

*Law*

# A WORLD WITHOUT GOD.

A REPLY TO MISS FRANCES POWER COBBE

BY

ANNIE BESANT.



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## A WORLD WITHOUT GOD.

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THE Roman Catholic conception of a world over which God is supreme and which is ruled under him by his Church, all authority flowing from that one fount, all duty owing to that one superior, is a logical and a consistent one; the Atheistic conception of a world of which man is the highest product and over which he rules, knowing no superior, and acknowledging no limit to his own rights save the collateral rights of those who share the planet with him, is a logical and a consistent one. On many points of duty the obligation imposed by authority and that deduced from experience will coincide, but the bases of the two schools remain entirely distinct. Between these reasoned and opposing systems float and drift many semi-rational and more or less inconsequent schools—Protestants orthodox and unorthodox, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregational, Unitarian, Theistic, &c., &c.—each of which has partially thrown off authority, here of Rome, there of Canterbury, here of a Kirk, there of a Book, but each of which claims authority for its own remnant of belief; each affirms the right of private judgment over all it rejects, but denies it for all it receives: and often the denial is the more bitter and the more unsparing as the assertion has been wide and sweeping.

Miss Frances Power Cobbe in an article in the *Contemporary Review* on "A Faithless World", and her critics in various religious journals, offer instructive examples of these varying semi-rational schools; herself a Theist and erstwhile at least an opponent of Christianity, she declares that the effects of Atheism in the future cannot be judged by the conduct of Atheists now, because Atheists are

surrounded by Christians. "The same holds true", remarks the *Church Times*, "of her own form of Theism, should orthodox Christianity disappear in its favor". Each creed thinks itself necessary to morality and despises all which are more liberal than itself.

Of all creeds, the purely Theistic is the most inconsequent, depending as it does for its "proofs" on the varying emotions of men. "Intuition", "feeling", these for it are the revealers of the Divine, and denying all special revelation, all Divine Incarnation, it leaves each individual to "feel" God for himself and to receive direct inspiration. This plan is obviously the negation of all argument, of all demonstration; a man's feelings may sway his own judgment; they can never convince the judgment of anyone else.

Miss Cobbe takes for her text some words of Mr. Justice Stephen on religion:

"We can get on very well without one; for though the view of life which science is opening to us gives us nothing to worship, it gives us an infinite number of things to enjoy. . . . The world seems to me a very good world, if it would only last. Love, friendship, ambition, science, literature, art, politics, commerce, professions, trades, and a thousand other matters, will go equally well, as far as I can see, whether there is or is not a God and a future state."

She proceeds to descant on "the chief consequences which might be anticipated to follow the downfall of such religion as at present prevails in civilised Europe and America", and defines religion as "definite faith in a living and righteous God; and, as a corollary therefrom, in the survival of the human soul after death. In other words, I mean by 'religion' that nucleus of simple Theism which is common to every form of natural religion, of Christianity and Judaism." A good deal of dispute might arise as to the meaning of the word "righteous" in connexion with any God common to natural religion, Christianity, and Judaism. The brutal and blood-thirsty Jahveh of the Hebrews was certainly not righteous, and Miss Cobbe does not believe in the God who walked in the Garden of Eden, ate calf with Abraham, showed his back to Moses, and presided over the slaughters of the Canaanites and the Amalekites. It is not straightforward to pretend that her highly-civilised nineteenth century God is identical with the brutal God of Moses and of Joshua, nor is her one indivisible God

the God of the Christians, one part of whom became man and in whom there are three distinct persons. After thus lightly waving aside all differences as to God, Miss Cobbe with equal lightness ignores the vast evils wrought by religions: "I absolve myself from weighing against the advantages of religion the evils which have followed its manifold corruptions"! But how can we balance the results of religion and non-religion if we are to leave out of account all the evils accruing from one? We are now to have, it seems, the "religion of Christ—*i.e.*, the religion Christ practised and lived". But that was Judaism, and there is not the smallest sign that Christendom proposes to revert to Judaism.

