

THE LATEST INFIDELITY.

A REPLY TO INGERSOLL'S POSITIONS.

The phase of infidelity most current among those who do not profess to accept the gospel is marked by two qualities: It is aggressive, and it is extreme. It refuses to stop short of that last result, blank atheism, or, at least, blank agnosticism, from which even the skepticism of previous ages recoiled with abhorrence. This ultraism of the present adversaries is in one respect very shocking; but in another it is promising. They are practically teaching the world that conclusion, on which James Mills justified his atheism, that when once a man's sense rejects the gospel theory, he finds no stopping place between that rejection and atheism; because, as Bishop Butler has forever established, every difficulty which besets the old gospel plan equally embarrasses the deistic plan. This disclosure is useful. Our atheists are teaching people that there is no decent middle ground for them to stand on; but the voice of nature and conscience never permits decent people to stand long on the ground of atheism. This outrages both head and heart too horribly. Were a son to insist, contrary to sufficient evidence of the fact, upon denying and discarding the very existence of his father, we see plainly enough how his position involves every phase of filial transgression, because it involves the absolute neglect of every filial duty. The position may involve, in the form of a sin of omission, the crime of parricide. The atheist discards the very existence of his heavenly Father; so, unless he has justified his denial by sound evidence, he includes in that act every sin of impiety. We see here the simple reason why the good sense of mankind has always regarded atheism with moral abhorrence. But this is the creed which the assailants of our day prefer to urge upon us, and that with boundless

audacity. Colonel Robert Ingersoll seems to be the leader who holds this "bad eminence" amidst this host; he seems ambitious of a large share of this dreadful responsibility. This fact justifies my occasional reference to his name as representing the code of opinions I propose to discuss.

His various essays and speeches—especially his recent large essay in the *North American Review*—appear to build his opposition to Christianity upon four grounds: One is composed of specific objections to points in Bible history and precept, which, he intimates, intuitively appear to him immoral. Another is his assertion of moral irresponsibility for opinions even upon ethical subjects. This he claims for himself, and of course for everybody else, as the only adequate basis for freedom of thought, which we all regard as an inalienable right. A third ground is his total denial of all punitive aspect and quality in the evil consequences of free human actions. He absolutely denies the element of rewards and punishments in the experienced course of human existence. He says that the evils which follow the mistakes of our free agency are nothing but natural consequences, following from the natural laws of the universe, which are necessary and invariable; so that these experiences give no evidence whatever of a moral providence over men. His fourth and chief ground is the old cavil, how God, if there were a God, could even permissively ordain natural and moral evil in his kingdom.

I. The first class of assaults I propose to follow to a very short distance. They could be all disposed of by pointing to the dense ignorance of their authors concerning the Bible, its real facts and its real doctrines. They are such criticisms as their authors would never have made had they read their Bibles with attention and candor. They are all absolutely exploded by simple explanations which the teachers of the church have been accustomed for generations to give even to the children of their Bible classes. It would be wearisome and useless to go over all of this thoroughly-trodden ground. One or two points will serve for illustration. In general I would only remark, that it would be well for the critics to get some little knowledge of the Christian literature before exposing themselves in a way both ludicrous and pitiable, by attacking subjects about which they have been too proud to learn anything.

For instance, we are hotly told by one that Joshua must have been a very wicked man, because he not only punished Achan capitally for disobeying a police regulation, but murdered his wife and children along with him. But the old testament makes Joshua a very pious hero; wherefore it also is a very wicked and foolish book. The simple and sufficient reply is, that the execution of Achan's family was none of Joshua's doings. He had no more discretion about it than about Noah's flood. God was the agent, and Joshua his merely involuntary instrument. So that the moral question in the given case resolves itself into this: Has Almighty God a right to punish a contumacious and immoral family of his creatures with death for a special wise end, death being the final just penalty of all sin? No man, after provisionally admitting the condition of this question, even for argument's sake, is silly enough to assert that, if there is such a God, such retribution from him would be necessarily unjust. Or, do they reinforce their cavil by saying there is no evidence that Achan's wife and children were accomplices in his theft? The simple reply is, that undoubtedly God knew them to be a bad family, worthy on general grounds of his eternal displeasure. For the principle of imputation on which this case proceeds is that God righteously imputes part of the guilt of wicked parents to children, but only to wicked children.* So that we are certain the family also was vicious and disobedient. Had God punished them some years after with death, or rheumatism, or cholera, nobody who admits that there is a God, would have dreamed of impugning the justice of that providential dispensation. Who, then, can blame the Sovereign Judge if, for the sake of an important and wise object, he anticipated the deserved punishment and connected it with that of the criminal head of the family? But I also deny the asserted ground of the cavil, that persons were punished along with Achan who, however otherwise sinful, were innocent of his particular breach of military orders. No doubt they were implicated with him by receiving and concealing the plunder. The receiver is as bad as the thief. If there were infants in the family, death removed them to the bliss of heaven.

*Ex. xx. 5; Ezek. xviii.

Or, they object to Joshua's invasion of Palestine, and charge that his war of extermination there showed him no better than a land pirate and a murderer; and that, as the Old Testament represents God as sanctioning these horrors, they feel intuitively it is a very wicked book. I reply, that here a very large sophism is foisted in under a very small jugglery of words. This shallow little trick consists in the phrase "God sanctioned," instead of "God ordained." Thus it injects into the mind this conception of the transaction: that after Joshua, a human sinner, who had no right to dispose of other people's property and lives, had conceived his murderous project, God granted it his approval. Of course that would be exceedingly ugly. But the actual fact is that Joshua never conceived the plan at all. The war of extermination against the Amorites was no plan of Joshua's. There is not a particle of proof that he ever thought he as a mere man had any right to dispose of other people's property and lives. The plan of extermination was God's alone. He dictated it to Joshua. And again we say this general had no more discretion about it than he had about God's infliction of the deluge. God's purpose employed Joshua as a mere executioner; and if the Sovereign Judge had a right to pass the decree, it is nonsense to blame the mere servant who was compelled to execute it. The logic of this accusation is just as silly as that of a man who, after admitting the righteousness of the laws of New York, should call Mr. Cleveland a murderer, because when he was sheriff at Buffalo he hung some convicted assassins. Now, then, the only question involved in this piece of history is, whether Almighty God has the right to punish a tribe of his own creatures, whose iniquity was now full, with the death penalty. We can get a pretty accurate conception of what the morals of these gross idolaters had become. Their habits, like those of other advanced idolaters, were doubtless defiled by every vile excess of lust, avarice, cruelty, unnatural affections, human sacrifice, infanticide. If God has any title at all to judge the world in righteousness, he certainly had a right to rid the world of this plague spot in his own way. He had adopted another instrumentality to burn out a similar plague-spot, Sodom, and he was justified for that by Jesus, by the apostles, and every honest man that ever read the

administrative reason for God's dealing: that he was planning to preserve a pure religion and morality in Israel, which required their effectual protection from the contamination of this pagan example.

