

## ARTICLE IV.

## RECENT QUESTIONS OF UNBELIEF.

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NEVER, since the crucifixion, has the religion of Christ, in its purest forms, had a stronger hold on the popular heart than at this day. But at no time has it been assailed with such variety and persistency of argument for its overthrow as during the hundred years just passed, nor in our own country as during the present century. Within the last fifteen or twenty years, especially, every department of knowledge has been solicited, both here and abroad, to bear witness against it. Even intelligent men, from whom we might have expected more wisdom, if not piety, led away by what the apostle has designated "science, falsely so called," and by "philosophy and vain deceit," have, in some instances, surrendered Christian hopes, and embraced a scepticism as terrible as it is unreasonable. The spirit of doubt has been extensively infused into the popular literature of the day; and a romantic semblance of Deity has been substituted in it, to an alarming degree, for the great personal God our Father. These seductive influences have shaken the faith of many who know little of the sources from which their misgivings were derived.

While the unlettered disciple of Jesus, besides that great witness which he has within himself, needs have no fear lest the argument for infidelity should be too powerful—even on the plane of the natural understanding—for the argument which defends the cross, intelligent men, under such circumstances, have a mission, not only to stand with firmness in their own constancy, but to protect and strengthen the weak; beating down antichristian opposition with the weapons of just reasoning and the wisdom of Christ.

We propose a few remarks on the Recent Questions of

Unbelief. We must premise, however, that they so overlap, intermingle, and complicate themselves with each other, that any perfect classification of them, chronologically considered, would be impossible. At the same time, we may hope to set them forth with sufficient exactness for the purpose now in view, by arranging them according to their degrees; beginning with the less formidable, and proceeding to those which leave us nothing but the blackness of darkness, instead of our old religious lights.

The first form of unbelief may be called a question of *interpretation*. It admits that Christianity is a supernatural religion; that Christ himself, in a high, mysterious, supernatural sense, is the Son of God; that the Bible, at least the New Testament, is a supernatural revelation. But it endeavors to eliminate from the record, by means of criticism and interpretation, all those principles which are distinctly evangelical. While it admits miracles, especially the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, it reduces the supernatural to the lowest possible degree, as expressed in them, and endeavors so to explain the text that the doctrines of the divinity of Christ, his incarnation as God in man, his expiation for sin, the personal divinity of the Holy Spirit, supernatural regeneration, justification only by faith, and all the kindred doctrines usually denominated "evangelical," shall not be found in it. This early opposition to the old orthodoxy of the fathers was sometimes, in the heat of conflict, denominated infidelity. But it was not infidelity, according to any received usage of the term. Though far enough from being the Christianity of the New Testament, it was still further from that absolute infidelity which rejects miracles and everything supernatural in the religion of Christ. It had pressed its explanatory and apologetic criticism far on towards the slippery and perilous edge of that abyss which separates it from infidelity, and from which many in its front ranks were soon seen plunging down to be engulfed; but still it was not infidelity. It had accepted miracles; it held strongly, at least with one hand, upon the New Testa-

ment as an authoritative revelation, and containing the pledges of a future life. But, at the same time, it rejected nearly the whole of that great system of Christian doctrine which the church, in the grand current and sweep of its faith, has always received. Of this form of unbelief it may be said: first, that its adherents have always been comparatively few. Common Christians could not find its negations in their Bible. Of the educated, only a small number ever ventured, by continuous commentary or explanation of whole books, to interpret the New Testament according to it. It sustained itself chiefly by objections and sceptical generalities. The notion of various readings, spurious interpolations, preconceived improbabilities, and consequently possible explanations through emendations, conjectures, and severe straining of the text, satisfactory almost to no one, formed the staple of its protest. In the second place, the foremost minds in this form of unbelief, those who dared to follow such principles to their logical conclusions, soon came to reject this method of interpretation altogether, as unsatisfactory and not radical enough to meet the facts of the case or the ends in view. Progressive minds in Germany, England, and America have generally long since given it up. It is now, for the most part, conceded that, whatever may be said of Christianity as a supernatural religion, it must be acknowledged that the New Testament as it stands teaches both it and the system of connected doctrines which the church has generally believed. We shall probably be opposed by comparatively few intelligent persons, when we assert that the system of interpretation here described is obsolete, and that the semi-rationalism which prevailed in New England forty or more years ago, and in Germany near the close of the last century, is essentially dead. Indeed, the idea of retaining the Bible as of supernatural authority, and of excluding the main features of the evangelical system from it, is hopeless and absurd. It would be like an attempt to explain Homer with the Trojan war left out, or construct a planetary system of astronomy with no place in it for the sun.

