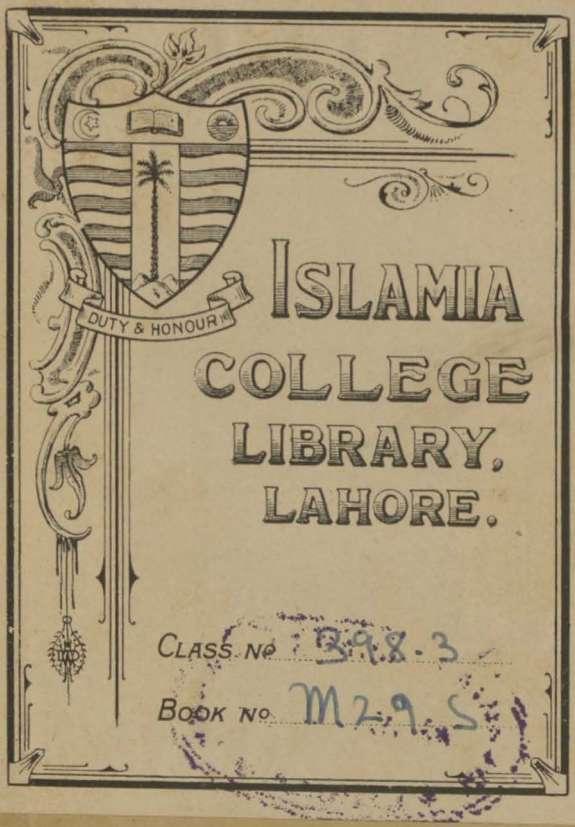
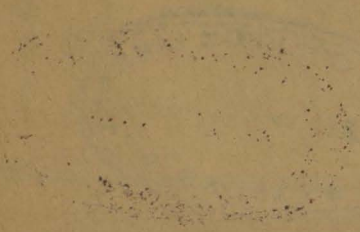
STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY SUPERSTITION

W. H. MALLOCK





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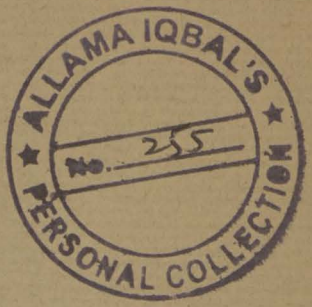

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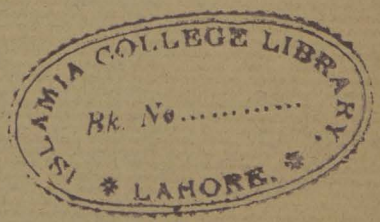

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STUDIES

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CONTEMPORARY SUPERSTITION

BY

W. H. MALLOCK

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1895

PREFACE

THE Essays comprised in this Volume originally appeared at intervals in the 'Fortnightly Review,' and bear, as might be expected, traces of the occasions by which they were suggested or provoked. But though not written in the form of a connected series, they all virtually deal with the same subject, and this subject is indicated by the collective title now given to them. By way of introduction I will explain how.

Alike in the sphere of religion, politics, and economics, the thoughts of men are undergoing rapid changes, and a large portion of the beliefs and opinions which the last generation, as a whole, accepted without question, are now either regarded with a sceptical and often contemptuous criticism, or are else altogether discarded as so many exploded superstitions. This destructive movement, however, does

not proceed alone, but is accompanied by another. The old beliefs which are being displaced were beliefs intimately connected with the practical needs of man, and as each in its turn is set aside and discredited, it is found imperatively necessary to put something else in its place, just as the inhabitants of a street which is in process of demolition find it necessary either to rebuild their houses as fast as they pull them down, or else to secure some other habitation somewhere. The present Essays are criticisms not of the destructive process, but of the attempts that are being made at reconstruction, and they one and all of them follow the same method, which is this: they aim at applying to the new beliefs the same tests and principles which have been used to condemn the old.

Now the old beliefs—religious, political, and economic—however different their respective subject-matter may seem, are all attacked and condemned on one common ground—they are condemned as being disproved by Science. And by Science are meant such truths, whether general or particular—general, like the law of gravitation, or particular, like the history of some Biblical book or books—as are held to be established by systematic external evidence. How Science in this way has affected Religion in general,

and Christianity in particular, by its natural history of the Bible, and its natural history of the world, and of the human soul and life, is obvious and familiar to us all. Scarcely less obvious is its operation in the sphere of economics and politics. That gradual destruction of social ideas and institutions which has been going on for the last hundred years, and which those who sympathise with the process delight in speaking of as *the Revolution*—that gradual destruction claims to explain and justify itself on the ground that the ideas and institutions destroyed do not correspond with the facts of human nature and human conduct, as ascertained and recorded by the rigid methods of Science.

Such, then, being the grounds on which Science destroys our old beliefs, it is easy to see the grounds on which it attempts to construct its substitutes for them, and the kind of claim which it necessarily makes for these last. It claims that the new beliefs will, whatever their value, at all events stand the tests that have proved fatal to the old. It claims that its substitute for supernatural religion will consist only of propositions rigidly demonstrable to the reason, precise in their terms, and resting on objective evidence. It claims that its doctrines as to government, equality,

rights, and the possibilities of social development, unlike the old superstitions as to the virtues of kings and aristocracies, are founded on the solid rock of demonstrable and verifiable facts.

Throughout the present volume, except in the last two Essays, no attempt is made to discredit or even to criticise the destructive operations of Science. For argument's sake their utmost results are accepted, and all that is done is this. The same method and principles by which men are destroying their old beliefs are applied to the new beliefs by which it is attempted to replace them; and the new are shown in their main features to be even less scientific than the old—to be vaguer, more inaccurate, more completely at war with all objective evidence, and, because their relationship to such evidence is no doubt nearer and more direct, to be not only unscientific but ridiculous. They are shown to be not superstitions only, but abject superstitions—the hopeless and helpless work of men who, as intellectual architects, parody every fault which they condemn as intellectual critics.

The first three Essays deal with the attempt to manufacture a substitute for supernatural religion out of the cultus of Humanity. Then follows one dealing with the attempt—even more ludicrous—to construct

a new Christianity which shall differ fundamentally from the old only in the fact that it denies, instead of affirming, the miraculous character of Christ. To this Essay succeeds one on 'Marriage and Free Thought,' in which I have endeavoured to show how singularly imperfect is the measure of free thought to which the majority of our religious freethinkers have really attained, and how tenaciously they cling, so soon as freedom threatens their prejudices, to beliefs which, if their principles are really worth anything, are of all superstitions the vainest and the least tenable. In the fifth Essay, 'A Catholic on Natural Religion,' attention is directed to the converse side of the question. I have there sought to show how certain defenders of supernatural religion are really guilty of precisely the same error as its opponents, and that, in attempting to defend Theism by the methods of the Positive thinkers, they reduce Catholicism to a superstition as unsubstantial as the Religion of Humanity.

This is the last of the Essays which is concerned directly with Religion. The next—'Science and the Revolution'—deals with the movement now taking place in the sphere of Social politics, and shows how this is vitiated by the same intellectual errors which are discoverable in the religious movement. This

Essay constitutes a kind of informal preface to the remaining two, which deal with the most definite form in which social superstition has embodied itself—that is to say, with Socialism.

There is one thing more which I desire to observe in conclusion. Throughout this volume I have written nothing which expresses a disbelief, on my own part, in the truth of supernatural Christianity, or of Catholicism, its most logical form. I have only said that its truth, if it be true, like the reality of virtue, if it be real, and the freedom of the will, if it be free, has no proof in positive Science, and that it is impossible to believe in it if such Science is to be our sole guide. Everything depends on our acceptance or rejection of this last hypothesis.

NOTE

THE main subject of the first five of these Essays has, whilst this volume was in the press, been dealt with independently by two well-known English writers. I refer to Mr. Balfour and Mr. B. Kidd, who has, from his own point of view, criticised Mr. Balfour's work. Except through reviews and extracts, I have not yet had access either to Mr. Balfour's work or to Mr. Kidd's criticism, but I believe I am right in saying that, though they approach the question from different sides, they agree with what is asserted in the following Essays—namely, that if religious belief has any basis at all, it has its basis in some organ of certainty unknown to positive science, and involved in the process which logicians recognise as reasoning.

I may further observe, however, that I entirely dissent from Mr. Kidd's contention that Religion is the sole, or even the principal, agent in reconciling the masses to the conditions which are essential to progress. Religion may make submission to these conditions less onerous; but the masses submit to them because they cannot help themselves, or only in so far as they cannot

help themselves. The last two Essays in this volume deal with the primary causes on which this submission depends; and although they were published before Mr. Kidd had made his views public, they constitute a partial criticism of his theory in this particular.

CANNES: *March* 1895.

CONTENTS

THE SCIENTIFIC BASES OF OPTIMISM

In many ways public attention in England has lately been called afresh to the great and universal question of what our modern science, if fatal to miraculous Christianity, will itself put, or allow to be put, in place of it. Only a few months since, in the pages of a well-known Review,[1] a new manifesto was issued by Mr. Frederic Harrison, which purported to describe the exact religious position taken up by the infant Church of Humanity. Mr. John Morley has republished in ten volumes what is, under one of its aspects, neither more nor less than an anti-Christian creed, embedded in a series of criticisms. Other eminent writers equally anti-Christian have been again exhibiting their opinions to the gaze of the pitiable millions, who still sit hugging the broken fetters of theology. Indeed, we may say that during the past two years each of the principal sects into which the Protestantism of science has split itself has appealed to us afresh, through the mouth of some qualified minister; whilst the hold which such questions have on the public mind, whenever they are put in a way

[1] *Apologia pro Fide Nostra*, by Frederic Harrison, *Fortnightly Review*, November 1888.

which the public can comprehend, has been curiously illustrated by the eagerness of even frivolous people in devouring a recent novel,[1] which on ordinary grounds would be unreadable, and whose sole interest consisted in its treatment of Christianity.

Stimulated by the example of our scientific instructors, I propose to follow, as faithfully as I am able, in their footsteps. There are certain canons of criticism, and there is a certain sceptical temper, which they have applied to Christianity, and which, they say, has destroyed it. The same canons and temper I now propose to apply to the principal doctrine which they offer to the world as a substitute.

Of course it will be said that thinkers who call themselves scientific offer us doctrines of widely different kinds. No doubt this is true. Amongst men of science as doctrinaires, there are as many sects as there are amongst theological Protestants; nor was it without meaning, as I shall show by-and-by, that I spoke of their creeds collectively, under the name of Scientific Protestantism. But though, like theological Protestants, they differ amongst themselves, and even quarrel amongst themselves, like theological Protestants also, they have fundamental points of agreement; and it is solely with these last that I now propose to concern myself. Let us take first a hasty glance at their differences, and it will be presently plain enough what the points of agreement are.

Putting aside, then, all minor questions, Scientific Protestantism may be said, with substantial accuracy, to be composed at the present moment of five principal

[1] *Robert Elsmere*, a novel, by Mrs. Humphry Ward.

sects, which differ from one another mainly in the following ways. One of them, whilst denying, as they all do, both miracles and a future life, believes in a personal God, not unlike the Father of the Gospels. Indeed, it adopts most of what the Gospels say of Him. It accepts their statements, it only denies their authority. There is a second sect which retains a God also, but a God, as it fancies, of a much sublimer kind. He is far above any relationship so definite as that of a father; indeed, we gather that he would think even personality vulgar. If we ask what he is, we receive a double answer. He is a metaphysical necessity; he is also an object of sentiment; and he is apprehended alternately in a vague sigh and a syllogism. He is, in fact, a God of the very kind that Faust described so finely when engaged in seducing Margaret. Neither of these two sects is greatly admired by a third, which regards the God of the first as a mutilated relic of Christianity, and the God of the second as an idle, maundering fancy. It has, however, an object of adoration of its own, which it declares, like St. Paul, as the reality ignorantly worshipped by the others. Its declaration, however, unlike St. Paul's, is necessarily of extreme brevity, for this Unknown God is nothing else than the Unknowable. It is the philosopher's *substance* of the universe underlying phenomena; and it raises our lives somehow by making us feel our ignorance of it. These three sects we may call Unitarians, Deists, and Pantheists. There is a fourth, which considers all three ridiculous; but the third, with its Unknowable, the most ridiculous of all. This fourth sect has also its God, which is best described by saying that

it differs from the Unknowable in being known in one particular way. It is revealed in a general tendency, discoverable in human affairs, which, taking one thousand years with another, is alleged on the whole to make for righteousness or for progress. The individual man is not made in God's image; but the fortunes or the misfortunes of a sufficient number of men are something still better—they are the manifestations of God himself. Lastly, we have a fifth sect, nearest akin to the fourth, but differing from it and from all the others in one important particular. It rids itself of any idea of God altogether, as a complete superfluity. An object of adoration, like all the others, it has; and, like the fourth, it finds this object in the tendencies of human history. But why, it asks, should we call them the manifestations of God? Why wander off to anything so completely beside the point? They are not the manifestations of God. It is obvious what they are; they are the manifestations of Humanity. We have here, under our noses, in a visible and tangible form, the true object of all these sublime emotions, those hours of comforting contemplation, which men have been offering in vain to the acceptance of all the infinities in rotation. The object which we have scoured the universe and ransacked our fancies to find, has all the while been actually in contact with ourselves, and we ourselves have been actually integral parts of it.

Here, then, classified with sufficient accuracy, are the principal forms of religion, which those who reject Christianity are now offering the world, in the name of science, as substitutes. Now the great fact which I wish to point out is this: however much the four first

differ from one another and from the last, yet the main tenets of the last form an integral part of all. The worshippers of Humanity base their worship of it on certain beliefs as to evolution and progress, which give to human events some collective and coherent meaning. Every one of the other sects, let it worship what it will, bases its worship on precisely the same foundation. The Scientific Theists, denying both a future life and a revelation, and yet maintaining that God has moral relations with man, and that a man's personal pleasure is the least thing a man lives for, can explain such a doctrine only by affirming a social progress which enlarges the purposes of the individual and exhibits the purpose of God. The religion of the Unknowable is obviously but the religion of Humanity, with the Unknowable placed under it, like the body of a violoncello, in the hope of producing a deeper moral vibration; and of every form of scientific theism we may say the same with equal even if not with such obvious truth. I do not suppose that anybody will dispute this, otherwise I should dwell on it longer, so as to place it beyond a doubt. I will take it then for admitted that in all scientific religions, in all our modern religions that deny a future life and a revelation, the religion of Humanity is an essential, is indeed the main ingredient. Let us now consider with a little more exactness what, as a series of propositions, this religion of Humanity is.

Every religious doctrine has some idea at the bottom of it far simpler than the propositions in which alone it can be stated logically. Let us see what is the idea at the bottom of the religious doctrine of Humanity. It appeals to us most forcibly perhaps under its negative

aspect. Under that aspect we may seize it completely, thus. Let us take Shakespeare's lines—

> Life is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

Let us realise fully all that these lines mean. The idea in question is a protest against that meaning.

In this form, however, there is nothing scientific about it. It is merely the protest of an individual based on his own emotions, and any other individual may with equal force contradict it. To make it scientific it must be transferred to a different basis—from the subjective experience of the individual to the objective history of the race. The value to each man of his own personal lot depends entirely on what each man thinks it is. No one else can observe it; therefore no one else can dispute about it. But the lot of the race at large is open to the observation of all. It is obvious to all that this lot is always changing, and the nature of these changes, whether they have any meaning in them or none, is not a matter of opinion, but of facts and inductions from facts. The religious doctrine of Humanity asserts that they have a meaning. It asserts that they follow a certain rational order, and that, whether or no they are related to the purposes of any God, they have a constant and a definite relation to ourselves. It asserts that, taken as a whole, they have been, are, and will be, always working together—though it may be very slowly—to improve the kind of happiness possible for the human being, and to increase the numbers by whom such happiness will be enjoyed.

Here, put in its logical and categorical form, is the primary doctrine common to all our scientific religions. The instant, however, it is thus expressed, another proposition, through a process of logical chemistry, adheres to it and becomes part of its structure. This proposition relates not to the tendencies of the race, but to the constitution of the average individual character. It asserts, and very truly, that a natural element in that character is sympathy; but it asserts more than this. It asserts that sympathy, even as it exists now, is a feeling far stronger and wider than has usually been supposed; that it is capable, even now, when once the idea of progress has been apprehended, of making the fortunes of the race a part of the fortunes of the individual, and inspiring the individual to work for the progress in which he shares; and it asserts that, strong as sympathy is now, it will acquire, as times goes on, a strength incalculably greater.

These two propositions united may be summed up thus. The Human Race as a whole is a progressive and improving organism; and the consciousness on the part of the individual that such is the case, will be the principal cause of its continued progress in the future, and will make the individual a devoted and happy partaker of it.

Here is the religion of Humanity reduced to its simplest elements. I have called it the religion of Humanity because the name is now familiar, and may help to show the reader what it is I am talking about. But having used it thus far, I shall now beg leave to change it, and instead of the religion of Humanity I shall speak of the creed of Optimism. For my present

purpose this name is a great deal clearer. A religion is a creed touched with emotion; a creed is nothing but a dry series of propositions. My present purpose is simply to examine two dry propositions, and I will put all questions of emotion as far as possible into the background. I am aware that the word Optimism is sometimes used with a meaning which many devotees of the religion of Humanity would repudiate. George Eliot, for instance, declared she was not an Optimist. Things were not for the best, she said; but they were always tending to get better. She accordingly said that she would sooner describe herself as a Meliorist. Nobody, again, lays greater or more solemn weight on the doctrine of progress than does Mr. John Morley; and yet nobody would more bitterly ridicule the doctrines of Dr. Pangloss. But in spite of the sober and even sombre view which such thinkers take of the human lot, they still believe that it holds some distinct and august meaning, that the tides of affairs, however troubled, do not eddy aimlessly, and do not flow towards the darkness, but keep due on towards the light, however distant. They believe, in short, that the human lot has something in it which makes it, in the eyes of all who can see clearly, a thing to be acquiesced in not merely with resignation, but devoutness. The soberest adherents of the religion of Humanity admit as much as this; and no violence is done to the meaning, or even to the associations of the word, if all who admit thus much, from the most to the least sanguine, are classed together under the common name of Optimists.

And now having seen what Optimism is, let us, before going farther, make ourselves quite clear as to

what results on life its exponents claim for it. They do not claim for it, as has been sometimes claimed for Christianity, that it is the foundation of the moral code. Our modern Optimists, without a single exception, hold the foundations of the moral code to be social. According to their theory, all its cardinal precepts have been the results not of belief, but of experience, and simply represent the conditions essential to social union. Belief, in certain important ways, may modify them; but it neither created them nor can substantially change them. Christianity, for instance, has put chastity on a pedestal, but it was not Christianity that made adultery a crime, nor would the completest atheism enable us to construct a society which could live and thrive without some sexual discipline. This is the view taken by modern science, and we may all accept it, as far as it goes, for true. Since, then, the propositions which compose the creed of Optimism are not propositions from which the moral code is deduced, what moral result is supposed to spring from an assent to them? The result is supposed to be this—not any new assent to the reasonableness of that code, but a new heart in obeying it. In other words, the end of moral conduct being the welfare of society, our assent to the creed of Optimism makes that welfare incalculably nearer and dearer to us than it would be otherwise, and converts a mere avoidance of such overt acts as would injure it into a willing, a constant, an eager effort to promote it. This is what Optimism, when assented to, and acting on the emotions, claims to do for conduct; and indeed it is no slight thing. It is a thing that makes all the difference between the life of a race of brutes and the

life of a race with something which we have hitherto called divine in it. For those who deny any other life but the present, what Optimism announces is practically the re-creation of the soul, and our redemption from the death of an existence merely selfish and animal. Optimism announces this, and of all scientific creeds it alone pretends to do so; and if its propositions are true, there are plausible grounds for arguing that a genuine religion of the kind described will result from it.

And now we come to the question which I propose to ask—*Are* its propositions true? Or are we certain that they are true? And if we are certain, on what kinds of evidence do we base our certainty? We have already got them into condition to be submitted to this inquiry. We have stripped them, so to speak, for the operation. There they stand, two naked propositions, whose sole claim to our acceptance is that they are scientific truths, that they are genuine inductions from carefully observed facts, that they have been reached legitimately by the daylight of reason, that prejudice and emotion have had nothing to do with the matter; that they stand, in short, on precisely the same footing as any accepted generalisation of physics or physiology. One of them, as we have seen, is a proposition relating to the changes of human history; the other is a proposition relating to the sympathetic capacity of the individual.

I propose to show that the first is not as yet a legitimate generalisation at all; that the facts of the case as at present known, not only are insufficient, but point in two opposite ways; that the certainty with

which the proposition is held by our scientific instructors is demonstrably due to some source quite other than scientific evidence; and finally, that even if, in any sense, the proposition should be found true, the truth would be found inadequate to the expectations based on it.

This is what I propose to show with regard to the proposition asserting progress. With regard to the proposition that deals with human sympathy, I propose to show that it is less scientific still; that whilst here and there an isolated fact, imperfectly apprehended, may suggest it, the great mass of facts absolutely and hopelessly contradict it; and furthermore, that even granting its truth, its truth would cut both ways, and annihilate the conclusions to which it seems to give support.

This last proposition we will consider first. Let us repeat it in set terms. It asserts that the sympathetic feelings of the average man are sufficiently strong and comprehensive to make the alleged progress of the human race a source of appreciable and constant satisfaction to himself. And the satisfaction in question is no mere pensive sentiment, no occasional sunbeam gilding an hour of idleness; but it is a feeling so robust and strong that it can not only hold its own amongst our ordinary joys and sorrows, but actually impart its own colour to both. It will also, as progress continues, increase in strength and in importance.

Now in considering if this is true, let us grant all that can be granted; let us grant, for argument's sake, that progress is an acknowledged reality—that human history, if regarded in a way sufficiently comprehensive,

shows us, written across it in gigantic letters, some record of general and still continuing improvement. Are our characters such that the knowledge of this fact will really cause us any flow of spirits sufficiently vivid to take rank amongst our personal joys, and to buoy us up in personal despondency and sorrow? Or, again, are they such that this general improvement of the race will be an object nearer our hearts than our own private prosperity, and will really incite us to sacrifice our strength and our pleasures to its promotion? To these questions there are two answers, which I shall give separately.

The first answer is, that from one point of view these questions are simply questions of degree. For instance, supposing it were suddenly made known to all of us, that some extraordinary amelioration in the human lot would, owing to certain causes, accomplish itself during the next ten days, the whole race would probably experience a sense of overmastering joy, through which ordinary sorrows and annoyances would hardly make themselves felt. Or, again, should it be known that this glorious piece of progress were contingent on every one making some specified effort, we may safely say that for the time very few men would be idle. And again, should it be known that by indulgence in personal passion the results of this rapid progress would be grievously and visibly diminished, for ten days, doubtless, self-restraint would be general. But in proportion as we suppose the rate of the progress to be slower, and the importance to the result of each separate act to be less, our satisfaction in the one and our anxiety about the other would dwindle, till the

former would be perceptible only when all other emotions were quiescent; and the latter, as affecting action, would cease to be perceptible at all.

To convince ourselves that such is the law which this feeling would follow, we have only to look at the commonest experiences of life: for the sympathy with general progress of which we are alleged to be capable, is not supposed to have anything miraculous about it, but to be simply a particular application of a faculty in daily exercise. Now an ordinary man is delighted if some great good fortune happens to some other who is very near and dear to him—if his son or his daughter, or his brother, for instance, marries well and happily; but if the same good fortune happens to some unknown connection, his delight is at best of a very lukewarm kind; whilst if he hears of a happy marriage in Germany, it is nonsense to pretend that he is really delighted at all. Again, if he reads in the 'Times' of an accident to a train in America, he says it is shocking, and goes on with his breakfast; but if a telegram comes to inform him that his son was amongst the passengers, he at once is in torture till he learns whether his son is safe. So, too, with regard to conduct, the consequences to be expected from any given act will influence his choice or his avoidance of it in proportion to their nearness or their remoteness, to their certainty or their uncertainty, to the clearness with which he is able to grasp them, and also to their objective magnitude relative to the amount of effort required from himself in doing the act or in abstaining from it. This is evident in cases where the consequences are consequences to the doer. A reward to be given in ten years' time stimu-

lates no one as much as a reward to be given to-morrow; nor does a fit of the gout hovering dimly in the future keep the hand from the bottle like a twinge already threatening. Again, if the ill-consequences of an act otherwise pleasant have in them the smallest uncertainty, a numerous class is always ready to risk them; and as the uncertainty becomes greater, this class increases. All intemperance, all gambling, all extravagance, all sports such as cricket and hunting, and the very possibility of a soldier's life as a profession, depend on this fact. Few men would enlist if they knew that they would be shot in a twelvemonth; few men would go hunting if they knew they would come home on a stretcher. And what is true of men's acts regarded as affecting themselves, is equally true of them regarded as affecting others. Sympathy follows the same laws as selfishness. Supposing a young man knew that if he did a certain action his mother would instantly hear of it and die of grief in consequence, he would be a young man of very exceptional badness if this knowledge were not a violent check on him. But suppose the act were only one of a series, making his general conduct only a little worse, and suppose that the chance of his mother's hearing of it were slight, and that it would, if she did hear of it, cost her only one extra sigh, the check so strong in the first case would in this be extremely feeble. Here, again, is a point more important still. In the case of any act, regarded as affecting others, which involves effort or sacrifice, the motive to perform it depends for its strength or weakness on the proportion between the amount of the sacrifice and the amount of good to be achieved by it. A man may be willing to

die to save his wife's honour, but he will hardly be willing to do so to save her new ball-dress, even though she herself thinks the latter of most value. A man would deny himself one truffle to keep a hundred men from starving, but he would not himself starve to give a hundred men one truffle. The effort is immense on one side, the result infinitesimal on the other, and sympathy does nothing to alter the unequal balance. Lastly, results to others, as apprehended by sympathy, even when not small themselves, are made small by distance. No man thinks so much of what will happen to his great-grandchildren as he does of what will happen to his children; nor would it be easy to raise money for building a hospital which would not be finished for fifteen hundred years. Sympathy, then, with other people, or with any cause or any object affecting them, influences our actions in proportion as the people are near to us, or as the objects are large, distinct, or important; whence it follows that to produce a given strength of motive, the more distant an object is, the larger and more distinct it must be.

And now let us turn again to the progress of the human race; and supposing it to be a fact, and accepting it as described by its prophets, let us consider how far our sympathies are really likely to be affected by it. Is it quick enough? Is it distinct enough? Is there a reasonable proportion between the efforts demanded from us on its behalf, and the results to be anticipated from these efforts? And how far, in each individual case, are the results certain or doubtful?

Now one of the first things which our scientific Optimists impress on us is, that this progress is ex-

tremely slow. Before it has brought the general lot to a condition which in itself is even approximately satisfactory, 'immeasurable geologic periods of time,' Mr. Morley tells us, will have to intervene; and Mr. Frederic Harrison himself has warned us not to be in a hurry. He is far more sanguine, indeed, than Mr. Morley; but even he thinks that we must wait for three thousand years before the results of progress begin to be worth talking about. Now, 'to a practical man,' says Mr. Harrison, 'three thousand years is an eternity.' I quite agree with him; to a practical man it is; and thus, whether his calculations are accepted, or Mr. Morley's, our own efforts on behalf of the general welfare are divided by a practical eternity from their first appreciable fruits. Now since Mr. Harrison refers us to practical men, let us try to imagine, guided by our common experience, how the knowledge that this kind of progress was a reality would be likely to affect the practical men we know. Let us first think how it would affect their feelings; and then how, through their feelings, it would affect their actions. The two questions are separate, and involve different sets of considerations.

To begin, then, with the question of mere feeling—if we wish to form some conjecture as to how men are likely to feel about the things of the remote future, we cannot do better than resort to a test which is suggested to us by the Optimists themselves, and consider how men feel about the things of the remote past. Of course, as we may see in the case of a man's own life, the feelings excited by the past differ in kind from those excited by the future; but the intensity of the one, we

may say with confidence, is a fair measure of the intensity of the other. If a man who has caused himself suffering by his own acts, forgets that suffering the first moment it is over, he is not likely to trouble himself about the possibility of its repetition. And the same thing will hold good as to our feeling for past and future generations. Events that are going to happen three thousand years hence will hardly be more to us than events which happened three thousand years ago. Now what man in any practical sense cares anything about what happened three thousand years ago? To re-people the cities and temples of the past—Memphis, and Thebes, and Babylon—to see at the call of the imagination the earth give up her dead, and buried generations come and go before us, is no doubt an occupation that many of us find fascinating. But the pleasure of watching these *ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα* has nothing akin to any personal interest in them. Neither, again, has the interest taken in them by the historian. Were we to learn to-day for the first time that all the plagues of Egypt had been repeated ten times over, or that a million slaves had been tortured by Pharaoh Necho, nobody's spirits would be in the least damped by the intelligence. The strongest feelings producible by the longest contemplation of the greatest triumphs and the greatest misfortunes of antiquity are mere phantoms, mere wraiths, mere reflections of the reflections of shadows, when compared with the annoyance producible by a smoky chimney. Supposing we were to discover that three thousand years ago there was a perfectly happy and a perfectly civilised society, the conditions of which were still perfectly plain to us, the

discovery no doubt would be intensely interesting if it afforded us any model that we could ourselves imitate. But our interest would be centred in the thought not that other people had been happy, but that we, or that our children, were going to be. The two feelings are totally different. Supposing we were to discover on some Egyptian papyrus a receipt for making a certain delicious tart, the pleasure we might take in eating the tart ourselves would have nothing to do with any gratification at the pleasure it gave Sesostris. The conclusion, then, that we may draw from our obvious apathy as to the happiness of our remote ancestors is that we are really equally apathetic as to the happiness of our remote descendants. As the past ceases to be remote—as it becomes more and more recent, some faint pulsations of sympathy begin to stir in us; when we get to the lives of our grandfathers the feeling may be quite recognisable; when we get to the lives of our fathers, it may be strong. This is true; and the same thing holds good as to the future. We may feel strongly about the lives of our children, more weakly about the lives of our grandchildren, and then presently we cease to have any feeling at all. Were we promised that progress in the future would be quicker than progress in the past, the case would change in proportion to this promised quickness; but this is precisely what we are not promised.

I said that this appeal to the past was suggested by the Optimists themselves. The feelings indeed which they dwell upon as producible are somewhat different from those on which I have just commented. But they are less to the point as indicating the possibility of any

sympathy with the future, and are seen when analysed to be even more fantastic. What the Optimist tells us that we ought to feel, can feel, and if we do but think over things, must feel, is not so much gladness or sorrow at our ancestors having been happy or unhappy, as gratitude towards them, for the happiness that their efforts have secured for us. Now the efforts of our ancestors have secured us a great number of things. If they have secured us our happiness, they have secured us also our afflictions. If we owe to them our present medical skill, we also owe to them consumption, and gout, and scrofula. Our gratitude, therefore, is to be of a somewhat eclectic character. Its object is not the whole of our ancestors, but only that proportion of them whose lives have been beneficial to us. But we can never know accurately what that proportion is. It is an undistinguished part of a dimly apprehended whole. How are we to be grateful to a shadowy abstraction like this? Mr. Harrison might tell us, and he actually does tell us, that we know our ancestral benefactors through certain illustrious specimens of them—'poets, artists, thinkers, teachers, rulers, discoverers;' indeed, he says that the worshipping gratitude in question 'is felt in its most definite mode when we enter into communion' with such great men as these. This, no doubt, makes the idea clearer; but it only does so to make its absurdity clearer also. Some great men have done good to posterity—good which we feel now; but many have done evil; and there are wide differences of opinion as to which of them has done what. Is Frederick the Great, for instance, to be the object of worshipping gratitude or of aversion? Are we to

enter into communion with him, or avoid him? Or supposing all such doubts as these to be settled, and the calendar of the saints of progress to be edited to the satisfaction of us all, there are difficulties still greater behind. Many men whose actions have been undoubtedly beneficial, have been personally of exceedingly doubtful character; the good they have done to posterity has been in many cases unforeseen and unintended by themselves; or even if they have foreseen it, love of posterity has not been their motive in doing it. Who, for instance, feels any worshipping gratitude to Lord Bacon? We may admire his genius, or may recognise his services; but benefit to us was not his object in producing them, and therefore our gratitude is not their recompense. It is as irrational to be grateful for an unintended benefit, as it is to be angry at an unintended injury. Of course we have some feeling about such great men. It is shown in its strongest form in the people we call hero-worshippers. But the feeling of the hero-worshipper is the very reverse of the vicarious feeling for humanity postulated by our Optimists. The hero-worshipper admires his heroes because they differ from the rest of mankind, not because they resemble and represent them. Even could we imagine that one or two great men actually foresaw our existence, and toiled for us with a prophetic love, we cannot imagine this of the great masses of our predecessors. So far as they are concerned, we are the accidental inheritors of goods which they laid up for themselves; and if there is any reason to praise them for what they have done well, there is equal reason to grumble at them for not having done it better.

If these reflections do not appear conclusive, let us turn from our ancestral benefactors to our remote contemporary benefactors. Our attitude towards them will enlighten us somewhat further. To some of the remotest of our contemporaries we owe some of our homeliest comforts. To take one instance out of many, we owe tea to the Chinese. Now does any English tea-drinker feel any worshipping gratitude towards the Chinese? We care for them as little as they care for us; and if we learnt to-morrow that the whole Chinese race was a myth, it is doubtful if one of us would eat a worse dinner for the news. If we feel so little about remote benefactors who are living, we shall hardly feel more about remote benefactors who are dead; and we shall feel less about remote recipients of benefits, who will not be born for an eternity.

To sum up, then, what experience teaches us as the extent to which an idea like that of human progress, moving imperceptibly to a goal incalculably distant, is able to affect the feelings of the ordinary individual, we must say that there is no evidence of any sort or kind that for practical purposes it is able to affect them at all.

And now let us pass on from this consideration to another. The emotions required by the Optimist we have shown to be not possible. Let us now consider how, supposing they were possible, they would be likely to influence action. We shall see that their influence at the best would be necessarily very feeble; and that it would be enfeebled by the very conditions which we mainly counted on to strengthen it. Supposing the human race could last only another two years, even Mr. Harrison would admit that we might

well be indifferent about improving it, and feel sad rather than elated at its destiny. As it is, Mr. Harrison, though he cannot say that it is eternal, yet promises it a duration which is an eternity for all practical purposes; and he conceives that in doing this he is investing it with interest and with dignity. He thinks that, within limits, the longer the race lasts, the more worthy of our service it will seem to our enlightened reason. One of the most solemn reflections which he presses on our hearts is this, that the consequences of each one of our lives will continue *ad infinitum*.

Now, from one point of view Mr. Harrison is perfectly right. Granting that we believe in progress, and that our feelings are naturally affected by it, among the chief elements in it which cause it thus to affect them will be its practical eternity—its august magnitude. But the moment we put these feelings, as it were, into harness, and ask them to produce for us action and self-sacrifice, we shall find that the very elements which have excited the wish to act have an equal tendency to enervate the will. We shall find that, as the porter in *Macbeth* says, they are 'equivocators.' They 'provoke the desire, but take away the performance.' For the longer the period we assign to the duration of the human race and of progress, the mightier the proportion of the cause we are asked to work for, the smaller will be the result of our efforts in proportion to the great whole; less and less would each additional effort be missed. If the consequences of our lives ceased two years after our death, the power of these consequences, it is admitted, would be

slight either as a deterrent or a stimulant. Mr. Harrison thinks that they will gain force, through our knowledge that they will last *ad infinitum*. But he quite forgets the other side of the question, that the longer they last, they are a constantly diminishing quantity, ever less and less appreciable by any single human being, and that we can only think of them as infinite at the expense of thinking of them as infinitesimal.

Now, as I pointed out before, it is a rule of human conduct that there must, to produce an act, be some equality between the effort and the expected result; but in the case of any effort expended for the sake of general progress there is no equality at all. And not only is there no equality, but there is no certain connection. The best-meant efforts may do harm instead of good; and if good will be really done by them, it is impossible to realise what good. How many workmen of the present day would refuse an annuity of two hundred a year, on the chance that by doing so they might raise the rate of wages 1 per cent. in the course of three thousand years? But why talk of three thousand years? Our care, as a matter of fact, does not extend three hundred. Do we any of us deny ourselves a single scuttle of coals, so as to make our coal-fields last for one more unknown generation? It is perfectly plain we do not. The utter inefficacy of the motives supplied by devotion to progress, for its own sake, may at once be realised by comparing them with the motives supplied by devotion to it for the sake of Christianity. The least thing that the Christian does to others he does to Christ. However slight the result,

Christ judges it by the effort and the intention; a single mite may be valued by Him as much as a thousand pounds; and however far away from us may be the human beings we benefit, Christ, who is served through them, is near. But the naked doctrine of progress has no idea in it at all analogous to this idea of Christ. Compared with Christianity it is like an optical instrument with some essential lens wanting. Christianity made our infinitesimal influence infinite; scientific Optimism makes our infinite influence infinitesimal.

But perhaps it will be said that the idea of general progress is not supposed to move and stimulate us directly, but is embodied for each one of us in some homely and definite service which we can do to those about us; and that we do not do such service for the love of the race in general, but rise to the general love through doing the particular services. The answer to this is obvious. If this is all that is claimed for the idea of progress, all claim for it that it influences action is abandoned. It does not tend to make men energetic, philanthropic, and useful who are not so naturally. Such men it leaves exactly as it finds them—the selfish, selfish still, and the filthy, filthy still. It affects those only who act well independently of it; and all that it can be supposed to do for these is not to make them choose a particular line of conduct, but to give them a new excuse for being pleased with themselves at having chosen it. This brings us back to the question of mere feeling; and the feeling supposed to be produced by the idea of progress, we have already seen to be a mere fancy and illusion. As I have taken special care to

point out, nobody claims for Optimism that it supplies us with a rule of right. That is supplied by social science and experience. What is claimed for it is, that it gives us new motives for obeying this rule, and a feeling of blessedness in the thought that it is being obeyed. We have now seen that in no appreciable way has it any tendency to give us either.

All this while we have been supposing that progress is a reality, and inquiring if it will excite certain feelings. Let us now reverse our suppositions. Let us suppose the admittedly real thing to be our capacity for the feelings, and inquire what grounds there are for believing in the progress which is to excite them. Of course the question is not one which can be argued out in a page or two; but we can take stock in a general way of what the arguments are. The first feature that strikes us in human history is change. Do its changes follow any intelligible order? If so, to what extent do they follow it? And is it an order which can afford us any rational satisfaction? Now that they follow some intelligible order to some extent is perfectly undeniable. The advance of certain races from savagery to civilisation, and from a civilisation that is simple to a civilisation that is complex, is a fact staring all of us in the face; and with regard to certain stages of this advance, few people will seriously deny that it has been satisfactory. It is true that, putting aside all theological views of man, certain races of savages have in all probability been the happiest human animals that ever existed; still, if we consider the earliest condition of the races that have become civilised, we may no doubt say that up to a certain point the advance

of civilisation made life a better thing for them. But is it equally plain that after a certain point has been past, the continuance of the advance has had the same sort of result? The inhabitants of France under Henri IV. may have been a happier set of men than its inhabitants under Clovis; but were its inhabitants under Louis XVI. a happier set of men than its inhabitants under Henri IV.? Again, if civilisations rise, civilisations also fall. Is it certain that the new civilisations which in time succeed the old bring the human lot to a veritably higher level? To answer these questions, or even to realise what these questions are, we must brand into our consciousness many considerations which, though when we think of them they are truisms, we too often forget to think of. To begin, then: Progress for those who deny a God and a future life, means nothing, and can mean nothing but such changes as may make men happier; and this meaning again further unfolds itself into a reference first to the intensity of the happiness; secondly, to the numbers who partake in it. Thus, what is commonly called a superior civilisation need not, after a certain stage, indicate any real progress. It may even be a disguise of retrogression. It seems, for instance, hardly doubtful that in England the condition of the masses some eighty years ago was in some respects worse than it had been a hundred years before. The factory system, though a main element in the most rapid advances of civilisation ever known to the world, did certainly during the earlier stages of its development not add for the time to the total of happiness. The mere fact that it did not do so for the time is in itself no proof that it may not have done so since; but

it is a proof that the most startling advances in science, and the mastery over nature that has come of them, need not necessarily be things which, in their immediate results, can give any satisfaction to the well-wishers of the race at large. But we may say more than this. Not only need material civilisation indicate no progress in the lot of the race at large, but it may well be doubted if it really adds to the happiness of that part of the race who receive the fullest fruits of it. It is difficult in one sense to deny that express trains and Cunard steamships are improvements on mail coaches or wretched little sailing boats like the *Mayflower*. But are the public in trains happier than the public who went in coaches? Is there more peace or hope in the hearts of the men who go from New York to Liverpool in six days than there was in the hearts of the Pilgrim Fathers? No doubt we who have been brought up amongst modern appliances should be made miserable for the time if they were suddenly taken away from us. But to say this is a very different thing from saying that we are happier with them than we should have been if we had never had them. A man would be miserable who, being fat and fifty, had to button himself into the waistcoat which he wore when he had a waist and was nineteen. But this does not prove that a large-sized waistcoat makes his middle age a happier time than his youth. Advancing civilisation creates wants, and it supplies wants; it creates habits, and it ministers to habits; but it is not always exhilarating us with fresh surprises of pleasure. Suppose, however, we grant that up to a certain point the increase of material wants, together with the means of meeting

them, does add to happiness, it is perfectly evident that there is a point where this result ceases. A workman who dines daily off beefsteak and beer may be happier than one whose dinner is water and black bread; but a man whose dinner is ten different dishes need not be happier than the man who puts up with four. There is a certain point, therefore, not an absolute point, but a relative point, beyond which advances in material civilisation are not progress any longer—not even supposing all classes to have a proportionate share in it. Accordingly the fact that inventions multiply, that commerce extends, that distances are annihilated, that country gentlemen have big battues, that farmers keep fine hunters, that their daughters despise butter-making, and that even agricultural labourers have pink window-blinds, is not in itself any proof of general progress. Progress is a tendency not to an extreme, but to a mean.

Let us now pass to another class of facts, generally held to show that progress is a reality, namely, the great men that civilisation has produced. Let us, for instance, take a Shakespeare, or a Newton, or a Goethe, and compare them with the Britons and the Germans of the time of Tacitus. Do we not see an image of progress there? To this argument there is more than one answer. It is an argument that points to something, but does not point to so much as those who use it might suppose. No doubt a man like Newton would be an impossibility in an age of barbarism; we may give to civilisation the whole credit of producing him, and admit that he is an incalculable advance on the shrewdest of unlettered savages. But though we find that civilisations produce greater men than barbarism,

we do not find that the modern civilisations produce greater men than the ancient. Were they all to meet in the Elysian Fields, Newton would probably not find Euclid his inferior, nor would Thucydides show like a dwarf by Professor Freeman. Further, not only do the limits of exceptional greatness show no tendency to expand, but the existence, at any point, of exceptionally great men is no sure indication of any answering elevation amongst the masses, any more than the existence of exceptionally rich men is necessarily an indication that the masses are not poor. The intellectual superiority of Columbus to the American savages was, unfortunately, no sign that his followers were not in many ways inferior to them.

What, then, is the evidence that progress, in the sense of an increasing happiness for an increasing number, is really a continuous movement running through all the changes of history? It cannot be said that there are no facts which suggest such a conclusion, but they are absurdly insufficient in number, and they are balanced by others equally weighty, and of quite an opposite character. Isolated periods, isolated institutions, do indeed very strikingly exhibit the movement in question. One of the most remarkable instances of it is the development of the Church of Rome, looked at from the Catholic standpoint. Again, we constantly find periods in a nation's history during which the national happiness has demonstrably moved onwards. Few of the phenomena on which the faith in progress rests have given to that faith such a violent stimulus as the rapid movement observable in such periods. A case in point is the immense and undoubted improvement

which, during the past eighty years, has taken place in the condition of the working classes in England; and no doubt, in spite of the ruinous price paid for it, France purchased by the Revolution an improvement not dissimilar. But these movements are capable of an interpretation very different from that which our sanguine Optimists put on them. They resemble a cure from an exceptional disease rather than any strengthening of the normal health. The French Revolution has been thought by many to have been a chopping up of society and a boiling of it in Medea's caldron, from whence it should issue forth born into a new existence. In reality it resembled an ill-performed surgical operation, which may possibly have saved the nation's life, but has shattered its nerves and disfigured it till this day. Whilst as for ordinary democratic reforms—and this is plainest with regard to those which have been most really needed—their utmost effect has been to cure a temporary pain, not to add a permanent pleasure. They have been pills, they have not been elixirs.[1]

The most authenticated cases, then, which we have of any genuine progress are to all appearance mere accidents and episodes. They are not analogous to a man progressing, but to a tethered animal which has slipped getting up on its legs again. As to the larger movements which form the main features of history, such as the rise of the Roman Empire, these move-

[1] The causes of material or national advance will be recognised in time as being mainly, though not entirely, due to the personal ambitions of a gifted and vigorous minority; and the processes which are now regarded as signs of a universal progress, are constant cures, or attempts at cures, of the evils or maladjustments which are at first incident to any important change.

ments, like waves, are always observed to spend themselves; and it is impossible to prove, without some aid from theology, that the new waves which have shaped themselves out of the subsided waters are larger, higher, or more important than the last. This is true even of the parts of such movements as history principally records; but of the part, which for our modern Optimists is the most important—which is, indeed, the only important part for them, history can hardly be said to have left any general record at all. The important part of such movements is their relation to the happiness of the masses. Does anyone pretend that we have any materials for tracing through the historic ages the fluctuations in the lot of the unnamed multitudes? Here and there some riot, some servile war, or some Jacquerie, shows us that at a certain period the masses in some special district were miserable, and we can trace through other periods some legal amelioration of their lot. But taking the historic periods of the world as a whole, the history of the happiness or the misery of the majority is a book of which everything has perished except some scattered fragments. The gaps between these can be filled up only by conjecture, in many cases not even by that; and they entirely fail to suggest in any serious way that the happiness of the multitudes concerned has followed any intelligible order, and they certainly negative the supposition that there has been any continuous advance in it. Mr. Harrison says that in three thousand years progress should at least be appreciable to the naked eye. Will Mr. Harrison, or anyone else, maintain as scientifically demonstrated that the children whipped to their work

in our earlier English factories [1] were happier than the Egyptian brick-makers amongst the melons and the flesh-pots?

