

# DISCREDITABLE TACTICS OF CHRISTIAN DISPUTANTS.

BY CHARLES WATTS.

DURING the past thirty years I have met in public discussion fifty Christian disputants, many of whom were fair in controversy. But some of my opponents appeared to have peculiar views as to what was right and honorable in their dealings with Secularists. In 1872 I held a four nights' debate with the Rev. A. Stewart, of Aberdeen, who, not content with publishing the debate as it was taken down, added to the printed report a long list of notes, either explaining the statements which he had made during the discussion, or answering points that I had urged upon the platform, and which the rev. gentleman had failed to answer at the time. On ascertaining that he was doing this, I requested the same privilege for myself; but it was not granted, upon the ground that the Christian Committee, who were issuing the debate, could not "publish *new* sceptical matter." The result was that the readers of the debate had a one-sided report presented to them. Such is the love of justice and fair play that is sometimes inspired by Christianity. Truly, "the tree is known by its fruits." The Rev. Z. B. Woffendale, acted in a similarly discreditable manner in reporting a debate he had with Mr. G. W. Foote. Christian disputants evidently recognise, after the debate is over, their controversial shortcomings, and try to cover their defects by replying to their opponents when no rejoinder is allowed.

The same kind of tactics was resorted to by Dr. A. Jamieson, of Glasgow, with whom I debated in 1894. Several months after the discussion took place the Doctor published a report of it, accompanied by an Appendix of sixteen pages, wherein he manifests a sad bitterness of temper, and indicates his disappointment at the part he played upon the platform. Here are a few specimens of how he deals, in the Appendix, with my arguments, after having had months of study to consider what he should say

In reply to my statement, that I believed in one existence which I called the universe, the Doctor says: "The universe is not one, but is composed of a multiplicity of *different* existences, as the sun, moon, stars, animals, plants, gold, silver, etc., each of which *has an existence of its own.*" Now, the Doctor ought to know that the composition does not affect the unity. Its forms and appearances—in other words, its phenomena—are numerous; but its noumenon, which underlies all external aspects, is one, hence its name. Why is it called the universe? The name is derived from *unus*, one, and therefore implies all that I contend for. The separate existences referred to by Dr. Jamieson, such as suns, stars, animals, plants, etc., are simply different modes of the one existence. They are all phenomenal, and will pass away by changing their forms; but the one existence, of which all things are simply modes, must remain to all eternity, as it has been from all eternity. Besides this there can be no other. This is the doctrine of Monism, which is now every day becoming more and more widely accepted by men of the profoundest intellect. Dr. Jamieson's quibble about the impossibility of an infinite whole being made up of finite parts goes to show what Sir W. Hamilton so clearly pointed out, that no human conception can be formed of the infinite at all, and hence any attempt to theorise about it will involve one in a contradiction.

During the debate I used the following argument, which the late Mr. Charles Bradlaugh frequently employed, with the view of showing that the universe could not have been created by an intelligent power extraneous to itself:—

"The fact I start from is the fact that something exists. Now, this existence is either infinite in duration—that is, unlimited in duration—that is, eternal—or else it has been created or brought into existence. If created, then it must have been by some existence the same as itself, or different from it; but it cannot have been created by any existence the same as itself, because that would have been but a continuation of the same existence; and it cannot have been created by any existence differing from itself, because things which have nothing in common with each other cannot be conceived in relation to each other and cannot be the cause of, or affect, one another."

Not once throughout the discussion did Dr. Jamieson notice this, but in his Appendix he elegantly remarks:—

“This argument (?) is not only *weak*, but it is *supremely silly*, and by it it could be easily proved that Mr. Watts himself is infinite, both in extent and duration, and, consequently, that *he himself* is the ‘one existence.’ If we substitute the words, *Mr. Watts exists*, for the phrase ‘*something exists*,’ throughout the argument, we will at once see the absurdity of which both Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Watts are guilty. The argument would then read thus: The fact I start from is, that Mr. Watts exists. This existence (Mr. Watts) is either infinite in duration, which is unlimited in duration—that is, eternal—or else he has been created or brought into existence. If created, then it must have been by some existence the same as himself, or different from himself; but he cannot have been created by an existence the same as himself, because that would have been but a continuation of the same existence; and he cannot have been created by any existence different from himself, because things which have nothing in common with each other cannot be conceived as having any relation to each other, and cannot be either the cause or effect of each other. The argument carried out in the same way with regard to *extent* would prove Mr. Watts to be infinite in that respect as well. An argument that leads to such an absurdity must itself be the very essence of absurdity. In face of the statement quoted, I think I may safely say that Mr. Watts’s position is ‘gone.’”

