

THE  
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—BISHOP BUTLER.

**B**ISHOP BUTLER was born in the year 1692, within less than an hour's journey from Oxford, in the thriving country town of Wantage, where his father was a respected and successful tradesman. Facing the site of the ancient shop, is now erected a modern statue of Alfred the Great, who was himself also a native of the same town. The house to which the family retired from business, and the room in which Butler was born, still exist in a condition almost unchanged. Butler received his earlier education in the Grammar School of the town, under the diligent superintendence of a worthy clergyman, Philip Barton; and it is pleasant to find that in after years, and so soon as Butler had the opportunity, he remembered his old schoolmaster's goodness, and preferred him to a living in his own diocese. Butler's father (who was a member of the Presbyterian communion), on discovering the abilities of his son, resolved to educate him for the ministry amongst Protestant Dissenters of his own denomination; and with this view removed him to a Dissenting academy then established at Gloucester and subsequently at Tewkesbury. It was here that he met with several fellow-students, who ultimately attained to great distinction and eminent usefulness in their respective spheres of life. Notably, there was his young friend Thomas Secker, who, in the lapse of time, became Archbishop of Canterbury, and whose esteem for his modest and earnest companion never wavered while Butler lived.

Butler pursued his theological studies under the able guidance of the distinguished tutor of the Academy at Tewkesbury, with so much diligence and success, that at the early age of twenty-one he attracted the attention and secured the lasting friendship of Dr. Samuel Clarke, well known both then and now as one of

the most learned divines in the Church of England. Dr. Clarke had published a work containing, as he believed, "A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God." The young student, however, was not wholly satisfied with some of the arguments adduced, and he engaged in a correspondence with the learned divine, carried on, at the suggestion of Butler's modesty, anonymously; his friend Secker conveying the letters and the replies to and fro between Tewkesbury and the post-office at Gloucester. This correspondence has happily been preserved for the benefit of the Christian Church, and it is a model on the one hand of the modesty and acumen of the young student, and of the patience, courtesy, and sincerity of the learned divine. In one of these now famous letters of Butler's, the young student remarks to Dr. Clarke: "*As I design the search after truth as the business of my life, I shall not be ashamed to learn from any person; though at the same time I cannot be insensible that instruction from some men, is like the gift of a prince; it reflects honour on the person on whom it lays an obligation.*" Such was the modesty, such was the sincerity of Butler.

And now not in invidious contrast, but for the purposes of an illustration of the moral results of it at a further stage, I shall here notice the manner in which David Hume (whose writings are to this hour the armoury and the arsenal of religious doubts and disbeliefs) began his attacks on Christianity at an age almost as early as Butler commenced his correspondence with Dr. Clarke. The guiding, ruling principles of the two contemporaries were widely different. "It must be confessed," says his admiring biographer, Mr. Huxley, that on the occasion of his first publication, no less than on that of his others, "Hume exhibits no small share of a craving after mere notoriety and vulgar success as distinct from the pardonable, if not honourable, ambition for solid and enduring fame:" . . . "that sort of success, in fact, which his soul loved." The actuating motives of the two young students, at the outset of life, being thus at variance, we can scarcely wonder that their subsequent careers and their ultimate issues were widely divergent.

The culture in the Nonconformist School at Tewkesbury, like the culture adopted by Dr. Doddridge at Northampton, though it naturally and generally bore good fruit, did not always bear the fruit intended. The Tewkesbury Presbyterian School produced three eminent bishops in the Anglican Church; and Dr. Doddridge, to his dismay, found that, after all his care at his own Evangelical Establishment, he had nurtured Unitarians.

Butler ultimately saw reasons for embracing the doctrine and mode of government of the Established Church, and with the view of becoming qualified for its ministry, he entered himself as

a Commoner at Oriel College, in this University. The portrait of its illustrious member will be found in the College, but, I fear, little or no other record of his residence in Oxford remains. He was awarded no share in the endowments of that religious corporation; neither scholarship nor fellowship was his. Not that any particular individual blame attaches to the unfortunate oversight; for Oxford at that day only shared and followed the general unconcern of a half-hearted age. Surely it would be a nobler and a truer aspiration to claim her right to lead, and direct, and illustrate, rather than be contented to adopt and reflect the morals, motives, and intellectual culture, which chance to be the predominant fashion of the times.