Third, Colonel Ingersoll himself has been in the habit of attacking the Bible passionately, because he found that, when candidly explained, it countenanced slavery—the Old Testament actually ordaining it, and the New Testament allowing it. But inasmuch as slavery appears very abominable to his moral intuitions, this compels him to regard them as wicked books. Here, again, the critic's whole difficulty arises out of a sheer misconception. Let me ask him what that thing is which appears so evil; he defines it substantially thus: the usurpation by a stronger individual at his own violent will over the being of his weaker fellow-man, whereby the victim is reduced from a human personality, with a moral responsibility and destiny, to a mere chattel, a brute possession, whose labor, happiness and very existence may then be exhausted by the usurper for his own selfish behoof. I am happy to be able to console the critic by assuring him, first, that everybody else would abhor such a relation just as he does; and, second, that the two Testaments, instead of ordaining or allowing it, even adjudged it just as he and I do. And here is the triumphant proof that this very conception of the usurpation which Colonel Ingersoll erroneously supposes to be the conception of slavery, is precisely the crime which both Testaments condemn. (As in N. T. the act of the *andrapodistes*, and in O. T. *nogebh ish*) The Bible abhorred it so much that whilst Moses made only a few crimes capital he made this one of them; and the New Testament usually recites it along with the enormous wickednesses that incur the damnation of hell. What, then, was that relation of human bondage which Moses ordained and the apostles allowed? Not the usurpation of a personal will over a fellow-creature, not the reduction of the bondman from a responsible human person to a chattel (which injustice is nowhere countenanced or excused by Holy Scripture, or by any modern Christian that ever I heard of), but it was wholly another thing, to-wit: the regular institution, by the legislative sovereignty of the commonwealth, of a personal and domestic authority for life over the involuntary labor of the bondman, who was deemed by the law unfitted

for his own safe control, in the hands of a citizen supposed by the law to be more competent, and this authority to be exercised by the master under the restraints of statute-law, which also treated the bondman as a responsible agent, and guaranteed to him his life, limbs and subsistence against the aggression even of his master. Now, it is apparent that he would be a very bold man who would undertake to argue that this relation is essentially unjust, and the code which established it under any possible circumstances a wicked one. When arguing thus he would have to attack the righteousness of the parental authority over minors, and indeed every form of governmental restraint of magistrates over individuals not grounded in conviction of crime.

I have shown in these three specimens how completely they are exploded by a little tincture of Bible knowledge and common sense. I assert that all the other objections of this class can be shown to be equally worthless, but they are too numerous and trivial to detain the reader.

II. The second general ground for rejecting Christianity is the doctrine so dear to skeptics, that no man is morally responsible for any of the opinions which he sincerely holds. They assert that this position is the only basis for true intellectual freedom. They argue from it that our charge of sinfulness, or possibly impiety, or even our manifestation of moral disapproval against their most extreme speculations, is unjust, and is of the nature of wicked persecution of the free-thinkers. They also argue that the Christian system is absurd, in that it makes faith its cardinal condition for enjoying God's favor, inasmuch as no man's faith has any moral character, and cannot be a subject of moral responsibility, or approval or disapproval. Colonel Ingersoll is certain that to whatever extremes of atheism, or even of what appears to other people blasphemy, he is really led (not feignedly) by his thinking, he is as innocent therein as a man is for the color of his hair or the height of his stature. And here is his proof: that if the evidence appears before the mind, intellectual credence is purely involuntary, being the logical result of the evidence, and metaphysically necessitated; that such credence is exclusively the result of intellectual activities of the mind, with which neither emotion nor will has anything to do; that our responsibility is limited to

those acts of the spirit which have a voluntary source. So, he thinks, it would be as unjust to blame him for his atheistic conclusions to which his thought has led him, as to blame a man for being wet when he has been thrown into the water.

If he were not extremely ignorant of philosophy and theology he would be aware that this is but the old sophism in psychology, which has been a thousand times refuted. When we hear Colonel Ingersoll assert that his anti-Christian convictions are the fruit of his pure intellection, without any element of emotion or will, we picture to ourselves the huge laughter of his own votaries at so vast and obvious an irony; for their own eyes and ears tell them that his agnosticism is all passion. What means that labored torrent of fiery and vindictive eloquence with which he assails the theologians and the Bible? Do not his auditors hear him ascribe his opposition to the Scriptures in part to his passionate abhorrence of slavery? Do they not see hatred of Christianity and its restraints blazing amidst the whole frame-work of his pretended logic? His unbelief pure passionless intellection indeed! Why, he is incarnate passion! It is supremely ludicrous! And we surmise that every applauder of his atheism who does any thinking is conscious of this; every one sees that there is really no logic at all in this agnostic eloquence, but it is all feeling, and it is acceptable simply because it harmonizes with the conscious hatred of his hearers against the holiness of the Bible and its restraints on their proud self-will. We have only to remember that the object of every moral judgment is a moral object which unavoidably engages and interests the disposition, affections and will of every rational moral agent, and all who can reason see that no moral conclusion can be a pure intellection, but that some voluntary element must enter for good or for evil into the sources of every such judgment. No man on earth reasons towards objects which he either likes or dislikes strongly, with the same complete intellectual impartiality with which he reasons about pure mathematics. If he claims that he does, it is because "a deceived heart hath turned him aside." This is the analysis of common sense. This is the philosophy on which every sensible man in the world accounts for the multitude of these familiar facts, to-wit: that all people, while agreeing perfectly upon the truths of mathematics and numbers, differ more

or less upon questions of property rights, law-suits, character, politics, medicine, and religion. It is because all these objects of thought involve elements which appeal to the feelings and the will. Now the false argument itself concedes that where a voluntary element is involved in the sources of any spiritual action, it is to that extent responsible. This is all I claim. Here is a man who has reached true conclusions on moral subjects. He is virtuous and approvable for them just to the extent to which a right heart has co-operated in his reaching them. Here is another man who holds erroneous opinions on a moral subject, and he is responsible and blamable therefor just to the extent in which a proud and evil heart has helped to bring them about.

So absurd is Colonel Ingersoll's position that he clearly discloses the fact that he does not believe it himself. He claims not to be responsible or blamable for his anti-religious conclusions; then, of course, all the rest of us should be equally irresponsible for our conclusions held with similar honesty. Now here is a man whose thinking has honestly led him to this conclusion, which he really believes from the bottom of his heart he has fairly reached, to-wit: that Colonel Ingersoll's agnosticism is erroneous, that it is morally blamable, that he is consequently responsible for it (not indeed to man, but to his God, and this is the vital distinction which guarantees to all of us all the mental and religious liberty to which we are entitled), and consequently that the reproaches suggested by this evil creed which he hurls against his God, and his fatal misleading of his immortal fellow-men, are extremely sinful. Now, does Colonel Ingersoll view this honest conviction of mine with any of that philosophic nonchalance which he requires me to use towards his? Not he! He blames me for it extremely, as unjust to him, as tyrannical, tending towards the wickedness of persecution for opinion's sake. He fulminates his indignant rhetoric against the wrong I am doing him. He fills the atmosphere with his complaints of me. Now this excites our huge laughter. The unbeliever himself demonstrates the absurdity of his own position, and refuses to stand on it at the first change of the case. So he teaches us he does not believe his own philosophy.

It is in fact impossible to be believed by anybody, because

it involves us in absolute contradictions. If honesty in error were all that is needed to hold us innocent, truth would have no practical value above that of error. But truth has its eternal intrinsic value. Again, our decisive conclusions according to the necessary laws of our spirits direct us in our actions. It is proper that they should, or otherwise our actions might always be irrational, aimless, and worthless. Now if we allow the man to hold himself irresponsible for his moral opinions, of course we must hold him irresponsible for all the actions which they logically direct. After you have justified the tree in being the species of fruit-tree it is, you cannot blame it for bearing that species of fruit. So that this philosophy requires us to justify some of the most mischievous and abominable crimes that are done on earth. Let us see again whither it carries its advocate. Colonel Ingersoll knows that the slave-holders were generally sincere in their belief of their right; therefore he would have to justify the slavery he so abhors. He knows that Messrs. Davis, Lee and Jackson were perfectly sincere in their convictions; so he must justify them in all those blows at "the life of the nation" which his patriotism abhors. Supposing the magistrates of the old-fashioned State of Delaware, honest and sincere in the advocacy of that antiquated statute which, we are told, still makes atheistic utterances a misdemeanor punishable at the whipping-post, and supposing the gallant Colonel's zeal for his truth to have led him to that Pauline grade of heroism which makes men glory in stripes for the truth's sake, his philosophy would require him to justify those magistrates, even at the moment the constable's scourge was descending on his back. But would it? We trow not. Again he provokes the inextinguishable laughter of the on-lookers. His theory of free thought is "unworkable."

