

The Needle

A

MARVELLOUS

VISION.

MISOPSEUDES!

OR THE

YEAR

2075.

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And deaf although they have ears;
Or let them hear in their turn and say this is true."

PRICE—ONE SHILLING.

John Hendle
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MISOPSEUDES: A VISION.

AS, under the lee of a gigantic eucalyptus, I lay supine, weary, inert, dozing, dreaming, while all the air of the solemn forest around was quivering and humming, musical and fragrant beneath the pulsation of the fervid sun, a vision came to my prophetic soul.

A vision, as of a youth—a student of the year 2075—girt about with a great gathering of fellow students, to whom he lectured, with whom he discoursed. And sore grief and dismay fell upon my soul as I hearkened to his words; for it quickly appeared that in his day all now extant Religious Creeds had become mere “Historical Expressions.” Of a verity, his day seemed to be the day of the “Abomination of Desolation.”

“My friends,” the student said, or seemed to say, “perusing these great works, the ‘History of Human Error,’ the ‘Hebrew and Christian Mythology,’ the ‘Dictionary of Superstition,’ and the ‘Curiosity of Unreason,’ one is filled with amazement and disgust, and with humiliation and shame too, as one discovers what gross superstitions, what puerilities, absurdities, impossibilities, contradictions, immoralities, atrocities and lurid horrors were held by our unhappy ancestors as sacred and divine truths and holy religion. Learning what poor infatuates our forefathers were of but two or three hundred years ago, our pride, if any pride be left to us, need no longer take affront at the theory of our immensely remote descent, or rather ascent, from the ape.

“Though much light had been for some time streaming in, and the black cloud of superstition, brooding incubus-like over the mind of man, had been riven and rent, and was being slowly dispersed, still, as lately as near the close of the nineteenth century, great numbers of so-called educated men continued to hold, or to profess to hold, such monstrous beliefs as these:—

“That they were in possession of paper-revelations from the Infinite Soul of the Universe, who was not only the Infinite Spirit, but also, somehow, a personal deity, whatever that might have meant; that there was also another great spirit—the spirit of evil—whom they commonly call the Devil, and who in some sort shared the dominion of the universe with the good spirit.

Though the good spirit, being omnipotent, could easily have extinguished the bad one by a gentle euthanasia, yet he did not so will it, but, on the contrary, appointed the devil his superintendent in some portion of the universe called Hell, where his appointed duties were to torture for ever, in *secula seculorum*, all the human creatures whom the Deity had made, except some few, who were saved by divine grace, or by their implicit faith, without inquiry, without using the reason God had given them, in impossibilities. But, nevertheless, God was all-merciful and of loving-kindness.

"And when any sceptic asked them what it was that was tormented in hell, seeing that they were speaking of dead men, they would reply it was 'the immortal souls; the immortal spirits of the dead.' When it would be pointed out to them that immaterial spirit, without flesh and nerves, would be incapable of feeling any sensation whatsoever, then they seemed to think that the immortal souls would be reinvested in fresh clothings of flesh and blood, facsimiles of the old ones, so as to enable them to enjoy again the luxury of sensation. But these new robes of flesh and blood were to be quite different from the old ones, inasmuch that they were indestructible, no matter how much they got torn. They could not bleed to death. When asked what was the difference between immaterial spirit and nothing, they were sorely puzzled, and could only say—nothing!

"Though they in some sort, perhaps rather dubiously, accepted the idea of God being the soul of the infinite universe, they, nevertheless, at the same time believed that he was also the son of the wife of a Jewish carpenter; that he was executed as a visionary impostor; but, coming out from his grave in a day or two, was mistaken for a gardener. That, after that, in the presence of human witnesses, this God went up from the top of the hill into the air, like a balloon, until he vanished out of sight, and never came down again, though he promised he would before that generation passed away!

"They had a notion, those superstition-bewildered fore-fathers of ours, that, by becoming thus incarnate and going through the ceremonial of human death—to a god it could be but a ceremonial—the Deity in some way appeased his own wrath against his own human creatures, or his Father's wrath (there is some confusion here, not easily unravelled, for it seems there were two or three gods, and still only one), and reconciled it to his own sense of justice to save mankind from the clutches of his superintendent, the evil spirit, and his cells of eternal torment. But, somehow, this divine scheme of the Omnipotent turned out not a great success, inasmuch as they held that, after and in spite of this queer divine expiation, the number of men to be

saved would be to those hopelessly damned but as the gleanings of the field to the harvest.

"When asked what was their warranty that Jesus of Nazareth was really incarnate God, their reply was that it was incontrovertibly proved by his having changed water into wine, and made loaves and fishes out of nothing, with some other similar little thaumaturgics. They also believed firmly that in those old days an angel used to swoop down from heaven once a year, and fall flop into an inconsiderable little pond near Jerusalem, and stir up the waters thereof, and that any sick or maimed mortal bathing therein after him would be immediately restored to health and the normal number of limbs. Also that their Anthropoid Deity had a singular talent for discovering lots of little devils in men's insides, and a faculty for making them come out of that pretty quickly. Sometimes he hardly knew what to do with them after their ejection, for it is narrated that on one occasion he had to get rid of them by making them fly down the throats of a herd of poor pigs, who incontinently, in affront or despair, rushed into the sea and committed suicide, drowning at once themselves and the little devils, their inside-passengers. A sad loss to the owner of the porkers. She was a widow, and they were her all. She died of starvation. If a handkerchief or other bit of rag touched the body of the Divine Anthropoid, or of any of his chief spokesmen, the woollen or cotton fibre thereof became impregnated with a certain magical aroma, capable of inoculating all sick people with health.

"Once upon a time the great Evil Spirit, Superintendent of Hell, carried this God to the top of a hill so lofty that he was able to show him from it all the kingdoms of this world, the spherical form of which was unknown to both of them.

"It is almost inconceivable, but I can assure you it is a certain fact, that all the grotesque fables of the old Hebrew mythology were held by our poor ancestors to be sacred truths, divinely-inspired narratives of real events! Of those old fables—sometimes merely fantastic and puerile, often horrible, sanguinary and revolting, full of impossibilities, immoralities and obscenities, and having as much verisimilitude as the 'Arabian Nights Entertainments'—they deemed every word to be divinely inspired! They accepted as the Infinite Soul's revelation of itself, all the sordid anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity formed by the dark minds of the old superstitious Hebrew people, who pictured him as a vague, gigantic old man, sitting in the clouds, full of their own vile passions, wrathful, revengeful, jealous, fickle, taking no heed of the great universe (of which they knew nothing), but solely occupied as the tutelary but cruel genius of one selected tribe. Thus they

believed, as a divinely-revealed fact, that quaint old myth of God having made the universe out of nothing only a few hundred years ago, and, after six days hard work at it, finding himself so knocked up that he had to rest on the seventh. Curiously enough, there is a reason to believe that in this old myth originated our present custom of generally keeping every seventh day as a sort of holyday. They further believed that God had to carve the rib out of the side of the first man in order to make the first woman. Also, in that queer old tale (which some of you may have seen in the nursery, bound up with the 'Arabian Nights') of a paradise somewhere near the site of the great railway station, on the Euphrates line, in which the first human couple were paddocked, and where the woman was overpersuaded by a rattlesnake to eat a ribstone pippin which God had forbidden her to eat—for which disobedience she and her female descendants were for ever cursed with the penalty of having to be the mothers of children. But for the snake there would have been no human race, it appears! Perhaps that was the reason he was worshipped in some countries in old times. It was also considered quite certain that the Asiatic aborigines used to live to the age of about a thousand years!

"It seems probable that at a very early human period, before our race had become very numerous, and when it was chiefly gathered together in some valley, perhaps in the alluvial flats of Mesopotamia, some considerable local flood occurred, by which many people perished, and others only escaped by boats and rafts. And that, after a time, among an utterly ignorant and barbarous people, this catastrophe got magnified into a monstrous myth—full of moral and physical impossibilities—bearing the palpable mark of the savage mind in which it was coined. And by degrees the fable was built up that in the days of yore, God, getting awfully enraged with all the organic life he had placed on the earth, determined to swamp it all, with the exception of one human family, and pairs of every species of animal and insect. So he 'gave the office' to an old aboriginal called Noah, and lessons in naval construction, and caused him to build a great punt, as big as one of our passenger steamers. Into this got Noah and his family, and received pairs of all the beasts, divinely inspired to come to them. Fancy the amiable Noah handing in the cobra-di-capella, and rattlesnakes and centipedes, and scorpions! Then God caused it to rain for four or five weeks, which had the singular effect of raising the water over the summits of the highest mountains in the world—the Himalayas, the Andes, etc. After a long cruise, the big punt grounded in shoal water on the top of a very high peak, and the four-or-five-miles thickness of water ran away into the sea-bed, and somehow found

room there. The old reciters (improvisatori), priests who piled up the myth, forgot or did not know that such a submersion would have destroyed all vegetable as effectually as all animal life. So, by this oversight, they omitted to make any provision for the preservation in the punt of seedlings of all trees and plants. No doubt it would have appeared to them only natural that all these should spring again in full development from the drying soil. You will find it hard to credit, but I can assure you I have ascertained it to be a fact, that this childish and ridiculous fable was universally believed in as lately as the seventeenth century, very generally in the eighteenth, and that even in the nineteenth century there were thousands among the classes middlingly educated who still believed or feigned and professed to believe it.

