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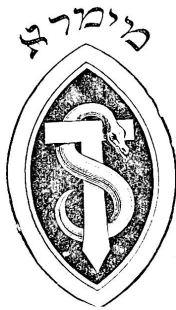
REASON, RELIGION,

AND

REVELATION.

BY

EDWARD VANSITTART NEALE.



"Yet let us ponder boldly. 'Tis a base
Abandonment of Reason to resign
Our right of thought."

Childe Harold, iv. 137.

PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
NO. 11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1875.

Price One Shilling.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY C. W. REYNELL, LITTLE PULTENEY STREET,
HAYMARKET, W.

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THE course taken by religious controversy of late seems to impose upon us the necessity of making clear to our own minds what we mean by Revelation, to which the one party insist that an unquestioning obedience should be yielded by the Reason, whose indefeasible superiority is asserted by the other. To reconcile these conflicting pretensions must appear, at first sight, a very hopeless task. And, in truth, they are commonly brought forward in such a manner, that the principle of Faith or Trust, which is of the essence of Religion, is in danger of being squeezed out of existence between the contending powers. It is my object, in the present tract, to offer some considerations adapted to remove this danger, and point out to the principle of Faith, which I regard as of the highest importance in the economy of human nature, a way of escape from the opposed foes, by showing that Reason and Revelation are really not antagonistic, but, on the contrary, are the inseparable factors of all solid knowledge—all that the Reason can be truly said to know, being a matter of Revelation; while, on the other hand, there is no faculty except the Reason to which this Revelation could be made, and to it a Revelation has been made sufficient for its wants. So that faith, instead of being driven to a perplexing choice between Reason and Revelation, is called on only to follow her native instinct, by trusting in that which the Reason can accept as the Truth of Revelation.

Knowledge of whatever kind, I conceive, ultimately rests upon the consciousness of some act of our wills, either in using the powers placed at their command, or in suffering some limitation of their action from that which acts upon us, and restricts the action of our wills. That which can be produced directly by the action of our wills we know, or may know, absolutely. But the sphere of this knowledge is limited, though within that sphere the ingenuity and patience of successive generations has built up a marvellous structure of knowledge absolutely certain—namely, the knowledge called pure mathematics. But of what our wills *are* in themselves, apart from what they have *done*, we have no inherent knowledge: no knowledge from which we can predict positively what they will do under any given circumstances. All our knowledge of their tendencies arises from Revelation, *i.e.*, from our consciousness of the way in which they commonly do act in ourselves, or our observation of their action in other persons, whom we assume to be constituted like ourselves, and to whom we turn in order to learn what we might become, or be disposed to do, under circumstances different from those which we have personally experienced. While of that which acts upon us we have no knowledge at all, except from observing how we are affected, and comparing these observations with the affections of other persons to whom we ascribe a natural constitution similar to our own. Setting aside the knowledge of our acts, all our knowledge, whether of ourselves or of that which is not ourselves, is strictly a matter of revelation. That we are subject to likings or dislikings of various degrees of strength, to sensations of pleasure or pain, and impulses to action arising out of them that we can, to a great extent, control these impulses, and determine which we shall yield to, and how far that we have within, a resisting power which asserts the right to control them; all these, and manifold

other facts concerning our nature, we learn only from the revelation of experience. The knowledge is not born with us; it is not a something discoverable by carefully looking into ourselves, as if it had always belonged to us. We learn it only by finding that the impulses come, and that the controlling power shows itself as occasion calls the one or the other forth. Only experience reveals to us what it lies in us to be.

And what is true of ourselves, and of the powers immediately subject to our will, is true still more emphatically of that which acts upon these powers, which we call our bodies. That we live upon a solid mass of something on which we can move about; that we can get off it, by our unassisted strength, little more if so much as half our own height, and are always pulled back again, by a force which we cannot resist; that we are exposed to alternations of darkness and light, of greater or less heat or cold; that these changes are connected with the presence to, or absence from, our sight of a body which we call the sun; all these and countless other similar facts, the materials of what we call science, are entirely matters of Revelation. We should not have any notion of them at all, if we did not find them experimentally to be what they actually are.*

All our knowledge, then, except pure mathematics, is revealed; but how is it revealed? To what faculty is this revelation made? To our Reason. That we *know* anything at all about the matters thus revealed, beyond the fact that there is some power not originating in our own wills, which

* There is an additional element necessary before either class of facts mentioned in the text can become the groundwork of science, on which I will not dwell further than to say that it appears to me to be an instinct of the Reason, namely the assumption that from similar antecedents similar consequences will follow—that what has happened once will, under the like circumstances, happen again.

acts upon them, depends upon a two-fold action, proper to this Reason. 1st. Its constructive power of Imagination. 2nd. Its analytical power of Reflection.

By these powers, acting within our own minds or upon materials which we present to our senses by our own act, the science of mathematics has been built up; and it is by applying these powers to interpret what acts upon us that we have arrived at whatever knowledge of this external agent we have attained. Let us follow the process.

