A MARVELLOUS VISION.

OR THE YEAR 2075.

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And deaf although they have ears;
Or let them hear in their turn and say this is true."

PRICE—ONE SHILLING.
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MISOPSEUDES: A VISION.

As, under the lee of a gigantic eucalyptus, I lay supine, weary, inert, dozing, dreaming, while all the air of the solemn forest around was quivering and humming, musical and fragrant beneath the pulsation of the fervid sun, a vision came to my prophetic soul.

A vision, as of a youth—a student of the year 2075—girt about with a great gathering of fellow students, to whom he lectured, with whom he discoursed. And sore grief and dismay fell upon my soul as I hearkened to his words; for it quickly appeared that in his day all now extant Religious Creeds had become mere "Historical Expressions." Of a verity, his day seemed to be the day of the "Abomination of Desolation."

"My friends," the student said, or seemed to say, "perusing these great works, the 'History of Human Error,' the 'Hebrew and Christian Mythology,' the 'Dictionary of Superstition,' and the 'Curiosity of Unreason,' one is filled with amazement and disgust, and with humiliation and shame too, as one discovers what gross superstitions, what puerilities, absurdities, impossibilities, contradictions, immoralities, atrocities and lurid horrors were held by our unhappy ancestors as sacred and divine truths and holy religion. Learning what poor infatuates our forefathers were of but two or three hundred years ago, our pride, if any pride be left to us, need no longer take affront at the theory of our immensely remote descent, or rather ascent, from the ape.

"Though much light had been for some time streaming in, and the black cloud of superstition, brooding incubus-like over the mind of man, had been riven and rent, and was being slowly dispersed, still, as lately as near the close of the nineteenth century, great numbers of so-called educated men continued to hold, or to profess to hold, such monstrous beliefs as these—"

"That they were in possession of paper-revelations from the Infinite Soul of the Universe, who was not only the Infinite Spirit, but also, somehow, a personal deity, whatever that might have meant; that there was also another great spirit—the spirit of evil—whom they commonly call the Devil, and who in some sort shared the dominion of the universe with the good spirit.
Though the good spirit, being omnipotent, could easily have extinguished the bad one by a gentle euthanasia, yet he did not so will it, but, on the contrary, appointed the devil his superintendent in some portion of the universe called Hell, where his appointed duties were to torture for ever, in acuta sanctorum, all the human creatures whom the Deity had made, except some few, who were saved by divine grace, or by their implicit faith, without inquiry, without using the reason God had given them, in impossibilities. But, nevertheless, God was all-merciful and of loving-kindness.

And when any sceptic asked him what it was that was tormented in hell, seeing that they were speaking of dead men, they would reply it was “the immortal souls; the immortal spirits of the dead.” When it would be pointed out to them that immaterial spirit, without flesh and nerves, would be incapable of feeling any sensation whatsoever, then they seemed to think that the immortal souls would be reinvested in fresh clothings of flesh and blood, facsimiles of the old ones, so as to enable them to enjoy again the luxury of sensation. But these new robes of flesh and blood were to be quite different from the old ones, inasmuch that they were indestructible, no matter how much they got torn. They could not bleed to death. When asked what was the difference between immaterial spirit and nothing, they were sorely puzzled, and could only say—nothing!

Though they in some sort, perhaps rather dubiously, accepted the idea of God being the soul of the infinite universe, they, nevertheless, at the same time believed that he was also the son of the wife of a Jewish carpenter; that he was executed as a visionary impostor; but, coming out from his grave in a day or two, was mistaken for a gardener. That, after that, in the presence of human witnesses, this God went up from the top of the hill into the air, like a balloon, until he vanished out of sight, and never came down again, though he promised he would before that generation passed away!

They had a notion, those superstition-bewildered fore-fathers of ours, that, by becoming thus incarnate and going through the ceremonial of human death—(to a god it could be but a ceremonial)—the Deity in some way appeased his own wrath against his own human creatures, or his Father’s wrath (there is some confusion here, not easily unravelled, for it seems there were two or three gods, and still only one), and reconciled it to his own sense of justice to save mankind from the clutches of his superintendent, the evil spirit, and his cells of eternal torment. But, somehow, this divine scheme of the Omnigod turned out not a great success, inasmuch as they held that, after and in spite of this queer divine expiation, the number of men to be saved would be to those hopelessly damned but as the gleanings of the field to the harvest.

“When asked what was their warranty that Jesus of Nazareth was really incarnate God, their reply was that it was incontrovertibly proved by his having changed water into wine, and made loaves and fishes out of nothing, with some other similar little thaumaturgics. They also believed firmly that in those old days an angel used to swoop down from heaven once a year, and fill up into an inconsiderable little pond near Jerusalem, and stir up the waters thereof, and that any sick or maimed mortal bathing therein after him would be immediately restored to health and the normal number of limbs. Also that their Anthropoid Deity had a singular talent for discovering lots of little devils in men’s insides, and a faculty for making them come out of that pretty quickly. Sometimes he hardly knew what to do with them after their ejection, for it is narrated that on one occasion he had to get rid of them by making them fly down the throats of a herd of poor pigs, who incontinently, in affront or despair, rushed into the sea and committed suicide, drowning at once themselves and the little devils, their inside-passerengers. A sad loss to the owner of the porkers. She was a widow, and they were her all. She died of starvation. If a handkerchief or other bit of rag touched the body of the Divine Anthropoid, or of any of his chief spokesmen, the woollen or cotton fibre thereof became impregnated with a certain magical aroma, capable of inoculating all sick people with health.

“Once upon a time the great Evil Spirit, Superintendent of Hell, carried this God to the top of a hill so lofty that he was able to show him from it all the kingdoms of this world, the spherical form of which was unknown to both of them.

“It is almost inconceivable, but I can assure you it is a certain fact, that all the grotesque fables of the old Hebrew mythology were held by our poor ancestors to be sacred truths, divinely-inspired narratives of real events! Of those old fables—sometimes merely fantastic and puerile, often horrible, sanguinary and revolting, full of impossibilities, immoralities and obscenities, and having as much versimilitude as the ‘Arabian Nights Entertainments’—they deemed every word to be divinely inspired! They accepted as the Infinite Soul’s revelation of itself, all the sordid anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity formed by the dark minds of the old superstitious Hebrew people, who pictured him as a vague, gigantic old man, sitting in the clouds, full of their own vile passions, wrathful, revengeful, jealous, avaricious, taking no heed of the great universe (of which they knew nothing), but solely occupied as the tutelary but cruel genius of one selected tribe. Thus they
believed, as a divinely-revealed fact, that quaint old myth of God having made the universe out of nothing only a few hundred years ago, and, after six days hard work at it, finding himself so knuckled up that he had to rest on the seventh. Curiously enough, there is a reason to believe that in this old myth originated our present custom of generally keeping every seventh day as a sort of holyday. They further believed that God had to carve the rib out of the side of the first man in order to make the first woman. Also, in that queer old tale (which some of you may have seen in the nursery, bound up with the ‘Arabian Nights’) of a paradise somewhere near the site of the great railway station, on the Euphrates line, in which the first human couple were paddocked, and where the woman was overpersuaded by a rattlesnake to eat a ribstone pippin which God had forbidden her to eat—for which disobedience she and her female descendants were for ever cursed with the penalty of having to be the mothers of children. But for the snake there would have been no human race, it appears! Perhaps that was the reason he was worshipped in some countries in old times. It was also considered quite certain that the Asiatic aborigines used to live to the age of about a thousand years!

