CHAPTER V

ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

We have been engaged throughout the last three chapters in laying down the lines along which God is revealed to men through their Intellect, their Moral Nature, and their Emotions, as Power, Righteousness, and Love. Whatever hindrances there may be just in the present conditions of thought to the recognition by all men of God as thus revealed, I am persuaded that the day will come when it will be as impossible for men really to doubt him as to doubt the outward world which they see and touch, and as impossible for them to be deaf to his voice in conscience as to be deaf to the thunder-clap or the bugle-note, and as impossible for them to be insensible to the love with which he penetrates them as to be insensible to the light that floods the day.

But many good and earnest people dare not trust these revelations of God, dare not believe fully in his righteousness and love, even though
they believe in his power, because of one great and awful fact which presses upon them and which it is impossible for them to ignore.

It seems to them that they would be deceiving themselves in supposing that there can be a God both All-powerful and Good, seeing that the fact cannot be hidden that in this world there exists great, varied, and terrible Evil. In the awful accounts of outrage and massacre which have recently burnt themselves into the consciousness of Englishmen, some of the best of men, within my knowledge, have thought that they saw the refutation of faith in a Heavenly Father. Their devout trust in the Divine government of the world has received a staggering shock from the horrors of Armenia; and, with poor Cleg Kelly, their hearts have cried out, 'It's all a dumb lie; God's dead.' Terribly impressive is it to observe how this despair of God as a Power making for righteousness in the history of nations has uttered itself in the recent writings of one whom some of us have looked on as the most promising English poet of the time. That profound faith in God or some underlying fundamental Good which gives strength and nobility to all the greatest poetry in the world seems, for the moment at least, to have been scorched clean out of the verse of William Watson.

Even Tennyson, the poet of trust and hope, in
one of his moods declares that 'Nature, red in
tooth and claw with ravine' shrieks against the
creed that 'God is Love.' 'Pain, grief, disease,
and death,' says Winwood Reade, 'are these the
inventions of a loving God?' Huxley, writing
on 'The Struggle for Existence,' decides that the
Power ruling the world cannot be benevolent.
And John Stuart Mill was expressing his own view
as well as that of his father, when he said that his
father 'found it impossible to believe that a
world so full of evil was the work of an Author
combining infinite power with perfect goodness
and righteousness.' Indeed there are philosophers
so impressed with what they deem the prevailing
sadness of all life that they argue that the central
principle of the universe is bad, and educate their
whole philosophy from the root-idea that conscious
existence is itself an evil.

And though, if I must tell you the real truth,
I shall have to confide to you that I believe the
pessimistic philosophy of Byron, of Schopenhauer,
and of many another had its real origin not in
hard thinking at all, but in a bad temper or a
bad digestion, yet I acknowledge to the full that
it is often the most generous, the most sympathetic,
the most chivalrous natures that are most shaken
in their faith in God by the spectacle of the vast
and terrific evil which confronts them in the world.

Let us then frankly consider the whole matter.
The argument against Theism is absolutely simple, seems absolutely clear. 'There is great evil in the world. If God cannot prevent it, he is not all-powerful; if he can, yet does not, he is not all-good.' Is there any escape from this dilemma?

Can we get out of it by denying that there really is any evil? Some have tried that way. But it can be adopted only by denying the meaning of words or refusing to acknowledge facts. There is evil. Let us see then what the evil is.

It is of two kinds, closely connected together no doubt, but still two kinds: Pain and Sin. Some have acknowledged that Sin is an Evil, yet tried to get out of recognizing Pain as an Evil. Now I shall argue presently that Pain is often the means to good. But it is useless to say that in itself it is not an evil. Our horror at the sufferings of the innocent, even more than our own shrinking from it, is the evidence that we do all consider Pain in itself an evil, however often it may be the means to good.

And I venture to stand by this opinion notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Gladstone, in his recently collected studies of Bishop Butler, has described the doctrine that pain is in itself an evil as to his mind 'false, fearfully prevalent, and most dangerous.' I shall myself presently contend that pain in its effects is the source of the highest good, even that the world would im-
measurably suffer by the total withdrawal of pain. But it seems to me a mere abuse of language to deny that pain, apart from its results, in itself considered, is an evil. Speaking at Liverpool, in the autumn of 1896, Mr. Gladstone declared that the recent massacre of Armenians in Constantinople had been far less terrible than the previous massacres among the Armenian hills; because these last named had, what the others lacked, the accompaniment of outrage and of torture. But if torture is no evil, where lies the force of the contrast? If pain is no harm, why are we indignant at its infliction? Or will you say that it is 'harm,' but that 'harm' is not necessarily 'evil'? This seems to me, I confess, a fantastic jugglery with words. The meaning of language can only be deduced from the common consciousness of mankind. And the doctrine that pain is not in itself an evil seems to me an attempt to escape from the common sentiment of our race in the interest of a particular philosophical or theological theory.

Pain then and Sin are the evils of the world. But it is important to decide which is the greater. Let the choice be between a great pain and a great sin. Which is the better choice? If we honour heroes and revere martyrs, that is a proof that we consider pain a less evil than sin. If sin were a less evil than pain, we should call the man who of
the two chooses pain, not a hero, but a fool. If
suffering were a greater evil than faithlessness, we
should call the man who of the two chooses suffer-
ing, not a martyr, but at the best a fanatic.

There are two evils in the world, then, Pain and
Sin; but of these two Sin is the greater evil and
Pain the less.

And what are the chief divisions of pain?

Some tender hearts have been most haunted
by the pain of the dumb animals. It is this that is
gathered up under Tennyson’s celebrated phrases
when he describes Nature as ‘red in tooth and
claw with raviné,’ and as ‘so careful of the type,’
‘so careless of the single life.’ I shall have more
to say about the sufferings of the animals presently.
Meanwhile we have nothing but sympathy to
express with those gentle hearts who sorrow over
all the pain which is scattered through the world
of beasts and birds and creeping things.

But others are touched most by the pains and
sorrows of the innocent and helpless among our
own kind—especially by those of children. And
they who go in and out among the slums of London
or Liverpool or who read the reports of such
societies as that for preventing cruelty to children,
know what a terrible mass of suffering this is.
Only let me just point out in passing that, while
those who read or hear of these things often have
their faith in God shaken by them, somehow or
other those who are working at their alleviation seem never to have their faith in God shaken by them, but, so far as I know, are generally all the more assured of the divine love, and seem to see God right through the misery and the anguish. Account for it as you will, that is a most remarkable and impressive fact.

And then, thirdly, there is all the pain which men bring on themselves by their sin—the disease of the debauchee, the rags and hunger of the idler and the drunkard, the isolation from all human sympathy of the selfish, the remorse which tortures the heart whenever the reality of its sin flashes in upon the consciousness, the great, awful mass of physical and spiritual woe which is the direct, visible fruit of the sins of men.

So much for the Pain in the world; then for the Sin. It appalls us by its magnitude, its blackness. There is no need for me to draw it out in detail. We have all been oppressed by the contemplation of it. We have all marvelled at its proportions. We have all known the sting of some of it in our own bosoms.

Yes, the mass of Evil is appalling—first Pain, and then, more and worse, Sin. Can God be omnipotent, and at the same time good, that he lets these things be?

Before we can answer that question, we must decide what we mean by ‘omnipotent,’ which is of
course simply Latin for the English almighty or all-powerful. I am going to tell you what will sound a very trivial, almost a profane thing. But it is neither the one nor the other, for it is the very most solemn and profound thought of which a very little boy was capable. I do not know how old I was, but I cannot have been far out of babyhood. I had been taught that God was very great and that he was almighty. And I remember quite distinctly thinking of him as an immense man with a square paper cap like a baker's, and wondering whether he could open and shut a window at the same time. If he was almighty, I supposed, he must be able to do that. And I imagined the opening and the shutting more and more quickly of one particular window in my father's house. But still I never could get them in my fancy absolutely at the same time. What was my mistake?

My mistake was in not seeing that 'opening and shutting a window at the same time' was not merely very difficult, but an absolute contradiction, and that almightiness or omnipotence does not mean ability to accomplish a contradiction; for a real contradiction cannot be. The word 'contradiction' means the combination of incompatible conditions. No doubt some things that to us seem contradictions would be seen not to be so really, if we could look at them from God's point
of view. But if two conditions really are contradictory, then not even omnipotence can bring them both to pass together. Not even omnipotence could make the earth a sphere and a cube at the same time. Not even omnipotence could make a triangle of which the side AB is longer than the side BC, and BC longer than CA, and CA longer than AB. All that we have a right to mean by omnipotence is power to do everything that is in itself possible, that is not in itself contradictory. If then it should appear that the idea of a world in which there is provision for moral goodness is in itself contradictory to the idea of a world where there is and can be no evil, then we are not denying God's omnipotence in any real sense if we say that he could not both provide for moral goodness in the world and shut out all evil from the world.