There is, however, another hypothesis possible, which may give the doctrine of progress a more scientific character. It may be said that though the changes of history hitherto have been seemingly vague and meaningless, they have been really preparatory for a movement which is about to begin now. Telegraphs, ocean steamers, express trains, and printing-presses have, it may be admitted, done little for the general happiness as yet; their importance may have been slight if we regard them as mere luxuries: but all this while they have been knitting the races of men together; they have been making the oneness of Humanity a visible and accomplished fact; and very soon we shall all of us start in company on a march towards the higher things that the future has in store for us. What shall we say to some idea of this sort—that progress is a certainty henceforward, though it may have been doubtful hitherto? The idea is a pleasant one for the fancy to dwell upon, and it is easy to see how it may have been suggested by facts. But facts certainly give us no assurance that it is true; they do but suggest it, as a cloud may suggest a whale. It is no doubt easier to conceive the possibility of a general onward movement in the future than it is to conceive that of it as a

[1] The unhappy lot of the child-workers, during the earlier stages of the factory-system, forms a more striking comment on the theory of general progress, the more clearly we realise what history has made so evident—that the parents were as much responsible for it as the masters.

reality in the past. Indeed, no one can demonstrate that it will not actually take place. All I wish to point out is that there is no certainty that it will; and not only no certainty, but no balance of probability. The existing civilisation, which some think so stable, and which seems, as I have said, to be uniting us into one community, contains in itself many elements of decay or of self-destruction. In spite of the way in which the Western races seem to have covered the globe with the network of their power and commerce, they are outnumbered at this day in a proportion of more than two to one by the vast nations who are utterly impervious to their influence—impervious to their ideas and indifferent to their aspirations. What scientific estimate, then, can be made of the influence on the future of the Mohammedan and Buddhist populations, to say nothing of the others equally alien to our civilisation, who alone outnumber the entire brotherhood of the West? Who can forecast—to take a single instance—the part which may in the future be played by China? And, again, who can forecast the effects of over-population? And who can fail to foresee that they may be far-reaching and terrible? How, in the face of disturbing elements like these, can the future of progress be anything more than a guess, a hope, an opinion, a poetic fancy? At all events, whatever it is, it is certainly not science.

Let us, however, suppose that it is science. Let us suppose that we have full and sufficient evidence to convince us of the reality and continuance of a movement, slow indeed as its exponents admit it to be, but evidently in the direction of some happy consummation

in the future. Now what, let us ask, will this consummation be? It is put before us by the creed of Optimism as the ultimate justification of all our hope and enthusiasm, and, as Mr. Morley says, of our 'provisional acquiescence' in the existing sorrows of the world. Does anyone, then, profess to be able to describe it exactly to us? To ask this is no idle question. Its importance can be proved by reference to Mr. Harrison himself. He says that if a consummation in heaven is to have the least real influence over us, it is 'not enough to talk of it in general terms.' 'The all-important point,' he proceeds, 'is what kind of heaven? Is it a heaven of seraphic beatitude and unending hallelujahs, as imagined by Dante and Milton, or a life of active exertion? And if of active exertion (and what can life mean without exertion), of what kind of exertion?' Now with regard to heaven, it would be perfectly easy to show that this demand for exact knowledge is unreasonable and unnecessary; for part of the attraction of the alleged beatitude of heaven consists in the belief that it passes our finite understanding, that we can only dimly augur it, and that we shall be changed before we are admitted to it. But with regard to any blessed consummation on the earth, such details as Mr. Harrison asks for are absolutely indispensable. Our Optimists tell us that, on the expiration of a practical eternity, there will be the beginnings at any rate of a blessed and glorious change in the human lot. In Mr. Harrison's words, I say, What kind of change? Will it be a change tending to make life a round of idle luxury, or a course of active exertion? And if of active exertion, of what kind of

exertion? Will it be practical or speculative? Will it be discovering new stars, or making new dyes out of coal tar? No one can tell us.

On one point no doubt we should find a consensus of opinion; but this point would be negative, not positive. We should be told that poverty, overwork, most forms of sickness, and acute pain would be absent; and surely it may be said that this is a consummation fit to be striven for. No doubt it is; but from the Optimist's point of view, this admission does absolutely nothing to help us. The problem is to construct a life of superlative happiness; and to eliminate physical suffering is merely to place us on the naked threshold of our enterprise. Suppose I see in the street one day some poor orphan girl, utterly desolate, and crying as if her heart would break. That girl is certainly not happy. Let us suppose I see the same girl next day, equally desolate, but distracted by an excruciating toothache. I could not restore her parents to her, but I can, we will say, cure her toothache, and I do. I ease her of a terrible pain. I cause her unutterable relief; and no doubt in doing so I myself feel happy; but as to the orphan all I do is this—I restore her to her original misery. And so far as the mere process of stamping out pain is concerned, there is nothing to show that it might not leave life in no better position than that of an orphan cured of a toothache. Indeed, if we may trust the suggestion thrown out by Optimistic writers, it would not, even so far as it went, be an unmixed good. These writers have often hinted that pain and trouble probably deepen our pleasures; so if pain and trouble were ever done away with, the positive

blessings of life might, on their own showing, be not heightened but degraded.

Again, let us approach the question from another side; and instead of regarding progress as an extinction of pain, let us regard it as the equitable distribution of material comforts amongst all. No one would wish to speak flippantly—or at all events no sane man can think lightly—of the importance of giving to all a sufficiency of daily bread. But however we realise that privation and starvation are miseries, it does not follow—indeed, we know it not to be true—that a light heart goes with a full stomach. Or suppose us to conceive that in the future it would come to do so, and that men would be completely happy when they all had enough to eat, would this be a consummation calculated to raise our enthusiasm, or move our souls with a solemn zeal to work for it? Would any human being who was ever capable of anything that has ever been called a high conception of life, feel any pleasure in the thought of a Humanity 'shut up in infinite content' when once it had secured itself three meals a day, and smiling every morning a satisfied smile at the universe, its huge lips shining with fried eggs and bacon?

I am not for an instant saying that mere physical well-being is the only sort of happiness to which Optimists look forward. But it is the only sort of happiness about which their ideas are at all definite; and I have alluded to it as I have done, merely to point out that their only definite ideas are ridiculously insufficient ideas. I do not doubt for a moment that thinkers like Mr. Harrison anticipate for transfigured Humanity pleasures which to them seem nobler than

the noblest we can enjoy now; but about these pleasures I say there is no consensus of opinion; what opinion there is, is quite indefinite, there is nothing to show that these pleasures will ever be realised, and judging from the hints we have of them, there is much to show that they would be impossible. To sum up then the altered Humanity of the future, even granting that we are advancing towards it, may be compared to an image of which one part only is definite. It is not like an image with feet of clay and with a head of gold, but like an image with a stomach of clay, and everything else of cloud.

We have now examined the creed of Optimism from two points of view, assuming in turn the truth of each one of its two propositions, and inquiring into the truth of the other. We first assumed the reality of progress, and asked how far our sympathy was capable of being stimulated by it; we next assumed the alleged capacities of our sympathy, and asked what grounds there were for any belief in a progress by which sympathy of the assumed kind could be roused. And we have seen that, so far as scientific evidence is concerned, both the propositions in question are unsupported and fanciful.

There remains for us yet a third test to submit it to, and this will be found to be the most fatal of all. Let us assume, for argument's sake, that both the propositions are true; and we shall see that they contain in themselves elements by which their supposed meaning is annihilated. Let us assume, then, that progress will, in process of time, produce a state of society which we should all regard as satisfactory; and let us assume that our sympathies are of such a strength and delicacy

that the far-off good in store for our remote descendants will be a source of real comfort to our hearts and a real stimulus to our actions—that it will fill life, in fact, with moral meanings and motives. It will only require a very little reflection to show us that if sympathy is really strong enough to accomplish this work, it will inevitably be strong enough to destroy the work which it has accomplished. If we are, or if we should come to be, so astonishingly sensitive that the remote happiness of posterity will cause us any real pleasure, the incalculable amount of pain that will admittedly have preceded such happiness, that has been suffered during the countless years of the past, and will have to be suffered during the countless intervening years of the future, must necessarily convert such pleasure into agony. It is impossible to conceive, unless we throw reality overboard altogether, and decamp frankly into dreamland—it is impossible to conceive our sympathy being made more sensitive to the happiness of others, without its being made also more sensitive to their misery. One might as well suppose our powers of sight increased, but increased only so as to show us agreeable objects; or our powers of hearing increased, but increased only so as to convey to us our own praises.

Can anyone for an instant doubt that this is a fact? Can he trick himself in any way into any, even the slightest, evasion of it? Can he imagine himself, for instance, having a sudden interest roused in him, from whatever cause, in the fortunes of some young man, and yet not feeling a corresponding shock if the young man should chance to be hanged for murder? The idea is ridiculous. The truth of the matter is, that unless our

sympathies had a certain obtuseness and narrowness in them, we should be too tender to endure a day of life. The rose leaves might give a keener pleasure; but we should be unable to think of it, because our skins would be lacerated with thorns. What would happen to us if, retaining the fastidiousness of man, we suddenly found that our nostrils were as keen as those of dogs? We should be sick every time we walked through a crowded street. Were our sympathies intensified in a similar way, we should pass through life, not sick, but broken-hearted. The whole creation would seem to be groaning and travailing together; and the laughter and rejoicing of posterity would be drowned by the intervening sounds, or else would seem a ghastly mockery.

But suppose—we have been waiving objections, and we will waive them again—suppose that the intervening pain does somehow not inconvenience us; and that our sympathies, 'on this bank and shoal of time, jump it,' and bring us safely to the joy and prosperity beyond. Now this jump, on Mr. Harrison's own showing, will carry us across an eternity. It will annihilate the distance between our own imperfect condition and our posterity's perfect condition. But how does Mr. Harrison imagine that it will stop there? He admits that all human existence will come to an end some day, but the end, he thinks, does not matter because it is so far off. But if sympathy acquires this power of jumping across eternities, the end ceases to be far off any longer. The same power that takes us from the beginings of progress to the consummation of progress, will take us from the consummation of progress to its

horrible and sure destruction—to its death by inches, as the icy period comes, turning the whole earth into a torture-chamber, and effacing for ever the happiness and the triumph of man in a hideous and meaningless end. Knowing that the drama is thus really a tragedy, how shall we be able to pretend to ourselves that it is a divine comedy? It is true that death waits for all and each of us; and yet we continue to eat, drink, and be merry: but that is precisely because our sympathies have not those powers which Mr. Harrison asserts they have, because instead of connecting us with what will happen to others in three thousand years, it connects us only slightly with what will happen to ourselves in thirty.

We thus see that the creed of Optimism is composed of ideas that do not even agree with each other. They might do that, however, and yet be entirely false. The great question is, do they agree with facts? and not only that, but are they forced on us by facts? Do facts leave us no room for rationally contradicting or doubting them? In a word, have they any basis even approximately similar to what would be required to support a theory of light, or heat, or electricity, of the geologic history of the earth, or of the evolution of species? Is the evidence for their truth as overwhelming and as unanimous as the evidence Professor Huxley would require to make him believe in a miracle? Or have they ever been submitted to the same eager and searching scepticism which has sought for and weighed every fact, sentence, and syllable that might tend to make incredible our traditional conception of the Bible? They certainly have not. The treatment they have met

with has been not only not this, but the precise opposite. Men who claim to have destroyed Christianity in the name of science, justify their belief in Optimism by every method that their science stigmatises as most immoral. Mr. Harrison admits, with relation to Christianity, that the Redemption became incredible with the destruction of the geocentric theory, because the world became a speck in the universe, infinitely too little for so vast a drama. But when he comes to defending his own religion of Optimism he says, 'the infinite littleness of the world' is a thought we 'will put away from us' as an 'unmanly and unhealthy musing.' Similarly, Mr. John Morley, who admits with great candour that many facts exist which suggest doubts of progress, instead of examining these doubts and giving their full weight to them, tells us that we ought to set them aside as 'unworthy.' Was ever such language heard in the mouths of scientific men about any of those subjects which have formed their proper studies? It is rather a parody of the language of such men as Mr. Keble, who declared that religious sceptics were too wicked to be reasoned with, and who incurred, for this reason more than any other, the indignant scorn of all our scientific critics. Which of such sceptical critics was ever heard to defend a theory of the authorship of Job or of the Pentateuch by declaring that any doubts of their doubts were 'unmanly' or 'unhealthy'? Who would answer an attack on the Darwinian theory of coral-reefs by calling it 'unworthy'? or meet admitted difficulties in the way of a theory of light by following Mr. Harrison's example, and saying, 'We will put them aside'?

Let the reader consider another statement explicitly

made by Mr. John Morley relative to this very question of Optimism. He quotes the following passage from Diderot:—'Does the narrative present me with some fact that dishonours humanity? Then I examine it with the most rigorous severity. Whatever sagacity I may be able to command I employ in detecting contradictions that throw suspicion on the story. It is not so when the action is beautiful, lofty, noble.' '*Diderot's way*,' says Mr. Morley, '*of reading history is not unworthy of imitation.*' Is it necessary to quote more? This astonishing sentence—not astonishing for the fact it admits, but for the naïve candour of the admission—describes in a nutshell the method which men of science, who have attacked Christianity in the name of the divine duty of scepticism, and of a conscience which forbids them to believe anything not fully proved—this sentence describes the method which such men consider scientific when establishing a religion of their own. Let us swallow whatever suits us; whatever goes against us let us examine with the most rigorous severity.

No feature in the history of modern thought is more instructive than the contrast I have just indicated—the contrast between the scepticism, and the exactingness of science, in its attack on Christianity, and its abject credulity in constructing a futile substitute. That there is no universal, no continuous meaning in the changes of human history, that progress of some sort may not be a reality, I am not for a moment arguing. All I have urged hitherto is, that there is no evidence, such as would be accepted either in physical or philosophical science, to prove there is. The facts,

no doubt, suggest any number of meanings, but they support none; and if Professor Huxley is right in saying that it is very immoral in us to believe in such doubtful books as the Gospels, it must be far more immoral in him to believe in the meaning of human existence. What the spectacle of the world's history would really suggest to an impartial scientific observer, who had no religion and who had not contracted to construct one, is a conclusion eminently in harmony with the drift of scientific speculation generally. The doctrines of natural selection and the survival of the fittest imply on the part of nature a vast number of failures—failures complete or partial. The same idea may be applicable to worlds, as to species in this world. If we conceive, as we have every warrant for conceiving, an incalculable number of inhabited planets, the history of their crowning races will, according to all analogy, be various. Some will arrive at great and general happiness, some at happiness partial and less complete, some may very likely, as long as their inhabitants last, be hells of struggle and wretchedness. Now what to an impartial observer the history of the earth would suggest, would be that it occupied some intermediate position between the completest successes and the absolutely horrible failures—a position probably at the lower end of the scale, though many degrees above the bottom of it. Considered in this light its history becomes intelligible, because we cease to treat as hieroglyphs full of meaning a series of marks which have really no meaning at all. We shall see constant attempts at progress, we shall see progress realised in certain places up to a certain point; but we shall see

that after a certain point, the castle of cards or sand falls to pieces again, and that others attempt to rise, perhaps even less successfully. We shall see numberless words shaping themselves, but never any complete sentence. Taken as a whole, we shall be reminded of certain lines, which I have already alluded to, referring to an 'idiot's tale.' The destinies of humanity need not be all sound and fury; but certainly regarding them as a whole, we shall have to say of them, that they are a tale without plot, without coherence, without interest—in a word, that they signify nothing.

I do not say for a moment that this is the truth about Humanity; but that this is the kind of conclusion which we should probably arrive at if we trusted to purely scientific observation, with no preconceived idea that life must have a meaning, and no interest in giving it one. No doubt such a view, if true, would be completely fatal to everything which to men, in what hitherto we have called their higher moments, has made life dignified, serious, or even tolerable. Hitherto in those higher moments they have risen, like the philosophers out of Plato's cavern, from their narrow, selfish interests into the light of a larger outlook, and seen that life is full of august meanings. But that light has not been the light of science. Science will give men a larger outlook also; but it will raise them above their narrower interests, not to show them wider ones, but to show them none at all. If, then, the light that is in us is darkness, we may well say, how great is that darkness! It is from this darkness that religion comes to deliver us, not by destroying what science has taught us, but by adding to it something that it has not taught us.

Whether we can believe in this added something or not is a point I have in no way argued. I have not sought to prove that life has no meaning, but merely that it has none discoverable by the methods of modern science. I will not even say that men of science themselves are not certain of its existence, and may not live by this certainty; but only that, if so, they are unaware whence this certainty comes, and that though their inner convictions may claim our most sincere respect, their own analysis of them deserves our most contemptuous ridicule.

If there is a soul in man, and if there is a God who has given this soul, the instinct of religion can never die; but if there is any authentic explanation of the relations between the soul and God, and for some reason or other men in any way cease to accept this, their own explanations may well, by a gradual process, resolve themselves into a denial of the theory they seek to explain. And such, according to our men of science themselves, has been the case with the orthodox Christian faith, when once it began to be disintegrated by the solvent of Protestantism. The process is forcibly alluded to by Mr. Harrison. Traditional Protestantism dissolved into the nebulous tenets of the Broad Churchmen; the tenets of the Broad Churchmen dissolved into Deism, Deism into Pantheism and the cultus of the Unknowable, and the last into Optimism. Mr. Harrison fails to read the lesson of history farther, and to see that Optimism in its turn must yield to the solvent of criticism, and leave the religious instinct, or what is the same thing, a sense of a meaning in life, as a forlorn and bewildered emotion without any explanation of

itself at all. What Optimism is at present must be abundantly evident. It is the last attempt to discover a peg on which to hang the fallen clothes of Christianity. As Mr. Harrison tells us, most of our scientific Optimists have been brought up with all the emotions of that faith. They have got rid of the faith, but the emotions have been left on their hands. They long for some object on which to lavish them, just as Don Quixote longed to find a lady-love; and if we may judge from certain phrases of Mr. Harrison, they have modestly contented themselves with asking not that the object should be a truth, but merely that it should not, on the face of it, be a falsehood. He does not ask how well Humanity deserves to be thought of, but how well he and his friends will be able to think of it. Once more let us say that this emotion which they call the love of Humanity is not an emotion I would ridicule. I only ridicule their bestowal of it. The love of Humanity, with no faith to enlighten it, and nothing to justify it beyond what science can show, is as absurd as the love of Titania lavished on Bottom; and the high priests of Humanity, with their solemn and pompous gravity, are like nothing so much as the Bumbles of a squabbling parish. We all know what Hobbes said of Catholicism, that it was the ghost of the dead Roman Empire, sitting enthroned on the ashes of it. Optimism, in the same way, is the ghost of Protestantism sitting on its ashes, not enthroned but gibbering.

On former occasions I have been asked by certain critics what possible use, even suppose life is not worth much, I could hope to find in laying the fact bare. To the Optimists as men of science no explanation is

needed. Every attempt to establish any truth, or even to establish any doubt, according to their principles is not only justifiable, but is a duty. To others, an explanation will not be very far to seek. If there is a meaning in life, we shall never understand it rightly, till we have ceased to amuse ourselves with understanding it wrongly. Humanity, if there is any salvation for it, will never be saved till it sees that it cannot save itself, and asks in humility, seeking some greater power, Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? But as matters stand, it will never see this or ask this, till it has seen face to face the whole of its own absurd helplessness, and tasted—at least intellectually—the dregs of its degradation. When we have filled our bellies with the husks that the swine eat, it may be that we shall arise and go.

'COWARDLY AGNOSTICISM'

A WORD WITH PROFESSOR HUXLEY

The Bishop of Peterborough departed so far from his customary courtesy and self-respect as to speak of 'Cowardly Agnosticism. — PROFESSOR HUXLEY, *Nineteenth Century* February 1889, p. 170.

I WELCOME the discussion which has been lately revived in earnest as to the issue between positive science and theology. I especially welcome Professor Huxley's recent contribution to it, to which presently I propose to refer in detail. In that contribution—an article with the title 'Agnosticism'—I shall point out things which will probably startle the public, the author himself included, in case he cares to attend to them.

Before going further, however, let me ask and answer this question. If Professor Huxley should tell us that he does not believe in God, why should we think the statement, as coming from him, worthy of an attention which we certainly should not give it if made by a person less distinguished than himself? The answer to this question is as follows. We should think Professor Huxley's statement worth considering for two reasons. Firstly, he speaks as a man pre-eminently well acquainted with certain classes of facts. Secondly, he speaks as a man eminent, if not pre-eminent, for the vigour and honesty with which he has faced these facts,

and drawn certain conclusions from them. Accordingly, when he sums up for us the main conclusions of science, he speaks not in his own name, but in the name of the physical universe, as modern science has thus far apprehended it; and similarly, when from these conclusions he reasons about religion, the bulk of the arguments which he advances against theology are in no way peculiar to himself, or gain any of their strength from his reputation; they are virtually the arguments of the whole non-Christian world. He may possibly have, on some points, views peculiar to himself. He may also have certain peculiar ways of stating them. But it requires no great critical acuteness, it requires only ordinary fairness, to separate those of his utterances which represent facts generally accepted, and arguments generally influential, from those which represent only some peculiarity of his own. Now all this is true not of Professor Huxley only. With various qualifications it is equally true of writers with whom Professor Huxley is apparently in constant antagonism, and who also exhibit constant antagonism amongst themselves. I am at this moment thinking of two especially—Mr. Frederic Harrison and Mr. Herbert Spencer. Mr. Harrison, in his capacity of religious teacher, is constantly attacking both Mr. Spencer and Professor Huxley. Professor Huxley repays Mr. Harrison's blows with interest; and there are certain questions of a religious and practical character as to which he and Mr. Spencer would be hardly on better terms. But underneath the several questions they quarrel about, there is a solid substructure of conclusions, methods, and arguments, as to which they all agree—agree in the most absolute way.

What this agreement consists in, and what practical bearing, if taken by itself, it must have on our views of life, I shall now try to explain in a brief and unquestionable summary; and in that summary, what the reader will have before him is not any private opinion of these eminent men, but ascertained facts with regard to man and the universe; and the conclusions which, if we have nothing else to assist us, are necessarily drawn from those facts by the necessary operations of the mind. The mention of names, however, has this signal convenience. It will keep the reader convinced that I am not speaking at random, and will supply him with standards by which he can easily test the accuracy and the sufficiency of my assertions.

The case, then, of science or modern thought against theological religion or theism, and the Christian religion in particular, substantially is as follows:

In the first place, it is now an established fact that the physical universe, whether it ever had a beginning or no, is at all events of an antiquity beyond what the imagination can realise; and also, that whether or no it is limited, its extent is so vast as to be equally unimaginable. Science may not pronounce it absolutely to be either eternal or infinite, but science does say this, that so far as our faculties can carry us, they reveal to us no hint of either limit, end, or beginning.

It is further established that the stuff out of which the universe is made is the same everywhere and follows the same laws—whether in the box-office of the Empire Theatre, or in the darkened star round which Algol wheels and shines—and that this has always been so to the remotest of the penetrable abysses of time. It is

established yet further, that the universe in its present condition has evolved itself out of simpler conditions, solely in virtue of the qualities which still inhere in its elements, and make to-day what it is, just as they have made all yesterdays.

Lastly, in this physical universe science has included man—not alone his body, but his life and his mind also. Every operation of thought, every fact of consciousness, it has shown to be associated in a constant and definite way with the presence and with certain conditions of certain particles of matter, which are shown, in their turn, to be in their last analysis absolutely similar to the matter of gases, plants, or minerals. The demonstration has every appearance of being morally complete. The interval between mud and mind, seemingly so impassable, has been traversed by a series of closely consecutive steps. Mind, which was once thought to have descended into matter, is shown forming itself, and slowly emerging out of it. From forms of life so low that naturalists can hardly decide whether it is right to class them as plants or animals, up to the life that is manifested in saints, heroes, or philosophers, there is no break to be detected in the long process of development. There is no step in the process where science finds any excuse for postulating or even suspecting the presence of any new factor.

And the same holds good of the lowest forms of life, and what Professor Huxley calls 'the common matter of the universe.' It is true that experimentalists have been thus far unable to observe the generation of the former out of the latter; but this failure may be accounted for in many ways, and does nothing to weaken

the overwhelming evidence of analogy that such generation really does take place or has taken place at some earlier period. 'Carbonic acid, water, and ammonia, says Professor Huxley, 'certainly possess no properties but those of ordinary matter. . . . But when they are brought together under certain conditions they give rise to protoplasm; and this protoplasm exhibits the phenomenon of life. I see no breach in this series of steps in molecular complication, and I am unable to understand why the language which is applicable to any one form of the series may not be used of any of the others.'[1]

So much, then, for what modern science teaches us as to the Universe and the evolution of man. We will presently consider the ways, sufficiently obvious as they are, in which this seems to conflict with the ideas of all theism and theology. But first for a moment let us turn to what it teaches us also with regard to the history and the special claims of Christianity. Approaching Christianity on the side of its alleged history, it establishes the three following points. It shows us first that this alleged history, with the substantial truth of which Christianity stands or falls, contains a number of statements which are demonstrably at variance with fact; secondly, that it contains others which, though very probably true, are entirely misinterpreted through the ignorance of the writers who recorded them; and thirdly, that though the rest may not be demonstrably false, yet those amongst them most essential to the Christian doctrine are so monstrously improbable and so utterly unsupported by evidence that we have no

[1] *Lay Sermons, Essays, and Reviews*, pp. 114, 117.

more ground for believing in them than we have in the wolf of Romulus.

Such, briefly stated, are the main conclusions of science in so far as they bear on theology and the theologic conception of humanity. Let us now consider exactly what their bearing is. Professor Huxley distinctly tells us that the knowledge we have reached as to the nature of things in general does not enable us to deduce from it any absolute denial either of the existence of a personal God or of an immortal soul in man, or even of the possibility and the actual occurrence of miracles. On the contrary, he would believe to-morrow in the miraculous history of Christianity if only there were any evidence sufficiently cogent in its favour; and on the authority of Christianity he would believe in God and in man's immortality. Christianity, however, is the only religion in the world whose claims to a miraculous authority are worthy of serious consideration, and science, as we have seen, considers these claims to be unfounded. What follows is this—Whether there be a God or no, and whether He has given us immortal souls or no, Science declares bluntly that He has never informed us of either fact; and if there is anything to warrant any belief in either, it can be found only in a study of the natural universe. Accordingly, to the natural universe science goes, and we have just seen what it finds there. Part of what it finds bears specially on the theologic conception of God, and part bears specially on the theologic conception of man. With regard to God, to an intelligent creator and ruler, it finds Him on every ground to be a baseless and a superfluous hypothesis. In former conditions of

knowledge it admits that this was otherwise—that the hypothesis then was not only natural but necessary; for there were many seeming mysteries which could not be explained without it. But now the case has been altogether reversed. One after another these mysteries have been analysed, not entirely, but to this extent at all events, that the hypothesis of an intelligent creator is not only nowhere necessary, but it generally introduces far more difficulties than it solves. Thus, though we cannot demonstrate that a creator does not exist, we have no grounds whatever for supposing that he does. With regard to man, what science finds is analogous. According to theology he is a being specially related to God, and his conduct and his destinies have an importance which dwarfs the sum of material things into insignificance. But science exhibits him in a very different light; it shows that in none of the qualities once thought peculiar to him does he differ essentially from other phenomena of the universe. It shows that just as there are no grounds for supposing the existence of a creator, so there are none for supposing the existence of an immortal human soul; whilst as for man's importance relative to the rest of the universe, it shows that, not only as an individual, but also as a race, he is less than a bubble of foam is when compared with the whole sea. The few thousand years over which history takes us are as nothing when compared with the ages for which the human race has existed. The whole existence of the human race is as nothing when compared with the existence of the earth; and the earth's history is but a second and the earth but a grain of dust in the vast dura-

tion and vast magnitude of the All. Nor is this true of the past only, it is true of the future also. As the individual dies, so also will the race die; nor would a million of additional years add anything to its comparative importance. Just as it emerged out of lifeless matter yesterday, so will it sink again into lifeless matter to-morrow. Or, to put the case more briefly still, it is merely one fugitive manifestation of the same matter and force which, always obedient to the same unchanging laws, manifest themselves equally in a dung-heap, in a pig, and in a planet—matter and force which, so far as our faculties can carry us, have existed and will exist everywhere and for ever, and which nowhere, so far as our faculties avail to read them, show any sign, as a whole, of meaning, of design, or of intelligence.

It is possible that Professor Huxley, or some other scientific authority, may be able to find fault with some of my sentences or my expressions, and to show that they are not professionally or professorially accurate. If they care for such trifling criticism they are welcome to the enjoyment of it; but I defy any one to show, putting expression aside and paying attention only to the general meaning of what I have stated, that the foregoing account of what science claims to have established is not substantially true, and is not admitted to be so by any contemporary thinker who opposes science to theism, from Mr. Frederic Harrison to Professor Huxley himself.

And now let us pass on to something which in itself is merely a matter of words, but which will bring what I have said thus far into the circle of contemporary discussion. The men who are mainly responsible for

having forced the above views on the world, who have unfolded to us the verities of nature and human history, and have felt constrained by these to abandon their old religious convictions—these men and their followers have by common consent agreed, in this country, to call themselves by the name of Agnostics. Now there has been much quarrelling of late amongst these Agnostics as to what Agnosticism—the thing which unites them—is. It must be obvious, however, to every impartial observer, that the differences between them are little more than verbal, and arise from bad writing rather than from different reasoning. Substantially the meaning of one and all of them is the same. Let us take, for instance, the two who, so far as words go, have been most ostentatiously opposed to each other. I mean Professor Huxley and Mr. Harrison.

Some writers, Professor Huxley says, Mr. Harrison amongst them, are accustomed to speak of Agnosticism as 'a creed' or a 'faith' or a 'philosophy.' Professor Huxley proclaims himself to be 'dazed' and 'bewildered' by such language. Agnosticism, he says, is not any one of these things. It is simply—I will give his definition in his own words—

> a method, the essence of which lies in the vigorous application of a single principle. . . . Positively, the principle may be expressed: In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: In matters of the intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable. That I take to be the Agnostic faith, which, if a man keep whole and undefiled, he shall not be ashamed to look the universe in the face, whatever the future may have in store for him.

Now anything worse expressed than this for the purpose of the discussion he is engaged in, or indeed for the purpose of conveying his own general meaning, it is hardly possible to imagine. Agnosticism, as generally understood, may, from one point of view, be no doubt rightly described as 'a method.' But is it a method with no results, or with results that are of no interest? If so, there would be hardly a human being idiot enough to waste a thought upon it. The interest resides in its results, and its results solely, and specially in those results that affect our ideas about religion. Accordingly, when the word Agnosticism is now used in discussion, the meaning uppermost in the minds of those who use it is not a method, but the results of a method, in their religious bearings; and the method is of interest only in so far as it leads to these. Agnosticism means, therefore, precisely what Professor Huxley says it does not mean. It means a creed, it means a faith, it means a religious or irreligious philosophy. And this is the meaning attributed to it not only by the world at large, but in reality by Professor Huxley also quite as much as by anybody. I will not lay too much stress on the fact, that in the passage just quoted, having first fiercely declared Agnosticism to be nothing but a method, in the very next sentence he himself speaks of it as a 'faith.' I will pass on to a passage that is far more unambiguous. It is taken from the same essay. It is as follows:

'Agnosticism [says Professor Huxley quoting Mr. Harrison] is a stage in the evolution of religion, an entirely negative stage, the point reached by physicists, a purely mental conclusion, with no relation to things social at all.' I am [Professor Huxley continues] quite dazed by this de-

claration. Are there, then, any 'conclusions' that are not 'purely mental'? Is there no relation to things social in 'mental conclusions' which affect men's whole conception of life? . . . 'Agnosticism is a stage in the evolution of religion.' If . . . Mr. Harrison, like most people, means by 'religion' theology, then, in my judgment, Agnosticism can be said to be a stage in its evolution only as death may be said to be the final stage in the evolution of life.

Let us consider what this means. It means precisely what every one else has all along been saying, that Agnosticism is to all intents and purposes a doctrine, a creed, a faith, or a philosophy, the essence of which is the negation of theologic religion. Now the fundamental propositions of theologic religion are these. There is a personal God who watches over the lives of men; and there is an immortal soul in man, distinct from the flux of matter. Agnosticism, then, expressed in the briefest terms, amounts to two articles—not of belief, but of disbelief. *I do not believe in any God, personal, intelligent, or with a purpose; or, at least, with any purpose that has any concern with man. I do not believe in any immortal soul, or in any personality or consciousness surviving the dissolution of the body.*

Here I anticipate from many quarters a rebuke which men of science are very fond of administering. I shall be told that Agnostics never say 'there is no God,' and never say 'there is no immortal soul.' Professor Huxley is often particularly vehement on this point. He would have us believe that a dogmatic atheist is, in his view, as foolish as a dogmatic theist; and that an Agnostic, true to the etymology of his name, is not a man who denies God, but who has no

opinion about Him. But this—even if true in some dim and remote sense—is for practical purposes a mere piece of solemn quibbling, and is utterly belied by the very men who use it whenever they raise their voices to speak to the world at large. The Agnostics, if they shrink from saying there is no God, at least tell us that there is nothing to suggest that there is one, and much to suggest that there is not. Surely, if they never spoke more strongly than this, for practical purposes this is an absolute denial. Professor Huxley, for instance, is utterly unable to demonstrate that an evening edition of the 'Times' is not printed in Sirius; but if any action depended on our believing this to be true, he would certainly not hesitate to declare that it was a foolish and fantastic falsehood. Who would think the better of him—who would not think the worse—if in this matter he gravely declared himself to be an Agnostic? And precisely the same may be said of him with regard to the existence of God. For all practical purposes he is not in doubt about it. He denies it. I need not, however, content myself with my own reasoning. I find Professor Huxley himself endorsing every word that I have just uttered. He declares that such questions as are treated of in volumes of divinity 'are essentially questions of lunar politics . . . not worth the attention of men who have work to do in the world:' and he cites Hume's advice with regard to such volumes as being 'most wise'—'Commit them to the flames, for they can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.'[1] Quotations of a similar import might be indefinitely multiplied; but it will be

[1] *Lay Sermons, Essays, and Reviews*, p. 125.

enough to add to this the statements quoted already, that Agnosticism is to theologic religion what death is to life; and that physiology does but deepen and complete the gloom of the gloomiest motto of Paganism—'Debemur morti.' If, then, Agnosticism is not an absolute and dogmatic denial of the fundamental propositions of theology, it differs from an absolute and dogmatic denial in a degree that is so trivial as to be, in the words of Professor Huxley himself, 'not worth the attention of men who have work to do in the world.' For all practical purposes, and according to the real opinion of Professor Huxley and Mr. Harrison equally, Agnosticism is not doubt, is not suspension of judgment; but it is a denial of what 'most people mean by religion'—that is to say, the fundamental propositions of theology—so absolute that Professor Huxley compares it to their death.

And now let us pass on to the next point in our argument, which I will introduce by quoting Professor Huxley again. This denial of the fundamental propositions of theology 'affects,' he says, 'men's whole conception of life.' Let us consider how. By the Christian world, life was thought to be important owing to its connection with some unseen universe, full of interests and issues which were too great for the mind to grasp at present, but in which, for good or evil, we should each of us one day share, taking our place amongst the awful things of eternity. But at the touch of the Agnostic doctrine this unseen universe bursts like a bubble, melts like an empty dream; and all the meaning which it once imparted to life vanishes from its surface like mists from a field at morning. In

every sense but one, which is exclusively physical, man is remorselessly cut adrift from the eternal; and whatever importance or interest anything has for any of us, must be derived altogether from the shifting pains or pleasures which go to make up our momentary span of life, or the life of our race, which in the illimitable history of the All is an incident just as momentary.

Now supposing the importance and interest which life has thus lost cannot be replaced in any other way, will life really have suffered any practical change and degradation? To this question our Agnostics with one consent say 'Yes.' Professor Huxley says that if theologic denial leads us to nothing but materialism, 'the beauty of a life may be destroyed,' and 'its energies paralysed;'[1] and that no one not historically blind, 'is likely to underrate the importance of the Christian faith as a factor in human history,' or to doubt 'that some substitute genuine enough and worthy enough to replace it will arise.'[2] Mr. Spencer says the same thing with even greater clearness: whilst as for Mr. Harrison, it is needless to quote from him; for half of what he has written is an amplification of these statements.

It is admitted, then, that life, in some very practical sense, will be ruined if science, having destroyed theologic religion, cannot put, or allow to be put, some other religion in place of it. But we must not content ourselves with this general language. Life will be ruined, we say. Let us consider to what extent and how. There is a good deal in life which

[1] *Lay Sermons, Essays, and Reviews*, p. 127.

[2] 'Agnosticism,' *Nineteenth Century*, February 1889, p. 191.

obviously will not be touched at all, that is to say, a portion of what is called the moral code. Theft, murder, some forms of lying and dishonesty, and some forms of sexual license, are inconsistent with the welfare of any society; and society, in self-defence, would still condemn and prohibit them, even supposing it had no more religion than a tribe of gibbering monkeys. But the moral code thus retained would consist of prohibitions only, and of such prohibitions only as could be enforced by external sanctions. Since, then, this much would survive the loss of religion, let us consider what would not survive. Mr. Spencer, in general terms, has told us plainly enough. What would be lost, he says, is, in the first place, 'our ideas of goodness, rectitude, or duty,' or, to use a single word, 'morality.' This is no contradiction of what has just been said; for morality is not obedience, enforced or even instinctive, to laws which have an external sanction, but an active co-operation with the spirit of such laws, under pressure of a sanction that resides in our own wills. But not only would morality be lost, or this desire to work actively for the social good; there would be lost also every higher conception of what the social good or of what our own good is; and men would, as Mr. Spencer says, 'become chiefly absorbed in the immediate and the relative.'[1] Professor Huxley admits in effect precisely the same thing when he says that the tendency of systematic

[1] 'Since the beginning Religion has had the all-essential office of preventing men from being chiefly absorbed in the relative or the immediate, and of awaking them to a consciousness of something beyond it.'—*First Principles*, p. 100.

materialism is to 'paralyse the energies of life,' and 'to destroy its beauty.'

Let us try to put the matter a little more concisely. It is admitted by our Agnostics that the most valuable element in our life is our sense of duty, coupled with obedience to its dictates; and this sense of duty derives both its existence and its power over us from religion, and from religion alone. How it derived them from the Christian religion is obvious. The Christian religion prescribed it to us as the voice of God to the soul, appealing as it were to all our most powerful passions—to our fear, to our hope, and to our love. Hope gave it a meaning to us, and love and fear gave it a sanction. The Agnostics have got rid of God and the soul together, with the loves, and fears, and hopes by which the two were connected. The problem before them is to discover some other considerations—that is some other religion—which shall invest duty with the solemn meaning and authority derivable no longer from these. Our Agnostics, as we know, declare themselves fully able to solve it. Mr. Spencer and Mr. Harrison, though the solution of each is different, declare not only that some new religion is ready for us, but that it is a religion higher and more efficacious than the old; whilst Professor Huxley, though less prophetic and sanguine, rebukes those 'who are alarmed lest man's moral nature be debased,' and declares that a wise man like Hume would merely 'smile at their perplexities.'[1]

Let us now consider what this new religion is—or rather these new religions, for we are offered more

[1] *Lay Sermons*, pp. 123, 124.

than one. So far as form goes, indeed, we are offered several. They can, however, all of them be resolved into two, resting on two entirely different bases, though sometimes, if not usually, offered to our acceptance in combination. One of these, which is called by some of its literary adherents Positivism, or the Religion of Humanity, is based on two propositions with regard to the human race. The first proposition is that it is constantly though slowly improving, and will one day reach a condition thoroughly satisfactory to itself. The second proposition is that this remote consummation can be made so interesting to the present and to all intervening generations that they will strain every nerve to bring it about and hasten it. Thus, though Humanity is admitted to be absolutely a fleeting phenomenon in the universe, it is presented relatively as of the utmost moment to the individual; and duty is supplied with a constant meaning by hope, and with a constant motive by sympathy. The basis of the other religion is not only different from this, but opposed to it. Just as this demands that we turn away from the universe, and concentrate our attention upon humanity, so the other demands that we turn away from humanity and concentrate our attention on the universe. Mr. Herbert Spencer calls this the Religion of the Unknowable; and though many Agnostics consider the name fantastic, they one and all of them, if they resign the religion of humanity, consider and appeal to this as the only possible alternative.

Now I have already, in a former essay on 'The Scientific Bases of Optimism,' endeavoured to show how

completely absurd and childish the first of these two religions, the Religion of Humanity, is. I do not propose, therefore, to discuss it further here, but will beg the reader to consider that for the purpose of the present argument it is brushed aside like rubbish, unworthy of a second examination. Perhaps this request will sound somewhat arbitrary and arrogant, but I have something to add which will show that it is neither. The particular views which I now aim at discussing are the views represented by Professor Huxley; and Professor Huxley rejects the Religion of Humanity as completely as I do, and with a great deal less ceremony, as the following passage will demonstrate:

Out of the darkness of pre-historic ages man emerges with the marks of his lowly origin strong upon him. He is a brute, only more intelligent than the other brutes; a blind prey to impulses which, as often as not, lead him to destruction; a victim to endless illusions which, as often as not, makes his mental existence a terror and a burden, and fill his physical life with barren toil and battle. He attains a certain degree of physical comfort, and develops a more or less workable theory of life, in such favourable situations as the plains of Mesopotamia or Egypt, and then, for thousands and thousands of years, struggles with varying fortunes, attended by infinite wickedness, bloodshed, and misery, to maintain himself at this point against the greed and the ambition of his fellow-men. He makes a point of killing or otherwise persecuting all those who try to get him to move on; and when he has moved on a step foolishly confers post-mortem deification on his victims. He exactly repeats the process with all who want to move a step yet further. And the best men of the best epoch are simply those who make the fewest blunders and commit

the fewest sins. . . . I know of no study so unutterably saddening as that of the evolution of humanity as it is set forth in the annals of history; . . . [and] when the Positivists order men to worship Humanity—that is to say, to adore the generalised conception of men, as they ever have been, and probably ever will be—I must reply that I could just as soon bow down and worship the generalised conception of a 'wilderness of apes.' [1]

Let us here pause for a moment and look about us, so as to see where we stand. Up to a certain point the Agnostics have all gone together with absolute unanimity, and I conceive myself to have gone with them. They have all been unanimous in their rejection of theology, and in regarding man and the race of men as a fugitive manifestation of the all-enduring something, which always, everywhere, and in an equal degree, is behind all other phenomena of the universe. They are unanimous also in affirming that, in spite of its fugitive character, life can afford us certain considerations and interests, which will still make duty binding on us, will still give it a meaning. At this point, however, they divide into two bands. Some of them assert that the motive and the meaning of duty is to be found in the history of humanity, regarded as a single drama, with a prolonged and glorious conclusion, complete in itself, satisfying in itself, and imparting, by the sacrament of sympathy, its own meaning and grandeur to the individual life, which would else be petty and contemptible. This is what some assert, and this is what others deny. With those who assert it we have now parted company,

[1] 'Agnosticism,' *Nineteenth Century*, February 1889, pp. 191, 192.

and are standing alone with those others who deny it—Professor Huxley amongst them, as one of their chief spokesmen.

And now addressing myself to Professor Huxley in this character, let me explain what I propose to prove to him. If he could believe in God and in the divine authority of Christ, he admits he could account for duty and vindicate a meaning for life; but he refuses to believe, even though for some reasons he might wish to do so, because he holds that the beliefs in question have no evidence to support them. He complains that an English bishop has called this refusal 'cowardly'—'has so far departed from his customary courtesy and self-respect as to speak of "cowardly Agnosticism."' I agree with Professor Huxley that, on the grounds advanced by the bishop, this epithet 'cowardly' is entirely undeserved; but I propose to show him that, if not deserved on these, it is deserved on others, entirely unsuspected by himself. I propose to show that his Agnosticism is really cowardly, but cowardly not because it refuses to believe enough, but because, tried by its own standards, it refuses to deny enough. I propose to show that the same method and principle, which is fatal to our faith in the God and the future life of theology, is equally fatal to anything which can give existence a meaning, or which can—to have recourse to Professor Huxley's own phrases—'prevent our "energies" from being "paralysed," and "life's beauty" from being destroyed.' I propose, in other words, to show that his Agnosticism is cowardly, not because it does not dare to affirm the authority of Christ, but because it does not dare to deny the meaning and the reality of duty. I

propose to show that the miserable rags of argument with which he attempts to cover the life which he professes to have stripped naked of superstition are part and parcel of that very superstition itself—that, though they are not the chasuble and the embroidered robe of theology, they are its hair shirt, and its hair shirt in tatters—utterly useless for the purpose to which it is despairingly applied, and serving only to make the forlorn wearer ridiculous. I propose to show that in retaining this dishonoured garment, Agnosticism is playing the part of an intellectual Ananias and Sapphira; and that in professing to give up all that it cannot demonstrate, it is keeping back part, and the larger part of the price—not, however, from dishonesty, but from a dogged and obstinate cowardice, from a terror at facing the ruin which its own principles have made.

Some, no doubt, will think that this is a rash undertaking, or else that I am merely indulging in the luxury of a little rhetoric. I hope to convince the reader that the undertaking is not rash, and that I mean my expressions to be taken in a frigid and literal sense. Let me begin then by repeating one thing, which I have said before. When I say that Agnosticism is fatal to our conception of duty, I do not mean that it is fatal to those broad rules and obligations which are obviously necessary to any civilised society, which are distinctly defensible on obvious utilitarian grounds, and which, speaking generally, can be enforced by external sanctions. These rules and obligations have existed from the earliest ages of social life, and are sure to exist as long as social life exists. But so far are they from

giving life a meaning, that on Professor Huxley's own showing they have barely made life tolerable. A general obedience to them for thousands and thousands of years has left 'the evolution of man, as set forth in the annals of history,' the 'most unutterably saddening study' that Professor Huxley knows. From the earliest ages to the present—Professor Huxley admits this—the nature of man has been such that, despite their laws and their knowledge, most men have made themselves miserable by yielding to 'greed' and to 'ambition,' and by practising 'infinite wickedness.' They have proscribed their wisest when alive, and accorded them a 'foolish' hero-worship when dead. Infinite wickedness, blindness, and idiotic emotion have then, according to Professor Huxley's deliberate estimate, marked and marred men from the earliest ages to the present; and he deliberately says also, that 'as men ever have been, they probably ever will be.'