The second question of unbelief, nearly allied to the former, and complicated with it, is a question of *inspiration*. It combats this thesis: "Holy men of old composed the sacred scriptures, as they were moved thereto by the Holy Spirit." It most generally admits the fact of a supernatural revelation once given, but totally denies that our biblical writings came to us under the sanction of divine authority. The Old and New Testaments are merely human and very imperfect records of *some things* divinely communicated, which the authors of our books were able to remember and put down, but with their own imperfect apprehensions of these things, and their still more imperfect comments upon them. We are, therefore, in forming our judgments as to what is truth, to consider the credibility of the biblical statements, their probability and reasonableness, and accept what accords with our notions, and reject the rest. Hence, while we may receive many things contained in the Bible, since they are confirmed by our intuitions or by our reasonings and what may seem to us likely, we cannot select a single passage of scripture, and say of it: This was certainly from God, and was rightly recorded. The consequences of such a position were as might have been expected. Many of the sketches, narratives, statements, particularly of the Old Testament; many views of God, actions directed or sanctioned by him under the first dispensation; and several doctrines of the gospel, particularly the Trinity, the atonement, and the eternal punishment of the wicked, judged by the standard of what is called human reason, it pronounced false.

To all this it was answered, first, that, on mere rationalistic grounds, many of the objections to specific passages and accounts, when these passages and accounts come to be carefully examined, disappear. This statement holds good all the way from Paulus to Colenso, and those who follow. Rightly considered, the objections are not there. Secondly, the number and weight of objections not thus disposed of are much further reduced by correcting the idea of inspiration which scepticism attributes to believers in the scriptures,

and which some believers to a certain extent have, in former times, justified. When it is remembered that "the Bible was written by men and for men," that it was written in human language by persons who expressed their thoughts each in his own manner, that it was written, not for purposes of scientific accuracy or information, but simply for the communication to man of a divine standard of faith and practice, most of these remaining objections also disappear.

As to the doctrines of the New Testament, it was answered, that the human mind is not competent to decide in such cases, beforehand, what principles and facts God would reveal. Indeed, the very necessity for a revelation arises chiefly from the incompetency of man to discover its truths unhelped. Moreover, the doctrines in question have been examined and accepted by minds at least as strong as those who have examined and rejected them, and no such contradiction to the reason of the former has been discovered in them. They ought not, therefore, to be put down as certainly contrary to reason. But the principle of unbelief in question does not usually extend to a total rejection of the supernatural in religion. It more commonly accepts the Christian miracles, or, at least, some of them. Most of all, it accepts the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and by logical necessity, therefore, accepts enough of revelation to make the Bible, at least the New Testament, our highest rule of faith and practice. Indeed, few Biblical scholars at this day would venture to reject most of the received doctrines of the church on the mere ground of imperfect inspiration. Christianity will stand in all its leading features, as set forth in our sacred books and heretofore believed in the church, unless some more radical question than this should destroy it. We must totally reject the fact of a truly divine revelation, the Christian miracles, the supernatural in religion; or the necessities of probable reasoning will bring us back to a reception again of that very evangelical system of faith which the doctrine of imperfect inspiration was expected to overthrow. In short, give us

the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and we are sure of our Christianity as from God. This second question, which we have called a question of inspiration, is quite an advance on the downward plane of scepticism upon the first—the question of interpretation. Both views, however, were for a long period held together within the limits of the same traditional supernaturalism and veneration. But even the denial of inspiration and the reliability of our scriptures was not total infidelity; though it approached fearfully near to it. There is an immense difference between the acceptance of the supernatural in our Christianity and the denial of it. Besides this, unbelief has gained almost nothing in its favor, so long as one allows that our Bible contains a true revelation, however intermixed and corrupted in its transmission. One might dispense with all the texts about which there is, or is imagined to be, the least possible question, and proceed to the sacrifice of entire chapters, and even books; and the great temple of truth, in its perfect proportions, would still remain without a single column broken.