And there is such a contradiction. For what is moral good? Moral good consists in right choosing. It is right choosing that makes what we call character. Human goodness is made up of right choosings massed into a habit and making the tone and substance of the character. Right choosing:—but if there is to be choosing, there must be two courses to choose between. If God had made me so that I could not tell a lie, I could not choose to tell the truth. I should tell the truth automatically as I breathe, and sneeze, and cough. But that would not make character. It
would not be moral good. To get moral good out
of me, to make character, I must have a free choice
between a better and a worse;—it must be open to
me to tell the lie, or there will be no morality in
telling the truth. But God cannot at the same
time leave it open to me to tell the lie, and shut
me off from telling the lie, any more than he
can at the same time open the window and shut
the window. Both alike are contradictions; and
omnipotence does not mean power to do contra-
dictory things, but power to do all possible things.

And as, if his object with men is to get moral
good out of them, to make character, God is
obliged to leave the lie open to me as well as the
truth, so also, throughout all the range of morals,
he is in like manner compelled, omnipotent though
he be, if he would have moral good evolved,
character (which is made up of right choosings)
developed in men, to leave open to them the
wrong as well as the right, the disobedience as
well as the obedience, the sin as well as the virtue.
And so, if moral good, character, righteousness, be
the supreme purpose of God with man, then even
omnipotence had to leave open the door to Sin,
the greatest of the evils.

But, say you, why could not God make us all
virtuous to start with? Why could he not endow
us with character ready-made? Because virtue is
right choosing, and if there be no choice there is no
virtue. Because character is built up of right choosings, and that which is ready-made is not character. Once granted that the purpose of God with men was goodness, character, the human will had to be left free to choose at every moment between the better and the worse; and it had to be left dependent not on God, but on Man, whether there should be sin in the world, and if so, how much, and how long it should be ere sin should be conquered and righteousness be set up in its place. If character was to be the purpose, then all that the omnipotence of God could do—since it could not do a contradiction—was so to order the conditions of human life that good should be sure in the end to overcome evil, and righteousness to blot out sin. We shall inquire presently whether God has done that.

But meanwhile some one may say, 'Granted that if character was God's purpose with man, even his omnipotence had to leave the door open to sin; but he need not have made character his purpose.'

No; that is true. God might have made a world in which moral good, character, was not the purpose, in which therefore sin was shut out, and virtue did not exist. Might have? He has made such a world. The animal world is such. The lion, the cat, the sparrow is guided by instinct, knows nothing of these moral choices that are
presented to us at every turn. But, let me ask you, if it depended on your vote, should you be prepared to vote that our life should be assimilated to theirs, and that the whole of the moral life, the whole power and trust of choice between good and evil should be cut clean out of us? I cannot conceive that any sane man will deliberately and sincerely answer ‘yes’ to that question.

The attack which Mill and those who agree with him make on God is that if he could prevent evil and does not, he cannot be all-good. But we have seen that to get goodness realized in men, it was necessary to leave the door open to evil. So that this is the shape the argument will have to take, ‘If God were all-good, he would not make goodness his chief purpose with men.’ So that, again, you are forced into the position of charging it as a blot on the goodness of God that his purpose is the goodness of man. But surely the very meaning of calling a being ‘good’ is that he loves goodness beyond all else. It is precisely by making goodness his first purpose with men, and through conscience teaching them that it is his purpose, that God makes us know that he is good. And if once we came to think that he was indifferent to human goodness, we could no longer mean anything by calling him good.

Such considerations as these—considerations from which it is impossible to find any real logical
escape—cut the ground from under our feet when we would lay it as a charge against God that he has left the door open to sin. The fact does not militate against his goodness, since it is the very manifestation of his goodness that he has called us to be good. It does not militate against his omnipotence, since omnipotence does not mean power to realize a contradiction, and to make human life a training school of character, yet shut out the possibility of sin, would be to realize a contradiction.

But we saw that there was one thing which it might still be legitimate to ask of God before we should be content to call him both omnipotent and good. Mr. Gladstone, indeed, in his earnest essays on the writings of Butler, protests strongly against any demands being made by us on the character of God or any attempt to vindicate his ways with men. He would have us simply bow down in absolute and unquestioning trust. But trust cannot spring up to order. It must have sure and certain grounds on which to rest. And we cannot trust God while our minds are tortured with apprehensions of injustice or cruelty in his government of man. It is the best and noblest part of our nature, and no idle or captious fancy, that insists on the vindication of his goodness. It is then legitimate to ask whether God has so ordered the conditions of human life that good
should be sure in the end to overcome evil, and righteousness to blot out sin. If he had made goodness his purpose with man, but had not placed man in such conditions that goodness must win in the end, we should still have to think him good, since why else should he have made goodness his purpose with man; but we certainly could not think him omnipotent, since we should see his good purpose in risk of ultimate defeat.

But the conditions of life are such that goodness must prevail in the end. Sin is sooner or later self-destructive, while goodness is reproductive of good. But if that be so—if in the world two forces confront each other, the nature of one of which is to eat itself away, and the nature of the other of which is to reproduce its like, to grow, to spread—then the battle between them may be very long, but in the end the former must necessarily disappear and the latter must necessarily occupy the field.

But is this so, or am I assuming what experience fails to warrant? Why do I say that the force of moral evil is self-consuming, self-exhausting, while the force of moral good is self-increasing, self-sustaining?

Here is one reason. He who practises moral evil seeks his own personal end. But he who practises moral good seeks an unselfish end. Now if ten men seek an unselfish end—say the carrying
of some reform, or the establishment of some hospital—they can all work together in perfect alliance, and the whole sum of moral force devoted to that end is exactly ten-man power, without a fraction of deduction. But suppose that ten men seek each his own selfish end, they may indeed enter into temporary compacts of alliance, but as their final object is not common to them all, but the real final object of Brown is Brown’s pleasure, and of Jones is Jones’s gain, and of Robinson is Robinson’s profit, and so forth through the ten, their respective forces inevitably at certain points work against each other, and weaken or cancel each other, and the total force applied to the common end will not be nearly ten-man power, but only ten-man power minus several fragments of individual power. And so the ten good men will wield a total force indefinitely greater than the ten bad men; and if the world were left to the ten good men and the ten bad men to manage, the force making for good would with certainty sooner or later overcome the force making for evil. And this is how it is that all confederacies of men for good ends exercise a continuous and solid influence for good; while all conspiracies among men for bad ends have in them the elements of their own disruption and decay, and the mischief they can do is sooner or later exhausted.

Then, again, here is another reason. Every
good man, sooner or later, awakens sympathy or enthusiasm on the part of others for his efforts after good, and so generates new forces in other human centres making for the like things. But every bad man, sooner or later, wakens aversion and repulsion on the part of others, and so, not only becomes more and more isolated, but actually generates opposing forces in other human centres making against his own ends.

And here is yet another reason. Every man who practises good grows stronger and stronger. Temperance strengthens his body and mind. Disinterested service braces and invigorates his character. And at fifty, therefore, he has more power for good than he had at thirty. But every man who practises evil grows weaker and weaker. No doubt, there is a certain infection in evil as well as in good. But intemperance weakens the body and the mind. Selfish conduct enfeebles the man-power, makes it flaccid, vacillating, spasmodic, deadens effectiveness. And at fifty, therefore, the bad man usually has less power for evil than at thirty.

And what is true of individuals is true also of communities, of nations, of races.

Nations that are temperate, brave, and conscious of a high ideal grow stronger and stronger, play a larger and larger part in the world, exercise wider and wider influence as long as that character
endures. But nations that are intemperate, luxurious, and unconscious of a high ideal, decay, break up, and disappear. A handful of Athenians overcame a host of Orientals; nor primarily because their generals were cleverer, but because they were morally more sound. And even after a temperate, brave, and noble race has ceased to be so, its dead heroes, its thinkers, its moralists, its artists exercise an undying influence on all future time. But a race that has always been corrupt endures but a brief span, and leaves little influence behind. Athens and Israel are among the most potent influences in the world to this day. But Assyria has been blotted out of the history of the world.

We all believe that if England roots out luxury, intemperance, and selfishness, she will endure, and her people and her thought will become the dominating influence in the world. But if she lets the evils grow, she will pass away like many a bygone power, and it will be left for purer races to guide the destinies of man. But to believe this is to believe that good is stronger than evil, and that God has so ordered the conditions of human life that good is sure in the end to overcome evil, and righteousness to blot out sin.

Walt Whitman gives voice to all that I have just been trying to make clear when he writes, after reading Hegel:—
Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is good steadily hastening towards immortality,
And the vast of all that is called Evil I saw hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead.

Now we saw before that if character was to be God's chief purpose with man, then all that even God's omnipotence could do was thus to order the conditions of human life. That he should so order them was all we could legitimately demand before recognizing that God is good. He has so ordered them. Therefore God is good.