Miss Cobbe then proceeds: "I confess, at starting on this enquiry, that the problem 'Is religion of use, or can we do as well without it?' seems to me as grotesque as the old story of the woman who said that we owe vast obligation to the moon, which affords us light on dark nights, whereas we are under no such debt to the sun, who only shines by day, when there is always light". If this be a true exposition of the state of Miss Cobbe's mind on the great subject with which she deals, she stands self-condemned as incompetent. No one can argue who is incapable of appreciating the opponent's position, and Miss Cobbe cannot appreciate the Atheistic position if she thinks it comparable to that of her ignorant old woman. I pass the intolerable impertinence of her assumption that her opponents are ignorant fools, as much below herself in knowledge and intelligence as the woman referred to was below the average man and woman; it is one of the results of religion, this intense and arrogant self-conceit. But even Miss Cobbe might deign to consider that it was scarcely worth while to waste fifteen pages of the *Contemporary Review* in solving a grotesque problem, and that the pains she takes to frighten people from Atheism prove that to her it is far more likely that intellectual people will accept it than her insolent parable would imply.

Religion, it seems, is the sun: friendship, science, art, commerce, and politics, are only "moonlike things". "It is the special and unique character of religion to deal with the whole of human nature, *all* our pleasures and pains and duties and affections and hopes and fears, here and hereafter. It offers to the intellect an explanation of the universe (true or false we need not now consider); and

pointing to heaven, it responds to the most eager of its questions. It offers to the conscience a law claiming to regulate every act and every word. And it offers to the heart an absolutely love-worthy being as the object of its adoration. Whether these immense offers of religion are all genuine, or all accepted by us individually, they are quite unmatched by anything which science, or art, or politics, or commerce, or even friendship, has to bestow." Let us consider this most curious paragraph. Religion offers to the intellect an explanation of the universe, "true or false we need not now consider". Pardon me, that is exactly what the intellect must consider, for a false explanation is worthless, and may be mischievous—as when it is accepted as true and prevents further investigation. One religion tells us that God made man out of dust and woman out of a rib; another relates that the earth was populated by Deucalion and Pyrrha throwing stones behind them, Deucalion's stones turning into men, and Pyrrha's into women; a third explains the sexes by saying that Brahma made a figure male and female, and then slit it in half; all these are "explanations". "Take them all", Miss Cobbe says amiably: "never mind whether they are true or false". Yet the value of an explanation depends entirely on the amount of truth it contains. It is idle for Miss Cobbe to answer that the explanation offered by "religion" is not that of any special religion, Jewish or Pagan; belief in God and in immortality offers *per se* no explanation of the universe, and each special religion dogmatizes but does not explain. Yet these fables are "quite unmatched by anything which science . . . has to bestow"! The discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, of Newton and Laplace, of Lamarck and Darwin, are all thrown into the shade as explanations when compared with these grotesque fancies of religion. I prefer the science.

"Pointing to heaven it responds to the most eager of its questions." And the response, I suppose, may be "true or false" as it happens. Happy hunting-grounds or Elysian fields, the Eastern magnificence of John or the sensual houri-filled paradise of Mahomet, it is all one to Miss Cobbe. Religion says "something" of a life after death. And to her impatient, unbalanced, helter-skelter mind, the crudest and most absurd answers are better than the patient sober silence of Science where knowledge fails.

"It offers to the conscience a law claiming authority to

regulate every act and every word." Where? In the Jewish Scriptures, commanding slavery and persecution? In the Christian Scriptures, commanding non-resistance of evil and celibacy wherever possible? If not in these, where is this law to be found? By intuition? The intuition of the Thug? of the Dyak? of the Fijian? of the Inquisitor? of the Covenanter? of the Sceptic? Or is the moral law evolved by Miss Frances Power Cobbe out of her own inner consciousness to be the law for all humanity?

"It offers to the heart an absolutely love-worthy being as the object of its adoration." Which being? I have never yet met a love-worthy God. The Jahveh of the Jews is detestable. The "Father" of the Christians burns the majority of his children for ever. The God of the Theist has invented the struggle for existence, and looks on unmoved at the immense misery of the world when he might by a word turn all its mourning into joy. Hateful and enemies of man are they, all these innumerable Gods. Love-worthy! it is blasphemy against Love to soil it by joining it to their names. "Whether these immense offers of religion are all genuine", is apparently a matter of small moment from Miss Cobbe's point of view. Yet on their genuineness must depend all their value. If they are not genuine, then the smallest gift of science, art, politics, commerce, or friendship, is more precious than the huge frauds of religion. The man who gives me a pound enriches me more than the man who promises me a million and gives me naught. To promise me the moon would be an "immense offer"; but I should prefer the gift of an acre in Arran.

