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CONSCIENCE *versus* THE QUARTERLY.

A PLEA FOR FAIR PLAY

TOWARDS

THE WRITERS OF THE

ESSAYS AND REVIEWS.

BY

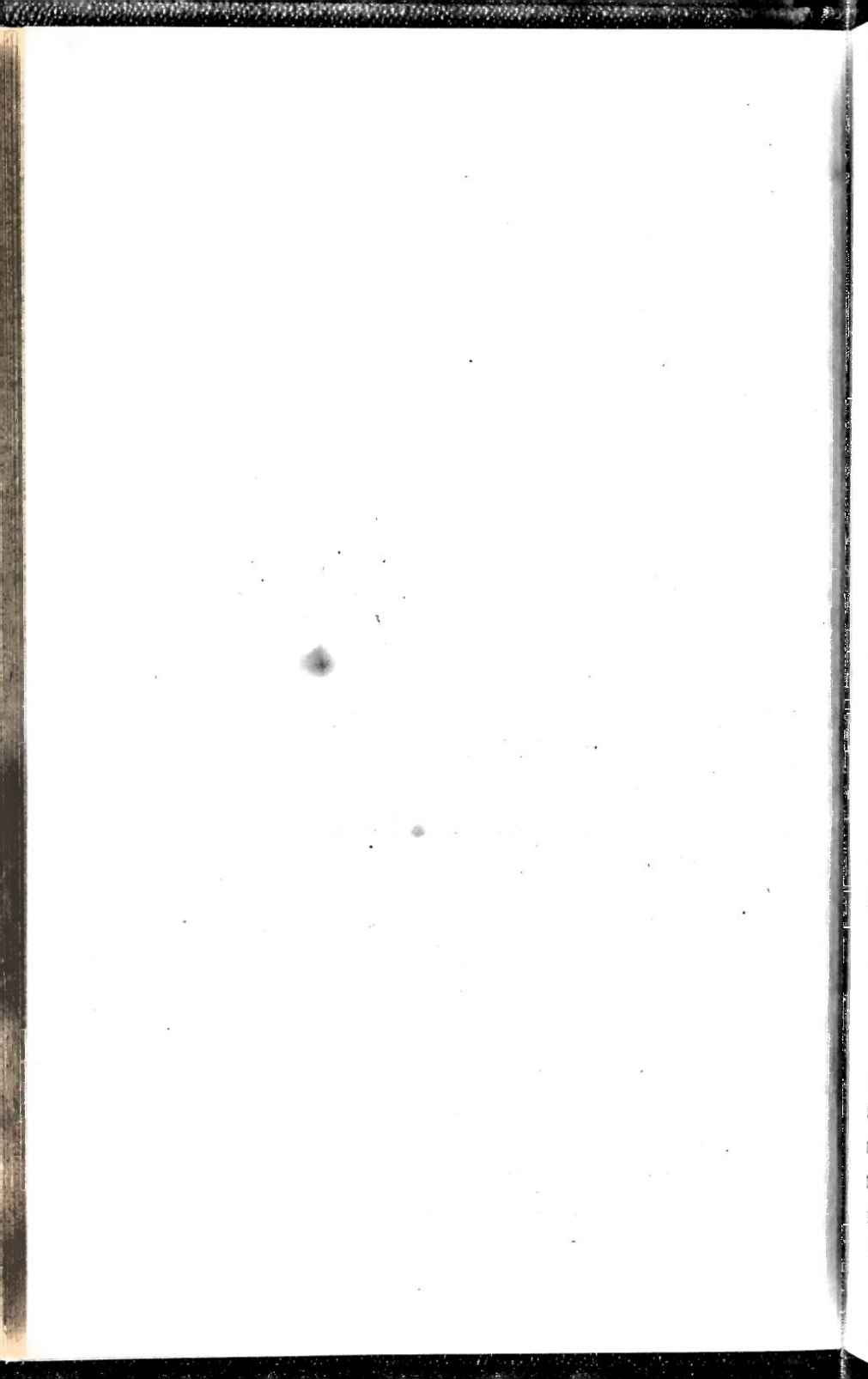
THE REV. HARRY JONES,

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LONDON:

ROBERT HARDWICKE, 192, PICCADILLY.

1861.