"It seems probable that at a very early human period, before our race had become very numerous, and when it was chiefly gathered together in some valley, perhaps in the alluvial flats of Mesopotamia, some considerable local flood occurred, by which many people perished, and others only escaped by boats and rafts. And that, after a time, among an utterly ignorant and barbarous people, this catastrophe got magnified into a monstrous myth—full of moral and physical impossibilities—bearing the palpable mark of the savage mind in which it was coined. And by degrees the fable was built up that in the days of yore, God, getting awfully enraged with all the organic life he had placed on the earth, determined to swamp it all, with the exception of one human family, and pairs of every species of animal and insect. So he ‘gave the office’ to an old aboriginal called Noah, and lessons in naval construction, and caused him to build a great punt, as big as one of our passenger steamers. Into this got Noah and his family, and received pairs of all the beasts, divinely inspired to come to them. Fancy the amiable Noah handing in the cobra-di-capella, and rattlesnakes and centipedes, and scorpions! Then God caused it to rain for four or five weeks, which had the singular effect of raising the water over the summits of the highest mountains in the world—the Himalayas, the Andes, etc. After a long cruise, the big punt grounded in shoal water on the top of a very high peak, and the four-or-five-miles thickness of water ran away into the sea-bed, and somehow found room there. The old reciters (improvisatori), priests who piled up the myth, forgot or did not know that such a submersion would have destroyed all vegetable as effectually as all animal life. So, by this oversight, they omitted to make any provision for the preservation in the punt of seedlings of all trees and plants. No doubt it would have appeared to them only natural that all these should spring again in full development from the drying soil. You will find it hard to credit, but I can assure you I have ascertained it to be a fact, that this childish and ridiculous fable was universally believed in as lately as the seventeenth century, very generally in the eighteenth, and that even in the nineteenth century there were thousands among the classes middlingly educated who still believed or feigned and professed to believe it.

"This Bible-God of our forefathers, neglecting the infinite myriad of myriad animal of thousand-fold grander worlds, devoted all his time and attention, in personal presence, to this microscopic satellite of a microscopic star, an insignificant unit in a that insignificant cluster of stars which we call the Milky Way.

"And even on this microscopic grain of cosmic sand there was only one paltry nation of redeemed slaves for whom he cared. With them he bivouacked; and sometimes he marched at the head of the escaping multitude in the costume of a pillar of smoke and of fire. Sometimes he sat in a burning bush and commanded a gentleman who came to interview him to show him decent respect by taking off his slippers, for the ground within a certain radius around the bush had become more holy than the rest of the surface of God’s earth.

"At another time, the Bible-God camped on the top of the Horeb ridges, surrounded by a really brilliant display of fire-works, accompanied by the blowing of trumpets and rams’ horns. The chief magistrate of the people of the valley below went up to call upon him, and to request the pleasure of an interview; when he, scarcely setting an example of good manners, replied that he would not permit him to see his face (for that no man could see and live), but that he might see his hinder parts if he pleased. Afterwards, however, changing his mind, he met the same visitor face to face, and conversed with him, ‘as one man to another.’

"And, on a second occasion, he courteously received a full delegation of the mayor and all the aldermen, and entertained them pleasantly. Nevertheless, not feeling quite sure of himself, he warned them to take care of themselves, lest he should break forth on them (like a savage dog). While he thus held court on the top of the hill, he took the trouble to engrave with his own royal hand, on tablets of stone, all his laws for the guidance of the human race,—or rather of the one wandering tribe for
which alone he cared. But herein he made a mistake, not being able to foresee or prevent the smashing-up of these tablets next day by an angry man.

"It is not unlikely that this myth had its origin from some volcano, of which the priests had availed themselves for the purpose of humbugging the people. Once upon a time, this great god, putting on a human form, indulged in a wrestling-match with one of the old patriarchs. Whether for so much a side or not, is not recorded. After a very severe tussle, he flung him by a cross-buttocker, and hurt him so much that he limped ever after.

"This Bible-Deity was not represented at all as an omnipotent god. On the contrary, he usually encountered great difficulty in carrying out his schemes, and often signal failure. For instance, when he took it in hand to free the slaves held by the king and people of Egypt, he first endeavoured to persuade the king to permit them to go. Failing in this, he next tried to coerce king and people by afflicting them with various juggling plagues, fantastic or horrible. The king, however, was still resolute—being a man of stronger will than the Bible-God, who then got up a sort of Fenian conspiracy among the slaves, instructing them to rise simultaneously in the night, rob their sleeping masters and mistresses, and bolt for the bush. Afterwards, by a beautiful act of military strategy, God succeeded, in decoying his enemy, the Egyptian king, into an ambush, where he could easily bring into play his old celebrated drowning tactics; which he did; swamping the hostile king and all his army. This brilliant success against a few of his own poor creatures—crawling upon a microscopic grain of cosmical dust—was an enormous and magnificent triumph for the Infinite Spirit of the Universe, and was celebrated ever after by endless rub-a-dubbing, and 'sounding of loud timbrels o'er Egypt's dark sea,' for the Infinite has triumphed, and his darlings were free. God himself was very proud of it, and frequently thereafter declared himself to be a Man of War, and the Generalissimo of Hosts! But he was not always so successful; for, when he and his people came into conflict with a tribe possessing chariots of iron he could not prevail against them. And all through these veracious, inspired histories, I find our Bible-God pictured as a struggling, striving, unsuspicious (but often unsuccessful) partisan.

"In point of morality this God was far lower in the scale than any other god ever invented by the human brain—altogether viler. The gods of the Greeks had their little foibles and peccadilloes, but, upon the whole, they were a gracious, amiable debonnaire and festive lot; gentlemen, and cavaliers, and ladies. But the god of the Jews was limned in the lurid and sanguinary hues of their own peculiarly dark, gloomy and ferocious minds. He was a god who delighted, above all things, in carnage, massacre and murder, in treasons, strifes and spoils. He led his armed and trained bands against nation after nation of peaceful and comparatively civilised peoples, always with sternest injunctions to smite and spare not; to slay slayer, man, woman, and child; to rip up the bellies of women with child; and to despise, burn and lay waste their cities. If they failed to make a satisfactory extermination in any case they themselves incurred his wrath. On one occasion, when his people had been hard at work all day, making a most lovely massacre, the day not proving long enough to make a nice clean finish of it, he graciously commanded the sun to stand still in the heavens for two hours, so as to give his pet braves so much more time for slashing and stabbing, and ripping up bellies. You see astronomy was not known when this myth was concocted. When 100,000 women and children of another nation were brought in captive, this Divine Being would command that all the women who were not virgins, together with all the boys, should be cut to pieces, and that the virgins should be divided fairly among the soldiers, after the priests had taken their pick.

"At another time he would proclaim to his chosen people, 'I remember that which Amalek did to Israel (four hundred years before), how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'

"And sometimes, when there were no other people about handy to be slaughtered, he would command his own people to cut each other muck among themselves, in such words as these—'Thus saith the Lord God, put every man his sword to his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.'

"He greatly delighted in good, clever, treacherous, private assassination. So, when an amiable woman invited a political refugee into her house, gave him good cheer and a comfortable bed, and then drove a spike nail into his brain as soon as he slept, he gave her great kudos, and proclaimed her 'blessed beyond all women.' His chiefest favorite among men, David, king, saint and inspired prophet, specially characterised as 'the man after God's own heart,' whenever he overcame foreign nations, was wont to put the people of all the cities under saws and under hammers of iron, and under axes of iron, and cast them into brickkilns. The exterminating massacres made by his people, under his guidance, among the peaceful nations of
Asia Minor have, probably, never been paralleled, before or since, in the world's history. Some nations were so utterly swept away that not even their name survives: no record, save the most imperishable ruins of their most magnificent cities—to overturn which those savages possessed not sufficient mechanical skill. For instance, the Baalbec ruins, which many of you have seen. The people who reared those wonderful temples or public buildings were certainly, in some branches of mechanics and in architecture, superior to us at this day. They must have enjoyed many centuries of peaceful prosperity, and must have attained to a considerable degree of civilization. They had, perhaps, never heard of war, and fell victims, helpless as sheep, before the ruthless sword of the chosen horde, under divine guidance.

"This old book I have here, entitled the 'Comic Bible,' is certainly the most comical of all the books I know; it was an immense favorite a hundred years ago, but has lost its piquancy now, because so few in these days know anything of the original of the burlesque."

The student seemed to resume:—

"It would fill a goodly volume, my friends, to give anything like a full answer to the question as to how so shallow and absurd a superstition as the Christian could ever have obtained a first footing in the days of the old Roman Empire. On this occasion I can do no more than point out very briefly two or three of the most salient and obvious causes—predisposing and active. The great predisposing cause was, beyond doubt, the absolute mental blankness of the lower classes in those days; the intellectual and educational status of the classes among whom, for the first two or three centuries, the new superstition crawled, like a low typhoid, was not superior to that of the neger slaves of early American history; while in natural acumen, sense of logic and appreciation of the ridiculous, the early Christians must have been inferior to the average uneducated African negro.