Before passing from these two questions of unbelief, it will be proper to notice a peculiar form under which both of them sometimes appeared. It might be called Indifferentism. It neither exactly accepted, nor exactly denied, the old methods of interpretation, the old doctrine of inspiration, or the accepted doctrines of the church; but passed them all by as unimportant. Dr. Porter, of Roxbury, in a sermon preached before the convention of Massachusetts ministers, in 1810, expressed the spirit of deteriorated Lutheranism in Germany, and a miscalled Arminianism in New England, as it had existed and been increasing at least since the Revolutionary War. His subject was "Christian Simplicity." After mentioning several doctrines, such as "original sin, a Trinity in unity, the mere humanity, super-angelic nature, or absolute Deity of Christ, and the absolute eternity of punishment," he says: "My individual belief in respect to the truth or error of these points can be of but little importance, and my subject no way requires that it should be

given. It rather becomes me to follow the example which has been sometimes set by learned judges on the bench, when difficult questions suggested themselves, but whose decision the main subject before them did not require, and prudently say: 'Neque teneo, neque repello.' But it is pertinent to the object of this discourse, and consonant to my serious and deliberate conviction, to observe, that I cannot place my finger on any one article in the list of doctrines just mentioned, the belief or rejection of which I consider as essential to the Christian faith or character."

The third question of unbelief is a question of *revelation*. Thus far the conflict has gone on within the limits of a professed loyalty to Christ. Many of the older Unitarians regarded the returning Deism of the preceding century with unfeigned disapproval. And it is no more than justice to say of their historical, though not perhaps logical, successors, that they are earnest believers in the superhuman Jesus, and regard with feelings approaching horror the idea of a Christianity with Christ left out; and, moreover, that the difference between them and those who are called evangelical believers dwindles down to an infinitesimal, compared with the awful gulf which lies between them and the other wing of their own denomination. In our third question we cross the gulf. Is there a revelation? This form of unbelief answers: No. It starts with the underlying assumption that a miracle is an impossibility, or, at least, that the fact of miracle has never been proved. The historical evidence, therefore, usually adduced in favor of Christianity, is rejected. But how? The testimony in support of the Christian miracles is acknowledged to be strong. For the establishment of any common fact in history it would be abundant and superabundant. The direct testimony of eye-witnesses, so situated that they could not be deceived,—of men who give every possible indication of competent intelligence, candor, and honesty, who attest the truth of their conviction by immense labors and the sacrifice of their lives,—demonstrate, if any such evidence can demonstrate, the

reality of the facts which they declare. The wonderful importance of the revelations which these miracles were wrought to confirm ; their adaptation, carried out into sublime effect, to regenerate spiritually individuals and masses of mankind ; the character of the Author of the religion, which, if he wrought no miracles, is itself a miracle ; the church, or kingdom of God on earth, built upon him, or by his influence — these and numberless collateral evidences concentrate upon the Christian miracles a more powerful proof than can be brought to sustain any other equally ancient events. No person would think of disputing the reality of them in consequence of any defect of testimony, except from the foregone conclusion that miracles are impossible, or, at least, that no ordinary evidences, however strong, could certify us of their truth. Hence the problem of this form of unbelief — *to explain away the supernatural of Christianity*. It is not enough to array objections, to allege corruptions of the original text, to show, if show it could, that some of the records are unreliable. Here is the religion, the wonderful effects it has produced, the miraculous story it affirms, the seemingly supernatural character of its author, its inherent, irresistible, constantly disseminating power and progress. Here is the mighty lever which, beyond everything else, lifts up mankind. The religion comes to us, also, bringing its own explanations. It accounts historically for its existence, and for all the phenomena which attend it, on the principle of the supernatural. Unbelief, therefore, must yield, and accept Christianity as a supernatural religion, or explain it away. This, then, is its problem — to explain the existence of the New Testament, the existence of the church founded upon it, the existence and character of the author of it, the experiences and lives of his followers, on principles of ordinary history, without anything of the supernatural connected with it.

In attempting to solve this problem, the existence of Christ, and his crucifixion in the time of Tiberius Caesar, his remarkable, elevated, noble character, his belief in, or

pretension to, something supernaturally divine in himself, and his effort to found a religion, is necessarily admitted. So is also the fact that the New Testament records were made up and finished, essentially in their present form, in the early part of the second century, if not before the close of the first, and that the Christian church was built upon this religion, and the world has been revolutionized by it. All this must be allowed; but all miracle, all that is supernatural, the whole idea of Christ being more than man, must be explained away. Many have worked on this problem with great diligence and perseverance. A special attempt was made to solve it on the theory of myths. The writers exaggerate facts, or romance them out of their imaginations, or record what was thus exaggerated or romanced by others; not exactly intending to deceive, nor hardly conscious that they were expressing feelings and fancies in forms of truth. In this manner Strauss attempted to explain nearly the whole of the New Testament religion. Narrative, doctrine, miracle, and all the true greatness of Christ's person went down before him.