Still it was impossible for a man like Butler not to have reaped many solid and permanent advantages from a residence at Oriel. One, among many others, arose from his attracting the notice and friendship of his fellow-student, Mr. Talbot, who, from his connection with persons of great influence, was able to bring the great abilities and worth of his friend under the notice of the powers that be. In this way Butler before long was appointed to the preachingship at the Rolls Chapel. And now began the reaping of that intellectual and moral harvest which had been sown and cultured with such abundant care at Tewkesbury and Oxford. Out of the many sermons preached in that famous chapel, Butler, on retiring to a country living, arranged for publication fifteen, the selection of which he said was mainly accidental, but some of which, and particularly those on the constitution of human nature, are probably unequalled for the truth and depth of their insight by any essays now extant on the same subject in the world. They bear somewhat of the same relation to Moral or Ethical Philosophy, which the *Principia* of Newton bears to the physical course of Nature. Any student possessing sufficient mental culture who has not read them, if such there be, has reserved for himself a duty and a delight. Immediately after the publication of these remarkable sermons, Butler set himself to work on the subject of the Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and the Course of Nature. In the deep retirement of his parish at Stanhope, not dead, but to the outer world of clamorous activity practically buried, Butler had leisure and freedom from distraction slowly to complete his immortal work; "searching after truth, as the settled business of his life": and it is a law impressed on humanity, that they who thus seek, find the object of their quest.

It is clear that he had long and deeply studied the intrinsic force of all the arguments and difficulties which had been successively urged against the religion of Christ, by the sceptical writers of his age. More than that, whoever attentively reads the pages of the Analogy, so "full of the seeds of thought," will

find that Butler has anticipated, in their principles at least, most, if not all, of those objections which bristle in our modern periodicals, and have made so troublesome a noise in our own day. It was not his habit indeed, or his object, to quote the very language of the host of deistical and infidel writers whose objections he sought to meet and to remove, and still less to designate the several writers by their names, for Butler was dealing with facts, and not with persons—with truth, and not with notoriety; hence the reader of the *Analogy* will there find a total freedom from all parade of learning, and a general absence of all quotations. Nevertheless, the actual objections of the sceptical writers are stated with a sincerity and a candour beyond the reach of impugment. They are always fairly met, and in general met with success.

After the publication of the *Analogy*, and no doubt owing very much to the fact that he was no longer buried from the public gaze, Butler was advanced from one stage to another of dignity and public usefulness. He had for himself chosen the lowest room, but the Divine Master of the House had now come to him and seemed to say by His Providence: "Friend, go up higher." Thus Butler became successively Bishop of Bristol, Dean of St. Paul's, Clerk of the Closet to King George II., and in 1747 he was offered the Primacy. But Butler, judging from the morals and tenor of the age, took a gloomy view, and, feeling himself unequal to cope with the dangers which beset so responsible an office, resolutely declined the offer. It is remarkable to record that eleven years after Butler had declined this exalted position, its duties were wisely and faithfully administered by Secker, the companion of his school-days, and the devoted watchful friend throughout his advancing years. Butler, however, a very few years before his death, was prevailed on to accept the Bishopric of Durham; but by one of those, to us obscure dispensations of Providence, which are the predestined education and discipline of our faith and our love, this eminent man was called away to a better service, though one would have supposed in the very acme of his usefulness on earth. He was buried in the Cathedral of Bristol, in the adornment of which diocese he had spent a larger sum than the whole emolument he had received. In his youth, as we have seen, he had "designed the search after truth as the business of his life:" throughout that life he had pursued the design with a candour, a diligence, and an intellectual grasp not surpassed; and then in his maturest days he was able to say, "I feel my feet upon the Rock."