CONSCIENCE *versus* THE QUARTERLY,

&c.

“THERE is, in truth, in the volume,” says the Quarterly Reviewer, “nothing which is really new, and little which, having been said before, is said here with any new power, or with any great addition, either by way of amplification, illustration, or research.”

To what, then, may we attribute the deep interest with which the “Essays and Reviews” are read? “Not certainly, we think,” replies the Quarterly Reviewer, “to its subject.”

Surely, however, we may ask how any subject which has already so occupied the human mind as to present *nothing new*, can cease to be interesting? The Reviewer does not admit this question; he attributes the notoriety of the book to its authorship. But though its subject has inherent, unfading attraction, the Reviewer himself has helped much to create the notoriety of this particular volume, and must be held accessory to whatever mischief it makes. He believes that he has discovered a

deadly spring; and having neither authority to close it up, nor power secretly to drain it dry, what does he?—pass it by in silence, lest the host he leads should drink and die? No such thing—he points it out, and then gives a mouthful to every follower, crying, “This is fatal—taste it!”

The result is that crowds are dosed: Messrs. Longman, who built the well, run to their structure and multiply its powers of delivery, as the demand for the mixture increases. “What is it like?” exclaim the fresh comers to those who have got a whole bottleful in the scramble. Others, who cannot wait, are fed with extracts, choice cupfuls, scooped out of the darkest, most poisonous-looking jets of the spring, while some save themselves the risk and trouble of tasting, and condemn it untried.

Perhaps the most curious, though the most apparent, inconsistency in this distribution is that many distributors accompany their sample with the request for an opinion, but add that those thus invited to taste are incapable of giving one, the “verifying faculty” being the most deceptive of any we possess when applied to the subject handled in this naughty book.

Let me hope the Reviewer will pardon me, if, in venturing to give utterance to some of the thoughts aroused by his vehement provocation, I err in applying the contradictory advice he thrusts upon me.

In attempting to follow it, I accept, for the sake of convenience, the article in the “Quarterly” as

the impression the "Essays and Reviews" have made on a large section of the religious world in England.

In the first place, it is very important to distinguish between the principle of the book and the application which is made of that principle by the several authors who have contributed to the volume in which it appears.

The principle itself they all evidently hold, and must be held accountable for, while each must answer for his individual use of that faculty the exercise of which they jointly defend.

What is the one idea influencing their several minds? "The idea," replies the Reviewer (p. 255), "of a verifying faculty—the power of each man of settling what is and what is not true in the inspired record, is *the* idea of the whole volume—the connecting link between all its writers."

It is this which has given the gravest offence—this which disqualifies them from the office of teachers in the Church of England.

What, however, can be the distinction in *principle* between the liberty to judge whether *all*, or a *portion* only of the statements in Scripture are to be regarded as much actual truths as physical facts are?

If once a man asks reason and conscience whether he shall obey the Bible at all, he recognizes the question, "what is and what is not true in the inspired record?" He has put it to himself, and decided it for himself, even when he concludes that

the whole volume is verbally infallible. As far as the *principle* of the Essayists is concerned, they only confess their desire to be always convinced in their own minds of the truth of their creed when acting for themselves, or attempting to guide others.

Such is the common charge against them. It looks like a farce, but it is made in bitter earnest. When the present boiling passions have cooled down a little, when the flushed executioners begin to try the offenders they have hanged, the judges will perhaps find that they have not been altogether free from the crime they are now punishing; for, do they mean to say, they do not pretend to any justification of their own opinions about the truth of Scripture? They utter them freely enough—on what pretext? If they despise the “verifying faculty,” why have they any opinion at all about anything divine? If they profess the acceptance of definite theology, what has induced them to accept it? Do they hold what they term orthodoxy without thought, examination, or proof? Have they never tested their decisions? By the exercise of what faculty have they arrived at their present belief? By the support of what convictions do *they* retain *their* positions and professional stipend? What makes them so loudly and frequently repeat that the views they condemn have been refuted already, unless they have weighed the value of the refutation, and so exercised the “verifying faculty,” as to what is and what is not true in the inspired

record, themselves? Nay, even if they believe what they are *told* to believe, what induces them to obey? Have they asked whether the commands laid upon them are *right*? Have they not decided that the authority to which they submit their thoughts is such as they *ought* to bow to?