"This Bible-God of our forefathers, neglecting the infinite myriad of myriads of thousand-fold grander worlds, devoted all his time and attention, in personal presence, to this microscopic satellite of a microscopic star, an insignificant unit in that insignificant cluster of suns which we call the Milky Way.

"And even on this microscopic grain of cosmic sand there was only one paltry nation of redeemed slaves for whom he cared. With them he bivouacked; and sometimes he marched at the head of the escaping multitude in the costume of a pillar of smoke and of fire. Sometimes he sat in a burning bush and commanded a gentleman who came to interview him to show him decent respect by taking off his slippers, for the ground within a certain radius around the bush had become more holy than the rest of the surface of God's earth.

"At another time, the Bible-God camped on the top of the Horeb ridges, surrounded by a really brilliant display of fireworks, accompanied by the blowing of trumpets and rams' horns. The chief magistrate of the people of the valley below went up to call upon him, and to request the pleasure of an interview; when he, scarcely setting an example of good manners, replied that he would not permit him to see his face. (for *that* no man could see and live), but that he might see his hinder parts if he pleased. Afterwards, however, changing his mind, he met the same visitor face to face, and conversed with him 'as one man to another.'

"And, on a second occasion, he courteously received a full deputation of the mayor and all the aldermen, and entertained them pleasantly. Nevertheless, not feeling quite sure of himself, he warned them to take care of themselves, lest he should break forth on them (like a savage dog). While he thus held court on the top of the hill, he took the trouble to engrave with his own royal hand, on tablets of stone, all his laws for the guidance of the human race,—or rather of the one wandering tribe for

which alone he cared. But herein he made a mistake, not being able to foresee or prevent the smashing-up of these tablets next day by an angry man.

"It is not unlikely that this myth had its origin from some volcano, of which the priests had availed themselves for the purpose of humbugging the people. Once upon a time, this great god, putting on a human form, indulged in a wrestling-match with one of the old patriarchs. Whether for so much a side or not, is not recorded. After a very severe tussle, he flung him by a cross-buttock, and hurt him so much that he limped ever after.

"This Bible-Deity was not represented at all as an omnipotent god. On the contrary, he usually encountered great difficulty in carrying out his schemes, and often signally failed. For instance, when he took it in hand to free the slaves held by the king and people of Egypt, he first endeavoured to persuade the king to permit them to go. Failing in this, he next tried to coerce king and people by afflicting them with various juggling plagues, fantastic or horrible. The king, however, was still resolute—being a man of stronger will than the Bible-God, who then got up a sort of Fenian conspiracy among the slaves, instructing them to rise simultaneously in the night, rob their sleeping masters and mistresses, and bolt for the bush. Afterwards, by a beautiful act of military strategy, God succeeded in deceiving his enemy, the Egyptian king, into an ambush, where he could easily bring into play his old celebrated drowning tactics; which he did; swamping the hostile king and all his army. This brilliant success against a few of his own poor creatures—crawling upon a microscopic grain of cosmical dust—was an enormous and magnificent triumph for the Infinite Spirit of the Universe, and was celebrated ever after by endless rub-a-dubbing, and 'sounding of loud timbrels o'er Egypt's dark sea,' for the Infinite has triumphed, and his darlings were free. God himself was very proud of it, and frequently thereafter declared himself to be a Man of War, and the Generalissimo of Hosts! But he was not always so successful; for, when he and his people came into conflict with a tribe possessing chariots of iron he could not prevail against them. And all through these veracious, inspired histories, I find our Bible-God pictured as a struggling, striving, unscrupulous (but often unsuccessful) partisan.

"In point of morality this God was far lower in the scale than any other god ever invented by the human brain—altogether viler. The gods of the Greeks had their little foibles and peccadilloes, but, upon the whole, they were a gracious, amiable debonnair and festive lot; gentlemen, and cavaliers, and ladies. But the god of the Jews was limned in the lurid

and sanguinary hues of their own peculiarly dark, gloomy and ferocious minds. He was a god who delighted, above all things, in carnage, massacre and murder, in treasons, stratagems and spoils. He led his armed and trained bands against nation after nation of peaceful and comparatively civilised people, always with sternest injunctions to smite and spare not; to slaughter man, woman, and child; to rip up the bellies of women with child; and to despoil, burn and lay waste their cities. If they failed to make a satisfactory extermination in any case they themselves incurred his wrath. On one occasion, when his people had been hard at work all day, making a most lovely massacre, the day not proving long enough to make a nice clean finish of it, he graciously commanded the sun to stand still in the heavens for two hours, so as to give his pet bravos so much more time for slashing and stabbing, and ripping up bellies. You see astronomy was not known when this myth was concocted. When 100,000 women and children of another nation were brought in captive, this Divine Being would command that all the women who were not virgins, together with all the boys, should be cut to pieces, and that the virgins should be divided fairly among the soldiers, after the priests had taken their pick.

"At another time he would proclaim to his chosen people, 'I remember that which Amalek did to Israel (four hundred years before), how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'

"And sometimes when there were no other people about handy to be slaughtered, he would command his own people to run-a-muck among themselves, in such words as these:—'Thus saith the Lord God, put every man his sword to his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.'

"He greatly delighted in good, clever, treacherous, private assassination. So, when an amiable woman invited a political refugee into her house, gave him good cheer and a comfortable bed, and then drove a spike-nail into his brain as soon as he slept, he gave her great kudos, and proclaimed her 'blessed beyond all women!' His chiefest favorite among men, David, king, saint and inspired prophet, specially characterised as 'the man after God's own heart,' whenever he overcame foreign nations, was wont to put the people of all their cities under saws and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and cast them into brickkilns. The exterminating massacres made by his people, under his guidance, among the peaceful nations of

Asia Minor have, probably, never been paralleled, before or since, in the world's history. Some nations were so utterly swept away that not even their name survives: no record, save the most imperishable ruins of their most magnificent cities—to overturn which those savages possessed not sufficient mechanical skill. For instance, the Baalbec ruins, which many of you have seen. The people who reared those wonderful temples or public buildings were certainly, in some branches of mechanics and in architecture, superior to us at this day. They must have enjoyed many centuries of peaceful prosperity, and must have attained to a considerable degree of civilization. They had, perhaps, never heard of war, and fell victims, helpless as sheep, before the ruthless sword of the chosen horde, under divine guidance.

"This old book I have here, entitled the 'Comic Bible,' is certainly the most comical of all the books I know; it was an immense favorite a hundred years ago, but has lost its piquancy now, because so few in these days know anything of the original of the burlesque."

The student seemed to resume:—

"It would fill a goodly volume, my friends, to give anything like a full answer to the question as to how so shallow and absurd a superstition as the Christian could ever have obtained a first footing in the days of the old Roman Empire. On this occasion I can do no more than point out very briefly two or three of the most salient and obvious causes—predisposing and active. The great predisposing cause was, beyond doubt, the absolute mental blankness of the lower classes in those days; the intellectual and educational status of the classes among whom, for the first two or three centuries, the new superstition crawled, like a low typhoid, was not superior to that of the nigger slaves of early American history; while in natural acumen, sense of logic and appreciation of the ridiculous, the early Christians must have been inferior to the average uneducated African negro.

"And there was an epidemic of credulity abroad which impelled the minds of the ignorant to accept with hungry and implicit faith all that was marvellous and impossible, which seemed, indeed, to make the marvellous and impossible more belief-worthy than the natural. As for scientific inquiry and physical truth, the ideas had not been born. One of the great fathers of the new sect declared, '*credo quia impossibile.*'

"It should ever be borne in mind that at first and for a long period, the new doctrines were promulgated only among the slaves, the pauper, the lazzaroni and gutter people of the old world; only among the classes clothed in rags, ignorance, dirt and disease. The educated classes knew little of what was going on in the cellars and slums; if they heard

of it, they called it an *extiabilis superstitio*, and 'pooh pooh'd' it, *de haut en bas*, as merely the silly Obism of the slaves. They ignored the disease, until, alas! it had spread beyond stamping out.

"Like the vile Communism which, a century and a half ago, it cost so much blood and treasure to hold under foot until the general spread of an enlightened knowledge of economic and social laws finally exorcised the unclean spirit, the new Gospel of Jesus was expressly framed to pander to all the mean passions and prejudices of an ignorant proletariat; to pander to the envy and malice, the dull and savage hatred, which, in the ignorant ages, always animated the hearts of the poor against all who were a little above them in material comfort, or education, or intelligence. It proclaimed the kingdom of heaven as the inheritance of the paupers only of this world! that into that blissful kingdom no rich man should enter: 'Woe to the rich; they had their portion here!' In the world to come they should only have hell fire. And the paupers luxuriating in the abodes of the blessed should solace themselves for ever by the agreeable spectacle of the writhings of their whilome masters in fiery lakes of sulphur! And, from the pauper standpoint of view, who is Dives, the rich man? Why, every man who wears a decent coat and lives in a comfortable house—the well-to-do farmer, shop-keeper, or tradesman, the successful artisan—they are the rich of this world, as viewed from the gutter. Woe to them all! they have had their portion—for them, in the world to come, only the worm that dieth not! It shall be as impossible for one of them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

"This new Gospel taught them also not to trouble themselves to be saving and prudent; to take no heed for the morrow, but to trust to odd jobs that might turn up. Not to bother themselves with much work or labour, but rather to follow the example of the lilies which 'toiled not.' What mattered rags and dirt, and a few ulcers? They would soon be looking down from heaven on all the prudent and painstaking, suffering infinitely worse inconvenience, in a place where there would be eternal gnashing of teeth. What a seductive, irresistible gospel for town lazzaroni and country mud-cabiners!