Again, the position leads to a consequence yet worse. It is entirely possible that two sincere reasoners may reach opposite conclusions concerning the same moral object. If each is irresponsible and innocent in his conclusion, he must be equally so in the action to which it directs him. So our philosopher has on his hands this strange case: A has a logical right to execute an action touching the disputed object, which B, the other party, has an equally logical and moral right to re-

sist as a wrong to himself! "The force of nature could no further go."

In conclusion of this head, we remind the "free-thinkers" (whom the above argument proves to be not free-thinkers, but crazy-thinkers), that their doctrine is refuted by every analogy of nature and every experimental fact of their own observation. The natural laws which regulate the results of our free actions invariably hold us responsible for our erroneous opinions. When we make honest mistakes as to the state of facts, nature makes no allowance for us, but inexorably holds us to the results of the real facts. The youth who goes sailing in a rotten boat, really supposing it to be sound, gets his ducking just the same. The farmer who exposes his grain, honestly thinking the fair weather will hold, if he proves mistaken in the weather, has his grain mildewed just as though he had wilfully neglected it. The sick man who swallows three grains of morphia, really supposing it to be quinine, dies just as the intentional suicide. But why multiply instances? We thus see universal nature repudiates this shallow philosophy. And so we return to our conclusion, that men are and ought to be responsible for their moral opinions; that the psychological reason why, is this: erroneous moral opinions cannot be adopted by the rational creature except there be some voluntary element at work amidst these sources of the wrong judgment; and to this voluntary element blame justly attaches; that, therefore, men are justly held responsible for their wrong actions, though logically dictated by their own opinions; that all penal responsibility for wrong opinions is reserved to God alone, and is never to be usurped by human beings unless those opinions be embodied in criminal actions; that the resistance of the errorist's fellow-men must be limited to disapprobation and argumentative refutation; and thus the truth is established without opening the door to the hateful doctrine of penal persecution for opinion's sake.

III. The third ground of objection, as given above, is his total denial of all punitive aspect and quality in the evil consequences of free human actions. He absolutely denies the element of rewards and punishments in the experienced course of human existence. He says that the evils which follow the mistakes of our free agency are nothing but natural consequences, following from the natural laws of the universe, which are

necessary and invariable; so that these experiences give no evidence whatever of a moral providence over men. Colonel Ingersoll roundly asserts that in the course of nature and experience there are no punishments, but only natural consequences. He also admits that the laws which dispense these consequences are invariable. The only possible method by which evil can be averted is to reform the mistakes which incurred it. The object of this strange doctrine is manifestly to escape that argument for the being and the moral providence of a God, which is written so plainly all over human events. We have two points here: First, his denial is abortive. Had he read, or read dispassionately, the second chapter of Part I. in Bishop Butler's Analogy, he would never have written those paragraphs in which he stated his doctrine. Bishop Butler shows by arguments which no man can refute, that the happy consequences of good conduct are of the nature of rewards, and evil consequences of misconduct have every trait and characteristic of true penalties, even down to the most minute; that this general law of nature is therefore a moral law as well as a natural one; that it is a disclosure of a righteous personal will above nature, and that it holds men under a moral probation for their conduct. And since this is universally true of man's moral estate, as soon as we learn his continued rational existence after death, the utmost probability arises, that we must meet the consequences of our probation in a future world as well as the present. All this follows without the light of Scripture. It is scarcely necessary to weary the reader by repeating the points of that masterly argument. It is a shame for any educated man, especially an English-speaking man, to handle this doctrine without informing himself of Bishop Butler's argument. No man who ever informs himself candidly of it will ever dispute its conclusions. I will, only for confirmation, make these two remarks: Every suffering transgressor in the world intuitively recognizes in his own consciousness the conceptions of guilt and punishment as soon as he recognizes the causal connection between his own error and the natural evil consequences. Let any such case be taken at random. Let it be, for instance, the case of a man who, by sensual excesses in the use of stimulants (alcohol, opium, tobacco), has ruined his digestion. His reason has admitted this proposition—that his own excesses have caused

his own sufferings. Has there ever been such a man in the world whose consciousness contained only the physical feelings of pain, nausea, lassitude, and so-forth, and the self-calculated personal feelings of fear, sorrow, and so-forth? Is this all that is in his consciousness? Never. There is always the additional element of self-blame. There is always self-reproach for having done what he *ought not*. The man knows intuitively that he has been guilty in the case, and not merely mistaken; and that these sufferings are penal, and not merely painful. Men not seldom incur severe physical sufferings in the magnanimous performance of duties, as, for instance, the faithful fireman who is burnt in rescuing human life. Now the burn hurts him just as badly as the drunkard's gastritis hurts him; but is it possible for the consciousness of these two men under the sufferings to be the same? Never. This brave, honest man suffers, but cannot reproach himself. This guilty sensualist also suffers, and is compelled to reproach himself. According to Colonel Ingersoll's theory, the two men ought to have the same consciousness. Such test-cases show that the human mind intuitively, and necessarily, recognizes those very moral elements of blameworthiness and punishment which are so rashly denied. My other remark is, that all men, when spectators of the natural penalties of transgression, intuitively recognize the penal relation. What they say is always something like this: "We are sorry for him, but it serves him right"; or, "Well, the fellow has got what he deserves." Now, what does the common sense of mankind mean by these words "right," "desert?" We thus see that the world is against that doctrine. Colonel Ingersoll is a lawyer. We would request him to attempt an explanation upon his philosophy of the penalties which civil society visits upon secular crimes. If there is any logic in his composition, a half-hour's meditation on that problem will convince him that his philosophy lands him in a Serbonian bog. For instance, would the conscience of mankind have universally justified such inflictions by civil society if it had not been instructed and supported by the analogy of these penalties of nature? Is not civil society itself one of the inevitable results of this constitution of human nature? Yes. Must it not follow, then, that the evils which civil society visits on secular crimes are also natural consequences of these natural laws, as truly so as the

drunkard's gastritis? But those are avowedly penal. Once more, Colonel Ingersoll on his theory would have to explain the imprisonment which he visits on a felon, as precisely parallel to the detention in a quarantine ship of a virtuous citizen who has just had the bad luck to sail recently from a yellow-fever port. Are the two inflictions precisely the same expediences for the public good, equally unfounded on an imputation of guilt to the sufferers? That is the explanation to which his philosophy would lead him; but he dare not accept it. He knows that the virtuous traveler is detained in spite of his innocence; but the felon is detained because of his guilt. He who says that the natural evils incurred by misconduct are not penalties, but mere consequences, ought also to say that evils which society, itself a natural institution, inflicts on criminals are also mere consequences, and not just penalties. But against this every conscience revolts.