I cannot credit the supposition that they are unable to give a reason of the hope which is in them—that they have arrived at no conscientious if not rational conclusions.

Even the man who deliberately surrenders his conscience to the Romanist director, does so because he thinks the arguments in favour of this arrangement are stronger than those against it.

No wonder, then, that the Reviewer finds it easy to prove his main charge against the Essayists. They *do* claim the power of deciding for themselves what is and what is not true in the inspired record, and so does he. The “verifying faculty” is the “connecting link” not only between the seven writers, but between all who read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Scriptures.

If you teach men to read, and give them the Bible, they are sure to hear some hostile criticism upon it. They soon find out that many of its statements are questioned by learned men. Now, directly you say “these doubts are needless—these objections are wrong,” and proceed to lay your proofs before the public with an appeal to their good feeling and good sense, you not only admit

the existence of the "verifying faculty" in every man, but claim its support.

The only way to prevent the Bible being freely handled is to prohibit it. Rome is consistent. She says the people cannot form a right judgment of its contents, and therefore she locks it up. We, on the contrary, offer the Scriptures to any one who will read them. And now these readers are told that it is a grievous sin to weigh the value of the statements they contain.

Why do such as the Reviewer urge more loudly than most teachers, that a man is as responsible for his religious opinions, as for his acts, unless they think that he is at liberty to form his opinions himself? The principle of which the Essayists are accused is so far from being vicious, that it is the special characteristic of English thought, and the living safeguard of spiritual liberty. It is the one essential which marks the difference between Popery and Protestantism; for though, as we have noticed, the principle is so necessary to sane existence, that the most Ultramontane pervert who delivers himself, body and soul, to the guidance of the Church of Rome, must exercise it once for all, when he decides to join that Church; though he then spends his liberty of thought, his whole spiritual fortune, in one terrible payment, being content to live thenceforward on such an allowance of freedom as the keeper of his conscience may think fit to trust him with, yet practically

the distinction between the Papist and the Protestant is the liberty of the latter to use this same "verifying faculty." The result of the Religious Census alone, is a convincing proof of the extent to which it is used, and may lead us to question the confidence of the Reviewer as to the verdict of the English people on the value of the principle the Essayists uphold.

How far they are justified in remaining ministers of the Church of England must be left for them to choose, or legal authorities to decide. But it would indeed be bad for our national Church if regard for the principles of the Reformation were held to bar the entrance to her ministry.

It is the extent to which these principles have been pushed, the use which these seven writers have made of the liberty they share with him, which has shocked the Reviewer.

Of course no one can wonder at him for doing all he can to prevent the adoption of their views, when he thinks them wrong, *i. e.* when they jar with the result of his "verifying faculty." That may lead him to conclude (p. 284), that "the position of six of these writers is both philosophically and religiously pitiable;" which is intelligible if not true, though we might have expected something less vague from the advocate of definite theology than his sentence on the other, who, he says, "seems contented to *sit down* with Spinoza on the frozen mountains of metaphysical atheism." Perhaps in assigning this locality to one of the seven, he an-

swers his own question put elsewhere (p. 282), "How is it possible to *stop* when once such a principle (the verifying faculty) has been admitted?"

Before we go on to notice some of the points which the Reviewer conceives he has made against these gentlemen, we must notice the charge (p. 274), of immorality which he brings against them; it sounds rather libellous to be sure: "As honest men and as believers in Christianity, we must pronounce those views to be absolutely inconsistent with its creed, and must therefore hold that the attempt of the Essayists to combine their advocacy of such doctrines with the retention of the status and emolument of Church of England clergymen, is simply moral dishonesty." It is true that in another place (p. 288), he drops this papal style, and says, "With some of them no doubt, the object before their own eyes.....is the desire to place Christianity upon a better footing."