To do our duty, then, evidently implies a struggle. The impulses usually uppermost in us have to be checked, or chastened, by others; and these other impulses have to be generated, by fixing our attention on considerations which lie somehow beneath the surface. If this were not so, men would always have done their duty; and their history would not have been 'unutterably saddening,' as Professor Huxley says it has been. What sort of considerations, then, must those we require be? Before answering this question, let us pause for a moment, and with Professor Huxley's help, let us make ourselves quite clear what duty is. I have already showed that it differs from a passive obedience to external laws, in being a voluntary and active obedience

to a law that is internal; but its logical aim is analogous —that is to say the good of the community, ourselves included. Professor Huxley describes it thus—'to devote oneself to the service of humanity, including intellectual and moral self-culture under that name;' 'to pity and help all men to the best of one's ability;' 'to be strong and patient,' 'to be ethically pure and noble;' and to push our devotion to others 'to the extremity of self-sacrifice.' All these phrases are Professor Huxley's own. They are plain enough in themselves; but to make what he means yet plainer, he tells us that the best examples of the duty he has been describing are to be found amongst Christian martyrs, and saints such as Catherine of Sienna, and above all in the ideal Christ—'the noblest ideal of humanity,' he calls it, 'which mankind has yet worshipped.' Finally, he says that religion, properly understood, is simply the 'reverence and love for [this] ethical ideal, and the desire to realise that ideal in life, which every man ought to feel.' That man 'ought' to feel this desire, and 'ought' to act on it, 'is,' he says, 'surely indisputable,' and 'Agnosticism has no more to do with it than it has with music or painting.'

Here, then, we come to something at last which Professor Huxley, despite all his doubts, declares to be certain—to a conclusion which Agnosticism itself, according to his view, admits to be 'indisputable.' Agnosticism, however, as he has told us already, lays it down as a 'fundamental axiom' that no conclusions are indisputable but such as are 'demonstrated or demonstrable.' The conclusion, therefore, that we ought to do our duty, and that we ought to experience what

Professor Huxley calls 'religion,' is evidently a conclusion which, in his opinion, is demonstrated or demonstrable with the utmost clearness and cogency. Before, however, inquiring how far this is the case, we must state the conclusion in somewhat different terms, but still in terms which we have Professor Huxley's explicit warrant for using. Duty is a thing which men in general, 'as they always have been, and probably ever will be,' have lamentably failed to do, and to do which is very difficult, going as it does against some of the strongest and most victorious instincts of our nature. Professor Huxley's conclusion then must be expressed thus: 'We ought to do something which most of us do not do, and which we cannot do without a severe and painful struggle, often involving the extremity of self-sacrifice.'

And now, such being the case, let us proceed to this crucial question—What is the meaning of the all-important word '*ought*'? It does not mean merely that on utilitarian grounds the conduct in question can be defended as tending to certain beneficent results. This conclusion would be indeed barren and useless. It would merely amount to saying that some people would be happier if other people would for their sake consent to be miserable; or that men would be happier as a race if their instincts and impulses were different from 'what they always have been and probably ever will be.' When we say that certain conduct ought to be followed, we do not mean that its ultimate results can be shown to be beneficial to other people, but that they can be exhibited as desirable to the people to whom the conduct is recommended—and not only as

desirable, but as desirable in a pre-eminent degree—desirable beyond all other results that are immediately beneficial to themselves. Now the Positivists, or any other believers in the magnificent destiny of Humanity, absurd as their beliefs may be, still have in their beliefs a means by which, theoretically, duty could be thus recommended. According to them our sympathy with others is so keen, and the future in store for our descendants is so satisfying, that we have only to think of this future and we shall burn with a desire to work for it. But Professor Huxley, and those who agree with him, utterly reject both of these suppositions. They say, and very rightly, that our sympathies are limited; and that the blissful future, which it is supposed will appeal to them, is moonshine. The utmost, then, in the way of objective results, that any of us can accomplish by following the path of duty, is not only little in itself, but there is no reason for supposing that it will contribute to anything great. On the contrary, it will only contribute to something which, as a whole, is 'unutterably saddening.'

Let us suppose then an individual with two ways of life open to him—the way of ordinary self-indulgence, and the way of pain, effort, and self-sacrifice. The first seems to him obviously the most advantageous; but he has heard so much fine talk in favour of the second, that he thinks it at least worth considering. He goes, we will suppose, to Professor Huxley, and asks to have it demonstrated that this way of pain is preferable. Now what answer to that could Professor Huxley make—he, or any other Agnostic who agrees with him? He has made several answers. I am going to take

them one by one; and whilst doing to each of them, as I hope, complete justice, to show that they are not only absolutely and ridiculously impotent to prove what is demanded of them, but they do not even succeed in touching the question at issue.

One of the answers hardly needs considering, except to show to what straits the thinker must be put who uses it. A man, says Professor Huxley, ought to choose the way of pain and duty, because it conduces in some small degree to the good of others; and to do good to others ought to be his predominant desire, or, in other words, his religion. But the very fact in human nature that makes the question at issue worth arguing, is the fact that men naturally do not desire the good of others, or, at least, desire it in a very lukewarm way; and every consideration which the Positivist school advances to make the good of others attractive and interesting to ourselves, Professor Huxley dismisses with what we may call an uproarious contempt. If, then, we are not likely to be nerved to our duty by a belief that duty done tends to produce and hasten a change that shall really make the whole human lot beautiful, we are not likely to be nerved to it by the belief that its utmost possible result will be some partial and momentary benefit to a portion of 'a wilderness of apes.' The Positivist says to the men of the present day, 'Work hard at the foundation of things social; for on these foundations one day will arise a glorious edifice.' Professor Huxley tells them to work equally hard, only, he adds, that the foundation will never support anything better than pig-sties. His attempt, then, on social grounds, to make duty binding, and give force

to the moral imperative, is merely a fragment of Mr. Harrison's system, divorced from anything that gave it a theoretical meaning. Professor Huxley has shattered that system against the hard rock of reality, and this is one of the pieces which he has picked up out of the mire.

The social argument, then, we may therefore put aside, as good perhaps for showing what duty is, but utterly useless for creating any desire to do it. Indeed, to render Professor Huxley justice, it is not the argument on which he mainly relies. The argument, or rather the arguments, on which he mainly relies have no direct connection with things social at all. They seek to create a religion, or to give a meaning to duty, by dwelling on man's connection, not with his fellow-men, but with the universe, and thus developing in the individual a certain ethical self-reverence, or rather, perhaps, preserving his existing self-reverence from destruction. How any human being who pretends to accurate thinking can conceive that these arguments would have the effect desired—that they would either tend in any way to develop self-reverence of any kind, or that this self-reverence, if developed, could connect itself with practical duty, passes my comprehension. Influential and eminent men, however, declare that such is their opinion; and for that reason the arguments are worth analysing. Mr. Herbert Spencer is here in almost exact accord with Professor Huxley; we will therefore begin by referring to his way of stating the matter.

'We are obliged,' he says, 'to regard every phenomenon as a manifestation of some Power by which we

are acted on; though Omnipresence is unthinkable, yet, as experience discloses no bounds to the diffusion of phenomena, we are unable to think of limits to the presence of this power; whilst the criticisms of science teach us that this Power is Incomprehensible. And this consciousness of an Incomprehensible Power, called Omnipresent from inability to assign its limits, is just that consciousness on which religion dwells.'[1] Now Professor Huxley, it will be remembered, gives an account of religion quite different. He says it is a desire to realise a certain ideal in life. His terminology therefore differs from that of Mr. Spencer; but of the present matter, as the following quotation will show, his view is substantially the same.

'Let us suppose,' he says, 'that knowledge is absolute, and not relative, and therefore that our conception of matter represents that which really is. Let us suppose further that we do know more of cause and effect than a certain succession; and I for my part do not see what escape there is from utter materialism and necessarianism.' And this materialism, were it really what science forces on us, he admits would amply justify the darkest fears that are entertained of it. It would 'drown man's soul,' 'impede his freedom,' 'paralyse his energies,' 'debase his moral nature,' and 'destroy the beauty of his life.'[2] But, Professor Huxley assures us these dark fears are groundless. There is, indeed, only one avenue of escape from them; but that avenue Truth opens to us.

'For,' he says, 'after all, what do we know of this terrible "matter," except as a name for the unknown and

[1] *First Principles*, p. 99. [2] *Lay Sermons*, pp. 122, 123, 127.

hypothetical cause of states of our own consciousness? And what do we know of that "spirit" over whose extinction by matter a great lamentation is arising . . . except that it also is a name for an unknown and hypothetical cause or condition of states of consciousness? . . . And what is the dire necessity and iron law under which men groan? Truly, most gratuitously invented bugbears. I suppose if there be an "iron" law, it is that of gravitation; and if there be a physical necessity it is that a stone unsupported must fall to the ground. But what is all we really know and can know about the latter phenomena? Simply that in all human experience, stones have fallen to the ground under these conditions; that we have not the smallest reason for believing that any stone so circumstanced will not fall to the ground; and that we have, on the contrary, every reason to believe that it will so fall. . . . But when, as commonly happens, we change *will* into *must*, we introduce an idea of necessity which . . . has no warranty that I can discover anywhere. . . . Force I know, and Law I know; but who is this necessity, save an empty shadow of my own mind's throwing?'

Let us now compare the statements of these two writers. Each states that the reality of the universe is unknowable; that just as surely as matter is always one aspect of mind, so mind is equally one aspect of matter; and that if it is true to say that the thoughts of man are material, it is equally true to say that the earth from which man was taken is spiritual. Further, from these statements each writer deduces a similar moral. The only difference between them is, that Mr. Spencer puts it positively, and Professor Huxley negatively. Mr. Spencer says that a consciousness of the unknowable nature of the universe fills the mind

with religious emotion. Professor Huxley says that the same consciousness will preserve from destruction the emotion that already exists in it. We will examine the positive and negative propositions in order, and see what bearing, if any, they have on practical life.

Mr. Spencer connects his religion with practical life thus. The mystery and the immensity of the All, and our own inseparable connection with it, deepen and solemnise our own conception of ourselves. They make us regard ourselves as 'elements in that great evolution of which the beginning and the end are beyond our knowledge or conception;' and in especial they make us so regard our 'own innermost convictions.'

'It is not for nothing,' says Mr. Spencer, 'that a man has in him these sympathies with some principles and repugnance to others. . . . He is a descendant of the past; he is a parent of the future; and his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. He, like every other man, may properly consider himself as one of the myriad agencies through whom works the Unknown Cause: and when the Unknown Cause produces in him a certain belief, he is thereby authorised to profess and act upon this belief.'[1]

In all the annals of intellectual self-deception, it would be hard to find anything to outdo, or even to approach this. What a man does or thinks, what he professes or acts upon, can have no effect whatever, conceivable to ourselves, beyond such effects as it produces within the limits of this planet; and hardly any effect worth our consideration, beyond such as it

[1] *First Principles*, p. 123.

produces on himself and a few of his fellow-men. Now, how can any of these effects be connected with the evolution of the universe in such a way as to enable a consciousness of the universe to inform us that one set of effects should be aimed at by us rather than another? The Positivists say that our aim should be the progress of man; and that, as I have said, forms a standard of duty, though it may not supply a motive. But what has the universe to do with the progress of man? Does it know anything about it; or care anything about it? Judging from the language of Mr. Spencer and Professor Huxley, one would certainly suppose that it did. Surely, in that case, here is anthropomorphism with a vengeance. 'It is not for nothing,' says Mr. Spencer, 'that the Unknowable has implanted in a man certain impulses.' What is this but the whole theologic doctrine of design? Can anything be more inconsistent with the entire theory of the Evolutionist? Mr. Spencer's argument means, if it means anything, that the Unknowable has implanted in us one set of sympathies in a sense in which it has not implanted others: else the impulse to deny one's belief, and not to act on it, which many people experience, would be authorised by the Unknowable as much as the impulse to profess it, and to act on it. And according to Mr. Spencer's entire theory, according to Professor Huxley's entire theory, according to the entire theory of modern science, it is precisely this that is the case. If it is the fact that the Unknowable works through any of our actions, it works through all alike, bad, good, and indifferent, through our lies as well as through our truth-telling, through our injuries to our race as well

as through our benefits to it. The attempt to connect the well-being of humanity with any general tendency observable in the universe, is in fact, on Agnostic principles, as hopeless as an attempt to get, in a balloon, to Jupiter. It is utterly unfit for serious men to talk about; and its proper place, if anywhere, would be in one of Jules Verne's story-books. The destinies of mankind, as far as we have any means of knowing, have as little to do with the course of the Unknowable, as a whole, as the destinies of an ant-hill in South Australia have to do with the question of Home Rule for Ireland.

Or even supposing the Unknowable to have any feeling in the matter, how do we know that its feeling would be in our favour, and that it would not be gratified by the calamities of humanity, rather than by its improvement? Or here is a question which is more important still. Supposing the Unknowable did desire our improvement, but we, as Professor Huxley says of us, were obstinately bent against being improved, what could the Unknowable do to us for thus thwarting its wishes?

And this leads us to another aspect of the matter. If consciousness of the Unknowable does not directly influence action, it may yet be said that the contemplation of the universe as the wonderful garment of this unspeakable mystery, is calculated to put the mind into a serious and devout condition, which would make it susceptible to the solemn voice of duty. How any devotion so produced could have any connection with duty I confess I am at a loss to see. But I need not dwell on that point, for what I wish to show is this,

that contemplation of the Unknowable, from the Agnostic's point of view, is not calculated to produce any sense of devoutness at all. Devoutness is made up of three things, fear, love, and wonder; but were the Agnostic's thoughts really controlled by his own principles (which they are not) not one of these emotions could the Unknowable possibly excite in him. It need hardly be said that he has no excuse for loving it, for his own first principles forbid him to say that it is lovable, or that it possesses any character, least of all any anthropomorphic character. But perhaps it is calculated to excite fear or awe in him. The idea is more plausible than the other. The universe as compared with man is a revelation of forces that are infinite, and it may be said that surely these have something awful and impressive in them. There is, however, another side to the question. This universe represents not only infinite forces, but it represents also infinite impotence. So long as we conform ourselves to certain ordinary rules we may behave as we like for anything it can do to us. We may look at it with eyes of adoration, or make faces at it, and blaspheme it, but for all its power it cannot move a finger to touch us. Why, then, should a man be in awe of this lubberly All, whose blindness and impotence are at least as remarkable as its power, and from which man is as absolutely safe as a mouse in a hole is from a lion? But there still remains the emotion of wonder to be considered. Is not the universe calculated to excite our wonder? From the Agnostic point of view we must certainly say No. The further science reveals to us the constitution of things, the feeling borne in on us

more and more strongly is this, that it is not wonderful that things happen as they do, but that it would be wonderful if they happened otherwise: whilst as for the Unknown Cause that is behind what science reveals to us, we cannot wonder at that, for we know nothing at all about it; and if there is any wonder involved in the matter at all, it is nothing but wonder at our own ignorance.

So much, then, for our mere emotions towards the Unknowable. There still remains, however, one way more in which it is alleged that our consciousness of it can be definitely connected with duty; and this is the way which our Agnostic philosophers most commonly have in view, and to which they allude most frequently. I mean to the search after scientific truth and the proclamation of it, regardless of consequences. Whenever the Agnostics are pressed as to the consequences of their principles it is on this conception of duty that they invariably fall back. Mr. Herbert Spencer, on his own behalf, expresses the position thus—

> The highest truth he sees will the wise man fearlessly utter, knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world, knowing that if he can effect the change [in belief] he aims at, well; if not, well also, though not *so* well.[1]

After what has been said already it will not be necessary to dwell long on this astonishing proposition. A short examination will suffice to show its emptiness. That a certain amount of truth in social intercourse is necessary for the continuance of society, and that a large

[1] *First Principles*, p. 123.

number of scientific truths are useful in enabling us to add to our material comforts, is, as Professor Huxley would say, 'surely indisputable.' And truth thus understood it is 'surely indisputable' that we should cultivate. The reason is obvious. Such truth has certain social consequences; certain things that we all desire come of it: but the highest truth which Mr. Spencer speaks of stands, according to him, on a wholly different basis, and we are to cultivate it, not because of its consequences, but in defiance of them. And what are its consequences, so far as we can see? Professor Huxley's answer is this: 'I have had, and have, the firmest conviction that . . . the *verace via*, the straight road, has led nowhere else but into the dark depths of a wild and tangled forest.' Now if this be the case, what possible justification can there be for following this *verace via*? In what sense is the man who follows it playing 'his right part in the world?' And when Mr. Spencer says, with regard to his conduct, 'it is well,' with whom is it well, or in what sense is it well? We can use such language with any warrant or with any meaning only on the supposition that the universe, or the Unknowable as manifested through the universe, is concerned with human happiness in some special way, in which it is not concerned with human misery, and that thus our knowledge of it must somehow make men happier, even though it leads them into a wild and tangled forest. It is certain that our devotion to truth will not benefit the universe; the only question is, will knowledge of the universe, beyond a certain point, benefit us? But the supposition just mentioned is merely theism in disguise. It imputes to

the Unknowable design, purpose, and affection. In every way it is contrary to the first principles of Agnosticism. Could we admit it, then devotion to truth might have all the meaning that Mr. Spencer claims for it: but if this supposition is denied, as all Agnostics deny it, this devotion to truth, seemingly so noble and so unassailable, sinks to a superstition more abject, more meaningless, and more ridiculous, than that of any African savage, grovelling and mumbling before his fetish.

We have now passed under review the main positive arguments by which our Agnostics, whilst dismissing the existence of God as a question of lunar politics, endeavour to exhibit the reality of religion, and of duty, as a thing that is 'surely indisputable.' We will now pass on to their negative arguments. Whilst by their positive arguments they endeavour to prove that duty and religion are realities, by their negative arguments they endeavour to prove that duty and religion are not impossibilities. We have seen how absolutely worthless to their cause are the former; but if the former are worthless, the latter are positively fatal.

What they are the reader has already seen. I have taken the statement of them from Professor Huxley, but Mr. Spencer uses language almost precisely similar. These arguments start with two admissions. Were all our actions linked one to another by mechanical necessity, it is admitted that responsibility and duty would be no longer conceivable. Our 'energies,' as Professor Huxley admits, would be 'paralysed' by 'utter necessarianism.' Further, did our conception of matter represent a reality, were matter low and gross, as we are accustomed to

think of it, then man, as the product of matter, would be low and gross also, and heroism and duty would be really successfully degraded, by being reduced to questions of carbon and ammonia. But from all of these difficulties Professor Huxley professes to extricate us. Let us look back at the arguments by which he considers that he has done so.

We will begin with his method of liberating us from the 'iron' law of necessity, and thus giving us back our freedom and moral character. He performs this feat, or rather, he thinks he has performed it, by drawing a distinction between what *will* happen and what *must* happen. On this distinction his entire position is based. Now in every argument used by any sensible man there is probably some meaning. Let us try fairly to see what is the meaning in this. I take it that the idea at the bottom of Professor Huxley's mind is as follows. Though all our scientific reasoning presupposes the uniformity of the universe, we are unable to assert of the reality behind the universe, that it might not manifest itself in ways by which all present science would be baffled. But what has an idea like this to do with any practical question? So far as man, and man's will, are concerned, we have to do only with the universe as we know it; and the only knowledge we have of it, worth calling knowledge, involves, as Professor Huxley is constantly telling us, 'the great act of faith,' which leads us to take what has been as a certain index of what will be. Now, with regard to this universe, Professor Huxley tells us that the progress of science has always meant, and 'means now more than ever,' 'the extension of the province of . . . . causation, and

. . . . the banishment of spontaneity.'[1] And this applies, as he expressly says, to human thought and action as much as to the flowering of a plant. Just as there can be no voluntary action without volition, so there can be no volition without some preceding cause. Accordingly, if a man's condition at any given moment were completely known, his actions could be predicted with as much or with as little certainty as the fall of a stone could be predicted if released from the hand that held it. Now Professor Huxley tells us that, with regard to certainty, we are justified in saying that the stone will fall; and we should, therefore, be justified in saying similarly of the man, that he will act in such and such a manner. Whether theoretically we are absolutely certain is no matter. We are absolutely certain for all practical purposes, and the question of human freedom is nothing if not practical. What then is gained—is anything gained—is the case in any way altered—by telling ourselves that though there is certainty in the case, there is no necessity? Suppose I held a loaded pistol to Professor Huxley's ear, and offered to pull the trigger, should I reconcile him to the operation by telling him that though it certainly would kill him, there was not the least necessity that it should do so? And with regard to volition and action, as the result of preceding causes, is not the case precisely similar? Let Professor Huxley turn to all the past actions of humanity. Can he point to any smallest movement of any single human being, which has not been the product of causes, which in their turn have been the product of other causes? Or can he point to

[1] *Lay Sermons*, p. 123.

any causes which, under given conditions, could have produced any effects other than those they have produced, unless he uses the word *could* in the foolish and fantastic sense which would enable him to say that unsupported stones could possibly fly upwards? For all practical purposes the distinction between *must* and *will* is neither more nor less than a feeble and childish sophism. Theoretically no doubt it will bear this meaning—that the Unknowable might have so made man, that at any given moment his actions would be different from what they are: but it does nothing to break the force of what all science teaches us—that man, formed as he is, cannot act otherwise than as he does. The universe may have no necessity at the back of *it;* but its present and its past alike are a necessity at the back of *us;* and it is not necessity, but it is doubt of necessity, that is really 'the shadow of our own mind's throwing.'

And now let us face Professor Huxley's other argument, which is to save life from degradation by taking away the reproach from matter. If it is true, he tells us, to say that everything, mind included, is matter, it is equally true to say that everything, matter included, is mind; and thus, he argues, the dignity we all attribute to mind at once is seen to diffuse itself throughout the entire universe. Mr. Herbert Spencer puts the same view thus:

> Such an attitude of mind [contempt for matter and dread of materialism] is significant not so much of a reverence for the Unknown Cause, as of an irreverence for those familiar forms in which the Unknown Cause is manifested

to us.[1] . . . But whoever remembers that the forms of existence of which the uncultivated speak with so much scorn . . . are found to be the more marvellous the more they are investigated, and are also found to be in their natures absolutely incomprehensible . . . will see that the course proposed [a reduction of all things to terms of matter] does not imply a degradation of the so-called higher, but an elevation of the so-called lower.

The answer to this argument, so far as it touches any ethical or religious question, is at once simple and conclusive. The one duty of ethics and of religion is to draw a distinction between two states of emotion and two courses of action—to elevate the one and to degrade the other. But the argument we are now considering, though undoubtedly true in itself, has no bearing on this distinction whatever. It is invoked to show that religion and duty remain spiritual in spite of all materialism; but it ends, with unfortunate impartiality, in showing the same thing of vice and of cynical worldliness. If the life of Christ is elevated by being seen in this light, so also is the life of Casanova; and it is as impossible in this way to make the one higher than the other, as it is to make one man higher than another by taking them both up in one balloon.

I have now gone through the whole case for duty and for religion, as stated by the Agnostic school, and have shown that as thus stated there is no case at all. I have shown their arguments to be so shallow, so irrelevant, and so contradictory, that they never could have imposed themselves on the men who condescend to use them, if these men, upon utterly alien grounds,

[1] *First Principles*, p. 556.

had not pledged themselves to the conclusion which they invoke the arguments to support.

Something else, however, still remains to be done. Having seen how Agnosticism fails to give a basis to either religion or duty, I will point out to the reader how it actively and mercilessly destroys them. Religion and duty, as has been constantly made evident in the course of the foregoing discussion, are, in the opinion of the Agnostics, inseparably connected. Duty is a course of conduct which is more than conformity to human law; religion consists of the emotional reasons for pursuing that conduct. Now these reasons, on the showing of the Agnostics themselves, are reasons that are not naturally forced on us by our daily interests and occupations. They lie above and beyond the ordinary things of life, and we must seek them out and rise to them in moods of devoutness and abstraction; but after communing with them on this elevated plane it is supposed that we shall descend to the ordinary world of action with our purposes sharpened and intensified. Such is the idea of the Agnostics. It is easy to see, however, if we divest ourselves of all prejudice, and really conceive ourselves to be convinced of nothing which is not demonstrable by the methods of Agnostic science, that the more we dwell on the Agnostic doctrine of the universe, the less and not the more will duty seem to be binding on us.

I have said that this doctrine can supply us with no religion. If we will, however, but invert the tendencies which religion is supposed to have, Agnosticism can and will supply us with a religion indeed. It will supply us with a religion which, if we describe it in

theological language, we may with literal accuracy describe as the religion of the devil—of the devil, the spirit which denies. Instead of telling us of duty, that it has a meaning which does not lie on the surface, such meaning as may lie on the surface it will utterly take away. It will indeed tell us that the soul which sins shall die; but it will tell us in the same breath that the soul which does not sin shall die the same death. Instead of telling us that we are responsible for our actions, it will tell us that if anything is responsible for them it is the blind and unfathomable universe; and if we are asked to repent of any sins we have committed, it will tell us we might as well be repentant about the structure of the solar system. These meditations, these communings with scientific truth, will be the exact inverse of the religious meditations of the Christian. Every man, no doubt, has two voices—the voice of self-indulgence or indifference, and the voice of effort and duty; but whereas the religion of the Christian enabled him to silence the one, the religion of the Agnostic will for ever silence the other. I say for ever, but I probably ought to correct myself. Could the voice be silenced for ever, then there might be peace in the sense in which Roman conquerors gave the name of peace to solitude. But it is more likely that the voice will still continue, together with the longing expressed by it, only to feel the pains of being again and again silenced, or sent back to the soul, saying bitterly, I am a lie.

Such, then, is really the result of Agnosticism on life, and the result is so obvious to anyone who knows how to reason, that it could be hidden from nobody,

except by one thing, and that is the cowardice characteristic of all our contemporary Agnostics. They dare not face what they have done. They dare not look fixedly at the body of the life which they have pierced.

And now comes the final question to which all that I have thus far urged has been leading. What does theologic religion answer to the principles and to the doctrines of Agnosticism? In contemporary discussion the answer is constantly obscured, but it is of the utmost importance that it should be given clearly. It says this: If we start from and are faithful to the Agnostic's fundamental principles, that nothing is to be regarded as certain which is not either demonstrated or demonstrable, then the denial of God is the only possible creed for us. To the methods of science nothing in this universe gives any hint of either a God or a purpose. Duty and holiness, aspiration and love of truth, are 'merely shadows of our own mind's throwing,' but shadows which, instead of making the reality brighter, only serve to make it more ghastly and hideous. Humanity is a bubble; the human being is a puppet, cursed with the intermittent illusion that he is something more, and roused from this illusion with a pang every time it flatters him. Now from this condition of things is there no escape? Theologic religion answers, There is one, and one only, and this is the repudiation of the principle on which all Agnosticism rests.

Let us see what this repudiation amounts to, and we shall then realise what, in the present day, is the intellectual basis which theologic religion claims. Theologic religion does not say that within limits the

Agnostic principle is not perfectly valid and has not led to the discovery of a vast body of truth. But what it does say is this: that the truths which are thus discovered are not the only truths which are certainly and surely discoverable. The fundamental principle of Agnosticism is that nothing is certainly true but such truths as are demonstrated or demonstrable. The fundamental principle of theologic religion is, that there are other truths of which we can be equally or even more certain, and that these are the only truths that give life a meaning and redeem us from the body of death. Agnosticism says nothing is certain which cannot be proved by science. Theologic religion says, nothing which is important can be. Agnosticism draws a line round its own province of knowledge, and beyond that it declares is the unknown void which thought cannot enter, and in which belief cannot support itself. Where Agnosticism pauses, there Religion begins. On what seems to science to be unsustaining air, it lays its foundations—it builds up its fabric of certainties. Science regards them as dreams, as an 'unsubstantial pageant;' and yet even to science Religion can give some account of them. Professor Huxley says, as we have seen, that 'from the nature of ratiocination,' it is obvious that it must start 'from axioms which cannot be demonstrated by ratiocination;' and that in science it must start with 'one great act of faith'—faith in the uniformity of nature. Religion replies to science: 'And I too start with a faith in one thing. I start with a faith which you too profess to hold—faith in the meaning of duty and the infinite importance of life; and out of that faith my

whole fabric of certainties, one after the other, is reared by the hands of reason. Do you ask for proof? Do you ask for verification? I can give you one only, which you may take or leave as you choose. Deny the certainties which I declare to be certain—deny the existence of God, deny man's freedom and immortality, and by no other conceivable hypothesis can you vindicate for man's life any possible meaning, or save it from the degradation at which you profess to feel so concerned. 'Is there no other way,' I can conceive Science asking, 'no other way by which the dignity of life may be vindicated, except this—the abandonment of my one fundamental principle? Must I put my lips, in shame and humiliation, to the cup of faith I have so contemptuously cast away from me? May not this cup pass from me? Is there salvation in no other?' And to this question, without passion or prejudice, the voice of reason and logic pitilessly answers 'No.'

Here is the dilemma which men, sooner or later, will see before them, in all its crudeness and nakedness, cleared from the rags with which the cowardice of contemporary Agnosticism has obscured it; and they will then have to choose one alternative or the other. What their choice will be I do not venture to prophesy; but I will venture to call them happy if their choice prove to be this: To admit frankly that their present canon of certainty, true so far as it goes, is only the pettiest part of truth, and that the deepest certainties are those which, if tried by this canon, are illusions. To make this choice a struggle would be required with pride, and with what has long passed for

enlightenment; and yet when it is realised what depends on the struggle, there are some at least who will think that it must end successfully. The only way by which, in the face of science, we can ever logically arrive at a faith in life, is by the commission of what many at present will describe as an intellectual suicide. I do not for a moment admit that such an expression is justifiable, but if I may use it provisionally, because it harmonises with the temper at present prevalent, I shall be simply pronouncing the judgment of frigid reason in saying that it is only through the grave and gate of death that the spirit of man can pass to its resurrection.

AMATEUR CHRISTIANITY

In the following essay there are two errors which I desire to correct, and I can do so more effectively by calling attention to them than by expunging them. I have classed amongst the persons who persist in calling themselves Christians, whilst refusing to believe in miracles and the miraculous character of Christ, Mr. Hutton, editor of 'The Spectator,' and Mr. W. T. Stead. I have since had reason to believe that I was mistaken as to Mr. Hutton's position, and from Mr. Stead I received a very indignant letter, bringing against me a charge, which he repeated in his own review, of breaking the Ninth Commandment, and 'bearing false witness against him.' He emphatically declares that he does believe in miracles, and more especially in the miraculous character of Christ. I am anxious to express my regret for my involuntary error with regard to him, and to record how unhesitatingly I defer to him as an authority about his own belief. But although his position, it appears, differs so fundamentally from my description of it, it happens, on this very account, to be all the more open to certain of the criticisms contained in the following essay. In this essay I have explained, as the reader will see, that the persons who regard Christ as nothing more than a man, and yet pose as apostles of Christian doctrine, base their approval of this doctrine—little as they may themselves perceive it—on their own tastes and consciences, not on Christ's authority. They give Christ His testimonial: they do not go to Him for theirs. And this procedure Mr. Stead adopts and even travesties, although at the same moment he is proclaiming Christ to be God. He pats on the back the Logos that was before all worlds; and acts as Magistrate's Clerk to the most worthy Judge Eternal. The result is a Christianity which differs from that criticised in this essay, only in the fact of its being much more grotesque. Christ, indeed, as treated

by Mr. Stead, is neither more nor less than a kind of spiritual Mrs. Harris, whose sole function is to praise Mr. Stead's plans and prejudices, and to declare him 'to be the best of blessings in a sick world.'

I have no wish to say a word against Mr. Stead's good faith and good intentions. No doubt he believes implicitly in what he professes to believe in; and since this essay was written, he has given the world information which may well lead us to think that he is capable of believing anything. He has declared himself a believer not only in the miraculous character of Christ, but a believer also in the reality of verbal inspiration; the inspired writings, however, being not the Biblical books, but certain parts—as I gather—of one of his own newspapers. The inspiring power, moreover, is much less vague in its operations than the fire that touched the lips of the Hebrew prophet, or the flames that sat on the heads of the early Christians. It takes the form of a young lady named Julia, who inspires Mr. Stead by the intelligible, and no doubt agreeable process of holding his hand and guiding it, whilst his hand merely holds the pen. His inspirations, in fact, seem to come to him as a knowledge of modern Greek came to Lord Byron and Don Juan; and he might appropriately say as Lord Byron said with reference to his own Julias—

'I learnt the little that I know by this.'

Mr. Stead cannot, of course, be expected to see himself as others see him; but he must, of course be aware that there are a large number of others who will inevitably see him as he does not see himself; and I retain in the following pages my mention of him as it originally stood, partly with a view to emphasizing my withdrawal of a statement that was inaccurate about him; and partly because, that correction having been made, his position as an 'amateur Christian' becomes only the more obvious.

FEW literary events, in this country or America, have been witnessed of late years, in one way more signifi-

cant than the abnormal success of a certain English novel. I mean the 'Robert Elsmere' of Mrs. Humphry Ward. Of its intrinsic merits there is no occasion to speak, for those even who would be disposed to estimate them most highly, would admit them to be quite incommensurate with the interest the book excited. Its interest, or at least its exceptional interest, lay entirely in the subject; and when I call its abnormal success significant, I mean that it was significant on account of the light it threw, not on the writer, but on the mental condition of her readers. In this way it exhibited three things—first, the amount of unformulated scepticism prevalent amongst the Christian public; secondly, the eagerness of this public to understand its own scepticisms more clearly; and lastly, its eagerness to discover that, whatever its scepticism might take from it, something would still be left it, which was really the essence of Christianity. In other words, the popularity of 'Robert Elsmere' is mainly an expression of the prevalence of the devout idea that the essence of Christianity will somehow survive the doctrines of Christianity.

The same fact is illustrated by the prosperity of numerous journals, which are animated by the same idea, and supported by those who share it. It will be enough to mention two of them—'The Review of Reviews' and 'The Spectator.'

I mention this novel, and these two successful journals, merely as a means of putting with some precision a fact which, if put vaguely, it is hardly possible to discuss. All three publications, then, resemble each other in the following way. They all three of them have a similar moral tone; they have all

of them a devotional tone, and that is similar also; and their morals and their devoutness are those of the severest traditional Christianity, with its special sectarian features not softened but accentuated. Both the journals in question, if they would praise or condemn conduct, are accustomed to do so by saying that it is, or is not, Christian; and how to live like a Christian is the one problem of the novelist. And yet all three are in agreement as to one fundamental doctrine, which Mrs. Ward expresses with trenchant brevity—namely, '*Miracles do not happen.*'

Let us expand this phrase into its most important specific meanings. It means that Christ was in no sense a miraculous person; but that He was born like other men, and died like other men; that He differed from other men in degree only, not in kind, just as any saint might differ from any sinner. It means also that the records of Christ's life are not more accurate than any ordinary biographies; whilst as for the Epistles, they illustrate Christ's teaching merely as Plato has illustrated the teaching of Socrates.

Here, then, we have the views of that large number of persons—active teachers and silent sympathetic disciples, who conceive themselves to be the nucleus of the Christian Church of the future—a Church which will not destroy but inherit the power of the Christianity of the past. And, indeed, such persons form a very important body, the position and prospects of which are well worth considering. For the world, like Mr. Gladstone, has three courses open to it—to submit itself openly to the uncompromising dogmatism of Rome; to free itself from the fetters of Christianity

altogether; or to attempt the construction of a Christianity such as these persons hope for.

The point, therefore, which I propose to consider is, whether this hope of theirs is based on any reality, or merely on prejudice or self-delusion; or whether to some extent it may not be based on both. Our preliminary question and its answer will be found to be very simple. If all the traditional doctrines as to Christ's nature are discarded, is anything left us that we can honestly call Christianity? With a certain reservation, which will be dwelt on presently, we answer to this, Yes—a great deal is left. Christianity, even according to the most rigid apostles of orthodoxy, is not merely a body of historical or metaphysical propositions. It is a rule of life, a way of looking at life, and a certain inward disposition of which these things are the result. To be just, to be pure, to be forbearing, to be forgiving, to help others and have the longing to help them—these are duties or virtues which commend themselves to a part of our nature, quite distinct from that which assents to or even considers such propositions as that Christ was born of a virgin, that He was begotten before all worlds, or that He withered a fig-tree by His curse. And if this be true of the teaching of Christ, it is equally true of His character as an example of it. His personality, like his precepts, owes its hold upon men to their moral and emotional, not their intellectual nature. Thus the impulse which leads them to take up their cross and deny themselves, to visit the sick, to suffer for the suffering, to cleanse their own hearts from malevolent or degrading passions, and to reverence the teacher

who has been an example of all these excellencies, is an impulse which refuses to extinguish itself merely because science and history have altered our views with regard to that teacher's pedigree; nor will his heroism in dying for the truth affect us any the less, because we have learnt to believe that, in doing so, he had not the solace of foreseeing himself at once coming to life again. In other words, not as a theological doctrine, but as a psychological fact, a large part of the kingdom of Christ is within Christians—even the most orthodox. It is not in their knowledge; it is in themselves: and it is only natural to expect that the men of whom this is true will not even contemplate the idea of committing spiritual suicide, because their views of history happen to have undergone a revolution.

All this might be put in much more touching language; but for our present purpose it is best to state things drily; and the admission I have just made is, at all events, abundantly clear. A large part of orthodox and traditional Christianity—and the part most intimately connected with practical life and character—has survived and is surviving the discredit of orthodoxy and tradition. The question, however, is not whether this part survives, but whether it survives unchanged; and to what extent it can honestly appropriate the name of the whole.

A name in a case like this is a very important matter; and if it is used in a misleading and illicit way, there is no species of fraud which should be exposed with less tenderness. For what we have here to do with is no question of etymology. Names are of different kinds. Some retain their original and simple

meaning. Others, by the time they come into general use, have acquired a meaning which, etymologically, is quite accidental, but which, for all practical purposes, belongs to them none the less. The words 'Christian' and 'Christianity' are words of this class; and it would be impossible to find more complete and striking examples of it. A Christian has meant, for eighteen hundred years, a man distinguished, amongst other things, by a belief that Christ is God; and the accumulated associations of all that immense period have made this part of the word's meaning perhaps the most unquestioned and prominent part. It need not for that reason be necessarily the most essential. That is precisely the question—is it so? Or is it merely prominent accidentally, and not essential at all? And will the word, with this part of its meaning dropped, be a virtual equivalent to the word with this meaning included? In old days, when one spoke of an Axminster carpet, a carpet was designated which was of a particular kind, and which, furthermore, was made at the town of Axminster. Such carpets are now made at Axminster no longer, but carpets of the same kind are made elsewhere. They still, however, are called Axminster carpets. Here is a case in which the most prominent meaning of a term is dropped, and in which the essential meaning is still retained. Now, is the case of the words Christian and Christianity the same? Is it no more essential to a Christian that he should believe Christ to be God, than it is to a carpet of a particular quality of pile, that it should be made at a certain insignificant town in Devonshire? I propose to point out that it is a great deal more essential; and that

though, if we were all using the word Christian for the first time, we might apply it with equal propriety to any one who revered Christ, we cannot apply it so now without a distinct spiritual fraud.

My meaning in saying this is, until I have actually explained it, almost certain to be mistaken. In order to make it clear, let me repeat what I have said already. Christianity hitherto has meant a union of two elements, of which one is moral and emotional, the other doctrinal. We may call one the Christianity of the heart, the other the Christianity of the intellect. These two elements, although always separable in thought, have hitherto been regarded as inseparable in reality. What is now being urged on us is that they are as separable in reality as in thought; that we can get rid of the one and still retain the other; that the one we can still retain is the one which is most important; and that the name which has hitherto meant the two in combination may therefore, with virtual accuracy, be applied to the one alone. Now what I am desirous of pointing out is this—that while a large part of this argument is absolutely and irrefutably true, a large part is absolutely false. Let us get rid of the Christianity of the intellect as completely as we like, and the Christianity of the heart does not share its fate. It remains, but it remains with a difference; and this difference is not only accidental, but essential. The thing that is left us is not merely one element without the other, but one element changed by the absence of the other, and changed to such a degree that, though it may be called a religion of the heart, it cannot, except on etymological grounds, be honestly called the Christianity of the heart

any longer. It is not the Christianity of the heart which Christians have lived by hitherto, and to persist in calling it by the same name is to palm off a new article under an old trade-mark.

To begin, then, ignoring every other change—the Christianity of the heart, divorced from the Christianity of the intellect, is the Christianity of the heart turned upside down, and resting on a new foundation. Originally the foundation was Christ; in the present case it is ourselves. Originally certain things were revered because Christ enjoined them. In the present case Christ is revered because He enjoined certain things. We approve of the injunctions, and therefore we approve of Christ. In other words, our own moral or our own spiritual judgment is the ultimate sanction of our religion. On this point let us make ourselves perfectly clear. There were good men in the world before Christ, and there have been good men since, who have known neither His teaching or example; and their goodness, in many respects, has coincided with His. But if the goodness of Christ, He being merely a man, differed in nothing except degree from the goodness of Paganism, and if the idea of goodness had been always for serious men the same, He is merely one saint amongst many in the great calendar of humanity; and to follow His example is not to obey Him, but to imitate His obedience to some monitor common to Him and all of us. A Christian in that case is merely a fanciful name for a good man. As a matter of fact, however, Christians have always claimed for Christ that there was in His goodness something distinctive in kind as well as in degree; that He was peculiar not only in

being a perfect example of a type, but in being an example of a peculiar type; so that any honest imitation of Christ, however incomplete, is better than the complete imitation of Marcus Aurelius or of Mahomet. Christians, I say, have always claimed this for Christ; and all persons who value the name of Christians make precisely the same claim for Him now. Those who think Him to be merely man, and those who think Him to be God as well, agree that He represents, as man, the perfect type of character. In other words, they have one dogma in common which, when their differences are eliminated, is seen to amount to this: that one special type of character is the absolute and perfect type. Mrs. Ward maintains this with as much unction as Cardinal Newman.

But let us go on to ask on what grounds they maintain this, and the fundamental difference between their two positions will appear. The Cardinal will answer that he knows the type to be perfect, because it was the type revealed by God in taking man's flesh upon him. Mrs. Ward can only account for her corresponding certitude by saying that it is the type which commends itself to her own judgment. She may, of course, add that it commends itself to the judgment of those she respects; but this in the long run comes to the same thing. The final authority of her glorification of this special type lies in the spiritual æsthetics of her own mind. Nor would the case be really altered, supposing that she and her friends could pool their predilections and give them a cumulative value. There would still be merely the predilections of a certain set of persons, who could only enforce their views by

shouting, 'The views are ours.' Miracles do not happen; that is the motto of this peculiar people. Their fundamental principle denudes them of every possible claim to knowledge or insight not possessed by others. They can only tell the world that tastes happen to vary—tastes in goodness as well as taste in dress; and that the garment of goodness, made after Christ's pattern, happens to be the garment most pleasing to themselves, while their only means of inducing others to wear it, is that of exhibiting it, as it were, in their shop-windows, as General Booth might exhibit a Salvation Army jersey.

If they boldly and frankly took up this position many might admire, and certainly no one could quarrel, with it; only it would be a position which, until the meaning of the name is revolutionised, could not with any honesty be called by the name of Christian. For to call it by that name, considering what the name means at present, instead of describing it belies it and literally inverts it. A Christian at present means a man with whom Christ is the supreme authority—a man who can clench an argument by quoting Christ's words. It is impossible to deny this—it is impossible to get over this. The very sound of the word Christ, as used by Christians, at present echoes with associations of authority of this kind. But it is precisely this authority that Mrs. Ward, and those who agree with her, deny. Their denial of it—a denial at once deliberate and passionate—is the one thing by which they distinguish themselves from the orthodox. They are curiously blind, however, to half of what their denial means. The Christians praised a certain type of character because

Christ embodied it. Mrs. Ward praises Christ because He embodied a certain type of character. The ultimate ground, the ultimate justification of her praise, is her admiration of this type, not a belief in Christ. Christ's existence, logically, is for her as much a moral superfluity as the existence of a philanthropist like Lord Shaftesbury. Lord Shaftesbury did a number of benevolent things; but Mrs. Ward does not admire benevolence because it was a characteristic of Lord Shaftesbury. She would admire Lord Shaftesbury because he was an example of benevolence; and if she discovered to-morrow that the career of Lord Shaftesbury was a myth, her admiration of benevolence would still remain unchanged.

I may, perhaps, be allowed, without being accused of flippancy, to mention an incident which occurred during my own boyhood. When I was at a private tutor's, I and some of the other pupils were discussing the right pronunciation of the name of an American humorist. We were discussing whether he should be spoken of as Artĕmus, or Artēmus, Ward. One of the pupils who posed as a man of the world, and who had a brother who very possibly was one, supported his own view by saying, with an air of triumph, 'I can tell you that my brother always calls him Artēmus.' But presently, in order to add to his own authority still further, he proceeded to make the injudicious assertion, 'My brother calls him Artēmus because I do.' 'In that case,' said our tutor, who happened to be a listener, 'two authorities are reduced to one.' Mrs. Ward is in precisely the same case. 'I must be right,' she argues, 'because I agree with Christ; and I know that Christ is right, because He agrees with me.' In asking her, then, for the founda-

tions of what she calls her Christianity, we shall find that inevitably in the end she must place them in her own personal predilections. Christ is not the authority for her religion, but merely an example by which she explains it.

And here let me pause to remove a misconception which is certain to suggest itself. 'What,' some excellent person will exclaim, 'if we are driven to believe that Christ was merely a good man, is goodness for that reason made a mere matter of taste? Is Mrs. Ward's preference of mercy to cruelty, of justice to injustice, of truth to fraud and falsehood, a preference she can put forward only as a personal predilection of her own? Have these virtues no defence in the common reason of man? Have they no root in the structure of all society? Cannot science afford us the amplest justification of all of them?' The answer is, that if science can, then there is no reason to have recourse to the Gospels. Why need we go back to the fragmentary assertions of Christ, when all that he meant and more can be found demonstrated by Bentham? If Christ said only what modern science can prove, then modern science says it much better than He did—with greater weight and with far greater completeness; and to quote His words, except for the sake of literary emphasis, would be like Professor Huxley appealing to the authority of Lucretius. As a matter of fact, however, the case does not stand thus. Christ's goodness, at least in the conception of persons like Mrs. Humphry Ward, has in it something distinct from the goodness of utilitarian science: or it is, at all events, one particular type of goodness, out of the many types for which utili-

tarian science can offer a logical basis; and the whole gospel which Mrs. Ward preaches may be summed up in the proposition, not that goodness is better than badness, virtue better than villainy, but that one special modification of goodness is better than any other, though science leaves them all on exactly the same level. And this proposition, unless miracles *do* happen, and unless Christ is God, can be propounded and defended only as expressing the personal predilection or judgment of such persons as propound it.

If even yet this should appear doubtful, a further set of considerations, which are immediately forced upon us, will be sufficient to prove its truth. Let us suppose for a moment, for the mere sake of argument, that Mrs. Ward's preference for the Christian type of goodness can be shown to rest upon something beyond her own taste and judgment. The question still remains, what that Christian type is. Christ's own character, regarded as merely human, has been conceived of differently by nearly every critic that has dealt with it; whilst even those who have had tradition and orthodoxy to help them, have shown us plainly enough, by the variety of their attempts to imitate it, how grotesquely divergent have been their conceptions of what it was. An imitation, in each case we may presume equally honest, produces a St. Simeon Stylites on the one hand, and a Rev. Charles Kingsley on the other; and indirectly it shows itself in such singularly antagonistic ways, as a carnival in the streets of Nice, and a Sabbath in the streets of Paisley. Differences of this kind date from the earliest Christian ages; and there was not a Gnostic, there was not a Manichæan, who had not,

according to Mrs. Ward's principles, as good a right to his own idea of Christ's character as the most orthodox of the fathers, as St. Paul or as Robert Elsmere himself.

