body, according to the current opinion, and if so, why upward? All these are pertinent questions which never have been answered, *and never can be*.

The soul develops with the body; it decays with the body. It is feeble in infancy; it is depressed and forceless in extreme old age. Before birth it was a valueless quantity; after death it is neither more nor less. Still we cannot in either case deny its existence.

No time can be named when the soul entered the body; no time can be named when it leaves it. We have no more right to say it enters the body at birth than two months before birth. We cannot say it leaves the body when it dies, for the death of the body is not the matter of a moment of time, but of regular and continued gradations.

IMMORTALITY.

It may be as well for me to remark in the beginning that I do not believe in the existence of a soul or mind independent of the body, and hence capable of existing before it or after it, or without it. I do believe in such a thing as mind or soul, but only as an attribute of the body. Is there any quality, that of sweetness for

instance, that could exist after the body to which it belonged, the apple we will say, has ceased to exist? The destruction of the body, all know, carries with it the destruction of all its qualities. Is mind or soul anything more than an attribute of a living body?

Mind is either feeling or is entirely dependent upon feeling for its action. Then how shall the mind act when we cannot feel? We know the mind does not act when we do not feel. Thoughts come to us only on condition that we are impressed by the things that surround us. Hence there is no mind, or no action of the mind, without feeling.

But a mind that does not act is no mind at all. Then can there be a mind, or soul, after death? A mind after the body is dissolved into dust, when there is no brain, no nerves, no heart, nothing! Through what medium would it act, by what power would it be set in motion? As we know the mind, it can only act, or even exist, on condition that there is a body; and the nature of its action depends upon the condition of the body. The mind develops with the body, it declines with the body, it keeps even pace with the body in every respect, then why should it not also die with the body?

It will be noticed I have used the term *mind* in its broad sense, as being something more than mere intelligence and will, and as embracing in its meaning what, for some people, would be included under the word *soul*. But it is useless to dwell upon the shades of meaning in words. What I have termed mind, I am willing that others shall call soul. My remarks are directed to the conscious, thinking, acting principle of man, call it what you like.

We hear much about the immortality of the soul, but I charge here that those who talk of the immortality of the soul, have in mind simply the immortality of the body, though this body is, in their minds, I know a very light, thin and vapory thing. But it is a body, and has the form and appearance of a body. They only call it the soul.

And there is some sound philosophy, some real truth in this. There is, it truly seems, a force within us leading us to believe that that which is once born and has come into life, can never cease to exist; that as its whole life is a series of successive changes, no doubt death also with its attendant dissolution, is only another one of these changes. I do indeed believe in the immortality, that is, the indestructibility, of the body.

I believe, moreover, that this immortality extends backwards as well as forwards. In fact, I would use immortality before birth to prove immortality after death. As I do not believe that death is

the end of existence, so I do not believe that birth is the beginning of it. We are accustomed to date the existence of a person from the day he was born. Yet we know that his existence began some months before that—may we not say years and centuries before that? Take the little grain of wheat. Will you date its existence from the time when you first caught it resting in its little cradle on the ear? You can trace back its growth to the time when it was smaller. Going back still further, you find it soft, pulpy, and further back yet, till you lose sight of it entirely. But does it then cease to exist? Do you not know that there are thousands of things so imperfect, so ill-defined, so small, that you cannot see them with your eye, but which, with a penetration a thousand times greater, you know could easily be discerned? The little bud comes out upon the branch and spreads out into a glorious bundle of foliage. You follow it back, you come to a point where it was the minutest prominence on the bark, a speck so small that you could hardly detect it. And would you boldly proclaim that even that speck was the beginning of its existence? So we may take the origin of any event, we will say the American Revolution. What was its cause, or when did it begin? We might go back in this inquiry from one thing to another till we were lost in eternity. It was, you may say, the stamp act, but what was the cause of that act, and the cause of that cause, and so on to infinity? So we observe, nothing begins to exist, begins to be. It only begins to be seen, that is all. All there is in the birth of a thing is that it has come to be visible. Conception is one stage of birth, but it is by no means the first stage.

But if the creature itself existed so long, so very long, before it became apparent to us through any of our senses, must not also its soul have existed with it? Must it not have passed with the body through all its anterior stages of existence, as it does through all its various eras of visible worldly existence?

And if the soul was with the body from the beginning, shall it not cling to it unto the end? If it was with the body in its anterior existence, will it not accompany it through its periods of future existence also? Or would you deny that the body has an existence and stages to pass through after what we call death takes place? We shall undertake to show under another heading, *Death*, that death is the work of slow degrees, that man, as he tends to the grave, is dying every day, that what we call death is properly only one of the stages or steps of death real, a scene in the drama, *but by no means the last one.*

As the body existed long before there were any evidences of sensation or any signs of motion, a long while before it had any

other existence than a mere vegetative one, so we know the body exists long after sensation is lost, and after every power of motion is lost with it. We know many instances, as in drowning, fainting and fits of various kinds, where all the powers of life are temporarily suspended and the body is really *dead*, and yet no one claims that the soul has departed or the body ceased to exist.