1. By our imaginative power we combine the revealing action of that which acts upon our wills under the forms of Space and Time, and the so-called categories of Quality, Quantity, Relation, Cause, &c., which belong to the constructive action of our imagination, and constitute the staple of metaphysics. Thus we form to ourselves, out of that which affects our wills, objects on which we can reflect, as in mathematical science, by a similar action, we form such objects out of that which our wills determine for themselves. What is the purpose of this reflection? Primarily, and in the objects of pure mathematical science exclusively, it is to *understand* our own work—to make clear to ourselves what is involved in the constructions of our imagination, by pulling them to pieces, and examining all their parts in their several relations, till they have become thoroughly intelligible to ourselves. Secondly, in all but pure mathematical science there comes in, after the first operation of reflection is ended, a second operation, without which what we call science would not exist, namely, the *testing* our imaginative constructions by carefully comparing what is observable in nature with what *ought* to be observable, if the action upon ourselves, which we observe, really arises from objects so constituted as those constructed by our imaginations; in other words, to ascertain whether the action of nature will

fit into our ideas about it, so that these *ideas*, which we know in themselves, may furnish to us an intelligible explanation of this action, which we know only by its effect on us.

How great the importance of this careful testing of our imaginative constructions really is, modern science is a conclusive witness, by the almost total revolution made by it, through this operation, in the conceptions about the universe which formed the staple of ancient speculation. But at present I would especially call attention to the *progressive* character which this double action of the Reason necessarily imparts to the whole of the Revelations made to it. For, although the *matter revealed* is quite independent of our imaginations, and we have no ground for supposing it to have been essentially different in the earlier ages of human existence to what it is now, the real revelation to *us*, that is all the knowledge of it resting on any solid basis which we possess, has depended upon our success in interpreting the revealing record, by the conceptions which our imaginations have constructed; and these conceptions have required to be continually remoulded so as to adapt themselves to the observations made by successive generations of mankind about what they thus attempted to interpret.

To the imagination of the ancient Greeks, for instance, it was revealed that the earth is round; not a mere round, flat surface, as the Jews of old appear to have imagined, but a round ball. But the further revelation that this ball turns on its own axis and moves round the sun, and thus produces day and night, summer and winter, was only suspected as a possibility by some of the most sagacious of the Greek race, who were deterred from following up their profound conception by the outcry of impiety raised against them, as it is now against those who, in interpreting records held to be divine, depart materially

from the imaginations sanctified by popular faith. These conceptions had not then attained that certainty, produced by independent conspiring evidences, which to us has raised them to the rank of unquestioned revelations.

Now these modifications in our interpretation of the revealing record, however great the revolution in our conceptions to which they may give rise—however considerable the disturbance produced in our minds from the necessity of recasting ideas grown venerable from the colouring of antiquity, obviously furnish no ground at all for doubting the reality of a revealing action addressed to the interpreting imagination. The changes in our constructive imaginings prove, not that there is nothing behind the veil, but only that the veil has been imperfectly lifted, and that, in consequence, the nature of the permanent reality has been inadequately apprehended. Nevertheless, in the course of this world-wide revelation, there has often arisen a disturbing action, producing unnecessary doubt and distrust, from the claim unduly set up on behalf of some interpreting imagination to be the last word, the unerring utterance of absolute truth on the matters to which it relates. The rivalries of sects and schools in the ancient world, the long enslavement of thought in the Mediæval ages, to the teachings, actual or supposed, of Aristotle, the throes attending that great struggle for the "right to ponder boldly," of which the religious reformation of the sixteenth century was only one phase, are familiar but instructive instances of the danger incurred by the imagination, of becoming stifled by the products of its own creative action. The past of human effort seemed so vast, when men looked back upon it, that it dwarfed the present. The contrast in the individual of the wisdom of age with the rashness of youth misled men by a false analogy. They forgot that, as has since been well said, if age owes

its increased wisdom to a longer experience, each successive generation of mankind, since it inherits the experience of its predecessors, may reasonably expect to attain a deeper insight into that which this experience can teach—that there is no ground whatever for supposing the Divine revealing action to be limited to one age or race which has passed away—and that, therefore, to test the conformity of any received opinion to the reality of things, far from being an act of irreverent scepticism, is, truly, the evidence of a profound faith; a proof of our belief in the continuous operations of that Divine Spirit in which the unwearied questionings of our intelligence originate. And we have, in modern science, an ever-growing testimony to the solid realities of truth thus attainable, by the greater clearness and comprehensiveness of the conceptions to which this process of faithful inquiry has conducted us.