So much for the existence of Sin. Of the two Evils in the world Sin is the greater, Pain the less. It remains to consider Pain.

First, let us take all that mass of pain—that immense area of suffering and sorrow—which is the direct outcome or effect of Sin. The shattered nerves, the aches and pains that come of intemperance, the wretchedness which the selfish man inevitably brings upon himself, the ruin of the gambler—take in any form you will the pain that is the direct issue of sin: no doubt, viewed by itself, all this pain is evil. But viewed as the direct inevitable outcome of sin, can we venture to call it evil still? We have seen that in a moral world the door had to be left open to sin. Would it be better, that being so, that sin should bring no penalty? Would it be better if a man could be selfish all his days and never lose a moment's
happiness thereby? Would you be more inclined to think God good if, when a man degrades himself and blots out the image of God in him by sensual indulgence, he could count on never having a headache or a pain in consequence? No, we all hold and often loudly express the very opposite. Do we not? Sometimes it seems to us (though always falsely) that some man’s sin is not bearing penalty, not bringing him any loss or pain. What do we say then? We cry out against God’s injustice. If the wicked man flourishes like a green bay-tree, we count that a defect in the making of the world. When the oppressor, the cruel man, the inflicter of suffering on others, comes up smiling and jaunty, and we are deluded into the notion that he has succeeded in sinning without retribution, that makes us inclined to doubt God’s goodness. But if that is our way of thinking, then we cannot also lay it as a charge against God that he has so constructed the world that suffering does inevitably result from sin. The suffering indissolubly attached to sin is one great and potent instrument for training men out of sin into virtue.

But I think that some will say, ‘Yes, we agree that God does well so to constitute the world that a man’s sin should involve that man in pain. But it involves too often not himself alone, but others also, in pain. Why should God constitute the world so?’ The sins of the fathers are visited on
the children; the sins of the rich upon the poor; the sins of the dead upon the living. Can this be the law of a God who is good?'

And here indeed you touch a problem which has broken down the faith of many—and chiefly of the good, the sympathetic, the chivalrous. Yet let me say again not often of those who are actually working to mitigate this pain in daily intercourse with it. They see God through it all. Such is the mystery of service.

But can we, looking on at the great drama of the world, justify to ourselves this fact that the innocent suffer through the sins of others?

Well, it is part of a greater fact and inseparable from it. What is that greater fact? That all the universe is one whole, and that the nearer its parts are to each other, the more intimately they act and react on each other. This applies to human beings no less than to the molecules of the physical universe. It has been stated so far as regards human beings in ancient words of sublime simplicity, 'We are members one of another'; 'whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it.' For my part, I grieve indeed over the pains of the innocent; but I cannot bring myself to think that this would be a better world if the pains incurred through sin were limited to the sinner himself. This fact of mutual membership involves great sorrows; but it involves also all
the purest gladness, happiness, and joy that there is in the world. If one man's conduct affected no one but himself, all the beauty and nobility of human life would be sapped at the foundation. The world would not be a colony bound together in fellowship of gladness and sorrow. It would be a vast prison, in which each man, woman, and child had to serve a life-term of solitary confinement.

And further: if my suffering from my sin is God's way of recalling me to a better mind, much more is my child's suffering from my sin God's way of recalling me to a better mind. If every wrongdoer brought trouble on himself alone, the forces making for the destruction of sin would be infinitely less powerful and effective than they are. The force that holds back the hand from striking is far more often the image of the pain which the wrong will bring to others than the image of the pain which it will bring to the man himself. The fact that his sin would break his wife's heart has much oftener kept a man true and pure than the fact that it would bring trouble on his own head. The more carefully you think out what human life would be if the sins of men brought pain to themselves only and left the innocent perfectly happy, the more distinctly, I believe, will you discern that it would be an infinitely sadder and less holy thing than it actually is under the conditions in which God has set it.
And then comes in a consideration of enormous weight, which has been felt most vividly by the best and devoutest. There are qualities in pain and sorrow which render them incomparably the most potent instruments in the making of character. If we theorize about this, we get wrong. Logic would seem to say, 'If God brings great pain on a man, it must make the man revolt against God.' But observation of facts compels us to say, 'No, on the contrary nothing exercises so extraordinary an influence in making men love God as the suffering of great pain at his hands.' Scientific thinking deals with facts as they are, not with a priori notions of what we should expect. And in this matter, the fact as it is, is that goodness is evolved from pain more richly than from any other source. This is what Dr. Martineau says: 'The truest piety is to be learned only in the school of suffering; and, strange to say, its usual characteristic is in a certain brightness and restfulness of spirit, free from the plaintive tones of painless religion; its faith is not shaken, but confirmed, by the shock. It is the observer that whimpers, while the victim sings, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.'

And I say all this after being permitted, by the kindness of the anonymous author, to read in proof an exceedingly clever and earnest little book called 'Evil and Evolution.' In that book the
author contends that a bright and unclouded existence is at least as good a school of character as a life chequered with suffering. I find it impossible to agree with him. Perpetual prosperity seems never to fail to breed selfishness in the heart, and the battle with difficulty seems the indispensable condition for the making of human greatness. Take away all suffering and all wrong, and surely heroism would be blotted out of the history of humanity. It is not a sickly and monastic saintliness that springs from the soil of pain, as this writer would seem to think, but all that we include under the term, ‘manliness.’ Among moderns, Mazzini seems to me the very type of the nobility thus educated—Mazzini, ‘the suffering Messiah of the nineteenth century.’

It is clear then about Pain, first that in a moral world it was much better that Sin should have Pain as its consequence than that it should not, and secondly, that Pain has a great and sacred function among men, namely, the training of them in character. These two facts go an immense way towards solving the difficulty we feel in believing that God can be both omnipotent and all-good, seeing that he permits Pain to exist.

But still the matter, it may be said, is not cleared up wholly. There is much pain in the world which is neither the outcome of human sin nor yet conducive to the training of character.
I doubt myself whether there can be shown to be any human pain which may not in one way or other conduce to character; but I readily admit that there are vast areas of human pain which are not caused by human sin, and also that in the animal world, at any rate, there are vast areas of pain which do not and cannot conduce to the making of character.

Let us look at both these facts:

Vast areas of human pain that are not caused by human sin; by what then are they caused? By the standing, enduring, universal laws of nature—the regular action of the primitive cosmical forces.

Take an example: the cosmical laws which run through the whole physical creation include the fact that the earth slowly cools, and, cooling, contracts and hardens at the surface. This involves in its process an occasional local spasm in the earth-crust. These spasms (called earthquakes) have tens of thousands of years ago become comparatively slight and comparatively rare, leaving the globe, on the whole, well calculated to support human life. But here and there, now and then, a bad earthquake still turns up, because the cooling and hardening and settling are not yet complete. A few millions of years more, and the earth will be too cold to sustain human life. Just now it is, on the whole, admir-
ably adapted for a thriving and vigorous humanity. Ought God to have waited to set any human beings on the earth till the very last earthquake was over? Who will dare to say so? That would have diminished the total number of happy human lives from first to last by thousands of millions. And yet that is exactly what you do say in effect when you point to the destruction which the earthquake wreaks as sign that God is not good.

These cosmical laws sweep through all time and space. Through them, and through them alone, has any universe at all been evolved. For us to stand up and find fault with gravitation or the law of the refraction of light does indeed seem a monstrous specimen of conceit. While to ask that these laws and the like should be suspended whenever a human being is in the way is to ask that God would substitute disorder and confusion for that perfect and universal order which is the very foundation of all society and civilization and progress and human happiness.

When we pass from the human to the animal, from the moral to the immoral world, then, however, Pain seems to wear a new aspect, and we are afresh startled at the sufferings of such multitudes of innocent creatures in a world over which we are told that a good God rules.

It is impossible here to say all I should like to say about animal happiness and pain. But I
would urge every one on whom this problem presses to read with the closest attention the last four pages of the second chapter of Wallace’s ‘Darwinism.’ Wallace, the enthusiastic disciple of Darwin, and himself the greatest living British naturalist, clearly points out the errors involved in estimates like Tennyson’s and Huxley’s of the volume and intensity of the woes of the animals. He shows with absolute lucidity that the phrase ‘the struggle for existence,’ though an excellent scientific expression, gives a most misleading impression of the troubles of animal life. And he—the highest possible authority in this matter—thus sums up: ‘The popular idea of the struggle for existence entailing misery and pain on the animal world is the very reverse of the truth. What it really brings about is the maximum of life and of the enjoyment of life with the minimum of suffering and pain. Given the necessity of death and reproduction—and without these there could have been no progressive development of the animal world—and it is difficult even to imagine a system by which a greater balance of happiness could have been secured.’