But, notwithstanding these ruthless criticisms, the character of Christ so stands out in glory, with all the world wondering about it; the religion is so full in every presentation of it, and so completely implied in all the various records and exhibitions of it; the witnesses are so numerous and unimpeachable in bearing testimony to it; and such a great kingdom of light and love has been built upon it, that very little impression has been made upon the uneducated or on the learned minds of its friends against it. While they have taken some trouble to answer the assailants, without a single doubt the faith of believers has only been strengthened by the attacks. Of Theodore Parker, however respected for his philanthropic efforts by many, it is not extravagant to say that, with considerable beauty of language and many noble sentiments and all the argument which he could command, his writings have made no impression upon evangelical scholars in the way of creating

alarm or misgiving. Renan's "Life of Jesus" hardly now deserves notice, except as a brilliant, but extinguished, vanity. For a time it made some impression, but is now regarded, even by the unbelievers, as hardly more than romance. Throwing out all miracle and everything supernatural in the Gospels, and reducing the Saviour of the world to a mere, though remarkable, man, this author's problem is to account for the wonderful story or stories recorded by the evangelists, and their still more wonderful exhibition of the character of Christ and the Christianity which he started, and which has overspread and overmastered the civilized world. Assuming the falsity of large portions of the fourth Gospel; more than insinuating the charge of dishonesty against the Apostle John; rejecting everything in the other evangelists which cannot easily be woven into his theory; resorting, in the case of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, to the absurd supposition that Jesus was himself deceived, or connived at a great imposition, and that Lazarus, feigning himself dead, wrapped himself in grave-clothes and came forth at the Master's call,— and all this because it was necessary to make the impression of supernatural power at that time, in order to overcome the growing opposition of the Jews at Jerusalem,— he seems to imagine that he has accounted sufficiently for Christ and his religion. His work, which is nothing less than a romance founded on certain facts in the life of Christ, has charms for some, and some may be bewildered in its delusions; but every wise man of Christian experience will only be confirmed in his faith by the utter shallowness, the total insufficiency, of this attempt to destroy it. The idea of lighted candles will not explain the stars, nor the supposition of a brass ball two feet in diameter explain the sun; but they are better explanations than Strauss and Renan and those who think with them have given of the religion of Christ.

The fourth question of unbelief is a question of *science*. Astronomy, geology, ethnology, and the science of organized beings generally, are set forth as giving testimonies incon-

sistent with the principles of natural and revealed religion. Science is thought to be infallible. Religion, therefore, must succumb to it.

More than two hundred years ago the whole Catholic church was thrown into convulsions by the astronomical discoveries of Galileo. They were considered as threatening the overthrow of the entire Bible. In this case the conclusions of science were fully sustained. But an improved intelligence as to the principles of interpretation brought about a natural and durable harmony between astronomy and revelation; and confidence in the Bible, instead of being destroyed, became stronger than ever. In our day, geology and the Book of Genesis have come into imagined contradiction. Paleontology, especially, is thought to be conclusively opposed to the Mosaic account of the creation. This, of course, believers in revelation deny; and they furnish plausible harmonies in answer to alleged disagreements, which, if not above question, are almost infinitely more probable than the idea of uninspired fable. But, without insisting on this position, if conclusions out of the opened volumes of the earth should finally be established in opposition to any which are usually drawn from the sacred scriptures, it now seems morally certain that, as in astronomy, so in geology and paleontology, a clearer insight into the real meaning and genius of the Bible would bring out harmony between the works and word of God. Ethnology, also, has boldly denied the Bible doctrine of the unity of the human race. But later theories of the creation, and the origin of species and organized being generally, confidently maintain that all the orders of living beings sprang from a very few original types, and perhaps from a single type. Hence the great argument for the diverse origin of the human races is so far from being conclusive that more thorough systems of scientific unbelief which have lately found favor, can secure converts only by renouncing it. We may say, then, with regard to the scriptures, that even on scientific grounds alone there is no reason for supposing

that the sciences in question can ever weaken their authority. The progress of science may require a better understanding of the principles, and some further modifications in the methods, of biblical interpretation. But we see not how it is possible for them to disturb the position that the sacred scriptures, properly understood, furnish a perfect, and the only perfect, rule of faith and practice.

The scriptures, it must be remembered, however, were not written to teach the sciences, but only to reveal religion. When the sciences, so called, shall prove themselves able to contradict successfully any of the great moral and religious principles of the Bible; and when it shall appear certain, after careful review, that those principles thus contradicted are in the Bible — then, but not till then, need we tremble for the ark of God.