"Another potent cause of the rapid spread of the mental epidemic is to be found in the panic terror with which the low multitude was stricken by the authoritative and positive announcement of the immediate end of the world, and by the horrifying pictures of a ghastly, imminent Hell, together with the confident and unflinching pretensions of the preachers, that

they alone could show the one way of escape therefrom. Be sure, preachers and proselytisers were plenty! To ambitious, vain and wordy loafers, who hate work and love to hear their own voices, what rôle so attractive as that of preacher and prophet? To rise, *per saltum*, say from the sweeping of a crossing to the position of semi-divine personage! To be welcomed to the best fare in every house or cabin, to be listened to with gaping mouth and wondering reverence; to be petted, and kissed, and worshipped by all the women! And no more work; no more sweeping of the crossing! Only to talk, and lift up the eyes! You have heard that some of them came to grief. That is so. Casualties occurred in the ranks both of the early Mormon and early Christian apostles. In both cases some were hanged by the authorities, and some wiped out in street rows. But they were mere casualties; happening to, say, one in a thousand. And in both cases, doubtlessly, when the victims (that were to be) first took up the propagand, they thought little of remote, possible, future danger, which each one, individually, would naturally hope to escape by prudence and management. Or, if they foresaw a slight contingency of peril, it would be to them enormously outweighed by the immense, immediate gain in position, in gratification of vanity, in the sudden emergence from unconsidered and unknown pauperdom to a sort of social eminence. When accidents happened to them they were dubbed 'holy martyrs,' and their bones and toenails were worshipped; and, in old world slang, they were said to have given 'testimony unto death'; to have 'sealed their faith with their blood,' etc. Yes; just as a fallen soldier may be said to have 'sealed his faith' in a red coat and the comforts of the barracks. A contingency attached to a good profession—that is all.

"But undoubtedly most of the early preachers were sincere and earnest fanatics, insane and frantic with the terror of their own conviction of the rapidly approaching end of all things.

"The propagandists always made a great hurrahing about their new doctrine being a 'gospel of glad tidings,' inasmuch as that they had come to show the only way of salvation, by which a few might escape the general doom of eternal damnation.

"What a wonderful piece of impudence was this! Considering that it was they and they alone who had set up the doctrine of eternal damnation, and that before them no human heart among all the nations had been dark-and-wicked-and-desperate enough to dare to dream such an atrocity. What a gospel of glad tidings! Hell for all except the singular few, who, by performing the arduous task of believing in the Impossible, might possibly escape the doom!

"My friends," the student went on, "it seems to me that I

have already partly answered your second question—Why we are at the present day usually taught to consider the Christian the most pernicious of the superstitions of the past? The student of history sees reasons only too grievous for so estimating it. It would, however, be more correct to speak, not of Christianity apart, but rather of the Hebraic cluster of religions conjointly. For, as you all know, Mormonism, Mahometanism, and Christianity, were only excrescences—morbid outgrowths from the original baleful Hebrew stock. Indeed, all dark and gloomy conceptions of Nature and of man and his destiny, seem to be derived from the farouche and sombre Semetic mind. It was that cluster of religions which first hatched the detestable idea of persecution for theological—that is, merely speculative—opinion. The principle of persecution was the marked characteristic which differentiated them from all other crystallisations of religious thought. All the other religions of the Old World were comparatively free from that fiendish element; comparatively mild and benevolent. The Greeks of old had their imaginary gods, but they picked no quarrel with the gods of other people. On the contrary, they complaisantly acknowledged them, and gave them niches in their Pantheon. And Buddhism, the religion which has numbered so many more followers than any other, was purely philosophical and meditative. The special Christian development possesses, however, the most direct interest for us, as having been the error of our own forefathers. Not without some element of good in it, the overbalance of evil and mischief wrought upon mankind by that superstition is incalculable. What calamities and woes it caused! What cruel persecutions, what horrors and gloom, and despair and blood.

"During the earlier centuries, when Faith was not merely nominal, but frightfully real and active, the peoples were frenzied by the new terror of an ever-yawning Hell. The world, under the shadow of night, was made hideous with the ceaseless prowlings of the Devil and his ghastly imps. No other such calamity as this terror of the Christian Hell ever fell upon mankind, overshadowing it with a sulphurous cloud of despairing asceticism; blotting out the brightness and joyousness of the earth; driving men into the unintelligent ferocity of frightened wild beasts. Men were taught that all who knew not, or accepted not, the Faith, were doomed to eternal torment by the inexorable decree of a merciless all-merciful God. More than that, each sect within the faith was taught that every other sect would be certainly damned! 'Tweedledum' believed that 'Twiddledee' would be as satisfactorily damned as even they who had never heard of 'Tweedledum' and 'Twiddledee.' Further; it was held that even among the correctly orthodox, only an elect few—not one in a thousand—would be really saved.

"With the conviction on every mind that the vast majority of mankind were predestined to be foul fiends in Hell, what could there be in the world of respect for human life; of kindly human feeling, of cheerful brotherhood? No; nothing in those days but the evilness of fear and despair. Only gloom; only cruelty; only self-brooding and self-mortification; only the stern suppression of all the pleasurable emotions. What could signify the present suffering, or the mortal lives of future demons? Let us slaughter and burn a thousand misbelievers, and so save our own souls.

"And hundreds of thousands were driven into caves and deserts, and monasteries and nunneries, and became more or less insane. Even up to a comparatively recent era thousands of fine minds were thrown off their balance and ruined by the terrible inner conflict between early-implanted faith and reason, revolting against the transparently false.

"So anti-social was the Christian dogma in its essence, that, had not the bulk of the people always and everywhere been too unimaginative—stolid and commonsensible—fully to apprehend and realise it, the human race would doubtlessly have died out under its icy, devitalising breath; for its real teaching was to despise all mundane matters, for 'the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand;' to cast away property as an incumbrance, to condemn wealth and comfort as snares; only to live upon such fruits of the earth as could be picked up without much anxiety, and to wait patiently as they could until death opened to them the portals of eternal bliss. Had all the world fully believed, all the world had turned anchorite,—as did the portion which so believed. There would have been an end of all industrial and commercial effort, or ships, colonies and commerce, of mines and manufactures. Why trouble ourselves about such trumpery? for 'the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'

"The ethics of this creed were often utterly bewildering. If a poor man were reckless, improvident, incapable, and so remained always a poor man, he had chance of Heaven; but if he were prudent and saving, and so raised himself into wealth and household comfort, then, woe to him! none such shall enter the kingdom! he had had his portion.

"So class was set against class, and the poor taught to hate the rich; yet, at the same time, passive obedience to all in authority was inculcated. Why should the poor man, certain of developing into an angel in Heaven, be so submissive to Dives, whose doom was hell? Though the whole nature of religion was such as necessarily to evoke the fiercest spirit of persecution, and though the reputed author himself was reported to have declared that he came to bring a sword into the world, still one of its chief moral teachings was cowardly submission to injury and insult.

If a man smote you on one cheek, you were to offer him the other to be smitten. How should evil be mended, or cured, or removed, if it were never to be resisted? A poor, mean, humble spirit was highly commended. And consider the monstrosity of making salvation depend upon faith, upon the wholly involuntary act of believing or disbelieving certain propositions, which were either mere assertions or theorems submitted to your judgment and reason! That was a puzzle which drove many men mad.

"To us, in this twenty-first century, there is, perhaps, nothing more repulsive in the old Christian ethics than the intersexual asceticism they set up, and the insult they offered to our human nature, by reprobating the sexual passion as unholy and impure. Taking the obverse of the true moral, that the gratification of this appetite, as of any other of our appetites, is naturally and essentially innocent, and only casually made sinful by circumstances and consequences, Christianity taught that it was naturally and essentially sinful and unholy, and only permissible under the one circumstance of matrimony, blessed by a priest; even then only barely to be tolerated, not to be commended. The only truly holy life for men and women was to live apart in monasteries and nunneries, and suppress natural desires by fasting, flagellation, fustigation, maceration. Weaker brethren (which perhaps meant the saner ones) were, however, out of consideration for their deplorable frailty, permitted the alternative of priest-blessed marriage, without being certainly damned; though their chances of salvation were, of course, far inferior to those of the nobler ones in the stone cells.

"The ethics of the Bible were, however, many-sided and abundantly contradictory; passage gainsaying passage throughout. So that out of them you could build up any moral system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During the latter periods of the prevalence of superstition, it was customary to pick out, by a judicious eclecticism, all the best precepts and ignore all the evil—pretending it did not exist. Then these selected, assorted, and sieved Bible-morals were held up to the admiration of the world as something too perfect ever to have been discovered by human reason, unassisted by Divine revelation. As if there were something very abstruse in the science of morals—the science merely of what, in the principle of moral action, tends, or tends not, to the well-being of mankind.