There are, however, pains inflicted on animals by mankind which, to my knowledge, hardly less than the awful catalogue of man’s atrocities against man, have tended to shake the faith of many earnest persons in the goodness of God. Some of these
are inflicted in sport, in wantonness, or in mere recklessness; others, and these amongst the most terrible, on the plea of the advancement of science or of mitigating human disease. A tender heart can hardly refrain from longing that God had put all this out of the power of mankind. But it is not easy to conceive how this could have been done. without arbitrary and destructive limitations on the physical capacity or the moral freedom of men. God certainly has ‘laid upon us a mighty trust’; and when we abuse that trust, we do produce real and essential evil; and the torture of animals is real and essential evil. We have yet to rise into a far higher and nobler conception of our fellowship with the animal world. Meanwhile, they who artificially increase the sufferings of races helpless against the might of man, take on themselves a responsibility which it seems impossible to measure.

It seems proper here to say a word about that very ancient mode of solving the Problem of Evil which consists in supposing that, as all good proceeds from God, so all evil proceeds from a personal author and lover of evil; the more so that this time-honoured method of dealing with the matter is revived with wide culture and devout enthusiasm by the writer of that essay on ‘Evil and Evolution’ to which I have already referred. On the surface such a theory seems at once to dispose of the whole
difficulty. God and Devil are contending with each other over the whole area of the universe. All the good is to be put down to the credit of God; all the evil to the account of the Devil.

But, after all, a little reflection suffices to show us that our problem remains exactly where it was. Suppose there be indeed a Prince of Evil. Is he or is he not the creature of him whom our recent essayist constantly speaks of as ‘the Creator,’ or ‘the Supreme Being,’ or simply ‘God’? Is the Devil created by him, and by him endowed with power to bring about whatever evil is in the world?

Let us first suppose that this question is answered in the affirmative. The Devil is God’s creature. It is God who has made him and endowed him with his capacity for evil. Where then do you find any relief from the difficulties which you felt before? You complained that God could not be altogether good if he sent pain into the world and permitted sin in the human heart. But how does it mend matters to suppose that he has done it all through the agency of one single evil spirit? Is it any better to suppose that he has created a single being in whom is concentrated all the malignity which darkens the world, than to suppose that in all his children he has, by the tremendous endowment of Free Will, left open the door to sin? Is it any better to suppose that he has endowed one angel of evil with the power to infuse woe into
myriads of human lives than to suppose that sorrow and pain are conditions inseparable from a moral world? Some evolutionists try to get rid of the idea of creation by dividing up the spiritual endowments of the present world into an infinite number of infinitely small accretions of spiritual power. This Satan theory is the reverse of that fallacious contrivance. It gathers up an infinite number of individual sins and lays them all in one vast lump to the charge of one single creature of God, in the hope of slipping evil into the world without making God responsible. The device is equally vain. A hundred million small acts of creation are creation still, just as much as one all-covering act. One single admission of colossal evil into the world presents precisely the same difficulties to the Theist as a hundred million admissions of fragmentary evils.

Let us then suppose that the Devil is not the creature of him whom our essayist calls ‘the Creator,’ ‘the Supreme Being,’ or simply ‘God’—that he is an independent being, and that God is in no way responsible for him. What then becomes of God? Why, he is God no more in any transcendent sense. He is not the universal Creator; he is not supreme. He is after all only a demi-god, or a god in the sense of the Greek mythology—a celestial hero, contending against evil powers for the happiness and the virtue of his human children. To such a being, such a champion of our cause, our
hearts would no doubt rightly go forth in loyalty and allegiance. But he is not *God*. We have to peer into the darkness behind him for some other being, the true Creator, the true Supreme, the great Eternal, the First Cause, whence have sprung both Spirit of Good and Spirit of Evil, both Ormuzd and Ahriman. And then with him we have to begin again the same great argument. Why did he admit evil into the world? Can he be both all-powerful and all-good? And so from this ancient expedient of a Devil, this *Deus—or diabolus—ex machina* solution of our problem, this audacious cutting of the Gordian knot, we are forced back to some such slow and patient argument as has formed the substance of this chapter.

I conclude, then, finally that neither the existence of Sin nor the existence of Pain—and these two things include all that we mean by the dread word 'Evil'—is in any way inconsistent with the view that God is omnipotent and all-good in any rational and real sense of those two words. Rigid reasoning disposes of the Problem of Evil, and leaves us free to revere and love God as all that the best and holiest have declared him to be. But our judgment is ruled more by warmth of feeling than by rigid reasoning. And in view of some terrible woe or wrong the rigid reasoning will often vanish out of our minds, and the very warmth and fervour of the sympathies which God has kindled in our
hearts will shake for the moment our faith in God’s goodness. The safeguard against that does not lie in rigid reasoning, valuable as that is, but first in engaging ourselves habitually in ministering to the sorrows of the world and trying to lead men towards goodness, and secondly in steeping our spirits day by day in communion with God through those several avenues by which, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, our access to him lies ever open.

In this chapter and in that on the Moral Law I have said much about goodness for its own sake being the proper aim of men and the apparent aim of God for his children. It is, I am convinced, of primary importance that we ourselves should seek first to be good rather than to be happy. But I fully admit that it may sometimes sound harsh to insist that God makes any other purpose paramount in his dealings with us over our happiness. Let me then add a few words which may perhaps be felt to soften and mitigate such a view of the ways of our Heavenly Father with us, his children.

The elder and coarser philosophical teachers taught that pleasure was the chief aim of life. We have all learnt, I suppose, to translate this word ‘pleasure,’ into the less gross term ‘happiness,’ a word of purer and brighter radiance. Let us now carry our translation one step higher still. Let us clarify and exalt the idea of ‘happiness’ into the idea of ‘blessedness,’ and it seems to me that this
great controversy of the highest good falls away and is solved in the larger unity. And I think that we may truly say that in the eternal heart of God the ‘blessedness’ of his children lies as the eternal purpose towards which, under his shaping hand, the whole creation moves.

I ask you to consider if this be not truly so.

On the one hand we have to confess that the purpose of God is our goodness even more than our happiness. But what is goodness? It is nothing less than life in harmony with the laws of God implanted in the universe and in our own spiritual nature. He who lives wholly in such harmony is wholly good. But again what is ‘blessedness’ save this—a state of feeling—a balance of the emotions—in harmony with those same eternal conditions which flow forth from the spiritual structure of the universe? To feel no desires save God’s desires, to feel joy in all that gives joy to God, that is to be in perfect blessedness. Some one has said that happiness is ‘harmony with our surroundings.’ That is true. And blessedness is harmony with those wider and more spiritual surroundings, those all-encompassing and interpenetrating spiritual conditions, of which the soul becomes sensible only as it advances in the life of goodness.

And so the great paradox would seem to be solved. Goodness is the life of harmony with the eternal conditions which spring from the being of
God; and Blessedness (the pure and perfect happiness) is the feeling of that harmony in the life. And so Blessedness and Goodness are but aspects of the one condition. And that manner of conceiving God which contemplates the one as the Supreme End for which he has created life and love, contemplates the other therein no less. And the two ideas—which in their lower phases set the philosophers at war—in their highest coalesce and are no more divided.

Only by us it is to be remembered always, that the goodness, the life, is the thing for which to strive and pray; that the blessedness, the feeling, can only come to such as have forgotten to make search for it and are wholly given over to the purpose of living in accord with God.

And so it is a beautiful and holy world; a world in which, if only we carry up our controversies and our difficulties high enough and contemplate them in the pure light of the shining presence of God, they fade out and are gone; a world in which with high and happy hope, with deep and undoubting faith, with full-orbed, self-forgetful love, we have to put our hand in God’s and go whither he by his Holy Spirit leads the way.
CHAPTER VI

ON ‘MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM

We set before ourselves at the beginning of this little book the question: ‘How may men know God?’ In the first chapter I tried to show that we must not expect to be able to reason the whole answer out by pure syllogism without assumption, because none of our knowledge in any department can be reasoned out by syllogism without assumption. All reasoning proceeds on assumption. ‘All science starts with hypothesis.’ Syllogism cannot begin without premises to build on. The assumption necessary to reasoning about God is the assumption that our own natural faculties are veracious. The premises necessary for syllogisms about God are those truths which are given in the deliverances of these faculties. My whole contention has been that in normal human nature there is provision for theistic belief—that assuming the truthfulness of human faculty, it follows that God is real and good and lovable.
You will no doubt have observed that throughout this long argument I have never once appealed to any authority whatever outside our own faculties. My appeal has been to the common reason, the common conscience, the common emotion. I have cited famous reasoners and teachers; but only to put what they have said to the test of this common reason, conscience, and emotion. Have their utterances stood this test, I have adopted them; have they broken down under it, I have rejected them. I have in no case said, 'This proposition must be true because it is vouched for by this Church, by this Book, or by this Man.' Herein I have departed from the almost universal practice of such as write or speak in the name of the Christian Religion. However free and able their reasonings upon that which is given them by Creed or Bible or Prophet—nay, even though in some portions of their argument they venture to go behind Creed, Bible, or Prophet for their premises, seeking them in our common human nature—all that vast class of writers of whatever school who are called Christian Apologists, do base some part of their argument on premises borrowed from Church, Book, or Teacher, or at least when they have constructed their argument, deem it incomplete till they have shown that Church, Book, or authoritative Teacher teaches just that same thing.
Now, though I shall have more to say about this in the next chapter, yet I may explain at once that my departure from this procedure is not due to any undervaluation on my part of that consensus of wise and pious men which may constitute the Creed of a Church, or of that gathering together of the words of the great and good which may invest a Book with the dignity of a Bible, or of that insight beyond the insight of ordinary men which makes the Prophet or the Seer. But my position is that the very existence of the Prophet and the Seer, the very existence, too, of Creeds and Bibles so far as these are representative of the wisdom of the Prophet or the Seer, is based on the normal human faculty which the Prophet and the Seer share with the rest of us, though in them it is greater in degree, more luminous, powerful, and distinct.