Our second point of objection is: that Colonel Ingersoll's doctrine about natural evils, if true, would be unspeakably harsher and more repulsive than the Christian doctrine, which he thinks too harsh to be endured. For, first, it places us erring mortals not under the dominion of a righteous personal will, which is also wise, benevolent, and merciful, but under the rule of invariable natural laws. Under these, the evils which men experience, saith he, are not penalties, but mere consequences. Now a code which has no penalties of course has no pardons. There is no room in it for the conception of forgiveness. It tells a suffering transgressor that, when once his mistake is made, his suffering must be as inevitable as the attraction of gravitation or the rotation of the earth. Can mere natural law hear a prayer? Does it understand repentance? Can it feel pity? Ask the ocean storm or the devouring fire these questions. Here truly we have humanity with a vengeance! The skeptic is too humane to endure the conception of penal chastisement directed by a personal God, who is both just and merciful; and to help matters, he proposes to consign his fellow-creatures to the iron and remorseless dominion of natural law, which is equally ignorant of repentance, mercy, and forgiveness. But, he says, let the erring man reform his mistake, and thereby he will emerge from the painful consequences. Is this true? Does he not know that the constant tendency of natural

evil is to proceed to the irreparable stage? This drunkard's gastritis, for instance, even if he reforms early, is only palliated, not wholly eradicated. At best he goes the rest of his life a crippled man, and death, the supreme natural evil, falls upon him at last; but in a multitude of instances the gastritis retains its virulence in spite of the reform. For all these innumerable sufferers the skeptic has only a gospel of despair. He tells his fellow, "You are in the clutches of inexorable physical law; you have transgressed it; you perish."

Next, it is impossible for Colonel Ingersoll to rid either himself or his fellow-creatures of the sentiment of moral desert in their conduct. It is at once the deepest and the keenest of human sentiments. There is no craving of the human soul so profound as the demand for justice to its merits, and a righting for the wrongs done to it. There is no anguish so keen, so inconsolable, as that inflicted by their refusal. Now the skeptic's theory proposes to take these moral creatures, with these exquisite sensibilities, and subject them to a system of laws which neither knows nor cares anything about moral deserts. Which is about as humane as to consign the feeding, nursing, and consolation of all the orphan, the sick, and the sorrowing children in the world to a huge steam engine. For our part, we would rather leave our orphans to an all-wise parent, who would whip them well when they deserved it, but who could also hear their prayers, understand their penitence, and forgive their waywardness.

Once more, our skeptic confesses that he cannot tell us whether we shall live beyond bodily death or not. Then, for all he knows, we may. And if we do, it follows of course from his theory, that we must pass our immortal existence also under this blind natural code of laws, which, knowing nothing of penalties, can know nothing of pardons. When we observe the system of nature, as expounded by him, the clearest and most ominous feature about it is, that these evil consequences of human error are continually tending to pass, under our own eyes, into the irreparable. The longer the career of error is continued, the more certainly is this result reached. Thus the only inference from his scheme of naturalism is this, that if we should not have the luck to die like the pig or the dog, we must face the violent probability, that these "mere consequen-

ces" of human error will, in every case, become irreparable and eternal. And this is the sort of comfort gravely offered to his sinning and sorrowing fellow-men, by one who professes to be too humane and tender-hearted to endure the Christian system, with its divine equities, and divinely wrought grace and pardon, offered to the whole world without money and without price.

IV. But the chief ground of objection which seems to prevail with the modern impugnors of Christianity is the old one of God's permission of evil in his kingdom. It is as old as human literature, having been discussed by Job, by the Psalmist, by the Greek philosophers, by Seneca, and by a multitude of divines of subsequent ages. The theodicy, or vindication, of God from this cavil, makes a part of almost every book on natural theology, and has engaged the greatest intellects of the world—as a Leibnitz, a Chalmers. Of course I profess to advance nothing new. Neither is there need of doing it; for the recent school of cavillers advance nothing which has not been pondered and rejected a thousand times before. And they differ from the more thoughtful and decent skeptics of previous days only in the superficiality and insolence of their objections. But I will use in dealing with them a candor they do not employ in opposing us. I will state the difficulties which attend God's permission of evil frankly, and with all the force which even the ablest objector can claim for them.

The theistic scheme professes to demonstrate the existence, attributes, and providence of God. It says that he is self-existent and the creator of all temporal beings; that he is absolutely supreme in authority; that he is of infinite knowledge and power; that he is perfectly holy, and must therefore prefer holiness to sin in all rational creatures; and that he is infinitely benevolent as well as just. The argument is, that it is incredible such a divine sovereign should freely choose the prevalence of evil in the kingdom which he made and absolutely governs, and especially that dreadful aggregate of remediless evil embodied in his hell. But if he is incapable of freely choosing such horrors they should have no place in his kingdom; since his knowledge and prescience are infinite, and his will efficacious and sovereign in his whole providence. Amidst this circle of attributes, it is urged, it ought to be impossible that hell

should find a place, not to speak of the lesser evils of our mortal state. The Christian apologists have been wont to offer these palliations: That while all these are real evils, and so repugnant in themselves to the divine nature, we actually see them made in his providence the occasions of excellent results and beautiful virtues. Evil evokes the virtue of fortitude, which would be otherwise not energized. Evil trains the soul to patience, submission, and heavenly-mindedness. Suffering is necessary to evoke the lovely virtue of sympathy. Hence we may hold that a benevolent God permissively ordains the evil, not for its own sake, but for the sake of those results which it occasions. This palliation our opponents sweep aside with disdain. They say if your God is omnipotent, he is certainly able to work all these admirable results by painless means. If he is benevolent, as you say, he must have chosen the easy means instead of the bitter, because he would thus have realized the whole aggregate of good and virtue for his kingdom, minus the miseries of the present plan. They confirm this point by reminding the Christians that, according to them, there actually is a splendid order of moral creatures for whom God has done this very thing. The virtue and bliss of Gabriel are certainly not inferior to those promised redeemed men; for their prototype "was made a little lower than the angels." And the utmost the Christian's Jesus dares to promise is that his redeemed shall be as *angelloi*. Here, then, they urge, is a whole world of happy and holy creatures, endowed with every desirable virtue, including sympathy and fortitude, and yet without any discipline of evil. Here, then, God has actually done the thing for them without the permission of evil; why does he not do the same thing for human creatures in the same way? Thus the caviller "refuses to be comforted" by any such palliation as this. Let us pause here and weigh this reply carefully. To what extent does it really damage the theodicy advanced? I candidly admit, that it does prove this class of palliations to be insufficient as a full solution of the difficulty. But I assert that the skeptic's position here is overweening and sophistical in this: when he so ingeniously cites to us the fact that God does cultivate in the elect angels, as free agents, a complete bliss and purity without the discipline of evil, he cunningly begs the question, whether God could succeed in this,

not only without evil among them, but without evil anywhere in the universe. What mortal can certainly know but that one of the means which God found necessary in the training of the elect angels, was some wholesome example of suffering for sin among some other order of free agents? But unless the skeptic can certify us about this, his instance remains inconclusive. It is more important to remark, that the facts cited in the above theodicy do give us a pleasing probability, which points in the direction of God's consistency in the permission of evil. For the beautiful feature which is common in the results cited is that we here see providence bringing good out of the evil. That fact is undeniable. Does the skeptic rejoin, "Yes, but why didn't your God bring about the whole good, minus the evil?" I grant that this solemn question is not answered. But let it be allowed for a moment, and for argument's sake, that God may see a good reason, then the fact that he does bring good out of the permitted evil will be of invaluable force to reinstate our confidence in his infinite benevolence in the midst of the unsolved mystery.

We proceed now to the next advance in the argument of the theodicy. The theologians set up these unquestionable premises. There is no natural evil in the universe which is not the result and penalty of moral evil, that is to say, of sin. God's higher glory is to be a moral governor of rational free agents. If the creatures are to remain such they must be governed by moral inducements. Should God depart from that method he would derationalize them and reduce them to the grade of brutes. Does any skeptic desire to see that done, and the creation stripped of its noblest order? Surely not. It follows, then, that God, in leaving men their free agency, must follow out punctually this plan of moral sanctions; and if his creatures choose to sin, he must needs allow the penalty to follow with the same regularity with which his rewards follow their virtues. Moreover, God's distributive righteousness not only justifies, but requires this course from him as a moral ruler; as the chief magistrate of the universe he is actually under moral obligations to his own perfections to be impartial, even if wilful transgressors do incur deserved miseries which his benevolence would fain see them escape. And this view is powerfully reinforced by the further fact, that the larger part of the penal

evils that follow transgression have not only a judicial connection, but a necessary natural connection with their sins, that, namely, of effects with their efficient causes. There is a true sense in which it is not God that volunteers to punish sin, but it is sin which punishes itself. "He that soweth to his flesh *shall of the flesh* reap corruption" (literally *perdition*. "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." To sum up, then, God's permission of natural evil in the world is all accounted for by the presence of moral evil, that is to say, voluntary transgression, and the entrance of the moral evil is an incident liable to emerge under any moral government of free agents.