"At first though, it would seem an inexplicable phenomenon that any among the educated classes in the nineteenth century could keep on believing, in face of the fact that, in those days, and in the previous century, it had been by many able writers repeatedly—and, we would say, incontrovertibly

—shown that the popular religion was no better than the baseless fabric of a dream; in face of the fact that it was repudiated, either contemptuously or with pity and in silence, by all their scientific men, and by the great majority of all their foremost thinkers. Again and again it had been shown that the religion was self-condemned by its own inherent absurdity; that the book they called 'inspired' was self-condemned by its own internal evidence; by its self-contradictions, its assertions of physical falsehoods, its laudation of vile crimes and immoral sentiments. It had been shown that the reputed and miraculous-and-supernatural events on which Christianity was based were reported to have occurred in a very dark corner of the world, in a very dark age, when there was no printing-press, no newspapers, no telegraph, no post-office, no stage-coaches, no special reporters, no publicity, and among the very lowest class of people—fishermen, beggars, etc.—among whom the accomplishments of reading and writing were not to be looked for (though these same disciples were afterwards absurdly credited with high literary abilities); that no scientific commission had examined into the alleged facts; no able counsel had been appointed to cross-examine the witnesses and sift the evidence; and no detectives had been dispatched from Scotland Yard. That, in fact, the very idea of scientific investigation had not been conceived in those days; the inductive study of natural laws was unheard of, and no definite boundary had been drawn between the natural and the supernatural, but both were jumbled up together—the one appearing as probable as the other.

"With regard to the writings which they called 'the Gospels'—on the literal truth and exactness of which they depended for all knowledge of the sayings and doings of the Founder of their Faith—it had been shown, again and again, that they were written nobody knew when, and nobody knew by whom; but certainly not by their reputed authors; that there was no historical record of their publication or their existence earlier than a century and a-half after the events of which they professed to be narratives by eye-witnesses. That, earlier than that, no writer had ever alluded to their existence; that those four Gospels were then avowedly selected by the priests, or "Fathers," from hundreds of other gospels; that these old Fathers were (*teste* their own writings) men, at once of inconceivable folly and credulity, and of boundless dishonesty; esteeming all frauds pious that favoured their own Church and their own interests.

"And it had been forcibly represented that, in those old, dark, troublous days, and in relation to events in which only some of the lowest and most ignorant class took any interest, the lapse of a century and a-half, or even half that time, would have thrown

over the past a more impenetrable fog of antiquity and obscurity than could the rolling of thousands of years of the modern world.

"There was another proof much relied upon by the Christians at a somewhat earlier period, namely,—the so-called 'Evidence of Prophecy.' This meant that certain more ancient Jewish writings referred to and had predicted the events of the Christian Gospels. The Divine Founder and the 'inspired writers' of those gospels distinctly claimed them in evidence. The Jews, however, who ought to have known something about it, always utterly denied that their old scriptures bore any such meaning. And when, at last, criticism proved beyond controversy that none of those ancient writings referred to the then-distantly-future Christian era, but to synchronous events easily designated, then the Christian divines, receding, took up the position that, if not in a direct or primary sense, still, in a secondary (allegorical and mystical) sense, they were unquestionably prophetic of Jesus. They argued well that 'Jesus was certainly the Christ' because the old prophets had prophesied of him; and that the prophets *had* certainly prophesied of him (even though only allegorically), since he, being the Christ, had said so.

"A great portion of the so-called 'prophetic writings' are void of all intelligible meaning, and may be supposed to signify anything or nothing. They were, probably, the rhapsodies and ravings of priests who had gone mad. In the East, the insane were always regarded with a superstitious reverence.

"I have remarked that the evidence from prophecy was not much insisted upon—indeed, seldom alluded to—since the close of the eighteenth century. The position seemed to have been abandoned, probably as untenable.

"In fine, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it had been made patent to all who were willing and able to inquire with an even-balanced mind, that the intrinsically incredible popular religion was unsupported, except by such shadowy proofs as would not for a moment be entertained in the discussion of any other historical question—proofs such as no secular historian would consider sufficient to throw any colour of authenticity over traditions of even a natural and non-absurd character. The true Gospel of Science had been proclaimed, and yet thousands of infidels shut their ears and kept on believing in their own mis-shapen idols. How was this? The phenomenon is not inexplicable. There were many reasons why it should be so. There was the heavy *vis inertiae* of old custom, and the dull, stolid resistance of bourgeois respectability and black-coated Philistinism. Then the women were systematically kept in the dark; so that, though *paterfamilias* might have made himself a thoroughly enlightened man, still his son—receiving his earliest, too often indelible, impressions from his

mother, female relatives, nursemaids and parsons—would have to start again in life from a mental platform no higher than that of his great-grandmother, gaining little, or nothing, by the intellectual elevation of his father. And each successive generation of young men had to repeat for itself the painful process of believing at first and learning to disbelieve afterwards. And in each generation the authority of the nursery clung supreme through life to thousands of minds, sluggish and unenquiring, or obstinate and proud, or timid and reverential and feebly imaginative. A reticence, for politic reasons very generally maintained, long upheld the form of a religion that was really moribund and nearly inanimate. The worldly success and comfort of most men depended upon appearing to swim with the tide of popular prejudice, and so, before the public they hypocritically pretended to reverence what, in their hearts and in the society of intimate friends, they despised and derided. Thus, the free-thinkers had no means of learning their own numbers and strength. And this cowardly reticence was carried so far, that, long after they were in a decided majority, each individual free-thinker was afraid to speak, supposing himself to be only one of a small minority. Writers of the close of the nineteenth century express an opinion that for nearly a hundred years the popular creed had floated only upon reticence.

“But to explain this phenomenon, which seems to puzzle you so much, of the coexistence, side by side, for more than a hundred years, of the broad light of Science and Philosophy, and the darkness of superstition, what more is necessary than the biological doctrine of the produced hereditariness of mental impressions, warps and twists, continued through many generations? We know that what we call instinct in the lower animals is only inherited memory, experience and habits. The fish that have swum for countless generations in the pitch-dark waters of the Adelsberg caves have become eyeless through the gradual atrophy of the unused organs of sight. When removed to open waters, many generations pass ere they begin once more to blink at the glimpses of the sun. Had the Chinese bandaged, cramped, and dwarfed the feet of both sexes for a certain number of generations, it is highly probable that, at last, the foot-deformity would have become congenital, inherited.

“Now, the minds of men who, in the light of the nineteenth century, still kept on believing, were like Adelsberg fish that had not yet been in the open water for a sufficient number of generations to recover their vision. The minds of their forefathers had been for so many ages shut up in the tenebrous crypts and cloisters of superstition—seeing nothing therein but false and doleful phantoms—that the mental eye, capable of seeing the truth, had become congenitally atrophied. And their minds were like the

suppositional Chinese foot; their predecessors' minds had been so long dwarfed and distorted by the bandages of priestcraft, authority and custom, that a few generations without bandages were necessary for restoration.

“Happy are we in this glorious twenty-first century! Happy to have learnt to be humble enough to acknowledge that there is a definite impassable limit to the range of human inquiry; to be wise enough never more to shatter our brain-power in vain attempts to transcend the limit into the infinite abysses! Whereas, the men of old, in the arrogance of ignorance, glancing at the one infinite phenomenon of the universe, flippantly declared themselves at once capable of hitting on the true solution of the mystery of mysteries, and that the solution was, that the universe had been made by a god pre-existing in vacuo (the Hindoo elephant and tortoise over again!), and thereupon fell to discussing the attributes and character of this brain-coined Being, *we* simply say that all inquiry into the first causes and the real nature of things is ‘beyond the limit,’ and cease to beat the air. While they, mistaking inference for observation, naively declared that they could plainly see all around the wonderful evidences of design, we, noting—all that can be noted—the marvellous adaptation of things, humbly admit that the cause of those adaptations is from man for ever hidden, and that the inquiry is beyond the limit.

“Happy are we that, with souls no longer perturbed by the menacing figure of the old-man-god in the clouds, with his attendant devil, we can tranquilly cultivate the one real religion—the religion of humanity—how we may best labour to promote the happiness and alleviate the woes of mankind.”

Here the impious vision ended, and, springing to my feet, I devoutly crossed myself, exclaiming, “*Anathema maranatha!*”

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS.

I AM quite aware of the mode in which the sacerdotalists deal with the promise and prophecy of Jesus that he would return in glory before that generation passed away. I know how, by a little hanky-panky, they deftly convert that terrible difficulty, that (one might have supposed) crushing disaster into a brilliant sham victory, with endless sham jubulations. But only sham, indeed. For it is simply not true that the Greek word *genea*, correctly rendered in the English version "generation," ever elsewhere bears the meaning of a "people" or "nation." No, Sir—not in any Greek work extant—not in any Greek passage that can be found and quoted. Consult the highest Greek authority you can find, and (if he be not pledged to falsification by his *métier*) I think he will tell you that in no context elsewhere does *genea* signify anything but a generation of man. Most assuredly the companions and immediate followers of Jesus understood that he had pledged himself to return before all who stood about him had tasted of death. Were they not as likely as we to understand his meaning? Note, too, that in the passage (Matthew XXVI.) "*Hereafter* shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven," the precise meaning of the original Greek word is not *hereafter* but *immediately*.