For, indeed, it is in this fact that all the authority of the inspired man lies. His apprehension of divine truth is keener than yours; and that which you only apprehend when it is suggested to you, he apprehends in the fulness of his insight without human suggestion. The authority with which Jesus of Nazareth is said to have been felt by ordinary hearers to speak lay in this, that when he declared religious verities, they felt inwardly that what he said answered to the dim and hitherto unrealized monitions within their own breasts. It
was as when a note is struck on a great organ or blown from a trumpet, it sets a thrill in a neighbouring piano or violin the same note in tremulous response. This last is the violin's own music, wrought of its own faculty. Yet it would have been silent but for the call of the larger and mightier instrument. Or it is as when some noble singer is singing glorious music, but he does not so clearly articulate that you can gather all the words. Then a friend, who knows the song well, repeats the words to you; and next time the noble singer lifts up his voice in the same great hymn, you hear every word distinctly, and marvel at the previous dullness of your ears. If a man is about to do wrong, and another argues with him, he may altogether fail to touch his conscience. But let the remonstrant fling out the force of his own conscience: 'You know it is wrong,' and the man of feeble moral fibre, whether he heed it or not, feels at once the quickening of his own conscience in response.

I believe, then, for my part in no other Revelation, no other Inspiration, no other spiritual Authority than that the seat of which lies in the Divine Word voiced in the common faculties of man.

Churches, Bibles, Prophets are media of Revelation, are vehicles of Inspiration, are of Authority to us all, just in the measure in which they quicken
in us an answering inward sense of the verity of that which they allege. Whentoever and in whatsoever they fail to awake in us such response, they may or may not be true, but for us they are not and they cannot be media of Revelation, vehicles of Inspiration, Authoritative Teachers.

Although, then, these Societies, Literatures, and Individual Teachers may be and often are helpful to us beyond all measure as quickening our own moral and spiritual sense, although without them we should be in comparative darkness and ignorance, yet they do not affect the real bases and sources of fundamental religious belief, which lie in the normal faculties which are ours as well as theirs.

And accordingly in these faculties I have asked you to put your trust. I have maintained that by our sense of Cause we know God as Power; that by our Moral Sense we are filled with awe of him as Righteousness; that through the sense of Beauty we perceive him as Love.

Now, amid all the official orthodoxies of the world which have enticed or constrained men to rest their faith on authoritative documents or teachers, there have always again and again sprung up men who have reverted to these innate faculties of their own and sought to know God through them. Some have relied wholly on intellectual methods, and these have been the
world's philosophers. But others have chiefly relied on the more spiritual faculties, and from these have emerged those profoundly interesting groups of men who are known as Mystics.

The word 'mystic' is no relation whatever to the word 'misty,' though many loose talkers seem to think that that is what it means. It is in its original Greek of the same stock as 'mystery.' But, though cousins, the two terms, as used in modern English, have formed quite different connexions and can hardly be said to be speaking acquaintances. The best definition of the mystic known to me is in the first chapter of Dr. Charles Beard's Hibbert Lectures. 'The mystic,' says he, 'is one who claims to be able to see God and divine things with the inner vision of the soul—a direct apprehension, as the bodily eye apprehends colour, as the bodily ear apprehends sound.' And he goes on: 'His method, so far as he has one, is simply contemplative: he does not argue, or generalize, or infer: he reflects, broods, waits for light.'

Now, if this is a true account of mysticism, then wherever there is spiritual religion, there in its measure is mysticism. When Mr. Beard says that the mystic does not argue, of course he only means that the arguing does not belong to the mysticism. But a man may be a mystic and a philosopher, too. He may claim to see God with the inner
vision, so being a mystic, and then he may proceed to defend the claim by reasoning, so turning philosopher. Some mystics have done this and some have not. But wheresoever men have revolted from the claim of Church or Creed to dictate the terms of their faith, and have struck direct for conscious contact with God, have declared that they heard him immediately in the voice of conscience, saw him immediately in spiritual contemplation, felt him immediately in the rapture, the ecstasy, the solemn awe, the deep peace of the soul, there there have been mystics and mysticism. And there is never any pure and unspoiled religion, but some element of mysticism lies at its root and gives it its sweetness and beauty.

The Bible is full of mysticism. A text starts up in my mind, as I write, from each of the Testaments carrying the very essence of mysticism in it. ‘Be still and know that I am God,’ sings the Psalmist, and we are reminded of that form of mystic piety called ‘quietism’—an absolute stillness of the soul in which the sense of being wrapped in God steals over it. ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,’ says Jesus. And the text serves for a condensation of half the mystical writing of the fourteenth and following centuries.

You will perceive then that, in my view, the
term 'mysticism,' so far from being rightly used as a term of reproach or scorn, really represents the central and ever-abiding principle of true religion. But just because I believe and feel this so strongly, and have indeed in these chapters urged on you much that is in the true sense mystical, I hold myself bound to warn you against both the intellectual and the moral dangers into which an enthusiastic mysticism is apt to run.

The intellectual danger of mysticism is that it should pass through and beyond the contact of man with God and God with man into the identification of man with God and God with man. Passing by the mystics of the ancient East, I suppose the first danger-signal in Christian mysticism may be found in such expressions of the Fourth Gospel as that in which Christ is made to pray for the disciples 'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us.' This bears, indeed, quite well the interpretation that all that is sought is complete harmony between man and God. But it also runs the danger of being interpreted as a seeking of actual unity, amounting to identity in personal essence of man and God. And so in the fourteenth century we have Eckhart, a great Master of Mystics, so describing the coalescence of man and God, that he says, 'While God makes himself man in us, he makes us divine in him.' This and the like are so beautiful, poetic ex-
pression so readily runs into similar forms, that we are apt to be lulled into unconsciousness that we are passing the line between harmony and unity. To be at one with God is one thing; to be one with God is another thing. Madame Guyon allures us in her exquisite hymnody into the like danger. If we take the following as poetry, it is as pure religion as the soul of man ever breathed forth. But if we take it as a literal expression of fact, we have passed the border line, and our mysticism has become the destroyer of our own sense of separate personality.

Madame Guyon writes:

I love my God, but with no love of mine,
   For I have none to give:
I love thee, Lord; but all the love is thine,
   For by thy life I live.
I am as nothing, and rejoice to be
   Emptied, and lost, and swallowed up in thee.

Such rapturous utterance entrances the religious mind. But it is absolutely essential to the balance of truth that we keep our grasp through it all on the fundamental fact that the man's Ego, the human self, is not God's Ego, the Divine Self, however fully the soul feels itself penetrated and permeated by the God who encompasses and sustains it.

To put the intellectual danger of mysticism into the language of philosophy, we shall have to say that the danger is lest the distinction between sub-
ject and object should be lost. The union of man with God must be like a marriage. The more perfect the union of will and feeling between man and woman in marriage, the more perfect is the marriage. But the very essence of marriage consists in the separate personalities of the two thus joined together. It is the sense of union, not with self, but with another than self, that constitutes all the beauty and solemnity of marriage. And in like manner it is the sense of union with Another, even with God, always other than self, however self be penetrated by God, that constitutes all the truth and holiness of religion.