But this is only an example of the wanton, cruel way in which he picks up anything rough and handy to throw at them, and then has an unwitting qualm of human feeling when he thinks the missile hits. Let us take his gentler sentence (p. 288), "They have no intention of abandoning Christianity,..... their desire is to place it on a better footing." If this be true, and I suppose the Quarterly Reviewer believes it, why should they quit the ministry of the national Church? It would be both foolish and wrong for them to do so. Foolish, because if they yielded to

the morbid feeling sometimes generated by misrepresentation, and for fear of maintaining stumbling-blocks in the way of weak brethren, or from a cowardly desire for material martyrdom, were to resign their posts, they would yield the influence and honour they are beginning to find. Wrong, because they would, as far as they were concerned, betray the right of private judgment in the Church of England. Thousands of her clergy without at all committing themselves to the conclusions of the Essayists, look to them as the present champions of the "verifying faculty," which, though it cannot be destroyed in England, may yet be eclipsed in her national Church, if those who venture to uphold it suffer themselves to be talked or worried out of her ministry.

It may be remarked however, by the way, that there is much nonsense uttered about the sin of putting stumbling-blocks in other men's way. There is no sin in doing so, if the weak brother be going wrong. The stumbling-block cannot be too heavy or high, when it bars the road to intolerance and slavery.

We will now pass on from the main charge the Reviewer makes against the Essayists, viz. that of honouring the "verifying faculty," when it is applied to the subject which is of the deepest interest and importance possible. Let us see how the Reviewer tries to convict them of abusing it. We have already noticed his hatred of the principle, but I cannot understand how he expects to arrive at a conclusion

without its help. We must forgive his blunders as we should those of an enraged Quaker who failed in the bayonet exercise, however fiercely he might clutch and flourish the forbidden weapon, when his carnal nature got uppermost.

Of course, among those who apply the verifying faculty, we must expect to see some overshoot their neighbours, and perhaps startle them by their boldness in handling what others will not touch.

I will, however, take a few passages which exhibit the spirit of the Reviewer, avoiding as much as possible, the most irritating phases of the controversy in which he engages. In page 254, he falls foul of the "canons" provided by the Essayists, and begins with "criticism," which they say will help us "to reduce the strangeness of the past into harmony with the present." Does he mean that this is an unfair assumption? or does he wish to monopolize it himself? Again, when he quotes what he calls their "pregnant words,"—"We find the evidences of our canonical books, and of the patristic authors nearest them, are *not adequate* to guarantee narratives inherently incredible, or precepts evidently wrong,"—does he mean that they *are* adequate to guarantee such narratives or precepts? Again (p. 256), he starts at such a supposition as "the conscience deciding for every man upon the truth of doctrine, and the historical value of facts," laying down as *his* canon, that conscience certainly has no direct connection whatever with mere intellect: would he have the conscientious man devoid of intellect? or the

intellectual theologian unconscientious? He naïvely adds, "Many good men are infinitely above their own theories:" let us give him the shelter of this admission.

In page 158 he is speaking of inspiration, and exclaims, "Here is the great principle of the Essayists,—Holy Scripture is like any other good book;" then he quotes Mr. Jowett, "Scripture is to be *read* like any other book,"—"not only," now the Reviewer goes on, "because it embodies the same errors as other books (*sic*) but also because it is not to be held to have meanings deeper, at least in kind, than they possess." Now this is most unfair—there may be no difference in kind, but a mighty one in result, between various workings of the same influence, just as in electricity, where the little spark and snap from the machine in the hands of a boy, are to be referred to the laws which regulate the crash of a thunderstorm, when the lightning shineth from the one part under heaven to another, and a nation starts.

A little further (p. 259) he asks, "Why is Strauss's resolution an excess? Where, and by what authority, short of his extreme view, would Mr. Wilson himself stop?" By the same authority which decides the Reviewer to accept what he calls the established scheme, instead of Mr. Wilson's views—viz., the authority of his own "verifying faculty."

In page 267 he quotes this apparently harmless

sentence in Mr. Jowett's essay—It is “most probable that the tradition on which the three first gospels were based was at first preserved orally, and slowly put together and written in the three forms which it assumed at a very early period, those forms being in some places perhaps modified by experience;” and then says, “From this origin he argues, to the utter destruction of all notion of inspiration (*sic*) that dissimilarities arose between them.” These read like the words of one who had never heard of the distinction between plenary and verbal inspiration, *i.e.* between the illumination of the writers by the Holy Ghost, and the supernatural dictation of the letters which were traced by their pens.

As an unfair distortion we may cite this (p. 268): “Mr. Wilson esteems the Apostle (St. John) as a man of rather contracted habits of thought,” whereas Mr. Wilson's words are, “The horizon which St. John's view embraced was much narrower than St. Paul's,”

‘Qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes.’”