Such then is a very rapid outline of some of the few particulars which remain to us of this great and good man's life; to me, at least, some such account seemed an essential element in the intelligent conception of his work. Many other interesting

details may be gathered from the excellent biography published by Butler's distant kinsman, Mr. Bartlett, some forty years ago. I have already had occasion to speak of the low state of morals and religion which prevailed in Butler's time. The causes, not far to seek, need not be referred to here. If, by Divine Providence, the Elijah of that age was Butler, then John Wesley may have been the Elisha: assuredly they were the conjoint instruments of doing God's work, each in his own way. These men laboured, and the Church of Christ has largely entered into their labours. But if any of ourselves are inclined to despair at the varied and persistent attacks which in our time are ceaselessly made, not only on the central truths of Christianity, but on the very existence of a personal Creator and Governor of the Universe, he may find his discouragement abated, by a consideration of Butler's description of his own day. "It has come to be taken for granted," he says, "by many persons, that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And, accordingly, they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and as if nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule." "Dr. Butler believes," said a well-known sceptic of the day, "that he has proved of Christianity, that, after all, there is really something in it." And now, at length, let us enquire what was Butler's method of stemming the tide of unbelief which in the days of some of our grandfathers threatened to overwhelm the Christian Church. It may avail something under the similar trials which beset ourselves.

Butler, then, commences his work with remarks upon the nature of that evidence which is to us the intellectual foundation of all religious belief. Anterior to careful and accurate reflection on the subject, it might be *presupposed*, that on questions fraught with such interest and importance to mankind as the Being of an Intelligent Creator and Governor of the world, and the existence of a future state of happiness or misery, the evidence would be of so demonstrative a character, so logical, and so overwhelming when truly stated, as to preclude all reasonable controversy on the subject. Some men might even demand that a Lazarus should be sent from the grave to confront his brethren with a proof and a warning, not to be withstood. But no such demonstrative evidence is to be found in relation to our religious hopes. And this is all of a piece, Butler would argue, all in a strict continuity with what we find in that dispensation of ordinary human society, in which we find ourselves placed. For, to us, probability is the guide of life; and if any man will examine the grounds on which he has determined, not merely the trivial acts of his daily routine, but even the most serious and critical

arrangements of his life, he will find that they have been decided on the principles, not of certainty and pure reason, but on the grounds of probability and faith alone. A perfect intelligence might indeed foresee the consequences of acts with an unerring certainty, but our capacities are limited, and so also must be the imperfect and circumstantial evidence which determines our choice.

Butler's own statement of the case is very striking, and I will quote his words:—

“From these considerations it follows,” he says, “that in questions of difficulty, or such as are thought so, where more satisfactory evidence cannot be had, or is not seen; if the result of examination be that there appears upon the whole, any the least presumption on one side, and none on the other; or a greater presumption on one side though in the lowest degree greater, this determines the question, even in matters of speculation; and in matters of practice, it will lay us under an absolute and formal obligation, in point of prudence and of interest, to act upon that presumption or low probability, though it be so low as to leave the mind in very great doubt which is the truth. For surely a man is as really bound in prudence to do what on the whole *appears* to him, according to the best of his judgment, to be for his happiness, as what he certainly *knows* to be so. Nay further, in questions of great consequence, a reasonable man will think it concerns him to remark lower probabilities and presumptions than these: such as amount to no more than showing one side of a question to be as supposable and credible as another: nay, such as amount to much less even than this; for numberless instances might be mentioned respecting the common pursuits of life, where a man would be thought, in a literal sense, distracted, who would not act, and with great application too, not only upon an even chance, but upon much less, and when the probability or chance of his succeeding was greatly against him.”

Such then is the general character of the evidence we may expect to find in questions relating to religious difficulties: the evidences are probable, not demonstrative; they are presumptions, not certainties. Butler's mode and principle of arguing on this sort of evidence is an eminently practical one, and it is on this wise. If anything appertaining to religion, and of importance to ourselves, is alleged in the Sacred Scriptures connected with the unknown or the unseen, *i.e.* connected with the life beyond the grave, he examines the known and the seen, *i.e.* the natural things around him, and then, assuming that the seen and the unseen proceed alike from the same Author and Governor of Nature, if he finds that a correspondence, an analogy, exists between the Scriptural allegations and the natural things around him, he concludes that there is so far a presumption, a probability, that the subject of the Scriptural affirmation is true. And Butler then argues that the establishment of this presumption or probability, in a practical matter, lays us under a moral obli-

gation to act, just as much as the certainty of conviction would.