But modern scepticism seeks to array the sciences against revelation in another way. It maintains that all processes in the universe are carried on by natural laws, and that miracles and the supernatural, being contradictory to them, are impossible. What is this but a new version of the oft-refuted sophism of Mr. Hume? It certainly begs the question. Its supporters say that natural laws are never suspended, and that nothing ever occurs except in accordance with them. But how do they know it? They answer: We have seen the constancy of nature's laws; but we have never seen them interrupted. Very well; you have never seen them interrupted; but does it follow that nothing has ever occurred in the universe except what you have seen? But again, if you have never seen the constancy of nature interrupted, you have seen many phenomena in nature which you cannot explain on any existing laws.

But suppose, for the sake of argument, it be granted that the Creator started the germs and processes of all things in the beginning, and rested forever? How is it known that, in his complicated arrangements, and with his infinite foresight and power, he did not make provision for all that we call supernatural — for miracle, for special providence, as

we designate acts, for answers to prayer? The truth is, men forget, in their mere natural studies, that there is a supernatural power — a living, infinite Being who created; that there is an infinitely intelligent, active Mind; and that there are minds, as well as matter, which he has called into being. In the study of mere natural laws they have no room for God to be, or to work, among them. But what! Did he create, and then enter into nothing? Has he, like Budh, after once existing, gone into nicban? But they say, all *science* is built on the constancy of nature's laws; and we could have no certainty in our inductions without such laws. But are none of nature's laws above our comprehension, and almost as much above it as the Christian miracles? And yet the study of science goes on. Indeed, miracles are so peculiar — so much above the common order of events, so exceptional — that, rightly regarded, they never can disturb the usual processes of nature or the conclusions of a rational science.

There have been attempts, powerful attempts, to prove by induction and inference that the universe as it now exists, with its myriads of starry globes, — the earth, with all its vegetable, animal, and rational forms of life, — is the result of development, through millions of ages, from some original, created or uncreated, unity. In other words, if there be, or was, a God, he has been totally inactive, so far as our earth is concerned, for countless millions of years. Without arguing the question at length, it may be sufficient, for the present, to say, first, that this theory, while in its scientific forms it does not deny the being of a God, has its logical, not to say well-understood, basis in pantheism. For once admit the being of a living, personal God, the original Creator of all things, and the groundwork of all this disbelief is destroyed.

Scientific scepticism, in these lines of non-belief, has totally failed in its attempt to destroy the grounds of natural and revealed religion. A sceptical writer, in full sympathy with Mr. Darwin's work on the Origin of Species, and

hailing it as a great discovery, no longer ago than 1860 — in an Article contained in the “Westminster Review” for that year — makes this remarkable concession: “Two years ago, in fact, the position of the supporters of the special creation hypothesis seemed more impregnable than ever, if not by its own inherent strength, at any rate by the obvious failure of all the attempts which had been made to carry it.” Up to that time, then, by the concession of high authority among the sceptical critics on the scientific side, science had totally failed in all its attempts to overthrow religion. Since that time, we have the treatises on the “Origin of Species.” But the journal just alluded to, while applauding the first of those works in the highest terms, and hoping that something decisive might be made out of it, was constrained to acknowledge, as every one must be, that the main propositions of the author had not been proved. While the doubters thus doubt, what reason have we for being disturbed as to the foundation of our faith, either in natural religion or revealed? On the contrary, the argument from science is not against a supernatural creation and government of the world, and of miracles.

But there is another form of scientific unbelief. We might almost call it a separate question of practical economy. Sustaining itself by the regular sequences of cause and effect, it consists in a simple abandonment of faith and all further inquiry respecting it. It says: Let us make the most of this world; we know nothing of another. And when conscience enters its loud protest against the recklessness and wickedness of this decision, a compromise is attempted with the higher nature thus outraged and outcrying, by implied pledges to live for the good of the race, whose only immortality is to be found in the endless succession of its generations on earth. It is a form of unbelief which, under able leaders, has taken powerful hold on the working classes of England. We refer, of course, to secularism, which means living for this world only. It is simply the old practical atheism of the human heart, and was sufficiently

answered by the Psalmist, three thousand years ago, when he said: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

Positivism, in all its forms, is necessarily inconclusive on the theistic question. In its observation of phenomena and generalizations deduced therefrom, it discovers no God; though on men generally phenomena have impressed the fact of his being. But, if it were true that the entire phenomena of the universe failed to evidence divine personality, nothing could thereby be established against the reality of the divine existence; for God might be, and might be proved to be, if phenomena did not witness, as they do, to the fact.