But, as I began by saying, the immediate revealing agent in all these operations is the human imagination, which, no doubt, fills only the office of an interpreter, and requires us at every step carefully to compare the interpretation with the document to be interpreted, but affords, in the continually increasing perfection of its interpretations, an ever-accumulating proof of the inherent correspondence between the interpreting faculty and that which is to be interpreted. Take away the imagination from the mind of man—you would perform on his intelligence an operation very analogous in its effects to the effect upon his power of perception of taking away that great instrument of the imagination—the eye. The consciousness of will, of the power which will can direct, of the affections to which it is exposed, and the impulses by which it is moved, might remain. The memory of sensation once experienced, if under such circumstances we possessed such a memory, might lead us to avoid what had caused us pain, and

welcome what had caused us pleasure; but from all that constitutes the noble domain of knowledge, we should be shut out as completely as we should be from all that attracts or elevates us in poetry, or art. How could the astronomer have attained the conviction that the earth is a sphere, or learned to ascribe day and night to its regular rotation, if he had not been able to build up in his imagination the form of a spherical body in order, by an accurate analysis of its properties, to show that the phenomena observable upon the earth correspond to them. And if this first step in the revelation of the deeper secrets of the universe depends upon the constructive power of the imagination, much more is this the case with the following steps, where the imagination has enlarged the boundaries of space of which experience gives us any direct indication, first to the orbits of the planets in their courses round the sun, and then to the distances of the stars, now beginning to be measured through the ingenuity of the same creative faculty, by processes of which no abstraction from sensations can furnish the slightest exception? Or, to take an illustration from another science, how could the geologist have read into consistent meaning the revelations of the "stone book," if his imagination had not been competent to enlarge the bounds of time derived from experience, as widely as the imagination of the astronomer has been competent to enlarge the bounds of space derivable by abstraction from sensation?

Nor is the action of this constructive faculty confined to the indefinite multiplication or more perfect determination of that of which the revelations of sense give it either direct intimations, as in the case of the fundamental conditions belonging to the exercise of will—space and time, or suggestive hints as in the case of the primitive geometrical forms—straight or curved lines, angles, circles, squares, spheres, cubes,

cones, many-sided figures, &c. The greatest triumphs of scientific explanation in recent times have been won by the aid of an imaginative construction to which sensation cannot give the least assistance, because what is thus constructed is imagined to underlie all sensation and make the action of the senses possible. Read any recent exposition of the sciences of Heat and Light, you will find yourselves in the presence of an all-pervading something called the *Æther*, neither fluid nor solid, but uniting the properties characteristic of both,* which eye hath never seen nor can see, nor tongue taste, nor nose smell, nor ear hear, nor body touch, but without which sight, and taste, and smell, and hearing, and touch would alike be impossible—the most daring creation ever made by the poetic faculty of imagination; and yet a substance whose action is conceived to be subject to the strictest determinations of mathematical analysis; the practically unlimited agent of a power everywhere limited by the most stringent law, in which the indefinitely vast is inseparably bound up with the indefinitely little—the all-embracing, all-separating, all-uniting, invisible, intangible, insensible condition of all that is visible, tangible, or sensible.

It seems to me impossible that, before this proof of the extent to which the constructive ideality of the imagination enters into the conclusions of scientific research, the popular philosophy of the eighteenth century, which resolved this ideal principle of knowledge into so-called abstractions from the assumed realities of sensation, can long continue to hold its

* Every phenomenon of light points strongly to the conception of a solid rather than a fluid constitution of the luminiferous æther, and that in the sense that none of the luminous particles are supposed capable of interchanging places, or of bodily transfer to any considerable distance from their own special locality in the universe.—SIR JOHN HERSCHELL, "Good Words," 1865, 506.

ground.* The little, hard, round, indestructible absurdities which these philosophers called "matter," and were pleased to scatter in patches over the boundless void, have vanished before the profounder researches of later physicists. The long words Attraction, Repulsion, Gravitation, Electricity, Galvanism, Magnetism, Affinity, Caloric, &c., &c., in which the idealising imagination of these naïve deniers of ideas dressed up their imaginary matter, deluding themselves into supposing that they had explained natural phenomena if they succeeded in tying them into proper bundles, and ticketing each with a name of its own, are coming to be recognised for what they really are—namely, elastic strings by which the imagination has bound together the materials supplied it by the senses, for the more convenient examination of their mutual relations. And the *explanation* of the phenomena thus classified is beginning to be found, and, from the success attending the attempts already made, is being everywhere sought, in the conception of modes of pressure, and the motions produced by their actions and reactions—conceptions in which the reflective Reason can find *veræ causæ*, revealing the origin of phenomena, because in them the imagination deals with that of which it can form distinct ideas, inasmuch as it is that which our own will is able to produce by the powers at its immediate command.†

* I say "so-called" abstractions because the process of unlimited addition by which the notions of a boundless Time or Space are supposed to be formed out of sensations of limited Space or Time is clearly more than abstraction.