Still our skeptics "refuse to be comforted." They retort, that the Christian scheme ascribes to God regenerative power; and that it holds that he can, and does, exercise it in a multitude of cases, without infringing the free agency of its subjects, or making any disruption in his general plan of governing them by rational and moral means. If the Christian's scheme relinquished this claim it would commit logical suicide. For it holds that the natural heart of men fallen in Adam is invariably determined to self-will and ungodliness; hence if God did not exercise a sovereign power of regeneration, he could never get one of them converted. They would all continue with absolute certainty to prefer the unconverted state. The scheme also claims that God has pledged himself to keep all redeemed men and elect angels in their heaven forever. But the voluntary apostasy of any of them must result in their exclusion from heaven. Now, therefore, if God had not the power of efficaciously determining their holiness without subverting their free agency, he has promised what he cannot be sure of performing, which would be dishonest. Once more; the Christian scheme says, that the promises of grace in answer to prayer are all yea and amen. So that if God had not this power these promises would also be uncandid. Now, then, since God has this power of preserving the sanctity of the unfallen, and of sovereignly regenerating the fallen (a power which they say he frequently exercises), and if he foresaw that whenever a free agent perverted himself, his own high judicial obligations would require him to bring misery on that creature, if he is infinitely benevolent, and truly prefers holiness to sinfulness in his creatures, why did he not preserve them all in holiness as he is said to have preserved

Gabriel? Or why does he not regenerate them at once instead of coming under this painful necessity of employing penal miseries, which he foresees, moreover, to be futile for curing their sinfulness? Why does he not regenerate Satan instead of chastising him endlessly, and that without bettering him? Here is a parent who has a delicate child; he foresees that this child is liable to eat a certain rich but unwholesome viand with a morbid appetite; he foresees also that the consequences will be a colic. Now, this parent may be entirely unable to break the pathological connection between a surfeit and a colic; but of course he will use his superior physical strength to remove that dish beyond the child's reach. If God is a parent, why does he not act in a similar way? I take the ablest skeptics to witness that I have extenuated nothing, but have stated their difficulty as strongly as they ever state it.

There is here solemn difficulty arising from our contemplation of the divine providence, and the thoughtful and benevolent mind will recognize it most impressively. I expressly admit also that its exhaustive solution is beyond human reach. The dread mystery which remains after all the efforts of human explanation is doubtless one instance of the exercise of that high prerogative of God in which he claims that secret things belong to him, but the things which are revealed belong to us and our children that *we may do* all the words of this law. If once the existence and attributes of God are granted, then every mind not wickedly and insanelly arrogant will instantly admit that it is reasonable such a sovereign should have counsels of his own, a part of which it is his just prerogative to reserve to himself. There is not an inferior chief magistrate on earth that does not claim a right to the same. Moreover, it is impossible that God should impart a full comprehension of his whole counsel to any mind that is finite and sinful, even if we supposed him to make the effort. Omnipotence itself could not put an ocean of water into a quart pitcher. But because God has not succeeded in working this impossibility in the agnostic's little clouded mind he flies off in a pet, and says he will not have any God at all! If theism is true, the plan of God's administration is universal and everlasting. It must, therefore, be literally infinite. Manifestly even he cannot put another mind in full possession of it without making that mind also infinite.

Whence it strictly follows that if these questioners could be gratified by giving them a religion without a mystery, verily they "should be as gods." (The Bible reader knows the satanic origin of that ambition.) This simple argument for modesty of thought in our theology is powerfully reinforced by another great fact, which is, that our acquaintance with all other sciences is conditioned and limited in precisely the same way. And every intelligent man knows that this is especially true of those physical sciences which the agnostics love to put in contrast with theology for superior clearness and certitude. I would like to know how it is that they are all perfectly willing to believe in the sciences of physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, astronomy, notwithstanding the insoluble mysteries involved in each, and refuse theism because of its mystery, when they ought to know that this is the very science in which the largest mysteries must reasonably be expected. Is it because they have a special dislike to the God whom theism discloses, sharpened by the apprehension that he has a just dislike for them? Let it be settled, then, that the real question in debate is not whether anybody can clear up the whole mystery of God's permission of evil, but whether that mystery justifies anybody in repudiating his heavenly Father, and all the duties he owes to him, which are the highest and holiest duties of his being.

Next, it must be settled which party is logically bound to assume the burden of proof on this question. I shall now show that it is the agnostic's. For why? Because the theist is in possession of all the rightful presumptive probabilities on the other side. The law gives every indicted man the right to assume his presumptive innocence, and throws the burden of the proof of his guilt upon the accuser. So here the facts previously demonstrated, or at least rendered presumably probable in this theistic inquiry, all give the theist the right to the initial presumptive. For instance, "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord," that is, the *a posteriori* marks or signs of the divine benevolence appear in every department of creation and human experience. The whole structure of the human faculties presents the most beautiful evidences of the benevolence of "the Father of our spirits." Here is one point among many: The psychologist finds in the human spirit a class of affections called the malevolent affections, that is, their prac-

tical objective impulse is to hurt somebody; but they all have this invariable trait in addition—even the few among them which are sometimes justifiable—that they are also painful to the person that feels them. There is a large opposite class called the benevolent affections; their objective impulse is to do good to somebody, and these have this invariable trait, that they are pleasant in their exercise to the persons who feel them. He is wilfully blind who cannot see the design of this pair of general facts. It is obviously to discourage and limit all hurtful human actions, and to stimulate and reward all beneficent human actions. In other words, the framer of our spirits is benevolent. But the most extensive and grandest disclosure theism makes about God is of his righteousness, and that both in natural and revealed theology. The ways of providence are always so devised that virtue is practical beneficence, and vice practical maleficence. Therefore when theology tell us that God likes the former and hates the latter more than he likes or hates anything else, it is but saying he is supremely benevolent. But we must not pursue this delightful line of argument.

Another great class of facts which authorize us to throw the burden of proof upon the accusers of God's providence, is that while he mysteriously permits evils, it is his dearest prerogative to bring good out of those evils. Are we to hold, then, that God's mysterious permission of evil has in his mind some sufficient ground, both just and benevolent, though above the reach of human comprehension? I say, Yes. Colonel Ingersoll says, No. Here is the issue clearly made up by the pleadings. Now I say I am entitled to hold my side as presumptively true until it is positively disproved. I say the burden of proof lies on him. He must assume it or the court will properly dismiss the case. The court says to him: "Mr. Prosecutor, you undertake to prove that an infinite God cannot have a conscious ground for his voluntary permission of evil in his kingdom which satisfies him as both just and benevolent. You must do all that, sir, or we will put you out of court. Your opponent, the theist, is under no more obligation to prove what that ground is than a citizen indicted for horse-stealing is bound to prove affirmatively that he did not steal the horse. He is entitled to stand on the defensive; the prosecutor must prove that he did steal the horse or he has no case. Sir, your duty here is similar."