We must not pass this form of unbelief without notice of a recent phase of it, in Professor Huxley and his notions of protoplasm. By protoplasm, he of course means the primordial forms of life, and maintains that they are the actual, though material, basis of all life; the same in the animal and the vegetable, producing in us nervous forces and activities and thoughts. But does not this hypothesis assume, what it makes no progress in attempting to prove, that there is no higher element in man than protoplasmic cells? On his own ground, if all egg formations are originally alike, and develop differently, why may not similar protoplasm develop forces which are radically unlike? But on any ground, has the Professor, after all, proceeded a whit beyond what was revealed to the Hebrews three thousand years ago, viz. that "the life is in the blood"; and therefore, on the principle of life for life, blood makes atonement? We cannot see that the new form of protoplasm proves anything against immateriality of thought and the doctrine of religion.

The last question of unbelief is a *question of philosophy*. It rejects the doctrine of a personal God our Father, and substitutes a world-god in its stead. This deity — the god of the pantheists — though variously defined, is substantially the aggregate and unity of all the forces in nature, physical and mental, with the phenomena resulting therefrom, working blindly, by regular processes of development, towards the never-to-be-reached perfectibility of itself. It is an infi-

nately complicated system of things—without a Creator, without a guiding intelligence, without a meaning, without an end; the immense whole denominated God, but never reaching consciousness or wisdom, except as they exist in man. Of course, accountability and the hope of personal immortality, and the religion of Christ as we understand it, perish together.

The basis of this radical form of unbelief is found in the supposed inability of the human mind to demonstrate by its reasonings the being of a personal God. We need not advance, in this connection, to any philosophical discussions of subject and object, being and becoming, mind and matter, and relations between them. It may be sufficient to say that no pantheistic philosopher, from Spinoza to Hegel (if Hegel, indeed, was a pantheist), nor any who followed after, have been able to prove—nor is it possible to prove—the negative of the question: Is there a personal God? The most that can be said, is: “Behold, we have gone forward, and he is not there; and backward, and we cannot perceive him.” They have sought him where a supernatural, spiritual, holy God would be least likely to reveal himself, in the processes of the natural understanding, or they have looked for him among the uncertainties of supposed intuitions, and they have not found him. Or rather, the problem which pantheism assigns itself is, how to conceive, or reason out, or explain the creation without a Creator. If it could have succeeded at all in this line of argument, it would not have proved the non-existence of our God, but only that the metaphysical evidence of his being is insufficient to establish it. Though we will not concede so much as this, it is all that the metaphysical pantheist could possibly demonstrate. Then, it should be remembered that not only have all theistic and Christian philosophers rejected the assumptions on which these reasonings are based, but no leading philosopher of this school has ever been satisfied with the postulates and conclusions of his predecessor. Nor has a single principle demonstrably opposed to natural or revealed religion been

established. Moreover, not only do all the evidences of the divine existence drawn from our intuitions, from observation of design and final causes, and from the natural sentiment of mankind remain untouched, but this last evidence, the universal sentiment of the race, convicts the doctrine of metaphysical non-belief of a positive absurdity. Its all-god, which is no God, develops a universal falsehood in human nature; it makes that nature testify firmly and universally to a belief which has no foundation.

Once more, the enormous credulity which could suppose that this vast and complicated system of things was developed out of nature without God — which must be the fact, if pantheism is true — would enable us to believe that *Christianity itself was developed in the same way*; that, in the process of development, that beautiful being, the Christ of the New Testament, came forth, the single and glorious outflowering of the human race; that it had pleased blind nature, which had developed such an infinite variety of wonders, to develop, at last, its masterpiece, an incarnate God working miracles, a being out of nature to be nature's head, embodying its forces in himself, and exercising them according to his will; and thus, coming round the circle in the track of pantheistic argument, we would get back everything, and have a real God and Saviour, after all.

It is also significant, on this subject, that while positivism and transcendentalism stand forth in strenuous antagonism to each other, Christianity alone, as a system, is able to mediate between them, and include them. She supplements positivism by the intuitions of the reason and the convictions of consciousness; especially when the inward evidence ascends to the region of communion with God and a perfect faith; and at the same time gives sobriety and direction to the inward beholdings of transcendental belief.