We know that not a particle of matter that is new is brought into existence, and none that is old is ever lost. The body is merely a mass, organized though it be, but nevertheless merely a mass, an accumulation of earth, of fluids, of gases. Not one particle of this body is ever lost, ever annihilated. But if this be true, how can the body ever be said to be destroyed? We cut down the living tree, we burn it, and in the end it disappears, a part lost here and another there. Modern science teaches that the whole is saved, *not an atom is lost*. The change is only that of form. Those particles, those ashes, those fluids, those gases, all came from surrounding nature. In their decay and destruction they are only returned to nature again.

A company of men disband. We consider it annihilated, but how little of the company really is lost. The individuals really exist precisely as before, just as absolutely, just as naturally, and practically. So the particles of a body after death are only *disbanded*. We must observe too that the company after dissolution, even as before its organization, is a force of so many men, acting, it is true, not in such close proximity as before, but nevertheless acting, and hence existing. It is well known that every body, every power, leaves its photographic impression on all nature around, and existing, thus continually in its effects, may again be said to *never die*.

It is not at all strange that men should, as they have in all places and in all ages, believe in immortality. There is a foundation for this belief in the very nature of things. The proofs that science adds every day strengthen this belief. We know that nothing is lost, either of force or of matter. Things appear to-day, but we know they have existed from eternity. They are merely passing by. The storm that sweeps over us has traveled thousands of miles, and many hours have been consumed, in reaching us. Every force that is developed to our senses, originated in and is backed up by some other force. We never see the beginning or the end of any development, any event, any movement. We catch a glimpse of one of its phases as it glides by, and that is all.

We never cease to exist. The flesh of our body, which represents us, is not in any actual sense our own *self*. So little is this flesh *ourselves* that we may lose a portion of it and still remain as before, *ourselves*.

I never began to exist. I date from the beginning of creation. I am as old as God himself; there is nothing in nature older than I. This life, this body, is only one phase of my existence. Take an event as our best illustration, the war of the Rebellion, for instance. When did that begin? When the first gun was fired on Sumpter? No, that was only one step, a step which had been preceded by a series of aggressive steps for thirty years or more. The elements of antagonism between the North and South *began with the creation of the world.*

RESURRECTION.

Nothing is clearer to my mind than that when people talk about the soul, they only have another body in view. A soul, a mere spirit, a vapor, a nothing, could have no such enjoyments, no such sufferings, as we speak of. How can anything but a body feel? How can anything but a body think? Without feeling there can be no perception, no knowledge. Can a spirit feel? We can understand how the eye can see and the ear hear, but not how seeing itself may see, or hearing itself may hear—especially after the organs themselves are lost.

But we will understand better what kind of a soul people have in their minds when they talk about it, by considering the matter of the resurrection. What kind of a resurrection did Christ speak of, what kind of a resurrection did he furnish us an example of in his own death and ascension, to say nothing of the prophets of the Old Testament who went to heaven body and soul together? Certainly it was the resurrection of the body. Even Christ's body was not a mere slough or shell to be cast aside as worthless. No, he was very careful to take it with him in his ascent into heaven. The people of Christ's day well understood that if the Lord's *body* did not go up, there would be no going up about it. The ascent of a soul without a body is simply an impossible and an absurd thing.

Job says, (xix:26,) "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." And the whole Bible, the New Testament as well as the Old, wherever the subject is referred to, implies that the dead are to be raised with their bodies. And really we could not speak of the raising of the soul, for when the body dies the soul departs. It is never buried and so is never raised.

Some have gone so far as to assume that the particles of our bodies, scattered abroad as they must be, are to be collected together, in some mysterious way, of course, at the final day of judgment. But here is a little impossibility to get over. Those very particles

may have become an element in a thousand other beings. How shall they all appear where they belong at the great judgment day?

Again, does nature anywhere, in any possible shape, give us an example of a resurrection parallel with that of a body after dissolution has taken place? The metamorphoses of insects have been supposed to afford an example. But those metamorphoses as now understood, do not involve a case of death. There is a series of developments, but the chain of continued existence is not broken for one moment. There is no death for the worm, consequently no resurrection.

DEATH.

We may say with as much truth as we say anything, that we can trace our existence back so far that we may be permitted to say we have existed from eternity. We are justified in this assertion principally by the fact that no one can find or can name the day, or the hour, or the minute from which we began to be, and before which we did not exist.

On the other hand, if no one can tell us when we began to exist, no one can tell us the moment when we cease to exist. It is commonly understood that we cease to exist when we die. But that is the great question: When do we die? Do we ever die as we consider it? Do we not always die, as we should consider it?

We believe in the immortality of the soul, because among other reasons, we do not comprehend the true nature of death. We are taught that the soul leaves the body when the body dies. Now, the soul is a single, individual thing, inseparable into parts, and existing only in its unity; when it departs, it must do so instantaneously, and not by degrees, as if it were an assemblage of individuals. But the death of the body, as is well known by scientific men, is not the work of an instant, but of degrees, the result of slow, steady and successive processes.