Later in the same page, after another extract from his essay, he remarks, “Little can be added to this, and yet something is added when Mr. Jowett tells us that ‘we cannot readily determine how much of the words of *our Lord*, or of St. Paul, is to be attributed to oriental modes of speech, for that expres-

sions which would be regarded as rhetorical exaggeration in the Western world, are the natural vehicles of thought to an Eastern people.’”

Now, the Reviewer considers every statement in Scripture as of equal value, or he does not. If he does not, he employs his own “verifying faculty” in deciding what is and what is not to be accepted in the inspired record, and so commits the grave crime of which he accuses the Essayists. If he does consider every statement in Scripture as of equal value, he has no right to *affect* a distinction between the words of *our Lord* and any others which the inspired writers have recorded.

In apparent forgetfulness of Scripture statements, however, he accuses Mr. Jowett of his “general notion” seeming to be, “that we are under a progressive revelation.” Why not quarrel with St. Paul, for saying: “We know in part, and we prophesy in part.” “When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things; for now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

In page 271 the Reviewer speaks of the “remarkable indifference to all doctrine which is everywhere apparent in the writings of Mr. Jowett. ‘The lessons of Scripture,’ he thinks, ‘may have a nearer way to the heart of the poor when disengaged from theological formulas.’ ‘The truths of Scripture,’ again, ‘would have greater reality if

divested of the scholastic form in which theology has cast them. The universal and spiritual aspect of Scripture might be more brought forward, to the exclusion of . . . exaggerated statements of doctrines which seem to be at variance with morality.’”

If this is wrong, we ought to have had no Reformation.

Many might be excused for not being shocked at this statement of Mr. Wilson’s (p. 272): “And when the Christian Church, in all its branches, shall have fulfilled its sublunary office, and its Founder shall have surrendered His kingdom to the Great Father—all, both small and great, shall find a refuge in the bosom of the Universal Parent, *to repose* or be quickened into higher life in the ages to come, according to His will.”

We think this rather a turgid paraphrase of St. Paul’s words, “Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom unto God, even the Father.” “And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.” But the Reviewer asks (p. 273) with confident emphasis, as one who has, to use his own words (p. 274), “forced up the prophet’s veil, and shown the foul deformity which it covers:” “Can the knell of all Christian truth sound more distinctly (*sic*) or more mournfully than this?”

It appears that Mr. Wilson did not speak twenty

years ago as he does now. The Reviewer rummages up a letter which he, with three others, signed in 1841 against Tractarianism. The authors of that letter protested against too great a liberty in interpreting the formularies of our Church in favour of Rome. Well, then, Mr. Wilson was one of the first to detect and expose the Popish tendencies of High Churchmen. We do not see how that is inconsistent with his present essay. But the Reviewer makes a great point of it, and writes very rudely. When he anticipates the horror with which this same gentleman (Mr. Wilson twenty years ago) would then have read his present essay, could it have been shown to him, does the Reviewer think that *any* change of opinion is wrong? that none are to be converted? that no one, from St. Paul downwards, can be acquitted of immorality if he contradicts any of his former statements, or even reverses the deliberate decisions of his early life?

It is curious to notice how the Reviewer recurs to his main charge against the Essayist's belief in the "verifying faculty," even when he professes to be examining details. "Why," he exclaims (p. 282), "should not the 'verifying faculty' of Voltaire, or Thomas Paine, be as good an authority as the same faculty when exercised by Rowland Williams?"

The Reviewer misses the point of the question here. Your verifying faculty is no guide to me: I am not responsible for such opinions as you have arrived at yourself. The Reviewer, however, seems

to think the verifying faculty to be like a telescope which may be handed about ; whereas it may rather be illustrated by eyesight, which every one is expected to use for himself. I may exercise a privilege, and yet regret its abuse in some cases ; just as a man who takes the liberty of warming himself at a fire, may be sorry to see his neighbour's house burnt down because he overheats his flue.

As a specimen of inconsistency, however, take the following, and, remember, it comes from a man who, above all things, protests against the exercise of the verifying faculty when applied to the subjects treated of in the inspired record :

“ If ” (p. 286) “ it can be *shown* to the young believer that the system offered to him in the Essays, full as it is of appeals to the pride of his reason, which tend to captivate his mind, must *by logical necessity* end in atheism, he is bound, as he values his salvation, not to listen to the syren's voice.”