I have spoken of a few of the gifts of science; what shall I say of those of art, of politics, of commerce, of friendship, the other "moonlike things" so contemptuously regarded by Miss Cobbe? Better the symphonies of Beethoven, the paintings of Turner and of Long, than the jangling of angels' harps and the pearl-gemmed gates of the New Jerusalem. Better the efforts to raise the poor and to bind in brotherhood the nations, than the dull contentment with misery preached by the believers in God. Better the commerce which unites than the religion which divides the nations. And better, a thousandfold better, the sweet trust of human friendship, the priceless wealth of human sympathy, the tenderness, the peace, the perfect joy of human love, than any dream of some non-human,

supernatural, unsympathetic Supreme Being, unsympathetic because sympathy implies fellow-feeling and equality, and these can never be between Man and God.

After this introductory statement, Miss Cobbe proceeds to deal with the subject-matter of her enquiry, the changes which may be expected to result from the "downfall of religion in Europe and America". The mere commonplace scientific student would be content to study facts and to deduce conclusions from them; but Miss Cobbe is an Intuitionist, and has methods far less laborious, if more expeditious. She alleges that "after noting the orderly and estimable conduct of many of them [undevout people], the observer might *per contra*, not unfairly surmise that they would continue to act just as they do at present were religion universally exploded. But ere such a conclusion could be legitimately drawn from the meritorious lives of non-religious men in the present order of society, we should be allowed (it is a familiar remark) to see the behavior of a whole nation of Atheists. Our contemporaries are no more fair samples of the outcome of Atheism than a little party of English youths who had lived for a few years in Central Africa would be samples of Negroes. It would take several thousand years to make a full-blooded Atheist out of the scion of forty generations of Christians." This is a fair sample of the argumentative style of Miss Cobbe. She admits that many Atheists—her "undevout" persons—are "orderly and estimable"; now a very large number of "devout" persons are neither orderly nor estimable. Some persons who do not believe in God nor in immortality are moral, some who believe in both are also moral, while many who believe in both are utterly immoral. Such are the facts. The obvious conclusion—by the logical "method of difference"—is that the two things, belief and conduct, are not causally related. But logic is not Miss Cobbe's *forte*, and she refers the moral conduct of Atheists to "forty [why forty?] generations of Christians". A Pagan of the type of Socrates or of Plato might remark that "it would take several thousand years to make a full-blooded Christian out of the scion of forty generations of Pagans", and as "several thousand years" have not elapsed since the birth of Christ, he might, arguing on Miss Cobbe's model, allege that the Christians of to-day had not yet worked out the degrading results of their creed. Still more forcibly does the *tu quoque* style



of argument apply to Miss Cobbe's Theism. Who can plumb the depths of immorality which will be reached by adherents of "mere Theism", when the constraining influence of Christianity has disappeared? All their present parade of virtue is worthless; "full-blooded Theism" is as far off as "full-blooded Atheism". Theists are virtuous members of society, not because they love virtue, but because they are forced into outward decency by their ancestral "forty generations of Christians", and the pressure of Christianity around them. Miss Cobbe's Theism and my Atheism are both products of modern thought. Her arguments against the morality of the one tell with fatal force against the morality of the other. Let Miss Cobbe go back to submissive Christianity, or let her be honest enough to recognise that in seeking a higher truth both she and I have broken with the past, and that while we both owe much to our forerunners, our morality is based on something more reliable than tradition or present pressure.

"As it is, then, impossible", Miss Cobbe goes on, "to forecast what would be the consequences of universal Atheism hereafter by observing the conduct of individual Atheists to-day, all that can be done is to study bit by bit the changes which must take place should this planet ever become, as is threatened, a *Faithless World*". Surely the word "study" is here written in error? To "guess at", to "fancy", to "manufacture", would represent the process, but to study, no! Anyone who desired to write carefully would at least have endeavored in forecasting changes to be guided by some analogy with observed facts, but Miss Cobbe deliberately ignores all the admitted facts, and starts off along a road of pure guess.

