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ESSAY  
ON THE  
SCEPTICAL TENDENCY

OF  
BUTLER'S "ANALOGY."

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BY  
S. S. HENNELL.

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1859.





## E S S A Y

## ON THE SCEPTICAL TENDENCY OF BUTLER'S "ANALOGY."

SINCE its first appearance before the world, nearly a century and a quarter ago, the "Analogy" of Bishop Butler has been acknowledged by general consent as the established orthodox bulwark of Revealed Religion; being held so perfect in its construction, and so impregnable in its position, that not even any outer-works of supplementary comment have been deemed necessary to add to its strength by his reverential followers. During the last sixty years, it has indeed shared the honour of being the standard defence of Christianity with Paley's "Evidences," which takes up a range of argument untouched by Butler; but while the later writer, incomparably more attractive to the generality of readers from the interest of historic treatment, from the exquisite perspicuity and fascinating simplicity of his style, and from the finely well-mannered liberality of his tone, has stood for one generation at least decidedly first in popularity: still there has always been an immense support to the Christian controversialist, during the vexatious skirmish-

*gives Butler's part to Cox*

ing with critical objections, in the consciousness of the great Natural argument of Butler in the background to fall back upon. And since the younger champion has had his polished forensic weapon turned by the keener edge of German *Gelehrte*,—since the profounder spirit of modern investigation, both German and English, has convicted his plausibility of superficiality,—the advocates of revelation have recurred with the more eager solicitude to the Author of the “Analogy” to repair their shaken confidence. Notwithstanding the alien demand for a more “spiritual” sort of faith than that maintained by Butler which has lately ripened within the Church, causing him to be left behind amongst the beggarly elements of carnal reason, in the *practical* estimation of both Tractarian and Evangelical, by the main body of Christian believers he is still considered unanswered and unanswerable, strong as a giant against all the puny attacks of Infidelity.

Yet, whatever may be the confidence with which the “Analogy” is regarded on the arena of controversy, a very different sort of feeling attends the conscientious study of it in the closet. There seems little risk of denial, when, appealing to the experience of all the thoughtful out of the number of the readers of this great work, the assertion be made, that the strongest impression resulting from its perusal, is the deep spirit of Scepticism which it engenders, and the absence in it of any principle capable of effectually combating that scepticism. William Pitt is reported to have said that it was Butler’s “Analogy” that first put it into his head to doubt of the truth of

Christianity, and probably multitudes of its readers have undergone the same experience ; but the fact now alluded to is, not only that it has stirred up the first serious thought upon the subject, which is necessarily attended by doubt, but that it has finished by leaving a permanent feeling of unsatisfactoriness rankling in the mind. There is a pervading tone on every page that seems to transfuse, as from the mind of the Author, a sympathetic gloom of suspicion into that of the reader, a secret consciousness of something terrible lying beyond, with which he dare not meddle. And the great *power* of the work, intellectual and moral, heightens this mysterious dread into even a kind of paralysing awe. The book is laid down with a sense of chilling silence in the mind. Objections are quelled, but there is nothing to satisfy ; and no provision is made for ever kindling up again the genial warmth of cordial faith.

In attending to this influence and seeking to trace it to its source,—not at all in the spirit of disputatious cavilling, still less of flippant disrespect to a great book, and the memory of a Great Man,—we may perhaps find ourselves on the road to a real benefit : such a re-adjustment of the whole question treated by Butler, as may enable us, by the guiding warning of his experience, to avoid the soul-discomfiture of the weary and thorny path which he has tried before us. At all events, if we see that it necessarily led into such discomfiture, we have a moral argument against its doctrine stronger than any logic ; and the applying of this test to check the latter in all its stages, may, by a reverse process, in exposing its

weak points, lead us to see how the direct reasoning may be rectified.

Let us place ourselves in the state of mind of a reader of ordinary Christian prepossessions, to whom the ascertaining of the truth of Christianity is a matter of anxious personal concern; who, perchance, has become aware of the vast amount of learning and study required to deal competently with the questions of external evidence, and who has betaken himself to the safer course within every man's reach, of judging from the effect made upon his own mind by the Scriptures whether they indeed contain a divine revelation for him. He has found doctrines that his reason is incapable of comprehending; for that he was prepared,—divine mysteries, he knows, must be expected to be out of the reach of human knowledge: but he has also come to representations of the actions of Deity that shock his moral sense:—here he must make a stand; and he has recourse to Butler to help him. He feels with an inexpressible sense of comfort, a glow of anticipation at expected relief, that here is a *strong mind in earnest* to rest upon; a man who has experienced and groaned over his own perplexities, and who has worked out a solution to satisfy himself before he offered it to others. The ground he takes is certainly the best he could find, for he is building upon it for his own dwelling; if disappointingly limited, it is all that he felt he could claim, and we may be sure he has neglected nothing that could further him in the drawing up of that claim: if perhaps it is a case that he is getting up, it is at least his own cause that he is pleading:—how will he bring it out?—He fairly

acknowledges the moral discrepancies in Scripture : that is well to begin with ; he has no intention of blinking the difficulty. But he shows that in the ordinary government of Divine Providence there occur in daily experience similar infractions of what in human estimation is counted just and right ; and he argues, If we believe that there is a God both good and righteous, notwithstanding these infractions, ruling in Nature, why should we deny it on the same account in Revelation ?—But in Revelation these infractions are directly sanctioned, marked as it were by special Divine approbation.—And is there anything that takes place in nature without the ordination and approbation of the Creator and Governor ? Except upon the principle of Manicheism, that God is striving against an antagonistic rival Power of Evil, He is himself the cause to whom all evil is attributable. If this difficulty have been already surmounted by natural religion, there is no new one in this respect in Revelation.—This, our inquirer feels, is a hard demand upon his faith. He had hoped that Revelation was designed expressly to clear up the difficulties found in Nature, instead of repeating them in magnified proportion.—But how, Butler asks him, except by this very similarity of style, should he be able to recognize the identity of the Divine Author of both ? whose works, moreover, he ought not to expect to comprehend fully in either case. Here is the salutary trial of faith and patience ; under the new dispensation of grace, as under the old of Nature, we are the subjects of probation, Divine Wisdom having ordained this as the present condition that is proper for us :—thus recurring

to that necessity of submitting the understanding to the supposed dictates of Divine Authority which is the universal stumbling-block in the way of the reception of Revelation, the arbitrary decree, Thus far shalt thou reason, and no farther, against which the natural man rebels, and to which the Christian world submits with varying shades of reluctance; so that, according to the different stages at which the restriction is placed, a characteristic is afforded for all the various sects into which it is divided:—the Roman Catholic giving up his reason wholly and implicitly into the hands of his priest; the Evangelical offering it up as a living sacrifice upon the altar of faith and love; the moderate orthodox Rationalist thinking to preserve the judicious and safe *via media* by discreet accommodation, binding down Faith and Reason by what he considers equitable terms to refrain from mutual interference (—as if the natural faculties of the human mind were antagonistic to one another, and had no power to adjust one another to harmonious proportion without adventitious aid; as if it were necessary that God should furnish man with a dark shade to wear over his eyes in order that his ears might attain a finer perception—); while the more thorough-going Rationalist, who claims entire freedom for his reason at the same time that he will in no wise relinquish his hold upon Revelation, either imposes upon it perforce the task to demonstrate the reconcileability of the two, or resolutely shuts his eyes to their points of incompatibility. The disciple of Butler will not willingly seek for aid in the former direction; but when the dictum of submission

to authoritative decrees is thus laid upon him, will first struggle hard to know the "reason why" reason must thus be forced to succumb. Can the Unitarian help him, who lying on the extreme verge of Christian profession, holds the minimum quantity of the faith that is to overcome the remonstrant understanding? In the main argument of the "Analogy" the Unitarian holds common cause with Butler; in regard for morality and respect for human nature, finds him entirely one with him, and even in his exercise of reason upon revelation does not go beyond him in the matter in hand, since in relation to it Butler plainly avers, that "it is the province of Reason to judge whether the morality of Scripture contains things contrary to what the light of Nature teaches us of God": though, indeed, he thinks he has greatly the advantage of him in bringing it to bear also upon those doctrines of Orthodoxy, which, he urges, magnify all the difficulties. How then does he, the Unitarian, deal with the question of the evil which, at all events, he cannot deny does pervade the dominion of Nature, in such apparent contradiction to that doctrine of the goodness and justice of God which is in a manner the sum total of his belief?