But what sort of testimony will this accuser need in order to prove that affirmative? Manifestly it must be a testimony which explores the whole extent of God's omniscience, and his whole eternal providence toward the universe; otherwise it will be a dead failure; for the defense will rejoin, that it is supposable always that God has seen his sufficient reason for his permission of evil in that portion of his infinite counsel and providence left unexplored by the witness. The accuser has as yet done nothing effectual to exclude the presumptive hypothesis that God may be justifiable; but this is what he undertook to do. He will say, perhaps, that his witnesses have proved so much namely: that God has full physical power to make and keep all his creatures holy and happy, so that he cannot justify himself in his permission of evil (as the Pelagian proposes he shall), by the plea of inability. Let the accuser say that God did not find the obstacle in the way of making his universe all holy and happy in a lack of personal power. Granted. But may not his infinite mind have seen a proper obstacle in some other quarter? That is the question. The man who undertakes to deny that ought to be omniscient himself. In other words, the accuser has undertaken an impossible task. He has rashly undertaken to establish affirmatively a proposition which none but infinite beings would be competent to discuss. The decree of the court therefore is, "The indictment is not proved."

To this extent, then, the providence of God is not convicted of wrong. I again admit candidly that its solemn mystery remains, and a questioning mind is not yet furnished with an exhaustive solution.

There is a species of *argumentum ad hominem*, which, the books on logic tell us, is unfair. It consists in attempting to transfer some odium attaching to the adversary from his person to his proposition and argument. I shall not use that form. There is another kind which consists in holding the opponent bound to any inconvenient or absurd consequences which proceed logically out of his positions, though we ourselves do not concede those positions. This kind is perfectly fair. The Saviour himself used it against the Pharisees. I am entitled to use it in this debate.

In this direction my first point is the following: The practical point of the cavil against God's permission of evil is, that,

if there is a God, he is culpable for it. He is exceedingly blamable for all this misery which should have been prevented by him. That is to say, the caviller is altogether in sympathy with these creature sufferers as against their hard master. Of course, then, this humane and sympathizing caviller is doing everything in his power to minimize the hardships so blamably inflicted upon his fellow-creatures. Of course he is steadily devoting his best energies, his time, talents, and money, to repairing the cruelties which this bad God has let loose upon poor fellow-mortals, to comforting the sorrowful, to supplying their destitutions, and especially to removing their ignorance and vices and irreligion, which he knows to be the practical proximate cause of so much of these pitiable sorrows. Of course this just accuser thinks he has no money to waste upon the pomps and luxuries of life, no time for any needless amusements, no time or talent to expend upon personal ambitions or any selfish aim. Of course he husbands all conscientiously for the sacred object of minimizing these evils of human existence, and mending so much as may be mended of the neglects of this cruel God. If he does not, is he not himself like the cruel God? Is not this accusation of God, coming from such as he, too much like "Satan reproving sin?" Does this agnostic waste any money upon Havana cigars and costly wines, which he would be better without; upon expensive architecture and furniture, where he sees more honored men than himself do with plainer; upon partisan political campaigns, which, whichever way they go, only leave the country more corrupt—sacred money which might have been used to ease the sick of their agonies, to feed the starving, to wipe the tears from the face of the orphan, to make the desolate widow's heart sing for joy, to dissipate the ignorance and vice and ungodliness from the heart of the youth who must otherwise reap the harvest of temporal perdition from these seeds? I bring no charge; but I submit that, unless the agnostic is truly acting in this philanthropic way, decency should close his mouth. For shame's sake let him not blame God for the results of a neglect which he himself practices.

The most probable rejoinder of the agnostic will be, that he sees the majority of the professed Christians also practicing this unphilanthropic neglect. My answer is, that I admit with sorrow that it is partly true. It is also true that nearly all the

great and blessed charities of this poor world come from these imperfect Christians. How much of them comes from agnostics? I do not know. But let that pass. My word to the agnostic is this: suppose we let this good exalted God alone, and turn all the blows of our criticisms on these inconsistent Christians. I say to the agnostic, with all my heart, "Lay it on them well; but let alone the heavenly Father whom they misrepresent."

My second point is this: When we showed in defense of the divine providence that, supposing free agents choose to sin, their suffering ought to follow, and must follow, because judicial fidelity requires it, and because sin *is* suffering; the reply of the agnostic was this: that if there is a God, he must have foreseen that, and he ought to have felt bound to protect his moral creatures from sinning by making their souls holy, or else regenerating them when they made themselves unholy. And we saw that this is really the agnostic's final stand in this contest. I will now ask a typical agnostic, say Colonel Ingersoll, "Sir, how would you like God to regenerate you?" Perhaps he will seek to evade me by answering, "But I do not now believe there is any God or regeneration." "Yes; but supposing you did believe them, how would you like to be regenerated yourself? Stay, do not answer till I tell you what this means. Regeneration means a complete revolution of the principles and ends of life. It means surrendering ambition and worldiness for spiritual good. It means the absolute subjugation of self-will under a superior and sovereign will, which will order you to obey and ask no questions. It means a thoroughgoing crucifixion of natural pride. It means the instant surrender of all cherished sins. It means the honest assumption for the whole remaining life of a career of new duties, many of which are known to be repugnant, and all arduous. It means praying, and Bible-reading, and watching one's self. It means, in a word, taking up for life the yoke of a complete self-denial and self-surrender. Regenerate persons will tell you that still they have found a new species of spiritual happiness in this arduous cross-bearing. But that pleasure is to you purely visionary, as you never felt anything like it. The Bible also tells you that this regeneration will finally bring you, after a severe discipline, the happiness of heaven. But that is all out of sight to you, lying beyond the boundaries of this world, which now en-

close all your wishes and aspirations—so completely enclose them that you remain in doubt whether it would not be better for you to die like a pig than to have any future world. Now, Sir, you told us there was a time when you had a speculative belief in God and his gospel. At that time how would you have liked this regeneration for yourself? You know very well that you disliked and resisted it with every fibre of your heart. Sometimes when conscience seemed to be leading you towards it, you recalcitrated, silently perhaps, but with the stubbornness of a wild bull in a net. You jealously cherished your self-will, your pride, your worldliness. You would have blushed to have been caught praying. One chief source of that secret but inveterate enmity which your heart cherished toward the gospel was just this: that it required of you such a regeneration and also offered it to you as a boon. Well, you are the same man yet in heart. The child has been father to the man. Could I re-convince your speculative intellect that this gospel which you have discarded is true, the desperate repugnance to its regeneration would doubtless revive in you. Remember, now, that we have agreed that there was one final method feasible for God, by using which he could have rescued all his creatures effectually from all moral and physical evil, namely, the regeneration I have described; and the very *gravamen* of your accusation against God is that he ought to employ that method in every case, but does not. But, lo! when this kind God comes to *you* and says, 'Ingersoll, let me take you at your word; let me regenerate you, here and now, and thus bestow on you this glorious and eternal security,' you are violently opposed to his doing it. Here is the one and only way which remained to God for avoiding the permission of any evil in his kingdom, and to this way you have as to yourself a violent objection. There is one medicine with which God could have cured the whole matter. You have been blaming him vehemently because he has not administered it to everybody; but when he offers the cup to you, you repel it with abhorrence. Do not you think, Sir, that for shame's sake it is time for you to stop blaming him?"