Miss Cobbe's bitter contempt for the philosophy she is engaged in caricaturing, and her habit of begging every point in dispute, break out in her next sentences. "Atheists have been hitherto like children playing at the mouth of a cavern of unknown depth. They have run in and out, and explored it a little way, but always within sight of the daylight outside, where have stood their parents and friends calling on them to return. Not till the way back to the sunshine has been lost will the darkness of that cave be fully revealed." I pass the "children playing". In serious controversy such phrases are out of place. But it is well to note the cool assumption that Atheism is "dark-

ness". Whether it be darkness or not is the question at issue; to the Atheist the world is "dark with Gods", and as these awful shadows pass, the sunshine of hope and of love illumines the saddened earth. Nothing is proved by Miss Cobbe's assumption that Atheism is darkness, nor by mine that Atheism is light. Sober investigation, not metaphor, is the only Ariadne's clue through this worse than Cretan labyrinth.

The first of the suggested changes in the "Faithless World" are "the suppression of public and private worship and of teaching; the secularisation or destruction everywhere of cathedrals, churches, and chapels; and the extinction of the clerical profession". And then follows a wail over the "effacement from each landscape of the towers and spires of the churches". "Worship" would certainly vanish under an Atheistic régime, but "preaching" not, unless the word "preaching" be confined to dissertations on superstitious dogmas; the teaching of social duties, of civic and personal obligations, will for a long time to come form a necessary part of public education. Why should cathedrals, churches, and chapels be destroyed? Atheism will utilise, not destroy, the beautiful edifices which, once wasted on God, shall hereafter be consecrated for Man. Destroy Westminster Abbey, with its exquisite arches, its glorious tones of soft, rich color, its stonework light as if of cloud, its dreamy subdued twilight soothing as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land"? Nay, but reconsecrate it to humanity. The fat cherubs who tumble over guns and banners on soldiers' graves will fitly be removed to some spot where their clumsy forms will no longer mar the upward-springing grace of lines of pillar and of arch, but the glorious building wherein now barbaric psalms are chanted and droning canons preach of Eastern follies, shall hereafter echo the majestic music of Wagner and of Beethoven, and the teachers of the future shall there unveil to thronging multitudes the beauties and the wonders of the world. The "towers and spires" will not be effaced, but they will no longer be the symbols of a religion which sacrifices earth to heaven and Man to God.

"The extinction of the clerical profession" would certainly take place in a "Faithless World". Those "barriers to thought" would happily have disappeared. Miss Cobbe thinks that this extinction would "reduce by many perceptible degrees the moral level", and that the "severity

of the strictures always passed on the faults of clergymen testifies to the general expectation, not wholly disappointed, that they should exhibit a loftier standard of life than other men". The severity is not so much due to the general expectation of nobler living from them as to the hatred that honest people feel for hypocrisy joined to pretensions of superiority; Pecksniff is detestable not only for the unfathomed depths of his meanness, but for the claim to sanctity above his fellows which is associated with his moral worthlessness.

The "Seventh Day of Rest" will, Miss Cobbe thinks, "survive every other religious institution"; it is, it seems, "so marvellously adapted to our mental and physical constitution". Adapted by whom? Unless Miss Cobbe has turned traitor to her former teaching, she cannot regard the seventh day as God-appointed. The nation is to "enjoy the somewhat doubtful privilege of keeping fifty-six Bank Holidays, instead of four, in the year". Doubtful privilege! Surely a "seventh day rest" will be more recreative to the worker when he may visit picture-gallery, museum, concert-hall, theatre, library, instead of lounging in a gin-palace or at a street-corner, or tramping through the dreary streets.

"Judicial and official oaths of all sorts, and marriage and burial rites, would, of course, be entirely abolished." For the oaths, granted. But why should marriage and burial rites be abolished? People will be married, I hope, and buried, I fear, in a "Faithless World" as in a religious one. The indecent Church marriage service will vanish, to the great gain of refinement and modesty, and the open and notorious evil-liver will no longer be buried in sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection, but man and woman will still join loyal hands in union unblessed by priest, and the last tender farewell will be given to the dead by lips that speak for love and not for fee.

Next will come "the reduction of the Bible to the rank of an (*sic*) historical and literary curiosity. Nothing (as we all recognise) but the supreme religious importance attached to the Hebrew Scriptures could have forced any book into the unique position which the Bible has now held for three centuries in English and Scottish education. . . . All the golden fruit which the English intellect has borne from Shakspeare downwards may be said to have grown on this priceless Semitic graft upon the Aryan stem."