The so-called Christianity of such persons as Mrs. Ward is thus doubly an assertion, not of Christ, but of themselves: firstly, because their exaltation of Christ as a teacher is due solely to the fact of His embodying the teaching that they prefer; and secondly, because the Christ who embodies it is solely Christ as He exists in their own special conception of Him.

But let us waive for the present this last point altogether. By-and-by we shall have to come back to it; but it is used here as an illustration, not as an argument. The point which thus far I have been concerned to insist on is, that, even supposing no difference of opinion as to Christ's character possible, supposing every one conceived of His goodness in precisely the same way, yet for those who regard Him as nothing more than a man, the selection of His special type of goodness is a mere act of personal choice, only to be explained by saying, what might doubtless be said with truth, that this goodness appeals in some special way to their hearts.

This brings us, however, but halfway on our journey. Much of Christ's teaching is of this precise kind which appeals to all hearts, even if it does not conquer them; whilst those whom it does conquer, it conquers in this way—it reveals to them, it touches into activity, their own latent sympathies. It does not affect and control them as a voice outside themselves, but as a voice that has roused from sleep some authoritative voice within. Although, therefore, if Christ

is no longer regarded as God, His voice loses its authority over those who are not constitutionally in sympathy with Him, it need not, so far as their feelings are concerned, lose its stimulating power over those who constitutionally are.

But persons like Mrs. Ward, who, denying Christ's Divine nature, are still anxious to be prophets of His moral doctrine, are all of them invariably guilty of an astonishing oversight. Because part of Christ's moral doctrine appeals, as I have said, to the heart, they forget that there is another part, perhaps even more distinctive, and clung to by them with a yet more dogged tenacity, which, if it appeals to the heart at all, does so solely in virtue of some intellectual judgment. The teaching of any man from whom we consent to learn may be, and generally is, of two kinds: one consisting of things which are pointed out to us, the other of things which are asserted. And our assent to the two rests on wholly different foundations. Let us take, for instance, the case of some piece of antique plate, the value of which would depend partly on its hall-mark, partly on the fact of its having been the property of some historic personage. The owner, who desires to sell it, points us out the hall-mark, hidden in a place where we ourselves should never have looked for it; and he tells us that he purchased the object at a certain royal sale, and had formerly seen it himself displayed on a royal table. Now as to the hall-mark, though we might never have found it out for ourselves, and though we required to be assisted by some person of superior knowledge, yet the moment it is pointed out to us, our belief in its existence has nothing to do with our confidence in the

knowledge of this person. It rests entirely on the evidence of our own eyes. We become ourselves an independent and sufficient authority for its existence. But our belief in the value of the object as an historical relic is a belief that can only be ours at second hand, and stands or falls with our belief in the veracity and knowledge of our informant. It depends, in fact, on our assent to certain biographical propositions concerning him. If it could be proved that he had never been at the royal table referred to, nor even ever been in the country in which the alleged sale took place, we might still value the object on account of its age or beauty; but its added historical value would dissolve and become nothing.

The same is the case with the ethical teachings of Christ. Some of them as soon as uttered are at once assented to by all men, or by all men of a certain temperament, on their own merits. But others depend for their authority, not on any grounds which we can ourselves perceive, but on facts alleged by Christ, to which we give credit only on the supposition that Christ had peculiar means of ascertaining them. Let us take, for instance, the doctrines which He laid down as to marriage. Multitudes who, on mere human grounds, would think divorce desirable, sacrifice this opinion to certain mystical statements, which have not only no force, but have hardly any meaning, except as coming from a teacher possessed of supernatural knowledge. It will be enough to take the shortest and the most important of them. 'From the beginning it was not so.' Now if Christ was God, of course these words are authoritative, and in some sense or other we may be

sure that they are absolutely true. But if He was not God, they have no authority whatsoever. How should they have? If miracles do not happen, and if Christ was merely a man, He knew no more about 'the beginning' than any one of His hearers, and not so much as the author of 'Primitive Marriage.' Here, then, is a most important, central, and distinctive part, not of the doctrine of Christianity, but of its practical ethics, which obviously, if the doctrine goes, loses its sole foundation. A person who, having convinced himself that Christ is not God, still continues to cite Him as an authority on 'what was in the beginning,' is like a person who should quote Mr. Stanley as an authority on the interior of Africa, supposing it to be proved that the explorer had never been out of Clapham. And this argument will be found to go much deeper, and to have an application not only to certain precepts as to conduct, but to that whole inner attitude which, owing to Christ's statements, the Christian soul assumes in the presence of God the Father. If miracles do not happen, and if Christ had not been with God from the beginning, what authority had He for describing to us the Father's character? And why should we order our souls in accordance with what He told us?

I need not pursue this point. What I have said already is enough for my present purpose, which thus far is simply this. It is not to prove that such persons as Mrs. Ward, Mr. Stead, and the editor of 'The Spectator' are not right in preferring any religion they like, or that they do not believe what they profess to believe with complete and even passionate honesty; but merely that these beliefs cannot, on their own

admission, be held by them on Christ's authority, or on any authority but their own; that in fact the first result to which their whole position leads is the definite substitution of their own authority for His.

And now we come to the practical part of our inquiry. What is the result of this result? We must remember, when we ask the question, that our real interest in the matter is not so much in Mrs. Ward and her friends themselves as in the probable influence of their views on others, now and in the future. But in order to forecast what the influence of these views will be, it is necessary to consider the position of those who at present preach them.

Mrs. Ward and her friends then, if stript of a tattered livery of phrases, of which they could be denuded by a child, so completely have they renounced all right to them, are seen to be nothing more than a set of lay sectaries, bound together merely by an accidental coincidence of opinions, and forming a special party in the world of religion and morals, just as the League of the White Rose[1] does in the world of politics. Such being the case, what I desire to point out is this: that this religion of theirs, however much we may respect it in themselves, has in it nothing permanent. Not only is it not calculated to make proselytes in the present, but it has no self-preservative principle which can keep its doctrines from decomposition, or at all events from indefinite change. It has nothing in it with which to conquer the consciences of those who are not in sympathy with it, or to coerce the consciences of those who

[1] The League of the White Rose is, I believe, an association, the object of which is the restoration of the House of Stuart.

are. It is, to return to a simile I have used already, nothing more than a fashion in spiritual dress. Its votaries may at present follow it with the same ardour as that with which women adopt the fashionable millinery of the moment; but like any fashion in millinery, it is certain not to endure. In other words, Christianity with a non-miraculous Christ, is merely a form of opinion, of feeling, or of prejudice, which is no doubt honest even to the degree of fanaticism, but which is due entirely to peculiar and transitory circumstances; which has no abiding foundation in science, logic, or history; and which, though retaining at present the semblance of many Christian features, retains them only like shapes taken by a cloud, and doomed to be lost or metamorphosed in the inevitable restlessness of the air.

This assertion is no mere rhetorical prophecy. We have only to apply to Christianity as a whole the same methods which Mrs. Ward applies to a part, and just as Mrs. Ward sees that 'miracles do not happen,' we shall see that Mrs. Ward's Christianity cannot be permanent. Mrs. Ward is never weary of insisting on the value of evidence; and if evidence teaches us anything it teaches us this. It writes it for us across eighteen hundred years of history, in letters as large and staring as those of a big advertisement.

Mrs. Ward and her friends have blinded themselves to their real position by one of the most curious delusions possible to imagine—a delusion which implies the denial of every intellectual principle, of which they boast themselves to be the special exponents. Whilst pulling to pieces the doctrinal structure of Christianity, and exhibiting it as an historical and purely human

growth, they entirely forget to study in the same way its moral side, the historical growth of which is far more evident. These simple sons and daughters of modern Protestant England, with all their complicated inheritance of pieties, prejudices, and pruderies, imagine that they have only to get rid of a belief in miracles, and the spiritual residuum left is the religion of the first disciples. Nothing, they think, is wanting to place them on a level with the evangelists except to deny the statements on which the evangelists most insisted. But as a matter of fact—an obvious matter of fact—their emotions and morals, their whole inner spiritual character, differ from that of the Christians who knew Christ, as much as a Little Bethel in an English country town differs from the Temple at Jerusalem, or from 'the upper room furnished.'

I have no wish to say anything of Mrs. Ward personally, but the school she belongs to, and with which she is in spiritual sympathy, is a school which is distinctly the outcome of English middle-class Nonconformity; and the peculiar character of its moral ideas and precepts are due as much to national and social conditions, and the history of this country during the past four hundred years, as they are to the words of Christ recorded in the four Gospels. This may be easily seen by comparing them with other contemporary Christians. Different churches, different classes, different races or countries, exhibit moralities of different and often inharmonious types. Compare a nun rejoicing in the appearance of the stigmata with a dissenting minister's wife rejoicing in five fat children. Compare the Scotchman who solemnises Sunday by not whistling as

he gets drunk, with the Frenchman who celebrates it by a happy evening at the opera. Compare the different values accorded in different countries to the same virtues, and the different amount of charity accorded to the same sins.

For the distinctive character of any moral teaching does not depend merely on its comprising certain precepts, any more than the distinctive expression of a face depends on its comprising certain features. The expression of a face depends, not on the presence of the features, but on their proportion and minute peculiarities of shape. In the same way a body of moral doctrines depends for its character, not on the precepts it comprises, but on the relative emphasis it gives to them, on the shade of feeling with which each is enunciated, and on the interpretation put on each, as applied to social circumstances.

Now the circumstances of our modern middle-class Nonconformists in England are three-fourths of them entirely different from those of a Galilean fisherman; and three-fourths of the moral judgments which seem to them most important are judgments passed on matters to which Christ either never alluded, or alluded to only in language which they cannot accept literally, and on which they are obliged to put some special interpretations of their own. Take, for instance, Christ's utterances about riches. Our Nonconformists, though few of them may have belonged to our richest class, yet have made the pursuit of riches the chief business of their lives. Their ideals have been the ideals of men who keep at least one maid-servant, who value themselves on the gentility of their parlours and their

mahogany chairs, and who consider a black coat as important as a white conscience. Voluntary poverty has never been one of their virtues, and involuntary poverty has had for them a strong savour of sin. They have, in fact, only existed as a class by pursuing and gaining riches so far as their powers allowed, and their ideal of righteousness has been painted on the sacred background of a competence. The whole turn of mind, the whole point of view implied in this, is in complete contradiction to the letter of Christ's teaching; and the means by which they conceive themselves to have reconciled it to the spirit are means which never, supposing Christ to be merely a man, could so much as have come within the scope of His mental vision. I allude to the views entertained by them with regard to all pleasures and perfections which they think to be merely human—to their contempt of intellectual culture, their distrust of philosophy, their horror of gaiety and amusement, their suspicion of art and science, and their condemnation generally of the æsthetic decoration of life. The means, in fact, by which they have sought to Christianise the pursuit of riches, have been the restrictions which they have placed on the enjoyment of them; and these are restrictions entirely peculiar to themselves. By other Christians they are repudiated and even ridiculed; and they would be impossible to people with a different education, with a different social status, with a different ancestry, and, we may even add, with a different climate.

This is not true, however, of our Nonconformists only. The same thing may be said of the morals of the Christians differing from them. These, too, are what

they are, owing to similar causes. And if this is evident from a comparison of merely contemporary types, it becomes plainer still if we look back over the past and observe how the types have changed from age to age, Christ in each age having seemed a somewhat different person, and, in many ages, several different people.

In a certain sense this would be denied by nobody. Most Christians, for instance, think now that Christ condemned slavery. His first followers never realised this. Most Christians now think that He condemned persecution; and yet, up to a comparatively recent time, Catholic and Protestant alike—

> Have burnt each other, quite persuaded
> That all the Apostles would have done as they did.

Many Christians now think that Christ condemned war; yet Christians of all denominations, from Philip of Spain to Cromwell, have thought they were serving Christ in cutting the throats of Christians who disagreed with them. Again, though Christ, by His doctrines as to divorce, has impressed a certain fixity on the Christian view of marriage, the ideal of married affection in the modern Christian world possesses a refinement which would hardly have been understood by Augustine. Chivalry was at once the cause and the indication of a new conception of man's duties to woman; and the Church of Rome is at this very moment professing itself open to some new conception of the duties of wealth towards labour.

Now persons who believe in the miraculous nature of Christ, and who, unlike Mrs. Ward, believe that miracles do happen, regard all these changes as superin-

tended by Christ Himself, and as merely representing a fuller understanding of His character. Catholics and Protestants alike assert this; and though the Catholics alone can do so with strict logical force, any one who starts with the assumption that Christ is actually God, can maintain the position with considerable show of reason. The fact remains, however, that the morals of the Christian world have, in the admission of even the most orthodox Christians, changed since the days of Christ's original disciples. According to their view it is a change which consists in development only; but, none the less, it is a change. It implies the addition to Christ's recorded teaching of a variety of new judgments —some on questions which in His time did not exist, others on questions which He never touched upon; and also the adaptation of many of His precepts to changed social conditions.

This, as I say, according to the view of the orthodox, is merely the realisation of what was meant from the very first by a teacher who knew the future as well as He knew the present, and was as familiar with the problems presented by a modern London or Paris as He was with those presented by a carpenter's shop in Nazareth. But with persons like Mrs. Ward, who believe that miracles do not happen, the development of Christian morals, and their adaptation to changing circumstances, must wear, of necessity, an entirely different aspect. For them it is altogether the work, not of Christ, but of man. According to them, no man is ever more than a man. The knowledge and the opinions of all of us are received through similar channels —are limited by our education, are bounded by our

social horizon, are coloured by the influences of time, and place, and race; and whatever truths we may feel ourselves called on to assert are conditioned by the contemporary falsehoods to which we endeavour to oppose them. As to the future, though some men have made shrewd conjectures, as Bacon did in forecasting the triumphs of physical science, the shrewdest of these are partial and full of inaccuracies; and the idea of anything like comprehensive second sight is, according to Mrs. Ward's principles, too idle and preposterous to deserve a moment's consideration. Christ, therefore, far from foreseeing the world as it is in the nineteenth century, could not foresee its history even to the end of the first. Being merely a man like other men, His views and His vision were limited. His knowledge was slight, His natural prejudices strong, His conception of life was bounded by His own narrow experience of it; and He was no more conscious of addressing other ages and civilisations than He was able, if Mrs. Ward's principles are true, to see the glories of Rome from the top of a hill in Syria.

Everything therefore that, since the days of Christ, has been added to His literal teaching, in order to meet new circumstances, or modified in it in order to make it practicable, has been added and modified wholly and solely by man. Christ has had no more to do with it than Bacon has to do with the lectures of Professor Tyndall.

Indeed, the analogy of physical science will be here of great assistance to us. Each generation of scientific men has always been eager to admit its debt to the generations that preceded it; but although it makes use of their discoveries, it has never been bound by

their opinions. It appropriates what it can itself verify; what it cannot verify it discards; and the greatest genius of fifty years ago might have all his theories upset by some accidental discovery of the very man whom he placed in a position to make it. If Christ be merely a man, His position in the world of morals is exactly similar to that of a genius of this kind. Christ committed His teachings to the care of succeeding ages, but each age has had to adapt them to its own needs; and although theologic belief has disguised from it what it was doing, it has been creating the moral doctrines which it conceived itself to be merely interpreting. In physical science there is progress, but no authority; or rather, there is no authority except *nature*. So in morals there is change, progress, or, at all events, adaptation, but there is no authority except *human nature*. Christ may have assisted men to consult the one, just as Bacon may have assisted them to consult the other; but it is as absurd for Mrs. Ward to call her religion Christian, as it would be for Professor Tyndall to call his science Baconian.

The belief that Christ was God, and that all His teachings were final, has, of course, given to the subsequent morals of Christendom a degree of fixity which they would not have possessed otherwise; but even in spite of this they have been continually changing: so much so, indeed, that were Christ merely a man, He would necessarily have been horrified at half of St. Paul's Epistles, and been utterly unable to understand the 'Summa' of St. Thomas Aquinas. Still, many of those changes and amplifications, no matter how great, have been made on lines which Christ's teaching

suggested; but the Christian world has not stopped at these. In spite of every belief, and every theory which might have restrained it, it has felt itself impelled, with the advance of knowledge and civilisation, to take into its life sympathies, thoughts, and interests as to which Christ suggested nothing, unless, as was believed for centuries, He suggested condemnation of them. That great movement which goes by the name of the Renaissance was the return of human nature to a lost part of itself, or the welcoming back to itself of a part that had been long banished. For centuries men had aimed at the purification of the mind merely; now they aimed at its cultivation. For centuries they had reasoned on data supposed to be miraculously given to them; now they endeavoured to find out facts for themselves. That part of themselves which for centuries they had despised and suppressed, they began to educate and adorn. The beauty of the human form, the glories of light and colour, which were regarded by Augustine as so many temptations of the devil, changed their aspect, and seemed part of man's noblest heritage. The mediæval sense of the beauty of holiness was supplemented by a sense of the nobility and holiness of beauty; and, along with this—or rather as the subjective side of this—reappeared a sense that had slept or been in hiding for centuries—a sense of the beauty, we might almost say, the duty, of pleasure.

It is true that this movement produced a great reaction. Protestantism was as much a protest against beauty and pleasure, as against popery; and it was a protest which, no doubt, had a good deal to justify it. But it differed from the mediæval asceticism protested

against by the Renaissance, although in a certain sense that asceticism was its parent. Mediæval asceticism was a protest against the vileness of the flesh. Protestantism was a protest against its charm. The monkish ascetic looked upwards, fixing his eyes on God. The Protestant ascetic looked downwards, making grimaces at man. Protestantism, moreover, in its asceticism, just as in its theology, took a great number of forms, protesting against pleasure and beauty in various tones, and with various degrees of moderation. Thus, ever since the revival of art, letters, and philosophy, the moral ideals of Christendom have increased in number and diversity, each affected by race, class, and education, and accurately expressing the origin and character of its peculiarities by the dress, manners, or dialect prevalent amongst those who cherished it.

Of all these ideals, various and incongruous as they are, what calls itself at present non-theological Christianity is the survival of the narrowest. It is a survival of a type which was developed in this country, and in a particular class, under the combined pressure of social and political circumstances; and which was carried from this country to a certain part of America. And, though during the past three centuries it has kept its principal features unchanged, it is an ideal which makes no appeal to the larger part of Christendom, and is wholly unsuitable to advancing material civilisation. But the point which here I am now concerned to insist on is, that whether this ideal be pleasing or displeasing to most people, it has only preserved its character, even amongst those who cherish it, owing to conditions which its prophets are now sweeping away.

It preserved its character owing to a fixed belief that Christ was God, and that every word of the Gospels was absolutely and literally true. It was supposed to be formed in strict accordance with the example of God the Son; and whatever anachronisms may be involved in representing a modern dissenter as reproducing the religion of Christ's original disciples, the original dissenters founded their unanimous anachronisms on a foundation that for them was absolutely sure and unalterable. But let us once apply to the Gospels the formula of Mrs. Humphry Ward—*miracles do not happen*, and what becomes of this Nonconformist *Imitatio Christi* then?

To this question there are two answers, both equally fatal to Mrs. Ward's position. One is that, if miracles do not happen, either Christ's character was intellectually and morally imperfect, because He claimed that His nature was miraculous, and pretended to work miracles; or else that the records we have of Him are so vitiated by the credulity of the writers, that it is quite impossible to say what His character was. The other is that, even were His character undoubted, even were it the exact character most admired by our modern dissenters, there is little reason to regard it as fit for general imitation, and less reason to suppose that it will continue to be generally imitated.

The first of these answers has been so often given that I will only touch on it very briefly here; but there are a few observations which I am constrained to make in passing. It is a favourite argument with Christians that Christ must be God, because, if He were not, He was either an impostor or a semi-lunatic. No argument,

however, could really be less forcible, considering the position of those against whom it is now directed; for what is asserted by persons like Mrs. Ward and her teachers is not only that Christ was not God, but that He never claimed to be so. He was not an impostor, but His disciples imposed on themselves. The story of His miraculous nature, and consequently of His miraculous actions, was not a lie—it was a myth. But none the less, if we accept this view of the matter, is the traditional conception of Christ's moral character changed. He does not appear before us as a bad man, but He does appear as a different man. Even were there nothing more to be said than this, He appears as a man about whom we know much less than we thought we did, for the simple reason that half the anecdotes told of Him have, since they turn on miracles, to be set aside as imaginary. But there remains to be added something far more important. These anecdotes that would have to be thus discarded not only contain the most distinctive, impressive, and touching manifestations of Christ's moral character, but the moral characteristics manifested depend for their whole value on our belief in the miracles associated with them. Let us take, for instance, the story of the Last Supper and the Passion. No story has ever been more moving than this, as received and interpreted by the theology of the Christian world; but take away from it the theological element, and everything in it that was specially moving evaporates. Christ's love and Christ's sorrow have moved the world more than the love and sorrows of other men because, whilst agitating and troubling a human heart, they were supposed to have been super-

human in their intensity. They were supposed to have been intensified by a unique and miraculous knowledge, which not only made him foresee His own agony, the treachery of Judas, and the denial of Peter, but also laid upon Him the sins of the whole world. If, however, He were merely a man, what becomes of all this? The sorrow dwindles down to very ordinary proportions; the character of His death, and the way of meeting it, change; and, indeed, of the whole story what remains? Not only its general significance, but its most moving details, go. Christ had no clairvoyance into the coming treachery of Judas; and He either never predicted Peter's denial at all, or, if He did, the prediction was merely a shrewd or cynical guess. In short, if we criticise the records of Christ's life on the assumption that every miracle narrated or implied is mythical, we not only, in point of matter, have very little left, but what is left altogether changes its aspect; and, apart from the question of whether Christ ought to be imitated, it is difficult to decide as to what there is to imitate.

Let us, however, waive this point entirely. Let us suppose that Christ, divested of His miraculous attributes, stands before us as a character perfectly unmistakable; let us suppose that the evangelists enable us to see Him as clearly as Boswell and Sir Joshua Reynolds enable us to see Dr. Johnson; and let us suppose also that, of the Christ thus seen, a modern dissenting minister, minus his creed, a clergyman like Robert Elsmere, minus his creed and orders, and a journalist like Mr. Stead, throwing the first stone at Mr. Parnell, are the most complete imitations. What, in that case, would

be the utmost these gentlemen could say of themselves? Simply that they were imitations of a certain half-educated moralist who lived in Syria, under the Roman empire; that they had, as the completion and perfection of their imitation would imply, divested themselves of all knowledge and sympathies not possessed by him, and ignored every feature of life of which he happened to be ignorant; in fact, that they appeared before the world of the nineteenth century as an absolute reproduction of a Jewish peasant of the first. If any one is honest enough to tell the world this, the world's general answer will be, 'So much the worse for you. The conditions of life have changed since the first century, and unless you have added to the ideas of your teacher, or modified them, the presumption is that they are either unsuitable or insufficient; whilst, if you have added or modified anything, the additions and modifications are your own, and we listen to what you say as coming not from Christ but from you. If your teaching is Christ's teaching unchanged, the presumption is that it is an anachronism. If it is Christ's teaching changed by you, others will either reject it or change it to suit themselves.'

I am not denying—no one can or need wish to deny—that persons like Mrs. Ward or Mr. Stead find that what they regard as non-theological Christianity meets with sympathy and acceptance amongst large numbers of people. Indeed, it is only because such is the case that their position is worth discussing. The ideals and morals of Evangelicalism and Nonconformity are still deeply rooted in certain classes of what Mr. Stead describes as 'English-speaking folk,' who, accepting

the conclusions of modern criticism, have, like Mrs. Ward, rejected all belief in the miraculous; and to such classes Mrs. Ward and Mr. Stead appeal, and find in them an echo of their own precise sentiments. My aim, as I say, is not to deny this fact, but merely to exhibit its true character and significance. The classes I speak of, and their prophets, are welcome to these moral ideals, just as they are welcome to their ideals of art, of etiquette, or politics. All I desire to point out is that, however tenaciously they may themselves cling to them, they have left themselves no ground on which to recommend them to others—not to their own children, should their children fail to be pleased with them. Even should Mrs. Ward convince us that her ideal is the ideal of Christ, she gains nothing by doing so. She weakens her case rather than strengthens it. But, as a matter of fact, we need hardly consider this, for no one who applies to history Mrs. Ward's own methods can fail to see that what she takes for the original Christ is, in all its most distinctive features, an ideal evolved slowly in the course of succeeding ages; and is not the figure so slightly sketched in the Gospels, but a figure which, though the Gospel sketches suggested it, owes all its drapery, and the larger part of its details, to the developing mind of mediæval and modern Europe.

Nor is this the conclusion of secular criticism only. It is the explicit view of all sacerdotal Christianity; and, if denied by our modern Nonconformists, it is denied by no other Christians. The Churches admit that our conception of Christ is a conception which has grown and developed, but they maintain that it has

grown and developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church of Rome, in its doctrines and its history, shows us this most clearly; and the Anglican and Greek Churches in this respect are merely Romanism arrested. Let us, then, glance rapidly over the development of Catholic doctrines. According to Catholic theology, Christianity, as Christ taught it, contained the Christianity of subsequent ages, as the bud contains the flower. In the few doctrines explicitly taught by Him, all the doctrines subsequently formulated slept, and were unfolded gradually, as petals unfold in the advancing seasons. The manner in which they were unfolded was at once natural and supernatural. On their natural side they appear as the ordinary operations of man's mind and conscience, on extending knowledge, and multiplying cases of casuistry. Thus the developed theory of the Atonement was derived from Roman law; the developed doctrine of the Trinity from certain subtleties of Greek philosophy; and the doctrine of the Real Presence from the more familiar teaching of Aristotle. The Christian intellect, appropriated from the domains of ordinary thought and knowledge whatever seemed proper to it. But this power of selection was, according to the Catholic theory, superintended at every step by the invisible Holy Spirit, who miraculously guided it to such doctrines, and such doctrines only, as Christ had implied from the beginning, though He had not explicitly propounded them. Now, if Christ was God, this theory is perfectly intelligible. Although, as we gather from St. John, He had never even learnt his letters, He was absolute master of all possible knowledge. The works of Aris-

totle, of which he never possessed a copy, the works of the Jurisconsults of the Empire, before they were in existence, were present to his mind more clearly than they ever were to their authors; and he knew what permanent truths were embodied by them amongst what was false or transitory. If, then, we suppose the Spirit of God to have been always present amongst Christians in some miraculous and exclusive manner, leading them to select these truths, no matter where found, nothing could be more natural or more strictly logical than the belief that the truths thus accepted were part of the conscious meaning of Christ. And in this way, up to the time of the Reformation, the doctrines of Christianity grew; and not the doctrines only, but the ideals of virtue and piety, and the attitude of mind and heart, of which the doctrines were at once the cause and the result.

And of the moral, if not of the doctrinal, Christianity thus developed, our modern Nonconformists are as much the children as are our modern Catholics. If we may believe the account they give of the Church themselves, they are Nonconformists merely as a result of the Church's sins. In that case we may call them her illegitimate children, who, like many illegitimate children, do not know their own mother. It is impossible for any unprejudiced human being to maintain that the Nonconformist Christianity of the last three hundred years was not largely the creature of the Christianity of the fifteen hundred years that preceded it, and lived on a part of the teaching of the very Church it repudiated: just as the France of to-day, in spite of the revolution, retains of its inherited civilisa-

tion far more than it destroyed, and is more like the France of Louis Quinze than it is like the France of Clovis.

But if from the Catholic theory of Christian development, which in an illogical and unavowed way has been really the theory of the Nonconformists also, we subtract the belief in the Godhead and omniscience of Christ, and with it the belief in the Holy Spirit, as miraculously guiding Christians, the whole theory immediately falls to pieces. It loses all credible, indeed, all conceivable meaning. Christ, however excellent, however sublime His character, becomes merely a Jewish peasant, ignorant, and with limited vision; and to maintain that the doctrines subsequently formulated as to His nature—that the ὁμοούσιος of the Nicene creed, or the οὐσία and ὑπόστασις of the Athanasian, or that the theories of the Atonement suggested by Roman law, were actually present in His mind, and consciously insinuated in His words, is as fatuous and ridiculous as to maintain that Thales, when he called water the best of things, was secretly but consciously expounding its actual chemistry, as if he were a professor at the Royal Institution in London. Obviously, unless Christ was God, everything added to His literal teaching, every trait in His character associated with the smallest miracle, every judgment on circumstances not in His time existing, or on matters with which He was not brought into personal contact—all this body of doctrines and moral judgments, is obviously nothing in any sense revealed by Christ, but something gradually evolved out of the mind of the generations that succeeded Him; and instead of representing the immutable truth of

God, represents so many phases of the intellectual history of man.

Now, if such be the case—and if 'miracles do not happen' it must be the case—it is plain not only that persons like Mrs. Ward and Mr. Stead have no grounds for inflicting their religion upon other people, but that their religion is a mere form of moral prejudice which in the course of a few generations will have ceased to be intelligible to any one. If the morals of the Christian world have changed as they have done, and assumed such various shapes when Christ's authority as God operated to keep them fixed, much more are they sure to change in the future, when that authority operates no longer.

In spite of Christ's words, and all traditional interpretations of them, in spite of all the machinery of the Church for emphasising and confirming their meaning, human nature, after some fourteen centuries, could be no longer restrained within the strict Christian limits, but insisted, at all costs, on again appropriating and enjoying those pleasures and perfections, physical, intellectual, and emotional, which the Pagan worlds of Greece and of Rome had cultivated, and from which it had so long debarred itself. This movement, though naturally it produced a reaction, and though certain excesses which at first marked it were moderated, was far from having spent itself by the beginning of this century, and farther still from having left Christianity as it found it. Such being the case, it has during the present century been year by year receiving some fresh stimulus, as science has fixed man's attention on the things of this present life, and been step by step dis-

crediting the teaching of the Gospels as to another. Is it to be supposed then, that a movement which developed itself in spite of restraint, will not continue and extend itself when that restraint is removed? We see signs around us everywhere that it is receiving a fresh impetus, and taking untried directions. Socialism, which is a complex phenomenon, is, in part at least, a demand for the good things of earth as opposed to those of heaven; and although it really would involve all sorts of impracticable self-denial, it appeals to its adherents as a protest in favour of pleasure, and a protest against that suffering which Christianity taught men to endure. The one object of modern progress is to produce those pleasures which Socialism seeks to distribute; in short, the aim of the whole civilised world is to elude the destiny which, according to the doctrines of Christianity, all men ought to welcome, and which those who would be perfect ought to court. Nor does the civilised world confine its aims and attentions to the mere multiplication and improvement of the material means of pleasure. It is distinctly feeling its way towards some new freedom in the enjoyment of them. Woman, to whom Christianity assigned a position of obedience, is gradually claiming a right to some life and some development of her own; and, for many reasons which need not be dwelt on here, modifications are being consequently demanded in the Christian view of marriage; whilst women and men alike are assuming a new attitude, and refusing to face the problem of their own existence and of the universe, as if humbly stooping under the burden of inevitable and universal sin.

The forces in fact that are changing the modern world—I do not by any means say all the forces that are at work in it—are distinctly non-Christian; and unless they are arrested or subjugated by Christianity in some form or other, it is a mere truism to say that they will transform our ideal of life, not perhaps into something wholly different from the Christian ideal, but at least differing from it quite as much as resembling it.

What the ideal thus evolved will be, it is impossible to say exactly; but we can, indeed we are forced, to form one or other of two conjectures about it, according to our point of view; and one of these, we may be assured, will in a general way be correct. Our point of view may be that of the Pope, or of Mrs. Humphry Ward. We may either believe that *miracles do happen*, and that Christianity is the creation of miracle; or we may believe that *miracles do not happen*, and that Christianity is the creation of man.

Now if our view be that of the Pope, and of the Christian world generally, the future of a movement which puts Christ's divine authority aside, and intentionally cuts itself off from all channels of supernatural grace, will necessarily appear to us as a future dark with iniquity and corruption. We shall foresee the disappearance of the very idea of virtue.

This view is so natural and so obvious that we need not dwell on it further. But if we place ourselves in the position of Mrs. Ward, we shall have to examine the prospect with somewhat greater attention. On the supposition that miracles do not happen, that no race has ever been favoured by any miraculous revelation, or enjoyed the invidious privilege of any miraculous

guidance, the character of man in the Christian as well as in the pagan past, will form a basis for a conjecture as to his character in a non-Christian future. In this case, the argument that a disbelief in Christ as God will loosen every restraint which Christianity has placed upon the passions, is an argument that loses not only its force, but its meaning. For if Christ was not God, and worked no miracles to show that He was God, His deification was the voluntary work of man; and expresses the desire and capacity of man to restrain himself. Nor does it express this only. It expresses man's possession of Christ's virtues, as well as Christ's abhorrence of sin. In fact man's passionate adoption of Christ's original teaching, is expressive of man's nature quite as much as of Christ's; whilst all that has been added to that teaching in the course of succeeding ages is an expression of man's nature, far more than of Christ's. Take, for instance, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the idea that God himself actually entered into our bodies. Never was there conceived a more efficacious means of introducing an external rule into the inner world of the heart, than this astonishing doctrine. The severest Protestant, who calls it an invention of mediævalism, can hardly deny its effect on those who believed it; and the more convinced we are that it was not the doctrine of Christ, the more clearly we shall see in it an expression of a something in human nature—a desire and a resolve to submit its various parts to the coercive rule of that part which it held to be the highest.

But we must not confine our attention to the Christian world only. We must look to the other

civilisations of which we are also the inheritors. We must look to the civilisations of classical Greece and Rome. The moral ideals and conduct which we there meet differ from those of Christianity; but the difference though great, is partial. Aristotle's conception of a good man may not be identical with that of Thomas-à-Kempis; but the difference between them is not that between a saint and a monster; it is simply the difference between one type of goodness and another. The corruption of the pagan world may have been great. So have been the corruptions of the Christian. The former sanctioned many practices which the latter has condemned; but many of these were the result of surviving savagery, rather than of corruption, and reappeared in the more savage ages of Christianity; whilst the corruption, great as it was, has been obviously much exaggerated. The gladiatorial shows now strike us with horror; but were the horrors of the pagan arena greater than those of the Christian stake and torture-chamber? The cruelties of the Catholics and earlier Protestants alike, towards criminals, and especially towards heretics, have been palliated on the ground that man's natural sympathies were far less sensitive then than they have since become. There is a great force in the argument; but if it applies to the Christian world, it applies to the pagan also; and it is quite probable that the Roman public which delighted in the sight of Christians fighting with beasts, or even of Christians burning in the gardens of Nero, would have been horrified at the sight of Calvin slowly roasting Servetus. Whilst as for the corruption of pagan life, as distinct from its cruelty, if the denunciations of the Christians had really been justified by

facts, the pagan world could hardly have endured for a generation. That it produced monsters of vice there is, of course, no doubt; but the very fact of these monsters having been so particularly described, is evidence that they were the exceptions, not that they were the rule. It produced a Marcus Aurelius, just as it produced a Tiberius; and just as Christianity was not needed to produce the one, so Christianity was not needed to condemn the other. With Christian moralists Greece, and above all Imperial Rome, has been pointed to as exemplifying the degradation, suicidal as well as abominable, into which without Christ man naturally tends to sink; and yet it was from Greece that Christianity took its philosophy; it was from Imperial Rome that it took its ideas of justice. It has been said that the Roman Empire fell owing to its own vices. It might as well be argued that it fell owing to the rise of Christianity, which coincided with its fall in a far more striking way than any decay in its morals, of which we have any evidence.

Looking thus at life, on the supposition that miracles do not happen, and judging of the future from the past, we may safely say that the tendency of moral development will be towards a morality in many ways different from the Christian, and in some ways doubtless shocking to the Christian judgment; but not towards any grotesque saturnalia of cruelty, injustice, or debauchery. It will be a tendency, on the contrary, towards some new type of excellence, differing from the Christian not in the way in which a Tiberius differs from Christ, but rather in the way in which a Goethe differs from a Spurgeon.

What chance of survival then, in the course of a change like this, has the so-called Christianity of such persons as Mrs. Humphry Ward and Mr. Stead? In so far as their moral feelings correspond with those of science, or with the general desires and temperament of the civilised world at large, their teachings will endure and will prevail; but they will prevail as the teachings of science, or as expressions of the desire of the world, not as the dictates of an oriental peasant who has been dead for some two thousand years. On the other hand, in so far as their teachings differ from the teachings of science, or run counter to the desires of the world, they may possibly meet with acceptance amongst a certain class of persons to whose personal temperaments they happen in some way to appeal; but with the exception of such persons they will have no hold whatever on any human being.

Persons like Mrs. Ward, and the classes whose opinion she reflects, are curiously misled when they think they can get rid of dogma without ridding themselves of anything besides. As long as the world assented to the proposition that Christ was God, those who practised the real or supposed precepts of Christ could urge them, with the strongest of arguments, on those who did not practise them; but when the Godhead of Christ is rejected by both sides as a myth, those who quote Christ as an authority have lost the fulcrum of their lever. In so far as his teachings correspond with those of science, to quote him is a superfluity; in so far as they are beyond or beside those of science, to quote him is useless. Now such Christianity as that of Mrs. Ward and Mr. Stead can only be distinguished as

Christianity at all because it comprises teachings of this latter kind—teachings beyond and beside that which is authorised by science and philosophy, and welcomed by worldly wisdom. It consists in the inculcation not of goodness as opposed to ruffianism, but of one type of goodness as distinct from, and hostile to, every other.

If this type of goodness, namely that of English-speaking middle-class dissenters, be pleasing to persons such as Mrs. Ward and Mr. Stead, by all means let them represent it in its most attractive colours, and let those who recognise its unique and transcendent beauty endeavour, if they will, to embody it. Of Mrs. Ward and Mr. Stead there is only one thing to be asked, and this is that, in the interests of honesty, they drop the name of Christ. What they recommend, they recommend on their own authority, not on His. If He has any authority at all, He can, according to their principles, only have it in virtue of their recommendation. They give Him his *cachet*, He does not give them theirs. It surely, therefore, is not too much to ask of them, since they declare Him to be merely man, not any longer to appeal to Him as if he were God, or attempt to enforce their doctrines on grounds which they themselves repudiate.

MARRIAGE AND FREE THOUGHT

THE curious outburst of indignation which drove Mr. Parnell from power, on account of a *liaison* which had nothing in it exceptionally discreditable, is, for many reasons, of more than passing interest. In spite of many unworthy elements that were mixed in it, there is no doubt that at the bottom of this indignation was a state of genuine opinion prevalent in this country as to marriage. Now in so far as this was the case—in so far as the indignation expressed did really originate in the opinion of which I speak, it was an indignation which, even if expressed foolishly, was fundamentally reasonable. But another question remains—a question totally different; and that is whether the opinion can be considered reasonable itself. In other words, on what basis, intellectual or religious, does the view of marriage rest, which not only proclaims itself by the stones which Dissenters throw at adulterers, but is also embodied in our laws relating to marriage and adultery?

What this view is, is sufficiently familiar to all of us. It amounts to this—that marriage is a bond which is properly and naturally indissoluble, and that it can be dissolved only by an act which is morally, if not

technically, criminal. Our laws as to divorce show this with curious clearness. A marriage is dissolved solely in the interests of the party who had, it is presumed, no wish for its dissolution; and it has only to be proved that both parties have desired to free themselves from its bondage, and the law takes care that the fetters shall be riveted on their limbs for ever.

We will presently analyse this opinion further; but we will first ask what, on a *primâ facie* view, are the grounds, if any, that can be pointed to as a reasonable foundation for it? There is one section of the community with regard to which the answer is obvious. I allude to the Roman Catholics. Whether the Catholic religion is true or not, is nothing to the point here. The Catholics believe it to be true; and the view that marriage is indissoluble has, for them, the most reasonable of all bases—the express teaching of an authority which they consider to be final and infallible. The same thing may also be fairly said of the High Church section of the Church of England; and even of some other bodies, which, though bitterly opposed to Rome, and the Roman doctrine that marriage is among the sacraments, are opposed yet more bitterly to scientific and sceptical criticism, and to everything which calls itself either modern, or free, thought. Of the position occupied by these various bodies, that of the Roman Catholics is undoubtedly the most secure. They frankly claim for marriage a sacramental and mystical character; they base its indissolubility not only on the ground that God through the Bible and the Church has miraculously declared it to be indissoluble, but on the ground that there is in its very nature something

that passes our understanding, just as there is in the sacrament of the altar and in baptism. None of the other religious bodies makes a claim for it of precisely the same kind. None of them either definitely attributes to it any mystery, or appeals with regard to it to the teachings of a Church that is absolutely infallible. But all of them, Catholics included, have two points in common. First, their belief that marriage is indissoluble has for its first foundation a belief that Christ was a miraculous being, who, whether of the same or only of a like substance with God, was at all events in God's confidence and familiar with the secrets of existence; that every sentence He spoke was an utterance from behind the veil; and that the Gospels record His utterances with an exactness miraculously secured. Secondly, all these religious bodies, and not the Catholics only, in addition to the above belief with regard to Christ's words, believe also in one single traditional interpretation of them; and they consider this interpretation as no more open to doubt than Christ's miraculous character and the miraculous accuracy of the Gospels.

With persons who hold these views it is impossible to discuss the marriage question at all; for they will not admit for a moment that there is anything in it open to discussion. All that we can do, if we act towards them in a right spirit, is to respect their position, however much we may dissent from it; and to make it clear that our arguments are not addressed to *them*. Now such persons, no doubt, form a considerable body in this country; and did they only comprise the whole, or the great majority of the nation, the present

inquiry need hardly be pursued further. The view that marriage is indissoluble, so far as this nation is concerned, would be obviously reasonable, as resting on a religion in which the nation believed.

But what are the facts? They are certainly the very reverse of these. The orthodox religious bodies, the opponents of free thought, considerable though they may be in point of actual numbers, yet if considered as a part of the nation, are merely a small part, and neither intellectually nor politically is their influence either dominant or increasing. This is no mere opinion. Facts prove it most conclusively. The recent history of the Church of England, if we go no farther back than the publication of 'Essays and Reviews,' gives us a series of proofs that would be quite sufficient in themselves. The literal accuracy of the Gospels may safely be impugned by any clergyman in the Establishment; and the traditional interpretation of the Gospels is discarded by the greater part of them. Secular standards, and the methods of secular criticism, are being applied to sacred things in a growing number of pulpits. The traditional interpretation is thus rapidly changing; and what at the beginning of the century would have been called blasphemy, is regarded by excellent men as the true evolution of Christianity. Much the same may be said of the Nonconformists; or at any rate of such of their leaders as make themselves generally audible. The religious movement is all in one direction—the questioning of traditional doctrines, the definite rejection of many of them, and the treatment of the rest as matters that are not essential. But we must not look only to the belief

of those who call themselves Christians: we must look to the attitude of Christians towards those who disclaim even any definite Theism, and to the increasing number and influence of these last. That a man is known to be not a Christian—that he is known to be hardly a Theist, creates now no distrust in him that could possibly be called general; indeed, the nation has gone out of its way in order to give effect to the conviction, first, that a Dissenter may be as good a legislator as a Churchman; and finally that a militant atheist may be as good a legislator as a Dissenter. It is unnecessary to describe the facts I allude to further, or insist further on their reality. That the intellectual and religious opinions of the nation, taken as a whole, have been changing and moving in one definite direction, is obvious; and the direction is that of what is commonly called free thought. And the results, so far as our present argument is concerned, may be briefly summed up as follows: The nation, as is shown by sanctioning the admission of atheists into Parliament, does not, as a nation, believe that the basis or the standard of legislation is a belief in God—in His will or even in His existence. Still less does it believe, as a nation, that this will is revealed to us by any special body of tradition, or in the pages of a book in which every sentence is miraculous. If anyone doubts this, he need ask himself but two questions. Could any scientific discovery in these days be discredited even for a moment by the authority of a biblical text? Would a text, no matter how plain, do anything towards arresting any popular reform or change? The answer to both these questions, as we

are all aware, is No. To this, however, there is one singular exception: and that exception is afforded by popular opinion as to marriage. Socialistic optimists who would laugh at Christ's pessimism in saying that we shall always have the poor with us; amiable clergymen who, when Christ said Hell was eternal, maintain that He meant something quite different from what He said; men who will put on almost any text some new or modified interpretation, or at the bidding of a philologist boldly deny its authenticity; as well as multitudes who in a general way care nothing for texts at all, or who entirely disbelieve in the miraculous character of Christ, are yet, as regards marriage, under bondage to an opinion which has for its ostensible foundation a belief in the miraculous character of every syllable in the Gospels.

Few people seem to be aware of what a strange anomaly is here. Whilst the religious and irreligious alike are not only engaged in boldly questioning everything, but are practising towards each other a toleration new to the modern world, when cardinals fraternise with atheistic radicals and grasp in friendship hands that have never been raised in prayer; when atheistic radicals court the countenance of cardinals whose dearest beliefs and whose most sacred functions are for them nothing but ridiculous or degrading nonsense; when the rationalist pardons the Catholic for maintaining that bread is God; and the Catholic pardons the blasphemer for insulting the Lord's body; there is one point as to which the liberality of all parties leaves them. The cardinal ceases to be tolerant; the free-thinker ceases to think freely. According to all reason and all theology,

a man who does not go to mass must, in the eyes of a Catholic, be in a far more hopeless state than a man who is living in adultery; but to judge by the language of Cardinal Manning and the Irish bishops, every sin can be forgiven a man but one. He may systematically hate his neighbour; he may systematically be false to God; but he may not systematically be too true to a woman. The free-thinkers hold precisely the same opinion; but as held by them it is logically even more inexplicable. Whatever view they may take of marriage individually, they are bound, if their claim for freedom have any real sincerity, to allow their views to be questioned or contradicted by others; and the only test of its sincerity is the very simple and obvious one—that they will not only tolerate views other than their own being stated, but that they will tolerate these views being acted on by those who hold and proclaim them. Now with regard to every kind of conduct, which does not of necessity happen against the will of one of the parties to it, such as theft, murder, or slavery, our free-thinkers do practise the kind of tolerance I speak of, with the single exception of adultery. Adultery is often condemned, and very rightly, for accidental reasons; for the ingratitude or false friendship involved in it, or for the sorrow or misfortune caused by it. But these have no special or essential connection with it; they are very frequently absent; and the curious thing is, that the more complete their absence is, the more complete, according to popular opinion, and also according to our laws, is the unpardonable character of the adultery. Let us suppose two couples, unhappily married, who if they could only re-sort themselves, might be mated to their common

satisfaction. Let us suppose further that there are no children to complicate the question. Now, if these four people were to agree to live in adultery, there could obviously be no deceit, no injury, no unhappiness; and if matters were managed decently, there would be no scandal. But according to our laws, and according to popular opinion, adultery like this would be adultery of the most aggravated kind. The very fact that all concerned in it wished for divorce, would, if the fact were known, make divorce impossible for them; whilst the fact that none of them was deceived or injured would, in the eyes of Mr. Parnell's censors, instead of exculpating any of them, only add a deeper blackness to all. But if the principles of freedom, if the repudiation of persecution proclaimed and boasted of by all professors of toleration—if these principles have really any meaning in them, adultery of this kind is merely, as Mill would have described it, a new experiment in living; and the union of a man and woman which could never be theologically sacramental, or in England legally ratified, is a union which may demand in justice from any liberal thinker at least as much toleration as Cardinal Manning extends to men who ridicule and repudiate all his sacraments together. Again, as we all know, during the course of recent events in Ireland, we have learnt from the very classes which condemned Mr. Parnell most loudly, that it is often necessary to break the laws in order to secure their being amended. Surely the men who excuse boycotting, the refusal to pay legal debts, outrage, the maiming of cattle, and even murder, on the grounds that without these it would be impossible to amend the land laws, must see

that adultery can be defended in a precisely similar way, on the ground that without it we shall never amend the marriage laws. But the very men who will use this argument about every other question, are the very men who would shriek in horror if anyone attempted to apply it to the question to which logically it is most applicable.