Unitarianism in its theory makes very light of evil of all kinds. It aims to leave it as much as possible in the background, seizing upon what is indeed the ultimate essence and divinest poetry of religion, namely, the enabling man to see good in all things, but perhaps in fact falsifying it by—shall we say?—its eager appropriation of it. There are moments of entranced feeling in

some of the highest moods of the mind, in which Nature loses all its shades of actual gloom, and appears as a paradise of beauty, bathed in a flood of glowing sunshine as from the beams of universal Love; when Sin can be looked upon as the mere faint shade that marks in relief the lineaments of divinely-attributed man, the conscious lord of nature and image of his Maker; when God is truly claimed by the soul in the sole aspect of the Father of unbounded mercy, of infinite sympathy and tenderness; when all the severest discipline of life is recognized as only preparation for incomparable bliss in store for all. But the enjoyment of such moments is a privilege that cannot be represented by doctrine. As soon as it is attempted to be attached as a right belonging to certain opinions, it is endangered by the contradiction that clear-sighted reason brings against its claim; and it is a vain self-deception to cultivate the delicious blindness, and seek to persuade ourselves that it is even an act of worship thus to immerse our mental perceptions in a haze of flattering delusion!—Evil, according to its seductive persuasion, ought no longer to be regarded as evil, when it can be demonstrated to be the actual parent of good: the mind is urged to fix upon alleviations and compensations, and not to suffer its satisfaction to be dimmed by recurring to the dark question that ever remains at the root of the matter—*why* was evil this appointed cause? why should not good of a different, perhaps a higher kind, have been derived through only good, and no evil at all? Here the mind must be content to fall back, by a circular movement, upon what is considered the esta-



blished basis of the theorized goodness of God. And reason that will still be inquisitive, and not rest till it has borne onward to its mark, is unsatisfied as before.—The following passage, from a Lecture on the Atonement by the Rev. James Martineau, (originally published about twenty years ago,\*) shows aptly the Unitarian position with regard to Butler's argument. The writer, after stating the inexplicability of the natural problem, is showing how the doctrines of orthodoxy only immeasurably increase the difficulty :—

“My reply is brief : I admit both the fact [of vicarious suffering in the natural world] and the analogy ; but the fact is of the exceptional kind, from which, by itself, I could not infer the justice or the benevolence of the Creator ; and which, were it of large or prevalent amount, I could not reconcile with these perfections. If then you take it out of the list of exceptions and difficulties, and erect it into a cardinal rule, if you interpret by it the whole invisible portion of God's government, you turn the scale at once against the character of the Supreme, and plant creation under a tyrant's sway. And this is the fatal principle pervading all analogical arguments in defence of Trinitarian Christianity. No resemblances to the system can be found in the universe, except in those anomalies and seeming deformities which perplex the student of Providence, and which would undermine his faith, were they not lost in the vast spectacle of beauty and of good. These disorders are selected and spread out to view, as specimens of the Divine government of nature ; the mysteries and horrors which offend us in the popular theology are extended by their side ; the comparison is made, point by point, till the similitude is undeniably made out ; and when the argument is closed, it amounts to this : do you doubt

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\* Now re-published in the volume called *Studies of Christianity*.

whether God could break men's limbs? You mistake his strength of character; only see how he puts out their eyes! What kind of impression this reasoning may have, seems to me doubtful even to agony. Both Trinitarian theology and nature, it is triumphantly urged, must proceed from the same Author; aye, but what sort of Author is that? You have led me, in your quest after analogies, through the great infirmary of God's creation; and so haunted am I by the sights and sounds of the lazar-house, that scarce can I believe in anything but pestilence; so sick of soul have I become, that the mountain breeze has lost its scent of health; and you say, it is all the same in the other world, and wherever the same rule extends: then I know my fate, that in this Universe Justice has no throne. And thus, my friends, it comes to pass that these reasoners often gain indeed their victory; but it is known only to the Searcher of Hearts, whether it is a victory against natural religion, or in favour of revealed. For this reason, I consider the 'Analogy' of Bishop Butler (one of the profoundest of thinkers, and on purely moral subjects one of the justest too,) as containing, with a design directly contrary, the most terrible persuasives to Atheism that have ever been produced. The essential error consists in selecting the difficulties,—which are the rare, exceptional phenomena of nature,—as the basis of analogy and argument. In the comprehensive and generous study of Providence, the mind may, indeed, already have overcome the difficulties, and, with the lights recently gained from the harmony, design, and order of creation, have made those shadows pass imperceptibly away; but when forced again into their very centre, compelled to adopt them as a fixed station and point of mental vision, they deepen round the heart again, and, instead of illustrating anything, become solid darkness themselves."

This argument may be effective against the opponents for whom it was intended, but what is its intrinsic value? Exaggerations of difficulties are foolish indeed, but where

is the wisdom of ignoring them? Certainly, to look at the bright side of things is the happiest lesson of practical philosophy; but it is equally certain that it will never answer in the end to shut our eyes to the truth. The idea of a "generous" study of Providence, is a figure of speech that strikes the mind as well as the ear with an inappropriateness approaching to profanity. If recent lights have not really removed any of the difficulties, but only diverted our attention from them, it is a very good thing for Trinitarianism or any thing else to remind us of them. The habit of leaving dark corners unexplored is the very forming of those centres of accumulations from mental disorders whence noxious doctrines spring. Covering them over may serve for temporary necessity, but is treachery in professed ministers of thorough purity and renovation. Hence, however agreeable the panacea that Unitarianism affords, and even temporarily beneficial, as a reactionary solace, a cordial tonic to restore a healthy cheerfulness after Calvinistic gloom, the doctrine furnishes no satisfactory resting-place for a consistently thoughtful mind. Not only is it the irresistible tendency of attention to settle precisely on those spots where stands the prohibitory warning of *dangerous*,—as "the tongue always goes to the aching tooth,"—but reason feels that it is illogical and delusive to ignore any part of the premises on which so all-important a question is based.—Our rigorous disciple of Butler turns away from Unitarianism with a sigh,—perhaps with somewhat of the feeling, Get thee behind me, Satan!—and prepares him, like a Hercules strong in his choice of rugged virtue, to grapple anew with the hydra of Orthodoxy.

But again disappointment meets him. The closer he examines into the reasoning of the “Analogy,” the more he perceives that the very same *ignoring of exceptions* which was repugnant to his intellectual integrity in Unitarianism, is but the carrying out of Butler’s own mode of arguing; that, in fact, wherever his principles are closely argued out, it becomes the only resource. The notable instance of the defence of Scripture immoralities is an evasion of this kind, which has drawn down abundance of indignant animadversion. The sophistry—not in the logic, but in the open defiance of natural principles with which the results of the logic are accepted,—is so apparent as with many readers to stamp the character of the author at once. But it must be remembered, the obviousness of the sophistry is owing not only to the clear vigour of the reasoning, but to the noble straightforward candour with which the whole process of thought is laid before the reader. And whoever has studied the moral writings of Butler sufficiently to feel the deep reverence for the law of conscience implanted in human nature, with which his mind was imbued, can judge with what painful self-contradiction he must have wrought out this flagrantly-chargeable vindication. The quotation of it must be given at length, with the interspersions which it may be ventured to make of comments expressing the sentiments it excites:—

“It is the province of Reason to judge of the Morality of the Scripture; *i.e.*, not whether it contains things different from what we should have expected, from a wise, just, and good Being . . . but whether it contain things plainly contradictory

to Wisdom, Justice, or Goodness ; to what the light of Nature teaches us of God. [How admirably distinguished ! we have no right to theorize upon Divine proceedings, but only to compare with our experience of the past ; the steadiness of which gives a just reliability to our impression of its characteristics, so that our human instincts may be assumed as capable of recognizing the genuineness of the Divine stamp.] And I know nothing of this sort objected against Scripture, unless in such objections as are formed upon supposition, that the constitution of Nature is contradictory to wisdom, justice or goodness ; which most certainly it is not. [Upon this assertion he is dogmatic ; it is a point that lies outside his argument, upon which he has no intention of entering, and which he does not expect will meet with contradiction.] Indeed there are some particular precepts in Scripture, given to particular persons, requiring actions, which would be immoral and vicious, were it not for such precepts. [How much must it have cost the Author of the Sermons on Human Nature to suppose such an arbitrary change possible ! but there was nothing else for it. He persuades himself he can show a peculiarity in the cases in question which will prevent injury to the revered law of Morality in general.] But it is easy to see [—is not this an expression that suggests how difficult he had found it to satisfy himself with it?—] that all these are of such a kind, as that the precept changes the whole nature of the case and of the action ; and both constitutes, and shows, *that* not to be unjust or immoral, which prior to the precept, must have appeared and really have been so : [here he anticipates how much his readers will be shocked, as no doubt he had been himself, and he goes on with more urgent vehemence :] which may well be, since none of these precepts are contrary to immutable Morality. If it were commanded to cultivate the Principles, and act from the Spirit, of treachery, ingratitude, cruelty, the Command would not alter the nature of the case or of the action, in any of these instances. But it is quite otherwise in precepts, which require only the doing an external action ; for