And this from Miss Cobbe's pen! This to be written by a woman who has done so much to degrade the Bible from this unique position by the whole tone and drift of her writings! The position held by the Bible in England has been one of the main obstacles to England's progress. It has been used since Shakspeare's time to prop the despotism of the Stuarts, to rivet the manacles on the slave, to delay the enfranchisement of men, to maintain a tyrannical Establishment, to resist the emancipation of Jews and of Dissenters, to justify the imprisonment of civil and religious reformers, to perpetuate the subjugation of women. To the charge of what other book can be laid the crimes against liberty which may be justly laid against the Bible? And this because of its "religious importance". As a book, it has much that is interesting and curious in it. As a religious code it has been a curse to the human race.

The changes dealt with in the preceding paragraphs are those which are regarded by Miss Cobbe as the most obvious; she next considers "those less obvious consequences of the downfall of religion which would take place silently".

"The first of these would be the *belittling* of life . . . . Only when they disappear will men perceive how the two thoughts—of this world as *God's world* and of ourselves as Immortal beings—have, between them, lighted up in rainbow hues the dull plains of earth. When they fade away, all things, Nature, Art, Duty, Love, and Death, will seem to grow grey and cold. Everything which casts a glamor over life will be gone." I meet this argument by denying the truth of Miss Cobbe's view of earth as well as by objecting to "glamor". The plains of earth are *not* dull; they are musical with birds, green with trees, gemmed with blossoms, sparkling with the silver threads of winding streams; they "Bask in purple, glow in green, exult in gold". "Rainbow hues" would not add to their glory. Wild rose and clematis, mayflower and harebell, wood-sorrel and violet, have hues as lovely and more lasting than those of the rainbow, while earth's garlands fling on the breezes a fragrance that the colored mist of heaven cannot rival. I accept Miss Cobbe's imagery; better the flowers of earth than the unsubstantial rainbows of the sky.

This, of course, is not argument; it is only phrase-making. But the suggestion underlying Miss Cobbe's image is as false as the image is ill-chosen. Art, Duty, Love, are no more "grey and cold" than the literal plains

of earth. Art was turned away from its true function when it painted ugly hermits and shrivelled nuns instead of types of human beauty. Sculpture and painting have often given to the world human figures of ideal beauty, and in deference to the superstition of their day have named these Apollo or Aphrodite, Sebastian or Mary, but it has been the human element, not the religious, which has been of value; the ugly Madonnas are as valuable from the religious point of view as are the beautiful ones; indeed, the most sacred of all, the black virgin and child, served for Isis and Horus before worshipped as Mary and Christ. Miss Cobbe admits that "in the purer modern types of religion . . . we should expect painting and sculpture to be less immediately concerned with it than in old days, because unable to touch such purely spiritual ideas. But", she goes on, "the elevation, aspiration, and reverence which have their root in religion must continue to inspire those arts likewise, or they will fall into triviality on one side (as there seems danger in England), or into obscene materialism on the other, as is already annually exemplified on the walls of the *Paris Salon*". The last phrase is well-chosen to terrify the British Philistine, but is very absurd. I doubt if Miss Cobbe has visited the *Paris Salon* annually, or has even taken the trouble to look over the *Paris Salon* issued by Louis Enault each year. What does she mean by "obscene materialism"? Studies of the nude? To many people the human body as "made by God" is obscene; to make God's work decent the co-operation of Redfern or of Wörth is necessary. But if the nude is indecent, all great sculpture of the human body stands condemned. The statutes of Apollo and of Aphrodite were not, as a rule, dressed; it has been left for the religious feeling of the Vatican to put tin cylinders over the majestic and exquisite nude figures of Pagan Greece. Further, some of the religious statues were really indecent, and the "obscene materialism" of the *Paris Salon* is modesty itself beside the "obscene religionism" of Egypt and of Southern Italy. In painting similar facts might be alleged; e.g., the exquisite Magdalen of Corregio is as voluptuously seductive as any non-religious female figure ever limned by Parisian artist. But the main point is not that of decency and indecency. It is of the true source of inspiration for sculpture and painting. I allege that nature is the only source of inspiration for the graphic

arts. Human, brute, vegetable, mineral, forms of beauty—on these alone can the sculptor and the painter draw. The existence of God, the immortality of the human soul, cannot affect the artist's materials. These exist, whether or not there be a God; an invisible, incorporeal being is not well adapted to serve as model for sculptor or painter; souls may wield the chisel and the brush beyond the grave, but it is the human brain and the human hand that guide them here.