No doubt some of us might passionately desire some greater and clearer light, on subjects that affect our dearest and fondest hopes; but that is no reason why we should fretfully refuse such lights as we can practically obtain. And there is, as I have already observed, a similar imperfection, nay obscurity if you will, in the evidence upon which we are called upon to act in the ordinary concerns of our social existence; yet act we do, and for the most part with a satisfactory issue.

Moreover we find a favourable peculiarity in the evidences for religion which seldom attaches to the evidences on which we commonly act in the ordinary affairs of life. For we shall find on examination that the arguments for the verity of the Christian faith are drawn from a great variety of sources, perfectly independent of each other. These evidences, that is, are not merely cumulative, but they are consilient. These evidences do not, so to speak, lie on the top of each other, and press independently by their respective weights, but, proceeding from a variety of independent and even from unexpected quarters, they are consilient *on one spot*; convergent, from a variety of independent lights, into one focus. And this sort of evidence is, I apprehend, the most convincing species of testimony that can apply to our limited capacities.

Nevertheless, it must fairly be admitted that some of the presumptions thus raised in favour of our Christian Faith and hopes, may be individually weak. Of themselves, individually and taken alone, they might fail to do more than raise an imperfect expectation; it is in and by their consilience, by their convergence alone, that they amount to a moral conviction. And here I am convinced lies the fertile source of a large portion of the religious difficulties which trouble and harass one man more than another.

For it is easy to consider these presumptions and the sources of them, one at a time and finding one or more of them to be, when taken by itself, not wholly convincing, or even very slightly convincing, each is rejected after each; many are not considered patiently at all, and the consilient character of the whole group of arguments is overlooked and disregarded. It is here especially that the force of our moral dispositions and of our intellectual habits, comes into play; and here an unbounded field lies open for the insidious activity of that strange faculty of self-deception, which more or less besets us all. Passion and Temper here play their part, and convert our wishes into our beliefs. A man need carefully examine the secrets of his own heart, and the disposition which, by the contraction of habits, he has engendered in his own mind, before he rejects as delusive what many of the

best and noblest of mankind have admitted to be the very staple of their dearest hopes. It was partly with this view that I ventured to draw your attention to the contrast between the governing principles which appear to have actuated Butler and Hume at the first outset of their respective literary and moral careers. Considerations of this sort I know to be assuredly dangerous and possibly invidious ; nevertheless they are real and they are practical. Whenever, for instance, we find a person or a writer indulging in sharp and clever writing, on subjects connected with considerations so solemn as those of our religion, we may so far doubt whether his judgment is to be trusted. If he give way to sarcasm or to ridicule, we may be quite sure that it is *not* to be trusted. And here perhaps I may be permitted to make two remarks which seem to bear with much force upon our present subject ; the one is made by Butler himself towards the end of his book ; and for the other, we are indebted to the Philosopher, Coleridge, a man second in many ways only to Butler himself. Butler, in speaking of the converging character of the Christian Evidences, and upon the inadvisability of ordinary conversation on matters which, by their very nature, require a patient and continued attention, thus gravely remarks : " It is obvious how much advantage the nature of this evidence gives to those persons who attack Christianity, and especially in conversation. For it is easy to show, in a short and lively manner, that such and such things are liable to objection, that this thing and that thing is of little weight in itself ; but it is impossible to reply in like manner by exhibiting the united force of the whole argument in one view." Coleridge, on the other hand, feeling how few persons possess the ability and the freedom from prejudice to judge of the whole complex argument as it lies, fearlessly and directly appeals to the force of experience ; and he says, not without reason, that the chief, and the most telling, and the most practical form of the evidences in the Christian religion lies in the spirit of two little words : " Try it." " Try it."