"And there was an epidemic of credulity abroad which impelled the minds of the ignorant to accept with hungrily and implicitly faith all that was marvellous and impossible, which seemed, indeed, to make the marvellous and impossible more belief-worthy than the natural. As for scientific inquiry and physical truth, the ideas had not been born. One of the great fathers of the new sect declared, 'credio guia impossible.'"

"It should ever be borne in mind that at first and for a long period, the new doctrines were promulgated only among the slaves, the pauper, the lazzaroni and gutter people of the old world; only among the classes clothed in rags, ignorance, dirt and disease. The educated classes knew little of what was going on in the cellars and slums; if they heard of it, they called it an extabulis superstition, and 'pooh pooh'd' it, de haut en bas, as merely the silly Obism of the slaves. They ignored the disease, until, alas! it had spread beyond stamping out.

"Like the vile Communism which, a century and a half ago, it cost so much blood and treasure to hold under foot until the general spread of an enlightened knowledge of economic and social laws finally exercised the unclean spirit, the new Gospel of Jesus was expressly framed to pander to all the mean passions and prejudices of an ignorant proletarian; to pander to the envy and malice, the dull and savage hatred which, in the ignorant ages, always animated the hearts of the poor against all who were a little above them in material comfort, or education, or intelligence. It proclaimed the kingdom of heaven as the inheritance of the paupers only of this world! that into that blissful kingdom no rich man should enter: 'Woe to the rich; they had their portion here!' In the world to come they should only have hell fire. And the paupers luxuriating in the abodes of the blessed should solace themselves for ever by the agreeable spectacle of the writhings of their whilome masters in fiery lakes of sulphur! And, from the pauper standpoint of view, who is Dives, the rich man? Why, every man who wears a decent coat and lives in a comfortable house—the well-to-do farmer, shop-keeper, or tradesman, the successful artisan—they art the whole of this world, as viewed from the gutter. Woe to them all! they have had their portion—for them, in the world to come, only the worm that dieth not! It shall be as impossible for one of them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

"This new Gospel taught them also not to trouble themselves to be saving and prudent; to take no heed for the morrow, but to trust to odd jobs that might turn up. Not to bother themselves with much work or labour, but rather to follow the example of the lilies which 'toiled not.' What mattered rags and dirt, and a few ulcers? They would soon be looking down from heaven on all the prudent and painstaking, suffering infinitely worse inconvenience, in a place where there would be eternal gnashing of teeth. What a seductive, irresistible gospel for town lazzaroni and country mud-cabiners!

"Another potent cause of the rapid spread of the mental epidemic is to be found in the panic terror with which the low multitudes were stricken by the authoritative and positive announcement of the immediate end of the world, and by the horrifying pictures of a ghastly, imminent Hell, together with the confident and unaltering pretensions of the preachers, that
they alone could show the one way of escape therefrom. Be sure, preachers and proselytisers were plenty! To ambitious, vain and wordy loafers, who hate work and love to hear their own voices, what rôle so attractive as that of preacher and prophet? To rise, per saltum, say from the sweeping of a crossing to the position of semi-divine personage! To be welcomed to the best fare in every house or cabin, to be listened to with gaping mouth and wondering reverence; to be petted, and kissed, and worshipped by all the women! And no more work; no more sweeping of the crossing! Only to talk, and lift up the eyes! You have heard that some of them came to grief. That is so. Casualties occurred in the ranks both of the early Mormon and early Christian apostles. In both cases some were hanged by the authorities, and some wiped out in street rows. But they were mere casualties; happening to, say, one in a thousand. And in both cases, doubtless, when the victims, (that were to be) first took up the propound, they thought little of remote, possible, future danger, which each one, individually, would naturally hope to escape by prudence and management. Or, if they foresaw a slight contingency of peril, it would be to them enormously outweighed by the immense, immediate gain in position, in gratification of vanity, in the sudden emergence from unconsidered and unknown pauperdom to a sort of social eminence. When accidents happened to them they were dubbed 'holy martyrs,' and their bones and tovenails were worshipped; and, in old word slang, they were said to have given 'testimony unto death;' to have 'sealed their faith with their blood,' etc. Yes; just as a fallen soldier may be said to have 'sealed his faith' in a red coat and the comforts of the barrack. A contingency attached to a good profession—that is all.

"But undoubtedly most of the early preachers were sincere and earnest fanatics, insane and frantic with the terror of their own conviction of the rapidly approaching end of all things. The propagandists always made a great harrowing about their new doctrine being a 'gospel of glad tidings,' inasmuch as that they had come to show the only way of salvation, by which a few might escape the general doom of eternal damnation. What a wonderful piece of impudence was this! Considering that it was they and they alone who had set up the doctrine of eternal damnation, and that before them no human heart among all the nations had been dark-and-wicked-and-desperate enough to dare to dream such an atrocity! What a gospel of glad tidings! Hell for all except the singular few, who, by performing the arduous task of believing in the Impossible, might possibly escape the doom!"

"My friends," the student went on, "it seems to me that I have already partly answered your second question—Why we are at the present day usually taught to consider the Christian the most pernicious of the superstitions of the past? The student of history sees reasons only too grievous for so estimating it. It would, however, be more correct to speak, not of Christianity apart, but rather of the Hebraic cluster of religions conjointly. For, as you all know, Mormonism, Mahometanism, and Christianity, were only excrecences—morbid outgrowths from the original baleful Hebrew stock. Indeed, all dark and gloomy concepions of Nature and of man and his destiny, seem to be derived from the farouche and sombre Semetic mind. It was that cluster of religions which first hatched the detestable idea of persecution for theological—that is, merely speculative—opinion. The principle of persecution was the marked characteristic which differentiated them from all other crystallisations of religious thought. All the other religions of the Old World were comparatively free from that fiendish element; comparatively mild and benevolent. The Greeks of old had their imaginary gods, but they picked no quarrel with the gods of other people. On the contrary, they complaisantly acknowledged them, and gave them niches in their Pantheon. And Buddhism, the religion which has numbered so many more followers than any other, was purely philosophical and meditative. The special Christian development of persecutions, however, the most direct interest for us, having been the error of our own forefathers. Not without some element of good in it, the overbalance of evil and mischief wrought upon mankind by that superstition is incalculable. What calamities and woes it caused! What cruel persecutions, what horrors and gloom, and despair and blood."

"During the earlier centuries, when Faith was not merely nominal, but frightfully real and active, the peoples were frenzied by the new terror of an ever-yawning Hell. The world, under the shadow of night, was made hideous with the ceaseless prowlings of the Devil and his ghastly imps. No other such calamity as this terror of the Christian Hell ever fell upon mankind, overshadowing it with a sulphurous cloud of despairing asceticism; blotting out the brightness and joyousness of the earth; driving men into the unintelligent ferocity of frightened wild beasts. Men were taught that all who knew not, or accepted not, the Faith, were doomed to eternal torment by the inexorable decree of a merciless all-merciful God. More than that, each sect within the faith was taught that every other sect would be certainly damned! 'Tweedledum' believed that 'Tweddledum' would be as satisfactorily damned as even they who had never heard of 'Tweedledum' and 'Tweedledum.' Further; it was held that even among the correctly orthodox, only an elect few—not one in a thousand—would be really saved."
"With the conviction on every mind that the vast majority of mankind were predestined to be soul fiends in Hell, what could there be in the world of respect for human life; of kindly human feeling, of cheerful brotherhood? No; nothing in those days but the evilness of fear and despair. Only gloom; only cruelty; only self-brooding and self-mortification; only the stern suppression of all the pleasurable emotions. What could signify the present suffering, or the mortal lives of future demons? Let us slaughter and burn a thousand misbelievers, and so save our own souls.

"And hundreds of thousands were driven into caves and deserts, and monasteries and nunneries, and became more or less insane. Even up to a comparatively recent era thousands of fine minds were thrown off their balance and ruined by the terrible inner conflict between early-implanted faith and reason, revolting against the transparently false.