What, then, is the explanation of this curious contradiction? As I have said before, I am not arguing with Catholics, nor should I expect them to consider any single argument that I am urging; but I have alluded to the conduct of Cardinal Manning and the Irish Bishops, because it may help to throw a certain light on the question.

My point with regard to them has been this—not that they condemn adultery as a very grave sin. Of course they condemn it. My point has been that, whilst tolerating other sins which theoretically must be far graver, they visit this with a condemnation which theoretically is grotesquely disproportionate, and for which their theology can give no sufficient account. The inference is this—that their condemnation, though based, no doubt, on their theology to a certain extent, has its principal basis on something that is outside theology. In precisely the same way the various professors of Liberalism, from broad-church clergymen and liberal Nonconformist ministers to worshippers of Humanity, such as Mr. Frederic Harrison, derive their views as to marriage, and their excitement about adultery, from some belief or prejudice which, whatever its real nature, is entirely outside the principles which they profess, and which they propound so emphatically.

It must be so. Just as Cardinal Manning whilst, so far as his associates are concerned, he remains a Gallio with regard to the mass, remains an inquisitor as to marriage, so do the liberals, religious and irreligious alike, become inquisitors and become persecutors also; and unite with a Roman Catholic in that one course of conduct—and that one only—on account of which they have execrated Rome most loudly. There must, for a fact like this, be some secret and unavowed reason.

The reader must not imagine that I am imputing to the nation generally any intentional, still less any sinister duplicity. When I say that a multitude of people act on some reason that is secret, I mean that it is secret only because they do not recognise it themselves. When once pointed out, however, its nature will, I think, be obvious. The popular opinion as to marriage which we are now discussing seems to me to rest upon a composite basis. What it principally rests upon is a sort of instinctive utilitarianism. It wants no philosopher to assure the most stupid of us that the happiness of a nation means the happiness of its individuals; that the happiness of the individual depends on the happiness of the family; and that this depends largely on the married happiness of the parents. Now long centuries of Christian, and especially of Catholic tradition, have caused us as a nation to associate the indissolubility of marriage with its existence; and this association, as is often the way with associations, has outlasted the grounds on which it was originally justified. The idea, therefore, is still prevalent that to make marriage dissoluble would be practically to destroy it, to inaugurate an

era of fantastic and unrestrained licence, and to destroy, together with marriage, the home, the family, and civilisation. The view of marriage accordingly which we have to deal with is the product of reasoning which is itself purely and strictly utilitarian, but which is clenched, made rigid, and placed out of reach of controversy by reasoning derived unconsciously from the doctrines of a discarded theology.

Let me explain this more fully. That the happiness of the home or family is an end to aim at, is a positive doctrine—it is a secular doctrine; it is not a theological one: and that we must regulate marriage so as best to secure this end is a doctrine which would be defended by a Benthamite as strenuously as by Cardinal Manning. Now, given a positive end in itself admittedly desirable, according to every modern theory of social and intellectual progress, the utmost freedom and toleration must be accorded, not only to every opinion, but to any practical experiment by which new means towards this end may be put before us and tested. Further, of all social arrangements, marriage, as at present regulated, is the one which presents us with the largest percentage of individual failures. I do not say that the cases in which marriage is fairly successful are not overwhelmingly in excess of the cases in which it produces intolerable distress; but these latter cases are at least so numerous that more than one of them must have been forced on the observation of everybody: and no one can deny—not even the severest Catholic—that, regarded as a means of producing social happiness, if our marriage arrangements could be improved, they call urgently for improvement. But the liberal and progressive

thought of this country, the moment it is brought to bear on this one social question, becomes doggedly false to every one of its boasted principles; it hampers itself with a literal interpretation of the Gospels which, with regard to every other subject, it has long contemptuously abandoned; whilst indignantly refusing to recognise the vows that bind the nun, it refuses even to consider the relaxation of those that may be killing the wife; and whilst ridiculing the idea that any other contract is inviolable, and whilst rashly sanctioning the experimental violation of most, it treats this contract of marriage, which constantly works so miserably, as a contract which no one may violate, though everyone concerned is willing, and which it is a kind of blasphemy to attempt to regulate better.

And now let me state precisely what I am here urging. I am urging not only on atheists, on agnostics, or on theists, but on all religious men, whether calling themselves Christians or no, who respect freedom of inquiry, who accept science as a guide, who weigh the accuracy of the Gospels in the balance of scientific criticism, and who consider Christ's nature, His authority, and His reported words, as all of them open to free and fearless inquiry—on all men, in short, who represent in this country the thoughts, hopes, and opinions which are most distinctively modern, and which for good or for evil are embodying themselves in our laws and our institutions—on all these men I am urging that they should treat marriage in precisely the same spirit as they treat everything else; that they should recognise and resolutely put away from them those

theological prepossessions, which all their most cherished principles condemn as the merest of superstitions, and which here interfere entirely with their putting their principles into practice. In other words, let them consider it as an open question whether marriage should be indissoluble, or easily dissoluble, or dissoluble only with difficulty, and whether adultery is necessarily an unpardonable offence, or whether it may not, under certain circumstances, be regarded merely as a 'new experiment in living.'

Surely, according to every modern principle this demand is reasonable; and the more wedded any liberal thinker may be to the opinions at present current, the more gladly should such an inquiry be welcomed by him; as its only result, according to his expectations, would be to place these opinions on their only legitimate basis. Let me also reassure the timid reader further. I have asked him to consider whether, when none of the parties implicated are unwilling, and when no children are concerned, adultery should not be regarded as a new experiment in living. But I ask him to consider this question merely as an introduction to the further one—whether marriage should not be dissoluble without the necessity of adultery, and whether a remedy should not be found for miserable or for unfortunate unions without someone paying for it by a cruel social stigma. I may further assure the timid reader of this, that such considerations as I am about to put before him will lead to results far more in accordance than he may imagine with his own existing prejudices. I shall say much that a Puritan may dissent from, but nothing that he can be shocked at.

Let me then ask the reader to consider for a moment what marriage is according to that opinion which is at the present moment embodied in the laws of this country. According to Catholic theology marriage is essentially indissoluble. According to the laws of this country it is dissoluble, but it ought not to be dissolved. Between these two views there is a profound and fundamental difference. There is the same difference as there is between telling a butler that certain tumblers are made of unbreakable glass, and telling him that he will be kicked out of the house if he breaks them. Marriage, therefore, even according to the opinions dominant in this country now, is not in its nature indissoluble. The law can, and the law does dissolve it. Opinion, then, in this country has definitely and distinctly repudiated the traditional interpretation of the Gospels; and has taken one step in the direction of freedom. The law, however, dissolves marriage for one cause only, and that cause is an action which is regarded as discreditable to the agent. Obviously this condition of things is *primâ facie* ridiculous. Why should the performance of a discreditable action be an antecedent condition of arriving at an end which the law sanctions, and sanctions only because it is supposed to be desirable? The only definite reason, the reason which has retarded the free consideration of the case, is one single word of seven letters, supposed to have been used by Christ; and it is a word whose meaning, except for the authority of Rome, is more than doubtful. But the authority of Rome is nothing to the English nation as a whole. The nation as a whole, not only rejects, but abhors interpretations of the Gospels

on which Rome most strenuously insists. How then can people who call Rome either blasphemous or absurd for the interpretation which it puts on the words, 'This is my body,' debar itself from even considering a most serious social reform, in deference to the Roman interpretation of the one word πορνεία? All that we have to do is to treat this word in the way in which liberalism treats all the rest of the Bible—to interpret it through its context by a free secular standard; or at all events, to allow for the latitude of its possible meaning: and we shall get from the Gospels nothing but this statement, that marriage should not be dissolved without grave and sufficient cause, what constitutes such sufficient cause being left to human beings to discover. Thus unless free thought allows itself to be fettered by the Bible in a way which on principle it certainly does not allow itself, all the freedom for which I am now pleading is sanctioned by the very words which are popularly supposed to forbid it.

Let us then consider what marriage is, when considered apart from all mysteries or sacramental theories. In the eye of the English law, and of the English people as a whole, marriage is a legal contract. That, however, expresses but a small part of the matter. The laws of a country are merely the expression of human nature as developed in that country. Marriage is a legal relationship only because it is first a human relationship; and such conduct as the law enjoins or protects with regard to marriage, it enjoins and protects only because men have found it desirable. The legal part of the contract is therefore only a husk and shell, of which the kernel is a natural human contract. It is

not law that gives its character to the contract, but the dominant wishes and feelings and practice of a community that give its character to the law. Law is merely a kind of railway which men have constructed in order to keep themselves on the best course towards an end which they have themselves chosen. What, then, if we strip from it its accidental husk of law, is marriage in itself, according to the highest and purest conception of it?

If any Nonconformist reads these pages, he will, perhaps, be reassured when he sees that, for an answer to this question, it is a Nonconformist to whom I turn. 'The internal form and soul of this relation,' says Milton, 'is conjugal love arising from a mutual fitness to the final causes of wedlock.' Milton's known views with regard to divorce have caused great injustice in some ways to be done to his writings on the subject. They have been neglected, because the conclusion which they seek to prove has up to the present day been not generally acceptable; but there is far more in them than what those who have never read them imagine. His treatise on 'The Four Chief Places in Scripture which treat of Nullities in Marriage' is not so much a piece of special pleading in favour of free divorce, as a long amplification of the description, just quoted, of marriage—of 'the internal form and soul' of it; and nowhere else in the English language, or probably in any other, has the highest and noblest conception of it been set forth with such majestic eloquence.

The Church of Rome, though it does not admit divorce, yet on certain occasions pronounces a marriage null—it declares, in fact, that what passed for a

marriage was not a marriage, on a ground which the Protestant world does not in any way recognise—the ground that free consent was wanting in the parties, or in one of them. Consent, according to the Catholic doctrine, is the essence of matrimony, and where consent is wanting no true marriage has existed. Now what consent is according to the Catholic doctrine, mutual fitness is according to the conception on Milton; and the view which he advocates with regard to the dissolution of marriage has properly no relation to the Protestant doctrine at all, but is neither more nor less than the Catholic doctrine rationalised. It is the Catholic doctrine with this alteration only—that he puts in place of 'full and free consent,' 'conjugal love arising from mutual fitness.'

Now putting, as we are putting, Catholic authority aside, and appealing only to those higher and the deeper perceptions which, rooted in our natural feelings, find their utterance in poetry, rise upwards towards religion, and form a part of whatever is most noble and most beautiful in life, no one surely can doubt for a single moment that Milton's doctrine has more to recommend it than the Roman. It is in fact the doctrine which, with ever-increasing completeness, underlies the spiritual progress, the spiritual elevation of man, and which, however much its consequences may be disputed, would be admitted as the truth, even if not the whole truth, by everybody. Let Milton speak further. Expressing himself, as he could not help doing, in the forms supplied him by his theology, he starts by saying that, according, to God's own statement, the first aim of marriage was full and fit companionship. 'Loneliness,' he says, 'is

the first thing which God names not good.' Nor is companionship, he urges—and those whom I am addressing will not be inclined to contradict Milton here—to be understood in an exclusively, or even mainly, physical sense. 'The Song of Songs,' he says, which is generally believed to figure the spousal of Christ with His Church, sings of a thousand raptures between those two lovely ones far on the hither side of carnal enjoyment. Adam's consent in marrying Eve, he urges, depended for its validity on his knowledge of her individual fitness for him; and if he could have put his inmost thought into words, his bridal words, Milton tells us, would have been these: 'This is she by whose meet help and society I shall no more be alone. This is she who was made my image, even as I the image of God, not so much in body as in unity of mind and heart.'

Now, Milton was addressing, just as I am addressing now, a public which admits that marriage may be dissolved on ground of adultery; and his argument is this—that the physical union being, at all events without other union, the lowest element in marriage, adultery injures a marriage to a far less degree than such complete and incurable antagonism between the character of husband and wife as makes any union other than the physical one impossible. 'When love, he says, 'finds itself utterly unmatched, and justly vanishes, nay rather cannot but vanish, the fleshly relation may indeed continue, but not holy, not pure, not beseeming the sacred bond of marriage; being truly gross and more ignoble than the mute kindliness between herds and flocks. . . . Why, then, shall divorce be granted for want of [bodily fidelity] and not

for want of fitness to intimate conversation, whereas corporal benevolence cannot in any human fashion be without this?' Marriage, he says, if truly and adequately conceived, may be compared to the spiritual affection of saints, such as Paul and Barnabas, who were 'joined together by the Holy Ghost to a spiritual work,' but who 'thought it better to separate when once they grew at variance. If,' he proceeds, 'these great saints, joined by nature, friendship, religion, high providence, and revelation, could not so govern a casual difference, a sudden passion, but must in wisdom divide from the outward duties of friendship or a colleagueship in the same family, or on the same journey, lest it should grow to a worse division, can anything be more absurd or barbarous than that they whom only error, act or plot, hath joined, should be compelled, not against a sudden passion, but against the permanent and radical discords of nature, to the most intimate and incorporating duties, therein only rational and human as they are free and voluntary; being else an abject and servile yoke scarce not brutish?'

In order to make all these passages appeal to the present age of liberalism, we have only to eliminate the theological element in their form, and the arguments and the sentiments expressed in them lose none of their cogency, If the literature of the modern world illustrates one fact in the spiritual history of man more clearly than another, it illustrates the gradual refinement and elevation of the idea of love proper to and possible in marriage, and essential to a right marriage. There is another aspect to the question which we will consider presently, but we are considering the relation-

ship now with reference to the married parties solely; and considered in the light of the companionship of a man and woman, the idea of it which is cherished by the conscience of the modern world, which is appealed to as the standard of what marriage ought to be, and which poets and religious writers alike have done their utmost to adorn and to express, is the idea of a most perfect and intimate union of mind and heart, which alone gives the physical union human meaning or dignity. And marriage of this kind has been recognised by the modern world, if not as a sacrament in the technical and theological sense, yet as something which has on the entire life a spiritual influence which elevates, just as the Catholics hold that the sacraments elevate, bringing the soul nearer to the mystery which is called God; and making it impossible, as Goethe puts it, for those even who dare not say, 'I believe in Him,' to say, 'I do not believe.' A union so complete as this must no doubt be rare. All natures are not capable of it; and circumstances do not always admit of it. But still for the modern world it is the type of what ought to be. It is 'the internal form and soul' of marriage in its true development; and the conscience demands that all marriages should approach this standard, even if they do not reach it. Does any one doubt this? Will any one venture to maintain that mind and heart is not the highest and the most essential part of marriage, the physical union being of value only because it tends to cement, to express, and to deepen the spiritual union?

Apart, then, from such ecclesiastical doctrines as are based on an interpretation of the Bible which

liberal thought repudiates, this conception of marriage which is described by Milton is the highest conception of marriage at which the world has yet arrived; and apart from certain of its logical consequences, the voice of our spiritual civilisation not only admits, but boasts that it is so. My purpose here is to urge on all liberal thinkers what these logical consequences are; and to urge on them that the strongest reasons in favour of facilitating divorce, of granting it for causes other than what is called adultery, of granting it in response to the wishes of both parties, and of removing from it altogether any necessary discredit—the strongest reasons in favour of all this, are to be found not in some low conception of marriage to which we might possibly sink, but in the highest conception of it to which we have yet risen.

And let me again point out, what I have already indicated, that the sort of divorce that would be facilitated in this way would not be properly speaking divorce at all. It would not be the violent rupture of a sacred bond, but a formal recognition that this bond, in its full sanctity, had never existed. It would be in fact the Roman Catholic view and practice secularised, and interpreted by modern methods and standards—the same methods and standards as are being applied to every other question. Whatever may be our views as to the reality of human progress in general, with regard to certain matters such progress is a reality. Civilised men, for instance, are less cruel than they were in the Middle Ages. In the same way, with regard to affection, the ideal now accepted by civilised men is more refined and more elevated than that which

in the Middle Ages was prevalent; or at all events men are more conscious of its higher and more sacred characteristics. On the other hand, whilst the ideal of affection has been thus growing spiritualised, the theory of conduct has been more and more secularised, and placed more and more completely on a utilitarian basis. We have spiritualised our conception of what married happiness ought to be, and we have adopted the principle that, in law and conduct alike, that and that only is right which conduces most to happiness. Thus, whilst bringing the Roman conception of the sacramental sanctity of marriage out of the region of theology, and enshrining it in the heart, in the imagination, in all the deepest feelings of man, we at the same time have freed ourselves from the difficulties—once insuperable—of the doctrine that the essence of marriage and its sacramental character, reside not in any qualities of the union of which the hearts of either party can be conscious, but in some magical charm residing in a mere momentary act of consent—a consent which, a day later, may have changed into unavailing repentance. In this way, so far as reason can guide us, we are brought inevitably to the great general principle that marriages can be pronounced null not only on the ground of the adultery of one of the parties, but of any fault, sufficiently grave, of any kind; and—what is still more important—of any quality or characteristic in either party which, without being a fault in either, makes happiness impossible.

Now it cannot be denied that in the present state of opinion the views just described would be received with general disapproval. Why would this be so?

The reasons, I think, are not difficult to discover. Summed up briefly they consist of the vague opinion that, if ever we begin to tamper with the marriage bond as it at present exists, we shall destroy marriage altogether. So far as this opinion really is what it affects to be I will discuss it presently; but it probably masks an opinion of an entirely opposite character. Let me speak of this first.

Many rigid moralists, Nonconformist and other, would tell us, as a ground for condemning the view in question, that it would open the door to all uncleanness and profligacy, by lessening the blame now attached to adultery. But the real feeling at work in their hearts would be, not that adultery would be treated as no worse than continued ill-temper or selfishness, but that selfishness and ill-temper will be shown to be often worse than adultery. The control now demanded of a single physical impulse would be, according to the view of marriage we are discussing, demanded of the whole heart and life—of the soul as well as of the body; and it is probably no sin against charity to say that the standard of morals thus erected would be most disagreeable and most humiliating to that special class of persons who, in virtue of education or temperament, are most censorious with regard to technical adultery. Many husbands and wives who have no other matrimonial virtue, are in their own estimation models of respectable excellence, because they have never had, or been tempted to have, lovers; and amongst these are no doubt numbers of those who were loudest in their execrations and holiest in their horror of Mr. Parnell. Such persons, tried by this new standard, would

certainly be covered with humiliation. When some minister was mounting the pulpit of his own physical chastity, and selecting the sharpest first stones with which to pelt some adulterer, conscience would say to him, 'Consider your own conduct as a husband. You have said bitter words to your wife almost every day; you have neglected her wishes; you have shown her no sympathy; you have systematically put on her conduct the hardest and cruellest interpretations; you have made no effort to love her. Every day, every hour of your married life, you have sinned more deeply and shamefully than this adulterer you are preparing to stone.' And if conscience spoke thus to many a preaching man, it would be equally candid to many a censorious woman; silencing and perhaps softening her with a knowledge of this most wholesome truth—that no woman is nearer hell than a woman whose sole virtue is chastity. In other words, to make a long matter short, the view of marriage and annulment of marriage which we are now discussing is simply a development of the view put forward by Christ. It is not a view which makes adultery venial, but which places other faults under a precisely similar condemnation.

But the more important point to be noticed is the genuine and real opinion mentioned above, that the marriage bond, if in any way tampered with, would fall to pieces, and the institution of marriage be ruined. If we consider how loosely men in general argue until some closer train of argument has been forced on their attention, this view will hardly seem unnatural. It is easy to show, however, that it depends for its main

force on the overlooking of one of the chief facts of the case. The belief in the sanctity of marriage is not peculiar to Christians or to the modern world; it cannot, therefore, be claimed that we derived the idea of it from revelation. It must, therefore, be regarded —and modern free-thinkers must be the first to admit this—as the outcome of something inherent in human nature, under certain conditions relative to race and civilisation; and all legal doctrines in favour of the indissolubility of the contract are expressive of the fact that men in general feel and think it best that the marriage union should be permanent. Laws have not made human nature, but human nature has made the laws; and it is absurd, therefore, to think that the moment a law is relaxed, in order to meet the requirements of certain numerous but exceptional cases, that human nature will suffer a sudden change, and that men and women will at once rush into irregularities which all of them know will not promote their happiness, and to which most of them will have but small temptation. The average man, quite apart from any other religious theories, marries a wife with the intention of remaining married to her. Indeed, the more firmly we believe that the permanence of marriage is approved and willed by God, the more firmly we must believe that such permanence has in it nothing arbitrary, but that God wills it because man's nature is most completely satisfied by it. Will even the most rigid advocate of the indissolubility of marriage maintain that this is not the case? Will he deny that a husband who really loves his wife will value and cling to her companionship more and more as life goes on? Will he venture to

maintain the contrary? Will he venture to say that constancy is a kind of penance—a kind of mutilation of affections which, in pursuit of mere natural and human happiness, men would be always transferring from one object to another? Does the average man act thus in regard to friendship? Why should he incline to act thus, then, in regard to serious love? A man's physical caprices may change from day to day, but love or affection, just as they take time to grow, the more they grow and the deeper their roots strike, the more difficult it is to uproot them, and to plant others in their place. It requires all kinds of effort—efforts of the mind, of the imagination, a new surrender of reserve, a new exercise of faith. In fact the *déménagement* of a heart is a very troublesome thing, and the average man who is happy with the wife he has got will be deterred from seeking another by the mere labour involved in a removal.

To all this, however, there is an important objection that will be urged. It will be said, and said with perfect truth, that a line of conduct or a course of life, which other people know would be for our happiness, and which in our sober moments we know would be for our happiness also, is liable at times to be presented to us in entirely false colours; and that if we have no external rule to guide us we are in constant danger of losing what we would really choose. This argument, which is true of human nature generally, is supposed to have special force as an argument for the indissolubility of marriage. Were marriage easily dissoluble, or dissoluble on other grounds than it is, any temporary quarrel or disagreement, it is urged, would lead both parties to a step which they would bitterly regret after-

wards. Disagreements which are really of the slightest and most transitory kind often at the time seem the deepest and most irremediable. If marriage were dissoluble at will, such disagreements would be fatal. The married life of every couple would be in daily danger of shipwreck. Whereas, if the dissolution of marriage is a difficult and painful thing, and not to be attempted except under the most desperate circumstances, these passing disagreements are comparatively harmless; and as it is known that they could justify no permanent separation, they do not even suggest it. Nor is the argument applied to definite disagreements only. It is applied also to the general conduct and disposition of those concerned. The knowledge on the part of either, that the other cannot be got rid of, and a substitute obtained, is said to produce a tendency in both towards making the best of things; and it is said that if the tendency thus produced were absent, disagreements which are now lived down, or conquered, would be so frequent in the lives of even the best assorted couples, that few marriages would be permanent, and few homes escape being broken up.

Now, though in this argument, as thus stated, there is a monstrous exaggeration, there is no doubt a considerable element of truth. No doubt the sense that to dissolve a marriage is out of the question does induce a large number of couples, so to control their dispositions and their tempers as to maintain amity, or even perhaps affection, where otherwise there would be estrangement or enmity. The answer to this argument is, that though it may be true, it is only a fragment of the truth. It is true of certain couples, but of certain couples only;

whilst as to others the truth is the exact opposite. If the sense that marriage is indissoluble leads some husbands to control their tempers, or keep their fancies from wandering, others would be prompted to a control even more strict and careful by the knowledge that a want of control might lead to their marriage being dissolved. If one man is mainly prompted to behave well to his wife by the knowledge that he cannot get rid of her and put someone else in her place, another will be prompted to behave well to her by the knowledge, that if he does not, she may get rid of *him*, and put somebody else in *his*. And if we look dispassionately at the average human character, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that this last class of cases represents human nature far more completely than the former; or that at all events it represents a far higher element in it. It is surely a higher, a happier, a more desirable thing in a husband that he should cherish and please his wife for fear she should get rid of *him*, than that he should smother his ill-temper or aversion because he cannot get rid of *her*. If the indissolubility of marriage in many cases tends to repress disagreement, its dissolubility in more would tend to prevent disagreements from arising, and would make the union depend mainly on what really gives it its sanctity—on mutual attraction and cohesion, not on an external chain.

Human nature is such, however, that in one and the same person the most contradictory motives are united; and if we take men and women as a whole, the truth probably is—what at first seems paradoxical—that married happiness would be best secured and promoted

by marriage being at once both dissoluble and indissoluble. This seeming impossibility would be reduced to a practical reality by the dissolution of marriage being made difficult, so far as the *process* is concerned; but easy so far as the *grounds* are concerned. The grounds of a divorce or a dissolution should be simply the will of the parties interested. They alone are the proper judges of its sufficiency; but in order to prevent their will, on so important a matter, being formed lightly, the carrying of their will into effect should demand serious sacrifices. How serious, is a question of degree.

And now let me pass to another aspect of the question, which up to now I have purposely put on one side. Up to now I have considered marriage as if it had relation solely to the husband and wife, and their relation to each other as companions. I have purposely avoided all consideration of children, not because this is not an equally important point, but because it gives rise to a different set of arguments; and in order to arrive at any clear conclusion it is necessary at first to keep the two apart. Marriage has two ends—the happiness and welfare of the parents; the happiness and welfare of the children. The conditions which promote each we must consider separately. Sometimes the conditions which promote each will coincide, sometimes they will differ. When they coincide there is no difficulty; when they differ there must be a compromise.

Now with regard to the children of parents whose marriage is annulled, it would not be difficult to provide for their material welfare. The only evil that could

result to them would be mental or spiritual. The foundations of character are laid in the home; and all the affections which men consider most sacred, depend for their development on experience of parental love, on the reverence felt for parents, and on the example set by them. This fact, however, though it tells as a rule in favour of the permanence of marriage, tells, in exceptional cases, for precisely the same reason, against it. If a husband and wife, who are mutually unsuitable, find the sanctity of marriage a mere name as regards themselves, so too will they in many cases make the sanctity of home a mere name as regards their children. Even those whose view of marriage is so completely physical, that technical adultery seems the only offence fatal to it, must yet see that, so far as regards the children, of all offences it is generally the least important. It is more often the result of an unhappy marriage than the cause of it. It is in itself an act of which generally the children know nothing; but it is constantly the result of conduct which the children know only too well—of ill-temper, of neglect, of coldness, of daily hardness, and above all daily injustice, on the part of father to mother, or of mother to father; and no one, with regard to justice, is more sensitive than a child. It is impossible to exaggerate the pain that children can be made to feel by the spectacle of dissension between their parents, or of the injustice of one of them toward the other; the miserable searchings of the young hearts, or the blight of moral scepticism which descends upon them too early. Whilst as for technical adultery, as I say, they will probably know nothing of it; and besides this, as everyone knows who

has any experience of life, many men who have secretly kept mistresses have, in every respect except physical fidelity, been most kind and unselfish husbands, most tender and affectionate fathers, and have surrounded their children with that atmosphere of unsullied affection which many of the technically chaste, by their injustice, by their selfishness, or by their coldness, have destroyed.

The consideration then of the children, though in many cases it may complicate matters, instead of conflicting with the general principle I am contending for, at once strengthens and illustrates it. It shows how the dissolution of a marriage, for any cause that makes it hopelessly unhappy, is demanded not only by our highest ideas of married companionship, but with equal or even greater force by our highest ideas of the home. It shows us that the permanence of the union should be the normal thing to aim at; but it shows also that when that union completely misses its ends, it should, because we value other ends so highly, be dissolved.

Once again, let me quote the words of Milton. 'Law,' he says, 'cannot command love, without which matrimony hath no true being, no good, no solace, nothing of God's instituting, nothing but so sordid and so low, as to be disdained of any generous person. Law cannot enable natural inability, either of body or mind, which gives the grievance; it cannot make equal those inequalities, it cannot make fit those unfitnesses; and when there is malice more than defect of nature, it cannot hinder ten thousand injuries and bitter actions of despite, too subtle and too unapparent for law to

deal with. And while it seeks to remedy mere outward wrongs, it exposes the inward person to others more inward and cutting. All these evils unavoidably will redound upon the children, if any be, and upon the whole family. . . . Nothing more unhallows a man, more unprepares him for the service of God in any duty, than a habit of wrath and perturbation, arising from the importunity of troubulous causes never absent. And when the husband stands in this plight, what love can there be to the unfortunate issue, what care of their breeding, which is the main antecedent to their being holy?'

Finally, to turn back from these complicated considerations, and to regard marriage again as having for its primary end the completion of man's being by some fitting, some ennobling, some lasting, companionship and affection, let me put before the reader these touching and eloquent words of the same writer: 'God cannot in the justice of His own promise and institution so unexpectedly mock us, by forcing that upon us as the remedy of our solitude, which wraps us in a misery worse than any wilderness.'

To those who believe, as a supernatural dogma or doctrine, that no divorce is possible, nothing that I have said is addressed; nor should I expect it to influence them. But to those who, not being Catholics, or, at all events, not believers in the older forms of orthodoxy, but professing, on the contrary, to be progressive and liberal thinkers, still cling doggedly to the doctrine that marriage is indissoluble, or to the bastard form of that doctrine that it is dissoluble only for adultery, I would say, let them reason back from

this conclusion of theirs till they reach at last its only possible premisses, and they will, at the end of their journey, find themselves landed in Catholicism. Let them admit the premisses, or let them abandon the conclusion.

A CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN ON NATURAL RELIGION

BELIEVERS in Revelation are constantly asked how far their beliefs rest on natural grounds, and how far on supernatural: how much to natural religion is added by revealed religion; in what way the first affords a basis for the acceptance of the second; and how much of the first would remain to man if, for some reason or other, the truth of the second were discredited.

This question in the present condition of thought is argumentatively of the first importance. The historical evidences of Revelation which were once thought irresistible, have suffered so much at the hands of modern criticism, and the idea of a Revelation, in the light of modern discoveries, seems to have so many incongruous and improbable aspects, that its inherent probability requires to be first vindicated before the sceptical inquirer can entertain the idea of its reality. We shall hardly believe, in the face of many difficulties, that God has spoken specially to a particular section of mankind, unless we are led on independent grounds to a presumption that God exists. What grounds, then, we ask, are there for that presumption? Through the ceaseless changes and transformations of matter, without end or beginning, and without conjecturable aim,

out of which the only consciousness of which we have any knowledge, seems slowly and blindly to have evolved itself, threatening again to be annihilated—by what faculties, by what observation, by what processes of reasoning, can we pierce through this, and find light and reason behind it?

Many answers, as we all know, have been given. The apostles and the expounders of Natural Religion have been many. But the importance and interest of their arguments have generally been weakened by this, that each of such apostles speaks generally for himself, and represents nobody but himself; that there is no body of doctrine which they all of them hold in common, and that their premises, their methods, and their conclusions are different, and are often mutually hostile.

Considerable interest, therefore, attaches to a work on Natural Religion by a distinguished theologian of the Roman Church, which has just been condensed and translated from the original German into English. It has, of course, no dogmatic authority, but it has been pronounced at all events to contain nothing contrary to faith; and the kind of view upheld, and the kind of arguments set forth in it, may be taken to represent the general tone and position which Catholic apologists are, at the present juncture, adopting in the face of modern science and of reason unchecked by authority.

This work forms, as originally written, the first volume of Dr. Hettinger's 'Evidences of Christianity'; but father Sebastian Bowden, who edits the present translation, has so arranged it that it constitutes a complete treatise, adding himself to it an 'Introduction on Certainty,' which is specially addressed to the secular

English public. This introduction is extremely lucid and interesting. It explains briefly Dr. Hettinger's philosophic position as a Catholic; it gives a brief view of the scope and the general substance of his argument; and a few quotations from it will assist the reader in seeing what the character of this argument is.

Father Sebastian starts with this proposition, that God's existence, and the fact that man is related to him, can be established 'by reason alone, apart from any supernatural source;' but that the knowledge thus gained is 'fragmentary and incomplete,' and quickened even in the earnest heathen 'a longing for a revelation.' The heathen philosophers, however, were, many of them, as far as they went, so sound in their reasonings, and so correct in their conclusions, that the Fathers of the Christian Church adopted large portions of their systems.

'They did so, not because theology,' as St. Thomas says—

> was of itself insufficient to prove its own doctrines, but because of the defect of our understanding, which is more easily led by the knowledge of the truth which it has acquired for itself, to the knowledge of those truths which are above reason, and which theology imparts. And thus the Church employed philosophy both to give expression to divine mysteries in human terms, to develop and illustrate them by human reasoning, and to defend the doctrines of faith against heretical attack. . . . Thus man advanced in knowledge from objects of sense to truths of reason, and from these, by a strictly logical sequence, to God.

The writer then goes on to emphasise an extremely interesting point, which will hardly be recognised with

enthusiasm by the modern Protestant world. The above procedure, he says, being that of Catholicism, that of the modern systems which began in the Reformation has been entirely and absolutely opposite. They have not begun in reason; they have begun with the rejection of reason. What, for instance, Father Sebastian asks, could be less reasonable, using the word in the rationalistic sense, than Luther's appeal to the Bible alone, or than Cranmer's appeal to the royal supremacy? And he adds that the chief reproach of the Reformers against the scholastics was 'the employment of human arguments in the matter of Divine Truth.' Now our modern positive thinkers may very likely admit that, with regard to Protestant Christianity, Father Sebastian is right. Indeed, Professor Huxley is almost every month asserting the same thing, only in less polite language. Professor Huxley, however, would certainly deny this daring impeachment as directed against himself. It must be owned, indeed, that it has a paradoxical sound; but when its meaning is further consulted, it will be found to be absolutely true. Just as Protestantism began with this principle, that 'in the sphere of revelation, no authority was to be recognised as infallible in matters of faith,' so the philosophy that grew up with Protestantism began with a similar principle, 'that in the domain of reason no principle, no fact, was to be admitted as certainly true. Hence,' Father Sebastian proceeds, 'the new philosophy opens with Descartes' system of "scientific doubt," which means *that in the logical order of thought doubt is prior to certainty*, and that everything is to be assumed as doubtful till it be proved true.'

Here, according to him, we come to the fundamental difference between the philosophy of Catholicism and the philosophy of the modern world. There is no question, it must be noticed, of Catholic theology; what is spoken of is merely the philosophy on which that theology builds itself: and the first principle of that philosophy is this—not that doubt is prior to certainty, as our modern Agnostics say, but that *certainty is prior to doubt.*

Now, according to Catholic philosophy (says Father Sebastian), certainty is of two kinds, natural and philosophical.

The certainty which all men possess, and on which all alike practically act, and which is therefore called *natural*, is direct and simple, and is obtained before the mind has by any reflective process determined the motive of its assent.

Philosophic certainty, on the contrary, is reflex and demonstrative, and is only obtained after the motive of the assent has been explicitly determined.

What Agnostics contend, then, is that *natural* certainty, because it arises prior to proof, is necessarily untrustworthy. . . . The Schoolman (or the Catholic theologian), on the other hand, affirms that *natural* certainty is not only true and reasonable in itself, but that it is the sole basis of *philosophic* certainty, and of all sound human reasonings. They argue thus: All knowledge is the result of two factors—the faculty which knows, and the object known. This faculty, *i.e.* the mind, like the eye, can only know or see objects that come within the range of its vision. Of objects beyond that range, of itself it knows nothing, but of objects within that range, it can and does speak with certainty. Thus all knowledge is primarily objective, and, as we are constituted, is derived first from sense-objects.

Such being the case, the writer proceeds to observe that natural certainty rests on three foundations—in the first place, the senses, as has just been said; secondly, the ideas which the objects of sense excite in us, together with our reasonings on them; and lastly, the information which we accept from the evidence of other men.

Now comes the great question: 'How far does natural certainty teach us the existence of God?' The answer is given thus. The truths of which we can be naturally certain are, as is implied above, of two kinds —first, those in which the motive of assent is self-evidently apparent, from some conclusion derived from premises of which the truth is previously known—as, for instance, that the whole is greater than the part. In such cases we behold the effect in the cause. Secondly, there is another class of truths, which are the inverse of the foregoing. Instead of being effects deduced from cause, they are causes deduced from effects. Such, for instance, is our certainty of the existence of the external world, which we deduce from its sensible phenomena; or our certainty of our own existence, which we deduce from our consciousness of our acts. Now our certainty of God's existence is a certainty of this order. 'God's essence is inconceivable to the human mind, and inaccessible to the human sense.' His existence is, therefore, not self-evident to us, any more than the idea of a part would be self-evident to us, supposing we had no idea of a whole. We reach our belief in it, from our certainty as to the world and ourselves. We demonstrate that the world and ourselves, from what we know of them, are not self-caused; and we conclude, by a

certain inevitable train of argument, that the only cause sufficient to have produced them is such an intelligent, free, and omnipotent Being, as we call God.

Let us now see what the details of this argument are, and we will do it by reference to the work of Dr. Hettinger itself.

We argue back to God, from ourselves and from the world. Dr. Hettinger expresses it, 'from the mind, and from nature.' To the proofs derived from these two things, must be added proofs derived from a third—from history, and from human testimony.

We will begin with the arguments derived from the human mind. These, according to Dr. Hettinger, logically base themselves on the theory of necessary truths, such as the primary ideas of logic and mathematics. These ideas, it is argued, are objectively true; they are true independently of the human mind. For the mind only apprehends them through reasoning from the things of sense; but these things of sense are themselves always changing, whereas the ideas which they illustrate, embody, and lead us to, never change. The latter, therefore, are something behind and beyond the former, and constitute an eternal reality, an eternal truth. Truth, however, cannot exist 'apart from an external reason that perceives it, [just as] thought [cannot exist] without the thinking mind.' The reason here spoken of, however, cannot be man's reason, it must therefore be the reason of an 'Eternal Mind, a Supreme Intelligence, and this Supreme Intelligence is God.' To this metaphysical argument is added the argument from conscience. Conscience is a commanding voice speaking within man; and as this voice is con-

stantly raised against man's strongest natural impulses and dearest wishes, it exists in him 'not by his own act, but in spite of him, and against his own will.' It speaks to him as a superior to a subject, authoritatively legislating for him. But 'every act of legislation is an act of the will.' Conscience, therefore, must obviously be the expression of the will of God.

So much for the proof from mind. Let us now pass to the proof from nature, or the material universe. This is composed of three separate arguments. In the first place, the writer lays down as self-evident the proposition that 'matter has in itself no principle of activity;' and yet the universe is 'instinct with movement, activity, and life.' Its movement must therefore come from some Mover outside itself; and this Mover is God. Further, the movement of the universe obviously does not proceed 'from a chance or random impulse, but is throughout ordered on a fixed and definite design.' All that exists in the visible world 'shows unmistakably adaptation to an end;' 'perfect harmony reigns in all parts of the universe;' so that all nature is evidence of 'an ordaining and adapting Intelligence,' the 'goodness' of which is as infinite as its 'wisdom;' and this Intelligence is God. Lastly, it is asked, whence did this universe come? For it does not exist of itself. We ourselves, as we know, do not exist of ourselves; still less, it is argued, 'do the visible things around us, for they are of a lower grade than the human intellect.' Dr. Hettinger then puts the same idea in another form. There are beings, he says, which are possible and contingent; which may exist, and which may not exist; therefore such beings when they

do exist, must have a cause; but there cannot be an endless series of causes; for such a sequence would be like 'a chain suspended in the air,' which yet must bear the weight of everything. The force of this argument, the writer insists, is seen with special clearness in the case of life and consciousness. For even if matter were eternal and self-existent, life obviously is not so, for 'scientific research has proved that at a certain period the condition of the earth made organic life impossible;' therefore for the cause of life, or for the cause of matter, we must go back to a first, supreme, and living cause, which is God.

Lastly comes the proof of God, derived from history and human testimony. The authority of Cuvier is invoked to show that the human race is not more than six thousand years old. Now during that period, it is impossible to discover any trace of religion having been invented; and yet, during that period, men universally, as Cicero bears witness, have always had some religion. But may not some primitive man have invented it, and persuaded all the others to accept it? This supposition is answered by an appeal to Pliny the Younger, who says 'that no one man has ever deceived everybody.' Therefore religion cannot have been an invention of any particular man, but must be naturally inherent in all men; and Pliny the Younger is again quoted, as declaring that a belief common to all men is never false. It is true, Dr. Hettinger observes, that an ingenious argument has been put forward, which derives the belief in question from awe of the forces of nature—a universal cause producing a universally similar effect. Now this argument, he says, 'is founded on the as-

sumption that man's primitive state was savage, his religion polytheistic, and that he has advanced therefrom by a necessary law of development, to civilisation and a belief in God.' But this assumption, Dr. Hettinger continues, is obviously false. We naturally ask why? He tells us. It is obviously false, because it postulates in man universally 'a constant *natural* tendency to progress, whereas the exact contrary is the fact. . . . The more man approaches the savage state, the more hopeless is his intellectual stagnation: [indeed] not only is the savage [of to-day] indifferent to civilisation; he shows a deliberate preference for barbarism. . . . Belief in the existence of God [then], being diffused throughout the nations of the world, as every page of history proves,' the highest form of this belief must have been the earliest; and the polytheism of to-day can be nothing else than degradation of an original and natural monotheism. Travellers tell us, however, that there are many nations who have no belief in God at all, and thus impugn the foundation of all the above reasoning—the proposition that theism is natural to man as man. But to this Dr. Hettinger answers that travellers are unreliable; that there is no evidence for the existence of any atheistic nation. The utmost that has been established—and this, he admits, has been established — is, that atheism has been discovered amongst a few 'isolated groups'—a few 'isolated savage tribes.' But the 'reasoning faculty of these tribes is so absolutely undeveloped, that their condition simply amounts to brutish.' Their existence, therefore, says Dr. Hettinger, instead of proving what our rationalists maintain that it proves, proves in reality

the exact opposite. It is a proof, not that theism is not natural to man, but that in so far as men forget theism, in so far as they lapse from their original instinctive faith, they lose the characteristics of humanity. We trace, then, Dr. Hettinger continues, the belief in God,

> from primitive times, and watch its unbroken career through subsequent ages. . . . Everywhere it appears as a natural growth . . . and it gains more than it loses with every advance of civilisation. . . . Truth and error [indeed] are alike transmitted from age to age, but with this difference, that while there is no limit to the spread of truth, error inevitably finds its level. . . . The vitality [therefore] of this belief [in God], its absolute independence of space and time, are a clear proof of its truth.

Here in outline are the arguments of contemporary Catholicism for the existence and the objective truth of a natural religion in man—a natural belief in God. But before criticising them, let us deal with one further question. Granting that we thus have such a natural belief in God, how much knowledge of God does this belief include? According to Dr. Hettinger, it would appear to be very partial. It includes at its utmost not more than was arrived at by Socrates and Plato; and its chief contents are as follows—that God, in addition to omnipresence and omnipotence, is a personal and designing intelligence; that good and evil being objective realities, God is infinitely good; that, as Plato says, He made the world out of love; that, as Socrates says, He demands, above all things, purity of heart and justice; and that 'whilst His providence watches over all things, it watches specially over man.' But all this

knowledge is incomplete and general. It tells us nothing of God's inner hidden life. Conscience itself, God's vicarious voice, 'is not the law of morals, but [merely] the application of that law to ourselves;' and in order that, in Plato's words, 'we may cross as in a trusty vessel the stormy sea of life,' we need more than a natural knowledge of God; we need a supernatural revelation from Him. It is not enough that our reason raises us towards Him; His goodness must descend and speak to us. Still, our natural knowledge teaches us this much—that whatever we may mean by *goodness* and justice, God is good and just: that He has made us to do His will; that we owe Him everything; and that He will take care that we pay our debts; and that a natural and reasonable certainty on these points, so thrusts itself on all of us, by the spontaneous action of reason, that we cannot avoid, much less reject it, without an intentional and criminal act of a perverse will. In fact, to use Father Sebastian's words, the personality of God, and His infinite care for man, and His infinite love and goodness towards him are so clearly demonstrable, whilst all objections are so shallow, so sophistical, and are so easily dispelled, that religious denial, and even religious doubt, 'is a crime of the most heinous malice possible in human act.'

Let us now briefly consider what force or value such a defence of religion as this is likely to have for the sceptical world at large; and whilst we approach it with perfect impartiality as to its substance, let us do so with complete and serious sympathy as to its aim. Let us suppose ourselves to be doubters, who desire the comfort of faith, and ask ourselves how far, in the

existing conditions of thought, such reasoning is calculated to be any help to us. To me it seems that this book, in a most deplorable and startling way, illustrates, little as he thinks it does, the following utterance of its editor: 'A defence of religion,' says Father Sebastian, 'based on arguments unsound or inconclusive, or ignoring the sceptical objections of the day, may only suggest new doubt, and do more harm than good.' He adds, that the present work he believes 'to be safe from this peril.' To any independent reader it will, I believe, seem to be full of it. It has every one of the faults that have just been mentioned. Most of it is inclusive, much of it is unsound, and the principal objections that require combating are ignored throughout the whole of it.

To begin by putting the case in a general way, the writer and the school represented by him, much as they may have studied our modern scientific thinkers, seem utterly unaware of the extraordinary change which modern science has accomplished in the position of the human mind. Historical criticism, philology, physiology, geology, astronomy, and science generally seem to these men to increase in bulk, but never to change in character; and the opinions of a man of genius in one age seem as objectively valuable as the opinions of a man of genius in another. Thus Rousseau is quoted as an authority for the authenticity of the Gospels, and Cuvier as an authority on the antiquity of the human race; as if Cuvier's knowledge could be placed on the same plane as that of Professor Huxley; or as if Rousseau's opinion as to the Gospels could have had the smallest critical weight in his own day or in any other. This

book is indeed a curious medley, in which all ages, however distant, are brought together to the front of the stage, and Socrates made to silence Darwin on the question of design; where Lucretius is treated as the mouth-piece of contemporary physical science, and the theory of mental evolution is refuted by a sentence from Pliny the Younger. The impression produced on the mind is just what would be produced if a modern map of the Mediterranean should be corrected by an appeal to the *Odyssey*, or Mr. Stanley's Travels by the geography of Martianus Capella.