I have just asserted the innate enmity of the human heart to God's law. Here is a consideration which has a vital influence on this discussion, but for which agnostics never make allowance. Yet, "whether they will hear, or whether they will

forbear," it is the right of the Christian pursuing this discussion, and his high duty, to bear his serious testimony to this indisputable fact of human nature. The point it contains is very plain, that a person who has a fixed and wrongful hatred to a government cannot be a just and correct critic of it. What man endued with common sense will gainsay that? And the agnostics stubbornly refuse this caution and protest their impartiality, when to everybody else but themselves their inveterate hostility to the holiness of God's law is apparent! But I claim more. We are all voluntary culprits. We are all obnoxious to the displeasure of the divine Judge. If his grace does not arrest us we all continue pertinacious transgressors, and this justifies his continued retributions. Now, every item of that aggregate of misery which presents the pretext of the cavil, is the just judicial consequence of the creature's own voluntary sin. There is not a pang of natural evil in the moral universe which is not the appropriate fruit of transgression. Hence, however hard to bear that natural evil may be, the culprits are certainly not the parties that are entitled to accuse the government. As soon as they appreciate their own guilt they always learn that this is outrageously unseemly. If any criticism of the divine management is to be made by any finite intellect, it ought to be at least an unfallen intellect, without sin of its own. The effectual way, then, of terminating these indictments of God would be for the agnostics to learn the real quality and aggravations of their own sins of heart, nature, and life. And could I teach them this, I should be conferring on them the most inestimable blessing. Not only would this sinful debate end absolutely, but this righteous humiliation of their own spirits would prove to them the beginning of everlasting good. Job was tempted to be an agnostic, and to make tedious efforts to argue himself into the assertion of God's harshness. His effectual cure came only when he was compelled to say: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The best wish I can offer to all the agnostics is, that they may become honest enough with themselves to look fairly at God until they appreciate his infinite sovereignty, wisdom, justice, and benevolence, and learn in the light of his holiness to see the exceeding sinfulness of their own sin. All this

debate will then be happily ended for them as well as for us.

One more point remains of this branch of my reply. I make it by asking them what will be gained for them and their fellow-men if they establish their indictment? What will they have proved? This: that the theistic scheme of the universe is incredible, because of the prevalence in it of this dreadful mass of natural and moral evil. That is, the doctrine of a personal, rational God is abolished. What hypothesis of the universe is left us? Only the materialistic and mechanical one. The flow of events in the universe is not directed by any personal or moral will at all. (Certainly our wills are impotent to control it.) All is governed by natural laws, which can mean nothing more than the irrevocable methods of blind natural forces. These forces are unknowing and reasonless; they are resistless; they are eternal; they are unchangeable. They can no more be prayed to than the whirlwind can. Thus the agnostic, in rejecting theism, unavoidably gives us the scheme of a universal mechanical fate. His universe is but an immense machine.

Now, I solemnly ask him: By forcing upon us this ghastly doctrine, has he diminished one iota of this volume of miseries, the conception of which so distresses us all? Does he stop the flow of a single tear? Does he arrest a single pang of disease? Does he diminish by one unit the awful catalogue of deaths? Does he take anything from the reality of any single human bereavement? Is there one particle of agency in this doctrine to check in any soul that sinfulness which is the spring of all our woes? None. Even agnostic arrogance does not dare to claim it. On his scheme every evil which he so bitterly objects against God's scheme remains. All that he has done is to rob suffering humanity of its sole true consolation, which is found in that fact the gospel alone shows us, that it is the darling prerogative of the Father of mercies to bring good out of this sore evil for all who will accept his grace and make it work out, bitter as it may be now, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Thus their doctrine can take nothing from the miseries of mankind; all it can do is to rob men of the only possible solace, and to tell them while they suffer that their woes are as futile of better results as they are inevitable. In a word, they give us as the true conception of our existence this somber picture, which F. D. Strauss substantially avows at the

end of his great agnostic argument. Our world is a huge and terrible machine of stone and iron; its motive power eternal, resistless, and blind; its revolutions impossible to be ever arrested or changed in the least, and the corn between its upper and nether millstones is an ever-flowing stream of human hearts, with all their precious affections and hopes and keen sensibilities, bleeding and crushed under the remorseless grind. And to the yawning jaws of this hellish mill each one of us knows he is traveling, and must be caught by them sooner or later.

And this is the scheme pressed upon us by gentlemen who affect too much humane sensibility to endure the harsh injustice of God's gospel! What, is this scheme rejected for this doctrine of despair? I repeat, it is the one which, while it recognizes God's holy sovereignty and right to punish sin, and to keep in his own breast the dread secrets of his infinite purpose, teaches us his wise, merciful, and holy control over this terrible blind machine of nature, and offers to all who do not contumaciously reject his goodness an almighty redemption which terminates these sufferings of time into eternal blessings. May God save us all from such humanity as that of the agnostics!

Proceeding now to a more independent line of attack, I request the reader to inspect the process of the agnostic's logic at its cardinal place. It is simply this: the line of argument for the being, attributes, and providence of God leads him up to a great mystery, which cannot be fully resolved for him. What then? He will stop and weigh the amount of validity it may contain, notwithstanding the mystery in its conclusion. Now, all men would deem this mere logical lunacy if applied to any other line of evidence. We know very well that evidence apparently valid which leads to an inevitable self-contradiction is defeated by its own result, whether we can put our finger upon its flaw or not. We justly claim that it cannot be correct. This, in fact, is the quality of the disproof of an argument by the *reductio ad absurdum*. But manifestly the case which the agnostic has made against theism is wholly different. A mystery in our conclusion is not a necessary self-contradiction; that it cannot be shown to be such, follows from the very fact that it is a mystery. Since we cannot comprehend it, we cannot assert its contradictoriness. And this I confirm by the assertion that ev-

ery other line of scientific evidence, in every department of human knowledge, leads sooner or later to some such insoluble mystery. So that, if the agnostic's method of procedure against theism were proper, he ought to reject every science known to man and announce himself an absolute ignoramus.

For instance, what physicist can answer this question: What is electricity? There is good and sufficient empirical evidence that this mysterious energy exists; but what is it? Why does it imbue some material bodies and not others? Why do only a few conduct it fully? If it is ponderable matter, why cannot the chemist weigh it in his most delicate scales? If it is not, how does it hit hard enough to rive the gnarled oak? Every good physicist knows he cannot answer these questions. Every agnostic, then, ought to say, if he will be consistent, and proceed in physics as he does in theology, "I will have none of this science of electricity. I will not avail myself of its conveniences, lightning-rod, telegraph, electric light, electric motors. I will not believe in electricity; even if the lightning strikes me I will not believe in it." The intelligent reader knows that if I cared to detain him, I could cite instances equally pungent from every one of those physical sciences which agnostics love to place in contrast with theology for their superior clearness. Now my point is, that no man can proceed upon this wilful method, which the agnostics would have us apply to the theistic argument, without incurring the charge of lunacy. But they ought to be more willing to apply that wanton method in physics than in theology; because in the latter we have more ground to expect mysteries from the infinitude of the Being whom we study. When a line of evidence leads a sensible man to a startling and mysterious conclusion, what does he do? He would be prompted to revise the evidence carefully. That is all. If he finds it valid, he admits the conclusion in spite of the mystery. The sensible man bestows credence upon any proposition in any science, not because he comprehends the predicate, but because he apprehends perspicuous evidence supporting the copula. Now the several lines of evidence, rational and scriptural, for the being, attributes, and providence of God, are of invincible force; they cannot be resisted in their own appropriate spheres. Every successive attempt to weaken them in that way perishes under the light of true philosophy. I con-

clude this point by firmly asserting that agnostics have no right thus to discount the whole force of this evidence, treating it as non-existent, when it has so substantial an existence, not because they can refute it, but simply because they do not like its result. The process is utterly illicit.

