

A LECTURE
ON
CONSISTENCY.

BY ROBERT DALE OWEN.

LONDON :
AUSTIN & Co., 17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET
STREET, E.C.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

LECTURE ON CONSISTENCY.

As we gradually awake from the unconscious sleep of infancy, to a perception of the appearances and occurrences of this busy earth, we find ourselves existing in a world of multiform scenes and of varied interest. And as our senses throw off the lethargy that envelopes their infant growth, so does the horizon of our observation expand. Every day brings new objects to our curious view, and every hour adds another item to the sum of our experience. We approach our finger to the dazzling candle, and we learn that its bright flame burns. Gradually we discover the sources of pleasure, and the causes of pain. We are taught that exercise braces our nerves, and that temperance establishes our health; that idleness destroys the mind, and excess the body. We feel the placid influence of kindly emotions, and we see the blighting influence of ungoverned passions. Amid the conflicting phenomena of human life—in each passing event, and under every change that comes over us—we seek happiness; sometimes, when experience has been our teacher, to find it; sometimes, alas! at the bidding of imagination, to find it not.

There is in man, and in youth especially, a restless spirit of curiosity; an unsatisfied thirst after novelty; an irrepressible desire to see, to hear, to feel, to know—to discover whatever is hidden, and to approach whatever is distant. Its movements first start us in the path of knowledge; and its gratification is our reward, as we proceed.

Much has this spirit of inquiry done for man. Without it he would be but as a passive mass, scarcely roused to exertion but by the immediate pressure of his wants; and, these satisfied, ready to sink back again into uninterested listlessness. That stirring spirit whets his senses, quickens his perceptions, spurs his industry, nerves his enterprize, and strengthens his perseverance. It leads him through every clime, into every country: to the mountain summit, where snows are eternal, and across the arid desert, where life is extinct

It would fain lead him beyond the mountain and the desert ; ay ! even in despite of his limited senses, beyond our earth and her phenomena. But it is hard to pass the limits of knowledge which these senses prescribe.

We can, indeed, watch the balloon as it rises above the lofty summer cloud, and see it disappear in the blue ether. We can rise *with* that balloon, until we look down on the storm, and see the lightning springing beneath us. But to the earth from whence it had risen the floating ball returns, and brings back with it the travellers to their sublunary home.

We can look on the distant stars, or on the nearer moon ; but, even with the best aids which modern science supplies to our vision, how little do we see ! how little can we learn ! We can indeed discover that these stars and that moon exist. But if they be worlds with phenomena analagous to those that surround us here, for us, at least, their imagined phenomena have no existence. If living and moving beings inhabit these sparkling globes, for us they neither live, nor move, nor have a being. If we speak of these inhabitants, we speak of nonentities, in the attempt to describe which language becomes utterly insignificant. Few and imperfect, then, are the impressions we receive, uncertain and scanty the knowledge we acquire, of existences out of this world. Our own material earth, as we see it, and hear it, and feel it around us, is that portion of matter which alone distinctly exists to our human perceptions and human experience. On it we walk ; on it we live. The familiar phenomena that hourly strike our senses are of this world. The beings whose welfare claims our care, and whose fates arouse our sensibilities, are all of this material world alone.

Still, that restless, unsatisfied spirit of thirsty curiosity will not be confined, even to earth. It has passed to other regions ; and brought us back information true or false concerning them.

Men have said that there exists somewhere in space, far beyond the limits of man's vision, and without the sphere of man's perceptions, a certain—place, must I call it ? I know not. Our earthly language is but ill adapted to give names to spiritual residences. But, since we of the earth can speak the earth's language only, we will call it—a place, named heaven.