"So anti-social was the Christian dogma in its essence, that, had not the bulk of the people always and everywhere been too unimaginative—stolid and commonsensical—fully to apprehend and realise it, the human race would doubtless have died out under its icy, devitalising breath; for its real teaching was to despise all mundane matters, for 'the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand': to cast away property as an incumbrance, to contemn wealth and comfort as snares; only to live upon such fruits of the earth as could be picked up without much anxiety, and to wait patiently as they could until death opened to them the portals of eternal bliss. Had all the world fully believed, all the world had turned anchorite,—as did the portion which so believed. There would have been an end of all industrial and commercial effort, or ships, colonies and commerce, of mines and manufactures. Why trouble ourselves about such trumpery? for 'the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'

"The ethics of this creed were often uttery bewildering. If a poor man were reckless, improvident, incapable, and so remained always a poor man, he had chance of Heaven; but if he were prudent and saving, and so raised himself into wealth and household comfort, then, woe to him! none shall enter the Kingdom but he had had his portion.

"So class was set again class, and the poor taught to hate the rich; yet, at the same time, passive obedience to all in authority was inculcated. Why should the poor man, certain of developing into an angel in Heaven, be so submissive to Dives, whose doom was hell? Though the whole nature of religion was such as necessarily to evoke the fiercest spirit of persecution, and though the reputed author himself was reported to have declared that he came to bring a sword into the world, still one of its chief moral teachings was cowardly submission to injury and insult.

If a man smote you on one cheek, you were to offer him the other to be smitten. How should evil be mended, or cured, or removed, if it were never to be resisted? A poor, mean, humble spirit was highly commended. And consider the monstrousity of making salvation depend upon faith upon the wholly involuntary act of believing or disbelieving certain propositions, which were either mere assertions or theorems submitted to your judgment and reason! That was a puzzle which drove many men mad.

"To us, in this twenty-first century, there is, perhaps, nothing more repulsive in the old Christian ethics than the imposture and asceticism they set up, and the insult they offered to our human nature, by reproving the sexual passion as unholy and impure. Taking the obverse of the true moral, that the gratification of this appetite, as of any other of our appetites, is naturally and essentially innocent, and only casually made sinful by circumstances and consequences, Christianity taught that it was only naturally and essentially sinful and unholy, and only permissible under the one circumstance of matrimony, blessed by a priest; even then only barely to be tolerated, not to be commended. The only truly holy life for men and women was to live apart in monasteries and nunneries, and suppress natural desires by fasting, flagellation, fasting, maceration. Weaker brethren (which perhaps meant the saner ones) were, however, out of consideration for their deplorable frailty, permitted the alternative of priest-blessed marriage, without being necessarily damned; though their chances of salvation were, of course, far inferior to those of the nobler ones in the stone cells.

"The ethics of the Bible were, however, many-sided and abundantly contradictory; passage gainsaying passage throughout. So that out of them you could build up any moral system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you pleased—from the worst to the best. During system you ple...
shown that the popular religion was no better than the baseless fabric of a dream; in face of the fact that it was repudiated, either contemptuously or with pity and in silence, by all their scientific men, and by the great majority of all their foremost thinkers. Again and again it had been shown that the religion was self-condemned by its own inherent absurdity; that the book they called 'inspired' was self-condemned by its own internal evidence; by its self-contradictions, its assertions of physical falsehoods, its laudation of vile crimes and immoral sentiments. It had been shown that the reputed and miraculous-and-supernatural events on which Christianity was based were reported to have occurred in a very dark corner of the world, in a very dark age, when there was no printing-press, no newspapers, no telegraph, no post-office, no stage-coaches, no special reporters, no publicity, and among the very lowest class of people—fishermen, beggars, etc.—among whom the accomplishments of reading and writing were not to be looked for (though these same disciples were afterwards absurdly credited with high literary abilities); that no scientific commission had examined into the alleged facts; no able counsel had been appointed to cross-examine the witnesses and sift the evidence; and no detectives had been dispatched from Scotland Yard. That, in fact, the very idea of scientific investigation had not been conceived in those days; that the inductive study of natural laws was unheard of; and no definite boundary had been drawn between the natural and the supernatural, but both were jumbled up together—the one appearing as probable as the other.

With regard to the writings which they called 'the Gospels'—on the literal truth and exactness of which they depended for all knowledge of the sayings and doings of the Founder of their Faith—it had been shown, again and again, that they were written nobody knew when, and nobody knew by whom; but certainly not by their reputed authors; that there was no historical record of their publication or their existence earlier than a century and a-half after the events of which they professed to be narratives by eye-witnesses. That, earlier than that, no writer had ever alluded to their existence; that those four Gospels were then avowedly selected by the priests, or 'Fathers,' from hundreds of other gospels; that these old Fathers were (test of their own writings) men, at once of inconceivable folly and credulity, and of boundless dishonesty; esteeming all frauds pious that favoured their own Church and their own interests.

And it had been forcibly represented that, in those old, dark, troublous days, and in relation to events in which only some of the lowest and most ignorant class took any interest, the lapse of a century and a-half, or even half that time, would have thrown over the past a more impenetrable fog of antiquity and obscurity than could the rolling of thousands of years of the modern world.

"There was another proof much relied upon by the Christians at a somewhat earlier period, namely,—the so-called 'Evidence of Prophecy.' This meant that certain more ancient Jewish writings referred to and had predicted the events of the Christian Gospels. The Divine Founder and the 'inspired writers' of those gospels distinctly claimed them in evidence. The Jews, however, who ought to have known something about it, always utterly denied that their old scriptures bore any such meaning. And when, at last, criticism proved beyond controversy that none of those ancient writings referred to the then-distantly-future Christian era, but to synchronous events easily designated, then the Christian divines, receding, took up the position that, if not in a direct or primary sense, still, in a secondary (allegorical and mystical) sense, they were unquestionably prophetic of Jesus. They argued well that 'Jesus was certainly the Christ' because the old prophets had prophesied of him; and that the prophets had certainly prophesied of him (even though only allegorically), since he, being the Christ, had said so.

"A great portion of the so-called 'prophetic writings' are void of all intelligible meaning, and may be supposed to signify anything or nothing. They were, probably, the rhapsodies and ravings of priests who had gone mad. In the East, the insane were always regarded with a superstitious reverence.

"I have remarked that the evidence from prophecy was not much insisted upon—indeed, seldom alluded to—since the close of the eighteenth century. The position seemed to have been abandoned, probably as untenable.

"In fine, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it had been made patent to all who were willing and able to inquire with an even-balanced mind, that the intrinsically incredible popular religion was unsupported, except by such shadowy and unproved prophecies as would not for a moment be entertained in the courts of justice. How was it possible to establish any historical question—proofs such as no writer of the Old Testament with all his secular historian would consider sufficient to throw any colour on believing in their own mis-shapen idols? How was this possible? The phenomenon is not inexplicable. There were many reasons. There were the heathen religions of old.

"But there was the 'vision' of so many fathers, of the centuries that had passed since the days of Moses and the patriarchs.
mother, female relatives, nursemaids and parsons—would have to start again in life from a mental platform no higher than that of his great-grandmother, gaining little, or nothing, by the intellectual elevation of his father. And each successive generation of young men had to repeat for itself the painful process of believing at first and learning to disbelieve afterwards. And in each generation the authority of the nursery clung supreme through life to thousands of minds, sluggish and uninquiring, or obstinate and proud, or timid and reverential and feebly imaginative. A reticence, for politic reasons very generally maintained, long upheld the form of a religion that was really moribund and nearly inanimate. The worldly success and comfort of most men depended upon appearing to swim with the tide of popular prejudice, and so, before the public they hypocritically pretended to reverence what, in their hearts and in the society of intimate friends, they despised and derided. Thus, the free-thinkers had no means of learning their own numbers and strength. And this cowardly reticence was carried so far, that, long after they were in a decided majority, each individual free-thinker was afraid to speak, supposing himself to be only one of a small minority. Writers of the close of the nineteenth century express an opinion that for nearly a hundred years the popular creed had floated only upon reticence.