† This statement may perhaps be objected to as not treating with proper respect Newton's claim to have found in his conceptions of gravitating force the *vera causa* of the motions of the moon and planets. But my criticism affects not the claims of Newton so much as those set up by his followers. Newton, setting off from a phenomenon directly observable—namely, that a body unsupported falls to the earth with a

Now what the imagination has done, more or less perfectly, during the whole recorded history of mankind, but especially during the four last centuries, for the world of natural phenomena, it has done also, but more especially during the earlier ages of our race, for the world of internal emotions, produced by the action of these phenomena upon us—the fear, dread, awe, on the one hand, and on the other the joy, hope, trust, confidence, which the great universe around us, by its mysterious union of that which lends itself to our desires with that which

certain initial rate of movement, continually accelerated in proportion to the time of its continuance, said, “I will explain this phenomenon, the motions of the moon round the earth, and of the earth and other planets round the sun, and a number of other phenomena, if you grant me two suppositions:—1st. That the power which makes bodies fall to the earth resides in each elementary part, both of the earth and of these bodies, each of which acts on all the others at the same distance from it with the same force, the total force exerted by any body depending on the number of these elementary parts contained in it—whence it followed that, as Galileo had shown, in opposition to the teaching of the Aristotelians, a piece of gold and a piece of paper will fall to the earth in the same time if the resistance of the air is taken away, and that the earth falls to a stone as truly as the stone falls to it. 2nd. That this power diminishes in proportion to the surface over which it is exerted—that is, in the inverse ratio of the square of the radius drawn from the centre of the body to this surface. I do not question the right of Newton to claim for this offspring of his imagination the character of a *vera causa*; that is to say, it furnishes conceptions from which the phenomena to be explained may be deduced with strict numerical precision, and thus satisfactorily accounted for. *How* bodies are able to exercise on each other the power thus defined, is quite another question—one in no way answered, as is often assumed, by saying that the attraction of gravitation is a property inherent in all matter, which, in fact, is only to say, in other words, ‘bodies attract each other in the way imagined by Newton because they do.’ What can be truly said is only ‘bodies act as *if* they did attract each other in the way supposed by Newton.’” The speculations referred to in the text make it probable that, by

thwarts them, of order and disorder, of tenderness and sternness, of the pleasurable and the painful, of growth and decay, of life and death, is adapted to produce, and which it produced with the greater vividness in the ages when the imagination had not yet seriously set itself to that task of drawing back the veil from the mysteries of nature, in which, by the help of the faculty of reflective analysis, it has gradually made so much progress. The first work of the imagination, in the exercise of its revealing function, was to create and mould into shape the idea

another happy exercise of imaginative genius, we may ere long be able to demonstrate *why* they do thus act.

Further, I would observe, that the phenomena really explained by the theory of gravitation are so explained only by means of an assumption, *of which no other proof can be given but its power of explaining these phenomena.* The attractive force ascribed by astronomers to the different celestial bodies is *not* the force with which they are experimentally familiar on the earth. If the sun, for instance, exercised as much attractive power in proportion to its bulk, as the earth exercises, its attractive force would be fourfold that ascribed to it by astronomers. But then, if the theory of gravitation is true, its action upon the earth and the other planetary bodies would be very different from what it is. Now the astronomers find that, if they assume the attractive power of the sun to be only one quarter of that which the earth would exert if it were as large as the sun, and if its power increased in proportion to its size, the action of the sun is what, according to the theory of gravitation, it ought to be. Therefore they ascribe to the sun an attractive power diminished to the degree above stated when compared with the ascertained power of the earth; or, in the received scientific phraseology, they say "the density of the sun is only one fourth" that of the earth. I do not contest the conformity of this hypothesis to the nature of things; I wish only to call attention to the fact that it *is* an hypothesis—a creation of the human imagination in the exercise of its revealing function. And that our confidence in the truth of this revelation depends upon the completeness with which we can deduce from this creation of our imaginations, results corresponding to the phenomena ascertained by observation.

of God. To borrow the profound words of the great German poet—

In Innern ist ein Universum auch,
Daher der Volker löblicher Gebrauch,
Das Jeglicher das Beste was er kennt
Es, Gott Ja seinen Gott erennt.
Ihm Himmel und Erde übergiebt,
Ihn furchtet, und wo möglich liebt.*

It is with these creations of the imagination in former ages, among races necessarily and in some respects very widely different from ourselves; races whose languages have passed away from living speech, whose modes of life and thought we can only imperfectly realise, whose ideas of the world in which they lived, in so far as we are able to compare them with our present knowledge, were in almost every point mistaken; it is, I repeat, with the conceptions by which the imagination of these races strove to make comprehensible to themselves the nature of the mysterious power underlying our own consciousness, and all the phenomena made known to us through its means, that we have to deal when we approach the precincts asserted to be the special home of Revelation. Hence arises the difficulty noticed above. Men have set up for these conceptions, or rather for some particular set of them to which they pin their own faith, a claim to be not of human parentage but of superhuman origin: not one of the forms under which the imagination of man has endeavoured to apprehend God, but special divine acts; peculiar

* Goethe—Gott Gemuth und Welt. I subjoin a paraphrase for the benefit of those who do not understand the original:—

A universe there is within the mind,
Hence the praiseworthy custom of mankind;
From that which each as noblest can conceive,
To frame a God, in whom he may believe—
Supreme o'er all, beneath, around, above—
Object of awe, and, if he can, of love.

manifestations of the being and action of God made by Him to some favoured men, in modes which their intelligence could grasp and transmit to others less favoured than themselves. And if this claim is contested, if matters are pointed out in these supposed especial revelations inconsistent with the supernatural origin asserted for them; if the evidence by which the claim is sought to be supported is shown to be of uncertain age or untrustworthy character, and the weakness of the alleged proofs is opposed to the validity of the claim, those who make it raise a cry that the criticism strikes at the root of all faith in a Divine Revelation; and if this faith be lost then farewell, they say, to all the consolations of religious trust, and the surest stay of any morality but that of enlightened self-interest.