instance, taking away the property or life of any. [What then are principles, but the result of constantly similar individual instances?—He must seek deeper for the explanation: before we condemn it, let us go with him to the very root of the tie between the creature and its Creator:] For, men have no Right to either, but what arises solely from the Grant of God: when this grant is revoked, they cease to have any right at all, in either: and when this revocation is made known, as surely it is possible it may be, it must cease to be unjust to deprive them of either. [How else! what means of knowing vice from virtue have we except through the faculties He has given us? He might have made us feel quite otherwise: virtue, right, are of His making,—*whatever* He makes them!—But what then has become of the confidence in our human instincts with which we started? is not our natural law of morality entirely upset by this Divine infringement of it?—How long did Butler pause and urge his stubborn too-clearly-logical brain over this dilemma, or did he shut his eyes at once and stumble into the botching conclusion—] And though a Course of external acts, which, without command, would be immoral, must make an immoral habit; yet, a few detached commands have no such natural tendency. [Oh, monstrous! there is no difficulty in believing God to command injustice, *i.e.* to be unjust, only now-and-then; there is no harm for once-and-away!—How came Butler by his conviction that the law of morality was a Divine law, except from his recognition of its immutability? and how are principles formed except from the generalization founded upon the constancy of repeated individual experiences? A clear case of Divine contradiction destroys the authority of natural morality for ever; a clear case of Divine *command* to do that which the voice we took for Divine within us peremptorily *forbids* us to do, breaks up its basis utterly, by showing the futility of our instinctive inferences. Our moral instincts tell us that God is hating and striving against sin like our own better nature, not abetting it like our lower nature; the idea that He should *command* is as abhorrent.—But then, “we

know" that nothing takes place without God's permission (the distinction between permission and command is a mere quibble). He suffers, he commands, wickedness, inscrutably to us, in the natural world, why not in Revelation?—Is then natural morality delusive?—Certainly, it is at decided issue with this idea of Deity whether in natural or revealed religion: arbitrary fiat is entirely antagonistic to it. No one was better able to see and feel this than Butler; but he turns his back upon the subject he had proscribed to himself.] I thought proper to say thus much, of the few Scripture precepts, requiring, not vicious actions, but actions which would have been vicious but for such precepts; because they are sometimes weakly urged as immoral, and great weight is laid upon objections drawn from them. But to me, there seems no difficulty at all in these precepts [!], but what arises from their being offences, *i.e.*, from their being liable to be perverted, as indeed they are; to serve the most horrid purposes, by wicked, designing men; and perhaps to mislead the weak and enthusiastic. [Surely Butler's conscience often smote him for this assertion, and confessed it a treachery to his moral nature! But at least he has been true to his standard. He recurs to the principle he has laid down for himself throughout; and, it appears, triumphantly:—he has succeeded in reducing this crucial difficulty to the same category with all the rest.] And objections from this head, are not objections against Revelation, but against the whole notion of Religion, as a Trial, and against the whole Constitution of Nature." Part II. ch. III.

Triumphantly, in fact, it appears, as regards the premises on which his argument is based, though most sophistically as to its ulterior consequences. A Deity who commands into existence the sinner,—doomed as such by constitution and circumstance, and at the same time an object as such of His own displeasure,—may well be believed to command a solitary act of sin. The

one idea is so revoltingly mysterious to our human comprehension, that our repugnance to the other may be easily absorbed in it:—but our principles of morality are all set loose and afloat! Butler shrank back from the perception of this result; he desired, he was determined, to hold his faith in Human Nature as firmly as his faith in God: but in endeavouring to effect the union of the two, he has brought the ideas into perilous antagonism; and in many minds into collision that will be fatal to either religion or virtue, or perhaps to both.

This, then, is the predicament in which the student of the “Analogy” finds himself: where Revelation offends, Natural Religion offends equally;—is, indeed, the root of offence. To meet the straight, Unitarianism, on the one hand, has been able only to bid him shut his eyes to the exceptional evil in Nature, and then, it assures him, you may believe in the goodness of God. Butler, on the other hand, charges him not to be disturbed by exceptional interruption of the law of morality, and then, he says, you may retain your reverence for the immutable authority of conscience. Here are two thorny misgivings planted in his breast, that will not easily cease to rankle. In revulsion from the first he was willing to fall back upon the remedies offered by orthodoxy; shall he seek its aid also in palliation of the latter?—But it must be orthodoxy of a more stringent kind than Butler could bring himself to acknowledge: that which boldly equals itself to the worst, and frankly assents,—The world of nature *is* a howling wilderness, and the heart of man *is* desperately wicked, and deceitful above all things: what



then? God's favour is his only happiness, God's grace his only virtue.

Thorough orthodoxy like this requires reason to be laid prostrate at its feet, and nature made it simply impossible for so great a master of reason as Butler to adopt it. Yet he was a professor of orthodoxy, and the orthodox church has accepted him as its champion. The fact indeed seems to be that he was eminently able to keep *sub silentio* topics which he had already determined were irrelevant to his purpose. His mind was perfectly subdued to the curb. We know that he began with the resolution of sifting his subject thoroughly to the bottom, but he had well trained himself to forbear chafing against the limits he found necessary to prescribe to himself, during the long years that he pondered over the composition of his great work. He was practical,—saw what he could do, and did it. He could and did, at all events, silence the levity of contemporary opponents, by showing the solemn depths of the questions they were unwittingly stirring. “It is come, I know not how,” he says in his introductory Advertisement, “to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. . . . Thus much, at least, will be here found, not taken for granted, but proved, that any reasonable man, who will thoroughly consider the matter, may be as much assured, as he is of his own being, that it is not, however, so clear a case that there is nothing in it. There is, I think, strong evidence of its truth; but it is certain no one can, upon principles of reason, be satisfied of the contrary.”

This nature of his argument, *ad homines* of his own day, renders it, according to the usual course of things, inadequate to the needs of our own. The premisses accepted by them, are become (in great part, doubtless, owing to Butler himself,) the main disputanda with us; and the slight manner in which Butler passes over them, can only excite disappointment and vexation in the modern reader, however consistent it was with the position of the author. In aiming to prove, not that Christianity was true, but that its existing opponents could not show it to be false, he was certainly justified in taking for the basis of his argument whatever he supposed to be recognized as established truth by them. But with regard to ourselves, our desire of a solid basis for conviction is ill met by the extent of debateable ground which his hypothesis is intended to cover:—that is to say, by finding him take for granted, as necessary postulates of natural religion in common with revealed, not only that there is an intelligent Author of nature, and moral Governor of the world, but also—that “the divine government of the world, implied in the notion of religion in general and of Christianity, contains in it: That mankind is appointed to live in a future state; that there every one shall be rewarded or punished respectively for all that behaviour here, which we comprehend under the words, virtuous or vicious, morally good or evil; that our present life is a probation, a state of trial, and of discipline, for that future one;” and moreover, “that this world, being in a state of apostacy and wickedness, and consequently of

ruin, and the sense both of their condition and duty being so greatly corrupted amongst men, this gave occasion for an additional dispensation of Providence"—to all which immense assumptions, may be added the farther one, of an amount of external evidence in favour of the actual occurrence of the miraculous portion of Christianity, which the unbelievers of that day had not sufficient learning to gainsay, but which has, to say the least of it, been rendered in the highest degree questionable in our own.