"But to explain this phenomenon, which seems to puzzle you so much, of the coexistence, side by side, for more than a hundred years, of the broad light of Science and Philosophy, and the darkness of superstition, what more is necessary than the biological doctrine of the produced hereditaryness of mental impressions, warps and twists, continued through many generations? We know that that which we call instinct in the lower animals is only inherited memory, experience and habits. The fish that have swum for countless generations in the pitch-dark waters of the Adelsberg caves have become eyeless through the gradual atrophy of the unused organs of sight. When remo ved to open waters, many generations pass ere they begin once more to blink at the glimpses of the sun. Had the Chinese bandaged, cramped, and dwarfed the feet of both sexes for a certain number of generations, it is highly probable that, at last, the foot-deformity would have become congenital, inherited.

"Now, the minds of men who, in the light of the nineteenth century, still kept on believing, were like Adelsberg fish that had not yet been in the open water for a sufficient number of generations to recover their vision. The minds of their forefathers had been for so many ages shut up in the tenebrous crypts and cloisters of superstition—seeing nothing therein but false and doleful phantoms—that the mental eye, capable of seeing the truth, had become congenitally atrophied. And their minds were like the suppositional Chinese foot; their predecessors minds had been so long dwarfed and distorted by the bandages of priestcraft, authority and custom, that a few generations without bandages were necessary for restoration.

"Happy are we in this glorious twenty-first century! Happy to have learnt to be humble enough to acknowledge that there is a definite impassable limit to the range of human inquiry; to be wise enough never more to shatter our brain-power in vain attempts to transcend the limit into the infinite abysses! Whereas, the men of old, in the arrogance of ignorance, glancing at the one infinite phenomenon of the universe, flippantly declared themselves at once capable of hitting on the true solution of the mystery of mysteries, and that the solution was, that the universe had been made by a god pre-existing in vacuo (the Hindoo elephant and tortoise over again), and thereafter fell to discussing the attributes and character of this brain-coined Being, we simply say that all inquiry into the first causes and the real nature of things is 'beyond the limit,' and cease to be the aim of things, humbly admit that the cause of those adaptations is from man for ever hidden, and that the inquiry is beyond the limit.

"Happy are we that, with souls no longer perturbed by the menacing figure of the old-man-god in the clouds, with his attendant devil, we can tranquilly cultivate the one real religion—the religion of humanity—how we may best labour to promote the happiness and alleviate the woes of mankind."

Here the impious vision ended, and, springing to my feet, I devoutly crossed myself, exclaiming, "Anathema maranatha!"
I AM quite aware of the mode in which the sacerdotalists deal with the promise and prophecy of Jesus that he would return in glory before that generation passed away. I know how, by a little hanky-panky, they deftly convert that terrible difficulty, that (one might have supposed) crushing disaster into a brilliant sham victory, with endless sham jubilations. But only sham, indeed. For it is simply not true that the Greek word γενεα, correctly rendered in the English version "generation," ever elsewhere bears the meaning of a "people" or "nation." No, Sir—not in any Greek work extant—not in any Greek passage that can be found and quoted. Consult the highest Greek authority you can find, and (if he be not pledged to falsification by his métier) I think he will tell you that in no context elsewhere does γενεα signify anything but a generation of man. Most assuredly the companions and immediate followers of Jesus understood that he had pledged himself to return before all who stood about him had tasted of death. Where they not as likely as we to understand his meaning? Note, too, that in the passage (Matthew xxv. 1) "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven," the precise meaning of the original Greek word is not hereafter but immediately.

Why, we should never have heard of Christianism but for the electrifying effect on the startled imaginations of the first converts produced by the positive announcement and daily expectation of the second advent and the end of all things. That was the sharp sword that gave first impetus to the new creed and set it rolling. At this time of day, however, it suits Christianists before the death of the last generation, those about him were still alive, and immediately, he really only meant, "before the Jews ceased to exist as a separate people." And thereupon they burst into gushing enthusiasm over the wonderful fulfillment of the word of our Lord. "Behold, say they, the existence of the Jews as a separate people, though scattered among all nations. They are a crushing evidence of the truth of Christianity and a continued pledge that the Lord Jesus is coming again." And so it was, securely clothed inside and out with self-deceit, they say all this and much more without blushing, without winking, in the face of the precisely parallel (miraculous!) facts of the Parthians or Zoroastrians of Persia, scattered for some 2500 years among all the nations of India, yet keeping themselves as distinct people even more rigorously than the Jews—of the gypsies, probably for nearly a thousand years—and more remarkable than all, of the anachronistic aborigines of India, the Bhils, Gonds, etc., who still, although the overfowling of India by the Hindoos (Aryan, Indo-Germanic race) occurred in times prehistoric.

Note that against Jesus' unfortunate unfulfilled prophecies of his immediate return Christianists had begun to hedge as early as the date of the writing of the gospel according to St. John (about A.D. 170), from which all these predictions are carefully excluded, and in which occurs that most unpleasantly procrastinating passage in chapter xxv. 20-23 which is too obviously aimed at quibbling away the convincing power of the Christianist's difficulty that John, the last survivor of the apostles, was dead, all "Divine promises to the contrary notwithstanding.

Some ingenious critics have defended the rendering of γενεα by "race" or "people" by appealing to the authority of our poet Pope, who, in his "race" thus—"Like leaves on trees the race of men is found, Now grown in youth, now withering on the ground; Another race the following spring supplies; These fall successively and successive rise; They fail in course, and course as they decay; From generation to generation the same story is now, The world has passed away!"

Here, however, it is plain enough that Homer and Pope understood the word in the sense of generation after generation, though the exigencies of English verse made the monosyllable "race" more convenient. In any case, Alexander Pope was not a Pope Alexander, and therefore not infallible.

Then, which of the Harmonists has been able to bridge over the well-known historical interval of ten years (diatessaron decade) between the facts and the word of the New Testament? As for the Jewish Emperor the latter is not so stubborn for death of Herod and the birth of Jesus has factually never been claimed by him. For it is certain that St. Luke tells us that Jesus was born during the time of the tetrarch Herod and the latter was Hierarch of Judea and Syria are not one and the same person; the former was the highest official of one of the Roman provinces in the East, the latter the chief of the Jewish nation. It was banished by the imperial Archon and that then began to understand the Roman Empire, government, those provinces directly under the imperial power. It was not until the Roman empire was dead and the people and their substance, as well as that of the Jews, under the general imperial system of taxation, At that time Joseph, the historian, who had written a history of the world, had been born. And before the poor things could, as contemporaries of Jesus, have heard of the remarkable all the minutiae of the affairs of Judea, had never heard of the remarkable events of the slaughter of the Innocents by a king who was dead ten years.

With regard to the so-called remarkable prophecy of the great modern Hebrew critic as to the world, the word of the New Testament in its earliest form in Genesis xliii. 10, the word of the New Testament in its earliest form in Genesis xliii. 10, is in English: "Then, which of the Harmonists has been able to bridge over the well-known historical interval of ten years (diatessaron decade) between the facts and the word of the New Testament? As for the Jewish Emperor the latter is not so stubborn for death of Herod and the birth of Jesus has factually never been claimed by him. For it is certain that St. Luke tells us that Jesus was born during the time of the tetrarch Herod and the latter was Hierarch of Judea and Syria are not one and the same person; the former was the highest official of one of the Roman provinces in the East, the latter the chief of the Jewish nation. It was banished by the imperial Archon and that then began to understand the Roman Empire, government, those provinces directly under the imperial power. It was not until the Roman empire was dead and the people and their substance, as well as that of the Jews, under the general imperial system of taxation, at that time Joseph, the historian, who had written a history of the world, had been born. And before the poor things could, as contemporaries of Jesus, have heard of the remarkable all the minutiae of the affairs of Judea, had never heard of the remarkable events of the slaughter of the Innocents by a king who was dead ten years.

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We crusaders of the nineteenth century against the infidels—"The Pagans succumbed in a creed outworn"—who deny the value of science, will never achieve our triumph, we shall never finally hurl down the great idol of supernaturalism until we popularise the inner and profounder thoughts of the scientific mind, and reveal to the people at large, in language they can understand; until, no longer limited as an exoteric doctrine to the outskirts of the highly educated few, something more than the spirit of science breaks out from the popular mass. We can never cast down this Dagon so long as the popular mass is still caged fast by the implicit conviction that whatever else may be entertained by the women, it is certain that the church must be guarded up.

For, one miracle granted, what bounds to the miraculous! One branch of the absolute reign of natural law, and at a stroke the reign of law is abrogated.