But if the natural action of the Reason be what I have endeavoured to point out; if the whole series of its operations is really a continuous revealing, and this revelation is made by the free action of the imagination in forming conceptions which the analysing intellect tests, then it must be clear—1st, that the criticism of any particular set of conceptions which are asserted to constitute an especially profound revelation, cannot in any way interfere with the revealing process, since criticism constitutes a very important part of it; 2nd, that the fact of any particular creation of the imagination proving to be erroneous, is not a proof that the imagination is not a true source of revelation on the matters to which that conception may relate; for all its revelations are essentially free creations, which acquire their revealing character through the action of the imaginative power in remoulding them to meet the objections of criticising reflection, till they become correct interpretations of the observed phenomena.

But, it may be urged, granting the imagination to

have the revealing function ascribed to it, yet since, by your own showing, we cannot rely upon its creations as true interpretations of the reality of Being unless we can test them, how can we discriminate between the truth or falsehood of the conceptions which it may form about the source of all existence? Set aside, as you apparently ask us to do, those proofs of the authority of the teacher on which the asserters of Revelation have relied in every case where the claim has been made, miracle, and prophecy, the so-called "signs and seals" of revealed truth, and what remains to point out among the diversity of conceptions which the imagination of mankind has evolved about God,—a variety not inferior to that of the conceptions by which it has striven to interpret the world of sense,—which are to be rejected and which retained? How are we to apply to them that testing process through which alone the voice of our interpreter can acquire reliable accuracy? I do not undertake to answer this question in detail within the limits of the present tract. But I will endeavour to point out the kind of answer which may, I think, be given to it. In the first place, then, I conceive that there is between the imaginative conceptions forming the subjects of religious faith and the conclusions resulting from scientific research a general consonance, which must increase our trust in the essential conformity of these primitive creations of the imagination to the reality of Being. All the great religions of the earth have the common character of presenting the actual condition of man as one of imperfection, falling short of the ideal law of his nature, for which some have endeavoured to account, by assuming a degeneracy of the race—a fall from a condition of original perfection—while all, with more or less distinctness, have looked forwards to a time of restoration and general happiness either on the earth itself or, if not here, in some future life

to succeed and make up for this. Thus, in one shape or other, the conception of a progress of mankind from their actual condition to a higher one has formed an essential element in the imaginative conceptions which have given shape to Religion. But this idea of progress is now beginning, through the scientific study of the earth's past history, to colour all the conclusions of scientific reasoning. Man, according to the teachings of geology, has slowly grown to the fulness of his present power and the maturity of his present knowledge by a gradual ascent from the common level of animal life. We can trace him back, in all parts of the earth, to a time when his arts and his knowledge seem to have been summed up in the discovery that it was possible to make tools of flint. We trace back this time to a geological epoch so remote that it forces us to count by tens of thousands of years the interval between it and the formation of the societies whose history constitutes what we call the records of civilisation. The slow advance of this civilisation in its higher forms, the periods of stationariness—even of decline and absolute decay—which have marked its course; the partial ebb of the fertilising waters from lands once irrigated by their presence—all this, so full of perplexing doubt when looked at in detail, sinks into insignificance, as a ground for reasonable inference, when compared with the enormous evolution of the race attested by the "stone book." Even if we do not accept the conclusions of Mr. Darwin and his followers—to which reasonable probability seems to me to attach—as to the gradual development of the human form from some ape-like ancestor, still we have but to compare the men of the age of flint implements with the men of the present day, or with those whose remains we possess in the monuments of Egypt or Assyria, Greece or Rome, to satisfy ourselves that the principle of progress, which the imagination of our ancestors con-

secrated as an essential part of their religious trust, does really constitute the governing influence in our earthly existence. The form given by the imagination to its bright creations may have been far from the truth, but those creations themselves represent a conception profoundly true.