This is another of those sophisms which play so conspicuous a part in the Doctor’s reasoning. Can he not see that Mr. Watts was not, and does not pretend to have been, “created,” but to have been formed out of pre-existent material of the same nature as himself? What possible analogy is there between this process of moulding or forming and the calling into existence of a material universe from nothing? Mr. Watts was formed out of an existence the same as himself, and which existence, in one of its phases, is continued in him. The argument which I employed is irrefutable when applied to a supposed creation as I applied it; but, of course, it has no bearing upon the mere modification of things out of pre-existent material. It remains, therefore, in full force, and will remain until a better reason than Dr. Jamieson has furnished is forthcoming to set it aside.

Dr. Jamieson prides himself on having produced a "new argument," and no doubt he hopes to attain to a sort of immortality as its inventor. Strange that so many centuries should have passed before this marvellous proof of God's existence was made known to the benighted world. Paley may now hide his diminished head, and all the Bridgewater Treatises be consigned to oblivion, since a new natural theologian has arisen with a brand-new argument, which must silence all Atheists, Agnostics, and doubters of the Divine. Here is this wonderful argument (?): "It is admitted that the universe in whole or in part is *cooling*. It is also admitted that *cooling* bodies *contract*. That which has *contracted* occupies *less space* than it once did. The material universe, in whole or in part, has contracted, consequently it *now* occupies *less space* than it *once* did. It must then be *finite* in *extent*. If finite in *one way*, it must be finite in *all ways*, and, consequently, in *duration*. If finite in *duration*, it must have had a *beginning*, and consequently a *Cause*. There must, then, be a Powerful Being distinct from the material universe upon whom it depends for its existence."

Such is this new argument (?), which the Doctor invites me to answer. I do so by pronouncing it as being the very essence of sophistry. The whole "argument" is based upon a mistake, and, upon this mistake, certain "ifs" are stated, and then the imperative there "must" have been "a powerful Being," etc., is *assumed*. This is a fair sample of the Doctor's metaphysics. Now, what are the facts? It is not true that cooling bodies *always* contract, for snow and ice occupy more space than water, although the temperature of the former is much lower than that of the latter. Cooling in this case expands, instead of contracting. Mark the sophism of the Doctor's. He says "the material universe in whole or in part has contracted; consequently it [what?—the whole or the part?] occupies less space than it once did." If the whole has contracted, no doubt that is so. But the Doctor does not venture to assert that the whole has contracted, but that the contraction may have been in part only. Yet the conclusion drawn is on the supposition that there has been contraction of the entire mass. This is manifestly illogical. What do we know of distant parts of the universe as to whether the

matter in existence there is cooling or not? In one part the temperature falls, and in another it rises, leaving probably the same amount of heat on the whole. No one can assert that the entire universe is cooling, and, therefore, undergoing contraction; hence the "new argument" that was to revolutionise the Theistic philosophy is not worth the paper it is written on.

Dr. Jamieson persists in his contention that "the effect can never be superior to the cause," and upon this assumption he gives what he terms "a fatal blow to the Atheistic hypothesis." In the debate I quoted J. S. Mill, who said: "How vastly nobler and more precious, for instance, are the vegetables and animals than the soil and manure out of which they are raised up." "But," says the Doctor, "the soil and the manure are not the cause either of vegetables or animals," but the cause is "a living germ" which is there. Granted; yet surely it will not be urged that this simple unicellular germ is greater than the oak tree which springs from it, or the animal—perhaps man—in which it develops. That germ has no intelligence, yet from it comes a Milton, a Bacon, or a Shakespeare. Was not the effect greater than the cause in such a case? Take another illustration of an opposite character. A bacillus, almost inconceivable in its minuteness, several millions of which could pass at the same time through the eye of an ordinary sewing-needle, enters the body of a strong man and sets up an action which stops all the vital forces of the powerful and well-knit organism. The cause here was this tiny thing, composed of just a single cell; the result, the death of a man of great vigor of body and strength of mind. Surely no one out of a lunatic asylum will maintain in such a case as this that the effect was inferior to the cause.

Dr. Jamieson's statement, that life precedes organisation, is so startling that one can hardly imagine it possible for anyone to make it who is acquainted with the merest rudiments of biology. Can we even imagine life apart from organisation? Will the Doctor tell us where it is to be found, and what it is like? That organisation and life are always found associated no one, we presume, will deny, just as force is always found in connection with matter. But it would be no less absurd to say that force was the