Nor do poetry, music, and architecture, need religion for their inspiration now, any more than they have needed it in the past. Belief in God is no more necessary to great poetry than is belief in fairies or in magic, although poets have long used Gods, fairies, and witchcraft as part of their machinery, and will probably continue to do so for many a day to come. They are fancies, not realities, yet fancies often find beautiful poetic setting. Ariel and Caliban need not exist in order that Shakspeare may introduce them into a play, and if any of the Gods be coveted by a poet among his *dramatis personæ* their real existence is not necessary for their utilisation. Lucretius among ancients, Shelley and Swinburne among moderns, tell us that poetry is possible without God. It is often alleged that all the grandest music is sacred, but this is prejudice, not fact. No mass or oratorio ever written rivals the sonatas, symphonies, and concerted chamber music of Beethoven; the secular music of Mozart is grander than his masses; the works of Schubert, Bach, Brahms, all bear the same testimony; Berlioz was not the least of the musicians of his day. The masses and oratorios are at present more popular, partly because they are better known, partly because, being inferior, they are better understood by the majority, and chiefly because the religious words "cast a glamor over" the music, and make people fancy that they are performing a work of piety while listening to them. Amusement flavored with religion has a special charm for persons superficially religious and inwardly world-loving. But architecture, at least, it is urged, owes its greatness to religion. Yet the Forum, the Coliseum, can surely hold their own against any cathedral in the world.

Though, however, it may be worth while to find out how unsubstantial is the claim made on the arts by religion, the real answer to that claim is one not of detail, but of principle. Even had man always given his best to his

Gods, yet the gift was of man, not of God. On what ground, then, should it be supposed that while the giver remains the same, the gift should be lessened in value because the recipient is altered?

But, leaving art, what shall we say to Miss Cobbe's allegation that duty will "grow grey and cold" without God and immortality? Yes, for those with whom duty is a matter of selfish calculation, and who are virtuous only because they look for a "golden crown" in payment on the other side the grave. Those of us who find joy in right-doing, who work because work is useful to our fellows, who live well because in such living we pay our contribution to the world's wealth, leaving earth richer than we found it—we need no paltry payment after death for our life's labor, for in that labor is its own "exceeding great reward".

And love "grey and cold" when God has disappeared! None but the unloving can echo Miss Cobbe's words. Love of friend for friend, of parent for child, of man for woman, how should such loves fade because a supernatural love has vanished? Man lives, though Gods die. Those who have been so unfortunate as never to have felt strong human love may fancy that their thin ghost of love for the unseen is the highest emotion that man can feel. But those who know what love is smile at, though they also pitifully sigh over, the twilight life which takes the moonlight of divine for the sunlight of human love.

But what of death? Miss Cobbe may ask. Death in old age, when life is fully lived, should lose much of the sadness it wears when it cuts short the thread of happy days. And annihilation is surely better than the life in torture which religions have offered to the world. Better the death of the beloved than the thought of agony after death. I am aware that Miss Cobbe believes in immortality but not in hell; that she regards all as "doomed to be saved". We are not all dowered with Miss Cobbe's facility for believing in pleasant things because we desire them. For many of us evidence must precede belief. I would gladly believe in a happy immortality for all, as I would gladly believe that all misery and crime and poverty will disappear in 1885—*if I could*. But I am unable to believe an improbable proposition unless convincing evidence is brought in support of it. Immortality is most improbable; no evi-

dence is brought forward in its favor. I cannot believe only because I wish. X

Miss Cobbe would keep belief in the unprovable on the ground that it "casts a glamor over life". I desire to see life as it is. If we would judge a landscape rightly we must not look at it through colored glasses. Unhappily, few people really love Truth; they prefer illusions, if the illusions are pleasanter than the truths, and become very angry with those who point out that illusions are not realities, and who are not afraid to recognise painful and disheartening truths. What should we think of a farmer who left undrained a fever-breeding swamp on the ground that the marsh-fires were "so pretty"? Yet there are people who would preserve the swamps of superstition because their dancing flames "cast a glamor over life".

"Again, it will not merely belittle life, it will *carnalise* it to take Religion out of it. . . . It needs no argument to prove that, as the bestial tendencies in us have scarcely been kept down while we believed ourselves to be immortal souls, they will have it still more their own way when we feel assured we are only mortal bodies." This sentence would be easier to deal with if Miss Cobbe had vouchsafed to tell us which tendencies in man she regards as "bestial". I should have regarded war as one of the strongest examples of a bestial tendency, but judging from her next paragraph Miss Cobbe does not regard war with the detestation felt for it by Atheists. Excuses for the brutality of war, however, may be looked for from anyone who admires the Bible.