The very fact of so much being taken for granted by so deep a thinker, raises suspicion as to its validity. Can we doubt that Butler had sought for satisfaction, and failed of finding it, on the *positive* side of the question, before he thus contented himself with taking the whole ground of it upon hypothetical assumption, in order to make out a merely negative demonstration? It was here certainly, that he felt his real strength lay; and to the reader the choice of treatment is from the first a tacit confession of weakness in the other direction. But following him in his own mode of argument, our course can be no other than to bring his hypothesis to the test. Within itself his logic may be, and indeed appears to be, perfect; so far as his own negative result is regarded within the limits of his own premisses, it may be entirely conceded as faultless and irrefragable. Upon those "principles of reason," by which Butler appears to mean "reasoning" or pure logical induction, no complaint can be made against the "Analogy." But the real point to which every mind that requires actual

satisfaction must come, is to ascertain whether the hypothesis itself can stand ; and for this, the only proof is by comparison with nature. In examining whether its consequences fall in harmoniously with the experience we have gained from the latter, we are surely employing the right reasonable mode of judging, though probably it is quite different from that contemplated by Butler, whose principle of argument is of that metaphysical kind, which the history of philosophy has shown to be very fruitful in delusion. The dealing with nature as a *scheme* of Providence, on which he uniformly insists, appears, on the very face of it, a treatment that should be inadmissible while confessedly we are acquainted with only a most insignificant portion of the whole order of things. When Butler says (with his usual noble candour and dignified simplicity,) “It is most readily acknowledged that the foregoing treatise is by no means satisfactory, very far indeed from it : but so would any natural institution of life appear, *if reduced into a system*, together with its evidence” (Part II. ch. VIII.) :—he is speaking a truth that surely tells with imperative weight against the making of any attempt to form any kind of system upon knowledge so confessedly imperfect as this, as indeed likely to turn out a very idle waste of reason. Butler himself forcibly expresses this position, when he says (Part II. ch. III.) “We fall into infinite follies and mistakes, whenever we pretend, otherwise than from experience and analogy, to judge of the constitution and course of nature.” No one could feel more clearly than he did the absurdity of pronouncing *à priori* upon the

character of the Divine proceedings, or appeal more powerfully, and with more genuinely pious humility, to man's consciousness of his own ignorance, as a demand upon him to wait with patience and see what God is going to do, instead of laying down rules for Him beforehand. Our admiration of this *true* "principle of reason," may make us feel assured that it was the imperfect knowledge of nature in Butler's day that was the main cause of his taking up a ground of argument that now seems so untenable.

We may therefore feel as if we had his own sanction and concurrence in bringing his principles anew to their proper test. And first of these is that one which, as it has here been endeavoured to show, forms the root of dissatisfaction in the constant experience of the upholders of the doctrine, namely, the principle of ignoring exceptions, which amounts in fact to the same thing as *the moral approbation of the practice of mental evasion*. It would seem as if the intellectual fallacy ought long ago to have made itself apparent; but when we search into the cause that has delayed the clearing of it up, we see that there has been a counter difficulty which even yet requires a long process of thought to be worked out before it can be effectually overcome. This difficulty proceeds from the supposed obligation of the mind to yield itself in blind submission to the demands of Religious Faith; an idea which of *necessity* gives rise to the habit and vindication of mental evasion, as soon as the intellect has become ripe for conflict. There seems no possible way of setting the understanding and the reli-

gious conscience right with one another, so long as the old established notion of the rival claims of Reason and Faith continues to be held. In the real nature of these faculties, lies the mainspring that governs the whole question, and science has yet to set its hand to rectify it. Mr. Rogers, who has shown himself a faithful disciple of Butler by his lucid exposition of the principles of the "Analogy", has well seen the position of the fundamental difficulty, and in his well-known Essay on "Reason and Faith," has at least set forth all the knotty intricacies of the tangled problem; but as usual he lets drop the thread in self-mockery, with all the helpless hopelessness of the Sceptic,—a character indeed, that he is so fond of assuming as to make it difficult to avoid inferring that he feels it belongs to him of right, and that he is conscious of believing in his own words, and in his own truth and earnestness no more than in that of any body else.—Until the real nature of the relation between these two faculties is discovered, that is, until it can be shown how the legitimate growth of each promotes the growth of the other, there must necessarily continue the old mischievous antagonism between the different parts of our nature. It would seem indeed as if the theological view were effectually working out its own confutation by the perplexity it occasions, in the vain attempt to stifle the internal warfare by external adjustment and enforcement of compromise:—the true object of Religion being uniformly held, according to this view, to consist in the subduing, to a greater or less degree, the refractory reason into submission before an authority which ought

to be met with faith alone. The idea of the school of Pascal and Butler is that in the Divine education of the race, reason is purposely checked, by obstacles arbitrarily interposed, in order that faith may have space for cultivation. They argue from daily experience that faith is a most desirable faculty, that no transaction of ordinary life can be carried on without it; they see too that reason is daily making conquests out of the dominion of faith; and they think it fair to infer that Divine Providence has taken measures to prevent it from effectually swallowing up its humble but beneficial fellow-worker. Hence the "difficulties" that encounter us in every department of nature and Revelation alike, which were graciously *designed* in order to discipline rebellious humanity into child-like acquiescence in paternal commands.

"Implicit obedience to the dictates of an all-perfect wisdom, exercised amidst many difficulties and perplexities, as so many tests of sincerity, and yet sustained by evidences which justify the conclusions, which involve them, would seem to be the great object of man's moral education here; and to vindicate both the partial evidence addressed to his reason, and the abundant difficulties which it leaves to his faith. 'The evidence of religion,' says Butler, 'is fully sufficient for all the purposes of probation, how far soever it is from being satisfactory as to the purposes of curiosity, or any other: and, indeed, it answers the purposes of the former in several respects, which it would not do if it were as over-bearing as is required.' Or as Pascal beautifully puts it:—'There is light enough for those whose sincere wish is to see—and darkness enough to confound those of an opposite disposition.' " *Reason and Faith*, p. 262.

Perhaps there seems little difference in the assertion, that human character is indeed formed and embellished

by its struggles through difficulties, so that the trials it has to encounter may prove in the end its best blessings : and the supposition that God, intending this result, expressly contrived the obstacles :—but, practically, we find that there is all the difference in the world ; inasmuch as the state of mind required by the one is a spirit encouraged to resistance, because it feels that God is on its side to overcome ; and the frame befitting the other is contented acquiescence. Nature indeed tells a man that it is good and wise to acquiesce when he has done his best in the struggle in vain ; but she makes the contest the duty, and submission the repose earned by meritorious labour, deservedly sweet when not the indulgence of indolence.—Again, the object of *keeping* man in a child-like disposition is counter to nature, who loves to see him grow, and whose way of making him grow is by encouraging him to depend upon the inward strength with which she has supplied him, and to look for no adventitious aid. Every wise human parent endeavours in this respect to imitate nature :—but, indeed, it is only recently that bandages to make the limbs grow straight, props and leading-strings, have begun to be discarded ; it is scarcely even now perceived that nothing more is needed to enable a child to acquire the full use of all his muscles, than to let them have their unobstructed play. In moral training also it is beginning, though only beginning, to be felt that the true parental influence is quite other than that supposed to be analogous to the conduct of the Divine Father. Happily the notion is growing out of fashion that to leave children



in ignorance of the motive of commands issued purposely in order to promote docility, is the way to secure the most desirable relation between father and son. The disciples of the Butler school seem to assume that the Deity carries on the education of the human race somewhat according to the ideas of a Madame de Genlis!

And equally defective with this idea of child-like obedience, must we conceive to be that of the *duty* owed to God as a Sovereign,—a rendering of the *dues* exacted in tribute, upon a principle akin to the loyalty of the subjects of a despot. Mr. Rogers observes acutely (in arguing against the complaint of insufficient evidence for theological doctrine both in nature and revelation):—

“Demonstration we cannot have; for God has not granted demonstration on that or any other subject in which *duty* is involved. If there had been any system which we could not *but* believe, which we *must* believe whether we would or not, no doubt the requisite evidence would have been such that scepticism would have been impossible...the word *duty* is the key to the whole mystery, for it implies the possibility of resisting its claims. We do not speak of its being *incumbent* on a man to rush out of a burning house, or to swim, if he can, when thrown into deep water. He cannot help it. If there be a Supreme Ruler of the universe, and if the position of his intelligent creatures be that of submissive obedience to him, it is inconceivable that a man can ever have *experience* of his being willing to perform that duty, with the sort of demonstration which you demand; and for aught we know, it may be impossible, constituted as we are, that we should ever be actually trained to that duty except in the midst of very much less than certainty.” *Eclipse of Faith*, p. 489.

To plain apprehension this reads very like the despotic tyrant's desire that his faithful slaves should not become too wise for subjection: nevertheless it is clearly consequential from the theological idea of *duty*—conformity to the Will of a Divine Moral Governor. But here again the idea shows itself at war with nature's teaching, which is: the *more*, and not the *less*, we know, the better we can obey. Blundering ignorance that obeys in the dark, with all his good intentions, makes often more mischief than he mends; and nature gives much better wages to the skilled workman who knows precisely what is the service she requires of him. The theological idea of duty supposes that it can be done better without intelligence than with it.—Supposing that after long ages of experience man should become so convinced that misery follows sin,—or let us say, some particular kind of sin,—that he no longer feels it *incumbent* on him to refrain from its commitment, but *cannot help it*: will Mr. Rogers say the consummation is so highly undesirable that it would have been worthy of Deity to interfere to prevent it, in order that the poor hankering sinner might continue to be withheld solely out of duteous regard to the behest of his Superior?