“It is the heart which ceases to act first,” says Bichat, “it is this whose death draws with it successively the death of other organs.” “Behold the man,” says the same authority, “who is extinct of a long old age; he dies in detail; his exterior functions come to an end one after the other; all the senses cease their action successively—the ordinary causes of sensation pass over them without affecting them. The sight is obscured, is troubled, and finally ceases to transmit the images of objects; it is senile blindness; all the organs depending on the skin are enfeebled and die; the hair, the beard whiten; odors give to the nose a feeble impression.”

“But organic life remain to the old man even after the total loss of his animal life; the digestive juices still dissolve in the

stomach the food which is found there. Nutrition is still manifest in the hair and nails. It would be so without doubt in all other parts as it is with the secretions, if we could observe the insensible movements from which these two functions result."

The different parts of the body not only do not die together, they were not born together, that is, they did not come into actual and visible existence at the same time; the heart, the lungs, the stomach, the liver, are not organs of the same age. This puts us in mind of calling attention to the following important and pertinent question: As the different parts of the body come into existence successively, and as they cease to live and act also by successive operations, at what time may we say the soul takes possession of the body, and when does it leave the body? But no one claims that the soul enters the body by pieces, by parts; no one claims, so far as I know, that the soul ever enters the body at all.

Assuming that the soul is born with the body, that is, is co-existent with it, and cannot separate itself from it, why have we a right to assume in addition, that there ever is a moment when the soul, like the bird from its nest, may take wings and leave its earthly tenement forever; or claim that there is a moment when the body can exist without the soul and the soul without the body? Is the human body when brought to death at all different from a clock that is run down, or an engine whose wheels have become clogged or lack the moving power of wind or water? The seed that keeps its living principle hundreds, nay thousands of years, does it not have a sleeping soul? In all these cases, does not the moving principle, the soul, remain as before, only that it is dormant? No one would dare to say in these cases that the soul had departed. Is the body aught but a machine, played upon and moved by forces externally and internally applied, just as is the case with every other machine? The parallel is perfect, only the living body, brought to death, is far more perishable than the machine which is made with human hands. It is not so easily repaired; if we could place the lost lung in the body otherwise sound, the subject would still live. The seed that lies in the granary a hundred years is dead, and only comes to life by the stimulating principles of heat and the soil. Where was its soul all this while? If a body, healthy and sound, could be preserved from decay, it would never really die; we should have a case merely of suspended animation, as we have in the case of animals who sleep in winter.

But to return to the death of organs successively. These organs are really separate and distinct individuals. The living creature is a mere organized mass of subordinate living beings, as

the brain, the heart, the hands, the head, the feet. This position is proved by a recurrence to the lower order of animals, and more particularly to the vegetable. No one doubts that the tree is a simple assemblage of distinct individualities, as the leaves and the branches, each one of which is capable, under certain conditions, when severed from the parent stem, of taking on itself an independent existence. Nay, even the roots may grow and become a complete tree. But it is not only true with the plant, that we may cut off the branch, or even the leaf, and have it grow and itself become a new and independent plant, but also in the lowest orders of animated existences, parts may be cut off, the whole animal may even be cut up into innumerable sections, and each become another and complete animal. In the higher order of animals, this process is not practicable. But still, many of the parts of the living body, as the brain, the arm, the leg, may be removed, and the animal still continue its existence, and even in some cases supply the place of the absent member by a new growth—showing that what remains, however small it may be, is still complete and entire in itself.

Now I ask: Are there as many souls as there are organs or members? When a part is lost, when it dies, does one soul die also, or does a fragment only of the great soul take its departure? That is the great and important question which those who defend the immortality of the soul must yet answer for us and themselves.

I might add farther in this connection, that any number of living beings collected together, as a company, a herd, an army or a nation, is a living being, just like a tree or a polype. But all the life that we find there is in the individuals which go to make up the organization. So it is with the single individual being, the life and substance is in the ultimate elements. Every collection of living beings, every collection of bodies, is a being having individuality, and hence a soul and mind. The whole human race is but one great organized being. Every living being is a mere aggregate of other living beings. The microscope has revealed the fact that all our fluids at least are actually alive with living creatures. What are we then ourselves but a small world of living beings, animated and directed by one common mind? Perhaps, nay, probably, there is no dead matter as we understand it. Every organ about us is itself an individual and separate being, just as much as we are. It is not independent or self-existent, neither are we.

The power of external force to give life to the body is shown by the use of galvanic electricity to revive, though temporarily, the dead. By its application the body moves, writhes, twists and

starts as if in the agonies of pain and despair. All this proves that the body does not move because of any soul distinct from the body. We consider motion in the body as an evidence of will and as a proof of a soul. But these experiments prove that these movements may appear when the soul has departed.

But as it is a mistaken idea that the body dies when it ceases to breathe, so it is equally a mistake that the soul takes its departure at the same time. Persons in a trance, where every part of the machinery of the body has long since ceased to act, as in some kinds of fits, and in cases of temporary drowning, or freezing, or some violent concussion, may aid us in forming some idea of the true nature of death. The body in these cases is as truly dead, the breath and life have as truly departed, as they ever do. But as we say in this case, the living principle, or life, is suspended in its action, so we may say when the body dies and is never revived and brought into action again, the suspended animation has simply become permanent.