It may be frankly acknowledged, however, that man inherits from his brute progenitors various bestial tendencies which are in course of elimination. The wild beast desire to fight is one of these, and this has been encouraged, not checked, by religion. National rivalries have often grown out of the rivalries of national Gods. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God", quoth Jahveh of the Hebrews, and the bloodiest wars waged by the human race have been the wars waged in the name of God. The "Holy War" has ever been a war of extermination, whether undertaken by the Moabites for Chemosh, by the Hebrews for Jahveh, by the Christians for Christ. Another bestial tendency is the lust of the male for the female apart from love, duty, and loyalty; this again has been encouraged by religion, as witness the polygamy and concubinage of



the Hebrews—as in Abraham, David, and Solomon, not to mention the precepts of the Mosaic laws—the bands of male and female prostitutes in connexion with Pagan temples, and the curious outbursts of sexual passion in connexion with religious revivals and missions. Another bestial tendency is greed, the strongest grabbing all he can and trampling down the weaker in the mad struggle for wealth: how and when has religion modified this tendency, sanctified as it is in our present civilisation?

All these bestial tendencies will be eradicated only by the recognition of human duty, of the social bond. Religion has not eradicated them, but Science by tracing them to their source in our brute ancestry has explained them and has shown them in their true light. As each recognises that the anti-social tendencies are the bestial tendencies in man, and that man in evolving further must evolve out of these, each also feels it part of his personal duty to curb these in himself and so to rise further from the brute. This rational “co-operation with Nature” distinguishes the scientific from the religious person, and this constraining sense of obligation is becoming stronger and stronger in all those who in losing faith in God have gained hope for Man.

“From the general results on the community, I now pass to consider those on the life of the individual which may be expected to follow the collapse of religion”. First of these Miss Cobbe puts the loss of “aspiration, the sacred passion, the *ambition sainte* to become perfect and holy”. Needless to say that Miss Cobbe does not explain why the longing after human perfection should disappear with faith in God. To the Atheist it seems that the knowledge that the perfecting of the race is only possible by the improvement of the individual, supplies the most constraining motive which can be imagined for efforts after personal perfection. The Theist may desire personal perfection, but his desire is self-centred; each righteous individual is righteous, as it were, alone, and his righteousness does not benefit his fellows save as it may make him helpful and loving in his dealings with them. The Atheist desires personal perfection not only for his joy in it as beautiful in itself, but because science has taught him the unity of the race, and he knows that each fresh conquest of his over the baser parts of his nature and each strengthening of the higher is a gain for all, and not for

himself alone. If, however, by "aspiration" Miss Cobbe only means mere futile longing after good apart from effort to realise it, that will certainly disappear with the invertebrate folk who feel it, as the race grows stronger and more rational.

"Again, repentance as well as aspiration will disappear under the snows of Atheism". Repentance, it is explained, is not the "sense of dissatisfaction" with oneself after having yielded to the lower appetites and passions, as defined by Darwin, but is an "awful convulsion of the soul", an "ordeal", the "vivid experiences of penitence and restoration". Awful convulsions may be seen at any revival meeting, where sinners writhe on the floor, proclaiming their own vileness and crouching and cringing for forgiveness before "an offended God". Such degrading exhibitions will, indeed, have ceased in "a faithless world". To awful convulsions will have succeeded sober and dignified regret for wrong-doing, coupled with a manful resolution to repair as far as is possible any injury inflicted on others, whether of actual aggression or of evil example. It is hardly an argument which will recommend Theism to the rational that losing Theism we shall lose spiritual hysterics.

Private prayer will be given up, of course, when belief in God has vanished, and "with aspiration, repentance, and prayer renounced and forgotten", Miss Cobbe considers that the "inner life" will be made "easy". My blinded eyes fail to see why a man's life should become ignobly easy because he is forced to be self-reliant instead of being dependent on God. A child's legs do not grow strong if he is allowed to walk with the support of leading-strings or of a "go-cart". They grow strong when he is left to trust to them only for support. The easy fashion of leaning on the divine "go-cart" has rendered flabby the muscles of Humanity; they will grow hard and elastic only when men learn to walk alone.