In the most famous and influential of all the more recent modes of philosophical thought—that which is broadly known as Hegelianism—the mystic tendency has received a great development, and the human soul—together with the outward universe—seems to be absorbed into the being of God to such a degree that man is deprived of any proper individuality at all and of any freedom of will. And some, who are by no means Hegelians, such as my friend, Professor Upton, in his most admirable and luminous Hibbert Lectures on the Bases of Religious Belief, while fighting hard for the real freedom of the human will, yet are greatly allured by the idea of a certain flowing over of God into the human soul, so that a man is partly, or in some aspects, a separate individuality, but partly also,
or in other aspects, of the very substance of God and not an individuality distinct from him. The chief intellectual temptation that leads thinkers of a very different school from Hegel’s to make this concession seems to be that they may thereby be able to account for the wonderful fact of conscious communion between God and man. But I cannot help thinking that they deceive themselves in supposing that such a conception will really help them at all. The bridge by which one consciousness passes over to another consciousness is one that the thought of man can never conceive or even begin to understand. And it does not surely in any way make it easier if we say that there is a divine, universal, or God-consciousness in me as well as an individual-consciousness. The puzzle of how one of these passes into the other is not one whit mitigated by a juggler of words which declares them both to be comprised in my own person. The fact is that there are a multitude of these ‘bridges’ in the physical and spiritual universes, in which we are obliged to believe, but which we cannot even begin to explain. Such is the bridge between a prick of my finger and a sensation of pain. Such is the bridge between a volition of mine and the lifting of my fist. Such is the bridge between the contagious emotion of two kindred souls. Such is the bridge by which gravitation acts between two distant bodies. Efforts are always
being made in philosophy to figure forth or explain these 'bridges,' but such efforts are always and necessarily vain. They bridge over chasms which human thought cannot bridge.

It is really no easier to conceive of gravitation acting through a 'medium' than through a vacuum; and it would seem to have been pure dogmatism on Sir Isaac Newton's part to describe such action through a vacuum as absurd. And it is really no easier to conceive of God holding communion with the human soul by supposing God to be in part a constituent of that soul, than if God and the soul are absolutely separate and distinct persons. Neither science nor philosophy has any claim to state that God cannot institute such communion; and experience has every claim to state that God does institute such communion.

And certainly the voice of experience goes strongly for saying that the inflow of strength or peace or gladness in answer to the soul's passion of prayer is not an inflow from another element of one's own nature supervening on the weakness or the grief of the properly individual element. On the contrary, the whole force and sacredness of this experience lie in the consciousness that the stream of hallowing grace comes, as I have said, from Another than oneself—One with whom the soul is brought, not into identity, but into communion, not into unity, but into union. If a
man have no clear sense of this in his own spiritual experience, let him read the story of that archetypal prayer, the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane. Surely that cry of the Master was not to an element in himself, but to One above and beyond; and that influx of spiritual might was no mere shifting of the elements of his own soul, but the coming of the Father to the rescue of his Son.

But the danger run by mysticism is a moral and spiritual danger as well as an intellectual one. The strength for a noble moral life which religion gives lies in the bestowal of a Companion, a Friend, on the lonely soul of man. But God cannot be felt as a Companion, a Friend, unless the man retain a vivid consciousness of his own individuality, a vivid consciousness that he is a separate person with a personal centre of his own capable of its own volition, its own emotion, its own personal life other than that of any other person human or divine.

And indeed history supplies us with some melancholy demonstrations of the danger in question. Mr. Beard very beautifully says of the mystic: 'He prepares for divine communion by a process of self-purification: he detaches his spirit from earthly cares and passions: he studies to be quiet that his soul may reflect the face of God.' Yes, but this very temper often holds a man off from the stirring duties of active
life which no man may with impunity shun. 'The morals of mysticism,' says Mr. Beard, 'are almost always sweet and good.' Yes, but as he allows, not quite always. When a man has arrived at that degree of mysticism in which he thinks that all his feelings are divine, the time comes when evil feelings also are taken to be of God—to be indeed God's feelings; and terrible sensualities have sprung out of this fatal error. Mysticism has sometimes toppled over into anomianism, which is Greek for lawlessness. Men have first said, 'I am filled with God; my emotions are all of God'; and then they have proceeded to ignore all moral law save these feelings themselves; and a distorted piety, an exaggerated pietism, has silenced and destroyed that other voice of God which we know as conscience.

But once warned of the intellectual and moral dangers of mysticism, let us revert to its virtues. 'Mysticism,' says a very great living philosopher and scholar, Dr. Otto Pfleiderer, 'overleaps all those channels by which religion is at once interpreted and obscured in the dogma and the worship of the Church, in order to find its life directly in religion itself, to experience the revelation of God in the heart of the individual, and to possess salvation now and here, in the sense of most intimate union with God.' 'As the kernel of religion,' he adds, 'does certainly consist in this,
it cannot be without direct advantage for the philosophical comprehension of religion in general to sound these depths of the mystical consciousness as a guide to the innermost features of the religious life.’ Those philosophers, like Mill, who will recognize no inlets of knowledge whatever in man except the avenues of the senses, naturally treat mysticism with impatient scorn. But every one of us who believes that we have faculties of direct apprehension apart from and prior to the senses, is a mystic just in the measure in which he holds that those faculties can directly apprehend that Eternal Power and Love to which we give the name of God.

If we desire an exemplar of the just extent to which mysticism may go, we have but to turn to the great Teacher who has given the world Christianity. No religious genius was ever more sensitive to the presence of God, or more vividly and joyously conscious of his touch upon the soul. None who has worn our flesh has ever lived with spirit more penetrated by the divine spirit. The communion which to most of us is the precious experience of our rarest and most sacred hours, would seem to have been to him the bright and invigorating experience of every day, the source of illumination and strength in every difficulty and every temptation, the uplifting consolation in the deepest and darkest sorrows. Yet no language
can be more pronounced or emphatic than that in which, at any rate in the Synoptic (and, as I believe, more historic) Gospels, he speaks of—yes, and speaks to—God as other than, separate from, himself. He gave enduring currency to the one symbol which best expresses this dualism between man and God—this fellowship without merging of the distinctive personalities—when he himself called him and taught his hearers to call him 'Father.' No term could have been coined more distinctly illustrating at once the perfect closeness of converse and communion open to man with God and the absolute distinction of the personal centre of the human worshipper from the personal centre of the Divine Being. I have been accustomed to think my own thoughts about much which Jesus is alleged to have taught. But I find nothing in literature which seems to me to comprise in brief so perfect, so irrefragable a philosophy of religion as the Nazarene's term 'Our Father' as summing up what God is to man and all the relations between the Eternal Source of all things and the human soul.

A controlled and sober mysticism then, a mysticism that retains the full sense of the human personality as endowed with a centre of its own apart from the divine personality, yet by vividness of conscience feels God and by purity of heart sees God, nurtures a potency of
manhood, an effectiveness of moral and spiritual character which nothing else can. It is men with a vivid sense on the one hand of their own personal being as responsible moral agents and on the other hand of God's actual touch with the soul at every point who everywhere make the renovations of humanity by their clearness of vision, their moral vitality, their sense of the smallness of conventions beside divine verities, their absolute fearlessness of men, their perfect faith in the power of man to realize his sonship to God. Such men are always condemned as heretics, generally rebuked as atheists. It is because their burning sense of the God-presence makes them indifferent to historic modes of stating it, impatient of conventions which deaden or conceal it. Of such on very different planes, but still always of such, have been, for example, Jesus, Paul, Luther, Wesley, Garrison, Mazzini, Theodore Parker. And it is a mark of such men that, while rousing the deadliest antagonism of some, they kindle in others passionate enthusiasm and regenerate the lives of these. In the proportion in which the tremendous twin truths of your own responsible personality and your power of communion with the personality of God possess you, will you rise to the like power and influence with such men as I have named.

To the above plea for the absolutely separate
personality of man, let me very briefly add a vindication of the use of the term ‘person’ as applied to God. Human persons, it is true, are limited beings, limited in power, in consciousness, in understanding, in faculty of every kind. (But the essence of personality does not lie in such limitation, but in the consciousness of selfhood, of a self-determining will and self-contained capacity of thought. Nor have I, I must confess, ever been able to understand why so many even of the most spiritual interpreters of the universe assume that ‘an infinite person’ is a contradiction in terms. At any rate, ‘person’ is the highest entity of which we have knowledge and of which we can conceive. And while I do not doubt that the Being of God comprises that which infinitely transcends the loftiest attributes of which we are able to frame an idea, I hold that we approach nearer to the absolute truth by describing God as ‘person’ than by refraining from such description. He surely has whatever ‘person’ has, even though he do not lack what ‘person’ lacks. ‘In any case,’ as I wrote several years ago in my ‘Man’s Knowledge of God,’ ‘if a religious man denies the personality of God, it is that he holds God to be above Person, not below, more than Person, not less.’ And I rejoice to add to this, words with which I was not then acquainted, written by Prof. Joseph Le Conte in
his truly admirable book on 'Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought.' 'In our view of the nature of God,' says this clear thinker and lucid writer, 'the choice is not between personality and something lower than personality, viz., an unconscious force operating Nature by necessity, as the materialists and pantheists would have us believe; but between personality as we know it ourselves and something inconceivably higher than personality. . . . Self-conscious personality is the highest thing we know or can conceive. We offer him the very best and truest we have when we call him a Person; even though we know that this, our best, falls far short of the infinite reality.'