Why, we should never have heard of Christianity but for the electrifying effect on the startled imaginations of the first converts produced by the positive announcement and daily expectation of the second advent and the end of all things. That was the sharp terror that gave first impetus to the new creed and set it rolling. At this time of day, however, it suits Christianists best to sing a palinode, and to *explain* that when Jesus said he would return before the death of that generation, while those about him were still alive, and immediately, he really only meant, "before the Jews ceased to exist as a separate people." And thereupon they burst into a gushing enthusiasm over the wonderful fulfilment of the word of our Lord. "Behold, say they, the unparalleled fact, the grand unmistakable miracle of the continued existence of the Jews as a separate people, though scattered among all nations. They are a crushing evidence of the truth of Christianity and a continued pledge that the Lord Jesus is coming again." (By the way, former Christians thought it the holy thing to try to exterminate them.) Securely clothed inside and out with self-deceit, they say all this and much more without blushing, without winking, in the face of the precisely parallel (miraculous?) facts—of the Parsees or Zorastrians of Persia, scattered for some 1200 years among all the nations of India, yet keeping themselves as a distinct people even more rigidly than the Jews—of the gipsies, probably for nearly a thousand years—and, more remarkable than all, of the aucthonic aborigines of India, the Bhuls, Gonds, etc., who still preserve themselves distinct, with all their immemorial rites and customs, though the overflowing of India by the Hindoos (Aryan, Indo-Germanic race) occurred in times prehistoric.

Note that against Jesus' unfortunate unfulfilled prophecies of his immediate return Christianists had begun to hedge as early as the date of

the writing of the gospel according to St. John (about A. D. 170), from which *all these predictions are carefully excluded*, and in which occurs that most unpleasantly prevaricating passage in chapter XXI. 20-23—too obviously and transparently designed to quibble away the disconcerting puzzle-priest difficulty that John, the last survivor of the apostles, was dead, all "Divine" promises to the contrary notwithstanding.

Some ingenious critics have defended the rendering of *genea* by "race" or "people" by appealing to the authority of our poet Pope, who, in his metaphrase of a passage in the Iliad (6th Book), has translated that word both "generation" and "race" thus:—

"Like leaves on trees the race of men is found,
Now green in youth, now withering on the ground;
Another race the following spring supplies,
They fall successive and successive rise;
So generations in their course decay,
So flourish these when those have passed away!"

Here, however, it is plain enough that Homer used and Pope understood the word in the sense of generation after generation, though the exigencies of English verse made the monosyllable "race" more convenient.

In any case, Alexander Pope was not Pope Alexander, and therefore not infallible.

Then, which of the Harmonists has been able to bridge over the well-known historical interval of ten years (*hiatus valde defensus!*) between the death of Herod and the birth of Jesus? Facts here seem too stubborn for them. For it is certain that St. Luke tells us that Jesus was born at the time of the taxing of Judea and Syria by the Roman Governor Cyrenius (or Quirinus). It is equally certain that after the death of Herod his son Archelaus reigned some nine years, when he was banished by the Imperial Government, those provinces definitely absorbed into the Roman Empire, and Cyrenius (see Josephus, Book 13, chap. i.) especially deputed from Rome to make registration of the people and their substance, and to put them under the general Imperial system of taxation. Josephus, the historian, who lived and wrote A. D. 37 to 97, and who was so intimately acquainted with all the minutiae of the affairs of Judea, had never heard of the remarkable event of the slaughter of the Innocents by a king who was dead ten years before the poor things could, as contemporaries of Jesus, have been born.

With regard to the so-called remarkable prophecy in Genesis XLIX. 10, the most eminent modern Hebrew critics have come to the conclusion that the word *Shiloh* means a *place*—a place of tranquillity, and that the correct rendering of the passage is "until Shiloh be come to, and to it shall the gathering of the people be."—*E.g.*, see Bunsen's (German) Bible for the people.

But after all, what folly it is to waste time and brain-power in so futile an occupation as minute verbal study of the legends of the old Jew semi-barbarians! What can it signify to us what they said, or wrote, or thought, with their poor undeveloped, uneducated minds?

The *primà facie* view of the Superstition has always been quite sufficient for me. If the Supreme Soul of the Universe had willed to speak to us externally, otherwise than through our own nature, it is incredible that He would have sent us his Divine message in a hole-and-corner manner, from out of very dark places in very dark days—or through the medium of miserable savages wandering through Arabian deserts, or of unlettered Jew paupers in Palestine, or of human manuscripts. Or that He would have spoken to one generation, and then have left the report of the rumour of his having spoken to be filtered down through thousands of succeeding generations until, by the ever-deepening mists left by the lapse of time and the imperfection of the very nature of human testimony, any semblance or trustworthiness that the report might have had should be gradually obscured and obliterated. Or that the reported Divine message should have been full of self-contradictions, absurdities, incredibilities, mistakes, misstatements, and

gross immoralities, and altogether of so vague, grotesque and unintelligible a nature as to be capable of bearing a thousand different interpretations, and so ill adapted to its intended effect as to have failed to have the slightest influence on the vast majority of mankind. Why, any so-called Divine message is self-condemned by the very fact of its being possible to question its authenticity.

But for one thing the wonder would ever grow that so many men of strong, sound, cultivated minds, and, in all other respects of logical habits of thought, should habitually become utterly fatuous, irrational, and imbecile, the moment there falls upon them the glamour of the gruesome Idol of Bibliolatry. And that one thing that solves the marvel is a due appreciation of the enormous influence over the dawning intellect of each individual man of the credulous, uncritical (or rather, imperfectly educated) female mind. Naturally, our childish minds are first moulded by our mothers and nurses, who press them in a particular shape. And but a few have sufficient innate strength to recover from the cramp and spring into natural form. So it comes to pass that so many strong fellows never get out into the light of day, but remain ever groping and wandering and puzzling among the gloomy, mouldering cloisters of a crumbling fetish; a fetish which always seems moribund, but still not to be utterly exploded while men continue to keep an esoteric doctrine of intellectual freedom and rationalism for themselves and an exoteric doctrine of Old Mother Hubbard and spiritual moonshine for the women. As it is, it is only by the women that all the churches are upheld. Priests and parsons are right in cultivating them so sedulously.

We crusaders of the nineteenth century against the infidels—"The Pagans suckled in a creed outworn"—who deny the gospel of science, will never achieve our triumph, we shall never finally hurl down the grim idol of supernaturalism until we popularise the inner and profounder thoughts of the scientific mind, and reveal them to the people at large, in language they can understand; until, no longer limited as an esoteric doctrine to the coterie of the highly educated few, something of the spirit of science be made to penetrate the masses. We can never cast down this Dagon so long as the popular mind is still clutched fast by the implicit conviction that whatever else may be doubtful, it is at least certain that there must have been *one* set of miracles and of special acts of divine creative power when organic life—that is, when tree, beast and man—appeared on earth. Here is the very root of the matter—which must be grubbed up.

For, one miracle granted, what bounds to the miraculous? One breach of the absolute reign of natural law, and at a stroke the reign of law is abrogated.

At present the popular mind is wholly unconscious of the fact that no such idea of sudden and violent creation is ever entertained by men of science—by any holding rank in the vanguard of thought. They hold—and this is what we phalathists must strive to pierce the stolid general mind with, by pegging away with incessant iteration, in plain phrases—they, the men of advanced thought, all hold that nothing has come to pass, *per saltum*, by sudden jump, but that all things have ever been, as now, governed by orderly and immutable physical law; slow, gradual working through aeons of ages; that organic life as it is now is the result of evolution and development—of evolution in humblest forms, out of the inorganic elements by natural processes, and development gradual through enormous periods from those first low types.

To use a metaphor—halting and imperfect indeed, yet roughly serving the turn—as we know that oxygen and hydrogen, mingled in certain proportions, filled by an electric spark, vanish, coalescing into an equal weight of water, so we hypothesize that certain other inorganic matters in combination,

under the stimulus of some force—it may be of magnetic currents in ocean depths—coalesce into protoplasm, the basis of physical life.

The theories of development, variation and natural selection, roughly explain the rest. Says Darwin (Descent of Man, vol. II, 385), "The main conclusion arrived at in this work is that man is descended from some less highly organised form. The grounds on which this conclusion rests *will never be shaken*, for the close similarity between man and the lower animals in embryonic development, as well as in innumerable points of structure and constitution, both of high and of the most trifling importance—the rudiments which he retains, and the abnormal reversions to which he is occasionally liable—are facts which cannot be disputed. They have long been known, but until recently they told us nothing with respect to the origin of man. Now, when viewed by the light of our knowledge of the whole organic world, their meaning is unmistakable. The great principle of evolution stands up clear and firm when these groups of facts are considered in connection with others, such as the mutual affinities of the members of the same group, their geographical distribution in past and present times, and their geological succession. It is incredible that all these facts should speak falsely. *He who is not content to look, like a savage, at the phenomena of nature as disconnected, cannot any longer believe that man is the work of a separate act of creation.*"

Among men in any degree imbued with the noble, because truthful, spirit of modern science, no other theory is tenable, tolerable, possible than that of the derivation of man from lower animal types, and through them in series long-drawn-out from the humblest organic forms, and thence from the inorganic elements. It may indeed be affirmed that there is no other competing theory now extant. For the fantastic goblin MIRACLE has been chased before the growing light of Science, as vanishes some poor clown's terror-drawn ghost before the realistic brightness of the morning.