At present the popular mind is wholly unconscious of the fact that no such idea of sudden and violent creation is ever entertained by men of science—by any holding rank in the vanguard of thought. The popular mind is what we philosophers must strive to pierce the stolid general mind with the light of advanced thought, all hold that nothing has come to pass, per saltum, by sudden jump, but that all things have been, as now, governed by orderly and immutable physical law; slow, gradual working through thousands of ages; that inorganic elements, by the gradual process, go ever to inorganic elements by natural processes, and development gradual through enormous periods from those first low types.

We use a metaphor—halting and imperfect indeed, yet roughly serving the turn—as we know that oxygen and hydrogen, mixed in certain proportions, fillipated by an electric spark, vanishes, congealing into a cloud of white smoke, so we hypothesize that certain inorganic matters in combination, under the stimulus of some force—it may be of magnetic currents in ocean depths—condense into protoplasm, the basis of physical life.

The theories of development of variation and natural selection, roughly explain the reason of why, as Darwin (Descent of Man, vol. II, 385), "The main conclusion arrived at in this work is that man is descended from some less highly organized form in the animal kingdom in which the lower animals are never seen in the close similarity of structure and in embryonic development, as well as in innumerable points of structure and constitution, both of high and of the most trifling importance, in which he retains, and the abnormal reversions to which he is occasionally liable—are facts which cannot be disputed. They have long been

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Whether do such things seem to bear the impress of intelligent creation, or of a spontaneity of organisation in the inorganic? As, without definite boundary, the animal kingdom merges into the vegetable, so, doubtless, does the organic world into the inorganic. As we go from the inorganic to the organic, we do the distinct light of the one, and are conscious of a separate creation, and a separate life. We never regard the inorganic and the organic as identical; we know there is no such thing as inert matter; that all things are permitted by force; that even a granite rock is in a violent state of force, and we begin to see the force which pervades the universe is one and constant. If we must have a god, we may regard that force as god.

The views of philosophical materialists are, vulgarly, much misconceived. We are wrongly interpreted to that there is anything in space but Matter-own-Force. But if we so dogmatise about the unknown, we are no better than theologians. What we maintain is, that all phenomena whatsoever, of which the human mind is or can be cognisant, are the resultant forces of Matter. But surely we are not supposed to pretend that we know in the least what matter is. For all that Man can possibly know, Matter may be Divine—it may be to us only a manifestation of a Divine Force filling Infinity. But such speculations are entirely beyond the limits of philosophic inquiry, and utterly futile and inane.

Contrariwise, for all we know, organic life may be the highest specialised outcome of Matter and Force. The spring-blooms on the tree of two thousand years growth are but slight and ephemerical things compared with the great trees that stand aloft, yet they are far superior to it; for higher and finer organisation, of more vivid activities, more nearly approaching to the state of consciousness. As they are to the trunk, so may we be to the inorganic cosmos.

Your maintain that you plainly discern through the physical world, especially in the animal and vegetable world, innumerable wonderful evidences of intelligent design! My dear fellow, do not permit the Cheshire Cat to lead you astray. I think you have fallen into the old, old logical error of mistaking inference for observation. What really do see is, only innumerable and wonderful instances of the adaptation of things. That those adaptations are the product of design is what we cannot possibly see: that would be merely a metaphysical and speculative inference which might or might not be true.

You say the inference is a good one, and quite the same as if one seeing a watch before a watch before a watch before a watch before—should infer that it was the work of a skilled watchmaker. There I differ from you entirely; it is not the same; the two cases are in no wise parallel; in the latter case you know for a certainty that man exists, and you have seen many other works which you experimentally know to be his; and it is some analogy with his other known works that would lead you at once to recognise his handiwork in the watch.

But, in the other case, you don't know for a certainty, or at all, of the existence of God; at least, you cannot assume his existence here, as that is just the theorem you are seeking to prove. To make the cases at all parallel, there ought to be many other worlds experimentally known to you to be made by God; then, reasoning by analogy, you would have a right to say, I recognise here another hand of the god who, I know, made those other worlds. But the mystery of the adaptations, which have the appearance of design, is the mystery of the universe, which is unique, and cannot be approached by any analogy, or by any comparison. No doubt these adaptations are marvellous, but more marvellous still would be our hitting, in the infinitude, upon their one real cause and true reason.

It always strikes me as something very arrogant and presumptuous, to assert that we can plainly discern the proofs of divine design; it is rating the power of the human intellect too high, thus to claim for the human intellect the depth of Infinite—that is the profoundness of the inference the depth of the Infinite—of the subtlety of the manner in which a phenomenon is produced. The more we regard the finite, the less we can believe in the Infinite. The more we see the order of finite beings, the less we see the order of Infinite beings. For instance, we see the order of vegetable life clearly, but we can see the order of human life only in the same way we can see the order of vegetable life. We do not see it in the same way we see the order of vegetable life. We do not see it in the same way we see the order of vegetable life.
this respect did but emphasize popular opinions. Singularly enough, the old Hebrew scriptures contain nothing of the doctrine, but on the contrary, every passage, seem opposed to it. Still, there must have been some such idea among the old Hebrews, as among other peoples in the world, for it springs naturally out of human infirmities. If you concede immortal souls to man, on what grounds can you refuse them to the ape, the cat, the dog? Do we differ from them in our finer physical organisation and ampler development of brain?

There is the distinction that we have reason and they have not—is there? But I know you don’t believe in that old-fashioned ignorant argument. Of course their brains are smaller in its statement: the lower animals have their reason faculties as we have ours, but ours are transfigured in the ratio of our finer organisation and our ampler brain: there is no radical distinction, but only difference in degree. Have you ever heard any plausible answers to many of the objections which are so far drowned in the aspersions?—when a man is so drowned in the aspersions, they would never move again, but, after an hour, or perhaps two, is restored to life by artificial means, what becomes of the soul in the interval of state which was virtually death? is the immortal soul, too, asphyxiated, or where is it? why can’t it report on return to the body?

No doubt the prospect of immortality is very gratifying to human pride and human tenacity of life, and very consolatory to the bereaved is the hope of meeting again the lost loved ones. But, before all things the truth! Pleasant or unpleasant, give us the truth! Away with sham and unscalable and figments, however flattering they be! But let us inquire whether, upon the whole, the expectation of eternal life really makes mankind happier; does its consolation outweigh its oppression—a oppression it lays upon all our lives—of vague dread, distrust and avulsion! Were it possible to pull the end of some pondom, which would not be-see how many a few enthusiasts and the impression by recent bereavement) whom would not gladly forego their hope to get quit of their dread? who would not choose, had they free choice, rather to lie as in the trees lies than chance a future of some mendacious, inconceivable mode of existence? Ask all your intimate friends, who are not too much encrusted with whitehokeism and Philistinism, to you a conscientious answer, and they will reply, After life’s fatal lover, let us lie as the tree lies! Why not? How can we really feel otherwise? How can we breathing terrestrial, children of our dear lovable and beloved mother earth, conceive of any existence away from her in the slightest degree desirable? Without our warm bodies, our passions, our appetites, our pleasures, our struggles, or even our perils—which love, marriage, and children, and home, and home-affects—without earth, ocean, air, and all their vicissitudes—without mountain, and valley, and sea and cities—without loving, and eating and drinking, and riding and sailing? No! Better a thousand times to lie as the trees lie than of some pondom, from all the surroundings we love. Remember the story of the old English farmer, who, dying, the person endeavored to cheer with word-pictures of the joys and glories of heaven.

"Ah! parson," she said, "all that you say about heaven is very fine and very true, no doubt—but, after all, Old England for my money! That is the natural human sentiment—our dear earth or nothing life as we know it, or nihility and dreamless peace! Pax nobiscum.

There is, upon the whole, an incompatibility between earthly happiness and the hope with-fear of immortality. May not this incompatibility be in some measure the cause of its unsatisfactory? But that is nought to the shine, to be taken for what it is worth. But let us also further inquire whether it would be for the advantage of mankind that the doctrine of a Future State should be true.