Surely, then, we have, in this coincidence between the results to which the study of the phenomenal world lead under the interpreting light cast upon it by the imagination when subjected to the careful testing of scientific analysis, and the forebodings of this same power when left to follow its own nature freely, a circumstance adapted to increase our confidence in those teachings of this inward guide which from their nature do not admit of the sort of verification possible in regard to its interpretation of the sensible universe—namely, the conceptions by means of which mankind have endeavoured to lift the veil that hides the All-sustaining power from the sustained. Now, in all these instinctive creations of the free imagination we find it introducing into its conception of God that notion of intelligent will, of will working for definite purposes and conscious of its own acts, which lies at the root of what we call personality. And to this Divine, conscious, intelligent will we find that the imagination has also uniformly ascribed a sympathy of some sort with the wants and wishes of mankind. No doubt the reflective criticism of the Reason has continually cast doubt upon these creations of its imaginative power. It has pointed out the inappropriateness of a conception derived from our consciousness of ourselves, as individuals limited by a being which we cannot change and distinguished by it from other beings, to that Being who *ex hypothesi* has no limitations but those expressing its own will. It has insisted on the dissimilarity between our conscious action, which can do only one thing at a time but exerts all its faculties to do that one thing perfectly,

and the Divine action which does a countless mass of things at the same time while it appears utterly indifferent to whether any one of them is or is not done as perfectly as it can be done ; and in every action is preparing the way for another distinct action to grow out of it. If it admits the marks of tender sympathy, of provident care disclosed by the world of organized life, it dwells, in opposition to them, upon the unsparing, indiscriminating destruction which continually sweeps this living world away, not only by gradual decay, a process, perhaps, to be accepted as the necessary accompaniment of individual existence, but by overwhelming disasters, arresting the living creature in the very beginnings of its existence, or in mid career, in the full swing of its active energy, and consigning it, without any fault of its own or the possibility of escape, to irretrievable destruction. It may point out that the personal Deities whom the imagination has created for itself are but "magnified men," and that if the anthropomorphic element is excluded, the conceptions lose all their distinctness. In vain. The imagination is perplexed, but not satisfied. There remains the instinctive conviction that consciousness cannot arise from that which is essentially unconscious, nor sympathy originate in that which is unsympathetic.* And as the analysing reflection, though it may pull the constructions of the imagination to pieces, cannot show that some future effort

* The last conviction is apparently the most deeply rooted—at least, this seems so from the case of the Buddhists, who retain prayer as a mysterious form of motion, it may be of the lips of men in uttering certain consecrated words or it may be of any substance on which these words are written, capable of securing benefit to those who originate it, while they deny to the Deity who sympathetically responds to this movement that conscious perception of the prayer offered, without which, to our European judgment, prayer becomes absurd. Hence the construction of those strange phenomena, abundant in Thibet, Praying machines.

may not be more successful, men are inclined, on the whole, to trust their constructive instincts rather than their critical analyses, and, taking refuge in the possibilities of the unknown, prop up by faith what they cannot sustain by demonstration.

Is this tendency justifiable? Is it possible to satisfy the analysing faculty of the Reason that there are matters on which it ought not to exercise itself? I do not think it is possible. But, on the other hand, is it possible to induce the constructive imaginative faculty of this same Reason to sit down contented with treating its own conscious, intelligent action as a sort of accident in existence; an inexplicable and occasional offshoot or outcome of a power which, except in these partial manifestations of consciousness and intelligence, is unconscious and unintelligent — to rest satisfied with assuming that its inherent desire to trace a principle of unity in all that it perceives is a delusion; and to substitute for the belief in an ever-present conscious Power which *eternally* gives rise to the unconscious by processes as yet unimagined, a belief in an ever present unconscious power which, by processes as yet unimagined, *occasionally* gives rise to the conscious? * Equally do I think that it is not possible.

Are we, then, shut up to a perpetual irreconcilable antagonism between these two constituents of our Reason, its constructive Imagination and its analysing Reflection. Can no test be found sufficient to decide our judgments on the one side or the other?

* A belief well described in the following vigorous lines of a song called the "Fine Old Atom Molecule," in *Punch*, for the 12th December, 1874, that—

Design sprang up by accident, Law's rule from hazard blind,
The soulless soul-evolving, against not after kind,
As the lifeless life developed, and the mindless ripened mind,
In the fine old atom molecule
Of the young world's protoprime.

I think such a test does exist, and that its application justifies the claim made by me for the imagination to be the true revealer of the mysteries of Being. The test of which we are in search appears to me to be furnished by the ascertainable facts of human progress. Whatever judgment we may pass on the trustworthiness of the conceptions about the universe and its author formed by the imagination, it is clear that the nature of man is itself a part of the great whole, and must be assumed to participate in that harmony and mutual suitableness, which we find to prevail generally between the constituent parts of this universe; at least until we have some overwhelming proof that it is an exception, out of harmony with all around it. And certainly if we accept the hypothesis of the gradual evolution of man out of the races inferior to him in mental and moral power, by the continuation of a process common to the whole series of living beings, the idea of such a want of harmony between his nature and the general constitution of things is absurd.