Then, also, we are to observe that this life, this living and breathing, as produced by external influences, being mechanical, and not in its nature more inherent in the body than it is for the clock to go or the wheel to turn. When the body dies temporarily, or when we have suspended animation, how is it revived and how is the soul brought back? By friction, by rubbing, by rolling, and other operations which are purely mechanical and external.

THE SOUL OF ANIMALS.

If it is right to consider the soul as identical with mind, with the principle of thought and feeling, we must then claim besides that the soul cannot be appropriated as a gift belonging exclusively to man. Other animals think, reflect, feel and have consciousness; hence other animals must have souls the same as man. This is precisely what science teaches. The doctrine that man is an anomalous creature, that he possesses powers and privileges not accorded to brutes, that he is the sovereign of creation, that he is all and everything else is nothing, is merely the vain presumption of an ignorant people in an ignorant age. Every step that science advances proves beyond question that man is an animal and no more; that he is made after the same image as the animal; that the qualities he possesses differ in degree but not in kind from those of the lowest animals. Every step that science takes relieves man of that shining and glorious crown which Genesis, and the world since Genesis, has endeavored to hold upon his head.

The likeness between the bodies of men and brutes cannot be disputed for a moment. Those bodies are machines made after patterns similar to our own. Are they not worked also upon precisely the same principles? Men, like animals, must eat and drink, labor and rest, fear and retreat, hesitate and consider, choose and act, in short, must do everything in their lives which animals do, and in the end, like animals, they must turn to the dust and disappear forever. Being similar machines, fitted for similar offices, and coming to similar ends, why must we not expect them to be guided, moved and managed by similar powers? Man is moved by the mind; why does not the mind move the dog, the horse, and the ant? And as the mind implies intelligence and a soul, why are not animals to be credited with a soul like man?

But we must observe farther, that the intelligence of animals is not by any means so mean and rudimentary as the less informed are apt to suppose. The lowest brute does all that man does; like man, he reasons, reflects, chooses and decides. We have only to refer to the many curious and instructive things which are known to be done by animals, to the herds of wild horses which follow implicitly the direction of their leader, to apes and birds who station one of their number as a guard to prevent them from being surprised in the act of their robbery. Any person who has seen the conduct of animals, their manner of bringing about results, and how they provide for contingencies, can certainly relate instances enough of intelligent and sensible action.

Animals have memory, judgment and imagination. They not only have arts which are born to them, but others which they acquire by study and observation. We might allow our thoughts to recur to the teaching which the old bird gives to its young in the art of flying. How carefully it provides for the nest till the young have grown up, and how regularly this provision is withheld after that, unless they are prevented from leaving the nest by some accident or design, as by the clipping of the wings, when the young are cared for as before. So we might refer to the cunning of beasts and birds of prey in the steps they take to escape detection and punishment, and observe how wily and artful they are; and to very many other facts in the history of animals which illustrate the same general truth.

The admirers of man have tried in vain to find some one quality, some little mark by which the body of a brute might be placed in opposition to the body of a human being. Men do indeed differ very materially from brutes, even from the highest and the best of them. But so do men differ from women, children and infants

from adults, the wild savage who feeds upon berries and bark from the polished citizen who lives in a fine house, and who warms and decorates himself with beautiful clothing and rare jewels. Nevertheless, we say that all these are equally and undeniably human beings, possessing like qualities and being alike heirs to the same inheritance as ourselves.

So we see it is not the amount of intelligence which decides the fate of the one who is a candidate for a place in the ranks of these august creatures, but the question is rather whether he has any intelligence at all. But has not the elephant, the lion, the horse, the dog, and the bee, intelligence as well as man? They may not have an order of intelligence as high as that of man, just as one man may have an order of intelligence not as high as some others have, and still he may be a man after all.

There is, we repeat, no difference in the mould after which the bodies of men and those of the lower animals are made. But scientific persons adhering to the doctrines of the Old Testament, while they are forced to leave this stronghold of theirs, still, as a last resort, cling to the idea that mentally man and the brute are not to be compared with each other, affecting to believe that man has a mind and a soul, and the brute has not. But I claim that this conclusion is the result of misconceptions, and of a want of accurate and reliable information.

Man is thus set apart from the inferior animals on the ground of the supremacy of his intellect, and yet the idiot, and the infant too, long before it can think and act, long before it can reflect or have any appreciable consciousness, is placed in the rank of men, and allowed to inherit that anomalous and mysterious possession, the soul!

Men delight to dwell, in speaking of animals, upon what they triumphantly assume to be their inability to learn, their want of capacity for improvement. But if they should examine the case more carefully, they would undoubtedly here find themselves mistaken, as they have in so many instances before. We have taken here, as usual, bare assumption for absolute demonstration. When in a few stray instances we have undertaken to teach an animal, we have done it with a very poor grace, since we have had no faith in the work. No one can conjecture how much may yet be done for the poor animal (just as there has been done for the poor African, or the blind and the dumb man), when we can once make ourselves understood by them. We must observe also and remember that man in his rude and wild state makes no improvement, no advance-

ment. He too must be taught before he can rise. He must come in contact with superior beings and be warmed by them into a new life.