In page 288, we have another example of the Reviewer's self-contradictory style ; he speaks of “ their new form of Christianity,” and then, lower down, he says, “ The path on which they have entered is no new one.” Which does he mean ? One cannot help thinking that, since in his opinion (same page), “ All unbelievers of all classes, and all believers of all shades, see plainly enough that the Essayists are simply deceiving themselves,” he might have spared himself the “ distasteful task ” of exposing their mistakes to the public.

Let us notice, however, the way in which he tries

to do this, in treating of the supposed discrepancies between revelation and the science of astronomy. He asks (p. 292), "Is the fulness and reality of revelation one whit shaken because the *standing still* of the light-giving luminary upon Gibeon was accomplished by the God to whom his servant cried, by any of the thousand other modes by which His mighty power could have accomplished it, rather than by the actual suspension of the unbroken career of the motion of the heavenly bodies in their appointed courses?"

Now, he believes, either that the sun stood still, in the common acceptation of the phrase, or that it did not; but how the light-giving luminary (*sic*) could have stood still, without the "career of the motion of the heavenly bodies" being broken, he does not pretend to say.

The Reviewer is withering when he comes to miracles. While dipping his pen in a pleasant pause of consciousness at having already blackened the Essayists, he hastens to transfer this sentence of triumphant severity to his paper, "There is" (p. 299) "but one other argument in favour of their system with which we need trouble our readers. It is that which continually re-appears throughout the volume, the impossibility of believing in a miracle."

Let us see how he removes it. First, in reply to theoretical objections, he says, "Supposing (p. 300) that, for the purpose of preventing man's falling under the power of outward things, occasional or periodic suspensions of what seems the iron-law of

order, were a part of the plan on which the universe were governed, who shall dare to say that there is in such a marvellous arrangement any disparagement of the wisdom, power, or love of Him who laid the foundations of the earth, and it abideth?" "It abideth *not*," we should have expected, if the Reviewer's notion of a miracle were true. The believer in miracles might well wish for a better champion.

But how does he reply to objections made on the ground of experience? "Once grant (p. 300) that there was at any epoch whatever of this series of causes and effects a Creator and a creation . . . fix the beginning of the series where you please, the existence of that on which we trace the law of order stamped is itself the greatest of all miracles."

Very well; but how does he go on? "He who then interfered may interfere at any other point in the series, and, before we can pronounce that He has *not*, and will *not* do so, we must be able to comprehend all His ways, and to fathom all the secret purposes of His all-wise but often most mysterious will." Thus he invites the return blow, which is made by leaving out the "nots," "Before we can *pronounce* that He has and *will do* so, we must be able to comprehend all His ways, and to fathom all the secret purposes of His all-wise but often most mysterious will." Now, as evidently neither the Reviewer nor his imaginary antagonist can do that, they are left, thanks to the Reviewer, just where they began. However, he jauntily concludes, "We see, then, nothing contrary to right reason in ad-

mitting the alleged fact of any actual miracle upon such evidence as would be sufficient to establish beyond doubt any other alleged fact." In short, that there is no more difficulty in believing that the ass spoke to Balaam, than that Balaam spoke to the ass.

Heaven defend us from being guided by the Reviewer's verifying faculty, which, in defiance of his own anathema, he applies with blundering ignorance of true faith, to the facts and statements of the Bible. Such as he are the real provokers of infidelity and atheism.

There are passages in his article (p. 283) in which he "handles freely" the words and character of the Son of God. I will not follow him there. Let us hope that those who read his Article will not be hindered in believing that, after all, love toward our Lord Jesus Christ, as we see him in the Gospels, is the essence of Christianity. A growing number of us will, I trust, as time goes on, feel that we owe the possession of an *open Bible* itself in the Church of England to the Divine implantation of our right to the exercise of the verifying faculty in English hearts; and while we protest against committing ourselves to the opinions, however honest, of any individual clergyman, yet see the greatest danger to our spiritual liberty in attempts to drive those whom we do not agree with, but who profess no hostility to the Church of England, out of that body, which is