But we are now come to the main stronghold of the argument of Butler, the doctrine of Probabilities, in which he appears to be as much at variance with nature as in the instances already pointed out. Let Mr. Rogers continue to be our exponent:—

“And the law of our religious condition is throughout in analogy with that of the entire condition of our present life; it

is *probable* evidence only that is given to man in either case, and ‘probable evidence,’ as Bishop Butler says, ‘often of even wretchedly insufficient character.’ Nature, or rather God himself, everywhere cries aloud to us, ‘Oh! mortals—certainty, demonstration, infallibility, are not for you, and shall not be given to you; for there must be a sphere for faith, sincerity, diligence, patience.’ And as if to prove to us not only that this evidence is what we must trust to, but that we safely may—He impels us by strong necessities of our lower nature operating on the higher (which would otherwise, perhaps, plead for the sceptic’s inaction in relation to this as well as to another world,) to play our part; if we stand shivering on the brink of action, necessity plunges us headlong in; if we fear to hoist the sail, the strength of the current of life snaps our moorings, and compels us to drive. Faith in that same sort of evidence which the sceptic rejects when urged in behalf of religion, prompts the farmer to cast in his seed, though he can command no blink of sunshine, nor a drop of rain; the merchant to commit his treasures to the deep, though they may all go to the bottom, and sometimes do; the physician to essay the cure of his patient, though often half in doubt whether his remedy will kill or save. ...God says to us in effect, ‘On such evidence you *must* and *shall* act,’ and shows us that we safely may. Without promising us absolute success in all our plans, or absolute truth in the investigation of evidence, he says, in either case, ‘Do your best; be faithful to the light you have, diligent and conscientious in your investigations of available evidence, great or little—act fearlessly on what appears the truth, and leave the rest to me.’” *Eclipse of Faith*, p. 440.

To this we may reply, that if we cannot in any case attain to absolute certainty, we may approximate it to a degree that is relatively sufficient for us; and that all the tendency of Nature’s teaching is to make us, not contented with probability, but unceasing in our efforts

to gain that safe ground, every step nearer to which is accompanied by incalculably increasing benefit. So far from encouraging rashness, she shows us that she hates all that gambling folly which is indeed the work of our headlong greedy *lower* nature, by sending sure ruin in its train; and reserving her crown of success for the wise prudence and forethought which proceed from the higher faculties—when they are not afflicted with that deplorable imbecillity against which it is the object here to raise a warning! With regard to the moral which Mr. Rogers draws, “act fearlessly on what appears the truth, and leave the rest to God”: the lesson may rather be read—if obliged to act while conscious of uncertainty, act *fearfully*, on your guard against the mischief that lies in wait in case you are wrong; and go on ever trying to remove the dangerous ignorance, in the blessed faith that perseverance will have its reward.

But, says Butler, we ought not to look for satisfaction here, this world is a scene of Probation!—Truly, we find it abounding in trial, disappointment, and vexation of spirit; too true are all its pains and penalties: but, in spite of all, we may protest that man does sometimes overcome his troubles, and that, when he does, he has in the very act of success a delicious satisfaction which is a real, present, and sufficient reward.—*Exceptis excipien- dis*:—the moral condition of mankind is far from being rectified yet. It is enough for the argument to see that nature *has* a reward for those who can get it.

For those who can-*not* get the reward, of conscious possession of truth (in so far as is possible to man,) to

cry, It is not of much importance after all,—shall we not say, it is a most unworthy aspersion of God's rich vintage! Yet the following is the “practical consequence” drawn by Butler at the conclusion of his defence of Christianity, which he laments “is not attended to by every one who is concerned in it” :—

“Now it has been shown that a *serious apprehension that Christianity may be true* [all that he claims to have established,] lays persons under the strictest obligations of a serious regard to it, throughout the whole of their life : a regard *not the same exactly, but in many respects nearly the same, with what a full conviction of its truth would lay them under.*”

Oh! lame and impotent—oh! profoundly SCEPTICAL conclusion!

In all these instances it appears that Butler has appealed, for confirmation of his scheme of revealed religion, to natural principles which on closer examination are found to be the reverse of capable of bearing him out. When he assumes, as the undeniable fruit of the moral experience of mankind,—that exceptions to a supposed rule are better not regarded; that it is desirable for man to content himself with probabilities; and that the practical effect of such reliance is little different from that of acting upon ascertained truth; that the course of nature is such as to suggest the idea of a Governor who commands blind obedience, or of a Father who is best pleased with uninquiring filial love, or of an Instructor by whom perplexities are expressly contrived, with a view to baffle reason, in order that it may not get the better of faith :—in all these averments, it now appears,

he is utterly contradicting the real facts of nature. And what is the consequence?—If it be so, does not Nature imperatively demand that the theory which she has tried and found wanting, should be duly abandoned? The holding on to it in spite of her remonstrance, is a daring resistance to her authority that cannot be expected to pass with impunity.

According to the human reason which is our means of interpreting Nature, the due and only *safe* course for the mind to take under the position of possessing a theory which is thus giving way under the ordeal of experience, is plainly to lean lightly upon it, not to rest our confidence upon it. When exceptions are recognized, they should be carefully registered, as proof that we are not yet in possession of the truth, and kept in view in order that we may be reminded to seek farther for it. The exceptions to the rule of beneficence in the government of the world,—according to the light in which they appear to our limited apprehension,—should convince us that our theory of accounting for them is still imperfect. When Christianity was found to be burdened with the same difficulties as Natural Religion, and even greater, it was evidence that there was radical deficiency in both of them, and real religious submission to the state of things required that all theorizing upon the subject should be suspended till farther light was gained. Mankind already possessed conviction that the *preponderating* tendency was towards good:—what they had to do for their security, was to hold fast at all events to that, and not let it go in the forced attempt to believe that *all* is

good, while manifest indications are pressing upon them the perception of the contrary. They have ample ground for *practical* confidence, both as regards conduct and feeling:—the danger of destroying the confidence lies in the making it depend upon a human *theory* instead of the same human *experience* upon which it has been already founded, and the only means of attaining to which, in yet greater measure, is the resolutely keeping our eyes open, and not in the shutting them in order to throw ourselves *blindly* upon our trust. Especially in a matter of such dear concern to us as the character of the Providence that enfolds our lives, and the life of our hearts, in its sway, does it import us to forbear entrenching our faith within a theory that perchance may leave the most keenly sentient portion outside, a prey to blank disappointment! In hastening to presume that it is a Humanly-Divine tenderness that is watching over us, we are preparing a sense of cruel mockery and desertion that will destroy the solid trust we might have enjoyed, if this theory of Personality had not been insisted on to the obstruction of that other already founded upon reliable experience.

Just the contrary to the remedy proposed by Unitarianism appears the real road towards satisfaction, for those who aim to *think* aright, and are not contented with the vague justness of sentiment, which is still sufficient for those who need only to *act* and *feel*:—though for them also it is of high ultimate importance that the thinkers should not lead them wrong by placing *theoretic* confidence, where yet no confidence is due. Just as

necessary as it is in practical action and practical faith, to fix attention upon the best, and for the moment *only* the best, is it imperative in seeking for the *abstract rule of faith*, to look at everything, at the difficulties most carefully and anxiously of all. A theory in its very nature must be held in suspension, and *never* relied upon. It must always remain open to improvement; regarded as a register of past experience and the means of acquiring more: but never must it be enclosed all around us, so as to prevent our seeing our way onwards. While exceptions to our theory exist, it remains only a probability; to endeavour to force ourselves to be contented with it is an ignoring of the value of Truth:—and the consequence, the fatal consequence, is the rendering of Truth as revealed by experience, subservient to our own present partial perception of Truth. By in fact taking this course, Butler found himself reduced to make the law of Morality, founded upon the former, give way to the theory of a personal administration of Providence founded upon the latter: and to a mind like his, which had fully recognized the Divine value of Experience, this was a conscious contradiction that set it altogether wrong with itself. It was a resting of the Certain upon the Uncertain, a making of that which was known to be the first, depend upon that which was felt to be the last. And by so doing he was endangering Religion, in so far as he was sapping the root of all our trust in our experiences and inferences as to the Power that governs us;—endangering the stability of the very constitution of the mind itself by the habituating it to this partial



resting upon its own theory instead of seeking God's real construction of facts. Whenever this is the case, and the distortion of the human will, and perversity of its settled habit, prevents it from yielding to the imperious demand of Nature, does it not follow as a consequence to be certainly looked for, that her Nemesis is at hand to compel the reluctant obedience!