Such, then, is the general scope of Butler's method of arguing throughout his work on the Analogy of Religion to the Course and Constitution of Nature ; and having laid down these general principles, he commences by an enquiry as to what light the natural things around us throw upon the fact of our future existence. Of course my readers will all along bear in mind, that in the first instance no reference whatever is made to the light that streams from Revelation. He truly says that it is our imagination alone which invests the King of Terrors with a gloomy mantle of human apprehension, and the suggestions of this forward and delusive



faculty must be silenced before the voice of reason can be heard in the case. "We live at this moment," he says, "and unless you can show reason why death itself should destroy the living being, whatever that living being may be, you have no reason to presume that anything else will destroy it. Now that living thing often exists in the bright exercise of its powers up to the very moment of the dissolution of the mortal framework with which it has been associated; and, moreover, that mortal frame is in a constant state of flux, and has been more than once wholly changed, while the living being, ourselves, has been left unaltered." The various organs of our bodies are, he observes, no more to us than pieces of machinery; props, levers, and lenses, they form no essential parts of our real selves, and hence he concludes that there is no reason for apprehending that the dissolution of the body is necessarily the destruction of ourselves.

Independently of such considerations he urges that the living being, ourselves, is not a composite entity, but a single unit, not discernible—incapable of division; and hence, he says, it cannot be destroyed, but rather may be set free, by the dissolution of other matter.

Further, he remarks that even if, from the close association which unquestionably exists between ourselves and our corporeal frame, the dissolution of the latter suspends the *active* powers of the former, there is no ground for supposing it so much as suspends, and still less that it destroys, the *reflecting* power after ideas have once been obtained. Thus Butler concludes that the voice of Nature is not wholly mute as to the continuance of our existence through and after death; nay, death may be to us a birth, and the commencement only of a freer and nobler life. And then he argues that this presumption, this probability of an immortality, is sufficient at any rate to answer objections, sufficient to determine our conduct, sufficient to dispose all reasonable persons to listen to the voice of revelation and the Gospel, which latter alone has brought life and immortality really to light.

I know not what the more thoughtful of my readers may say to these arguments of our great philosophical divine, but in all candour I am bound to add a few remarks which may naturally occur to the thinkers of this day, now that our knowledge of Nature has become more enlarged.

In the first place, then, it has been urged that the lesion of certain parts of the brain, and of certain vital nerves, though it does not destroy or suspend the general action of the corporeal system, does certainly either destroy or suspend the powers of consciousness and of accurate reflection.

I admit that this cannot be denied. But in the midst of our

real ignorance as to where the powers of consciousness and of reflection reside, how can I tell whether this lesion of the brain or of vital nerves does not introduce, so long as it lasts, the action of a new force? And how can I be sure that when this new force, arising from the lesion, is removed by the dissolution of the body, the conscious reflecting self may not be set free and recover its liberty? The lesion in question may not be so much the removal of an essential active force, as rather the introduction of a new repressive one. And this, I think, is a sufficient reply to the difficulty suggested.

But I further think that the light of modern knowledge does shed some rays of a more positive and distinctive hope. For we possess a presumptive knowledge of the constitution of matter not possessed by the thinkers of Butler's day. We know tolerably well something of the atomic structure of an elemental vapour, for instance; and this we believe to be the purest and simplest form of matter.

Definite, very definite groups or clusters of indiscernible atoms are associated, we believe, into molecules, the atoms of each molecular group being in a continuous state of intense vibration, and then, independent of this, the molecular groups themselves are subjected to far wider excursions.

If the dimensions of an average human being be taken as a scale to represent the dimensions of a molecule of gas now consuming in a burner, we have reason to believe the average distance of contiguous molecules would be represented by some 300 yards. There is ample room, therefore, and verge enough, for the insertion of this or that substance, this or that ether or essence, call it by any name, between the contiguous molecules of our corporeal frame. So curiously, so wonderfully, so fearfully are we made.

But, again, there seems to be a generic difference, an absolute difference, in kind, between the molecules of living organisms and those of gross brute matter, such as of stone, or of iron, or of gold. Not all the well-tried ingenuity of modern chemists has ever yet been able to produce an organic substance, from other substances which themselves have not been previously endued with life. A living molecule differs then generically from a molecule of brute matter.