Even tradition ventures no conjecture as to the extent of this location, nor furnishes any distinct account of the particular phenomena it exhibits. I believe it is usually imagined to contain a stupendous throne, surrounded by bright clouds, and diffusing on all sides a light of exceeding brilliancy. In the space around this throne, myriads—I was about to say, of human beings ; but here again our mundane language is at fault. The existences which

are imagined around that throne of brightness, are *not* human beings. Many of them are indeed said to be the same which once lived and acted upon earth under that name, and are imagined to possess forms of surpassing beauty: but these forms ~~are~~ not of material figure or corporeal dimensions; they have, therefore, no material existence, and cannot, by the most ventured stretch of analogy, be termed human beings. But, whatever the name under which we choose to imagine them, myriads of existences are said to surround that throne. Each of these existences, we are told, retains a sense of identity with some individual man or woman who formerly lived on this earth. They have one occupation only. It is that of pronouncing praises and thanksgivings, and of executing songs and hymns, accompanying their voices on golden harps. Thus, we are informed, they shall exist throughout eternity.

Men have said also, that on this throne, whence the light proceeds which illuminates the space called heaven, an immaterial being has his residence. They tell us that to this omnipotent existence the thanksgivings and hymns of the inhabitants of heaven are addressed; as well in order to increase that being's glory, as because he is well pleased to receive such praise.

It is said that the occupation itself is to the immaterial spirits, who were formerly human beings, a source of unceasing enjoyment, infinite in degree and endless in duration. It is asserted, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived," the unclouded and eternal felicity of that distant abode. All earthly enjoyments, we are told, are but as worthless vanity compared to the bliss of one moment thus spent in heaven.

But there is also another unearthly location of which, it is said, human beings have obtained some particulars. It is situated within view of heaven, wherever that may be; and is separated from the heavenly kingdom by a great gulf which is fixed between these two residences. It has been called hell, and is usually imagined to contain a lake of prodigious extent. This lake is on fire; it is filled with brimstone, which burns without ceasing, and emits a smoke as of a great furnace. It is said to contain, in its burning waters, millions on millions of wretched existences, a great proportion of whom were once human beings. These are tormented in the flame, and are not even allowed a drop of water to cool their tongues. They will continue throughout eternity to be so tormented; and, though changed in their nature no less than the inhabitants of heaven, they also retain a consciousness of their former state of existence upon earth.

Both heaven and hell, notwithstanding our indefinite conceptions of their form and extent, are, I believe, imagined to have

gates. We are told that the keys of the gates of hell are in the hands of the creator of the universe, and those of the gates of heaven in the hands of St. Peter, a man who was born about two thousand years ago. I presume that the inmates of both places are supposed to enter them through these gates.

Other particulars regarding heaven and hell I might add, on the authority of those who profess to be accurately informed; but the accounts appear to me somewhat contradictory, and very indistinct. In what manner or at what time the bodies—or as some have it, the living principles—of those who die on earth, are supposed to be conveyed to their future abodes, I cannot clearly explain to you; for the documents relating to this subject are not very explicit. It is, so far as I can learn, generally imagined, either that these bodies or living principles are conveyed thither immediately after death, or else lie asleep for some thousand years, until a day when the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the stars shall fall on the earth, like untimely figs cast from some fig-tree that is shaken of a mighty wind; that then, on that day, these bodies or living principles shall be awoke from their long slumbers by the sounding of seven trumpets, and shall stand before the throne that is raised in the midst of heaven, to be judged from books in which have been regularly recorded for the last six thousand years all the actions of mankind, whether they have been good or whether they have been evil.

Many glowing pictures have been drawn of the joys of heaven, and many frightful descriptions given of the torments of hell. I can still recollect the vividness of perception which characterised my infant conceptions of both places—the thousand questions I used to ask about them, and the mingled sensations of delight and horror which the replies to my questions produced within me.

Mrs. Hemans has beautifully expressed, in the following lines, the vague ideas which a child first conceives of heaven, and the indefinite, but the enthusiastic and exciting answers, that are usually made to it.

“ I hear thee speak of the better land,
 Thou call'st its children a happy band;
 Mother! oh where is that radiant shore?
 Shall we not seek it, and weep no more?—
 Is it where the flower of the orange blows,
 And the fire-flies dance through myrtle boughs?”
 —“ Not there, not there, my child!”

“ Is it where the feathery palm-trees rise,
 And the date grows ripe under sunny skies?—

Or 'midst the green islands of glittering seas,
Where fragrant forests perfume the breeze?
And strange, bright birds, on their starry wings,
Bear the rich hues of all glorious things?"