"Christian charity" will vanish in "a faithless world", and this because "the charity of Science is not merely different from the charity of religion; it is an *opposite* thing altogether. Its softest word is *Vae Victis!* . . . . Science says, 'The supreme law of nature is the survival of the fittest; and that law, applied to human morals, means the remorseless crushing down of the unfit.'" Miss Cobbe's blind and ignorant hatred of Science comes out strongly in this passage; the "survival of the fittest" in the struggle

for existence is a *fact* which has underlain past progress ; the weak sentimentalist may shriek over the truth, but the thoughtful prefer to recognise a fact as a fact. Miss Cobbe should at least remember, as a Theist, that her God is responsible for the sad truth, and that he deliberately chose that progress should only be possible through struggle and death. But Science does *not* say that this struggle need continue ; on the contrary it teaches how man's reason may checkmate the malice of Miss Cobbe's God, and may substitute co-operation for competition, fraternal aid for fratricidal strife. Even if Miss Cobbe points to her *bête noire*, vivisection, as an instance of scientific cruelty, she should remember that if her God had not devised frightful diseases for the torture of men and of brutes, scientists would not need to inflict passing pain to win permanent cure for pain ; and that the human vivisector at his very worst limps far far behind the divine vivisector, who daily strews his mangled mutilated victims over the torture-trough of earth, till every forest is stained with blood and every sea and river is sobbing with incalculable pain.

So far from Science teaching us to remorselessly crush down the unfit, Science teaches us not only how to render the unfit more fit to-day, but by laying bare the causes of unfitness she teaches us how to prevent unfitness to-morrow. Those that can be cured, she cures ; the incurable, she nurses and relieves ; at the same time, she strives to remove the causes of disease, so that a healthier generation may need less of her curative skill. Christian charity ! we know its work. It gives a hundredweight of coal and five pounds of beef once a year to a family whose head could earn a hundred such doles if Christian justice allowed him fair wage for the work he performs. It plunders the workers of the wealth they make, and then flings back at them a thousandth part of their own product as "charity". It builds hospitals for the poor whom it has poisoned in filthy courts and alleys, and workhouses for the worn-out creatures from whom it has wrung every energy, every hope, every joy. Miss Cobbe summons us to admire Christian civilisation, and we see idlers flaunting in the robes woven by the toilers, a glittering tinselled superstructure founded on the tears, the strugglings, the grey hopeless misery of the poor.

Miss Cobbe, however, is by no means blind to the suffering which is present in the world, and it is indeed on the existence of suffering here that she partly bases her

belief in a future wherein all shall be well with all. By Mr. Justice Stephen's optimistic cynicism she is not unnaturally irritated; he remarked that "a man who cannot occupy every waking moment of a long life with some one or other of these things [friendship, politics, commerce, literature, science, and art] must be either very unfortunate in regard to his health, or else must be a poor creature". In answer to this she writes: "It is not necessary to be either unfortunate oneself or a very 'poor creature' to feel that the wrongs and agonies of this world of pain are absolutely intolerable unless we can be assured that they will be righted hereafter; that 'there is a God who judgeth the earth', and that all the oppressed and miserable of our race, aye, and even the tortured brutes, are beheld by him. . . . Not that which is 'poorest' in us, but that which is richest and noblest, refuses to 'occupy every moment of a long life' with our own ambitions and amusements, or to shut out deliberately from our minds the 'riddle of the painful earth'." To us there is but small comfort in Miss Cobbe's assurance that earth's "wrongs and agonies" "will be righted hereafter". Granting for a moment that man survives death, what certainty have we that "the next world" will be any improvement on this? Miss Cobbe assures us that this is "God's world"; whose world will the next be, if not also his? Will he be stronger there or better, that he should set right in that world the wrongs he has permitted here? Will he have changed his mind, or have become weary of the contemplation of suffering? To me the thought that the world was in the hands of a God who permitted all the present wrongs and pains to exist would be intolerable, maddening in its hopelessness. There is every hope of righting earth's wrongs and of curing earth's pains if the reason and skill of man which have already done so much are free to do the rest; but if they are to strive against omnipotence, hopeless indeed is the future of the world. It is in this sense that the Atheist looks on good as "the final goal of ill", and believing that that goal will be reached the sooner the more strenuous the efforts of each individual, he works in the glad certainty that he is aiding the world's progress thitherward. Not dreaming of a personal reward hereafter, not craving a personal payment from a heavenly treasury, he works and loves, content that he is building a future fairer than his present, joyous that he is creating a new earth for a happier race.