And further still, whatever may be the ultimate fate of that ingenious modern hypothesis of Evolution, denied as not proven by some of the very ablest philosophers of the day, one thing is certain, that he who first, from the resources of his own mind, evolved Evolution, he, I say, entertains no doubt that the living *human* self is not the subject of the same law as that which controls or constitutes the living principle in other animals, or in plants. If this be so, then we have

first of all the gross, complicated, highly manufactured thing called inorganic matter; then we have that still brighter and more beautiful thing called a living thing; and lastly, the still more marvellous thing constituting the living *human* self, standing apart from all other known things in this sublunary sphere, in God-like pre-eminence, apart from matter, and apart from animal protoplasmic life, whatever the latter may be. A wondrous creation, methinks, with the breath of the divine around it or among it. Think for a moment of the vast range of its capacities, far beyond the present field of its action, reaching from the Satanic to the angelic, nigh to the divine. Endued with the singular power of introspection, it contemplates itself: it contemplates also what God contemplates, truth in its absoluteness, the properties of space and number. It geometrizes: *ὁ Θεός γεωμετρεῖ*. In its holier phases, and specially when disciplined into humility, it aspires to a fellowship, a communion with the Spirit of the Supreme. It assumes for the model of its character, the character of Christ. Like him it can *endure* the cross, and it can *weep* for the sins and the miseries of others.

And consider for a moment that marvellous power of memory. In this world and in this life, it exists not in a form disassociated from that organ called the brain. Yet the brain is ever changing, ever in a state of flux and slow disintegration; ever renewed upon old renewals. Yet the memory remains still the same. Surely then this power of human memory either is, or arises from something impressed, photographed on the living being itself, on the spiritual molecules themselves set into vibration. If this be true, as I for one suspect it to be an approximation to the truth so far as we have capacity to apprehend it, what a vista for hope or for apprehension is here unfolded. All that we have ever thought, or done, or wished; our hates and our loves; our secret aims never wholly disclosed even to a friend, and half concealed even from ourselves, there they are photographed, indelible, on the vibrating molecules of the human spirits. Can this marvellous being perish with the dissolution of a gross material frame? May it not, will it not start up into a freer and more active vibration when liberated by the birth of death? And if it does—what then? Some of us remember,—I remember it well, myself,—that when the old coinage of years gone by had become incognisable by stress of wear and mutilation, much of it was at first refused by authority as probably of spurious origin. The test of the genuine was at once curious, and easy, and certain. The questionable coin was subjected to heat. If genuine, the old image and superscription started into a renewed and a clear existence, patent to observation, and as if by the touch of magic. *Can we, my friends—shall we, abide the fiery scrutiny?*

It is also recorded of Butler that when very nigh to the close of his life, a closeness measured by minutes rather than by hours, the dying Prelate remarked to his friend and chaplain, Dr. Foster, then kneeling at the side of his bed, "that he found it a very awful thing—a very awful thing—to appear before the august Governor of the World." His friend—and Bishop Butler was never without a friend—his friend reminded him of that "Blood which cleanseth from all sin." A pause then seems to have ensued, when the dying Bishop,—Butler, the learned, the modest, the devout, the pure, the earnest, the seeker after truth, with faltering, failing lips replied, "Oh this *is* comfortable," and with these words the spirit of the Bishop escaped to Him who gave it. Yes—"The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God." "Oh death, where then is thy sting?—Oh grave, where is thy victory?"<sup>1</sup>

C. PRITCHARD.

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## ART. II.—THE CHURCH IN WALES.

**I**N the remarks I made on the Welsh Church in the December Number of the *CHURCHMAN*, I called special attention to the religious revival of last century in the Principality. That revival commenced in the Church of England, but it terminated in a large secession of the Welsh people from her communion. The movement, through the force of circumstances, and under the current of events, had been drifting for years in that direction; but the secession was not finally consummated until the year 1811, when the Calvinistic Methodists set apart a certain number of their lay preachers for the ministration of the Sacraments in the Connexion. By that act they formally separated from the Church of England, and became an independent Christian community. The secession was an event of great moment; it created a new era in the religious history of the Principality, and its results were accompanied with serious consequences to the Church in Wales. On account of its importance it demands special attention, and it is my purpose in this Paper to investigate the circumstances under which it occurred.

I would observe, in the first place, that I consider that the revival was the work of the Spirit of God. I believe that the awakening which under its influence moved the masses was the breath of life which quickened souls that were dead in trespasses

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<sup>1</sup> A Lecture recently delivered in St. Mary's in connection with the Oxford Branch of the Christian Evidence Society.