Divines are perfectly correct in maintaining that there is a logical via media between accepting what they call Revelation on the one hand and the abandonment of the dogmas of the Immortality of the Soul on the other. Certainly there are no natural reasons (that are not merely fanciful) in favor of that theory—all natural reasons are emphatically opposed to it. If we accept it at all it must be on the basis of the so-called Revelation. Now what does this Revelation teach us? That God has formed, saved, and loved, ruined creatures, born into the world and living in the world under a divine curse. As the grave is the ultimate receptacle destined for the human body, so a place of endless and unspeakable torment is the natural receptacle destined for the human soul. If this be true, then the wildest imaginings of the most savage creeds are as sunlight compared with the horrors of our situation. Yet a gleam of light (it is but a gleam) is sufficient to penetrate to our dreary prison, in which we are penned up like so many cattle with our furrowed brows. In virtue of a mysterious transaction in Judea, a certain number of persons will be "sared," that is to say, will not only be rescued from the general fate, but will exchange it for a condition of endless happiness. These Scriptures lay it down very clearly that the number of the saved will be extremely small, and that a vast majority of us are destined by the Creator (of the theologians) to a fate at which imagination stands aghast.

Now, it is certainly not for the advantage of mankind that the great bulk of us should be thus doomed to eternal perdition, while only a few spiritual aristocrats are nominated for eternal bliss. Therefore, it would not be to our advantage that, standing on the only possible basis on which it can stand, the doctrine of a future state should be true. Q.E.D.

Even to wish it to be true is abominable. A painted man, confident of his own election, wishing it to be true must be a monster of man-sinfulness. For he wishes for his own eternal happiness bound up with the inevitable corollary or the eternal misery of nearly all the rest of our race. How he expects to be infinitely happy in the endless contemplation of the empty toil of the billions, millions of his own bloated and unprofitable accoutrements, is hard to explain. Certainly some of us poor carnal unspiritual terrestrials are incapable of conceiving so grand a syllable of cynical egotism.

Yes the "Divines" call upon us to hasten to embrace their "Revelation," seeing that the only other alternative is a "cold heart-witherding negation too fearful to be contemplated!" Rather should the human heart expand with joy, and the human face glow with kindly gladness at having found some relief from the crushing involvements of our accumulated accounts. For my part, I hope I am, above all else, a philanthropist, and I would do anything, sacrifice anything to help, "tast soil por, to bless my fellow men with the blessing of cold negation.

In this lies lost all its terrors when we know it to be nothing but Cessation—nothing but the extinction of Ego with the dissolution of the organism.

"That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them as the one death, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one death: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast."—Eccles. vi. 19.

Often have I thought how true an emblem of organic life is the great whirlwind dust-column we frequently see stretching across the vast plains of the Australian plains! Each is a specialised and individual manifestation of force; each has a corpus constituted of particles which, ever as it marches, it assimilates and discards; a body, whose constituents are ever changing, upheld by a force preserving its identity, but subject to a little, while the special differentiation of force ceases; the force flows upward into the universal, and the dust falls back to the dust; the organisation has vanished—the column and the man have ceased for evermore.

Mind is but the product of organisation; thought but the music of the organism swept by the current of impressions, as the Arabian harp by the wind.
EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS.

CAN we reckon up the whole theory of moral philosophy, and of the nature of the moral sentiments and conscience, within the compass of a page or two? We should find it difficult to do so. It does not seem presumptuous to say that the attempt seems presumptuous. It is not needful that it should; the whole matter is one of the most important and abstruse subjects of study, and which has been only confined by the admission into the question of the nature of the moral sentiments and conscience, within the compass of a page or two. We should be justified in saying that the attempt seems presumptuous. It is not needful that it should; the whole matter is one of the most important and abstruse subjects of study, and which has been only confined by the admission into the question of the nature of the moral sentiments and conscience, within the compass of a page or two.

Single copies of the times that have been written on this subject would be of the first value to be required to carry all the works on theology. That last mass of verbiage—what a subject!—what a contempt!—what an utter inability and vacuity, except as waste paper or manure for the fields! What hundreds of thousands of fine intellects—naturally fine, but distorted by superstition—have earnestly and fervently wasted all the bright days of their poor lives, and all the energies of their good brains, in endeavouring to

"distinguish good and evil.

Hair betwixt South and South-west wind!"
The hairs, alas! not being real and substantial hairs, but merely the shadowy etchings of dreams.
The moral law, as conceived by man, is purely subjective, relative to his own welfare; there is nothing in it mysterious, spiritual or divine; it is built on the material basis of self-preservation—on the well-being of self, or of our race. We call all moral actions in which the principal involved is such, according to our judgment, as to tend to promote the well-being of mankind, good or virtuous—all moral actions springing from a principle, as we judge, of an opposite character, bad or vicious. This is the concise but perfect definition of virtue and vice, of good and evil, as seen from the human standpoint. This is the formula by which the merit or demerit of all moral actions is tested. The desire of approbation, of being liked by our fellows, and the desire of being respected and feared by our enemies, contained the first germ, the sufficient root of all the moral feelings. Not a jot or tittle of the miraculous in conscience, or the so-called moral sense—that sense which seems to tell us instinctively, without need of appeal to reason, that this action is good, that action vicious. Much the same story is told of the intuitions and the derivatives (such as the hard words the metaphysicians use). But now we may safely regard the intuitive school as become moribund, or, if it still anywhere survive, it is only in the dusty regions of priestly and sanctified fogeyism.

That so-called instinctive sense is derived partly from infantile impressions and partly from inherited memory. Just as the wonderful habits of the animals—usually vaguely called instinctive—are due to the inherited reminiscences of the experiences of millions of ancestral generations; so the human brain, subjected, generation after generation, to certain vivid moral impressions, acquires a modification which becomes hereditarily transmissible.

Other cerebral impressions there are, which plainly become hereditary—notably, proneness to superstition, and an abnormal tendency of accepting particular forms of superstition, which, though professed follows, nevertheless has been believed in by a long train of unenlightened ancestors. This instantaneously-acting moral sense is, among the children of an average orderly and not uncivilized ancestry, a generally safe guide. But in other cases it is so unreliable, so variable and so obtrusively subjective to human conditions and environments, that it is marvellous how any could have deemed it a divinely-implanted rule of conduct. It does not tell the young and heedless that it is wrong to pilage and murder the people—only that cowardice and treachery to the band

are heinous crimes. It tells the American Indian that it is meritorious and praiseworthy to tear his scalp and scalp all who belong to other tribes than his, to cut off his prisoners—that cowardice and treachery, within or against his tribe, are the only crimes. It does not tell the Hindu that it is wicked to burn widows, nor a thing that there is any moral delinquency in strangling the non-Turks—nor priests that it is not good to burn them whose doxy is not their doxy. But one might fill volumes with instances of the diverse and perverse teachings of the "innate moral sense"—while among the children of the hereditary criminal classes, it is simply non-existent, a fact which makes the reclamation of them so difficult.

Educated intellect is the only trustworthy arbiter of right and wrong. It is for the Reason, cultivated and experienced, to decide whether any given class of moral actions is of such a nature as to be beneficial or prejudicial to man. Nor does she give uncertain responses, very clear she makes it, that if we would that this or our world should be for a habitable and not unhappy abode, our rule of life must be perfect probity, honesty and honour, truthfulness and trustworthiness; kindly, gentle, cheerful, sympathetic consideration for others; courage and vigor in the resistance and suppression of evil; and sternness, tempered by mercy, in dealing with evil-doers.

And though the rules of interpersonal ethics are, naturally, allowably conventional and shifting, varying with time, place, social status and circumstances, yet one unmistakable law governs through every phase—to refrain from any act likely to be productive of misery to others."

I don't think we educated sons of educated fathers and forefathers sufficiently realise the enormous mental disparity between ourselves and the uneducated descendants of forefathers from the beginning of things uneducated.

It requires some thoughtful study, much inquiry, questioning and probing, to arrive at any just conception of their to-us-strange mental incapacity and impotence—of their lack of all the higher intellectual powers, especially of the logical faculty, and of all the capability of discriminating between the possible and the improbable, the possible and the impossible, the natural and the supernatural.