—"Not there, not there, my child!"

"Is it far away, in some region old,
Where the rivers wander o'er sands of gold?—
Where the burning rays of the ruby shine,
And the diamond lights up the secret mine,
And the pearl gleams forth from the coral strand?
Is it there, sweet mother, that better land?"

—"Not there, not there, my child!"

'Eye hath not seen it, my gentle boy!
Ear hath not heard its deep sounds of joy;
Dreams cannot picture a world so fair;
Sorrow and death cannot enter there;
Time doth not breathe on its fadeless bloom,
For beyond the clouds and beyond the tomb,

—"It is there, it is there, my child!"

It is a less pleasing task to lay before you the descriptions which are presented to us of the region of endless misery. I select for that purpose the following from the pen of a much respected orthodox religionist, the Rev. Mr. Edwards, as given in his "Discourses on the Eternity of Hell Torments."

"Be entreated," says he, "to consider attentively how great and awful a thing eternity is. Although you cannot comprehend it the more by considering it, yet you may be made more sensible that it is not a thing to be disregarded. Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme pain for ever and ever; to suffer it day and night, from one day to another, from one year to another, from one age to another, from one thousand ages to another, and so adding age to age, and thousands to thousands, in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth; with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, with your bodies and every member of them full of racking torture; without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, or help, or change for the better. How dismal will it be, when you are under these racking torments, to know assuredly that you never, never shall be delivered from them; to have no hope—when you shall wish that you might be turned into nothing, but shall have no hope of it; when you shall wish that you might be turned into a toad, or a serpent, but shall

have no hope of it; when you shall rejoice if you might but have any relief, after you shall have endured these torments millions of ages, but shall have no hope of it when, after you have worn out the age of the sun, moon, and stars, in your dolorous groans and lamentations, without rest, day or night, or one minute's ease, yet you shall have no hope of being delivered; when, after you have worn out a thousand more such ages, yet you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit nearer to the end of your torments; that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries incessantly to be made by you, and that the smoke of your torment shall still ascend for ever and ever; and that your souls, which shall have been agitated by the wrath of God all this while, shall still exist to bear more wrath; your bodies, which shall have been burning all this time in these glowing flames, yet shall not have been consumed, but will remain through an eternity; yet which shall not have been at all shortened by what shall have been past!"

I have thus endeavoured to furnish you with a sketch of the most commonly received opinions regarding heaven and hell; an impartial sketch, so far as I can judge; and though not very luminous nor definite, yet as much so, perhaps, as the nature of the subject—if indeed we can talk of the *nature* of that which is *supernatural*—as luminous, perhaps, and definite as the nature of such a subject and the character of human language permit.

But besides the sketch of the places themselves, we are furnished, by those who conceive themselves well-informed in such matters, with a statement of the means by which we, the present occupants of the earth, can become inhabitants of heaven, or inmates of hell.

The conditions of admission to these two places, it is said, are contained in a book called the Bible. The legally appointed expounders of that book inform us, that to obtain a place in heaven it is necessary to believe all that the Bible relates, to perform the spiritual exercises it dictates, and to obey the precepts it enjoins. They inform us also, that a failure to comply with these conditions will cause us to re-exist for ever in hell.

This is one side of the great—I may say, the engrossing question, of religion. and it is the side which has hitherto been taken up by a considerable portion of the civilized world.

Others, however, there are,—and the number is on the increase—who do not believe in the descriptions I have given you; and who cannot see any reason to conclude, that a belief in the Bible, or the performance of any spiritual ceremonies whatever, can influence, alter, or in any way determine for us a future state of existence in unseen regions. On the contrary, they are of opinion, that while we remain here on earth, we can correctly

know and understand ~~those~~ things only which appertain to the earth, and can make no useful, practical discoveries out of our own planet.

Now, I am not about to discuss this question. It is not my present intention to inquire whether we can make and have made such superhuman discoveries, or whether we have not made and cannot make them.

But permit me earnestly to request your serious, undivided attention to the proposition I am about to state to you.

Either we HAVE information regarding these two residences, heaven and hell, or we HAVE NOT. This is as self-evident as any mathematical truism.