This brings us to the interesting question: What is really the attitude of the Catholic apologist to that modern science, to whose methods and conclusions he refers so constantly? Does he set aside its methods as unsound, or as leading to conclusions of no special importance? Or if it can speak with authority as to any subjects, what is the range of subjects as to which it can so speak? One might have thought, judging merely from Dr. Hettinger's general tone, that he considered its authority as purely speculative, in most cases, and as grotesquely false in others. The fact, however, is quite otherwise, as the following passage shows:—

'A mere speck on the earth's surface, man,' he says,

now weighs this terrestrial sphere, and measures its height, its breadth, and depth. Astronomy subjects to its formulas the mechanism of the heavens. Geology penetrates into the mysteries of its [the earth's] origin. Natural philosophy determines the laws which govern the movements and changes of the material world. Chemistry shows the elements by whose combination bodies either exist or dis-

appear. Physiology reveals the formative process of organisms, and the continuity of their fundamental types, from the lowest up to the highest—that of the human body. . . . The pages of history reveal to him the whole course of the human race. Comparative philology gives him an insight into the structure of language.

Now what is the real meaning of the above explicit statement? It means this—that except for the doctrines of natural selection and spontaneous generation, which the author specially excludes—the discoveries of modern science, with regard to the material world, are true; and these discoveries are obviously seen by him to include the evolution of the lifeless universe from some simpler substance; the evolution of all existing life from some simpler vital principle; and also the history of the human race, as rewritten in the light of modern scientific evidence. But the curious thing about Dr. Hettinger is this: that though he accepts all these revelations of science, he seems totally unaware of the real character of their authority, or their real drift and meaning, when taken together as a whole. He does not see how completely they take away from him the coercive force of his principal arguments.

In the first place, he does not discriminate between one scientific authority and another; and in talking of modern science, he exhibits the most curious misconception as to what modern science is. Thus, as we have seen already, he goes to Cuvier as a final authority on geology, and accordingly declares modern science to have demonstrated that the human race began at the traditional date of Adam. Fortified by this view, he proves to his own satisfaction that man's original condi-

tion was a condition of the purest monotheism; and he bases on this one of his arguments for God's reality. He seems never to have heard of the age of flint implements; nor to know of those forlorn traces left by the human foot, so far in 'the dark backward and abysm of time,' that Adam seems as modern by comparison as yesterday's 'Daily Telegraph.'

His arguments, however, in the face of science, have far deeper flaws than this. He contends that God's existence can be proved in each of these two ways—since the universe moves, it must have a mover; since it exhibits perfect design, it must have a designer; and further, since the design is obviously benevolent, the designer must be infinitely good. But to all such arguments what science does is as follows. It does not destroy them as logical structures, but it blows away the bases on which they rest, like so many pieces of thistledown.

In the first place as to design—if it allows us to entertain the belief in design at all, it transfers the whole question to the very beginning of things, or to the time when the universe, as we know it, existed only potentially in its simplest elements. All that has since happened—at all events in the material world—in all of man's surroundings, if not in man himself, was designed then, once for all, immutably and completely. Dr. Hettinger himself sees this; for he speaks of 'the action of the forces of nature' as being 'necessarily fixed;' and he argues that matter cannot be a self-existing substance, which God found and worked with, because the forms which things take are the result of the 'very nature and essence' of their component parts;

and are 'absolutely inalienable from the things themselves.' If then everything that now exists in the physical universe (and this includes the physical part of man), everything from the course of the planets to the slightest molecular change in each human brain, or the smallest tremor of each blade of grass—if all this existed necessarily in 'the primordial arrangement of the molecules of the universe,' and could not, unless all the laws of matter had been subsequently revolutionised, have happened otherwise, nothing is gained logically by postulating a moving principle outside the molecules, as well as within them. On whatever grounds such a postulate may be adopted, it is not adopted by the mind, owing to any compulsion of reason; as is abundantly shown by a glance at the set of arguments which Dr. Hettinger relies on for proving to us that it is.

These arguments are as follows: 'The Divine Substance,' he says, is evidently '*essentially* different' from the molecules of the universe, because the 'divine substance' being 'eternal, necessary, and infinite,' every manifestation of it must be 'eternal, necessary, and infinite' also: but the things of the molecular universe are exactly the reverse, therefore, the molecular universe cannot be identical with the divine substance. Again, were the two identical, all finite existences, if resolved into their primordial matter, would produce a divine substance which is infinite: but the infinite cannot be obtained by the addition of things finite, any more than a unit can be the product of a sum of zeros. Again, were God and the universe the same living substance, the same substance would be at once free and necessary, conscious and unconscious; what is free would have

been evolved from what is not free:—which is impossible, for the lower cannot produce the higher, or the imperfect produce the perfect. Finally comes this argument, which must be given in the writer's own words, 'If the world is not the work of God, but self-created, as the less cannot produce the greater, it must have been the work of man. But man is inconceivable apart from nature; indeed, of all organic beings, he is the last produced. Therefore the world was not created by man, who is conditioned and finite, but by a first cause, who is superior alike to man and to the world.'

The deepest feeling which these lamentable puerilities call forth in us, is astonishment that any serious man should in these days have recourse to them: but it will still be well to notice a few details of their ineptitude, for they give us the key to the fundamental unsoundness of the writer's entire position.

With regard to the statement that if God apart from the universe does not exist, we are driven to assert that infinity is made up of a number of finite things, Dr. Hettinger is no doubt quite correct; but the hypothesis of a separate God does nothing to help us out of the difficulty. If science forces on us any belief at all, it makes us realise every day more and more irresistibly, how this universe of finite things actually is infinite; or at all events it makes any limit to it inconceivable. Conversely, too, it brings this home to us—that not only do finite things thus make up an infinite thing, but that an infinite number of things go to make up finite things. Let us consider the particles that make up a drop of water. Chemistry may come to the point when

it can divide them no further, but thought divides them for ever, and can never put a term to the process.

But there are other criticisms to be made on Dr. Hettinger's argument that are more important still. If God did not make the world, he says, man must have made it. The philosophical absurdity of this alternative we need not now insist on. The point to be noticed is, that for Dr. Hettinger, man still seems to be the central fact of the universe,[1] and the earth and the universe he uses as convertible terms. He seems to know nothing of that stupendous and overwhelming revelation which science has forced on man of nature's unfathomable magnitude; how it has dragged aside the curtain which for so many thousands of years roofed him in and sheltered him, in what seemed a comprehensible cosmos —a cosmos in which he was the crowning feature; and how it has laid bare to his astonished eyeballs those endless profundities of time and space, swarming with worlds and systems, and suns shining and darkened, which drown the universe as man once knew it, and swallow up what seemed its august and divine significance in their desolating and unthinkable enormity. Had Dr. Hettinger realised this, he would have seen all his arguments, which take man as the centre of things, and assumes for him some destiny that is obviously pre-eminent and significant—he would have seen all these arguments perishing on each side of him, like helpless sailors washed overboard in a storm.

And now let us go on to another point. 'Were God and matter,' he says, 'one identical substance,

[1] 'Nature exists only as a means by which man attains to God, and will endure only as long as that purpose remains,' p. 277.

what is free would be evolved from what is not free—which,' he exclaims triumphantly, 'is impossible!' and he imagines that he is thus refuting the scientific theory of the universe. Here again we see that he has not the smallest idea of what the scientific theory of the universe is. According to that theory nothing would have happened of the kind he mentions. What is free would not have been evolved out of what is not free; because, according to that theory, no such thing as freedom is in existence. What we call freedom is a mere subjective delusion; and Dr. Hettinger in assuming it to be a reality attempts to answer science on its own grounds, by starting with the principal proposition which science declares itself to have disproved.

Lastly, let us turn to an argument on which Dr. Hettinger lays even greater stress, and which he thinks is most calculated to carry conviction to the ordinary mind. This is the argument from design. The universe evidently displays some purpose, he says, therefore there must be some mind in which the purpose is conceived; and it is equally evident that the purpose is infinitely wise, good, and benevolent. Now the obvious answer to this is, that the discoveries of modern science, though they have not disproved the possibility of some providential purpose, have at all events taken from it, as a postulate, all logical necessity. This, however, is but a small part of the matter. The aim of Dr. Hettinger, and all those who believe with him, is not merely to prove that the universe reveals a purpose, but that this purpose is infinitely wise and benevolent. But when we talk of benevolence or goodness, we mean, and we can mean only, benevolence and goodness to such living

and conscious things as we know, and primarily and principally to man. It is, of course, admitted by all theologians that this goodness need not have for its object, in all cases, man's material prosperity; but it has, in all cases, as Dr. Hettinger says with emphasis, such circumstances for its object as will enable each man, if he wills it, to attain to God. In other words, God apportions to each man the circumstances best calculated to lead each man to Himself. Now this may be true or it may not be true. We are not concerned with that question here; we are only concerned in asking how far natural reason shows it to be true. Dr. Hettinger professes for the time to appeal to nothing but that. Let us consider then one of the principal facts which he alleges in support of his proposition, and that is the universality of the knowledge of Himself which God has implanted in every human heart. That knowledge, or rather the possibility of that knowledge, Dr. Hettinger describes as universal, so that, 'every man' is able to arrive at it, unless he deliberately and maliciously sets his face against doing so. Let us, however, take certain of Dr. Hettinger's own admissions. Having declared that there is no nation, however savage, which has not some religion, he admits that in many cases the religion in question is nothing but 'the fear of evil spirits;' and he admits further the existence of certain isolated groups who have not a vestige of any religious belief at all. Now how does he reconcile such facts as these with the general proposition? He says that the natives whose sole religion is the fear of evil spirits are races who by their own sins have fallen, and who are 'degraded and chastened;' whilst the isolated

groups which have no religion at all, have been more sinful, have been chastened and degraded yet farther, 'so that their reasoning faculty is absolutely undeveloped, and their condition amounts to brutish.' Let us suppose that this is so. Now comes the following question. We take the case of these degraded creatures to-day—we take them one by one individually and we ask, 'Did these men sin or their parents? Obviously their parents, their remote ancestors, of whom these living men knew nothing. But God's goodness, as Dr. Hettinger describes it, is goodness not only to a race as a corporate community, but goodness to each separate immortal life, to each individual immortal soul. Here then are a number of immortal souls to whom God has allotted circumstances in which, so far as reason and observation can inform us, no knowledge of God is possible, and no life at all but a life that is 'simply brutish.' 'But,' says Dr. Hettinger, 'these men are few in number.' Was there ever a more lamentable apology? If a God who is supposed to be infinitely powerful and good can be convicted of want of goodness in the case of a single soul, His character for power and goodness is as much destroyed as if the same conviction could be arrived at in the case of millions. And it is this that really is the case—always supposing that reason and observation are our sole sources of knowledge. Millions are always with us, other than savages, who were born into the world, not only surrounded by circumstances that are inexorably brutalising, but with brutal passions ingrained in their whole system, and forced upon them by the very formation of their skulls. It is idle to say that in the course of progress such

millions will exist no longer. They have existed, and they do exist; and it will do the theologian little good to argue that his God will be a just God in the future, if it still remains apparent that He has been an unjust God in the past. And to the eye of natural reason, unjust God is and has been, if we suppose a God at all. That there are countless instances of what seems His goodness, His care, and His wisdom is, of course, undeniable; but these only throw into darker shadow those instances equally, if not more numerous, of what seems His malevolence, His cynical indifference, or His impotent stupidity. Let us take the only argument that ever has been advanced, or can be advanced, against this position, and that is the argument that all the apparent evil God inflicts on man is meant for his good, and will result in his good hereafter. That may be true. I am not, for a moment, saying that it is not true; but the point is that, however true it may be, its truth is not apparent to natural reason: natural reason cannot discover a hint of it. How can natural reason discover in the earthquake of Lisbon any wisdom or goodness, so far as the men and women are concerned who perished in it? or in the hereditary weakness, taints, and manias with which so many are burdened from the moment they come into the world? Or again, if we turn to the great events of history, what trace of good or of wise purpose can we distinguish there? Even granting that we can persuade ourselves that they show signs of some general progress, what is that from the point of view of the individual? All that the theologian can see, by the light of his natural reason, will be that God is facilitating the perfection of men's

souls in the future by the wholesale sacrifice of men's souls in the past.

This argument is almost as old as human thought itself; but that does not make it any the less forcible. On the contrary, the discoveries of science are every day giving new force to it, illustrating it and bringing it home to us by fresh examples, driving it into the ears of the world in a way never before dreamed of; and Dr. Hettinger, on grounds of natural reason, makes no attempt to answer it.

Indeed, this Catholic defence of natural religion, regarded as an answer to the arguments of scientific Agnosticism, is no answer at all. The subtleties of the metaphysical part of it we need not discuss here. The philosophy on which these are based may be true or false. The only point on which I am now concerned to insist is, that whatever difficulties such arguments may meet, there are other difficulties which not only are not met, but which it seems the writer has not even conceived of. These difficulties consist, one and all of them, of certain broad generalisations, the truth of which modern science is daily branding deeper into the consciousness of civilised man. They may be summed up as follows:

The material universe is infinite and eternal, all its changes being the result of all-pervading and eternally unchanging laws.

Life and consciousness, whatever may be their nature, are inseparable from this material universe; they follow its laws, and are the results of its laws. They are another aspect of the movements of the same machine.

Such life and consciousness as we see exhibited in

man is a fleeting and infinitesimal phenomenon in the eternity and the infinity of this All.

No purpose that to human reason seems rational can be discovered by human reason in man's circumstances and history—certainly not any benevolent purpose; and as to the universe as a whole, no meaning or purpose in it is even conjecturable.

The universe is eternal; freedom is unthinkable; purpose is undiscoverable; the hypothesis of a designer is unnecessary. Such is the verdict of natural reason applied scientifically; and there is this important fact to be remarked—that if that verdict has weight with anybody, it ought to have special weight with such Catholic philosophers as Dr. Hettinger, because, as we have seen, one of the fundamental doctrines of their philosophy is the trustworthiness of the evidence given us by our senses with regard to the external world, the trustworthiness of our consciousness with regard to ourselves, and the trustworthiness of those laws of thought which we discover in ourselves.

The conclusion, then, of the whole matter is as follows. If by natural religion is meant a belief in God, based on the application of man's logical faculties to the facts of his own intellect and of the sensible universe, there is no such thing as natural religion at all. However the idea of God may have arisen in our minds, the accurate use of reason, and the accumulation of accurate knowledge, are so far from having led us to it, that the more systematic and more accurate they become, the more utterly baseless do they show this idea to be.

And now let me turn round to the reader and

answer a question which he will perhaps ask. He will perhaps ask, to what purpose are these criticisms put forward here? Is it with the purpose of proving that natural religion is a delusion, and that it is idle to attempt to give to human life any aim or hope above and beyond itself? The purpose is very different. It is not to show that there is no such thing as natural religion, but that if there is such a thing, it founds itself, and must defend itself, on quite other grounds than those put forward by writers like Dr. Hettinger. What, as it appears to me, these grounds are, I will try to explain briefly.

In the first place, it must be recognised, with absolute clearness, that neither the testimony of sense, nor the testimony of history, nor the laws of the intellect, give us any proof of the existence of a personal Creator.

In the second place, it must be recognised that if we mean by a Creator a Creator infinitely benevolent to man, and add as a corollary to this, man's moral responsibility to this Creator, then such a Creator and such a responsibility are not only not discovered by observation and by the intellect, but the very idea of them, the more we contemplate it, becomes more and more preposterous. The propositions that God is infinitely good, and that man's will is free, must be recognised as being as unthinkable as the proposition that two straight lines can enclose a space.

But the matter does not end here. There is a third truth to be recognised, which is this—that not only are a good God and a free human will unthinkable, but that everything else, if we try to think it out, ends

in being unthinkable also. Time, space, eternity, we know that they exist, and yet the more we contemplate their existence, the more and more do we see that some impossibility is involved in it. We know that the universe exists, but we can neither conceive of it as being infinite, nor as having any confine. Our conception is incomplete, and in trying to make it complete we tear it to pieces. And with all conceptions it may be shown that the case is really the same. In all there is sleeping a germ of the inconceivable. The mind has only to realise all that is really implied in them, and, like Faust's poodle, each of them swells and swells to a monster, till the logical girdle of thought is no more able to contain it than a woman's sash is able to go round the equator. Out of the reason there are ever ready to spring the wild horses, which, if we allow them, will tear reason to pieces. In other words, all thought is founded on assumptions, which involve the negation of the laws of thought.

Now if this fact is once realised, the mere idea of God's existence and goodness, and of man's freedom and responsibility, will not present to us any insuperable difficulties, on the ground of their logical impossibility. It must be remembered, however, that the argument that has just been urged does not go to show that every impossibility is true, but merely that every impossibility is not necessarily untrue. It merely gives us, as it were, a kind of permissive bill, to construct a natural religion if we can. It assures us that reason shall not interfere with us; but it does not promise that at starting reason shall do anything to assist us. That is to say, it leaves us to take the first step

independently of reason. We have to start not with something proved, but with something assumed.

Now what is that something? Is it God, and man's freedom? Is the first step we speak of the direct assumption that these are realities? Before answering we must consider the following point—that though natural religion must, as we say, be based on an assumption, and though we have no proof which will show it to be true, still we must have some motive for wishing to believe it to be true. Now what motive can man have for wishing to believe in the two propositions in question—that God exists, and that man is free, and responsible to God? They are propositions which are not only scientifically superfluous, and which also multiply and deepen the difficulties of the intellect, but they involve many consequences which are practically terrifying and disagreeable. The only motive then that can make us wish to assent to them does not lie in themselves. These primary doctrines of natural religion are not its primary assumptions: or, to speak more correctly, they are not assumptions at all. They are logical deductions from some assumption already made; and the assumption is the assumption of the value, the dignity, and the significance of man's life. In other words, putting the question of a revelation aside, a belief in God can only logically be defended by assuming, first, a certain belief in life—a certain spiritual importance and dignity in certain acts and moods of mind, and a certain meaning in certain spiritual fears and hopes, and a certain authority, beyond that of a tribal instinct, in the voice of conscience. Now, so far as proof is concerned, all this is

mere assumption. What faculty is there in man which is to urge him to assume it?

It is difficult to suggest for it any better name than faith; and its formula put briefly comes to be as follows: 'I *do* believe in the spiritual value and the eternal meaning of life, because my nature is such that I abhor the belief that is the alternative.' This step once taken, natural reason steps in and works in the ordinary way; proving, just as it might prove any other theorem, that given to life the sort of value in question, the existence of God and of man's freedom are its necessary logical consequences, and that it cannot be explained, or even expressed, without having recourse to them.

Science, whilst increasing the difficulties in the way of natural religion on one side, has strengthened all the arguments in favour of it, on the other. In dwarfing man into apparent insignificance, when compared with the sum of the universe, and in thus robbing his life of all its objective magnitude, it has made a belief in God and in immortality essential, to a degree that could never have before been realised to any rational belief in the dignity of so evanescent an existence. To put the whole matter briefly, it may be said that whilst the hypothesis of God becomes more and more superfluous in the world of matter, it becomes more and more logically necessary in the world of spirit; and my sole complaint against such apologists as Dr. Hettinger is that they stultify and discredit the second of these great truths by their blindness to the first. They place their treasure, indeed, in a strong-room, but the foundation of the strong-room they insist upon seeking in the sand.

SCIENCE AND THE REVOLUTION

RELIGIOUS belief and political and social Conservatism are very commonly supposed to be related and to go together; still, there are many sections of the religious world which would doubtless deny that the connection was in any way fundamental or necessary. Few people, however, would deny this—that whatever may be the relations of Religion and Conservatism to one another, they have in common one position at all events—a position of antagonism to a certain common foe. The common foe is that body of discoveries, whether alleged or real, those methods of discovery, those tests of truth, and that general habit of mind, which are now popularly described by the words Science and Scientific. The quarrel between Science and Religion is direct and open; the quarrel between Science and Conservatism is less direct; but in both cases the antagonism is equally real and notorious. Science claims to destroy what has hitherto been called *religion*, by destroying the bases and evidences of our traditional religious beliefs. It claims to destroy the cause of political and social Conservatism, by supplying society, not only with the material appliances of improvement, but—more important still—with a new theory of itself.

Now how do Religion and Conservatism meet this

common antagonist? How do Christians meet what they consider to be the science of Antichrist? How do Conservatives meet what considers itself the Science of the Revolution? They meet it—speaking generally—in two wholly different ways, and each way is the worst way possible. Each perversely pursues the conduct that would be appropriate to the other, and does so with results that are at once ludicrous and lamentable. The true character of this intellectual drama is so little appreciated at present by the general public, that I shall not be engaging in any superfluous task, if I try to suggest it to the attention of the reader.

The fundamental difference between Religion and Science is really confined to one question, which, though profound, is strictly limited. It is this. Are the only truths of which we can be certain, by which we are bound to live and insist on others living, for which we should be ready to die, and perhaps inflict death on others, such truths as can be established by scientific evidence? Or are there other certainties arrived at by other means, for which science affords no evidence whatever, but which men are as fully justified in proclaiming, in teaching, and in acting on, in using as the bases of legislation and daily conduct, as they are in teaching and acting on the ordinary laws of health? Science says that there are no such certainties; Religion says there are. We have here not only the sole ground on which the two conflict, but the sole ground on which they even meet. Within its own limits every sensible theologian ought to see that science is absolutely right, in enforcing its test of truth, and in refusing credence to anything that will not stand it. He ought to see,

no matter how ardent his faith, that the physical world as known to us by experience, and the spiritual world which alone gives the physical world meaning, are to be explained, and must be explained on totally different principles; and that it is as essential to forget God, in trying to understand the first, as it is to remember Him, if we would give any sense to the second. But the majority of those who affect to defend religion, especially of the clerical defenders of it, whatever else they may be, are not sensible theologians. I beg the reader to remark that I speak of the majority only; but it is the majority, unfortunately, that makes the most noise, and in the intellectual world, as in the political, is held to represent the stronger side of a question. Let us, then, turn to the apologetics and the polemics of the average Christian pulpit, and what sort of reasoning and what sort of temper do we encounter? We know only too well. Who is not familiar, either in church or out of it, with what we may call the curate *contra mundum?* He directs his attacks—if, indeed, they are worthy of the name—not at the vulnerable heel of science, but at the most solid parts of its armour. He ridicules doctrines and discoveries, which every rational man accepts as indubitable, and he taxes their discoverers with an arrogant vanity in proclaiming them. He denounces as feeble sophistries reasoning which is irresistible to any intelligence stronger and better informed than his own; and many of the profoundest religious difficulties which modern scientists point out he disposes of in a moment with a few nursery arguments, little deeming that apostles, fathers, and schoolmen have seen them and weighed

them long before modern science was thought of, and have humbly and reverently acknowledged them as solemn and insoluble mysteries. Well does one of the most thoughtful of our living Catholic writers say, that 'no small number' of our Christian apologists 'rage furiously against a doctrine without really comprehending it,' and urges on them 'to reconsider some of their favourite positions.' Well does he add, with even greater emphasis, that 'the understanding revolts at the ineptitudes of these defenders of the faith.' It has been urged with considerable force, with regard to the Roman Church, that its divine character is proved rather than disproved by the vices of some of its popes and its epochs of gross corruption, because nothing that was not divine could ever have survived the mass of shame and scandal by which at times the Church has been covered. In the same way it may be said that revealed religion generally is proved rather than disproved by the frantic feebleness of its apologists, because if it were not divinely and profoundly true, it would have been long since discredited by the arguments of its most voluble supporters. These unfortunate men, in their endeavour to avert the destructive impact of modern science on Christianity, act exactly like a man who, wishing to arrest a train, should jump at the engine, instead of turning it into a siding.

So much for the treatment which science meets with from those to whom it opposes itself as the destroyer of Christianity and religion. Let us now consider how it fares with regard to that other class to whom it opposes itself as the supporter of progressive democracy, of what is sometimes called 'The Revolu-

tion,' and of 'advanced' ideas generally. The spectacle which thus presents itself to us is curiously different. The demeanour of Conservatism towards its scientific enemy is the precise opposite to that so unfortunately adopted by Religion. Instead of using the language of hatred and ridicule, Conservatism treats the scientific claims of democracy with deference, almost with timidity; and it attacks democracy through everything rather than through these. When our modern Revolutionists talk of the laws of progress, of sociology, of social evolution, of the true basis of government, and of the rights and powers of the people, of education, of heredity, of equality, and equality of opportunity, and declare that their views represent what the world recognises as science, our Conservatives, instead of replying with any railing accusations, accept the statement as being in the main true. We hear nothing, in this connection, of the arrogance and effrontery of science, of conclusions said to be demonstrated, which really are no conclusions, of the ignorance, of the absurdity, of the confusion of scientific men. On the contrary, our Conservatives seem to vie with the Revolutionists in treating Science with an ostentatious civility; and they actually accept it as a matter of course that the favourite generalisations and formulas employed by the Revolutionists are scientific.

Here we have that odd inversion, that perverse exchange of parts, to which I have just alluded. This respect which Conservatism pays to what its adversaries call their science, is every whit as absurd as the contempt and the shrill abuse of the curate. What the occasion requires is that each of these two characters

should completely abandon his present temper and position and adopt that of the other. Let the controversialist of the pulpit meet science as applied to religion, not with indiscriminating contempt, but with discriminating respect, and he will see its weak points better, from fully mastering the points where it is impregnable. On the other hand, let the Conservative, in dealing with the science of the Revolutionists, pick up all the contempt we suppose to have been abandoned by the curate, let him boldly adopt every sneer, every affronting phrase; let him make his tongue ache with talking of ignorance, of arrogance, and confusion, of shallowness and self-contradiction: let him do all this, and do something more besides; let him not only adopt the terms which the curate applies to the man of science, but let him adopt those also which the man of science applies to the curate; let him taunt his opponent with fanaticism, with prejudice, with unmanly and fatuous sentimentality, with hysteria and superstition, and he will hardly have said a word too much in speaking of that farrago of unscientific nonsense, which our democrats, our 'advanced thinkers,' our apostles of revolutionary progress, have contrived to impose on the world, and on themselves also, as science.

The class of thinkers and leaders of thought I allude to no doubt comprise men who, though highly influential perhaps as practical politicians and agitators, are not supposed even by their followers to be very profound philosophers. But I have not such men in my mind only: I allude even more particularly to others, whose philosophic reputation is high, and who, if not philosophers, are nothing. A good example of

such men is Mr. Frederic Harrison. Discussing the Revolution of 1789, 'the cardinal features of the movement,' he says, 'are in no sense locally French, or of special national value. They are equally applicable to Europe, and indeed to advanced human societies everywhere. . . . They concern the transformation of a feudal, hereditary, privileged, authoritative society, based on antique right, into a republican, industrial, equalised, humanised society, based on a *scientific* view of the common weal.' The main point he is insisting on is this, that the French Revolution is really important, not as the revolution of a nation, but as a marked stage in the social evolution of man—as 'a movement of the race towards a completer humanity'—a movement which, to quote his own words again, 'forms the subject of a crowning human science,' which has 'emerged out of the physical sciences.'

Now of modern science, professing as it does to found itself solely on evidence, the chief characteristic should be, and indeed in most cases is, an extreme carefulness, an absolute accuracy, an utter rejection of rhetoric, in stating the observed facts on which it bases its generalisations and conclusions. Even the rashest of our physicists, when dealing with physical questions, always in this respect are anxiously and severely conscientious. It will be instructive to turn to a few sentences of Mr. Harrison's in order to see how the crowning human science, when applied by its exponents to explaining the evolution of the 'common weal,' differs from 'the physical sciences out of which it has emerged.' We will take Mr. Harrison's treatment of certain classes of facts, certainly of grave importance in estimating the general character

of the 'movement of '89.' We will take the change in the condition of the peasantry, and the development in the state of organised philanthropic socialism. Mr. Harrison's statements on both these points, though they cannot be said to have no truth in them, are yet vitiated by a carelessness and a wild inaccuracy which not only makes it impossible to draw from them any scientific conclusions, but which would utterly discredit him as a witness in an ordinary court of law. Let us begin with what he says of 'hospitals, asylums, poor-houses,' and 'social institutions of a philanthropic sort' generally. 'Almost everything,' he says, 'which we know as modern civilisation [in connection with these] has taken shape and systematic form within these hundred years. The care of the sick, of the weak, of the destitute, of children, of the people—all this is essentially an idea of '89.' Now Mr. Harrison tells us that one of the stages by which men rose to a scientific conception of history was the 'extension of their interests' beyond the history of Europe to the history and the fortune of 'all who dwell on the planet'; and that this it was that 'gave a new colour to the whole range of thought.' Such being the case, it is sufficient here to point out that every one of the above functions of the State, which he so confidently speaks of as unknown before '89, had been organised and discharged by the State five hundred years previously in a country as large as the whole of Western Europe, with a completeness that has not yet been excelled, and with a benevolence that has not yet been equalled. No one who is acquainted with the condition of Mediæval China, and its elaborate provisions for old age and for sickness,

amongst the common people, can fail to see the absurdity of Mr. Harrison's statement, especially when put forth as a generalisation of the 'crowning human science.'

Inaccurate in a similar and a far more obvious way are his statements as to the comparative position achieved and enjoyed by the French peasantry of to-day. He declares, for instance, that what he calls 'landlord law and landlord justice,' by which, as he tells us, he means 'territorial oppression,' 'may be found in Ireland, may be found in Scotland, may be found in England, but have totally disappeared from France.' It is enough to say, by way of comment on this, that if French law had prevailed in Ireland during the last eight years, every tenant of the class so dear to Mr. Harrison and his friends would have been long since evicted with a vigour, a promptitude, and a ruthlessness, which have never, as a matter of fact, been known in that country, even on the estates of the hardest and the most detested landlords.

These statements of Mr. Harrison, however, are merely misstatements of facts. If we pass to Mr. Harrison's next sentences we come to a fault that goes deeper—we come to confusion of thought. We have two curious instances of it, one after the other. 'The eight million peasants,' he says, 'who now own the [French] soil are masters of their own destiny, for France has now eight million kings, eight million lords of the soil.' This might be accepted as a passable though inferior piece of rhetoric in the essay of a boy at a grammar-school, but as coming from a writer who insists on being taken seriously, who claims our atten-

tion mainly on the ground that he is writing scientifically and who means his statements to be taken as statements of hard and unadorned facts, it bears as little resemblance to what he means it to be—that is to say, a scientific statement—as a child's fairy tale bears to a chapter of constitutional history. How, in any serious sense, can eight million men be said to be, each of them, masters of their own destiny? How can they be said to be each kings in any sense that is not self-contradictory? What king was ever master of his own destiny even in the days when kings governed as well as reigned? Was each king not largely dependent on the action of his fellow kings? And if this was true in the case of a dozen kings, each ruling over millions, much more is it true in the case of millions of kings, where the destinies of each are dependent on the destinies of all the rest. Mr. Harrison would have spoken with equal truth if, instead of calling these peasants eight million kings, he had called them eight million slaves; or, if he wants to see an exact duplicate of his statement, he may be referred to the saying of a well-known American humorist, that there was no jealousy in the ranks of a certain volunteer corps, because all the men were generals. Of course, it may be said that in dealing with historical subjects, more licence must be allowed to expression than is required or admissible in physics; and that it is absurd in the former case to take mere expressions literally. But what we have here is no mere question of expression; it is a question of expression which conveys a radically erroneous thought, and is valuable to the argument of the writer on account of this error, mainly.

Let us take from Mr. Harrison one case more. It occurs in the sentence following that on which we have just been dwelling. 'The twenty thousand, or thirty thousand, it may be,' he proceeds, 'who in these islands own the rural lands, should ponder when the turn of their labourers will come to share in the "ideas of '89."' Now, this statement, if it means anything, evidently means this—that the landlord class in Great Britain and Ireland occupy the same position that the corresponding class in France occupied under the old régime, and that the labourers, so soon as their eyes are sufficiently opened, will view their own position in the same light as that in which the French peasantry in '89 viewed theirs. This, however, as might be shown from Mr. Harrison's own writings, is impossible. The labourer in these islands can never share the ideas of '89, for the simple reason that the ideas of '89 were a protest against things which existed then in France, but which neither had, have, or can have any existence here. It is as absurd to conceive of the English labourer of the future sharing the ideas of '89 as it is to conceive of a Cook's tourist at Jerusalem sharing the ideas of Godfrey de Bouillon. The English labourers may imbibe ideas some day in some way analogous to those of the French peasants, but the difference between the two will be at least as important as the likeness; and to treat them as identical is as unscientific a blunder as it would be to treat gunpowder as identical with brimstone and treacle.

But these particular blunders of Mr. Harrison are, no doubt, after all, microscopic; and if they stood by themselves it would not be worth our while to dwell on them, or even to notice them. But they do not stand

by themselves—they are representative. They represent follies, errors, and confusions on a small scale, which throughout the theories of our modern democratic philosophers are repeated on a colossal scale, and which supply the warp if not the woof of their philosophy.

It is this fact which the apologists of Conservatism seem not so much as to suspect. They imagine their opponents, in one way at least, to be far stronger than they are; and they mistake for the solid mountains of science what are in reality nothing but wind-bags inflated with superstition. The task of pricking the wind-bags with the spear-head of real scientific reasoning, and reducing to their true proportions the prospects of democracy and social change, is a task waiting to be undertaken by some school of clear and vigorous thinkers. The effects which physical science has produced on the popular creed of Christianity are as nothing when compared to the effects which such thinkers would be sure to produce on what at present passes muster as the scientific creed of democracy.

One contemporary writer has done something in this way already. He is the Catholic writer from whom I just now quoted a trenchant condemnation of certain clerical controversialists; and I have specially in view one particular chapter in the work from which that quotation was taken. Mr. Lilly's 'Century of Revolution'—a succinct discussion of the great social movement which has characterised the past hundred years—has one chapter devoted to 'The Revolution and Science.'

He begins this chapter with pointing out afresh to his readers the arrogant and imperious confidence with

which the leaders of the Revolution claim science as their own, and declare that on it their principles and their prospects rest. 'The new ideal of the public order,' he says, 'is a society where science will be all-sufficient—"une société où la science suffise à tout, à la théologie, à la morale, à l'éducation, aussi bien qu'à l'industrie."'

There is [he proceeds], in the present day, a great, I might almost say a unanimous, *consensus* of testimony to the same effect from Revolutionary publicists. On every side we hear that the Revolution must be, that it is, scientific. The word is almost invariably employed in that mutilated sense to which it is now so generally narrowed . . . it is used as a synonym for physics. The very use is a tacit, in most cases, no doubt, an unconscious, recognition of what Mr. Morley calls 'the great positive principle that we can know only phenomena, and know them only experientially'. . . . The Jacobins of to-day seek in the laboratory a 'solid formula' for their politics. It is upon 'natural truths,' they urge, that the foundation of the public order must rest.

Mr. Lilly then goes on to point out that the primary 'natural truth,' which they claim as the basis of their theoretical edifice, and without which the whole would collapse like a house of cards, is the theory of evolution, which is associated with the name of Darwin—the theory, as he puts it—

that in the development of the individual from the simple unsegmented cell, in which the human organism originates, we have the abstract and brief chronicle of the race. . . .

Now, how [he says] does the Revolutionary dogma look in the light of these facts, so luminously exhibited by Mr.

Darwin as the 'scientific' account of the human mammal? First, consider the doctrine of the natural, inalienable, and imprescriptible rights of the individual, which is the chief corner-stone of the whole Revolutionary edifice. How is it possible to predicate such rights of an animal, whose attributes are constantly varying—whose original is not Jean-Jacques' perfect man in a state of nature, but not to go further back, a troglodyte with half a brain, with the appetites and habits of a wild beast, with no conception of justice, and with only half articulate cries for language? . . . Take the thrice-sacred formula, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. What place [he asks] is there for these conceptions [in any creed professing to be 'scientific'?] Liberty! [he proceeds]: The sovereignty of the individual! It disappears with the fiction of a perfectly homogeneous humanity. The message of scientific evolution to the masses is to know their masters . . . to recognise the provision of nature which has made the few strong, wise, and able; the many, weak, foolish, and incompetent. Equality! So far from being 'the holy law of nature,' as Marat was wont to affirm, it is flat blasphemy against that law. Inequality is everywhere her rule, and is the primary condition of progress. Why, man is nothing but the product of vast inequalities—of successive variations of previous animal types. . . . Fraternity! Yes, the fraternity of Cain and Abel. Cain survived because he was the fittest, and proved his fitness by surviving.

Mr. Lilly then turns to another side of the question, and having dealt with this pseudo-scientific theory of man's natural rights, he examines with even greater force and severity that other theory which is essential to it, and is always linked with it, the theory of man's natural goodness. Mr. Lilly reminds us that Mr. John Morley has pointed emphatically to the words of

Diderot, 'Human nature is good; and the evil in the world is the result of bad education and bad institutions;' and has declared that here we have 'the central moral doctrine of the Revolution.' This doctrine, Mr. Lilly would have us observe, is actually palmed off on a scientific age as science. But is it scientific? he asks. To his ears such a claim sounds like the impudence of a cynical quack or the mad raving of an unlettered religious fanatic. 'The natural goodness of the *bête humaine*!' he exclaims. 'It is aboriginally unethical; ferocious passions are its very groundwork.' The party which calls itself scientific, he observes, declares that crime is the result of bad education; whilst the very science from which it professes to derive all its doctrines, informs us plainly, to quote from Mr. Herbert Spencer, 'that crime is really connected with an inferior mode of life, *itself usually consequent on an original inferiority of nature*.'

That is what science says; but the moment the party of progress, turning from physical questions, seek to apply science to questions of politics and society, every intellectual acquisition which science has brought to them, and of which they profess to be the proudest exponents and the fiercest guardians, is disturbed, inverted, thrown to the winds, or trampled contemptuously in the mud.

The Revolutionary democracy of the present day [to return again to Mr. Lilly's own words] starts from the proposition that man, *qua* man, possesses all the higher attributes of citizenship. It is based upon an *à priori* theory of the supposed rights, inalienable and imprescriptible, of humanity in a hypothetical state of nature.

It everywhere depends, whether consciously or unconsciously, upon the doctrine of man and society which Rousseau formulated, and which Robespierre sought to realise; an abstract, an unrelated, a universal man; identical in all ages, in all latitudes, in all races, in all states of civilisation. It everywhere aspires, with varying degrees of vehemence, to sweep away historic institutions, with the immeasurable diversities attaching to them, in order to make room for a reconstruction of the public order, on the basis of arithmetic and what it calls pure reason. . . . Thus the Benthamite aspiration, 'Everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one,' or the more succinct formula, 'One man, one vote,' is merely a translation into the vulgar tongue of Rousseau's sophism of the equivalence of all members of the community, and of their natural right to participate equally in the expression of the general will. The proposition with which the air still resounds, that 'The true political creed is faith in the people,' is but a variation on the theme that 'human nature is good,' justly reckoned by Mr. Morley 'the central moral doctrine of the Revolution.'

Thus, as Mr. Lilly points out with reiterated emphasis, the entire political and social creed of that party which arrogates to itself the name of the party of progress, of free thought, and of science, is a creed which, taken as a whole, is a mass of fanciful superstition, as far removed from science as the theology of Johanna Southcote. Mr. Lilly's criticisms deal with the fundamental propositions of this pseudo-scientific school, but they deal with them only. I propose to point out how, through all its distinctive arguments, through all its distinctive assumptions, through all the distinctive trains of reasoning, together with their ac-

companying phraseology, by which it seeks to appeal to and lead the present generation, there runs the same ignorance of science, the same superstition and confusion.

Let us take, for instance, those doctrines concerning land, to which such prominence has been given by Mr. Henry George. The great claim which Mr. George made for his doctrines was that they were scientific—that they could one and all be demonstrated, and that they follow one another with an absolute logical necessity. Now, whether Mr. George's economic arguments were sound or unsound, they all, as put forth by him, derived their practical, their moral force, from a major premiss with regard not to economics, but theology. That premiss was this—that God made the land with a distinct, even if not with an exclusive, view to man's use of it, and had certain definite intentions as to what that use should be. But Mr. George, whatever his religion may be, did not come before the world as the apostle of any Christian Church, or of any special revelation; and certainly the public which has given him the most hearty reception, has not been a public which believes in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, or in biblical texts, as foundations for scientific theories of society. How, then, does Mr. George know of the existence of God, and still more of the exact intentions of God? It is again yet more pertinent to ask, Does Mr. George's public believe in the existence of God, or in the possibility of demonstrating by science that He has any intentions at all? Let Mr. George set plainly before his public the various theological propositions which really underlie and are essential to the whole of his

economic gospel, and let that public examine on what authority he makes them. The examination will lead to only one verdict—that they are either entirely unsupported deductions from certain texts in a Bible whose authority the public in question has repudiated, or else that they are arbitrary assumptions of Mr. George's own.

Mr. George for his own sake is hardly worth referring to; but he *is* worth referring to for the sake of the error, which, in this way, he represents. The statements which he makes with such frequency, with regard to God and God's intentions, and which form the practical fulcrum of his reforming lever, are part of the stock-in-trade of the whole democratic school, and it is hardly too much to say that no revolutionary appeal to the people ever is made, or can be made, without them. The only difference between him and other reformers is, that whereas he makes these statements explicitly, and fully aware that he is making them, the others make them implicitly, and in stupid ignorance of the content of their favourite propositions. For instance, whereas Mr. George says God made the land, and intended all men to enjoy it equally, the ordinary democratic reformers say, The land *is not made* for the few; or, The land *is not intended* for the few; or, The land *does not exist* for the few.

This class of phrase is familiar to everyone. It is frequent no doubt in the mouths of religious people; but it is most frequent, at the present day, and it is employed with the greatest and the most exaggerated emphasis, by those to whom religion is nothing but a lie, a dream, or a conjecture. It is not from priests and ministers, but from the scientific leaders of the social

revolution, that we hear most often what the land exists for, and is made for. Now, what are these assertions when we come seriously and severely to inquire into their meaning? They are simply so many assertions that the world was created by an intelligent being, with special social and political intentions, and that these intentions, in all their minutest details, are known by a certain school of human politicians. They are, in fact, a series of theological dogmas, which differ from all other theological dogmas in this only—that they endeavour, as though they were ashamed of themselves, to hide their sacred character; that they do not profess to rest on any vestige of evidence; and that they are put forward by the very men who declare that all theology is a delusion, that no evidence for any one of its doctrines is possible, and that to believe anything without evidence is the most contemptible form of imbecility, and the vilest form of immorality. We have here indeed a curious spectacle; and yet strangely enough the public have not yet discovered its absurdity. We have the very same philosophers, in the austere name of science, scourging theology out of the Temple with one hand, and smuggling it back, in a sack of verbiage, with the other.

It would require far more space than can here be given to point out fully the extent to which theology—and theology of the crudest and most anthropomorphic kind—the theology of Salem Chapels and Little Bethels—forms the groundwork of our advanced scientific theories of social progress and scientific demands for social reform. It would require a long chapter or an essay, instead of a few brief paragraphs, to track it and

to expose it, through the phrases and moods of thought and feeling in which it ignominiously hides itself; to fully expose the nature of this truly astonishing transaction, this clandestine re-introduction of condemned intellectual goods, by the very men who have made their reputations by condemning them; and the curious irony of the fate which has made them base all their practical doctrines on those very beliefs which their chief intellectual mission has been to exhibit as dreams and fancies beneath the contempt of old women and children.

Some of Mr. Lilly's remarks, though not made exactly in this connection, indicate a partial explanation of what I have just said. 'We are living,' he writes, 'in an age of commonplaces. The popular mind is fed chiefly on phrases provided by the newspapers, which constitute for the great majority their only literature. . . . One result is that words lose precise connotations, and too often serve merely to darken counsel.' Journalism no doubt has done much in certain ways to degrade language, though in others it may have improved it; and precisely the same thing may be said of literature generally. As the production of literature, the number of competing producers, and the number of readers, increases, the quality of literature inevitably declines. There is a higher average level; that is undoubtedly the case; but it is precisely here that the great evil lies. There is now an enormous public which takes an interest, more or less intelligent, in subjects which formerly were approached only by the few; and to meet the demands of this public an army of writers has arisen who supply it with information and guides what it calls its thoughts. The consequence has been that whilst

literature, *as a profession*, has risen, literature as a pursuit and as a fine art has declined. Mediocrity in style has become a real power, which whilst it raises much up to its level, drags also much down to it, and prevents more from ever rising above it. If, however, nothing but mere literary style were in question, this would not, for our present purpose, be worth remarking upon. But literary style is bound up with, it causes, it denotes, and it explains, other things of far deeper importance—that is to say, the state of knowledge, the habits of thought and the modes of reasoning prevalent; and in our own age, not only knowledge, not only thought, but also the sympathies and the hopes of men, have been affected—or it might be better to say infected—by this disease of literature, to a degree that is not generally suspected.

What has happened has been this. In the first place accuracy of thought has been lost. That is one thing; but it is not all. Accuracy of thought has not only been lost, but it has been lost under cover of a pseudo-accuracy which makes men pride themselves on the very quality in which they are most profoundly wanting. There is one exception to this rule which not only proves it, but is also the cause and the explanation of it. This exception is supplied by physical science. Here thought and language alike have arrived during the present century at an accuracy never before known. Accurate methods, accurate ways of thinking, and accurate phraseology, have all gone together. The first has necessitated the last two, and the triumphs of modern science are due to the three taken together.

But now comes the unfortunate part of the matter.

In attempting to apply the principles and discoveries of physical science to what Mr. Harrison calls 'the crowning science' of man—to moral, to political, and to social problems, our modern philosophers, one and all of them, have set to work with a simplicity truly childish. Instead of applying the methods of physical science, they have applied its phrases; and with regard to these phrases, they have entirely failed to see that, though as applied to physics they may be absolutely, and even pedantically, accurate, classifying facts and giving clearness to every generalisation, yet, as applied to questions of human conduct and character, they are for the most part nothing but so much jargon, which only goes near enough to the real truth to obscure it.