Finally, when we compare men and animals, in trying to connect the two parts of the chain, let us be careful to put together the two parts that belong together in the connection, the highest of animals with the lowest of men. If we do this we shall find the difference not quite so striking as we might at first be led to suppose. The difference in the appearance, character and habits of the wild savages of Southern Africa or the slaves of Borneo and Sumatra, and that of the higher classes of apes, or even other animals, is not so great as we might have been led to imagine.

I feel that there is no valid reason why animals should be denied the credit of having souls, nor why they should not be entitled to all the privileges and prerogatives belonging to man, especially that one greatest of all, the privilege of living after death. Who can give one single reason, save preconceived notions and long established prejudice, why man should live on to eternity, man, even the most degraded and the weakest of the class, while the noble horse, or the lion, or the eagle, is annihilated from the very moment of death? Animals are born like men, they live as men, and as men they die. Who can give one single reason for the belief that one is lost for all time and the other saved for eternity? We answer, no one.

It is then presuming and selfish in the extreme for us to imagine a creator and a savior who only remember us, while they leave all other living beings to death and irretrievable ruin. It will do very well for us to make such pretensions for the world to come, about which all must be uncertainty and speculation, but when we come to this present world, where the evidence is full and decisive, we find that God is just as careful to preserve the worm as the hero or philosopher; that the worm is just as wonderfully made; that it is protected by the same laws and guided by an intelligence similar to that of man in his highest estate.

I really believe that animals are not only born and live like us, but that when they die they have just as much of an inheritance awaiting them as we have. Nay, I would go still farther; so far as immortality is concerned, I would include the vegetable and all that has life. I believe that if man lives after death, after his dissolution into dust, so does the animal and the plant. Believing as I do that the animal and the vegetable are to be taken into consideration in forming our ideas of our destiny after death, I think they may throw some light upon the great question of the immortality of the soul.

THE FUTURE STATE.

With what has already been said on the Soul, on Immortality, on Death, on the Soul of Animals, we are now prepared to consider the Future State of Man.

Man lives after death, but not his soul, not his consciousness. Man lives in the impressions he has made and the effects he has left. With them he goes to eternity. He lives in the race that survives him. He lives with the world itself. He lives in his recollections. *A man that is born cannot die.* What single act do I do in all my life that does not enter as an element into my nature and remain there to eternity? I build a house, I write a book, I utter a word. Is it ever lost? Does it not vibrate on and on forever? The house, or the book, or the word, may in the end disappear, but will it not also leave its impression? Tell me not I am nothing after death. My body may perish, but I shall live forever! It is the drone only, the man who does nothing, who really dies when the breath leaves him. Every man survives in his works, *and the more he works the more he survives.* But literal immortality, literal resurrection and continuance of life, that I believe impossible and monstrous. That is merely a dream of the ancients, a wild vision of the unlettered world.

Consciousness is born and developed with the body, it decays with the body. Without consciousness, without feeling, without thought, there can be no literal immortality, no surviving of the soul. Sentiment and feeling must lead to action, they are given solely to produce action. But how could there be action where there is no body? As well talk of the impression on a gold dollar after the coin itself had been dissolved in acid.

A spirit cannot feel, or think, or act, or reflect. Why, a spirit itself is a foolish absurdity, proper enough for old women and children to talk about, but not worth the breath of grown up and sensible people. There is not half as much evidence to establish the existence of a spirit separate from the body, as there is to prove that the lunar spots are a veritable "man in the moon."

It is curious to see that everybody admits that he knows not the first thing about spirits or souls, or of devils or gods, or of heaven or hell, and yet people will talk of them as if they knew all about them. How much poor engraving has been wasted on devils and dragons, angels and demons! The devil, for instance, how variously has he been represented! With a tail and without one, with horns and hoofs and without them, as a handsome and as a hideous man, as a roaring lion and as a raving maniac! But the

devil is now pretty well done for. He is now only a *spirit*, soon he will be gone entirely, and with him all spirits, and witches, and ghosts, and angels, and demons, and dragons, and such like.

I am sorry to dispel that beautiful and consoling thought that we shall meet our friends in heaven, but it is the bare truth: I do not believe a word of such doctrine. Death, I repeat, if it really destroys nothing else, destroys *consciousness*. That no one doubts, no one denies. But if I am not conscious, how shall I know, how shall I think, how shall I feel? No, it is impossible to make me believe that after a man dies he is still not dead; that when he is putrified, when he is scattered as dust before the winds, he still feels and knows, suffers and enjoys! The thought of life after death is a beautiful one, but it is a childish fancy, *the most reasonless of all absurd conceptions*.

It is clear enough that I do not believe in a heaven and a hell, and a world to come, such as Christian people tell about. I do not believe in a world that God keeps waiting for us, outside of and away from everything else. What is now always was and always will be, and there is not and cannot be, at any time, anything beyond it. All I know about is this world, this life, this universe, this man, and that is enough for me.

But if there is no world to come, if there are no future rewards and punishments, how shall men be kept in subjection? I answer, *just as they are now*. It is the laws of society and the regard for public opinion that govern us, not the hope of reward or fear of punishment hereafter. What do men care whether God sees them or not? They know little about God and care less. People talk much about God, and heaven, and hell, and the devil, and the like, but they are empty words for them. *They mean absolutely nothing in practice*.