What follows? Either that we ought to occupy ourselves in ascertaining these terms of admission and in complying with them, or we ought not. It is of exceeding importance that we should well consider what this alternative involves.

And, first, let us inquire what proportion of our lives should be devoted to examine and fulfil these terms of admission, *on the supposition* that we can ascertain what they are. To discover this it may be expedient that we seek to understand, if we can, ~~what~~ eternity means, seeing that the state of being in question is said to be eternal.

It has been calculated that the distance from hence to the sun is nearly one hundred millions of miles; and the distance to Sirius, the nearest of the fixed stars, more than five hundred thousand times greater. The distance to the more remote among the fixed stars has never been calculated. But conceive, if it be possible, how immense the distance from our earth to the remotest star that telescope ever aided us to discover. Then imagine a circle drawn at that inconceivable distance all round our earth, and suppose a globe of sand of such stupendous dimensions that its circumference should fill up that mighty circle. Imagine each grain of that sand one million times less than the smallest animalcule which microscope ever made visible. How utterly beyond the power of imagination must be the number of these grains that should go to make up the whole enormous mass! And now imagine that one of these imperceptible grains were detached from that mass at the close of each million of centuries. How long, think you, would it require ere the whole immeasurable globe was thus dissolved, grain by grain? Do not your human senses refuse even to imagine the period? Do you not feel that you are approaching a region of imagination that belongs not to man? If I asked you how many moments that period may contain, might I not seem to ask it in derision?

And yet each single moment it contains is millions on millions of times longer, compared to the period itself, than is the period

compared to eternity. Let such a globe be formed, and thus lessened by one grain each million of centuries, until, grain by grain, it pass away. Let another of equal dimensions replace it, in like manner to lessen and to disappear. Then another, and another, until thousands have been added to thousands, and millions to millions, in the stupendous succession. Then take the sum of these immeasurable periods, and deduct it from eternity.

Have you obtained a tenth, a thousandth, a millionth part? Have you obtained the smallest expressible fraction? Have ye shortened eternity even by one fleeting instant? Would ye be, even by one single moment, nearer the end of eternity, if these unimagined periods were come and past, than you are at this day?

Now, it is this period of eternity which, we are told, is to be spent in heaven or hell. If terms of admission to both places have, in very truth, been tendered to us, our compliance or non-compliance with these terms shall affect our well-being *through this period of eternity*.

I recur, then, to my question, "What proportion of our time may reasonably be devoted to the fulfilment of these terms, if they have been so tendered? and what proportion to the remainder of our business?" In other words, "How much of each day or week should be employed for heaven, and how much for earth?"

How much? Suppose you had two bags, one containing a cent, and the other a million of dollars: what proportion of your time might be reasonably devoted to the care of the cent, and what proportion to that of the million of dollars? Would ye spend for that paltry cent *six* days out of the seven, or *one* day out of the seven, or one hour of a single day? You would not; you know too well the relative value of moneys.

Have ye ever accurately calculated the relative value of a life one hundred years long, and a life throughout eternity? If you have, and if you sincerely believe in orthodox supernaturals, you have come to the conclusion that one minute per week is incalculably too much to spend for this world, and six days, twenty-three hours, and fifty-nine minutes per week too little to spend for the next.

Observe, then, I pray you, what this question about unseen regions involves. Not the occupation of one day in seven, but of **YOUR LIVES**. Not the rational direction of a portion of your money, a portion of your talents, a portion of your influence, but of **ALL**. This the most orthodox and zealous among religious ministers themselves openly declare.

Allow me to repeat the alternative to which I have already called your attention. Either we *can* know nothing of heaven, and can *gain* admittance to it by our own exertions, or we *can not*.

Do we know it, and can we gain admission? Then ought the world to be one vast temple; its occupation one great religious ceremony; its desires one engrossing wish for eternal happiness.

Do we know nothing either of the place itself, or of the means whereby we may reach it? Then has blood been shed, and treasure expended, and precious time consumed—for a dream. Then are we paying yearly twenty millions—for a dream. Then is good temper forfeited, good fellowship marred, union broken, kindness destroyed, honesty persecuted, and hypocrisy extolled, all—all—for a dream.