To him whose mistaken human pride still fights against this theory, two or three questions may be propounded: From what has he himself, as an individual, been derived? Has he not been developed from a minute germinal vesicle, from a minute ovule? an ovule in no respect distinguishable from that of any other mammal? Is it not an indisputable fact that in his embryonic stages he has progressively assumed the form of a fish, of an amphibian, of a dog, of a monkey? If such a past career be not degrading to the individual, why so to the species?

To belong to an ever-improving and ascending series, or to the degenerate progeny of perfect parents—which is the more cheering and ennobling view? In all nature we believe that there never have been any sudden, miraculous—that is, *unnatural* creations, nor any events not growing naturally out of their antecedents.

All the processes of nature resemble what we understand by the word *growing*. Black Topsy's blanky ignorant theory of her own existence—"Guess I grow'd"—is the summary of all that the highest knowledge and the profoundest thought can teach us. We bud out of the earth, we are it; efflorescence. The inorganic world teems forth organic life at every pore; of most probably the process of so-called creation still goes on even to-day, of which the not unfrequent appearance of new forms of insect blights and fungoids may be a token.

Says Shelley:—"Infinity within, infinity without, belie creation." Recognising that there is nothing strictly logical in the objection, nevertheless I have always felt some immense force in it. Look at the infinity of minuteness! Consider how all the living tissues of all animals are pervaded by hosts of parasites, and the bodies of those parasites by their parasites. How

"Great fleas have less fleas,
And they other fleas to bite 'em,
And those fleas have their fleas,
And so ad infinitum.

Whether do such things seem to bear the impress of intelligent creation, or of a spontaneity of organisation in the inorganic ?

As, without definite boundary, the animal kingdom merges into the vegetable, so, doubtlessly, does the organic world into the inorganic. As we get more light, even to us does the distinction between those two worlds seem to lessen. We no longer regard the inorganic as inert matter ; we know there is no such thing as inert matter ; that all things are permitted by force ; that even a granite rock is in a violent state of force, and we begin to surmise that the force which pervades the universe is one and constant. If we must have a god, we may regard that force as god. But, different to our old anthropomorphic idols, a god without attributes conceivable by us. The views of philosophical materialists are, vulgarly, much misconstrued. We are wrongly interpreted to deny that there is anything in space but Matter-cum-Force. But if we so dogmatised about the Unknowable we should be no better than theologians. What we maintain is, that all phenomena whatsoever, of which the human mind is or can be cognizant, are the resultants of the molecular Forces of Matter. But surely we are not supposed to pretend that we know in the least what matter is. For all that Man can possibly know, Matter may be Divine—may be to us only a manifestation of a Divine Force filling Infinity. But such speculations are entirely beyond the limits of philosophic inquiry, and utterly futile and inane.

Contrariwise, for all we know, organic life may be the highest specialised outcome of Matter and Force.

The spring-blossoms on the tree of two thousand years growth are but slight and ephemeral things compared with the great trunk which bears them aloft, yet they are far superior to it, of higher and finer organisation, of more vivid activities, more nearly approaching to the state of consciousness.

As they are to the trunk, so may we be to the inorganic cosmos.

You maintain that you plainly discern throughout the physical world, especially in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, innumerable wonderful evidences of intelligent design ! My dear fellow, permit me to say that I think you here fall into the old, old logical error of mistaking inference for observation. What we really do see is, only innumerable and wonderful instances of the adaptation of things. That those adaptations are the product of design is what we cannot possibly see ; that would be merely a metaphysical and speculative inference which might or might not be true.

You say the inference is a good one, and quite the same as if one seeing a watch for the first time—and never having heard of a watch before—should infer that it was certainly the work of human hands and human intelligence. There I differ from you entirely ; it is not the same ; the two cases are in nowise parallel ; in the latter case you know for a certainty that man exists, and you have seen many other works which you experimentally know to be his ; and it is some analogy with his other known works that would lead you at once to recognise his handicraft in the watch.

But, in the other case, you don't know for a certainty, or at all, of the existence of God : at least you cannot assume his existence here, as that is just the theorem you are seeking to prove. To make the cases at all parallel, there ought to be many other worlds experimentally known to you to be made by God ; then, reasoning by analogy, you would have a right to say, I recognise here also the hand of the god who, I know, made those other worlds. But the mystery of the adaptations, which have the appearance of design, is part of the mystery of the universe, which is unique, and cannot be approached by any analogy, or by any comparison. No doubt these adaptations are marvellous, but more marvellous still would be our hitting, in the infinitude, upon their one real cause and true *raison d'être*.

It always strikes me as something very arrogant and presumptuous, to

assert that we can plainly discern the proofs of divine design ; it is rating the power of the human intellect too high, thus to claim for it the ability of sounding by the plummet of an inference the depths of the Infinite—Unknown. Rather let us be humble here, and call ourselves Agnostics.

This is a problem of which a conclusive solution is unattainable ; still one on which the human mind cannot easily cease to speculate. At present and provisionally, until we know more, we may accept the Darwinian—as of all theories—the most satisfactory. Any materialistic is better than a supernatural exegesis ; anything better than calling in the aid of a vague, indefinite *deus* whom we have to invent for the occasion.

As the light of knowledge has advanced, the boundary of the chaotic realm of the supernatural has ever been pushed back. Says Büchner (Man in the Present, Past and Future), "Every science, and especially every philosophy, that seeks reality instead of appearance, truth instead of pretence, *must necessarily be free from supernaturalism* ; otherwise it blocks up against itself the path to its end, the truth. As soon, then, as in a philosophic book the word "God" occurs, except in criticism or reference, one may confidently lay it aside ; in it will be found nothing capable of promoting the real progress of knowledge. In properly scientific works the word will be seldom met with ; for in scientific matters the word "God" is only another expression for our ignorance ; in like manner as are also on more special occasions the words 'vital force,' 'instinct,' 'soul,' etc." We may well believe that, were our knowledge absolute, the supernatural chimera would have vanished utterly into the inanities.

PRÆCIPUUM NATURE BONUM, MOER.—*Pliny.*

BUT how account for the fact that the idea of the immaterial soul, as distinct from the body and surviving it, has been conceived by all the people of the earth, by even the most barbarous tribes—otherwise than assuming it to be an intuition—a divinely-implanted intuition of the human mind ?

For the sake of argument, grant for a moment that, in point of fact, the soul is but an unreal figment ; still, I think, a little consideration will show you that the idea must, nevertheless, have arisen, necessarily and naturally, in the minds of men everywhere. The illusions of the senses, the hallucinations resulting from abnormal and distempered conditions of the brain and nervous system, would inevitably have given birth to it. If an uneducated man, suffering from fever, has the sensation of seeing his dead friend or foe standing by his couch—of seeing him as distinctly as ever he saw him in life, and of hearing, perhaps, his voice and his words—must not the conviction at once be borne in upon him, that after dissolution of the body man still continues to exist in some indefinable condition ? In his physiological ignorance, to what other conclusion could he come ? Then he relates his experiences and communicates his convictions to others ; others corroborate them from their own similar experiences ; the idea spreads, the dogma follows. On this dream-land basis has been reared the whole superstructure of the doctrine of a future life ; what other foundation for it can you suggest ? There is not only no proof, no evidence, but there can be none. All knowledge comes to us through the material organs of our senses, and by the reflections we make on what they teach us. It is impossible that any intimations of the immaterial should penetrate us through the portals of our material organs.

You know, they who are still in subjection to the Christian delusion, and the belief in divine messages and inspired papers, very generally admit, or assert, that the hope of eternal life depends wholly on the word of the Nazarene Jew. I think the opinion is common among them that he was the first to enunciate the doctrine ; though, of course, it existed among many nations, or all nations, hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years, before the date of the earliest Christian papers, which in

this respect did but emphasize popular opinions. Singularly enough, the old Hebrew scriptures contain nothing of the doctrine, but on the contrary, in many places, seem opposed to it. Still, there must have been some such idea among the old Hebrews, as among all other peoples in the world, for it springs naturally out of human infirmities. If you concede immortal souls to man, on what grounds can you refuse them to the ape, the dog, the horse, etc.? Do we differ from them in anything but our finer physical organisation and ampler development of brain?

There is the distinction that we have reason and they have not—is there? But I know you don't believe in that old-fashioned ignorant argument. Of course it is not true in its statement; the lower animals have their reasoning faculties as we have ours, but ours are transcendent in the ratio of our finer organisation and our ampler brain; there is no radical distinction, but only difference in degree. Have you ever heard any plausible answers to many questions such as this?—when a man is so far drowned that, unassisted, he would never move again, but, after an hour, or perhaps two, is restored to life by artificial means, what becomes of the soul in the interval of state which was virtually death? is the immortal soul, too, asphyxiated, or where is it? why can't it report on return to the body?