But there is an immortality to live for. Men do live after death. They leave an impress behind, an influence for good or ill. The worst of men, I notice, are careful about the memory they leave to posterity. Every man desires to be thought well of after death. Every man desires to be loved and esteemed, even after the breath has departed from his body and after the praises of mankind are inaudible to his ears. So a wise man, a thoughtful man, a good man, does live chiefly for immortality. The rewards of the present are entirely incommensurate with the efforts he puts forth. What people now think of him, he cares not so much as what will posterity, what will God think of him when he dies? These are the questions he asks. What nobler, higher, better incentive to worthy

action than this? I am making history every day. The press, the telegraph and the people are recording this, item by item, and passing judgment upon it. I cannot feel unconcerned while I know all this is being done.

Men will be punished for their sins and rewarded for their good deeds hereafter, but not in the gross physical sense which is generally conceived. Men will not boil, and hiss, and hop, and howl, while the devil is stirring them up with a sharp stick and making the brimstone burn fiercer than ever. It is generally conceded now, even among devout people, that this fiery furnace business is a tall joke, good to frighten foolish people with, but good for little else. But it does not frighten people now, because the joke is too old, and people don't believe a word of it. So the happiness to come, the crown of gold, the gates of pearl, are all counted for what they are, a beautiful dream, a baseless fancy. People now look for some other kind of reward than that.

PREDESTINATION.

Were I asked if I thought all things were predestined, I would say yes. But as we never know what an order is, it is a matter of no concern to us whether things are predestined or not. It is simply for us to work, to do our best towards accomplishing our ends, and then await the result. Men make efforts every day and fail; men make efforts every day and succeed. If we made no effort we should certainly fail; if we made the experiment, we might possibly succeed. So the only alternative we have is to work, using those powers and exercising those faculties which a kind Providence has given us.

Remember, the efforts we make are themselves a part of what is foreordained. So it is not for us to lay down our oars and allow ourselves to drift over the precipice. We must go to work as if there were no predestination in the world. And yet this consciousness of predestination often gives us courage, gives us hope. It seems unavoidable that we must concede predestination, for we see things happen every day against our art and against our effort, things that could not be avoided by using ever so much skill. Are they then not predestined? As we are blind in the matter, we must work. We see things happen one way to-day without our interposition that would have happened very differently with it.

For all practical purposes man is a free agent. We cannot turn aside a single one of God's purposes and plans, and yet we know that it is a part of his order that we shall add our share to the final accomplishment of his ends. In doing so we are merely following the impulse of our nature, and affording in ourselves an illustration of the doctrine that *labor also is fated*.

FREE WILL.

“That which a man is about to do is always a consequence of that which he has been, of that which he is—of that which he has done up to the moment of his action; his total and actual existence, considered under all its possible circumstances, contains the sum of all the motives to the action he is about to commit; his life is a series of necessary movements; his conduct, whether good or bad, virtuous or vicious, useful or prejudicial, either to himself or to others, is a concentration of action, as necessary as all the movements of his existence.” “Education is only necessity shown to children.”

Man is free to act, somebody has said, but with his hands tied. Men have about as much control over their character and actions, as they have over their body and its dimensions. We all know that our bodies take character and cast from agencies which were in actual operation long before we were conscious even of our own existence. We all know that after we are born, after we are, as a plant, set upon the earth to grow, very much depends upon the nature of the soil, much upon the climate, and much upon the common accidents of life. Over all these things we have little or no control. We are compelled to conclude that our bodies grow up almost independent of our own exertions. The influence which we may have upon their form and character, we perceive, is reduced to a quantity infinitesimally small—perhaps so small that when we consider how much our own free will exertions, so considered, are themselves directed by nature rather than will, this influence may amount to nothing at all. We have only to look about, only to consult history, to ascertain the fact that men are mentally, morally and physically just what their mode of life and the nature of the country have made them. No effort of the will could give the poor savage of California that polish, grace and intelligence which characterize the highly cultivated citizen of America or Europe.

Choice of action usually consists in the examination of the question, which is desirable? When facts are known there is really no choice about it, for, if you choose at all, you must of necessity choose that which, all things considered, you find desirable. Where there is no choice there can be no free action. Suppose a man is struck an insulting blow. He has his choice either to resent the blow or flee. But it would be impossible for a true coward to fight, for if he fought, he would be no coward. Hence from the very necessity of the case he retreats when a brave man would resist. A man at the stake may burn or retract, but it may be, and often is, that in the stubbornness of his nature he has no alternative.

Theoretically, no such thing as free action exists; practically, it does. Practically, we are endowed with a will which indicates what we must do and what we must let alone. I act, but I am unconscious of the motives which impel my action. I never feel my restraint till I undertake to do what I cannot do, what my nature will not suffer me to do. I think, but I am unconscious of the unsevered connections of thought, and I do not realize how impossible it is to have a thought not brought forward by some previous thought. As we do not perceive the limited circle in which we are confined, we believe we have the whole world to ourselves. Because we are unconscious of the power that moves us to act, we imagine we are free moral agents, endowed not only with power, but supreme power, not only with freedom of the will, but freedom to do anything we choose. Short-sighted and ill-taught man, how little there is that he himself can do! Without God's help he could not raise his hand, and yet he talks about free moral agency! However, for diversion, perhaps such questions may answer as well as any.