Let us take, for instance, the most prominent word in the vocabulary of socio-political science—The People. In the first place, no scientific definition of The People has ever been formulated, or at all events there is none generally known and accepted; and not only this, but it is abundantly evident that no scientific conception of what *The People* is exists in the minds of any of the theorists who reason about it. There is not a single democratic philosopher who does not use the word in a variety of senses inconsistent with each other and with the arguments supposed to be supported by them. Mr. John Morley, for example, tells us in one place that *The People* are the poorest and most helpless classes in the community, and consequently the classes most likely to suffer from oppression and injustice. For this reason, he says, they ought to have power in the State, because they have naturally most need of protection. Now, if any one chooses to use the word *People* in this sense,

Mr. Morley's argument has a certain intelligible meaning; but even so it is a meaning very far short of scientific. For instance, supposing the bulk of any population is in the habit of making itself constantly helpless by drink, Mr. Morley would, of course, not argue that sots should have the principal power in the State, in order to protect themselves against the kicks of the sober? In every community, however, a great deal of poverty and helplessness is produced by causes analogous to drink. Evidently, therefore, Mr. Morley's claim for the people is based not simply on this assertion of their helplessness, but on another implied assertion, that this helplessness is, as a general rule, not caused or accompanied by any moral or intellectual decrepitude. The moment, however, we state this explicitly, a number of difficulties and questions at once present themselves. It may be obviously right that The People, in this sense of the word, should be protected against oppression, but is it equally obvious that the People, who are differentiated from the rest of the community only by the fact of their being poorer and more helpless, would be able to devise the means for securing the end in question? Is it not quite possible that means which to them seem the worst and the least satisfactory, would be in reality more efficacious than any that might be suggested by themselves; and that it would be, in the long run, for their own interest that those means should be forced on them against their wills by others? Both *Power* and *People* are evidently used in arguments such as these with an indefiniteness and an incompleteness of meaning which cloaks corresponding incompleteness of thought. Still we have here a proposition which, so

far as it goes, is really true and sensible—viz., that it is right that those of the community who are least able in daily life to protect themselves should be provided, by some means or other, with protection by the State.

But what a very little way this takes us, even if we accept Mr. Morley's own way of putting it! The whole business of the State is not to protect the poor against oppression. Even supposing the poor to be the only class worth consideration, the State would do very little for them if it were nothing more than their defender. As society becomes more complex, the barest necessaries of life for the poorest citizen, and the conditions under which he can earn even the poorest livelihood, become more complex also, and require exceptional study, and exceptional power and concentration of mind to grasp them. They are also constantly changing, obviating some evils, and surprising us by producing others; rendering old restrictions superfluous or disadvantageous, and demanding new ones; and the legislative and executive changes thus necessitated, require for their accomplishment some of the rarest qualities that can be produced by exceptional training and by exceptional natural aptitudes. Thus, they who say that all power should be in the hands of the People must plainly differentiate the People by something besides their comparative poverty and their comparative absence of leisure. The People, as the source of power, must include those who are essentially *the few*, as well as those who are essentially *the many*. The great thesis of scientific democracy being this, That all power should be in the hands of the People, it is evident that all those must be members of the People whose talents and

education are essential to the right exercise of power. If this be so, who then are not the People? The excluded portion of the community cannot be the rich as a whole, because many of the rich will have talents, training, and knowledge, specially fitting them for the performance of certain necessary functions; nor again can such of the rich be excluded as are without exceptional ability; because, if one thing is more self-evident than another, it is this—that the absence of exceptional ability is the prevailing characteristic of the People. Reflections like these are so obvious, that it may seem hardly worth one's while to make them; but they suffice to show something which is very far from obvious to many excellent persons—namely, the ridiculous vagueness with which our revolutionary science conceives of the principal subject of all its speculations and its researches.

And now let us pass from the word *People* to the word *Power*. Precisely the same vagueness both of language and of thought confronts us here. Political power is spoken of and argued about by our modern theorists as though it were some simple and single thing; whereas in reality, as may be easily seen, it is in the highest degree complex, comprising in itself many clearly distinct parts. One very simple division lies almost on the surface. Political power, whenever exercised, implies three things, at all events—the conception of some given end as desirable; the will to accomplish this end; and the devising of the means for its accomplishment. Let us take a very simple example. An entire community, living on the banks of an estuary, are unanimous in thinking that it would be

convenient if a suspension bridge were built over it. In addition to thinking it would be convenient if a suspension bridge were built over it, they come to be unanimous in thinking that it would be possible to build it—possible as a piece of engineering, and possible also as regards their own power of paying for it. Now, thus far we can conceive of the entire community acting together like a single individual, and being rightly described in this special connection as one body, or as The People. But the resolve to build the bridge, though an essential part of the power requisite to build it, is not for practical purposes any power at all until it is united with and subjected to the special knowledge and skill of a small part of the community—the engineers, who have to plan every detail of the structure, and, indeed, to decide whether it is a possible structure at all. Thus power, as applied to any practical purpose in politics, consists, firstly, in the desire for certain ends; secondly, in the criticism of these ends and the discernment of how far they are practicable, and, thirdly, the devising the best means for accomplishing them. Again comes this further division. The purposes to which power is applied are of two kinds—destructive and constructive—the blowing up of bridges and the building of bridges.

And now, bearing this in mind, let us ask ourselves how far Power—that is to say the sum of all these powers—ought to reside, or is capable of residing, in the poorest and most numerous class of the community, taken as a whole, and excluding all exceptional minorities; or even in the whole community, including these minorities, but merging them in the mass and denying

them any exceptional influence. It is perfectly obvious, the moment we examine the matter closely and resolve to bring our thought and language into any kind of severe and accurate order, that some of the most important elements of power never have resided in any class that can be called 'the people,' and never can reside in it. The devising of the means for fulfilling the requirements of the community must always be in the hands of a minority who possess, or are supposed to possess, talents above the average—a minority which is not merged in the people, but is differentiated from it. And thus we arrive at what is perhaps the best definition of the *People* that is possible—*all those persons who are without exceptional talents*, and whose qualities, when exceptional at all, are exceptional by being below, not by being above, the average. It is conceivable, in certain cases, that The People thus defined may be capable of wielding all the power requisite for some *destructive* purpose, but it is utterly inconceivable that they can ever be capable of *construction*. A drunken mob some day may blow up the Forth Bridge, but a drunken mob will never rebuild it. Between the people sweeping away what demagogues call abuses and the only classes that could put anything better in their place, there is all the difference that there was between Newton and his dog Diamond.

It may be said, however, that even though the People may not be able to carry out any given purpose, they are yet capable of feeling, and expressing a common desire and will that such and such purposes should be carried out. And within certain limits this is true, but within certain limits only. I shall not here even

endeavour to specify what these limits are. I wish merely to point out that these limits exist, and that until they have been inquired into, and some general perception of their nature arrived at, it is idle to talk about the will of the People, except for the purpose of the coarsest and most unscientific oratory. Let any Radical define the People as he pleases, and then ask himself how far, and under what conditions, he can seriously attribute to the vast multitudes in question any complete singleness of will, of wish, or of opinion. If by the People he means the whole community, it is one of his commonplaces to declare that the People have two opposing wills—the will of the classes, and the will of the masses. As a matter of fact, however, he always excludes the classes: still, whatever the details of this exclusion may be, the *People* means for him the great bulk of the population; and the People thus defined does not differ more from the classes than the various sections of the people differ from one another. These sections are divided by various interests, various temperaments, and various social grades; it is only in the rarest cases that they think or feel the same about any given question, or that they think or feel deeply about the same question at all. The number of persons, I do not say who led, but who took an active part in, the French Revolution was incredibly small. The bulk of the population remained passive; acquiescent, no doubt, in the *destruction* of certain abuses, but without any will whatever as to any scheme of reconstruction; and it would, indeed, be hardly too much to say that, except for purposes of destruction—the destruction of something existing which is obnoxious

to the vast majority, and felt as a hardship by each individual citizen—no spontaneous act of will on the part of the People is possible.

It would be easy to show that what is called the popular will, and what actually seems to be such, is certainly a delusion in many cases, and is probably a delusion in most. In one class of cases, it is obviously not spontaneous: it is at best but a choice made by the majority between a few alternatives offered them by a very small minority; and the course of public affairs is obviously dependent less on the will of the people than on the ability and the character of a certain handful of politicians. There is, however, no doubt, another class of cases, in which the initiative, to all appearance, does come from the multitude—cases in which we hear of 'great waves of popular feeling,' of 'indignation meetings,' and of feelings agitating 'the great heart of the masses.' Now, such expressions as these of the will of a certain number I quite admit may be genuine so far as they go, but as to how far they go there is room for endless misapprehension. Newspapers, the medium through which public events are viewed, necessarily form, even the best of them, a medium which is in many cases distorting. Enthusiasms, interests, aspirations, indignations, and so forth, make, through the newspapers, a noise in the public ear that is out of all proportion to their real power and extent. They, for the most part, originate in small minorities, and end with small minorities; but these are precisely the bodies that delight in public meetings, in writing to the newspapers, and in doing things of which the

newspapers can take note. They are thus in the position of a man who makes his voice heard everywhere, as if it were the voice of a multitude; not because his voice is powerful, but because he has his mouth at a speaking-trumpet. About a great number of subjects apathy is as golden as silence, and the body of the people are really apathetic about them; but this wise apathy, though it makes a sensible people, would naturally make an intolerably dull newspaper; indeed, a newspaper can hardly give expression to it. And thus, from the very nature of the case, in nine instances out of ten, newspapers, as representing the state of popular opinion, represent, not the common-sense of the majority, but the deviations from common-sense on the part of a numerically small minority.

I am not denying that the *People*, in some sense or other, is a real body, differing from any special class; that on some occasions it may be accurately said to have a will, and within certain limits to have power; and that its power, such as it is, may be developing. But I do say that neither the People, nor the People's power, have ever been accurately defined, or even accurately conceived of; that as for the People's will it has seldom been truly ascertained, and never accurately studied: and that when true scientific methods are applied to social questions, the prospects of modern democracy, and the whole meaning of that change which has been hastily named Progress, will be seen to be profoundly different from anything that our advanced thinkers suspect.

The Science, in fact, of these thinkers, with their theories of revolution and evolution, has no resemblance

to true science deeper than what comes from an echo of its phraseology. The social philosophy of such thinkers as Mr. Morley and Mr. Harrison have precisely the same relation to science that alchemy had to chemistry. The Popular Will, the People, Progress, and Social Evolution, are phrases which, as used by them, are fitted only to take rank with the Four Elements, with Phlogiston, and with the Vital Principle.

FABIAN ECONOMICS

I

WHAT DOES SOCIALISM MEAN?

SOCIALISM is a word which is, by many people, used in senses so vague and so contradictory, as often to deprive it of all arguable meaning. Were the matter one of mere verbal propriety, everybody who is touched by a knowledge of social suffering, and desires to relieve it by organised action of any kind, would, no doubt, by the derivation of the word, be equally justified in claiming for himself the name of Socialist. But it must be remembered that with precisely the same justification we might call a crow a blackbird, or a Newfoundland dog a water-wagtail. The practical meaning of a word is determined, not by its etymology, but its most definite and distinctive use; and the word *Socialism*, as everybody really knows, possesses a meaning more or less definitely fixed, and does not mean merely a desire to relieve social suffering, but a belief that social suffering is due to certain special causes, and a consequent desire to relieve it by special and peculiar methods. It is known, further, that these methods, whatever may be their details, would involve the destruction of insti-

tutions and principles which have hitherto been considered the foundations of all society and civilisation; and in especial the institution, as it now exists, of private property. So much about Socialism the general public knows, and so far as it goes this is all perfectly true; but the general public knows little more than this, and what it does not know it makes up for by guesses and assumptions, which are for the most part wrong. Such being the case, I shall endeavour in the clearest, the briefest, and the fairest way possible, to explain what Socialism is, as formulated by its most competent exponents; and having thus set before the reader its main and most essential elements, I shall fix his attention on those of them which differentiate it from other systems; and isolating them from the rest, I shall point out the fallacies which underlie them.

We must begin by observing that Socialism, in a perfectly definite sense, has meant, and may mean, three different things, which are, however, by no means mutually exclusive—a conspiracy, a party, and a creed. But in this country, at all events, it does not mean a conspiracy; nor can it as yet be even regarded as a party. It is indeed struggling to form itself into a party; but it is doing this by ordinary constitutional means; and so far it is not peculiar, and calls for no comment. There is, in short, nothing peculiar about it except the creed to which, if ever it becomes a party, it will aim at giving effect. Socialism, therefore, as it now exists, may be defined as a body of economic and social doctrines, resulting in certain conclusions as to the future possibilities of society — possibilities which

Socialists as a party will endeavour to make actual. It is, therefore, as a body of social and economic doctrines that we must consider it if we would understand to any purpose its character and its prospects.

First, however, let us ask this: How, or how far, can these distinctive doctrines be identified? For there are Socialists of various sects, just as there are Christians; and about certain points they rival Christians in their disagreement. This is true; but amongst the more thoughtful Socialists—those who, so to speak, have the intellectual charge of the movement—though disagreement about secondary points may grow, about certain primary points there is a growing clearness and agreement. It is to these last points that I propose now to confine myself; and, in order to show the reader what they are, I shall make use of a volume which has been issued, with a similar purpose, by a society of English Socialists, who, whatever their importance as a practical force may be, are the ablest, the clearest, and most practical exponents in this country of what Socialism really is. The society I allude to calls itself 'The Fabian Society'; and its name is now met with in newspapers not infrequently. Societies for propagating views are apt to seem ridiculous; it may therefore be not superfluous for me to say that the writers of the present volume —for it consists of essays by several writers—are persons of high education and trained powers of reasoning; that they are fully conversant with the orthodox theory of economics; that many of the orthodox doctrines form part of their own system, and have been adapted by them to new purposes in a most plausible and ingenious way; that many of their own views and arguments are

highly suggestive and valuable; and that the principal writer, Mr. Sydney Webb, is a lecturer on Political Economy at the City of London College. This volume, then, which is called 'Fabian Essays in Socialism,' may be taken as exhibiting Socialism in its most favourable and most reasonable aspect. To this volume we will now proceed to refer. Between some of the writers there are minor differences of opinion; and some of them on minor points are not quite consistent with themselves. But matters like these are trifles. In dealing with a book of this kind, our object must be to criticise, not the way in which a case is stated, but the case itself; and any chance defect in the mere statement of it we ought to remedy, rather than dwell upon, if we would criticise it to any advantage. What we want is to see how much truth certain men have got hold of; not to waste time in quarrelling over the manner in which they have managed to express it.

II

SOCIALISM AS PRESENTED TO US BY ITS INTELLECTUAL LEADERS

Socialism, then, as these writers are careful to tell us, is 'not a religion'; it is *par excellence* 'a property-form'; it is 'the scheme of an industrial system for the supply of the material requisites of human social existence.' Socialists see civilisation in some ways steadily advancing. They see that in all civilised countries the aggregate income produced every year is constantly increasing far faster than the population produces it.

And yet, in spite of this, they see poverty on all sides of them. The increasing wealth seems to accumulate in the hands of a limited class; whilst the great masses of the community are face to face with starvation, and are saved from it only by the sale of their labour and their liberty to others. And this condition of things, which would have been miserable enough at any time, is being rendered more intolerable by the education which makes men reflect upon it, and by a consciousness of political power which inspires them with hopes of changing it.

Such is contemporary society as seen and depicted by the Socialists generally, and by the Fabian essayists in particular; and Socialism, as a reasoned system, consists, first, of an analysis of the causes of this condition of things; and, secondly, of doctrines as to the means by which it is to be revolutionised for the better.

In their analysis of the causes of the existing social system, economic science owes a great debt to the Socialists. They have imported into it something which was before altogether wanting to it, namely, the historical and the comparative method. The older economists accepted the facts around them, as if they were part of the immutable order of nature. The Socialists have thrown a new light upon the problem by giving prominence to the fact that such is not the case, and that certain of the most prominent features of our present industrial system have only developed themselves fully during the past five generations, whilst a few centuries ago they were altogether absent. The chief of these new features are Capital, as we know it, and the position of the ordinary labourer with regard to

the conditions of his labour. In the Middle Ages, as the Socialist school has effectively pointed out, the position and occupation of the labourer were settled for him by birth and status. 'Agriculture,' as one of the Fabian essayists says, 'was organised in the feudal manor . . . handicraft was ordered by the guilds of the towns . . . every man had his class, and every class its duties.' That is to say, in one way or another every man was, by the very constitution of society, assured of access to the means of providing for himself a suitable livelihood. This picture, though incomplete, contains much that is true and pertinent, and accepting it for the moment as the Socialists present it to us, let us see how to account for the change which society has undergone since.

Many Socialistic agitators, of the more foolish and ignorant kind, have sought to explain all the evils which they denounce by attributing them to the exceptional wickedness of the rich and the capitalistic classes. But the men to whom Socialism owes its existence as a reasoned system do nothing of this kind, except, perhaps, in momentary fits of temper. On the contrary, their entire method of dealing with the question puts on one side these crude and angry puerilities, and they see that even the worst of the evils which arouse their pity or their indignation are due to the action of men who were neither better nor more wicked than their fellows, but who each pursued the course that seemed best to him, entirely unconscious of the changes he was instrumental in producing. In a word, the Socialists in their explanation of economic changes, are sober and dispassionate Evolutionists.

They are the very reverse of what many people take them to be. Thus, as one of the writers in the Fabian volume says, the old social order collapsed only because 'it was burst by the growth of the social organism'; and 'the main stroke in the industrial revolution was contributed,' as Mr. Sydney Webb emphatically says, not by the designing policy of any individual capitalist, but by the inventions of men like 'Newcomen, Watt, and Arkwright.'

And now comes the part of their creed which is important practically. Just as the existing social state has been evolved out of a state that was widely different from it, so out of it in turn will be evolved another equally different. Just as the feudal system has passed away, so, by the same power, will pass the Capitalistic system; not because theoretically men consider it 'immoral or absurd,' but because it is being gradually 'burst by the growth of the social organism.' This transformation, the Socialists maintain, is in progress now around us, and has been in progress for the past sixty years. The very capitalists themselves, and politicians who hate the name of Socialism, are unconsciously working for it and hastening it on. Indeed, all that the Socialists think it possible for themselves to do, is consciously to guide and accelerate a movement which would anyhow, sooner or later, accomplish itself without their aid. They are, let me repeat, Evolutionists, as distinct from revolutionists. Any violent revolution, supposing it to be successful, would, according to them, be only a sign, and not a cause, of progress. It would only be a chance turbulence on the surface of a great current. But the whole tenour of their teaching is,

that it would, as a fact, be not successful; that it would defeat its own object, and result in temporary retrogression. The Fabian essayists argue this point very acutely. Their ultimate aim is, as we shall see presently, the complete expropriation of what they call the possessing classes; but they realise that any violent or even sudden expropriation, would not only ruin the rich, but a good half of the entire community also. 'The result,' says the editor of the essays, 'would considerably take its advocates aback. The streets would be filled with starving workers of all grades. . . . They would cry, "Back with the good old times, when we received our wages, which were at least better than nothing." . . . In practical earnest,' he proceeds, 'the State has no right to take five farthings of capital from anybody, until it is able to invest them in productive enterprise.' Therefore, the Socialists argue, the process of taking must be gradual, but none the less will it be sure, and each year its speed tends to accelerate. It has, in fact, begun already. It began years ago. It began with the establishment of the Income Tax. 'Then,' say the Fabian essayists, 'the thin end of the wedge went in. The Income Tax,' they declare, 'is simply a forcible transfer of rent, interest, and even rent of ability, from private holders to the State, without compensation;' and, so far as the mere process of expropriation is concerned, the full development of Socialism will be merely the gradual extension of taxation of this kind.

Expropriation, however, is merely a means to an end. The State would do no good by taking all this money and locking it up; and it would do only evil by scattering it as an indiscriminate largess. The sole

object of taking it is to use it as Capital, with which to pay the wages of productive labour. But before the State can pay the wages of labour, it must first become master of the complicated organisation of labour, and this it can do by degrees only. Consequently its spoliation of the private landowners and capitalists must take place by degrees also. Let us, for instance, take the case of the iron trade. The Socialists' programme is that the State, by means of income tax, shall ultimately take the entire profits of the iron-masters, and with these buy up their property; just as if one man has a glass of beer and twopence, and another man takes the twopence and buys the glass of beer with it. But it would be suicidal for the State thus to treat the iron-masters until, firstly, other industries had accommodated themselves to the change, and, secondly, till the State was in a position to manage the production of iron with at least as much skill and economy as the present generation of employers. The development of the State, however, as the general employer of labour has begun already, and daily goes on apace. The municipalisation of tramways, gas-works, and water-works are the most important recent examples, and the most significant; while the most important, as well as the oldest, is the Post Office. The State, then, has only to proceed on the course on which it has embarked already. From supplying towns with gas and water, it will go on to supply them with boots, with coats, with bread, butter, and so forth, until at last it has become the universal manufacturer, farmer, merchant, shopkeeper, and landlord. And in this process, let it be again remarked, the Socialists maintain, and

very plausibly, there need be no violence or even abruptness. The process might be half accomplished before many people knew that it had begun. For the State would not forcibly extinguish any private enterprises. It would extinguish them only by successfully competing against them—by producing the same quality of goods, selling them at the same or even lower price, and at the same time paying higher wages. It would, in fact, extinguish the competitive system by competition.

And supposing this process to be completed, what will be the social result? The result, in this country, according to the Fabian essayists, will be as follows: The aggregate income of the country, according to the Fabian essayists, will be as follows: The aggregate income of the country will continue to grow as heretofore; but for argument's sake we may estimate it at its present figure, which is, roughly speaking, about *thirteen hundred millions*. About a third of this, say the essayists, represents interest on capital, and about an eighth the actual wages of ability, or exceptional productive talent. The highest exceptional talent, they say, could be had, in the open market, for 800*l.*; and were the highest wages of ability cut down to this, we should diminish its existing wages by nearly one-half. Such being the case, nearly half the existing wages of ability, and the entire profits of capital, would be diverted from the pockets of the able men and the present possessors of capital, and would find its way into the pockets of the State. The sum which the State would thus become possessed of would be something like *five hundred million pounds*; and this would constitute an addition

to the existing wages fund, and would be employed in raising the wages of the entire community. When this is done, the Socialistic transformation will be complete. There will still be a capitalistic employer, and there will still be wage-earning producers; but the capitalistic employer will virtually be a committee of the producers; and instead of taking for itself any portion of the product, will only collect this product, and pool it; and then, in the shape of wages, return to the producers, not, as the private employers do, only a part of it, but the whole. In one sense private property will be as secure then as it is now. Each man's wages or income will be absolutely his own, and all the articles of consumption and enjoyment which he buys with it. The only kind of property which will have been Socialised will be, not articles of consumption, but the means of production; and the Socialisation of these last will mean merely that each citizen has an equal share in them, just as if all were equal shareholders in some existing railway company, in which they were all at the same time wage-receiving employees. Their income will thus consist of wages supplemented by profits. Their wages may vary, but the profits that supplemented each man's wages will be the same. Then, with the State for employer, there will be full work for all, for everyone will have the right to demand access to the means of labour; and of his own labour, as Mr. Sidney Webb says, 'he will obtain the full result.' To distribute products or riches '*according to the labour done by each* in the collective search for them'—this, says the editor of the volume, 'is the desire of Socialism;' and the process above

described is the process by which the desire will be accomplished.

It remains for a moment to look under the surface and consider the forces to which this evolutionary movement is, according to the Socialists, due. Conscious endeavour is the last, and in some respects the least. At all events it would be unless there was some stream of tendency with which it coincided: and this stream of tendency consists of a treble series of events. The first is the growth of population, which necessarily results in a vast portion of the community being landless; the second is the change in the methods of industry—even of agricultural industry—which makes individual ownership of the means of production impossible, and at the same time teaches the workers how to act in concert, and familiarises them with the idea of social, as opposed to individual production; and the third is the growth of political democracy, which is the inevitable result of education, the diffusion of news, and rapid travelling.

Industrial democracy, say the Socialists, is merely the obverse of political democracy. The former has already matured the methods and habits requisite for the latter; and now, by the rapid development of municipal and county councils, which are almost as rapidly becoming employers of labour, the conversion of political democracy into industrial democracy is being accomplished. Private capitalism has played an essential part in this evolution. It has associated the workers. Having done this, the private capitalist becomes gradually useless, and falls away. The State

takes his place. The State becomes the capitalist, but a capitalist transfigured, who is at the same time the people.

III

SOCIALISM, A DISTINCTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT, AND AN HISTORIC THEORY OF THE PAST

Such is the theory and scheme of contemporary Socialism, as set forth by the leading Socialists themselves—a scheme which, when fully realised, will, according to them, restore to men their lost economic freedom, will redeem them from the transient bondage to which private capitalism has subjected them, will render it impossible for an unemployed class to exist, and enrich each labourer by rendering back to him that vast theft from the products of his daily industry which the present system, not the wickedness of individuals, makes inevitable. I have described this scheme, not only as fairly but as fully as the limitations of space will allow. I have not, however, been able (for space would not allow of this) to give the reader a full idea of the sober care, the cultivated and laborious thought, and the powers of acute reasoning, exhibited by the writers of the Fabian Essays generally, and by Mr. Sidney Webb in particular. And yet in spite of all these qualities, as I shall now proceed to show, there is not a distinctive—that is to say a really Socialistic—argument, in the whole book, which is not based on an entire misunderstanding of the question—a complete misapprehension of the most important facts dealt with, and a failure to recognise at all the most important

facts involved; and that the moment we apply to it any approximately complete criticism, the Socialistic theory, despite all the talents of its advocates, tumbles to pieces like a frail castle of cards. The principal errors I allude to, which are absolutely inherent in the system, and run through the writings of all Socialists, and of all the contributors to the Fabian Essays in particular, may be classified under three heads; and though they are too closely connected to admit of entirely separate treatment, I shall, so far as is practicable, examine them in order. They consist firstly of an erroneous and incomplete analysis of the existing industrial system; secondly of a false estimate of what, historically, are the tendencies and results of that system; and lastly a false view of economic history generally, and a correspondingly false application of that method of comparative criticism, the introduction of which in itself is, as I have said before, so greatly to the credit of the modern Socialistic school.

IV

THE FUNDAMENTAL ERROR IN THE SOCIALISTIC ANALYSIS

The main error in the Socialistic analysis of the existing system of production is one which I have lately exposed at length in a volume called *Labour and the Popular Welfare*.

That error is the doctrine that Labour is the chief, if not the sole human agent in production, and that the non-labouring classes are consequently non-productive classes. When once this error is exposed fully, the

foundation of scientific Socialism altogether disappears. It is an error, however, for which the Socialists are not responsible. They have borrowed it without criticism from the orthodox economists, in whose works it is still rampant. In the book just alluded to, I have analysed this error at length. The substance of my criticism I will repeat briefly here. I pointed out that the orthodox economists—and I took Mill as an example—see plainly enough that not only muscular labour but invention, scientific discovery, and industrial management also, are obviously concerned in production at the present day; and that the modern increase in the productivity of industrial exertion, is due to the development of the latter, not of the former. But all these later forms of industrial exertion the orthodox economists include under the one term Labour. Thus they speak of the 'labour of the savant,' 'the labour of the inventor,' 'the labour of the superintendent.' That is to say, they recognise and admit theoretically that labour is of two kinds, or that the word means two things; and that one kind of labour is a universal faculty, and the other a scarce faculty. But this recognition is only occasional; the truth involved in it is never analysed, or incorporated with their general theory; and although on these rare occasions they admit that the word labour means two things, yet in all their practical arguments, without any exception, they invariably and persistently use it as if it meant only one thing; and that one thing is average muscular labour, to the exclusion of labour of any other kind. As an instance of this I cited in my book the title of one of Mill's chapters in his 'Principles of Political Economy,' which he calls 'The Probable Future

of the Labouring Classes,' explicitly and exclusively meaning by these classes the mass of wage-earning manual labourers. And the Fabian essayists repeat Mill's confusion. It permeates their whole volume. They too recognise intermittently that Labour can be said to be the sole producer of wealth only if by Labour we understand two things; but like Mill they reason practically as if the word meant only one. Here, for instance, is the editor of the Fabian volume striking in the opening essay the key-note of the whole argument. 'Shareholder and landlord,' he says, 'live alike on the produce extracted from their property by the labour of the proletariat.' And if we want to know exactly what he means by labour, we have only to refer to the beginning of the same paragraph. He tells us that labour is a form of human exertion, 'the acquisition of which is a mere question of provender.' There is always a supply of it tending to be in excess of the demand. Labourers, he says, 'breed like rabbits'; and he expressly declares that it is the labour of men like these that 'piles up the wealth' of the possessing and employing classes.

Now what I have urged in my book, *Labour and the Popular Welfare*, is that, so long as the word Labour is used in this sense, it is impossible to reason or even think clearly about production, if we apply the same word also to the exertions of the inventing, the discovering, and managing class whose interests are represented as being not only different from, but opposed to, those of the labouring class. Accordingly, to the exceptional faculties of the former I gave a distinct name—Ability. I pointed out that the moment we

make language in this way correspond with fact, the absurdity of saying that labour 'piles up all the wealth' of the 'shareholder and the landlord' becomes self-evident. Ability, even the Socialists admit, has some part in the piling up, or, in other words, produces some portion of the pile; so that instead of saying that Labour produces, or piles up, all the wealth of the community, we are driven to say something that is very different—we are driven to say that it produces only a certain fraction of it; and then comes the question, what fraction? As soon as we come to see this, the whole case of theoretic Socialism is lost. Its main logical weapon breaks in two in its hands. I will point out how and why.

I have explained in *Labour and the Popular Welfare* the principles on which the product of Labour is to be discriminated from the product of Ability, and also the way in which those principles are to be applied. The principles are merely principles of ordinary logical analysis: the application is a question of industrial history. Put briefly, what I said was as follows.

So far as production is concerned, the great economic fact of the modern world is the constant increase in the amount of wealth that results from the exertions of the same number of men. To take our own country for an example, there is, in proportion to the population, about three times as much produced now as there was in the days of our great-grandfathers. That is to say, two-thirds of our existing national income is due to the action of some force the development of which is new since that comparatively recent time. Now this force is not some new development of labour—of labour as

defined by the Socialists—of that muscular force which can always be had for asking—the force which, as the Fabians say, 'breeds like rabbits.' Muscular force is no more powerful now than it was then; nor is the muscular skill greater. The most exquisite work that mere manual effort can accomplish has been accomplished long ago, and we cannot surpass it now. The sole cause, then, of this increment has not been Labour, but the gradual concentration of the moral and intellectual faculties of exceptional men on the problem of directing Labour. These faculties thus concentrated constitute Industrial Ability, or—to put it more shortly—Ability. It is the increasing operation of Ability that has been the sole new factor in production, and therefore it is to Ability that the modern increment in wealth is due. In other words, about two-thirds of our present national income is produced, not by Labour, but by Ability. In *Labour and the Popular Welfare* this calculation is carefully worked out, but it is enough here to put it in this brief form.

Now it is this fundamental fact that Socialism ignores—Socialism generally, and the Fabian essayists in particular; and in the case of these special writers this *lacuna* in their analysis can be made all the more clear in connection with the above criticism, because they not only, like Mill, recognise in an intermittent way that Ability is a productive force of some kind, but they actually call it by the name I myself have given to it. They call it Ability. They even speak of 'the rent of Ability,' defining this as the quantity by which the products of the able man exceed those of the average labourer; and they admit on these occasions

that, whilst Labour is a universal faculty, the more productive forms of Ability are by comparison extremely rare. The editor of the volume, for instance, speaks of it in the opening pages as a function 'of those scarce brains, which are not the least of Nature's capricious gifts.' Now if the writers had followed out the train of thought latent in this admission, their entire reasoning would have been inevitably altered; but they never do this. They only at intervals recognise this truth, to drop it; and instead of incorporating into it their logical system, they leave it lying, useless and detached, on the surface.

This procedure on their part is mainly due to the fact that they have never clearly seen what Ability really is, and in what precise way, as a productive agent, it differs from Labour. The true difference, which I have explained at length in *Labour and the Popular Welfare*, is as follows. Labour, of whatever degree, skilled or unskilled, is a kind of industrial exertion which begins and ends with the particular task or material on which each labourer is engaged—whether it is carrying a sack of coals, fixing a brick in its place, riveting the plates of a ship, or scraping a true surface for the side-valve of a steam-engine. Some of these forms of labour are skilled, some unskilled. One will bring the man who performs it fifteen shillings a week, another four guineas, or even more. But each has this characteristic in common, that it begins and ends with the individual sack carried, the individual surface made true, and so forth. But Ability is a form of industrial exertion which influences the labour of an indefinite number of men on an indefinite number of tasks, either

by supplying each simultaneously with a similar assistance in performing his task, or with some given pattern by which he is to work, or by correlating the different exertions of different bodies of labourers. For instance, so far as Labour is concerned, precisely the same kind and quality of force is exerted in digging a canal and in digging a railway cutting or throwing up a railway embankment. But what has transformed canal-transit into railway-transit has been the Ability of a minority of men operating on a vast army of labourers, and entirely transfiguring the result, whilst the Labour has remained unchanged. And what is true of the creation of railways is true of modern progress and modern production generally. The entire growth of wealth in the modern world is an increment which has been added by Ability to the old product of Labour. The Fabian essayists, often as they mention Ability, have, as I say, never attempted an accurate analysis of its character and its functions; but the moment they do so, and connect this analysis with the rest of their theory, the above conclusion is inevitable. It leaps to light.

For the elucidation of this truth, so fatal to the Socialistic theory, the Socialists themselves are to be thanked. The orthodox economists dealt with the labourer's reward only under the aspect of the wages paid him by an employer, and treated it as something regulated by supply and demand. The Socialistic economists have done signal service by insisting that this is a wrong, or at least a one-sided, view of the matter; and that the true view of the point at issue is obtained not by inquiring what Labour receives

under the existing system, but by inquiring what Labour produces; by insisting that wages are merely a disguised form of what is produced by the labourer, and by declaring that the wage-question is at bottom this—Does the labourer get the whole of his produce? Or does he get only part? But here comes the point which the Socialists fail to see. If the reward of Labour is to be considered in this way, the reward of Ability must be so considered likewise; and the question is forced upon us, What proportion of the national income does Ability produce? or, in other words, what does that small minority of men produce, who in virtue, as the Fabians say, 'of Nature's capricious gifts,' possess that rare faculty? And the answer is arrived at in the way above indicated. This small minority produces all that portion of the national income which, without the assistance of its 'rare gifts,' the majority could not produce.

Such is the principle by which the respective products of these two faculties must be discriminated. Let us now come to the application of the principle. This, as I said, can be made only by the assistance of actual experience, and especially the facts of experience, extending over considerable periods, as recorded in industrial history. In *Labour and the Popular Welfare* I took the products of the industry of a population of ten million persons in this country a hundred years ago; and for argumentative purposes made Labour a present of the total produce. It is impossible to maintain that mere Labour, the faculty 'that breeds like rabbits,' divorced from the control of Ability, can produce more than the total which, in the days of our

grandfathers and great-grandfathers, was produced by Labour and Ability together. Starting, then, with the above exaggerated estimate of what Labour can produce, I showed what the total product of Labour in this country is at the present time; the result being that Labour at this moment produces less than five-thirteenths of the existing national income, and Ability eight-thirteenths. The wages of Labour, however, are about seven-thirteenths of the whole; that is to say, Labour receives to-day at least forty per cent. more than it produces.

The whole materials of this conclusion are in the Fabian volume itself. Over and over again is the admission made that in order to maintain production in its present state of efficiency, still more to increase it, the State will require 'the scarce brains' just as much as private enterprise does now; but the writers fail to see the enormous results of this admission. I am not speaking now of the precise figures in the calculation just made. They are matters not of theory, but of historical detail. But some result substantially the same as what I have mentioned inevitably follows from the reasoning of all the Fabian writers, when once their unconscious admissions have been expanded into their full significance. The only theoretical answer possible, which bears any semblance of plausibility, is one which they have not given, but which they might give; and I will mention it for two reasons—firstly, because its plausibility at first sight is so great; and, secondly, because by dwelling on its falsehood, we shall have our attention fixed on a fundamental economic truth, which has hitherto by all schools been altogether neglected,

and which will throw additional light on the calculation made above.

The plausible answer is this. It may be said that if Ability is to be held to produce all that part of the product which is over and above what Labour could have produced without its assistance, by the same argument Labour can be shown to have produced the whole of the product, since without its assistance Ability would produce nothing. But this contention is false for two reasons—a minor reason and a major reason. The minor reason is that when we talk of Labour and Ability we mean not abstract faculties, but we mean men possessing them; and though the average Labourer is not a potential man of Ability, the man of Ability *is* a potential Labourer; therefore men of Ability could always produce more, per head, than average Labourers, even though these last gave them no assistance whatever. But this point is trifling, and requires but passing notice. The important point is as follows.

All practical reasoning is carried out by the aid of suppositions. We estimate the causes of this or that result by seeing what would happen if such and such a cause were withdrawn. But in all practical reasoning—in all reasoning intended to guide action—the suppositions we make must be suppositions of possibilities. Thus in economics we take no account of the part played in agriculture by the air, or by the force of gravity; because nothing we can do by our social or political action will interfere with the presence and operation of either one or the other of them. They are permanent facts of nature, and we therefore assume them as such. Now Labour is, in this respect, exactly like

air or gravity. It is a permanent necessity of life. Under certain circumstances a minority of men can be exempted from it: but for the majority in all communities, to labour is as necessary as to eat, or even to breathe. In other words, the task-master of man is Nature. The average man is a little mill that Nature turns, by the wind or the stream of his necessities. His limbs and muscles labour as inevitably as his heart beats. But the case of Ability is altogether different. This is a faculty which develops itself only under special circumstances; whilst the productivity of Labour varies little, that of Ability is capable of indefinite increase; and again, after it has increased, it may at any moment contract. Therefore, whilst we are arguing in accordance with the realities of things when we calculate what Labour would do if there were no Ability, we are indulging in a supposition which is altogether fanciful when we consider what would happen if there were no Labour. We might as well calculate what would happen if the labourers had wings, and were to fly away to the moon.

The recognition of this truth leads us to a second set of considerations. The true task-master of man being, as was just said, Nature, his true task-master is not the employing class. What this class, which represents Ability clothed with capital and operating through capital, really does, is to intervene between man and Nature, and transfigure the impersonal brute task-master into a reasonable and personal one, which at its hardest imposes conditions no harder than Nature does at *her* hardest; which generally imposes conditions at once less hard and more advantageous; and which is

the one intermediary through which mankind in general can ever strike with Nature a better bargain than it does at present. The dark picture which Socialists draw of the lot of the working-classes owes most of its darkness to the fact of their measuring life by a false standard. They estimate the lot of the workers by the lot of those who employ them—a lot which, under certain conditions, may be made impossible for anybody, but which, under no conditions, could be made possible for all; and they attribute the hardness of the general lot to the action of those who enjoy the exceptional lot. But let them remove these last, and what will happen then? The employing, the privileged class, would have been swept aside, only to reveal the sterner, the more grudging, the more implacable features of Nature, the arch-capitalist—who, in some regions, indeed, smiles on some of her slaves, keeping them by her smile in savagery, but who, over far wider portions of the earth's surface, sweats them more unmercifully than the most callous of human tyrants.

Here, for instance, is a description of men free from the domination of capital, and having Nature for their sole employer. 'They labour early and late. They work hard. They plod on from day to day, and from year to year—the most patient, untireable, and persevering of human animals. There is not an hour of a single day in the year during which they rest. It would astonish the English common people to see the intense labour with which they earn their firewood.' It might be thought that the above was a passage from Karl Marx, describing the misery of the 'white slaves' of capital. It is not. It is taken, with merely the senti-

mental padding omitted, from an account quoted by Mill as a 'show specimen' of the happy condition of a German peasant proprietor.

And now we may return with a fresh set of illustrations, from the question of the natural bondage of Labour to the question of the natural products of Labour. The scanty amount wrung from the soil by the German peasant is a good living example of what Labour itself produces. Other examples are the village boot-maker, who works for himself and sells direct to the consumer; and the old cotton-spinners and weavers, who worked in their own cottages. Both these last are cited by the Fabian essayists as types of the position of labourers, when not under the tyranny of the profit-mongering and plundering employer. That under the dominion of the employer their gross product is increased is too well known to require reassertion here; but it will be well to point out that not only is the gross product increased, but that what the labourer himself receives is increased also. A weaver, in the good old days to which the Fabian essayists refer—a weaver who represented Labour not in bondage to Ability—earned, according to Arthur Young, seven and sixpence a week. A weaver in a modern cotton-mill earns thirty shillings.

There is no space here to pursue this subject further; but enough has been said to make it clear to the reader that there are ample means of verifying the practical reality of the fact that the Labour of the many, as apart from the Ability of the minority, creates but a small part of our existing national income; that the national income rises with the increased application and increased efficacy of Ability; and that if Ability is unduly ham-

pered, or suffers a reduction in force by a reduction of its natural incentives, the national income is capable of indefinite shrinkage.

When once this truth is plainly stated it becomes impossible for even the Socialists themselves to deny it. It is, indeed, implicit in their teachings; and it is unconsciously acknowledged by every one of the Fabian essayists. The State, according to their view, is to become the sole employer; but the State, to fulfil this function, will be obliged gradually to enlist in its service all the Ability now in the service of private enterprise; and on the efficiency of this Ability, under new conditions, will depend whether there will be as much to distribute amongst the labourers, when labour takes nearly the whole, as there is now, when it takes only a part.

So far as the question of men 'selling themselves into bondage' is concerned, Socialism would make no change whatever. If a man who has no land, who lives only on wages, and who has nothing to separate himself from starvation but the sale of his labour—if such a man is a white slave now, the bulk of the community under Socialism would be white slaves still, and slaves with no chance of ever attaining freedom. The three cardinal doctrines enforced by all the Fabian essayists are, first, that no man must be allowed to own any of the means of production; secondly, that he shall own, but own only, his wages, and the articles of consumption he can buy with them; and, thirdly, that without labour a man will get no wages at all, and that if, as one of the Fabian essayists says, 'he choose not to work he will be in danger of starvation.'

So far as the bulk of the community goes, Socialism does not even promise any change, except in the two following particulars. One is that, no matter how fast population increases, the State will be able to find productive labour for all. The other is, that their labour will be rewarded by increased wages.

Now, as to the first point, it must be enough for me here to say that there is in the Socialistic scheme no hint of any new power or principle by which a Socialistic State would be better enabled to solve the problem of finding productive Labour for all than the private capitalist is. A Socialistic State could easily waste the savings of the country in setting men to useless and unproductive labour; but how to make productive labour, on one narrow portion of the earth's surface, keep pace with an indefinite multiplication of its inhabitants is a problem to be solved, if at all, not by the State as the State, but by the State as a body able to secure the services of individuals endowed with rare industrial genius—the genius that is able to wrest new secrets from Nature and discover new industries or new methods of industry. To say that the State, as the State, would be able to do this is as absurd as to say that the State could discover a new star.

Next as to the question of increased wages—an increased reward for Labour—this point can be dealt with very briefly and simply. The Fabian essayists, as has been said, calculate that were Socialism realised to-day the State would have an annual fund of five hundred millions at its disposal, taken from the present possessing classes, and that this would be available for division amongst the great mass of the wage-earners.

These Utopian financiers, however, forget that, as Mr. Giffen pointed out, two hundred millions of this represents capitalised savings, and that, unless the productive powers of the community are to decline, this saving would still have to be made. The wage-earners could not have it to spend as private income. The five hundred millions, therefore, shrink to three hundred, which would have to be divided amongst some thirty-three million persons,[1] and which would yield them a bonus per head of three-and-sixpence per week.

So much, then, for what Socialism, according to the figures quoted by Socialists, could do for the people generally, even if we accept their own premises. But in their premises the most important question of all is neglected. They assume this five hundred millions of annual income as a natural product, inevitably resulting from the exertions of a population of thirty-eight million people. But let them look back only a few decades—let them look back only to the time of the first great Exhibition, and they will find that even at that recent date, had the population then been as great as it is now, the production of this sum would have been impossible. If the actual wage-earning population at that time had received the same wages per head they receive now, the entire national income would have been more than swallowed up in paying them,

[1] In this calculation about five million persons are deducted from the total population, as belonging to the class of State Employers of Labour and their families. If this number is thought too large, it is easy to alter the calculation, so as to increase the number of the labourers, in which case the increment of wages will be even less than what is above stated.

and the Socialists would have found no surplus remaining at all. The entire fund then, with which they propose to deal, is practically a growth of the last forty years. It has come to be produced only through a series of very complicated circumstances, and the play of intricate forces; and were these interfered with the millions would at once dwindle and disappear. It is, in other words, the product, not of the labour which we may always count on to exert itself, and 'to breed like rabbits,' but of the Ability of the 'scarce brains, which are not the least of Nature's capricious gifts,' and which may cease to exert themselves any day if they are not appropriately stimulated.

Here, then, comes the point of fundamental difference between Socialism and the existing system. So far as concerns the necessity of men selling themselves for wages, and working at the bidding of industrial superiors, Socialism will make no difference, except that it will arm every director of industry with the powers of a State official. Its fundamental peculiarity is that it will take from the men of Ability the larger part of what they produce, and yet expect that they will continue to produce it just the same. Every stimulus to exceptional exertion will be annihilated. The 'scarce brains' who will still have to wield capital are to be released alike from all the penalties of failure, and nearly all the rewards of success—from the penalties of failure, because the capital will not be their own; and from the rewards of success, because, as the Fabians distinctly say, a graduated income-tax would always be held in readiness for the special purpose of taking from every industrial genius

everything that he produces annually above the value of 800*l.*

The Fabian essayists will at once say No to this. They will say, and with perfect truth, that all through their book they draw a sharp distinction between the wages that will be paid to Ability, and the interest on capital, or that part of the product which now goes to a man as owner of the means of production. To own the means of production, say the Socialists—and no one insists on this truth more logically and lucidly than they do—is necessarily to receive interest, on account of the use made of them; and it is mainly, they say, in the shape of interest that the money goes away, which it is the great object of Socialism to give back to Labour. Therefore, all that the Socialistic State will do is, they contend, not to rob Ability, but merely to resume possession of the materials through which Ability operates.