The reasoning level of the average uneducated adult so descended is probably scarcely as high as yours and mine was at seven or eight. We may hope that it is not. But it seems to be that the important fact of the mental and moral incapacity of the unproved is so generally overlooked as to be insufficiently appreciated—when we consider that it has always been exclusively among such that every reform has first arisen! It was only poor twilight-thinking creatures of that sort before whom Joe Smith, Mahomet, Jesus and Moses appeared.

Of people in that cerebral mental stage, the observations, the inferences, opinions, and reports are, simply valueless—of no importance whatever. They can't understand what they see and hear, nor correctly report what they do or attend to.

When we were children of seven or eight years, had some individual appeared to us of commanding stature, of singularly majestic and heroic presence, of unusual nobleness of voice (as we know Joe Smith was, and Mahomet, and Jesus of Nazareth, and others were), and had he asserted himself to be the Prophet, or the Son of God, or God himself, should we not probably have

1 I may assume that my readers are above the childish illogicality of expecting against the asserstion of the subjectivity and absolute relativity of our moral feelings, our revolting against cruelty to the lower animals, and our sympathising with their sufferings. The answer to such objections is obvious—that in any deed of cruelty we see in action, one of the principles which we most dread, and that our sympathy is due to the imagination putting us in the place of the sufferers.

For the nearest exposition of the mode in which the moral sense has been derived from the social or gregarious instincts, consult Darwin's "Descent of Man."
implicitly believed him, if left to ourselves, with none more enlightened around us? Just so; and not a whit wiser were the other first converts.

I knew, of my own knowledge, of whole races of people whose mental development is yet in so rudimentary a stage, that not unfrequently they lack the power of distinguishing between their own dreams and actual events.

When, in some far-outlying parts of Australia, I was first thrown into association with the aborigines, I was much surprised at the utter disregard with which reports made by them to us were often received by the old hands around us. "Why," I would say, "don't you hear what these blacks report?" "Oh," the reply would be, "we knows'em! what they says goes in at one ear and out at t'other with—there is such infernal lies!" "But," I would remonstrate, "they can have no possible interest in planting this story off on us, if it is false." "That says nothing," an old hand would answer, "nobody can tell why, or how, they invent their lying yarns—seems to me they somehow believes 'em themselves—you see, sir, they're not quite the same as human beings, and no one can make out their ways."

One time, some of the blacks belonging to the station, friendly and under protection, came to me to report a terrible event that had just occurred at a station about forty miles away, at which there were three white men. Two of them, they said, had been surprised and murdered by bush-blacks, and the third was defending himself inside the she-but, and had shot many of the assailants—many details were added. We could not learn from them exactly how they had heard all this, but were not surprised at that, knowing that there were bush telegraphs, about whom they did not wish us to know anything. Between our quiet station and others who were out in the bush and inclined to be hostile. On the strength of this information, three of us rode over to the beleaguered station. There was not the slightest foundation for the report—no disturbance whatever had occurred!

On my return, I investigated the origin of the fable as closely as I could, and came to the conclusion that a woman in the camp had told it, and given it out as fact to the others, who had implicitly accepted it.

Often afterwards, comparing notes on this subject with other experienced bushmen, I found they all agreed that such cases were common.

Lately I read in the papers of an expedition which, where in South Australia, had been sent four hundred miles out to some place in the desert, where the blacks reported there were white men with large herds of cattle. Of course, when they got there there was no sign that hoof had pressed the ground since the ground was formed. Had those South Australians known the nggerras as well as I do, they would not have troubled themselves. So with all the aborigines' reports about Leichhardt—at utter vanity.

It never necessarily follows, in these cases, that the natives are wilfully lying, or that they don't really believe what they say, but the origin of their belief may always be in some dream. Their waking and mental states get jumbled up, and what anyone among them positively affirms, all the rest will believe, without question required.

Thank you, that the barbarous Hebrews, of Mosaic times, were not like these people—just about in the same mental stage? Or that the Jew papists who were Christ's witnesses were any better?

For my part, the three lots, I would soonest believe our own nggerras, just because they are extinct, and not dead two or three thousand years ago.

INSEMINA VANA VALENT.

Consider what was man's conception of the surrounding universe in the days of Eld, when the Idea suddenly up in the word God first sprung up in

his bewildered darling brain! A conception from immediate optical sensation! To him the Earth was the material universe. It was a plane, archetypal, by the "permanent," a solid blue crystal vault, above which was the natural abode of the anthropoid gods, and through which they could at will glide down to Earth. Beneath this vault the Sun, Moon, and Stars, lamps devised by God for the benefit of terrestrials, were daily and nightly driven across by his hand, extinguished under the western horizon and then retrimmed back to the Orient. With his own hand he held the thunder and smote with the lightning. Eclipses and Comets were signals of the breaking out of his capricious fury against his creatures. The rainbow was a token that his multitude of business had not caused him to forget a solemn treaty he had made with man. All environing phenomena were the intermediate acts of Gods or Demons; under foot, beneath the plane of the Earth, was a suitable locality for Hades. Had it been patent to primeval man that the Earth by the spook of dust dancing round an insignificant star, itself wallowing among infinite millions of other stars—that there is really no Above and no Below, that when we close our hands and cast our eyes up to heaven, we are looking towards a point which in twelve hours will be under our feet, and are at the same time, relatively to our Antipodes, in the position of looking downwards—that there is no firmament, nor heaven just above our heads, but infinite space everywhere—nothing below but our Antipodean friends—that we are, in fact, but parasites on a little globular grain of matter—and had these comical facts been patent to man in primeval times, probably none of those baseless dreams called Religions would ever have tortured poor Humanity.

In point of plain logic Copernicus and Galileo destroyed religion. Human stupidity resists long; but yields at last.

You may say that not only is every religion a delusion, but that the religious feeling itself is but a barbaric emotion of wonder, unworthy of adult man.

You don't doubt the word of God? The man was never born who could doubt the word of God. But the question is—what is the word of God? You say it is contained in this book. I ask, what rational knowledge had you of God—what previous intimacy existed between you and God to authorize you thus positively to authenticate these as his writings—these as his sentiments? Was he really A, your familiar friend? Or is he not rather the unknown X for ever and ever? Is he even competent to the Human Mind to discover whether He be indeed an Objective Reality, or only a Subjective Idea? You say the internal evidence of this book convinces you, everything it contains being entirely consonant with your idea of God. But then you will in fairness concede that you are not everybody. For instance, here am I, to whose conception of what God may be this book is in most violent dissonance and oppugnance.

Said a friend to me, "Against our making any active strenuous exertion to spread over the general world the Free-thought-light to which we ourselves have attained, there are two reasons which appear to me sufficient. First, that such effort would be unsuccessful, the time not being ripe yet, that in the existing low mental status of the people the Light would be even more hurtful than their old gross superstitions. Man is very young yet; civilization is only dawning. The people think themselves finely educated, but in all capacity for logical thought their progress is imperceptible. Prove to them by the most crystalline logic that their Holy Things are but Mumbo-Jumboes—what use? they would stoically stick to their Mumbo-Jumboes all the same—for they are only in the Heathen stage of mental evolution. Vain the attempt to disabuse them of Mumbo-Jumbo! And
for the few minds capable of assimilating the logic, still what use? Where would be found the courage to fly in the face of Extreme Respectability and his spouse Mrs. Grundy? For one more half-century let the majority of the people continue to be driven by the priests, with winks, bit and rein, until the numbers that can be so driven be reduced to minority by the gradual trickling-in of better sense, by thousands of little runlets. For you and me, with our culture and our philosophy, the emancipation from all Supernaturalism is our glory and our greatest happiness. But there can be no doubt that Preehough should ever go hand in-hand with Culture. I think that by working against Superstition quietly and privately, but diligently, each of us may do a duty sufficient for the present day.

"Your words, my friend," I replied, "are largely the words of wisdom. No more than you, wish I for any speedy boulevirement. But I think we ought to be more active in hastening the trickling of the runlets of Truth-shine. My idiosyncasy differs from yours, in being more coarsely honest, more bluntly earnest. I take for my motto—Truth is the one radiance; and all complacence for, or complicity with, Falsehood is extremely repugnant to me. Though Man can never attain to the Truth Absolute, he can still keep on drawing nearer and nearer to her. And he must how down or uproot the obstructing Palistias in his endeavours.

To narrow the realm of the False and the Vain."

FINIS.