Assuming, then, that man's nature is in harmony with the universe, it follows that if the history of human development shows clearly a tendency to favour the growth of any particular character, the conceptions about the universe which accord best with this character, and so account for the development of man having taken this line, must derive from the known history of mankind strong evidence of their truth. Now I think it must be admitted, by any one at all conversant with human history, that the principle of sympathy has been continually advancing in its influence over mankind. We have but to think of the general abolition of slavery, in the nations of Europe and their off-shoots, and the earnest efforts made by these nations to suppress, at least the trade in slaves, even where the existence of slavery cannot be as yet touched, compared with its universal prac-

tice in the ancient world, and its approval even by the noblest spirits and deepest thinkers; or to name the word hospital; or to consider how different is the position occupied by women among ourselves from that generally recognised in Greece or Rome, at a stage of civilisation comparable with our present life, in order to satisfy ourselves on this point. Probably no one will contest that there is a marked difference in this respect between the civilisation which has grown up since the Christian era, and the civilisation in the midst of which Christianity appeared. And the change thus manifested is upon so vast a scale, it affects so deeply the life and character of those nations whom the course of events unmistakably designates to be the leaders of the human race, that it cannot be set aside as not a legitimate growth from the constitution of the universe, without contravening those conclusions about the unity of all Being, to which as we have seen scientific research conducts us. But the principle of sympathetic tenderness, which thus vindicates its right to be recognised as a true manifestation of the all-sustaining source of existence, requires for its satisfaction the faith in a Divine sympathy responsive to its movements. It is not content to rest upon itself, and leave the question whether there is any sympathetic being except that manifested on the earth unsettled, as the self-determining *ego* of Fichte's earliest philosophy might have been. It needs to feel that it is leaning on the eternal. It demands a God with whom the spirit of man can hold communion; because it cannot find in the beings around it that perfect response which it requires for its entire satisfaction.

“Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe
Our hermit spirits range and dwell apart.”

“Nor can the tenderest heart and next our own,
Know half the reasons why we smile or sigh,”

says Keble, in one of those passages where he writes

with the insight of the true poet, undimmed by the theologic dust which he was apt to throw into his eyes. Doubtless true sympathy must not confine itself to such mysterious responses from an inward power, but is bound to go forth, and labour in the world around us for the good of others. But it needs to refresh itself in its work, by the sense of a universal Presence sympathetic with its efforts, which the idea of Humanity substituted by A. Comte is inadequate to replace; as Comte himself felt when, in his later life, he came under the influence of the sentiment of love, and was driven to supplement the worship of Humanity by the concrete adoration of a deceased woman, who in truth became for him God; much as the Chinese supplement their formal respect for the Gods whom, according to the advice of Confucius, they "honour and keep far from them," by their reverence for the spirits of their ancestors. What can we say, then, but that here, as in the idea of progress, the imagination has anticipated the slow progress of inference? God, argues Ludwig Feuerbach, is only a name for our own desires, which we set over against ourselves as a Being endowed with the power and the will to gratify them. The reproach is not undeserved by the purposes for which men often raise their prayers. But history justifies the act. The imagination, forestalling the course of human progress, at a time when the spirit of sympathy had very little influence over human action, placed the universe under its care, and thus constituted it into a home fit for that spirit which was to be, and was to be the great source of blessings to mankind. The voice of history, which is entirely beyond the control of the will of man, has justified the creations originating in his imaginative will; and thus furnishes a test of the general truth of his religious conceptions, which reduces the part of the criticising reflection in this matter to a protest against investing

the details of these conceptions with that degree of reasonable assurance, to be claimed on this historical ground for the common basis of all religious trust—the assumption, which is what men really mean by speaking of the personality of God,* that the universe arises from the action of a conscious, wise, and loving Being, who sympathises with men.

It may be objected, perhaps, to this argument that, if it were true, men ought to have become more profoundly religious as the ages rolled on, while, in fact, an opposite tendency has manifested itself, both in the world of ancient Greece and Rome, where the original, warm, popular faith gradually died away under the criticism of philosophy, and in our modern world, since the Reformation. But strong as this objection appears at first sight, it loses its force when closely examined. What happened in the ancient world is just what happens under our eyes. The adherents of the traditionary religious faith failed to distinguish the fundamental principle of religion from the conceptions about the Divinity, in which their Scriptures had embodied their consciousness of a Divine presence, and the latter was in danger of perishing before the criticism directed against the former. But the reign of ancient scepticism was terminated by the instrumentality which produced it.

* In support of the claim here advocated for the emotions, I may refer to an interesting article by Mr. James Hinton, in the *Contemporary Review* for December, 1874. I would especially call attention to a suggestion, which I do not remember to have ever met with before, that the principle of self-sacrifice—that is, the voluntary giving-up of itself by one existence to another—if presented as a phenomenal action, would assume the scientific aspect of cause and effect—that is to say, of one thing merging itself in another; so that the unvarying succession of cause and effect, which above all things appears to “banish spirituality from nature,” assumes the character of an embodiment of this spirituality, taking the form of “meeting every fresh demand with a new sacrifice.”