I speak not now as the advocate, nor as the opponent, either of religion or of scepticism; I speak but in favour of consistency.

Tell me not that nature is too weak to mortify even its strongest desires at the voice of religion. Have ye never heard of the Indian Fakir? never read of those martyr devotees who, with a consistency that might shame the lukewarm religionist of Christendom, will endure to be swung for years in that torrid clime before a slow fire—who will crawl, on hands and knees, around a mighty empire; or roll their naked bodies in the dust, over hill and plain, across from the shores of the Indus to the banks of the sacred Ganges—who will continue for life in one unnatural, unvaried posture, till they lose all power to change it; or swing, suspended by human flesh-hooks, until crucified nature sinks under the infliction? Powerful and enduring, even in his follies, is man! Wherefore should we deem a life spent in religious exercises and pious penances impossible to him?

I speak, then, in favour of consistency. I would have him who professes religion to be religious, not in word only, but in daily practice. I would have him consider what religion is, what it requires of him, and whether he conforms to its requisitions. I would have him conform to them, be they what they may. I would have men to be what they say they are. I would have them draw the line at once, boldly, distinctly; I would have them take sides, courageously, consistently.

If servants of God there be upon earth, ministers promoted by his nominations to the offices they hold, guides appointed by him to light us, with the gospel lamp, on the way to heaven—if such favoured mortals there be, with genuine credentials from the Almighty, I would have them act like the Almighty's servants. Why permit us to insult their Master by tendering to him a seventh only of our time, twenty millions only of our property, and devoting the rest to the service of Mammon? Let them claim, as they ought to claim, the sovereignty of the land. Let the Christian party in politics be, in their hands, the Aaron's rod, swallowing up all the rest. Let them set aside worldly constitutions, temporal laws, secular governors; and let them stand for-

ward, bold in the strength of their holy mission, to engage, in its support, every hand and every heart throughout the land. Theirs should be our property, for God's use; theirs our time, for God's service; theirs our talents, in God's cause; theirs our obedience, according to God's command. Let them establish their saintly rule over land and sea, forest and mountain, even to earth's remotest confines. They have spoken of church and state; let them speak of the church alone. She it is that should command our submission and dictate our rights; because she only can secure our everlasting happiness. Once, in the zenith of her power—in those days when England's proud Henry knelt before Becket's tomb, and bared his body to the ecclesiastical scourge—in those pious days the wealth that flowed into her coffers outweighed the treasures of kings, and the reverence she obtained for her priestly decrees was beyond the reverence paid to the mightiest of the earth. Let her servants again claim all, and more than all, they ever then possessed. If they be what they profess to be, and what we permit them to call themselves—the elected of God—it is theirs of right; it is all theirs, most justly, most consistently. If they save one soul—one only soul—from the undying torments of hell, they have produced more of happiness to the human race—millions of times told, than the riches of this earth can repay, or the power of all her potentates confer. In gratitude, then, no less than in justice, earth's treasures and powers should be theirs alone.

Will ye tell me that those who men call reverend are not the servants of God? that an Immaterial Spirit never adopted them to be his confidants—never disclosed to them the secrets of his government—never appointed them the expounders of his laws, and the apologists of his conduct? Will ye tell me that mortals cannot find out the doings of any unseen, unsearchable spirit? that human knowledge cannot extend beyond “the bourn from whence no traveller returns,” to paint to us, brightly or darkly, a future, eternal destiny? Will ye tell me all this?

And what of your country, if ye speak truth? What of the clerical influence that pervades, and the religious fear that rules it? What of persecutings for scepticism and heartburnings for heterodoxy? Is that influence, that fear, are those persecutings, those heartburnings, all uncalled for?—all uncaused, save by imagination alone? But what of all the sights and sounds that fill your city on this, the first day of the week?—the measured toll that calls to the house of worship; the gaily-decked throng that answers to the call; the stately edifice that opens to receive them; the silken-cloaked orator that ascends the consecrated pulpit; the prayers he offers up, the doctrines he expounds, the reverence he awakens, the salary he receives? What shail we

say of all these? Does the church-going bell but sound to proclaim the credulity of man? is the gay throng decked out only to assist at idol-worship? are those stately edifices all reared to imagination? and these fluent orators, are they but the teachers of idle illusion, and the receivers of thousands a year for the inculcation of vanities? What of our mammoth tract-house, with its steam-presses and its thousand hands? Is it all but the stereotyping of fables? the waste of public money? the abuse of public confidence? Will ye tell me all this?