Before bringing this chapter to an end, it will perhaps be useful to refer in a few sentences to the method of reasoning which I have followed in this book. I have throughout ignored entirely certain great and momentous philosophical controversies which touch the very foundations of thought. I have, indeed, told you that some thinkers aver that the very idea of 'cause' is a self-deception of our own minds, that it is a form of thought to which we are condemned, but which corresponds to no objective reality. But I have not told you that the same is the case with the idea of space, with the idea of time, with the idea of matter. The most illustrious of all modern philosophers,
Emmanuel Kant, taught that 'space' and 'time' are 'forms of thought' and forms of thought only. He meant that they are a kind of mould in our own minds into which we are obliged to pour our ideas of the universe and the objects and events therein, but that our being obliged to think in that shape is no guarantee that space and time are real. Again, there are others who teach that matter has no real substantiality in itself, but is perhaps merely a name we give to bundles of forces which are not material at all, but purely spiritual; while others again teach that matter also is purely and solely a 'form of thought'—a mould through which we are obliged to pass our ideas of the existences around us. And yet I have throughout calmly talked of space, time, and matter as if they were as indubitably sure as the Ego which a man is himself, and God—the only two existences of which Cardinal Newman, even as a boy, felt sure.

Is it, then, that I think the contention that space, time, matter, are only forms of thought unworthy of notice? Far indeed from that. The suggestion is to me of profound philosophical interest. And again, with regard to matter, even without going so far as to reduce it to a mere form of human thought, I am pretty sure that our current conception of it (if, indeed, we have any current conception of it!) is delusive, and I am very much taken by the sug-
gestion that what we call "atoms" are in reality vortices of pure force; though I feel that that too would be a dangerous hypothesis to insist on as abstract truth, inasmuch as a "vortex" implies both time and space, and it is difficult to conceive of force save as acting on something, and that something is pretty hard to distinguish from "matter." To parody the old Latin proverb, you may thrust out matter with a pitchfork, but it always turns up again. But, whether it be true or false that space, time, and matter are only forms of thought, or that the idea of matter is to be dissolved in the idea of force, at any rate space, time, and matter are forms of thought—necessary forms of human thought; and, therefore, you and I, who are human, can do no other by any mental legerdemain than think them. If they are forms of thought built into the structure of our minds we must think in those forms, and it is vain to try to escape.

Does that, then, invalidate our reasoning? Far from it. Some thinkers strive to think of the universe and reason of it outside these forms. The result is inevitable philosophic confusion and darkness. Here and there they seem to get outside of the conditions of space and time and matter in their reasonings about the universe, but at the next turn they inevitably drop back into them; and there is and can be no consistency in their
language or their thought. He who thinks by cleverness to transcend his own intellectual nature necessarily meets with the like fate to the man who half-way up the ladder tries to pull the ladder after him that he may mount to a loftier height.

Whether you prefer to say that our faculties are the direct gift of God or that they are the product of evolution by survival of the fittest, we shall get nearer to truth, you may be sure, by faithfully using them than by any struggle to get outside them. Space, time, matter may be ideas corresponding to fact, or they may have in them elements of illusion. But either way they are guides for our thinking. In some higher state of being we may be able to escape from them and think a philosophy that dispenses with them. But the philosophy which we think now and here can only in the end prove translatable, transposable into that purer language of thought if we have patiently thought it out along the lines of our existing mental constitution.

In all things these minds we have now can at best think relative truth, not absolute. Only remember that relative truth is truth. Truth for us consists in truly apprehending, not existences in themselves, but the relations existing between existences. I judge, when I find in my mind certain unescapable forms of thought common and
necessary to me and to all men, that it is within the boundaries of those forms that I can most truly apprehend these relations which for me are the sum of truth. Therefore I put in a plea for the canon of Common Sense in philosophy, the canon which bids us think along the lines of the intellectual constitution common to our race and constituting its sense in the realm of thought.
CHAPTER VII

WHAT THEN OF THE BIBLE?

In this little book I have tried firmly to base the fundamental elements of religious belief on the deliverances of our own nature. I have contended that we have within ourselves, if we properly interpret and wisely trust our own faculties, incontrovertible testimony that we and the world in which we live are the offspring of God, that he is our Father, that we are his children, that he cares for us and loves us, that we may enter into actual communion with him in prayer, drawing from that communion peace, gladness, and moral strength, and that he will bring about in the end the triumph of good over evil, of righteousness over sin.

Whether I have been in any measure successful in that contention it is for others, not for me, to judge. But I desire once more to point out that, in this course of reasoning, I have followed a route quite other than that which is commonly pursued
by the defenders of Christian faith. Indeed very many of those defenders of the faith would, I am afraid, straightway condemn my little book as one of vain speculation, and myself as a vain speculator substituting the questionable imaginations of human reason for the certainties delivered once for all to men in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. This would without doubt be the attitude, for instance, of so learned, liberal, and persuasive a disputant as Mr. Gladstone, who recently followed up his splendid edition of the writings of that famous theologian, Bishop Butler, with a volume of 'Studies' subsidiary to that author's works. For Mr. Gladstone takes the volume known as the Holy Bible, together with the solemn œcuménical pronouncements of the Christian Church in the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds and elsewhere, as the very starting-point for any religious inquiry. These and these alone to him represent certainty, solid ground where one may plant one's feet firmly without fear of error; while the use of reason outside that certified territory or the adducing of considerations that are not based on a text or a creed, he regards as at best a dangerous business, and one the results of which must be rigidly tested by comparison with Bible or with Prayer Book.

The position taken up by Mr. Gladstone and by a host of less illustrious controversialists is that in
the Scriptures (to pass by the later declarations of the Church) God has once for all revealed to us such measure of religious truth as it is meet for us to be acquainted with, and that any excursion into outside speculation is legitimate only if it holds itself in readiness at all points to be checked, corrected, and condemned by reference to this supreme authority.

According to such thinkers, no doctrine resting on other foundations can ever claim the same certainty or take the same rank as belongs to those which are found upon the Scripture page. These have a divine seal which is impressed on the utterance of no secular philosopher, the writings of no unauthorized theologian.

Thus, for example, Mr. Gladstone lays it down as an absolutely unquestionable fact 'that our Lord preached to certain disembodied spirits, and that these were the spirits of the men who had been disobedient in the days of Noah,' and founds a far reaching argument on that event, the ground of his certainty being that the statement occurs in the so-called First Epistle of Peter. But he rebukes very severely those—with Tennyson among the number—who from general considerations of the character of God, argue that he will at last win the souls of all his children to himself, because there is no text in the New Testament which, in so many words, gives us that assurance.

Thus then the attitude of this distinguished man
and a host of lesser writers is this:—Whatever is stated in Scripture is to be accepted absolutely, because the Scriptures are a Divine Revelation; whatever is not stated in Scripture is a mere human speculation and, if incompatible with any declaration of Scripture, is to be ruthlessly rejected, no matter what reasons may be adduced in its support. Hence the one sole ground of real religious knowledge is, we are taught, the Bible—together, say some, with the authoritative pronouncements of the organized Church.

Now such a view is in absolute contradiction to the view which I have advocated, the view, that is, that our religious belief is to rest on our own innate faculties. On the one hand, we have the view that religious belief is to rest on and make its final appeal to reason, conscience, and the immediate flash of God upon the soul. On the other hand, we have the view that the only secure basis for religious belief is in a Divine Revelation comprised in that particular book or collection of books which we call the Bible.

There could not be a more far-reaching divergence in first principles. What then are we to say to this tremendous claim put forward for the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures—this claim that they shall take superior rank to reason and conscience and be the paramount authority for our beliefs about God and Man and eternal life.
There seems to me to be one thing to be said, which is absolutely fatal to this extraordinary claim. That one thing is this: The claim itself can only be established, if at all, by the use of those very faculties which this Divine Revelation is to supersede. If you cannot trust our reasoning powers to begin with, then neither can you trust them to establish this prodigious claim for the Christian Scriptures. Even if it were true that these Scriptures were an infallible revelation of the religious truth, they could only be proved to be so by the marshalling together of an immense and protracted argument entering into countless details and resting on an enormous mass of minute and varied learning. All except the picked scholars of the world, all the ordinary mass of mankind, must simply accept the alleged authority of Scripture on the word of others, whose learning and whose reasoning they have no possible means of putting to the test. But that is an act of intellectual suicide;—and seeing that God has given each one of us reason and conscience of his own, to hand these over, bound and gagged, at the command of those who can give us no guarantee of their authority, would seem to be as gross and flagrant an act of infidelity as it is possible for the mind of man to conceive.

Let us consider for a moment, by way of illustration, how many propositions of an intrin-
sically disputable nature Mr. Gladstone has to take for granted before he can build up that theological argument of his on the basis of the propositions that ‘our Lord preached to certain disembodied spirits, and that these were the spirits of the men who had been disobedient in the days of Noah.’ The text on which this is based runs thus: ‘he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.’