In view of this exhibition of scepticism at the present day, it becomes obvious, that we have no cause for being "shaken in mind" by the unbelief of some distinguished scholars. Considering circumstances, their infidelity need

not surprise us. While we appreciate their researches, and beseech them to go on in all ways of honest inquiry, we would not charge them with conscious dishonesty in weighing the Christian evidences, or with an overmastering wish to break them down. Many of them have been led to their conclusions by objections and difficulties which they have really experienced in their reasonings. But in estimating the worth of their opinions, some special considerations ought to be noticed. In the first place, according to their own showing, they have never experienced that great spiritual renewal in themselves which the gospel designates, and all evangelical Christians accept, as a resurrection from the dead, a new creation, and a new birth; and which it declares to be necessary in order that a man should have the true witness in himself, or any clear perception of the grounds of Christian truth. In the next place, unbelievers are necessarily prejudiced, and most powerfully prejudiced, against some of the essential principles of the New Testament scriptures; for instance, the Christian atonement, the change of heart, and the deep personal depravity which makes that change indispensable. While they accept a religion of natural culture, the idea of supernatural redemption is repulsive to them. The educated mind, and the more highly educated the more proud it becomes, must either receive these doctrines, and submit to what they involve, or reject and denounce them as false. Hence, unconsciously to themselves, perhaps, many are predisposed to construct or adopt systems which set the brand of falsehood on a religion so obnoxious to them. Hence, in part, the denials of the supernatural, and the attempts to explain religion on mere natural principles. We would on no account speak uncandidly of those men who reject the revelation in which our hopes are all centred. But we must say that, while in our solemn conviction the unbelievers have totally failed in all their principal efforts to explain religion, the New Testament has beforehand explained them, or, at least, some of them. Among many passages, take the following: "Light has come

into the world, and men loved darkness, rather than light"; "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him"; "When they knew God," or might have known him, "they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened"; "Professing themselves wise, they became fools"; "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness"; "The world by wisdom knew not God"; "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Moreover, the very studies of these men lead them away from God. They confine themselves chiefly to the laws of nature, to mere natural causes and effects, or to the logic of the natural understanding or doubtful intuitions; neglecting the conscience and the deep wants and longings of the soul. No great philosopher in the domain of unbelief has ever taken universal sin and guilt, as the New Testament represents it, into his reasonings; but has left out a fact, which, if it be a fact, must vitiate his conclusions.

How should we conduct ourselves, in view of the unbelief which presses so hardly upon us? To the mass of less educated Christians we say, confidently: You have no call to follow the sceptic through the tortuosities and subtleties of learned irreligion. The faith, as you have received it, is a light on the earth, and a light within you. It makes your days blessed, and lifts you into the heavens, while you cry out, exultingly: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." The worst that could happen is that our Christianity should finally fail us, and thus we all go down together. And for our part, we had rather go down with John and Paul, and the blessed mother of our Lord, and the martyred church champions, and the great church teachers, and the precious saints we have known who lived and loved and slept in Jesus, than with Celsus and Porphyry and Julian, Voltaire and Thomas Paine, and the more respectable, but no less

determined, unbelievers, Strauss and Parker and Renan. Yes, let us go down, if go down we must, with that Divine Man, though man, of Calvary, who flooded all the ages which came after him with life and light and joy and love, than with Judas who betrayed him, Pilate and Herod who gave him up, and the "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," of whatever generation, who have cried: "Away with him! Crucify him; crucify him!"

But we shall not go down. The religion of Christ is that "munition of rocks" against which the infidel cannon has been thundering for centuries, and has never made in it a destructive breach. Is it possible that for thousands of years the world has been crying, "O my God, my God," when there is no God? Has nature, or the universal whole of things, so true in the instincts of beasts and birds and reptiles which it has developed, failed only, and failed fatally, in the instincts of man? Was Christ an impostor? Let us open our New Testament, and read: "When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." Could the Christ of the Sermon on the Mount have uttered the ineffably pure and heart-searching sentences of that soul-ravishing discourse, and wind up with the miserable juggleries of false miracle and imposition upon the people? Could he pass days and hours in deceitful contrivances and duplicities, that by hypocritical shows he might astonish and gain the multitudes, and, with no deterioration of character, come out the blessed Christ whom we worship? "It is difficult," says an unbeliever,<sup>1</sup> "without exhausting superlatives, even to unexpressive and wearisome entirety, to do justice to our intense love, reverence, and admiration for the character and teaching of Jesus. We regard him, not as the perfection of the intellectual or philosophic mind, but

<sup>1</sup> Creed of Christendom, p. 227.

as the perfection of the spiritual character, as surpassing all men of all times in the closeness and depth of his communion with the Father. In reading his sayings, we feel that we are holding conversation with the wisest, purest, noblest being who ever clothed thought in the poor language of humanity. In studying his life, we feel that we are following the footsteps of the highest ideal yet presented to us on earth." All this! and yet a whole life of falsehoods and impositions—the alone super-eminent man, yet making assumptions which, if he were not divine, were blasphemy. No, no; there is no other alternative; the glory of Christ must go into dread eclipse, or we must say, with the centurion: "Truly this was the Son of God."