No doubt the prospect of immortality is very gratifying to human pride and human tenacity of life, and very consolatory to the bereaved in the hope of meeting again the lost loved ones. But, before all things the truth! Pleasant or unpleasant, give us the truth! Away with shams and unrealities and figments, however flattering they be! But let us inquire whether, upon the whole, the expectation of eternal life really makes mankind happier; does its consolation outweigh its oppression—the oppression it lays upon all our lives—of vague dread, distrust and avulsion? Were it possible to poll the real sentiments of mankind, do you think many would be found (besides a few enthusiasts and the impassioned by recent bereavement) who would not gladly forego their hope to get quit of their dread? who would not choose, had they free choice, rather to lie as the tree lies than chance a futurity of some undefinable, inconceivable mode of existence? Ask all your intimate friends, who are not too much encrusted with whitechokerism and Philistinism, to give you a conscientious answer, and they will reply, After life's fitful fever, let us lie as the tree lies! Why not? How can we really feel otherwise? How can we breathing terrestrials, children of our dear loveable and beloved mother earth, conceive of any existence away from her in the slightest degree desirable? Without our warm bodies, our passions, our appetites, our adventures—our struggles, or even our perils—without wooing, and marrying, and children, and home, and home-affections—without earth, ocean, air, and all their vicissitudes—without mountain and valley, and sea and cities—without loving, and eating and drinking, and riding and sailing! No! Better a thousand times to lie as the tree lies, than to exist sundered from all the surroundings we know and love. Remember the story of the old English farmer, whom, dying, the parson endeavoured to cheer with word-pictures of the joys and glories of heaven. "Ah! parson," said he, "all that you say about heaven is very fine and very true, no doubt—but, after all, Old England for my money!" That is the natural human sentiment—our dear earth or nothing—life as we know it, or nibility and dreamless peace! *Pax nobiscum.*

There is, upon the whole, an incompatibility between earthly happiness and the hope-with-fear of immortality. May not this incompatibility be in some measure a sign of its unveracity? But that is metaphysical moonshine, to be taken for what it is worth. But let us also further inquire whether it would be for the advantage of mankind that the doctrine of a Future State should be true.

"Divines" are perfectly correct in maintaining that there is no logical *via media* between accepting what they call Revelation on the one hand and the abandonment of the dogma of the Immortality of the Soul on the

other. Certainly there are no natural reasons (that are not merely fanciful) in favor of that theory—all natural reasons are emphatically opposed to it. If we accept it at all it must be on the basis of the so-called Revelation. Now what does this Revelation teach us? That we are lost, degraded, ruined creatures, born into the world and living in the world under a divine curse. As the grave is the ultimate receptacle destined for the human body, so a place of endless and unspeakable torment is the natural receptacle destined for the human soul. If this be true, then the wildest imaginings of the most savage creeds are as sunlight compared with the horrors of our situation. Yet a gleam of light (it is but a gleam) is suffered to penetrate to this our dreary prison, in which we are penned up like so many cattle waiting for the shambles. In virtue of a mysterious transaction in Judea, a certain number of persons will be "saved," that is to say, will not only be rescued from the general fate, but will exchange it for a condition of endless happiness. These Scriptures lay it down very clearly that the number of the saved will be extremely small, and that a vast majority of us are destined by the Creator (of the theologians) to a fate at which imagination stands aghast.

Now, it is certainly not for the advantage of mankind that the great bulk of us should be thus doomed to eternal perdition, while only a few spiritual aristocrats are nominated for eternal bliss. Therefore, it would not be to our advantage that, standing on the only possible basis on which it can stand, the doctrine of a future state should be true.—Q. E. D.

Even to wish it to be true is abominable. A sainted man, confident of his own election, wishing it to be true must be a monster of inhuman selfishness. For he wishes for his own eternal happiness bound up with the inevitable corollary or the eternal misery of nearly all the rest of our race. How he expects to be infinitely happy in the endless contemplation of the endless torments of the other billions of billions, including many of his own blood-relations, is hard to explain. Certainly some of us poor carnal unspiritual terrestrials are incapable of conceiving so grand a sublimity of cynical egotism.

Yet the "Divines" call upon us to hasten to embrace their "Revelation," seeing that the only other alternative is a "cold heart-withering negation too fearful to be contemplated!" Rather should the human heart expand with joy, and the human face glow with kindly gladness at having found sure relief from the crushing incubus of their accursed figments. For my part, I hope I am, above all else, a philanthropist, and I would do anything, sacrifice anything to help, *tant soit peu*, to bless my fellow men with the blessing of "cold negation."

Death has lost all its terrors when we know it to be nothing but Cessation—nothing but the extinction of Ego with the dissolution of the organism.

"That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast."—Eccles. III. 19.

Often have I thought how true an emblem of organic life is the great whirlwind-dust-column we frequently see solemnly stalking across the vast and arid Australian plains! Each is a specialised and individualised manifestation of force; each has a *corpus* constituted of particles which, ever as it marches, it assimilates and discards; a body, whose constituents are ever changing, upheld by a force preserving its identity and individuality. After a little while, the special differentiation of force ceases; the force flows away into the universal, and the dust falls back to the dust; the organisation has vanished—the column and the man have ceased for evermore!

Mind is but the product of organisation; thought but the music of the organism swept by the current of impressions, as the Æolian harp by the wind.

CAN we reckon up the whole theory of moral philosophy, and of the nature of the moral sentiments and conscience, within the compass of a page or two? Why not? Does the attempt seem presumptuous? No need that it should; the whole matter is one of the extremest commonsense simplicity, which has only been confounded by the admission into the question of the ever confounding element of supernaturalism—of phantasms and of spiritual moonshine.

Single copies of the tomes that have been written on this subject would freight a ship worthy to be one of the fleet which would be required to carry all the works on theology. That last mass of verbiage—what a subject for melancholy contemplation! All utterly inane and valueless, except as waste paper or manure for the fields! What hundreds of thousands of fine intellects—naturally fine, but distorted by superstition—have earnestly and fervently wasted all the bright days of their poor lives, and all the energies of their good brains, in endeavouring to

"distinguish and divide,
Hairs betwixt South and South-west-side!"

The hairs, alas! not being real and substantial hairs, but merely the shadowy etchings of dreams.

The moral law, as conceived by man, is purely subjective, relative to his own welfare; there is nothing in it mysterious, spiritual or divine; it is built on the material basis of self-preservation—on the well-being of self, or of our race. We call all moral actions in which the principal involved is such, according to our judgment, as to tend to promote the well-being of mankind, good or virtuous—all moral actions springing from a principle, as we judge, of an opposite character, bad or vicious. This is the concise but perfect definition of virtue and vice, of good and evil, as seen from the human standpoint; this is the formula by which the merit or demerit of all moral actions is tested. The desire of approbation, of being praised and liked by our fellows, and the desire of being respected and feared by our enemies, contained the first germs, the sufficing roots of all the moral feelings. Not a jot is there of the miraculous in conscience, or the so-called moral sense—that sense which seems to tell us instantaneously, without need of appeal to reason, that this action is good, that action vicious. Much the sacerdotalists and superstitionists have made of this faculty of quick discrimination between good and evil, parading it ever as a divinely-implanted intuition. Long and wordy has been the battle between the intuitionists and the derivativists (such are the hard words the metaphysicians use). But now we may safely regard the intuitive school as become merely an historical memorandum, or, if it still anywhere survive, it is only in the fusty regions of priestly and senile old-fogeyism.

That so-called instinctive sense is derived partly from infantile impressions and partly from inherited memory. Just as the wonderful habits of the animals—usually vaguely called instinctive—are but due to the inherited remembrances of the experiences of millions of ancestral generations; so the human brain, subjected, generation after generation, to certain vivid moral impressions, acquires a modification which becomes hereditarily transmittable.

Other cerebral impressions there are, which plainly become hereditary—notably, proneness to superstition, and an abnormal facility of accepting particular forms of superstition, which, though *primâ facie* absurd and incredible, have nevertheless been believed in by a long train of unenlightened ancestry. This instantaneously-acting moral sense is, among the children of an average orderly and not uncivilised ancestry, a generally safe guide. But in other cases it is so unreliable, so varying, so grotesque, and so obviously subjective to human conditions and environments, that it is marvellous how any could have deemed it a divinely-implanted rule of conduct. It does not tell the young bandit-born that it is wrong to pillage and murder the people—only that cowardice and treachery to the band

are heinous crimes. It tells the American Indian that it is meritorious and praiseworthy to tomahawk and scalp all who belong to other tribes than his own, and to torture his prisoners—that cowardice and treachery, within or against his tribe, are the only crimes. It does not tell the Hindoo that it is wrong to burn widows, nor a Thug that there is any moral delinquency in strangling the non-Thugs—nor priests that it is not good to burn those whose doxy is not their doxy. But one might fill volumes with instances of the diverse and perverse teachings of the "innate moral sense"—while among the children of the hereditary criminal classes, it is simply non-existent, a fact which makes the reclamation of them so difficult.

Educated intellect is the only trustworthy arbiter of right and wrong. It is for the Reason, cultivated and experienced, to decide whether any given class of moral actions is of such a nature as to be beneficial or prejudicial to man. Nor does she give uncertain responses; very clear she makes it, that if we would that this our world should be for us a habitable and not unhappy abode, our rule of life must be perfect probity, honesty and honour, truthfulness and trustworthiness; kindly, gentle, cheerful, sympathetic consideration for others; courage and vigor in the resistance and suppression of evil; and sternness, tempted by mercy, in dealing with evil-doers.