The form the avenging Deity takes with regard to religion, is this same drear phantom of Scepticism. It lays a cold paralysing hand upon the heart palpitating feverishly in the strained effort at a now impossible faith—bids it “believe no more!”—and leaves it hard and hollow to render back only an echo of dismal laughter at all that healthy minds know still to be true and good. But there will generally be a reactionary impulse, before yielding up the mind finally to its influence, causing it to throw itself upon the protection of Superstition. Having abjured the path of consistent reason, there seems a resource in the opposite direction, in undivided allegiance to the principle of submission of the understanding. Of this convulsive effect we have abundant evidence at the present day, when the consequences of the theological struggle of the last century are become ripe and obvious. But it is already discernible where we can trace the diagnosis without danger of invidiousness and with certain profit to ourselves:—in the illustrious man who stands at the head of the struggle, and whose personal character has rendered him as much an object of habitual reverence, as the works of his religious genius have constituted him a main pillar of our country's Church.

Circumstances gave to Bishop Butler the position of a representative man; and still more the character of his mind and life, so eminently apart from worldly influences, constitute their history a clear specimen of the working out of a principle. No where shall we find a more perfect and instructive example of the course liable to be taken by the mind under the perilous contingencies of a turning crisis of thought, when the slightest oscillation may determine it one way or the other, for evil or for good. His intellect was of that large sort which comprises tendencies of the most opposite description, so that in himself he typified that religious contest that was to occupy so much more than his own age; and the manner in which he arranged it has been accepted for a long time as satisfactory by those who have felt in him the welcome power of a master mind to deal with their own kindred difficulties. They have vainly tried to persuade themselves that he *did* settle it for them; but the fact shows itself with notable moral effect in its consequences, that he never *was* able to settle the point to his own satisfaction, and that in the endeavour to persuade himself of the contrary, he fell into a dilemma of self-disintegration that renders his experience a warning for mankind. No one fails to recognize the massiveness of his intellectual power: there seems only a something wanting to give it determination and efficiency. He was so able to see arguments on all sides, that difficulties were peculiarly apt to press upon him; and he was so remarkably free from the animal passions and domestic inclinations which serve as determining influences to

most men, that he had to *reason* out the nature of those practical motives which others feel by instinct, and from his deficiency of instinct, as perhaps we have seen, calculated them falsely after all. No one can doubt the largeness of his moral nature—no one, at least, who has studied his “Sermons” as well as his “Analogy;”—but that it was still relatively inferior to his great intellect, seems equally apparent. Nothing else can account for the degree of sophistry with which he occasionally imposes upon himself. A little more *moral courage*, perhaps, would have enabled him to take a ground that would have rendered his influence over his disciples as positive as it is now merely negative,—unsettling,—discomforting,—sceptical.

Let us recall his personal position by a glance over the leading circumstances of his life. He was born a Dissenter (anno 1692), the son of a respectable shopkeeper at Wantage in Berkshire, who, observing in Joseph, the youngest of his family of eight children, an “excellent genius and inclination for learning,”\* determined to educate him for the ministry. He was accordingly sent to the Dissenting Academy at Tewkesbury, then under the superintendence of Mr. Jones, who had the “singular fortune of having for pupils, with the view of being ordained to the Presbyterian ministry, three young men afterwards prelates of the Established Church, Chandler, Butler, and Secker, the two latter of whom

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\* Quotation is made here chiefly, from the *Life of Dr. Butler*, prefixed to Bishop Halifax's edition of his works.

were contemporaries.” This triple conversion implies that something was due to the influence of their common tutor ; but we know that Butler’s mind was too powerful to have been led (except as the turning-point of the scale,) by any one who did not speak according to the tone of his own mind. When dissenters turn churchmen, one of two motives seems to be in operation : the vulgar one of worldly promotion, or the refined one of a leaning towards the outward expression of religious feeling by artistic forms and ceremonies. The disinterested simplicity of the character of Butler raises him far above the suspicion of the former ; and the alternative of the latter is confirmed by his later history : but we may well credit also that the catholicity of his mind was revolted by the sectarian narrowness which attends the zeal of dissenters in general, though less, it may be, amongst those of the Presbyterian than of any other denomination, it being the lineal progenitor of modern Unitarianism. For already during his student life he was occupied with a much deeper range of thought, as we see by his celebrated correspondence with Dr. Samuel Clarke, carried on anonymously in the first instance by the modest youth of twenty-one, till the acumen and excellent temper of his remarks drew towards him the friendship of the appreciating Author. In the opening of this correspondence, on the *à priori* argument in the “ Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God,” the young logician thus states his early experience :—

“ I have made it, Sir, my business, ever since I thought myself capable of such sort of reasoning, to prove to myself

the being and attributes of God. And being sensible that it is a matter of the last consequence, I endeavoured after a demonstrative proof; not only more fully to satisfy my own mind, but also in order to defend the great truths of natural religion, and those of the Christian revelation which follow from them, against all opposers: but must own with concern, that hitherto I have been unsuccessful; and though I have got very probable arguments, yet I can go but very little way with demonstration in the proof of those things. When first your book on those subjects (which by all, whom I have discoursed with, is so justly esteemed,) was recommended to me, I was in great hopes of having all my inquiries answered."

Alas! like many a sanguine expectation of youth, this hope was, as the correspondence shows, disappointed; nor was any other means ever found to make it good, for with this merely *probable* argument he was still obliged to content himself, after no idle occupation of his mind up to the full maturity of his powers.—As already observed, with this great question already working in his thoughts, he was likely to feel little disposed to enter upon the petty distinctions which measure out the bounds of the different sections of the Christian world with their various shades of belief, and to be glad to shelter himself from them in the repose of an established creed, and imposed form of clerical duty, which also gave him the largest opportunity for the exercise of that practical goodness which was the main employment of his irreproachable life. "He entered," says Bishop Halifax, "into an examination of the principles of non-conformity; the result of which was, such a dissatisfaction with them, as determined him to conform to the Established Church."

After some opposition from his father, he was admitted a commoner at Oriel College, Oxford, on the 17th of March, 1714. Here he formed an intimate friendship with the son of the Bishop of Durham, which laid the foundation of all his subsequent preferments, and procured for him a situation of note, when he was only twenty-six years of age. This was the preachingship at the Rolls Chapel, which he retained for eight years, in the course of which he delivered those Sermons which show his eminence in the character of a moralist.

The mind of Butler seems essentially realistic: how odious to him was mere chopping of logic, without the earnest search for truth, is evident from many passages in his writings, poignant with witty sarcasm; as, *e. g.*, in the first paragraph of the Preface to these Sermons, he can hardly moderate his contempt for those "many persons," who "from different causes, never exercise their judgment, upon what comes before them, in the way of determining whether it be conclusive, and holds. They are perhaps entertained with some things, not so with others; they like, and they dislike: but whether that which is proposed to be made out be really made out or not; whether a matter be stated according to the real truth of the case, seems to the generality of people merely a circumstance of no consideration at all...For the sake of this whole class of readers," he goes on maliciously, "I have often wished that it had been the custom to lay before people nothing in matters of argument but premisses, and leave them to draw conclusions for themselves."—Excellent champion of right rational

independence! how has his spirit been dishonoured by many of his servile admirers,—and unjustly maligned by many of his captious opponents!

And the same love of solid reality, and integrity of purpose, was shown in his conduct in life, by the carrying out of his view of duty in the faithful discharge of his pastoral office. We need here to note this, not as a matter of common-place panegyric, but in order to observe how the education of his mind was going on. Checked in his abstruse speculations, he took what a sound mind always instinctively feels the only method of setting itself in right order,—he betook himself steadfastly to the path of active duty. And these Sermons show how wholesome was the tone of his mind under its influence. He was trying to do good to man, and the study of humanity, in harmony with the effort, was one in which a noble harvest lay all within his reach. Here he could and did employ that method of research which his natural truth-seeking intellect had always taught him to prefer, that which led to *positive demonstration*, and which he had to his chagrin found baffled in his first attempts after knowledge that was *not* within his reach.

“There are two ways,” he says (Preface VI.), “in which the subject of morals may be treated. One begins from inquiring into the abstract relations of things: the other from a matter of fact, namely, what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature. In the former method the conclusion is expressed thus, that vice is contrary to the nature and reason of things: in the latter, that it is a violation or breaking in upon our own nature. Thus they both lead us to the same thing, our

obligations to the practice of virtue ; and thus they exceedingly strengthen and enforce each other. The first seems the most direct formal proof, and in some respects the least liable to cavil and dispute : the latter is in a peculiar manner adapted to satisfy a fair mind ; and is more easily applicable to the several particular relations and circumstances in life.”