Philosophy, as time advanced, became religious. To Plutarch the Divine is as real as the moral. The Jupiter of Epictetus and Marcus Antoninus differs from the Jupiter of Cleanthes by being invested with that element of personal sympathy with man, which is the characteristic assumption of religious faith. And with the rise of Neoplatonism the philosophic thinker gradually merged into the religious mystic. No doubt the growth of Christianity deprived these later phases of philosophic thought in the Roman world from passing down into the beliefs of the people, who in the mean time had become Christians. But no one, I think, familiar with these philosophies, can doubt that they constitute a genuine, spontaneous development of the speculative imagination entirely independent of the new religious creed destined to undermine their labours; and thus are an evidence of the truth that criticism cannot permanently destroy Religion, but only change its form.

The free thought of modern times has been nurtured under influences giving to it a direct antagonism to the contemporary religious conceptions unknown to ancient philosophy, which, in its opposition to the ancient creeds, had but to "come, be seen, and conquer" in the minds of any who would attend to its voice at all, and found itself confronted by no organised bodies of religious teachers, no wide-spread system of popular instruction, no catechisms or Sunday Schools, no Church or Bible invested by the uncriticizing imagination of the faithful with infallibility, whence the opposition directed against its criticisms might derive strength. All this, modern criticism has had to encounter. And, but for the aid afforded it by the enormous growth of physical knowledge, the unexpected revelations made by its means, and the habits of accurate investigation thus fostered, we may well question whether the criticisms of the Reason would not have been always turned aside by the combined

influences leagued in support of the traditionary conceptions consecrated by religious faith. As it is, though the old intrenchments are now pierced with a thousand breaches by the powerful artillery of scientific and critical research, the criticising Reason has still to sustain a constant fight with a fresh host of defenders, who press on to guard the shattered bulwarks by their personal trust. It is, therefore, of necessity so much occupied in effectually pulling down what is thus perpetually attempted to be again set up, that it can scarcely be expected to make progress in reconstructing a religious ideal of its own. And yet indications, by no means obscure, seem to me to be showing themselves that modern philosophy is advancing in the same direction as that taken by ancient philosophy in the ages between Augustus and Justinian—that is, towards the transformation into new religious ideals of the ideals destroyed by criticism in their original shape. How unlike, for instance, is the treatment of religious faiths by Emile Burnouf to their treatment by Voltaire! How different the tone of the life of Jesus by Renan from the writings of Tom Paine! And yet, so long as the critical analysis of religious conceptions, or of the writings on which they are founded, is regarded as a religious crime, those only will commonly deal with the criticism of religious beliefs whose inclinations dispose them to criticise rather than to construct; while, obviously, it is to the latter class—those who are not satisfied with destroying, but desire to build what will bear examination, in order to dwell there in peace—that we must look for conceptions capable of replacing the conceptions which criticism has swept away.

Is it possible at all to forecast what form such imaginations are likely to take; by what road they can carry us beyond that general trust in the basis of religious conception, for which, as I have endea-

voured to show, a sufficient positive foundation is laid in the accordance between the historical development of man and the qualities ascribed by the imagination to God at a time long anterior to this development. One principle, I think, we may lay down with confidence. Whatever permanent work of this nature can be done must be done *scientifically*. That is to say, it must rest, not on any supposed intuitions into the Divine nature, but on the revealed facts relating to Religion; that is, upon the conceptions by which men have attempted to embody their consciousness of the Divine. The effort of such a theology will be to account satisfactorily for the different modes in which the great interpreter has endeavoured to solve the problem of the Divine essence, by gathering them up under some uniting conception, by which they may be shown to represent divers sides of the Divine reality, and thus receive a satisfactory explanation as being essentially all parts of one revealing action. It may appear a very hopeless task to construct anything like such a consistent system of theology out of the manifold imaginations, for each of which a fit place should be found in it. But I do not despair of its accomplishment if it be undertaken in that spirit of patient inquiry, and the acceptance of those conceptions which most completely explain the whole body of known facts as presumably true, on which scientific certainty rests. I am persuaded that, in the case of these phenomena, as in that of other natural phenomena, apparent confusion will resolve itself into an intelligible order; because I am satisfied that the freedom of the human imagination is no more devoid of law than the necessity of the physical world. Each mode of Being, the interpreting imagination, and the nature which it has to interpret, including the nature of man, is to me the expression of the same Eternal Reason. And of Reason, we must affirm, from our own experience of its action,

that it is the property to harmonise freedom with order. Of this harmony the religious conceptions of mankind have, I conceive, partaken, in their instinctive attempts to apprehend the Divine under the influence of the providential course of circumstances. It is the office of a true Science of Religion, in my judgment, to appreciate justly these attempts, and combine their characteristic ideas, purified and transformed by the refining fire of criticism, into one connected whole, by the constructive action of the Imagination, which would thus reveal in its great outlines the deepest mystery of existence; and, I believe, will make this Revelation by a conception approaching the fundamental ideas of the Catholic Faith much more nearly than those commonly suppose who now dwell only on the opposition apparent at present between the Catholic dogmas and scientific thought.