EVIL.

The great question is, what is evil? Our opinion of what is evil and what is good may be best understood when we consider that what we condemn as vice, other people, less civilized than we are, esteem as virtue—even theft, adultery, child killing and the worst of crimes.

Again, there is no evil unmixed with good, and no good unalloyed with evil. A good to me is a harm to another. There is no wind so ill that it blows not somebody some good. Doctors live on the miseries of others, and ministers and undertakers thrive on the offerings that death brings them. Our worst conflagrations merely cause a redistribution of property and funds. Some fall by the misfortune, but as many rise by it. War brings desolation to some, but prosperity and happiness to many more. A thing is good or ill according to the stand point from which it is viewed. Anything may be good and bad at the same time.

Why say a man does wrong? What does that mean? He transgresses some law, some conventional rule, perhaps. Say he steals. It is not half so bad as we think it, to steal. We all steal, and we all would steal more if we could do so and be sure that no harm would come to us for doing it—at least our minds have a little tendency that way. Our high sense of honor turns out to be only well directed selfishness. Men are honest because they find it necessary to be so. Most of what we gain we prevent others from

getting. It is our cunning, our diligence, our prompt action, that has perhaps given us the advantage over them. All our gains are mere transfers from other men's pockets to our own. Our sharpest, shrewdest speculators are simply our most adroit pickpockets.

Much of our crime is either good or bad as we look at it. Men are not half so bad as we take them to be, or rather they are not so much worse than other folks as we assume they are. The worst criminal is human. He has done perhaps what the best of men desired, but did not dare, or did not find it advisable, to do. *It is the heart that fixes the crime.* We condemn robbers, and yet there is not a foot of land owned on this planet that is not held simply by the right of conquest! Take our lands; where did we get them? Of our fathers. And where did they get them? Of the aborigines. They were the stronger party. They drove off the aborigines, or killed them, and now their children enjoy this peaceful inheritance! We derive our titles chiefly from such heroes as William the Conqueror and Alexander the Great, great robbers, who had might on their side. The beasts of prey are robbers and murderers in our sight, and how much less are we in theirs?

We are in antagonism with everything in nature. The wind, the heat, the cold, the waves, the dust, gravity itself, all oppress us; but must they be banished as evils? Everything that lives, not weevils, and worms, and rats, and robins, alone, everything that lives must devour. Shall they be exterminated as evils? Even God himself could not exist without a devil. There would be nothing for him to do. Somebody has asked, why God, being a Supreme Being, has not long ago killed the old devil and put him out of the way? and we answer it: Because God knows his own business better than we do for him, and understands full well the fact that the devil is just as indispensable to the continued existence of this world as God himself.

The worst of criminals are perhaps as necessary to the continued success and elevation of society as the best of men. The thief and pickpocket play their part. They at least keep us busy. They sharpen our intellect. They make us vigilant and active. I detest criminals, but I acknowledge their importance in the economy of nature. Without obstacles nothing moves. Without obstacles society would never progress. Shall we suppose God made anything in vain? Does he not protect with as much care the most heartless robber as the most devout Christian? Is God himself not wise? Does he not understand our needs? If we were going to condemn and cast off what was hurtful to each one, there would

be nothing left in the world, for there is nothing done that is not injurious to some one. Is sickness not as necessary to our welfare as sound health? Do we not need plagues and storms to save us as well as to carry us to destruction? Is an insect a pest because in seeking to live it destroys our harvest? What shall the insect say of us, when it sees us grudge the very little that it asks for its daily subsistence? *What would become of us if the very law which we apply to the feeble creatures around us were applied to our noble selves?* Is it the *golden rule* that we are daily applying in our treatment of these poor devils? It is a Bible fancy, a Bible monstrosity, that men only have rights. We just begin to see it. Hence our laws to prevent cruelty to animals. Strange that the world had to be 6,000 years old, and over, before we could come up to the understanding that God meant that other creatures should live upon earth besides Christians and Jews!

In the eyes of God, it is evident enough that evil has no such meaning as it has for us. In a comprehensive view, everything is good. Nothing is plainer than that God orders the evil as well as the good.

The bad man is just as much impelled by his nature and circumstances to do wrong, as the righteous man is to do right. Then why should we hate and oppress him? No, pity him, restrain him, educate him, elevate him, but do not hate and persecute him. What is indeed the difference between good men and bad men? The worst men have their redeeming excellences, and the best of men have but little more.

But shall we resist not evil? Certainly we shall. Resistance to evil is just as much fated and necessary as evil is itself. They are counterbalancing forces. We must have rights, and duties, and obligations. We must have rules and laws, or we ourselves would descend to the level of savages. Nearly all our rules grow out of a sense of our own weakness. Hence we despise cheats, and tricks, and stratagems. We may protect ourselves and secure ourselves from disease and starvation, but can do little more. Relentless robbers as we are, let us not be too unmerciful to those of our kind.