This shows us that, while the positive method had his decided preference, he was far from suspecting that the old scholastic mode of *formal proof* from the *à priori* assumed “nature of things,” was in fact utterly delusive for the attainment of truth, and that the two methods by no means, necessarily, “lead us to the same thing.” It is a notable fact, that might have startled himself, as it is ignored by his followers, that the admirable system of morality which he worked out by his positivism, has served as the foundation for a scheme that is now considered the most directly antipodal to every notion of religion. What do the orthodox disciples of Butler say to the fact of his view of the moral nature of man proving itself the basis for that physiological system of mind which they now hold in abhorrence as gross materialism, and utterly alien to the spiritual belief in which alone they see ground of hope and salvation ! Yet they will find it hard to show that Mr. George Combe is guilty of any misrepresentation in the inference that he thus makes respecting him, in his work on “The Relations between Science and Religion” (in a note, page 181.) :—

“Bishop Butler appears, in his Sermons on ‘Human Nature’ and ‘Upon the Love of our Neighbour’, to have made such a near approach to the practical doctrine of the present work, that



I am led to think that the dogmas of his creed restrained the full and free exercise of his profound, upright, and comprehensive understanding, in pursuing the subject to its legitimate conclusions."

Without entering, however, on the physiological question, it seems clear that orthodox Christians are quite right in repudiating Butler's view of Human Nature as alien to his doctrinal creed. The very reverence with which he regarded it, and which was so deep a principle in his mind, seems in itself, indeed, as if it must have made it impossible for him ever to have been a real believer in the theology which is essentially based upon a notion of its corruptness. It is true that he admits it is not now in its perfect and proper condition; (—a condition which he said, perhaps once *did* belong to it; which it *may* be thought, is better to be referred in the light of a possibility to the indefinite future, as one that perhaps one day *will* belong to it;—) that he allows it does not actually correspond to the Divine intention respecting it; and that he submits passively to what "the Scripture tells us" of man's being in a *state of ruin*, &c.: but, if it were only that he uniformly makes human nature the standard by which we are entitled to judge of the soundness or unsoundness of Revelation, it would be sufficient indication that he could never really regard it in the light which is necessary to genuine orthodox faith. In fact, his Christianity at this time at least, (as was the case in the Church generally of his day,) was not essentially beyond that of the Presbyterian denomination, which was soon to be the parent of Unitarianism, of rationalism and humanitarianism.

In conjunction with his duty at the Rolls, Butler had received also the rectory of Stanhope, one of the richest but most secluded parsonages in England; and as long as he held both, he divided his time between town and country; but when he had resigned the former,

“He resided during seven years wholly at Stanhope, in the conscientious discharge of every obligation appertaining to a good parish priest. This retirement, however, was too solitary for his disposition, which had in it a natural cast of gloominess. And though his recluse hours were by no means lost, either to private improvement or public utility, yet he felt at times, very painfully, the want of that select society of friends to which he had been accustomed, and which could inspire him with the greatest cheerfulness.”

These recluse hours, tinged with melancholy, we know were devoted to the abstruse speculations to which he was turning back with the resolution of completing what he had early made the object of his life's ambition—the effecting a substantial defence for the religion which the provoking and sinful carelessness of those around him, accepted, or rejected, with equal levity, and indifference as to whether the arguments “be conclusive, and hold,” or not. The *à priori* method which he had formerly tried, had afforded him no positive demonstration; neither could he attain it in any other way: nevertheless,—as we must suppose, in a too resolute purpose to maintain the religious ideas in which his whole cast of thought was rooted,—instead of continuing the sure course of observation of nature, he had recourse to the only available argument left to him, and, taking now upon assumption what he had failed to

prove, contented himself with seeing if his hypothetical logic would not at least serve his need in a negative direction. He made out his case, as we have seen, with a logical accuracy which no principle of reasoning, based like his own upon certain assumed premisses, could prove by mere logical inference, to be at fault; but which might well turn out delusive after all, if their results came out in opposition to the principles which Nature was all the time working out her own way, very different from those of man's devising:—and if Butler had a secret misgiving that such was very possibly the case, his negative foundation for religion was not likely to furnish him with an antidote to the natural gloom of his disposition.

Happily for his personal well-being, his friends had not forgotten him in his retirement. His quondam dissenting schoolfellow, Mr. Secker, who had been himself appointed Chaplain to the King,

“Took occasion, in a conversation which he had the honour of holding with Queen Caroline, to mention to her his friend Mr. Butler. The Queen said she thought he had been dead. Mr. Secker assured her he was not. Yet her Majesty afterwards asked Archbishop Blackburn, if he was not dead: his answer was, ‘No, Madam, but he is buried.’”

Through this influence being recommended as Chaplain to Lord Chancellor Talbot, Mr. Butler was called up to Town, and taking Oxford in his way, was there admitted to the degree of Doctor of Law in 1733. Honours now accumulated upon him, as the personal weight of his character and talent was felt at a court

where philosophical and religious merit had been already in so many instances appreciated and rewarded.

“In 1736, he was appointed Clerk of the Closet to Queen Caroline ; and in the same year he presented to her Majesty a copy of his excellent Treatise, entitled ‘The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature.’ His attendance upon his Royal Mistress, by her especial command, was from seven to nine in the evening every day : and though this particular relation to that excellent and learned Queen was soon determined by her death in 1737, yet he had been so effectually recommended by her, as well as by the late Lord Chancellor Talbot, to his Majesty’s favour, that in the next year he was raised to the highest order of the Church, by a nomination to the bishopric of Bristol.”

He was also subsequently promoted by the regard of George II. to the Deanery of St. Paul’s, whereupon, “finding the demands of this dignity to be incompatible with his parish duty at Stanhope,” where he had conditioned on his first coming to London that he should continue to reside one half of the year, “he immediately resigned that rich benefice.” It is recorded also, as a proof of his pecuniary disinterestedness, that as Bishop of Bristol “he expended, in repairing and improving the episcopal palace, four thousand pounds, which is said to have been more than the whole revenue of the bishopric amounted to, during his continuance in that see ;” and both his private and public benefactions were on a munificent scale. On the death of Dr. Chandler in 1750, he was translated to that see, and was thereby

“Furnished with ample means of exerting the virtue of charity ; a virtue which eminently abounded in him, and the exercise of which was his highest delight. But this gratification

he did not long enjoy. He had been but a short time seated in his new bishopric, when his health began visibly to decline ; and having been complimented, during his indisposition, upon account of his great resignation to the Divine will, he is said to have expressed some regret, that he should be taken from the present world so soon after he had been rendered capable of becoming more useful in it."

He died at Bath on the 16th of June, 1752, sixty years of age, having never married, but preserved all his social feelings and personal interests bound up in his sacred office. "*Qualis quantusque Vir erat, Sua libentissime agnovit ætas,*" says the inscription on the flat marble stone beneath which his remains repose in the cathedral of Bristol: yet, in spite of the contemporary honour which attended his exemplary life, calumny, his biographers tell us, was soon to busy itself with his name. With unbounded indignation they report, how the malevolent spirit of detraction suggested to his enemies the easily-to-be-refuted accusation that this champion of truly rational Christianity had become "addicted to superstition," "inclined to popery," and had actually "died in the communion of the Church of Rome;" and quote triumphantly in exculpation his express acknowledgment of the great value he attached to our English ecclesiastical constitution, inasmuch as it was "a security from that great corruption of Christianity, Popery, which is ever at hand to bring us again under its yoke:"—a passage occurring in one of his published Sermons, delivered only four years before that "Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Durham,"\* dating the year

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\* "The only one of his publications which ever produced him a direct literary antagonist."

preceding his death, which furnishes the main support to the calumny,—in conjunction with the fact, that “when Bishop of Bristol, he had put up a *Cross*, a plain piece of marble inlaid, in the chapel of his episcopal house.” “The principal design of the Bishop in his Charge,” says Dr. Halifax, “is, to exhort his Clergy to ‘do their part towards reviving a practical sense of religion amongst the people committed to their care;’ and as one way of effecting this, to ‘instruct them in the *Importance of External Religion*,’ or the usefulness of outward observances in promoting inward piety;” the Cross, though “on account of the offence it occasioned, both at the time, and since, it were to be wished, in prudence, it had not been done,” “was intended by the blameless Prelate merely as a sign or memorial, that true Christians are to bear their cross, and not to be ashamed of following a crucified Master.”