There are those who begin to whisper such heresy very uncere- moniously, very audibly. If they speak truth, my friends, alas for the credulity, or, yet more, for the supineness, of our coun- try! When will she awake to distinguish the mental fetters that are forged on her children's minds? when assume courage to shake off the system that sits, like an incubus, on the best efforts of her genius? when see fit to arrest the increase of those spiri- tual locusts, that swarm in clouds throughout our Christian land, shutting out the free light of heaven even while they devour the fair produce of earth?

Again let me remind you, that I speak not now as asserting, save hypothetically. I do but say, that religion is all or nothing; either that which deserves the devotion of our lives, or that which merits not a moment's consideration; that the clergy are either the heavenly-appointed servants of God, or the self-constituted deceivers of mankind. If God's servants, then, entitled to do- minion on the earth beneath, and honour even in heaven above; if deceivers, then—be they honest or dishonest—still idle con- sumers of unearned wealth, and salaried opponents of truth and knowledge.

Observe, that I do but remind you that there is no consistent halting between two opinions; no conscientious serving of two masters; no compounding between faith and scepticism. We know that the throne of God exists above the clouds—or we know it not; we have discovered the conditions under which we may obtain a place among the myriads around that throne—or we have not discovered them. We are religionists, or we are sceptics.

Were I a religionist—did I truly, firmly, *consistently* believe, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and the practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another—the spirit of truth be my witness, religion should be to me *every thing*. I would cast aside earthly enjoyments as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as less than vanity. Religion should be my first waking thought, and my last image when sleep sunk me in unconsciousness. I would labour in her cause alone. I would not labour for the meat that perisheth, nor for treasure on earth, where moth and rust corrupt,

and thieves break through to steal; but only for a crown of glory in heavenly regions, where treasures and happiness are alike beyond the reach of time and chance. I would take thought for the morrow of eternity alone. I would esteem one soul gained to heaven worth a life of torture. There should be neither worldly prudence nor calculating circumspection in my engrossing zeal. Earthly consequences should never stay my hand nor seal my lips. I would speak to the imagination, awaken the feelings, stir up the passions, arouse the fancy. I would kindle the hot enthusiasm of youth, till it blazed with holy fervour, consuming by its scorching influence all human feelings, and human reserves, and human interests; and if reason melted away before the burning power, and the convulsions of conversion were succeeded by the ravings of insanity, that should not, for a moment, arrest my course. Believing that it is better to enter into life insane, than, having the soundest reason, to be cast into hell-fire, in a world changed to one great lunatic asylum I would see but the nursery of heaven. Earth, the mortals it contains, its joys and its griefs, should occupy no moment of my thoughts. The society of those I loved as my own soul should be to me valueless and vain, and the dearest pledges of their friendship worthless as a passing shadow; for these are but the affairs of a portion of eternity so small, that no human language can express its infinite littleness.

I would strive to look but on eternity and on the immortal souls around me, soon to be everlastingly tortured or everlastingly happy. I would deem all who thought of this world—who sought to increase mere temporal happiness, who laboured to obtain temporal goods, who bestowed even a passing thought on the purest, dearest of temporal pleasures—I would deem all such poor madmen. I would go forth to the world and preach to it, in season and out of season; and my text should be: "*What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*"