Mr. Gladstone has to assume (and cheerfully does so) that (1) this Epistle is by the Apostle Peter, who (2) wrote under an inspiration which guarantees his accuracy in all matters of fact; that (3) the passage cited has always formed an integral part of this Epistle, and (4) is therefore rightfully included in Canonical Scripture. Further, he must assume that (5) the Church is right in interpreting ‘prison’ as ‘hell’ in which the spirits of the unsaved survive in a disembodied state, that (6) the story of the flood as told in Genesis is substantially correct, and that (7) of the whole population of the world eight souls only were saved from death by drowning.

All these propositions, then, must be accepted before we can go one step with Mr. Gladstone in his argument. But on most of these propositions
the learned and scientific world is divided, with a steadily growing weight of opinion on the adverse side. Yet every text upon which Mr. Gladstone can build involves, if it is to be treated as of absolute authority, a similar array of assumptions the legitimacy of which only the learned can decide. In how lamentable a dilemma, then, does the unlearned man find himself if he submit to Mr. Gladstone’s leading! Faith, hope, trust in God, the blessed life of religion, must wait till the learned have decided all these things, and decided them too in a sense contrary to the existing trend of opinion, and convinced the unlearned of the authority of their decision.

The great facts of religion are the Power, the Wisdom, and the Goodness of God, the reality of communion between the human spirit and the Divine, the conquering power of Good over Evil. It is given to us to know these truths from our own reason and our own experience. To remove them from this natural basis on which God has set them and stake them on the theory that a particular set of books written from seventeen to twenty-five hundred years ago, and selected some fifteen hundred years ago by a particular group of ecclesiastics to the exclusion of all the rest of human literature, contain and constitute the sole authoritative revelation of God to man, would be as insane as to attempt to root up the Great
Pyramid from the platform of rock on which it has rested for seventy centuries in order to balance it on its apex on the crest of one of the slim and slender palm-trees that rear their graceful forms between the desert and the Nile. The doctrine that the Bible and the Bible only comprises the revelation of God to Man was invented to make religious faith secure; as a matter of fact, it cuts off religious faith from its true and broad foundation to rest it on a slender Eiffel tower of propositions of questionable soundness in themselves, and but loosely bolted together, which only the learned can test, and which most of the learned emphatically reject.

We have then to accept the position that reason and conscience are not to be tested by the statements of the Bible, but the statements of the Bible are to be tested by reason and conscience.

Is then the Bible, that ark of so many sacred associations, the Bible which has gathered round it the affections and the reverence of such multitudes of the best and noblest of our race, to be incontinently cast aside, as a literature whose pretensions have been exposed, a scripture having no value for enlightened religious men?

That is far indeed from being my opinion.

There was a time in the history of human thought when the writings of Aristotle were taken almost as a Bible of the intellect. It was enough to show
that such and such a philosophical theory had been put forward by Aristotle. If that were so, then it was thought that the theory in question was sufficiently established. There was no more to be said about it. But with the light of the New Learning some four centuries ago, men began to feel that, great as Aristotle was, he was not infallible, that he had only used with exceptional power and ingenuity that reasoning faculty with which God had endowed the sons of men generally, and that, if one were to accept an Aristotelian doctrine, it must not be merely because Aristotle had laid it down, but because it stood the test of thoughtful reasoning and inquiry. Did men therefore fling Aristotle aside? On the contrary, he was thenceforth studied with a more mature intelligence, and by the intrinsic merits of his writings, their balanced wisdom, their admirable method, their marvellous outlook on human nature and the world, they have held their own from that day to this as classics in the realm of thought; and they are woven inextricably into all the best and wisest reasoning, enter into the structure of the daily thought of multitudes who never heard the name of Aristotle, and have helped to discipline the mind of modern Europe.

And in like manner that truly wonderful literature which we call the Bible, though we no longer approach it as the one infallible treasure-house of
divine truth, yet has entered into the very structure of our faith and trust, has fed and disciplined our spiritual life, has helped to make vivid in our hearts precious trusts and hopes which have never been expressed in loftier strain or with truer touch on the deepest truths which God writes in our souls. The old Greek story of Pygmalion always seems to me most happily to illustrate the difference between the manner in which the old way of regarding the Bible affects men and that in which under this new way it touches our hearts. You remember that Pygmalion wrought in marble the figure of a nymph. Stately and beautiful was her form, but she had no life in her. Then at his prayer the statue descended from the pedestal and became flesh with all the glowing warmth and loveliness of a living woman, and a woman’s heart beat within her bosom. In like manner the Bible has indeed come down from the pedestal on which it stood, but not to be dishonoured, but to be quickened with the life of our humanity, and to be the companion, the comforter, the inspirer of our daily life.

Open such a volume as Mr. Moncure Conway’s Sacred Anthology or the more recent collection of passages from the Scriptures of all nations made by Mr. Coupland. Turn over its pages. You shall find a great wealth of beautiful selections from the sacred books of the Hindu, the Parsee, the China-
man, the Arab, and many others. But it is the Hebrew and the Christian excerpts that arrest your attention and go straight to your heart. For this Hebrew people among whom this literature arose, had the very genius of religion; and there is nothing in the rest of literature quite to equal or to parallel, on their own lines, the lofty pæans of the later Isaiah, the ethical glow of Micah, the seraphic gladness of some of the Psalms, the noble pleadings of Paul, and, above all else, the Beatitudes and Parables of Jesus, the Master.

But the condition of arriving at a true appreciation of the Bible is that we let it take its place among the literature of the world, that we do not fence it off or separate it or guard it in any special way. When I have been visiting the sick and have offered to read to them from the Bible, I have sometimes asked what passage I should select, and received the answer that it is all equally good. That is idolatry, not appreciation. The chronicles of the Kings of Israel are not 'equally good' with the twenty-third Psalm or the magnificent fortieth of Isaiah, nor the story of Ananias and Sapphira with the great speech ascribed to Paul at Athens or his own sublime account of charity or love. We must set down this great literature of Israel among the other noblest products of human genius, the writings of Homer, of Plato, of Dante, of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Tennyson. Some things
in each of these are worth ten times more than some things in the Bible. But the Bible as a whole is worth more than all these put together. Remove all artificial restraints and barriers, and the power of the writers of the Old and New Testaments over the hearts and consciences of men will assert itself victoriously, whatever be their theories of inspiration and of theological authority.

And if to the due appreciation of the Bible this freedom of estimate be essential, much more is that so with the central and transcendent person in whom it culminates. Those who have most endangered the ascendancy of Jesus of Nazareth over the affections and the loyalty of men are those who have most insisted on theological definitions of his nature. There is at the present moment a considerable movement in certain Evangelical circles, while acknowledging that the Bible as a whole can no longer serve as the ultimate basis of religious belief, to assign this function without qualification to the words of Jesus Christ. No writer has pleaded for this position more persuasively than Dr. John Watson—better known as 'Ian Maclaren'—in his essay on 'The Mind of the Master.' Such writers would seem to forget, indeed, that the actual words of Jesus are not preserved to us in any contemporary monuments, and that the Gospels themselves must necessarily be subjected to a like criticism with other Bible
documents; so that it would be hard to draw up a catena of the utterances of Jesus with that absolute and indubitable certainty which would be necessary were they to be made the one sole basis of our religious faith. But, waiving that difficulty, let us rather insist that the authority of the beautiful sayings of Jesus rests on the fact of the response which they awaken in our own moral and spiritual nature; and that the authority of our moral and spiritual nature does not rest on the sayings of Jesus. To say this is exacted from us by loyalty to God; and it assuredly involves no disloyalty to that wondrous Son of Man. He is pre-eminently a man among men. It is as a man among men that his moral and spiritual power becomes transcendent. Set him down, this peasant son of Mary, among the millions of his fellow-men. Let him find his own place in the company of the world’s heroes, prophets, martyrs, saints. Have no fear for him. Let us meet him eye to eye and clasp his hand in ours. Let us talk with him on the way, kneel with him on the mountain-side, move with him among the crowd, hear the cordial of his speech to weary men and stricken women, watch him at the last through the shadows of Gethsemane and the gloom of Calvary, and you need have no fear but what he will assert his power over our thought, our imagination, our emotion, our life.
The religious life is the life in which a man knows God as the ever-present Father, hears and obeys his living voice in conscience, and holds intimate communion with him in prayer. But though that life be open to us all, yet our realization of the God-presence is apt to faint and fail, and in the tumult of human affairs we are apt to lose living touch with the Heavenly Father. Then is it a help beyond expression to lift up our eyes and behold the face of him, the great Teacher, or to listen to the words that fall from his gentle lips. For then we see and know the life of the human child with God in its fullest realization. It is not because Jesus has told me so that I believe that the Eternal God is my Heavenly Father, but because God himself has told me so in the hours of rapt communion. But when I lose my way in life, and through the dimness of my spiritual vision know not how it behoves a child of God to acquit himself in this turmoil of strife and struggle, then, if I look up into the face of Jesus, I see the answer to my bewilderments, and my heart goes out to the Brother who, of all whom I have ever known, helps me the most and leads me the truest way.

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