Our weakness makes us good. The man who aids us most we prize the highest. We oppose criminals just as they oppose us. We simply counteract their movements.

PRAYER.

In prayer as an act of duty, as an expression of our innermost feelings, I sincerely believe, but not in petitions that imply that God is to be moved by them, not in those prayers which assume that God will do this or that for us at our own bidding.

True prayer comes not from the head but from the heart. Every man prays who has a wish, a fear or an enjoyment. If he does not pray aloud, he prays in his own heart. Every man prays who has thanks to utter or a wish to express. Prayer is not simply Christian like, it is manly. The true Christian loves to pray and feels the better for praying. It is a consolation to feel that we have some one on whom we can rely, some one who deserves our reverence, our gratitude, our worship. Prayer exalts and ennobles the man; prayer raises him from the low and common things of earth to the consideration of things spiritual and eternal; prayer teaches us to know ourself; prayer makes us humble; prayer strengthens and revives the soul. Prayer does not affect God. It is from the reflex action upon ourselves that prayer derives its value.

But I cannot too severely condemn as senseless and obsolete all praying to God for special interpositions. Why, if God were to be moved by half the insane demands of those who pray, the world would go to wreck quite speedily. God's plans are all interwoven and interlinked for the whole universe. To change one would be to destroy the whole. Besides, God is feelingless, inflexible, *but he is just*. I am happy to know that praying for special providences is fast disappearing. Scarcely any one now hopes to change God's purposes. No one thinks they can be changed by copious tears, much bending of knees and long talkings at prayer time.

REPENTANCE AND SALVATION.

In the prevailing Christian dogmas on repentance and salvation, there seems to be a vast deal of fiction. I do not think that any formal act of repentance is going to save a man. I do not believe in forms. Christ died to save sinners, but not in any mysterious or unnatural way. He has given them his instructions; he has left them his example. Those who choose to profit by them may find in them ample means of salvation. Those who do not, must go the way of all transgressors and meet the fate of those who see the straight and narrow path but refuse to enter it.

I am free to confess here that I do not adopt the prevailing Christian dogma on salvation. I do not make it a matter of theory and fancy, but treat it as a real and substantial thing, capable of being put into every day practice. I treat salvation for the world to come as purely a matter of speculation, but salvation for this world as something that we all need and can all use. He who teaches us how to live happily, honorably and successfully, and who finally prepares us to die nobly, is the one who is entitled to all our confidence and all our adoration. As such I worship Christ, our Savior.

I do not think that any one is going to get to heaven, or even pass creditably through this world, on any such basis as Christians set forth as the sole means of final salvation. People are asked to repent, be baptized, and thus be saved in a mysterious and formal way. I have no confidence in any repentance but that which makes of us *better men and better women*. I do not believe in death-bed repentance. There is no possible way by which we may escape the penalty of past transgressions. Christ, I apprehend, never intended to save men from the sufferings due for wrongs already committed. His was no *ex post facto* salvation. Christ died not that sinners *must* be saved, but that they *might* be saved if they would.

But what a monstrous doctrine Christians teach in connection with this salvation dogma! A man's habits and character, his ways and works make no apparent difference in their estimation. By their theory men are to be saved not by what they do so much as by what they *believe*. They must be born again (no one knows exactly how), they must be regenerated, they must read the Bible, they must attend church and the prayer-meeting regularly, but above all things (and here lies the whole matter), they must *believe*. They must believe in the church, in the Bible, in the liturgy, in God, in Christ, in the devil, in angels, and all this. And they must believe not in accordance with the teachings of their own hearts, but believe precisely in accordance with the tenets of the sect to which they happen to belong. Without fulfilling these formal conditions, no one can enter the kingdom of heaven, not at least in a Christian way. But who supposes God is such a feelingless and exacting tyrant as this? Who supposes he wants us to go down on our knees to him and say amen, amen? Who supposes that God individually cares one particle whether we go to church on Sunday, or to some place of amusement? *It is with ourselves that we are dealing, not with God*. It is for us to consider what we ourselves need, not what God needs. I really believe we ought to humble ourselves before God; we ought to thank him for his goodness; we ought to praise him for his holiness; we ought to attend church; we ought to attend prayer-meeting,—but not because God wants it, not because we are afraid of God; no, not from any such selfish and base motives as these, but because we feel that we *ought to do so*. It is a matter that lies between us and ourselves, between us and man, and in no sense between us and God. For our own good, our advancement, our enjoyment, we ought to be meek, we ought to be humble, we ought to be devout and reverential. I believe in salvation, not through the church, but through Christ, through his teachings, his example and death.

There are some strange things about the Christian theory of repentance. If Christians are correct in their views, the worse a man is, the more he has to repent for, and the better chance he has to be saved. Give a man a fair chance, and no matter what crimes he may have committed, nor how wicked his whole life may have been, if he has a few spare moments in which to be regenerated and receive the blessings of the priest, he stands a better chance of getting to heaven than any man, however pure, who happens to neglect those conditions. This is Christianity as it has come down to us for hundreds of years. I am so constituted that I cannot believe a word of such repentance and salvation as this. I am glad to know that such is not the voice of intelligent man to-day, such is not the "Light of the Nineteenth Century."





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