cause of matter than that life was the cause of organisation. Most of the quotations given by Dr. Jamieson from men of science are quite beside the question, and only show that the writers held life to be something distinct from organisation, which no more proves life to have been the cause of organisation than the holding that electricity is something distinct from the battery proves it to have been the cause of the combination of metals and acids employed. However, the quotations themselves are from books written long ago. The one most in harmony with the views under consideration is that from the *Reign of Law* by the Duke of Argyll. And this book was written nearly thirty years since, and its author was certainly never considered an authority upon questions of biology. Huxley most assuredly held a view diametrically opposed to this, as any one can see who will take the trouble to read his *Physical Basis of Life*. In that discourse he ridiculed the notion that life is anything more than a result of organisation, by comparing it with the old theory that aquaosity was something added to the hydrogen and oxygen in the formation of water. For instance, the Professor wrote: "It will be observed that the existence of the matter of life depends on the pre-existence of certain compounds—namely, carbonic acid, water, and ammonia. Withdraw any one of these three from the world, and all vital phenomena come to an end. They are related to the protoplasm of the plant, as the protoplasm of the plant is to that of the animal. Carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen are all lifeless bodies. Of these, carbon and oxygen unite in certain proportions, and under certain conditions, to give rise to carbonic acid; hydrogen and oxygen produce water; nitrogen and hydrogen give rise to ammonia. These new compounds, like the elementary bodies of which they are composed, are lifeless. But when they are brought together under certain conditions they give rise to the still more complex body, protoplasm, and this protoplasm exhibits the phenomena of life" (*Physical Basis of Life, Lay Sermons, p. 135*).

In my debate with Dr. Jamieson upon the soul question I used the phrase, "Diseased brain impaired thought." In reply to this the Doctor, in his Appendix, gives a long string of authorities to prove the contrary. But they do nothing

of the kind. I am reminded that Professor Ferrier said that "the half of the brain has been diseased, and that the intellectual powers of the patient have not been interfered with." Well, what of it? So a man may have a disease in one eye or one ear, and yet see or hear very well with the other. The brain is double, like the eye or the ear. There are two hemispheres, and if one is affected with disease the other can act healthily. And it was to illustrate this very fact that Dr. Ferrier introduced the case. Then there is a reference to cases in which mental derangement has occurred, and after death no lesion of the brain has been found. Doubtless; yet I suppose there is no physiologist who does not believe but that there was some brain disease which escaped detection, in consequence probably of its minute character. But if the Doctor thinks differently, will he kindly inform us what was diseased if the brain was not? Can the immortal soul suffer from derangement? Is the immaterial spirit liable to disease and decay? For, if so, would it not be a fair deduction that death also might be the culminating point of such an abnormal condition? Then, what would become of the supposed immortality?

Dr. T. Cromwell, in his work upon *The Soul and a Future Life*, says: "Immaterialists have dwelt much on cases of considerable, though always partial, injury to the brain, with which no perceptible mental disorder was associated. But to this there are adequate replies. 'Many instances are on record in which extensive disease has occurred in *one* hemisphere (of the cerebrum) so as almost entirely to destroy it, without any obvious injury to the mental powers, or any interruption of the influence of the mind upon the body. But there is no case on record of any severe lesion of *both* hemispheres, in which morbid phenomena were not evident during life' (Carpenter's *Human Physiology*, p. 775). 'In every instance where there exists any corresponding lesion or disease on *each* side of the brain, there we are sure to find some express injury or impairment of the mental functions' (Sir. H. Holland's *Chapters on Mental Physiology*, p. 184). 'There are no cases on record in which the mental faculties have remained undisturbed when the disorganisation has extended to *both* sides of the brain' (Solly on *The Human Brain*, p. 349

1836). Dr. Maudsley, in his *Physiology of Mind*, p. 126, observes that he has come to the assured conviction that mind does not exist in nature apart from brain; all his experience of it is in connection with brain. Lawrence, in his *Lectures on Comparative Anatomy*, p. 112, says: 'I firmly believe that the various forms of insanity, that all the affections comprehended under the general term of mental derangement, are only evidences of cerebral affections, disordered manifestations of those organs whose healthy action produces the phenomena called mental—in short, symptoms of diseased brain' (quoted by Cromwell, p. 97).

The Doctor accuses me of ignorance because I spoke of scars in connection with anatomy, which, he says, belong to the province of physiology. Let me tell my *learned* opponent, who informs me that he has "successfully passed examinations in two universities," that it would have been still more correct to have relegated scars to the region of pathology, or the wound which caused the scar to the domain of surgery. Anatomy is a general term applied to the human body, and is not always limited to a cut-and-dried description of the bones, muscles, nerves, etc. Strictly speaking, the word anatomy is derived from a Greek word which signifies to cut up; but it is used by all persons—except, perhaps, first-year students in a medical school—in a much broader sense. And no man who is not bent on hair-splitting would have accused me of ignorance in consequence of my applying it to scars. Then we are told that sometimes scars disappear. That is true, but not always, for I have now a scar upon my forehead that has been visible for over forty years. In my debate with the Doctor I gave scientific reasons why scars could remain, notwithstanding the many changes the body undergoes. But the disappearance of some scars does not in any way prove the Doctor's contention. Ideas sometimes disappear, especially late in life. Memory fails almost invariably at advanced age, and even childishness supervenes. If that be not due to brain decay, then to what is it due?

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