And as to the “malicious” inferences that were drawn

“From the natural melancholy and gloominess of Dr. Butler’s disposition; from his great fondness for the lives of Romish saints, and their books of mystic piety; from his drawing his notions of teaching men religion, not from the New Testament, but from philosophical and political opinions of his own; and above all, from his transition from a strict Dissenter amongst the Presbyterians to a rigid Churchman” :—

Archbishop Secker replies,

“That the natural melancholy of the Bishop’s temper would rather have fixed him amongst his first friends, than prompted him to the change he made; that he read books of all sorts, as well as books of mystic piety, and knew how to pick the good that was in them out of the bad; that instead of being a strict Dissenter, he went occasionally, from his early years, to the

established worship, and became a constant conformist to it when he was barely of age ;”—in short, that “few accusations have been so entirely groundless as the present one, so pertinaciously carried on.”

This charge of “Popery,” which naturally sprang up, and was readily extinguished, fifteen years after the death of its object, shows itself in another light, now that a century of farther experience has unfolded the way in which certain tendencies habitually work themselves out. Undoubtedly there can be no wish to repeat the “calumny, that Bishop Butler died a Papist;” but it is surely a most instructive lesson to be gained from the history of his life, that the mental influence to which he had chosen to give himself up, was one that was leading him on the direct road towards Popery ; and that, small as was the way he advanced in it himself, other minds which continue it under precisely the same guiding principle, will find themselves unable to stop short of the Arch-superstition of Rome itself. And this road, it seems equally apparent, he chose, *not because his faith was strong, but because it was weak.* The seeking for external aid, which is the spirit of Catholicism, is a mere sign of deficiency felt within ; the demand for outward forms and ceremonies to rouse the languid feeling of religion, is an evident token that the actual stimulus has become wanting ; and hence it seems fairly to be inferred that the increasing need shown for them by Butler was a proof that religious faith was become more difficult for him than it was wont to be. He exhibited this tendency, indeed, already in his early years, when he deserted

Presbyterian simplicity for the ritual of the Established Church; and he was as logically consistent in carrying out the principle he there acted on, as in his abstract reasoning itself. The principle of “aids to devotion,” once adopted, fairly leads all the pomp and circumstance of Romanism in its train.

But Dr. Butler was in his lifetime accused of *enthusiasm*, the reverse extreme to superstition!—And it is this very comprehensiveness, this excellently-balanced constitution of his mind, open to all influences, which brings out the conclusion which it is the present aim to show as the really important to ourselves moral of his example:—namely, that it was no fault in his method of dealing with his principles, but in *the principles themselves*, that led him out of the only safe track for the mind of man to follow, that which is unfolded in God’s book of Nature studied by the light of reason.—If the fundamental idea of Revelation be really one which increasing intelligence is proving to be false, it is clear that it must require adventitious aid to support it; and surely the reverse argument must be equally true, that if it require adventitious aid, it is thereby shown to be false; except upon the principle of Catholicism, that adventitious aid is the very design of Providence: which we find utterly at variance with all the analogy of nature. Butler felt clearly, with his vigorous practical mind, that Christian doctrine did not work well left to itself; it needed enforcing; it needed ministering agents,—organization,—a Church,—a State Church;—thence; would he not have seen, if he had lived long enough and been able consis-



tently to follow out the idea, the ministers must be priests, the Church must be the infallible Romish Church? But, long short of this, nature was already telling him that he was altogether wrong; she had implanted within him an antagonistic principle that all along kept him at war with these inherited notions, claiming by old-rooted dogmatism to be the inestimable possession, or talisman, which it were death to part with. His richer inheritance on nature's side, of noblest powers of mind, demanded with unquenchable importunity to have satisfaction for reason, and forbade faith on any other condition. He had started in life, as we have seen, with the settled ambition of giving to the world a solid defence of Christianity. He sought it out in steadfast earnestness; when positive demonstration failed him, he tried to content himself with the negative, and its all too unsatisfactory results; he persevered, when he had found that, with all his endeavours, it was impossible for him to attain that rational conviction which he had fondly hoped for,—persevered, that is, when it was time he should have given it up, if those adventitious “aids” of Christian faith, moral, æsthetic, and selfish, had not given it a hold in his nature too strong for his reason itself. In throwing himself still more upon them, he was in a manner confessing his secret misgiving and faltering faith. Are we to suppose that even the heartfelt prayer for help to unbelief, was insufficient by itself, so that outward forms were required to make it more availing?—Can any idea be more touching—if we may, without irreverence, venture such an intrusion into the sanctuary of his private

thoughts,—more suggestive of mingled awe and compassion, than that of the venerable Author of the “Analogy,” prostrate before the figured symbol of Christian Salvation, imploring aid to enable himself to believe!

If it be thought unjustifiable to regard Butler himself in the light of a Sceptic, it appears at least manifest, that his mode of argument in proof of Christianity leads as certainly towards Scepticism, as his mode of enforcing its practical observance leads towards Roman Catholicism:—the latter the resource for those who cling to a beaten track, still haunted by flickering memories of a faith all but extinct; the other, the helpless condition of those who cannot dig a new path, and are ashamed of this,—who look on listlessly, wondering at, and perchance envying, the bold energy of those confident, because confiding, spirits who are ever alert to explore and conquer new realms of thought. The favourite jeer of intended irony, on the part of professed Christians whose own faith is too much worn out to enable them to be in earnest about anything, perhaps to have any feeling so genuine as even envy,—“O Infidel; great is thy faith!”—proves all too true for a jest. Faith is deserting the Believers by profession, and has become eminently the characteristic of men of Science. In reliance upon the creed they have earned, as to the agencies that govern the secular affairs of the world, and those mighty elements of physical force, to tamper with which is instant destruction to the feeble frame of man, these steady conquerors of Nature show themselves in working earnest,

with their lives in their hand. The noble courage that has animated many of them to a martyrdom for science in all its branches, including the disinterested efforts for discoveries that help to social good and general philanthropy—can we count it less than religion, is it not the highest of all religion as well as the most genuine?

The real meaning of religion is the seeking of God's truth, and not our own, wherever we can find it. If, for the present, our aimings at the most ambitious portion of it, prove to be a delusive aspiring at what remains entirely beyond our reach, true wisdom, identical with true piety, bids us occupy ourselves, if only preparatorily to that highest, with such study of His works and ways, as actually we have found to yield us no unavailing fruit.

This is the light in which philosophical religion appears to us, when once the delusiveness of that former aspiring has become known—a constant seeking in true humility for truth, instead of the forced endeavour at self-gratulation upon the supposed possession of all that is needful for us to know. To those who have arrived to see it under what now appears this advanced aspect, the clearing away of that delusiveness is so far from a work of mere destruction, that it is felt to be not only the making room for a higher kind of conception, but in itself the working out of an insight of the most indispensable kind into the real nature of Religious Faith. Through the observation of its influence upon the constitution of the mind, we learn something of itself, and something that is of no slight moment to our practical concern. When we see that it does not answer in Religion any

more than in any other species of mental intelligence to build upon what has not been tested and approved in the ordinary mode of experience, and that the trusting that the compulsive reliance upon faith will bring the faith itself in time, is a dangerous experiment of ruinous expenditure to the mind's health, we shall bend our efforts with more steady purpose to gain for our Faith that sure foundation upon which when it has once taken up its station there is no danger of its failing us.

And if we feel that the possession of this conviction is, or would be, a positive gain, let us not be guilty of the ungrateful folly of forgetting that we owe the advanced ground, and the surety of our faith, to those pioneers who also were faithful in the preparatory labour of their earlier day. Through the painfully elaborated conceptions of theologians, and it may be added as perhaps of at least equal effect, through the example of their moral experience, is it solely owing that it has become possible for philosophic thought perhaps to win a larger and a stronger basis for human trust. Amongst our venerated memories the name of Bishop Butler may continue to rest, even though side-by-side be added those of Auguste Comte and other leaders of seemingly antagonistic thought, which in their fame can never supersede while they succeed to his own.—When the Biographical History of Theology is written, as a much-to-be-desired companion to that of Philosophy, our great ecclesiastical Thinker will come to have *positive* honour rendered to him for even his *negative* merit of having brought the metaphysico-theological hypothesis to a point where the

untenableness of his own estimate of it becomes easily demonstrable. Much more shall honour continue to be rendered to him for that noble exposition of his (—showing him to be a true Doctor of the Common Law of Nature, if not of Divinity—) of the great principle of Analogy and Experience henceforth established in general recognition as our sole means of attaining to heavenly just as much as earthly science, which makes his position with regard to philosophic religion parallel with that of Locke, and shows him, like that fellow-vindicator of the “Reasonableness of Christianity,” a legitimate precursor of the Positive Philosophers of the present day.

THE END.



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