As a sceptic, my feelings and practices would be the reverse of all this. Doubting the accuracy of all predictions regarding our fate beyond the grave; convinced that we do not yet know, and utterly sceptical as to whether we ever shall know, any thing about it; perceiving not how we can influence our situation in any other world by any belief or religious exercises in this,—I would take a warm interest in the temporal happiness of mankind. I would consider the improvement of man's condition and the increase of his enjoyments here, as objects *in themselves* worthy the best exertions of the philosopher and the philanthropist. It should satisfy me if I felt myself useful to my fellow-creatures, and at peace with myself. I would labour for food, even though it

perisheth, and for raiment, even though the lilies of the field neither toil nor spin. I would not imitate the fowls of the air who sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns. I would take thought for the necessaries and comforts of life; because I should distrust the promise that a Being who feeds the sparrows of heaven and clothes the lilies of the valley, will feed and clothe me also if I but live in faith, and neglect all to follow his kingdom. I would test the virtue and vice of actions, not by their imagined efficacy in procuring salvation hereafter, but by their present evident daily effects on the minds and bodies of my fellow-creatures. That which injures the mind or the body, or which disturbs the tranquillity of the heart, I should judge to be wrong, whether the sacred books of the Jew or the Christian, the Mahometan or the Hindoo confirmed or condemned the judgment. That which brings calm enjoyment to the senses, and peace to the bosom, I should decide to be right, without first waiting to inquire if the name of Jehovah, or of Allah, or of Bramah, or any other name, had been employed to sanction or to denounce the decision. For me there should exist no artificial authoritative standard. I would imagine no after-reckoning beyond the grave, to falsify or confuse my temporal calculations. To the earth and its inhabitants my duties should be confined. With them I would associate, their plans I would discuss, their wishes and feelings I would endeavour to ascertain. But for spirits of the air, I would address them neither in public nor in private; nor would I ever discuss their plans or imagine their pleasure. To improve the earthly condition of my fellow-beings, to merit their esteem, and to obtain their affection, should be the extent of my ambition. I would look to the happiness I enjoyed in such a condition as to the end of my being on this side the grave; and for a future eternal destiny, I would take no thought for it; because, however engrossingly it would occupy my time and talents, if I could know and modify it, I should not perceive the utility of endeavouring to remove a veil beyond which all is darkness, or to influence an unknown destiny which is in other hands than mine.

In either case, as religionist or as sceptic, I should be consistent. I would not profess one thing and practise another—nor speak of spiritualities with my lips, while my heart was far from them. What I called myself, that I would be. St. John should never accuse me, as he did the church of Laodicea, that I was neither cold nor hot. The thoughtless alone, or the hypocrite, is lukewarm; and it ever has been and ever should be the endeavour of each honest man to avoid equally thoughtlessness and hypocrisy.

Such be our endeavour, my friends! Freely let us inquire, **patiently examine**, honestly judge, and consistently stand to our

judgment. Let no man find reason to accuse us of negligence or indecision. Let no man find cause to say, that, whether in enlightened truth or in honest error, we are not conscientiously consistent.

Let our rights know no bounds but the equally inviolable rights of our fellows. Within these just and peaceful limits, let us dare all things. While there is no doctrine so extravagant that we treat its expression with contempt, let there be none so sacred that we approach its examination with apprehension.

Let us draw the veil from before those things which men call holy. Truth can bear the light, and error must learn to bear it. Let us look *within* the veil. They say that the words of Omniscience are recorded there. They tell us that man's life and death are there both placed before him. Thither they direct us for a divine rule of life; thither for an infallible standard of right and wrong; thither for the decrees of unerring truth and the statutes of omniscient wisdom. Let us enter, then, even to the holiest of holies. By the light of reason let us read; it is our privilege as sentient beings. Mysteries that are illegible by that light were never made for man. That which it concerns men to believe, concerns them first to know and understand. Useful truth needs not the aid of mystery, and useless error ought not to obtain it.

Free be our inquiries, then, and zealous as free. Let us not rest satisfied until we have sought and found our rule of life—in religious precepts and spiritual decrees, if reason discover it there—in earthly deeds of kindness, and human principles of justice, if these be the more fitting rule for beings of earthly origin and human organization.

Among those who agree in spirit, let not words become a source of dissension. If works of gentle mercy and acts of unspotted integrity must needs be called religion, religion let them be called. The heartless and the dishonourable will then be the only infidel.

And, among those who *disagree*, not in word alone, but in very deed, let there still be charity to others' opinions, and **CONSISTENCY** to their own.