Superficial opponents of God's retributive justice frequently argue that this is a different attribute from his love, and indeed so antithetic that they cannot find a place for it in a nature declared to be infinite love. A little correct thinking will show that this reasoning is not only groundless, but absurd. In fact, the principle of righteousness in every moral being is not dual, but single. The plurality of its actions arises solely from the contrast of the objects to which the principle directs itself. The magnetic needle in the compass is endowed with one energy or magnetic principle, not two. This single energy will cause either end of the needle to act in opposite ways to the two opposite poles of the earth; and because the upper end is attracted towards the north pole, for that very reason it is repelled from the south pole. I prove it by this fact, that it is impossible to make a needle such that its upper end would be attracted to the north pole and not repelled from the south pole. Should any sailor tell you that he had such a needle, nobody would believe him. This instance presents us with a correct parallel to the action of the moral principle in a moral agent. The principle is and can be only one. It acts in opposite ways towards virtuous and vicious objects, because it is one, and because it rationally apprehends the objects as opposites. Hence it follows, that this central principle would not be capable of acting in the amiable way of approbation, complacency and reward towards a virtuous object, unless it were certain from its own nature to act in the opposite and severer way of reprehension towards towards a vicious and repulsive object. I repeat, that unless this principle is so constituted as to repel the repulsive action, it cannot be so constituted as to be attracted to the attractive action. One might as well talk of a yard-stick with only one end, or of a house with its south side, and no north side. Every man when he thinks knows that this is the condition upon which all correct moral principle exists, and he is incredulous about any other. Let me construct a little parable. I ask the agnostic, or the universalist, to come with me

and watch the proceedings of a certain stranger, of whom all we know as yet is that he claims a high reputation for amiability, philanthropy, equity and charity. He tells us that it is a perennial pleasure to him to witness and reward all benevolent and generous actions. I say to him, "Stranger, so far, well. I must now point you an opposite object. There stands a young reprobate, the son of a devoted widowed mother, who is known to have robbed her of her little property, to neglect her wants in her destitution, to heap reproaches and curses upon her, and even to strike her venerable face. What are your feelings towards that object?" We suppose the stranger to answer, "Oh, sir, I assure you I am too thoroughly amiable to have any feeling about it. True, I see nothing in it to admire, but I am too affectionate to detest anything. I have no feeling at all towards that reprobate." I ask, would anybody believe him? Or, if we believe his statement that he felt no reprehension for so detestable a son, must we not set him down also as a cold-blooded villain, whose pretended charity was all sheer hypocrisy? Such is the judgment of every man's common sense.

Let us pass now from the virtuous principle in man to God. I assert that my argument only becomes the stronger. The perfectness of God's virtues only renders it more conclusive, because the purity, the equity, the truth, the love of God are infinite. It is therefore only the more certain that the central principle which makes him approve and love the virtuous must prompt him to reprehend the vicious. Men vainly imagine that it would be a delightful theology to have a God so amiable as to be sure to reward all good things, but also too amiable to be capable of punishing any evil thing. They demand an impossibility. The only way to reach it would be to have a God without any moral qualities at all. Who would wish to live under an omniscient and omnipotent Ruler who was not capable of knowing or caring whether he was rewarding the wicked and punishing the good? If we must desire such moral principle in our Supreme Ruler as will be always certain of acting amiably and justly towards the good, then we must be willing that he shall be equally certain to reprehend the wicked. If they would have a God too amiable to maintain a hell, they must accept one who is also too careless and heartless to provide any heaven.

Does one say that still the mystery of God's permission of evil is not fully explained? I did not promise to explain it fully, which I believe will never be done in this world. What I promised was to satisfy the just and humble mind that God has his sufficient explanation, which we are sure is consistent with his wisdom, benevolence, and holiness, without knowing what it is. Natural theology gives sufficient ground for this consoling conclusion from its splendid evidences that he is all-wise, righteous, and benevolent, which have their preponderating force notwithstanding the unanswered question, and especially from this important trait, which runs through the whole mystery, that the plan of his providence is to bring good out of the evil.

But revealed theology gives us a crowning and all-sufficient satisfaction. It is found in the fact that God is so infinite in benevolence and mercy, that at his own mere option he has made the supreme sacrifice for the redemption of his enemies. He provides this infinite blessing for them at the cost of the humiliation and death of his eternally begotten and co-equal Son, whom he knows to outrank, in the dimensions of his infinite being and in his moral desert, all his rational creatures combined together. The gospel tells us that this transcendent sacrifice will not redeem the apostate angels, and will not receive full application to all human beings. These are awful truths. But, be the cause of this limitation found where it may, it cannot be sought in any lack or stint of goodness in God. For had there been any such stint in his nature, one fibre of neglect, or injustice, or cruelty, this would inevitably have prevented the supreme sacrifice for the behoof of any one. There is the triumphant theodicy in the infinite love which prompted redemption—redemption as apprehended by the evangelical trinitarian. There, no doubt, is the supreme glory of this gospel by which the apostle tells us God is making known to all worlds his manifold wisdom through the church of ransomed men. I will set forth the point of this argument in a closing parable. We see a surgeon enter a dwelling. A mother calls to her pallid, limping child, and seizes her in her arms. The surgeon produces one of those treacherous cases—so beautiful without with their ornamented woods and gilded clasps, so terrible within with the cold glitter of

forceps, bistouries, amputating-knives, and bone-saws. The child beholds with wide-eyed wonder and then with terror, ere she perceives that these instruments are to be employed on her body. As the surgeon approaches she appeals to her mother with agonizing screams and tears: "Oh, mother, mother, save me!" But we see the woman, with stern eye, compressed lips, and pallid cheek, bare the child's swollen joint, and hold her struggling in her relentless arms, while the cruel knife cuts the tender skin, carves the bleeding flesh, and pierces even to the very marrow of the diseased joint. Is this a mother or a tigress? The simple explanation is, that she is a true mother, wise and tender, who knows that this severe remedy is needed to save the precious life of her child, who would otherwise be the victim of a slow, loathsome, and torturing death. Has she not shown the truest love? and has not her fidelity cost her inward pangs of sympathy more cruel than the bodily smart of the surgery, which she has heroically borne for love's sake? But now steps forward the caviller, and says: "Stop, this woman is herself a wondrous leech. She knows all healing lotions, and all the herbs of virtue, some of which would have cured the diseased limb without a pang while the child slept; or, at least, she could have secured for her child the unconsciousness which chloroform gives during the operation. Why, then, did she not use the gentler means to save this life, when she had them at her option? No, she must be intrinsically cruel and heartless. She must find pleasure in the gratuitous suffering of her own child." I am compelled to reply: "I do not know her reasons. Her social station is far above mine. She has never taken me into her domestic confidence. I had no right to demand that she should. But I can testify to another fact. A few months ago the cry of fire drew me to a dwelling not far from this place which was wrapped in flames, and evidently near the final crash. The parents had been busy rescuing their children, and, for the moment, supposed they had saved them all. But a cry issued from another window. A little white-robed figure was seen at it through the eddying smoke, crying: 'Father, mother! O save me.' All declared that it was too late. Even the father, amidst his bitter tears, acquiesced. But I saw the mother tear herself from the restraining hands of the firemen, who told her that any effort at rescue was mad-

ness and suicide, leaving the shreds of her raiment in their clutches, and dart up the fuming stairway. The stern men turned their faces away from the horror and stood wringing their hands. But in a minute the woman returned, her silken tresses blazing, her garments on fire, one of her fair cheeks scorched, shrivelled by the blast, one eye blistered in the socket, but with her child in her arms wrapped safely in a blanket. After only pausing to extinguish the flames that were threatening her life, I saw her fall on her knees, and say: 'Thank God; I have saved my child.' Pass around this lady's chair, Mr. Caviller, you will see upon the other side of her face the scars of that rescue which, in one moment, blighted the beauty of her young motherhood for life. This is that mother; and this is the same child. Now, sir, I cannot satisfy your curiosity about the disuse of the chloroform, but I know this heroic mother's heart has its reason. For why? Because I saw her make the supreme sacrifice for this child. After such a demonstration of boundless love, your cavil is impertinent, if not brutal."