To the *mass* of *educated* men one might say almost the same thing: You have no call to perplex yourselves often with the objections of unbelief. Live in your religion, enjoy it, and grow in it; remembering the words of the Lord Jesus: "Blessed are they who have not seen me, and yet have believed." But, as there must be officers in armies, so in the defence of Christianity there must be leaders and champions for the foremost foes. We must have scholars who can sound the depths of Fichte and Feurbach, test the inductions of Darwin and the "Vestiges," and meet Paulus and Baur and Powell and Jowett on their own grounds. Nor need they be afraid to study the universe, whether mental, material, or natural. Only let them study reverently, living, meanwhile, "in the light," and the Spirit which guides them into all truth will preserve them.

In dealing with the scepticism of the present day, there is a peculiarity which must not be passed without notice. The profane levity and bitter scorning of the preceding century has nearly ceased. The unbelievers have grown serious. They no longer rail at the Nazarene. They stand by the dead form of the blessed Christ with head uncovered; they touch the bier reverently; they bear him forth tenderly; they bury him with religious rites, "dust to dust, ashes to ashes," but with no resurrection. He is a dead Christ, and

neither here nor hereafter shall we see him any more. But not yet has human thought become free. The infinite Father must also go down. In all the universe there must be no God. The unbelievers understand themselves; they perform their work resolutely, but sorrowfully; and there is a strange mixture of wretchedness and exultation, as they contemplate the result. The world with them is at length free; for that awful power no longer overshadows it. But there are yearnings in the desolated heart which will not be appeased. The loneliness, the vacancy, the sense of bereavement which some of them express in their melancholy gladness appalls us. Could Sarah Hennell and her distinguished brother, whose death she so sorely lamented, have had the spirit of him who cried out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," or of one who exclaimed, in anguish, fearing that the foundations of his faith were passing away, "Ask the Saviour you believe in, if he be true, to convince me," she might have seen the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God; and, instead of those poor attempts to exult in the discoveries of foremost thought, amidst the appalling darkness of her spirit, she might have joined the chorus: "Unto us is born a Saviour." At the hazard of being thought unscholarly in our discussion, we accord to such persons our compassion. They seem to us like mourners, who have come up from the funeral of the Great God. While we contend in argument, believers as we are in prayer, we ought to pray for misguided scholars, with whom we have so many sympathies, to him who said, "I live forever," that he who cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," might guide them unto truth.

A closing caution still remains. All Christians should regard it; for it springs from the nature of their religion. While we do not believe in the utility of too much of what may be called preaching, when such subjects are under discussion; nevertheless, as certain as the religion is true, there is a moral influence which must affect our conclusions. "Take heed," said the apostle, "lest there be in any of you

an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." If the religion is true, we cannot understand our scriptures without a spirit which is in harmony with them. In the neglect of true Christian culture, in the disuse of spiritual communion and a loving, obedient endeavor, the mind will grow dark. It is an appalling retribution, that they who exclude the light gradually lose the power to see. As fishes in dark caves have rudimentary eyes, but no vision, so, if the real truth is disliked, or regarded with prejudice, the mind will be darkened to its perception. We meet a blind man, with downcast face and hesitating step, groping his way along the street, and are sad for our blind brother. But how much more an object of compassion is he of the sightless soul.

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ARTICLE V.

DEMOSTHENES AND THE RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES  
ESTABLISHED BY HIS EXAMPLE.

BY THE LATE GEORGE SHEPARD, D.D., PROFESSOR IN BANGOR THEOLOGICAL  
SEMINARY.

It is a remarkable fact that eloquence is to be found in its highest and best state at so early a period of its history. It is another remarkable fact, that there has been an almost universal concurrence in the sentiment that places Demosthenes at the head of all the eloquent. Men have differed in most other matters. But all eyes, from all countries and all ages, have agreed to look upon Demosthenes as the prince of orators. The verdict of all time being as it is, and being right, probably, I have selected him as being thus the highest authority in all matters of eloquence, and, for the purpose I have in view, shall first give a mere outline of his training — a summary of the qualities of his manner and style — and then proceed to derive from him certain oratorical lessons; using him as a teacher and corrector, and