The confusion of thought implied in this reasoning is astonishing. In the first place, if interest, under the present system, can be said to be a robbery from anybody, it is obviously a robbery not from Labour, but from Ability; since it is a point admitted, by even the Socialists themselves, that it is only Ability, or 'the scarce brains,' that can manipulate the means of production, as they now are, to advantage. I shall recur to this point presently; but at the present moment it is not the point that it is really important to notice. The important point is that the means of production, as they exist to-day in this country, are themselves the production of Ability. Their estimated value is about ten thousand millions; and of these ten thousand

millions, eight hundred thousand have been created since the year 1800. Socialists talk of them as if they were indestructible gifts of Nature, which had always existed, and which could never be destroyed, no matter what tricks we played with them. They talk of them as if they were synonymous with the natural qualities of the soil; and accordingly we find the Fabian essayists constantly speaking of the State *resuming* its mediæval rights to them. They might just as well talk of the State resuming its mediæval rights to the last picture painted by Sir Frederic Leighton. The Fabian phrase is plausible only with regard to land;[1] and no

[1] I am compelled here to criticise briefly in a foot-note a point which on some other occasion I hope to deal with at length. The Fabian programme as to the Soclalisation of land is as follows. Let us divide, for simplicity's sake, the various qualities of soils in a county into two classes. A man's labour on soil of the first class yields, let us say, 150*l.* a year; a similar man's labour on soil of second class yields 50*l.* a year. Thus if the soil were owned by the cultivators, the first man, owing to no extra effort of his own, would be the happy possessor of an extra 100*l.* a year. The Fabians tell ns that the Socialistic State would take this 100*l.* a year from the first man, and divide it between the two, the result being that each would have 100*l.* They entirely fail to perceive that such an arrangement would at once introduce into the Socialistic State all the seeds of the deadliest industrial warfare. For let us assume (as the Fabians do with sufficient accuracy for the purpose of argument) that all the best land is occupied first. We have then a class of cultivators who all have 150*l.* a year: but the moment, with the growth of populatiou, the inferior soil is occupied, every new cultivator inflicts a direct injury on the old, making him poorer by exacting some part of his income. Every cultivator, therefore, of any acre of inferior land, would be the natural enemy of the cultivator of superior land, and it would thus be the direct interest of the latter to prevent inferior soils being cultivated at all.

doubt it might be possible to organise a new community in which the State should be the owner of certain rights in the soil. But in any old and highly cultivated country, the soil is a kind of centaur, the body of which is land, and the head and shoulders capital. Even as it is, the land of this country forms, in point of value, only one-seventh part of the total means of production; and if we deduct the value that Capital and Ability have added to it, it would not count for so much as one-tenth. Virtually, then, those means of production in which Socialists say the State is to resume its mediæval rights, are means of production the very existence of which were hardly dreamed of even at the end of the last century. They are the artificial product of the present century—the product, roughly speaking, of three generations of able men—the grandfathers and the fathers of the men who now possess it, and of these living able men themselves, who have created more than a fifth part of it; and to whose constant exertion it is alone due that the whole is not dissipated. These means of production, in other words, are the savings from the private incomes created by able men; and one of their main motives in creating these incomes has been the desire to capitalise a part of them into means of future production, in order that this should yield, either to themselves or their families, these very millions on which Socialism desires to seize.

I will illustrate this by a case which the Fabian essayists suggest—the case of an able man, who, because his ability is a social necessity, will be able to command, they estimate, about 800*l.* a year. Such a man would, with sufficient motive, be able to save

annually, say 700*l.* If he does this from the age of twenty-five to thirty-five, he will be the owner of 7,000*l.*, which, if managed by himself, will, under the existing system, bring him in some 700*l.* annually. He will now be able to save 1,400*l.* a year; and if he does this for another ten years, he will have saved at the end at least 14,000*l.* more, and then be the owner of 21,000*l.*, which will bring him in some 2,000*l.* annually. At this juncture, if he chooses to do so, he will probably be able to sell the business he has developed to some other man of Ability, and be able at forty-five to retire as a leisured man. At all events, he will be master of an income which is the result of his past exertions, and is independent of his present exertions, and which he will be able to leave to his wife or children. He will have created in the shape, let us say, of a factory or printing works, an inanimate co-worker with Living Ability and Labour; and as the owner of it, he will command a share of the product which it helps to produce, just as he would were it some colossal horse which he had constructed and endowed with life, and let out for hire. Such is the process by which the great mass of the existing means of production have come into existence, and are kept in existence. This interest is just as much the product of Ability as are the wages of superintendence or management; and it has been only for the sake of enjoying this product that Ability has exerted itself to increase the means of production. It is indeed Ability's indirect product; but it is the product for the sake of which Ability mainly exerts itself.

To convince ourselves that such is the case, let us

see what would be the conditions of our man with 800*l.* a year—the maximum—under Socialism. The moment he can command this salary from the Socialistic State, every motive to exert himself further is gone. Let him develop and apply his genius to never such good purpose, let him multiply wealth by the use of his 'scarce brains' to never so great an extent, he will be creating these new products only to have them swept away from him by the collector of income-tax, who will be watching him as though he were a public enemy. But not only will every motive to produce more be annihilated; what is of yet greater importance, every motive to save—or, in other words, to increase the means of production—will be annihilated likewise. He will be allowed to spend his 800*l.* a year as he likes, so long as he spends it on wine, on plum-cake, or on neckties; but if, instead of spending 700*l.* a year on these, he should wish to spend it on the construction of some improved printing-press, the Socialistic State would say to him, 'By all means do so if you like; but the moment it is finished we shall confiscate it; and whoever gets any benefit from it, you, at all events, shall get none.' The Fabian essayists distinctly say that any property, no matter of what kind, which is capable of yielding any rent to its owner, must, on Socialistic principles, be ruthlessly taken away from him.[1]

[1] One of the Fabian essayists gives as an example of rent-yielding property some great picture by Raphael; and points out with great clearness, that if such a treasure is suffered to be the property of an individual, nothing can prevent the owner's deriving a rent from exhibiting it. The writer naïvely hints a doubt whether any men exist who would be really selfish enough even to wish to call such a picture their own; but oddly enough he forgets to con-

It will be thus seen that Socialism is a war upon two things—first, on every motive to increase the gross products of the community, or, in other words, the fund out of which alone capital can be saved; and, secondly, upon every motive to save it. So far as it is possible to translate into figures the programme sketched out by Mr. Sidney Webb and his friends, Ability is to be robbed of about half of the hundred and eighty millions which it produces annually by its direct action, and of the whole of the four hundred and fifty millions which it produces by its indirect action; and, in addition to this, of the fraction of its products that would be left to it, it is to be jealously and forcibly prevented from making that use—namely, saving and investment—which in the eyes of the most energetic men, gives it its greatest value. Mr. Sidney Webb denounces 'the freedom to privately appropriate the means of production,' forgetting that the means of production are the personal product of the Ability of the appropriators,

sider the case, not of a man who accidentally owns an ancient masterpiece, but of a living artist who produces masterpieces himself. If we accept a picture as representing rent-yielding property, what concerns us as economists is the production of new pictures, rather than the inheritance of old; and, according to the Socialists, if some State servant happened also to be a great artist, he need only employ his leisure in painting pictures great enough to make the public anxious to look at them, and the State would swoop down on them, and seize them as if they were smuggled brandy. A great artist is indeed the one kind of producer who might occasionally be found willing to produce under such conditions; but even amongst artists this would occur but seldom; whilst amongst no other kind of producer would it occur at all. A man may be willing to produce something with the intention of giving it away; but he will not produce anything with the certainty that it will be forcibly taken away.

and that what he calls appropriation is merely a man's keeping what he has made, and putting it to the use for which he has made it; and he speaks lightly of the ease with which 'appropriators' could be 'expropriated by the community.' He might just as well speak of the ease with which we could cut a labourer's throat, and then argue as if the man would go on labouring.

Here we have the one peculiar doctrine on which Socialism rests, and which alone fundamentally divides it from all other systems. It is the doctrine that Ability will continue to exert itself as heretofore, when almost every motive to exertion is taken away from it. Socialism, no doubt, has many other peculiarities; but these are secondary and incidental, and they are all derived from this. If any one doubts that such is really the case, the writings of the Fabian essayists contain all the materials for showing him that it is so. Almost every one of the writers, unconsciously but continually, is acknowledging that the bulk of our modern wealth is the product of Ability, not Labour—of the few, not of the many; and that were the exertions of the few hampered or weakened, the wealth which the Socialists would distribute would cease to exist at all.

The Essayists constantly endeavour to hide this fact from their eyes by trying to persuade themselves that, by some unanalysed process, the powers of Ability are diffusing themselves amongst the community generally; and they support this contention by observing that capital now is not usually manipulated by the men who own it, but by salaried managers, who do all the work

of Ability—managers who can always be obtained for a salary of 800*l.* a year; and they point in especial to the formation of trusts, and the grouping of many capitals under one central management. But the puerility of these arguments is one of the strangest things in the book. Do Mr. Webb and his friends think that the powers which introduced steam, for instance, are represented by a manager at 800*l.* a year? Do the shareholders in a Transatlantic steamship company hire this marvellous being, tell him that they want a ship which will go in less than six days to America; and do they wake up presently and find the *City of Paris* on the Clyde? Did the community—the social body—feel a wish for electric lighting, for the telephone, and the phonograph, and give a manager 800*l.* a year, and tell him to produce these things? The Fabian essayists are even more unfortunate in their examples than in their theory; for, having pointed to the American trust companies as the great classical example of how the profitable management of capital may be divorced from any direct and personal interest in it, they admit incidentally that the most important trust of all—namely, the Standard Oil Trust—'is controlled by nine men owning a majority of the stock.'

I have no space, however, to dwell upon this matter. I return to the broad statement made above—namely, that it can be logically demonstrated, even from the admissions of the Fabian essayists themselves, that the larger part of the wealth of the modern world is actually the product of a minority of able men, and would dwindle in proportion as the exertions of these

were relaxed; and the sole fundamental change Socialism proposes to introduce is to rob them of every motive for producing more than one-ninth part of it.

If any one thinks that Ability would continue to exert itself under these conditions, it seems to me that such a man is impossible to argue with. Indeed, the Fabian volume itself is full of incidental admissions, with regard to human nature, which themselves prove how absurd such a view is. But a far more forcible answer to it than any argument is to be found in the fact that could Ability be secured under the conditions in question, the whole State would have become Socialistic long ago, by a spontaneous and inevitable process. According to Mr. George Howell, the aggregate revenue of the trade unions of this kingdom ten years ago amounted to two millions a year; and the amount by this time is most probably larger. If, then, Ability is to be had for next to nothing—if the highest productive genius can be secured for 800*l.*, which is not much in excess of what Mr. Pickard receives for organising strikes, why do not the unions become their own employers? They could, of course, begin on a comparatively small scale only; but they could begin on a scale that would be large compared to that of a private firm; and if they made profits as rapidly as they imagine the employers make them, their capital would go on increasing year by year, and their business would extend with an ever-increasing celerity. The principles of Socialism would show all the world their soundness by their success; and Socialism in the course of a generation would have destroyed individualism, not

by attacking it, but by doing its work better, in precisely the same way as railways destroyed coaches. Again, why do not the co-operative societies do the same thing? Here, again, there is ample capital. These societies owned between them in 1891 more than sixteen million pounds, and in 1892 more than seventeen millions. And what do they do with it? In 1891 they had invested three-eighths of it in individualistic enterprise; and of their increased capital in the year following they had similarly invested a yet greater proportion. They have at this moment more than six and a half millions of capital thus invested. Of the capital which they employ themselves, about 92 per cent. is employed, not in production, but in what the Socialists call joint-stock shop-keeping. The crucial problem is the problem of production. If it is possible to secure Ability, under conditions designed especially to mulct it of the larger part of what it produces, why do not these societies use all these millions in production?

If ever there was an opening ready for them—for them and the trade unions between them—there is, on their own showing, an opening now. There are hundreds of thousands—so the leaders of the unionists tell us—hundreds of thousands of their fellow-workmen without employment. Why do not the unionists and the co-operators themselves employ them—the one with their annual revenue of two millions, the other with their capital of nearly seven millions, now invested in non-socialistic enterprise? The answer is plain. Neither of these bodies can employ either the unemployed or themselves, because to employ successfully

Ability is the prime requisite—and ability of a very high order; and it is impossible to secure such Ability on the Socialistic terms.

The very existence of an unemployed class, indeed, so far from being a proof that Socialism is required, is a proof that we require yet rarer Ability, a yet more strongly stimulated individualism. Let a new Arkwright, a new Watt, or a genius who will do for British agriculture what these men did for manufacture, make his appearance; in short, let the multiplication of Ability merely keep pace with the increase of population, and an unemployed class (other than criminals, and drunkards, and exceptionally worthless persons) will be an impossibility. Does the bitterest opponent of the private capitalist imagine that if the wit of man was able to devise means by which under existing circumstances the present unemployed could be set to produce anything which the rest of the community would recognise as exchangeable wealth—does any one imagine that under these circumstances the labour of the unemployed would have to go begging, and that eager employers would not rather be competing for it? No doubt the State, as it is, may support these men, by finding for them unremunerative labour, and thus trenching on the savings of the country; but this is merely a disguised charity, and is no real solution of the problem. The problem is, how to make the labour of the unemployed as efficient and as wealth-producing as that of the mass of their fellows. And this is a problem which can be solved by industrial Ability only. The Socialists would encourage Ability by robbing it of all its products. What is really wanted—if anything new is

wanted—is rather that the State should offer it an additional bonus.

So much, then, for Socialism as an analysis of the process of production. In the following essay I shall consider the view of its historical evolution, and its progress in recent times, and at the present moment, as given by the Fabian essayists, and shall show that in every one of their generalisations they are altogether mistaken. I shall show that whilst when they are analysing Socialism they use the word in one sense, when they are dealing with history they use it in two totally different senses—not only different from, but antagonistic to the first. Finally, having shown the falsehoods and confusions contained in the Socialistic contribution to economics, I shall endeavour to sum up the valuble truths contained in it; to show that the proper place for these is in what—in a broad and social, as distinct from a party sense—may be called the system of Conservatism; and to show how the defenders of this system may be able, by a fuller understanding of it, to speak to the intellect, the heart, and the hopes of the people of this country, like the voice of a trumpet, in comparison with which the voice of Socialism will be merely a penny whistle.

THE SO-CALLED EVOLUTION OF SOCIALISM

I

SOCIALISTS ON THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIALISM

I HAVE pointed out in the preceding essay the one fundamental doctrine in which Socialism differs from Individualism. I showed that this, reduced to its simplest form, was one single, bald, definite doctrine with regard to the process of production in the modern world, which all Socialists implicitly affirm, and which everybody else implicitly sets aside as a piece of raving. The doctrine I refer to is neither more nor less than this—That the men who, year by year, create by their exceptional ability by far the larger part, and the only growing part, of our national income, would continue to produce the same number of millions under a Government specially organised to take all they produced away from them, as they produce now under a Government which confirms them in the possession of three-fifths of it. The Fabian essayists, one and all of them, admit—though they fail to realise clearly what this admission implies—that the growing amount of wealth produced in the modern world depends not on the labour contributed by the average labourers, but on the ability of

those 'scarce brains,' to quote Mr. Shaw's words, 'which are not the law of nature's capricious gifts'—that is to say, on the ability of the exceptionally gifted few by whom the exertions of the labouring many are organised; and production, under Socialism, as conceived of by Mr. Sidney Webb, differs fundamentally from production under Individualism only in the fact that the men with the 'scarce brains'—the active private employers of the present day—will be converted into an army of Government taskmasters, and will be plundered by the Government of almost everything they produce. The labourer will still be a wage-earner, who will have to work or starve; there will still be industrial discipline as rigid as any that now exists. The sole distinctive advantage held out to the labourers is that, by robbing the men with 'the scarce brains' of what they produce as fast as they produce it, the Government will provide itself with a fund to increase the present wage of labour—a fund which, as I showed from the figures supplied by the Fabian essayists themselves—would give each citizen an extra sixpence a day. But I am not going to dwell here on the inadequacy of this result, nor on what most people will consider the obvious character of the fact, that if the men with 'the scarce brains' are to be robbed of what they produce, there is very little chance that they will go on producing it. The point on which I am now concerned to insist is, that it is the doctrine of Socialism that they *will* go on producing it—that a man, for instance, will be as anxious to make 100,000*l.* if he is only allowed to keep 800*l.* of it, and not even to employ that as he likes, as he would be were he allowed to keep 80,000*l.*, and

spend or invest it according to his own judgment. And not only is this peculiar doctrine the doctrine of the Socialists, but it is—as will appear more clearly in the following pages—the only fundamental doctrine in which they are peculiar. It is the only fundamental doctrine taught by them which is not either actually in some way taught also by Individualists, or is else capable of being appropriated by them and used to strengthen Individualism. The Fabian essayists, though they are constantly losing sight of this fact in their arguments, are yet constantly proclaiming it; and to show the reader that I have not misrepresented the matter, I will quote the following words from the concluding essay:—'It is not so much to the thing the State does,' says the writer, 'as to the end for which the State does it, that we must look before we can decide whether it is a Socialist State or not. Socialism is the common holding of the means of production and exchange, and the holding of them for the *equal* benefit of all'—*i.e.* in such a way that the man who produces most shall have as little as possible more than the man who produces least; and no one, says the writer, is a true Socialist 'who hesitates to clamour his loudest against any proposal whose adoption would prolong the life of private capital [which means *par excellence* interest on private capital] for a single hour.'

And now, having thus summed up for the reader the gist of my previous essay, and having shown him again what in its essence the Socialistic system is, I propose to examine those theories of history and evolution by which the Socialistic economists aim at convincing us that Socialism is the condition towards

which all civilised society is working—a condition which is inevitably and rapidly being evolved out of the economic conditions that have preceded it. I pointed out already that the Socialistic economists have rendered an invaluable service to economic science by introducing into it the historical and comparative method, instead of doing as their orthodox predecessors had done, and treating the society existing round them as the only society requiring or deserving analysis, and as representing the sole form which industrial civilisation could assume. What I shall now have to point out is that the service they have rendered by insisting on the necessity of applying the historical method, has been only equalled by the failure which has attended their own application of it; and I shall deal with their historical criticisms under two heads—first, those that refer to the present and that near past during which the capitalistic system, as we now know it, has developed itself; and secondly, those that refer to the four or five preceding centuries, during which the beginnings of this modern system were slowly evolved out of the mediæval. The reader will see that there have been two distinct propositions submitted to us. First, that out of Capitalism is being evolved Socialism; secondly, that out of mediæval Individualism was evolved Capitalism. The historical order, as I have placed them, is inverted; but it is the order in which it will be most convenient to consider them.

II

THE ALLEGED CONTEMPORARY EVOLUTION OF SOCIALISM AN APPEARANCE ONLY, NOT A REALITY

The theory of the Fabian essayists as to modern and contemporary tendencies, forms, from their point of view, the best, and indeed a conclusive, answer to the arguments of those who maintain that Socialism is unworkable; for it is a theory at once illustrated by, and based on, a number of industrial facts, which the essayists declare to be examples of Socialism already at work. I am going to take the principal examples cited by them, and to show the reader that not a single one of them is really Socialistic in the sense which the Socialists attribute to the term; but that the Fabian writers—no doubt with perfect honesty—have been playing fast and loose alike with their language and their thoughts; and that, whilst defining Socialism as being in its essence one thing, when they are looking for realised examples of it they mean quite another.

The chief examples which the Fabian essayists give us are the Post Office, the Income Tax, Free Education, and the management by municipal bodies of gas-works, water-works, public libraries, tramways, and ferries. Each of these they declare to be an actual instalment of Socialism; whilst Trusts and Joint Stock Companies are represented as the Socialistic chicken, alive and almost ready to burst out of the Individualistic egg. I propose to show that in none of these examples is the real Socialistic principle embodied at all; but that, on the contrary, the success of each experiment involves

that very principle of Individualism which the Fabian essayists declare it is the mission of Socialism to destroy. What I mean in saying this is, that in every one of these so-called examples of Socialism the presence and use of private capital are implied—that private capital used or accumulated by private persons is in each of these cases an essential factor, and in most of them a principal factor.

Let us begin with the Income Tax. Mr. Bernard Shaw declares that this is Socialism pure and simple—Socialism already in our midst. 'It is the transfer,' he says, 'of rent and interest to the State by instalments.' If this tax is not Socialism, it is, he declares, 'an intolerable spoliative anomaly.' But Socialism it is, he continues, absolute, although not complete; and all we have to do is to increase this tax gradually, and at last the Socialism will be complete as well as absolute. The State which at present socialises a part of rent and interest will at last have socialised the whole. It seems entirely to escape Mr. Shaw's mind, that if the State should attempt to socialise the whole, or even the larger part of this sum, the result would be that the sum would no longer be produced. With the exception of a very small part of it—namely, the prairie rent of the land—the sum which he alludes to, and which he estimates at about five hundred millions, is an annual product of ability, new since the last generation; and were the conditions and influences which have stimulated its production withdrawn, it would disappear far more quickly than it appeared. But I have dwelt on this point already, and I only mention it here in passing. What I want here to insist on is that, what-

ever might happen under other circumstances, the Income Tax as we know it at present is actually a transfer to the State from a sum that is produced by individual enterprise—by individual ability manipulating private capital; and that the amount transferred has been carefully adjusted with a view to taking as little as possible from the individual, not as much; in other words, to diminishing as little as possible the normal reward or incentive of those who save private capital, or who employ it. Instead, therefore, of being an example of Socialism, it is one of the most astonishing witnesses to the productive force of Individualism. The same criticism applies to Trusts and to Joint Stock Companies. I need not repeat at length an observation I made in my former paper, that one of the greatest of existing Trusts, which the Fabians cite as a typical example, is—as with a curious *naïveté* they tell us—directed by nine men, who own the larger part of the stock. Two far more important and more widely-reaching facts to be noticed are, first, that the capital invested in these enterprises is the product of the previous application of other private capital, by the ability of individuals whose main motive in producing it was its future investment in enterprises of this very kind; and, secondly, that the men who direct these enterprises, even if their position be that of mere hired managers, enjoy the advantage which quintuples the moral value of their salaries, and which, as we have seen, it is the Socialist's primary aim to abolish—the advantage of investing whatever they may be willing to save, or, in other words, of converting it into private means of production, and thus hereafter reaping from it an independent or

anti-Socialist income. Does Mr. Shaw imagine that the manager of any great railway company would consider his present salary to be as valuable a reward as it is, if one of the conditions of its payment to him were that he was at liberty to invest none of it, or that any investment he made were to be *ipso facto* confiscated?

The favourite, the proverbial example with the Socialists, of Socialism in operation, namely, the Post Office, and the municipal enterprises—distributive, as in the case of water, or distributive and productive both, as in the case of gas—on which the Fabian essayists lay still greater stress, differ in one point from the companies I have just alluded to, and with this I shall deal presently. But in every other respect their position is the same. Every employé, either under the Government or the municipal authorities, can convert his savings into private means of production, and derive interest from them; and the rarer and more valuable his ability, and the larger his salary, the more important as a motive the hope of this saving is. And now let us look at the matter from another point of view, and we shall see that, on the admission of the Fabian writers themselves, what was said about the Individualist foundation of all Trusts and Companies is even more strikingly illustrated by the enterprise of Municipal bodies. Municipal Socialism has been rendered possible only—to quote the distinct admission of Mr. Sidney Webb—'by the creation of a local debt now reaching over a hundred and eighty-one million pounds.' In other words, it has been rendered possible only by the fact that private ability had created all this

capital, and created it—as the event shows—with the distinct object of employing it so that it should yield interest. If Mr. Sidney Webb doubt this, let him ask himself whether those millions would have been forthcoming if the municipal authorities had not only promised no interest on them, but had distinctly declared that they bound themselves never to pay any—in fact, that whatever money was lent to them, they meant practically to confiscate. Mr. Webb knows, as well as anybody, that if municipal enterprise had attempted to establish itself on these Socialistic terms, or on any terms which did not call to its aid the normal and vital motives which have created private capital, municipal enterprise could never have established itself at all. I am not at this moment considering how it may extend itself in the future. I am doing what Mr. Webb does. I am speaking of it as it is; and certainly as we know it at present, it is so far from being an instalment of Socialism, that it is a mere extension of the immemorial functions of Government, which has been made possible only by the assistance of Individualism, and is, like the Income Tax, a witness to the forces which Individualism represents.

The case of the Post Office will enable us to see into the matter yet farther. I need hardly repeat, with reference to the Post Office officials, what I have said already about the employés of public bodies generally, namely, that no enterprise is really Socialistic which allows salaries to be saved and invested as private capital. I will merely point out the fact, to which I have drawn attention in my recent volume, *Labour and the Popular Welfare*, that the Post Office, even

when regarded under its most Socialistic aspect, is merely a film of Socialism supported on the sinews of Individualism. All the improved means of transport —the ocean steamers which go to America and back in twelve days now, whereas sixty years ago the same journey occupied a hundred and five—the development of railways and telegraphs, and more recently of the telephone—all of these are the children of private ability allied with private capital; and the Post Office, as compared with these, is a child riding on the shoulders of a giant. And what holds good of the Post Office at the present moment, has been true of it, in a marked degree, throughout its entire history. The main improvements in its service have been due to private initiative, from the days when Murray and Dockwra, and after them Povey, started successively a penny and a halfpenny post for London, and when John Allen, who rented the cross-posts in the country, trebled the business by his organisation of it, to the days when mail coaches were started by a private member of Parliament.

And now, let us go back for a moment from Imperial enterprise to Municipal, and take three of the special examples which Mr. Sidney Webb gives. 'Bradford,' he says, 'supplies water below cost price.' Mr. Webb entirely misses the meaning of this statement. It either means that the municipality makes a losing business of the water supply; or else, that the loss is made good by a tax on incomes which are produced by Individualistic enterprise. Therefore, the Bradford water supply is either unsuccessful Socialism, or it is not Socialism at all. Secondly, Mr. Webb tells us that 'Liverpool

provides science lectures;' and, thirdly, that 'Manchester stocks an art gallery.' The first statement really means that Liverpool secures the services of individual men of science, who give lectures. The municipality either pays the lecturers, or it does not. If it does pay them, it pays them out of a rate on Individualist incomes—so here again is another tribute to Individualism. Or, if it does not pay them, there is no municipal Socialism in the matter. We have simply an instance of the intellectual charity of the lecturers. And now, lastly, let us turn to the Manchester picture-gallery. In a public gallery itself there is nothing new, and nothing more Socialistic than there is in a cathedral. All we need consider is the pictures; do they represent Socialism? The pictures have been either bought by the municipality, or presented to it by persons who have bought them; or it is conceivable that some of them may have been the gifts of munificent artists. But even these last—if such there are—represent, not Socialism, but private munificence. Mr. Webb will hardly maintain that there is no difference between Sir John Millais making Manchester a voluntary present of a great picture, and Sir John Millais having the same picture seized by two armed officers of a Socialist corporation, set to watch him as he worked, and to deprive him of it as soon as the last touch had been given. Whilst if—to take the typical case—the pictures are bought and paid for, the money ultimately comes from an Individualist income on the one side, and goes to swell an Individualist income on the other. The production of pictures can be socialised in two ways only—either by depriving the artist of any property in his

own work, by rendering it penal for him to possess his own pictures; or else by each hundred county or parish councillors setting to paint a masterpiece with a hundred brushes between them.

The more we examine the instances given by the Fabians of the actual evolution and development of Socialistic institutions, the more apparent does it become that these institutions represent no new Socialistic development at all; and that the only new feature or new vitality to be observed in them is due to the very forces which Socialism would supersede or smother. I am not forgetful of the fact that in institutions like the Post Office, or municipal gas-works, there is an element which in strict truth may be said to partake of Socialism. But as I shall show presently, there is in none of these institutions anything which in any way points to the evolution of Socialism as a working principle. There is an evolution of sentiment and of incomplete thought which results in a belief amongst many that Socialism can be made to work. But the actual evolution of events—and the class of events especially which the Fabian writers cite—proves the exact contrary of what the Fabian writers think. I shall make this presently far more clear, but I must first turn from the Socialists' misreading of modern history, to consider their treatment of the history of social evolution generally.

III

MISCONCEPTION BY THE SOCIALISTS OF THE NATURE OF INDUSTRIAL EVOLUTION GENERALLY

Following the example of Karl Marx, the entire Socialist school begin their historical review of what they call the evolution of Socialism, with the state of society which prevailed in Europe, or rather in this country, five hundred years ago: for it is to this country especially, which Marx called the 'classic' example, that all their writers turn. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in the Fabian volume, treads in the exact footprints of his predecessors. 'I shall,' he writes in his essay on 'Historical Transition,' 'begin at the beginning. I shall make no apology for traversing centuries by leaps and bounds at the risk of sacrificing the dignity of history to the necessity of coming to the point as soon as possible. Briefly, then,' he continues, 'let us commence by glancing at the Middle Ages.' And when he mentions the Middle Ages, what is he specially thinking of? His next sentence tells us. It is England. 'There,' he says, 'you find, theoretically, a much more orderly England than the England of to-day.' Of no other country, of no other civilisation, is there the smallest mention. This singular limitation of their historical vision is characteristic of the entire science of the Socialists. To whatever they give their attention they see only a fraction of it; and here, though they may be said to have actually pointed the way—as I have before observed—to the historical study of economics, they have been not only the pioneers of the true

scientific method, but a warning example of the puerile and unscientific application of it. The Socialistic theorists, with very great ingenuity, trace a whole series of historical steps in the history of this country, such as the suppression of the monasteries, the growth of the wool trade and sheep-farming, which led to the development, on the one hand, of a class of landless labourers, and on the other of a capitalistic middle-class, which hired these labourers as its instruments; and this process, as they point out, continued to the middle of the last century. Then the epoch of modern scientific inventions dawned, and the new motive powers and machinery introduced by men like Arkwright and Watt, acting on the industrial conditions which had been by that time evolved, resulted naturally and inevitably in the modern factory system. In place of the old mediæval organisation, which at once secured and fixed each man in the position he was born to, industrial society had been at last metamorphosed into a small body of irresponsible employers, and a vast and fluid body of proletarian labourers, who could only live by working at the employer's bidding. From an historical analysis like this the Socialists argue that just as the social rule of Feudalism has given place to the individual rule of the capitalist, so the rule of the capitalist over the labourers will, by a process precisely similar in nature, give place to the rule, under Socialism, of the labourers over themselves.

The plausibility of this piece of philosophising rests entirely, not on its inaccuracy, but on its superficiality and its incompleteness. Let us consider its incompleteness first. If we are to derive any profit from the

historical study of economics, from the comparative method, and from the theory of evolution, it is absolutely useless to confine ourselves to a few isolated centuries in the life of an isolated nation. Our study must be extended, so far as our means permit, to the civilisations and barbarisms of the human race as a whole, and the most distant countries and the most distant periods must be compared. For any fragment of history, such as that to which the Socialists confine themselves, is not only a history of certain events, individuals, and populations; it is a history also of human nature, human character, human capacities: and it is only in so far as it throws light upon these that it can afford us any ground for even a plausible conjecture as to the possibility of any fundamental social change in the future. The Socialists will, of course, say that the five centuries of English history from which they argue do show us an example of this very thing—that is to say, a fundamental social change in the past. The answer to this brings us to the root of the matter. The answer is, that if we look below the surface, and regard the history of these centuries as a history of human nature, they reveal to us no fundamental social change at all. They show us many superficial changes, many changes of form, but no change in those underlying human forces by which all the changes in form and circumstance are produced. This will be at once apparent if we summarise the historical argument of the Socialists in terms of its real meaning. Its real meaning is this. In the Middle Ages the many were controlled by the few, according to a certain elaborate and peculiar system. In the

course of time this system changed so completely that the old controllers of the many lost the whole of their original power. Power of that kind, in fact, ceased to belong to anybody. A new kind of power, resting on a new basis, was developed, and centred itself in a different class of persons; and the many, emancipated from the government of one minority, became subject to the government of another. Similarly, so the Socialists argue, by a new process of change, the many emancipating themselves from this second minority as from the first, will cease to be under the government of any minority at all.

As soon as their case is thus stated, the flaw in the argument becomes apparent. But the principal absurdity in the Socialistic reasoning is not derived from any mere defect in logic. It is the result and the sign of that superficial view of history which fails to see what, at bottom, the subject matter of history is; and the limitation of view to which I alluded is the direct consequence of this. For the moment we realise that all the events of history are but so many manifestations of the forces of human nature, and the moment we describe the transition from the Feudal to the Capitalistic systems so as to show what is at once its most general and its most essential character, so as to exhibit it as a change in the relations between the many and the few, we at once see that it was no isolated occurrence, but that it has had its counterpart in every age and country; and that the rudest or the earliest civilisations, however unlike ours on the surface, really offer to our study precisely parallel cases. Whenever human beings have risen from the most abject savagery, and in proportion

as they have risen from it, we find presented to us a fact which is everywhere essentially identical—namely, the fact of the many being under the control of the few. The form of the control varies; but the fact of it never varies. Its basis is sometimes military, sometimes religious, sometimes economic; sometimes it is of all three kinds together; but there the control is. In the early pastoral ages we have patriarchs with flocks, and herds, and servants. In ancient Egypt and Babylonia, in ancient Greece and Rome, through countless differences there appears this same phenomenon. Groups of men have been cast on distant countries, compelled to build up their social life from the foundations. They have been cast amongst new circumstances and opportunities that have been the same for all. But whatever their history may have been, it has been the history of this one thing—the evolution of a governing minority, and its relation to the governed. And what makes this fact all the more striking, is the parallel fact, that generally — though not universally — the many have constantly been rebelling against the few, attempting to make some change in the social structure; and that in every case the end has been just the same —they may have sometimes changed masters, but they never have got rid of them. Nor is this true of the old world only. Amongst the most startling and instructive of all the facts of recorded history, are the conditions of civilisation which the first discoverers of America found existing amongst the most advanced native races. Certain writers have cited the empire of the Incas as affording an example of vast and successful Communism; and so far as the majority of the people were concerned

there is some justification for this view of the matter. But such writers forget how this Communism was maintained. They forget to mention that the majority were under the rule of a king and a double aristocracy, as powerful and exclusive as any that could have been found in Europe; that equality amongst the people was an equality of the most rigid poverty, though not of want; and that all the wealth and luxury produced in the entire empire was produced for the king and the priesthood and the noble classes only.

Had the Socialistic theorists realised the above great and universal fact, they would have seen that their attempt to understand the nature and causes of Capitalism by a mere study of one isolated fragment of human history, was about as rational as an attempt to explain man's mortality by examining the accident or the illness which caused the death of a particular individual. This might be small-pox, or it might be a donkey's kick; and if we reasoned about life as the Socialists reason about economic history, we shall inevitably come to the conclusion that human beings would be immortal if they were all vaccinated, or if there were no donkeys to kick them. And, indeed, if we had only the case of one man to study, such a conclusion would be by no means irrational. It is shown to be irrational only because we see that, as a matter of fact, all men die, however various their circumstances; and that in each special case, accident, debility, or disease is the proximate cause of *a* death, but is not the cause of death. In the same way, the circumstances which led in this country to the change from Feudalism to Capitalism were merely the proximate causes of the

transfer of power from one minority to another. They were not the causes of that great universal fact that power, under all circumstances, is in the hands of a minority always; nor do they offer the smallest indication that in this respect things will ever change in the future.

The real change underlying the great industrial transition, on which the Socialists build what they take to be their scientific theory, was simply a gradual change in the kind of personal superiority required by the age in pursuit of its changing ideals and its ambitions. During the Middle Ages the required superiority was mainly military. It was of more importance to defend industry than to organise it. As time went on the situation slowly reversed itself, and it became more important to organise industry than to defend it. In the mediæval world valour employed industry; in the modern world industry employs valour. And now let us look below the surface a little deeper, and we shall see that the great mental event, of which these outer changes were the expression, was the gradual withdrawal from war of the strongest intellects and characters, and their concentration on the business of production, supplemented by the development of faculties of many new kinds, which now found uses never before open to them, and which placed their possessors amongst the potentates of the new era. In a word, the military ability of the minority has gradually turned into, or has given place to, the industrial ability of the minority. And this, again, is but the expression of another fact that is deeper and wider still—the fact that no matter what the special faculties may be which under any given cir-

cumstances are most useful to a community, these faculties, in their highest degree and their most serviceable forms, are found to exist only amongst comparatively few persons; and by an inevitable and natural process these few persons become the rulers, and democratic forms of government may conceal this fact, or modify certain of its results, but they never fundamentally alter it.

The events then which the Socialists have mistaken for an evolution of the economic rule of the many out of the economic rule of the minority, has really been nothing but the evolution of a new minority out of the old; and the evolution of a minority whose special faculties and functions not only as yet show no signs of being superseded, but are every day becoming more and more necessary. It is impossible here to explain or illustrate all this in detail. I can only attempt to indicate the bare outlines of the situation; but their truth will be recognised by the many quite as clearly as by the few. The great objects involved in the contemporary aspirations of all classes, and of the majority especially, are, first, the maintenance of our existing industrial productivity; and secondly, the increase of it. The 'Labour leaders' of to-day are constantly teaching the people to look forward to a progressive shortening of the hours of labour, together with a constant increase in the total product of the community; and it is perfectly obvious that such a result is possible only by an increased intensity in the action, not of Labour, but of Ability. But this increased intensity in the action of Ability, or, in other words, of the exceptionally gifted few, is necessary not only to increase the rate of production in proportion to the population, it is also

necessary if we are to prevent the present rate of production from diminishing. When we are dealing with a population that occupies any given area—such, for instance, as the area of the British Islands—and when the number of inhabitants which we start with are very few, production will become easier as they gradually grow more numerous, up to a certain point, but up to a certain point only; and then after that it will constantly become more difficult. That is to say, when the population increases beyond a certain point, the amount of wealth produced will depend more and more, not on the amount of Labour, but on the Ability with which it is organised. Thirty average labourers, occupying a thousand acres, will probably produce more wealth per head than three; but a thousand average labourers, packed together on three acres, will produce nothing at all, unless they are organised and directed by Ability.

Thus just as an examination of these contemporary facts, from which Socialists argue that Socialism is already in the course of developing itself, shows them to be really examples and results of a developing Individualism; so does a wider and more philosophic study of history show us that amongst all the changes and developments of all the civilisations known to us, there is not one which even suggests a belief that the evolution of Socialism is a possibility, or which is not a step in the evolution of some new form of its opposite.

IV.

THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL EVOLUTION.

And now let us go back to the contemporary facts in question. I said that certain of them—such as the Post Office, and municipal gas-works and water-works, had one side to them, at all events, which was Socialistic actually. We have in each of these cases an industrial enterprise managed under State control, and generally managed at a profit. But what I am going to point out is, that in each of them there is a peculiar feature, which prevents them being typical of industrial enterprise generally. This peculiarity is most marked in the case of the Post Office. The Post Office is a distributive agency, but it distributes a kind of goods whose economic character is unique. The distribution of all other goods depends on complicated problems connected with supply and demand; but in the case of letters—the goods which are distributed by the Post Office—the supply and demand naturally and necessarily balance themselves, tradesmen's bills being almost the only kind of letter for which the demand is less than the supply. Thus the customers of the Post Office naturally solve themselves difficulties which most other distributing businesses have to solve for their customers. Gas and water are examples—though much less perfect examples—of the same peculiarity. The relation between demand and supply can be gauged with exceptional ease; and though there are many degrees of excellence in gas and water, there is an

average degree required by the general public which is easily attained, and of which everybody is a sufficient judge. If all London required a supply of mineral and aerated waters, as well as of ordinary water, and if men were as critical in their tastes with regard to them, as they are with regard to wine or beer, a Socialistic water-supply would be a very different matter. Whatever element of Socialism there may be in their enterprise, it is made possible and successful only by their exceptional simplicity; and could the principle of competition be conveniently introduced into them, it is impossible to doubt that in each case the results would be far better. Oddly enough, one of the Fabian essayists admits that this would be the case even with the postal service in towns; though he says that it would not be so if we take the country as a whole. In saying this he is right; and if we consider the reason why, we shall see in all these enterprises another peculiarity, which, in a far more important way, accounts for the Socialistic element in them. They are all enterprises in which the benefits of competition would, owing to physical circumstances, be more than neutralised by its inconveniences. It is impossible to imagine a number of competing postal services; or houses invaded by the pipes of competing water companies; nor could we tolerate that our streets should be continually rendered impassable by the laying of new gas mains for supplying some improved gas. All the enterprises which a State can advantageously undertake, are characterised by one or other of two features, or by both of them—firstly, their exceptional simplicity; and secondly, the fact that

from their very nature it is exceptionally desirable that they should be monopolies. And now, bearing this in mind, let us look back at the civilisation of the past. We shall find that State enterprise of this limited kind is no new thing. We shall find, on the contrary, that it is as old as civilisation itself, and its natural and necessary accompaniment. We shall find that it existed in the ancient world of slavery, and that there was more of it in Imperial Rome than in modern London or Manchester. In order to make the truth of this more evident I will cite another example, to which I have often alluded elsewhere—namely, a street. If a public hall, as Mr. Sidney Webb seems to think, is an example of Socialism, so is a street also. Both are constructed and maintained by the public authorities: and the money for constructing and maintaining them is extracted from the pockets of the community. But unless the existence of streets in London and Manchester is altogether a new sign of the times, portending the evolution of a new Social order, there is no such sign to be found in public halls and municipal gas-works.

I began the preceding essay with observing that the word Socialism was used loosely and in various senses; and that in one of them only did it stand for any opinion or principle which essentially differentiates Socialists from men of any other party. But it is not only the general public which is confused by the ambiguity of the term. The Socialists themselves, and the Fabian essayists in especial, are confused by it also; and whilst they fancy themselves to be arguing for the principle which separates

them from their opponents, they are often unconsciously defending and advocating views which all the world holds as strongly and intelligently as they do. I shall now be able to make intelligible to the reader what these various and confusing meanings attached to the word Socialism are. They are broadly speaking three; and, whilst still retaining the word, the three different things meant may be classified and distinguished thus—as *Incidental Socialism*, *Supplementary Socialism*, and *Fundamental Socialism*. A street is an example of the first; the income tax is an example of the second; and the doctrine that men will exert themselves to produce income when they know that the State is virtually an organised conspiracy to rob them of it, is not only an example, but also the substance of the third. If the word Socialism has any distinctive meaning, and if Socialists in any way are a distinct and peculiar party, what Socialism means is this third thing—Fundamental Socialism. It is to the examination of this that, in these two essays, I have thus far addressed myself; and I have aimed at showing the reader—or rather showing him how to show himself—that it is nothing more than a foolish dream and delusion, repugnant alike to the teaching of common sense and of history, and important only because it is at once plausible and dangerous—not dangerous because it could ever be realised, but because incalculable harm might be done by vain attempts to realise it.

But it is not my only aim to enforce this negative conclusion, nor is it my chief aim. I have emphasised the dangers and the fallacies of Fundamental Socialism, mainly with a view to separating from it Incidental and

Supplementary Socialism; and have thus urged all Conservatives to be on their guard against the former, mainly with a view to showing them that they need not be afraid of the latter. In the social and political gospel preached by the Socialists, and preached by the Fabian essayists with more than ordinary ability, there is a mixture of profound and wholesome truth with the most puerile falsehood. My aim is to show that the truth may be appropriated by all of us, whilst we leave the falsehood behind, as the sole shibboleth of a mischievous and misguided sect. In order to explain this, let me explain the names I have given to these two forms of so-called Socialism, of which no Individualist need be afraid.

I have called institutions, such as a street or a public building, or, we may add, the fortifications of a town, examples of *Incidental Socialism*, because institutions of this kind are incidental to all civilised life. And I have referred to them because they afford us the simplest and most self-evident proof that the fact of great institutions being maintained by the State for society, is no sign that society is Socialistic, or on its way to Socialism. I have spoken of the income tax as an example of *Supplementary Socialism*, because the kind of institutions it represents are not necessarily incidental to civilisation. They are, indeed, in its earlier stages impossible, and came into being, and can come into being, only as the crowning result of wealth, when it is increased beyond a certain point by the intensified operation of Ability. This Supplementary Socialism includes not only the income tax, but any appropriation by means of rates or otherwise from private income, and the use of it for

public purposes, such as the providing of free libraries, free education, or free ferry-boats. On the surface, no doubt, this looks like Fundamental Socialism—like the Socialism of the Fabian essayists; and for that reason many people are afraid of it. It is in reality the very negative of that Socialism, being, as I have said before, rendered possible only by the existence of wealth increased and maintained by the forces of Individualism, and so long as this fact is steadily borne in mind, though the principle of Supplemental Socialism is capable of foolish application, there is in the principle itself nothing that Conservatism need fear. On the contrary, Conservatives may recognise it as capable of indefinite, though not indiscriminate, extension. There is no reason, so far as the fundamental principles go, that the most rigid economic Conservative should not outbid the Socialists in their endeavours to secure for the masses supplementary benefits from the State. He might advocate the provision for them of free theatres so long as he remembered that these would ultimately have to be paid for out of the income produced by individual ability, and that if too much is taken from it this year, there may next year be none to take.

Here we see the truth of the observation of one of the Fabian essayists, which I have already quoted. 'Although Socialism involves State control, State control does not involve Socialism. It is not so much the thing the State does, as to the end for which the State does it, that we must look, before we can decide whether it is a Socialistic State or not'; and no policy is Socialistic, he proceeds to tell us, 'which would prolong the life of private capital a single hour.' Nothing can

be more true than this. Here is the one point—the one essential point, as to which economic Conservatism joins issue with Socialism. Let me express by a simple figure the character of their opposition. The larger part of our annual national wealth is, as has been said already, the product not of the Labour of the many but of the Ability of the few. The few, with 'the scarce brains,' produce the only part of our wealth that grows, therefore the continued exertion of the few is recognised as a necessity by both parties. But the motive of the few in producing has been the prospect of enjoying what they produce, partly in the form of immediate profits, but mainly in the deferred form of rent and interest. Now we may not inaptly call motive the fuel of action. Profits, rent, and interest, these are the fuel of industrial Ability, just as coal is the fuel of the steam-engine. The practical teaching of Socialists as bearing on the immediate situation is simply that the fuel is being consumed wastefully, and that it is possible to reduce the quantity; and if we take this teaching apart from any ulterior significance, it may come from a Conservative reformer just as well as from the Socialist. The two, in fact, may be in exact agreement. But if we look not to this teaching alone, but to the views and aims underlying it, we are at once in presence of the essential antagonism of the two; for the aim of the Conservative reformer is so to improve the engine, that whilst reducing the consumption of coal, we may maintain the effective heat of the fire, or with the same consumption increase the heat; whilst a reduction in consumption is advocated by the Socialist only as a step towards raking the fire out. The object of one is to

generate more steam with the least wasteful fire; the dream of the other is to generate it without any fire at all.

Let us return from the language of metaphor to that of actual fact. The Socialists say that they value no reforms that do not tend to the extinction of private capital and Individualism; the Conservatives may answer, if they have only courage to do so, that they dread none. They need not be afraid of the State doing anything that is beneficial to the people, so long as in securing the money required for such a purpose it does nothing to discourage the action of that individual Ability which alone can supply the funds necessary to such State beneficence.

If our economic Conservatives will only realise this, if they will separate the truths which the Socialists are popularising from the falsehoods, and adopt the former at the same time that they expose the latter, they will find that the more boldly and completely they face the labour question, the easier will the vindication of their position in the eyes of the community become to them. The ideal, in fact, towards which they will be able to point the people, may be not inaccurately described as Socialism without its impossibilities.

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