And though the rules of intersexual ethics are, naturally, allowably conventional and shifting, varying with time, place, social status and circumstances, yet one unmitigable law governs through every phase—to refrain from any act likely to be productive of misery to others.*

I DON'T think we educated sons of educated fathers and forefathers sufficiently realise the enormous mental disparity between ourselves and the uneducated descendants of forefathers from the beginning of things uneducated.

It requires some thoughtful study, much inquiry, questioning and probing, to arrive at any just conception of their to-us-strange mental incapacity and impotence—of their lack of all the higher intellectual powers, especially of the logical faculty, and of all the capability of discriminating between the probable and the improbable, the possible and the impossible, the natural and the preternatural.

The reasoning level of the average uneducated adult so descended is probably scarcely as high as yours and mine was at seven or eight.

What a huge pity it seems to be that this important fact of the mental ineptitude of the unimproved is so generally overlooked, or insufficiently appreciated—when we consider that it has always been exclusively among such that every religion has first arisen! It was only poor twilight-blinking creatures of that sort before whom Joe Smith, Mahomet, Jesus and Moses appeared.

Of people in that crystalic mental stage, the observations, the inferences, opinions and reports, are simply valueless—of no importance whatever. They can't understand what they see and hear, nor correctly report what they fancy they see and hear.

When we were children of seven or eight years, had some individual appeared to us of commanding stature, of singularly majestic and heroic presence, of unusual melodiousness of voice (as we know Joe Smith was, and may assume the others were), and had he asserted himself to be the Prophet, or the Son of God, or God himself, should we not probably have

* I may assume that my readers are above the childish illogicality of objecting against the assertion of the subjectivity and absolute relativity to ourselves of the moral feelings, our revolting against cruelty to the lower animals, and our sympathising with their sufferings. The answer to such objections is obvious—that in any deed of cruelty we see in action one of the principles which we most dread, and that our sympathy is due to the imagination putting us in the place of the sufferers.

For the clearest exposition of the mode in which the moral sense has been derived from the social or gregarious instincts, consult Darwin's "Descent of Man."

implicitly believed him, if left to ourselves, with none more enlightened around us? Just so; and not a whit wiser were the other first converts.

I know, of my own knowledge, of whole races of people whose mental development is yet in so rudimental a stage, that not unfrequently they lack the power of distinguishing between their own dreams and actual events.

When, in some far out-lying parts of Australia, I was first thrown into association with the aborigines, I was much surprised at the utter disregard with which reports made by them to us were often received by the old hands among us. "Why," I would say, "don't you hear what these blacks report?" "Oh," the reply would be, "we knows 'em! what they says goes in at one ear and out at t' other with us—they are such infernal liars!" "But," I would remonstrate, "they can have no possible interest in palming this story off on us, if it is false." "That says nothing," an old hand would answer, "nobody can tell why, or how, they invent their lying yarns—seems to me they somehow believes 'em theirselves—you see, sir, they are not quite the same as human beings, and no one can make out their ways."

One time, some of the blacks belonging to the station, friendly and under protection, came to me to report a terrible event that had just occurred at a station about forty miles away, at which there were three white men. Two of them, they said, had been surprised and murdered by bush-blacks, and the third was defending himself inside the slab-hut, and had shot many of the assailants—many details were added. We could not learn from them exactly how they had heard all this, but were not surprised at that, knowing that there were bush telegraphs, about whom they did not wish us to know anything, between our quiet station-blacks and others who were out in the bush and inclined to be hostile. On the strength of this narration, three of us rode over to the beleaguered station. There was not the slightest foundation for the report—no disturbance whatever had occurred!

On my return, I investigated the origin of the fable as closely as I could, and came to the conclusion that a woman in the camp had dreamt it, and given it out as fact to the others, who had implicitly accepted it.

Often afterwards, comparing notes on this subject with other experienced bushmen, I found they all agreed that such cases were common.

Lately I read in the papers of an expedition which, somewhere in South Australia, had been sent four hundred miles out to some place in the desert, where the blacks reported there were white men with large herds of cattle. Of course, when they got there there was no sign that hoof had pressed the ground since the ground was formed. Had those South Australians known the niggers as well as I do, they would not have troubled themselves. So with all the aborigines' reports about Leichhardt—utterly valueless.

It never necessarily follows, in these cases that the natives are wilfully lying, or that they don't really believe what they say, but the origin of their belief may always be in some dream. Their waking and mental states get jumbled up, and what anyone among them positively affirms, all the rest will believe, no proof required.

Think you, that the barbarous Hebrews, of Mosaic times, were not like these people—just about in the same mental stage? Or that the Jew paupers who were Christ's witnesses were any better?

For my part, of the three lots, I would soonest believe our own niggers, just because they are extant, and not dead two or three thousand years ago.

"INSOMNIA VANA VALETE."

CONSIDER what was man's conception of the surrounding universe in the days of Eld, when the Idea summed up in the word God first sprang up in

his bewildered darkling brain! A conception from immediate optical sensation! To him the Earth was the material universe. It was a plane, arched over by the "firmament," a solid blue crystal vault, above which was the natural abode of the anthropoid Gods, and through which they could at will glide down to Earth. Beneath this vault the Sun, Moon, and Stars, lamps devised by God for the benefit of terrestrials, were daily and nightly driven across by his hand, extinguished under the western horizon and theurgised back to the Orient. With his own hand he rolled the thunder and smote with the lightning. Eclipses and Comets were signals of the breaking out of his capricious fury against his creatures. The rainbow was a token that multiplicity of business had not caused him to forget a solemn treaty he had made with man. All environing phenomena were the immediate acts of Gods or Demons; under foot, beneath the plane of the Earth, was a suitable locality for Hades. Had it been patent to primeval man that the Earth was but a speck of dust dancing round an insignificant star, itself waltzing among infinite millions of other stars—that there is really no Above and no Below, that when we close our hands and cast our eyes up to heaven, we are looking towards a point which in twelve hours will be under our feet, and are at the same time, relatively to our Antipodeans, in the position of looking downwards—that there is no firmament, nor heaven just above our heads, but infinite space everywhere—nothing below but our Antipodean friends—that we are, in fact, but parasites on a little globular grain of matter—had these cosmical facts been patent to man in primeval times, probably none of those baseless dreams called Religions would ever have tortured poor Humanity.

In point of plain logic Copernicus and Galileo destroyed religion. Human stupidity resists long, but yields at last.

We may say that not only is every religion a delusion, but that the religious feeling itself is but a barbaric emotion of wonder, unworthy of adult man.

You don't doubt the word of God? The man was never born who could doubt the word of God. But the question is—what is the word of God? You say it is contained in this book. I ask, what PRIOR knowledge had you of God—what PREVIOUS intimacy existed between you and God to authorise you thus positively to authenticate these as his writings—these as his sentiments? Was he really A, your familiar friend? Or is he not rather the unknown X for ever and ever? Is it even competent to the Human Mind to discover whether He be indeed an Objective Reality, or only a Subjective Idea? You say the internal evidence of this book convinces you, everything it contains being entirely consonant with your idea of God. But then you will in fairness concede that you are not everybody. For instance, here am I, to whose conception of what God may be this book is in most violent dissonance and oppugance.

SAID a friend to me, "Against our making any active strenuous exertion to spread over the general world the Free-thought-light to which we ourselves have attained, there are two reasons which appear to me sufficing. First, that such effort would be unsuccessful, the time not being ripe; next, that in the subsisting low mental status of the people the Light would be even more hurtful than their old gross superstitions. Man is very young yet; civilisation is only dawning. The people think themselves finely educated, but in all capacity for logical thought their progress is imperceptible. Prove to them by the most crystalline logic that their Holy Things are but Mumbo-Jumboes—what use? they would stolidly stick to their Mumbo-Jumboes all the same—for they are only in the Fetish stage of mental evolution. Vain the attempt to disabuse them of Mumbo-Jumbo! And

for the few minds capable of assimilating the logic, still what use? Where would be found the courage to fly in the face of Extreme Respectability and his spouse Mrs. Grundy? For one more half-century let the majority of the people continue to be driven by the priests, with winks, bit and rein, until the numbers that can be so driven be reduced to minority by the gradual trickling-in of better sense, by thousands of little runlets. For you and me, with our culture and our philosophy, the emancipation from all Supernaturalism is our glory and our greatest happiness. But there can be no doubt that Freethought should ever go hand-in-hand with Culture. I think that by working against Superstition quietly and privately, but diligently, each of us may do a duty sufficing for the present day."

"Your words, my friend," I replied, "are largely the words of wisdom. No more than you, wish I for any speedy bouleversement. But I think we ought to be more active in hastening the trickling of the runlets of Truth-shine. My idiosyncrasy differs from yours, in being more coarsely honest, more bluntly earnest. I take for my motto—TRUTH IS THE ONE SACROSANCT; and all complacency for, or complicity with, Falseness is extremely repugnant to me. Though Man can never attain to the Truth Absolute, he can still keep on drawing nearer and nearer to her. And he must hew down or uproot the obstructing Falsities in his endeavours
To narrow the realm of the False and the Vain."

FINIS.

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