

*Paragon, Epitaph, &c.*

# FREE THOUGHTS CONCERNING RELIGION;

OR,

## NATURE VERSUS THEOLOGY.

BY

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## TO THE READER.

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THE following "Thoughts concerning Religion" were delivered by the author at the Hartford Bible Convention. They are re-published in order to meet objections which generally prevail in reference to the propriety of making Religion and Theology topics for free investigation and free discussion. The author has presented his "impressions" in a fair and forcible style, which even the most superficial reader cannot fail to comprehend. It is hoped and believed that the author's "Free Thoughts" will find their acquaintance in thousands of minds

THE PUBLISHER.

## THOUGHTS CONCERNING RELIGION.

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THE course of Nature is marked by vast and mighty changes. In the lower departments of the physical world one set of circumstances continue till their mission is completed, when they gradually expire, and from their ashes a *new order* of things is born into existence. Every great general *improvement* in the physical aspect of the globe — every magnificent alteration in the relation of things — is preceded, accompanied, and succeeded by some grand announcement and startling demonstration. The formation of mountains — those glorious symbols of everlasting truth — was accomplished by the most terrible convulsions. From centre to circumference the terrestrial *ball* is shaken — portions fall while others rise — the earth trembles and quakes — and so are made the lofty mount, the beautiful valley, the undulating landscape, and the ocean's bed. But observe : terrible changes are *never* terrible in fact ! Every alteration in Nature's domain is invariably succeeded by *better* circumstances. (It is only man's short-sightedness which hinders his perception of the future good.)

So in the religious world. There are circumstances

— conditions of mind and organization — which demand a change. (And he who interrogates the page of progress on this point, receives back the answer that in the religious world great and startling alterations have from age to age occurred — disturbing, for the time being, the body of mankind with paroxysms of dreadful apprehension.) But these changes are inevitable — indispensable, in fact, to the development and education of the world. The mounts of truth, the vast territories of reform, are thrown up out of dogmatism and despotism by stupendous efforts. And the genius of history, with pen and ink ready, stands ever near to record the causes and consequences of the alteration. So posterity and subsequent generations are enlightened; and the world at last learns the lesson, that Truth, like the ocean's tide, is ever onward and resistless.

There is nothing strong enough to stay the immutable workings of this principle of change — this law of alternation — this method of the universe! Kings, priests and tyrants utter heart-rending groans, and remonstrate bitterly at the awfulness and majesty of Change. Wherefore? Because they are so delightfully circumstanced in external things, and so strongly intrenched in the compelled ignorance and consequent servitude of the masses! But, thanks to the Supreme Power of the universe, the law of reform works unchangeably onward, and the dreaded hour at last arrives. *The voice of justice*, so long silenced by prevailing powers, is heard thundering o'er palace and cathedral; and all time-sanctified institutions are invaded by the disciples of REASON, notwithstanding the lamentations of their conservative proprietors and dreamy inhabitants!

The object of this Convention\* is to explore and investigate *the origin, authority and influence of the Old and New Testaments.*

What a question for the nineteenth century! In the opinion of many well-meaning persons, a convention, with such an object in view, can be nothing less than an act of supererogation. (They suppose the origin, authority and influence of the Testaments to be as well established as the sun in the heavens. This *superstition* is the chief in Christendom. Unaided by the revelations of science, how could the early inhabitants give us a Bible without mythology and errors? Without a philosophical and historical understanding of the *origin* of the Bible, how can we estimate its *authority*?) Without a knowledge of the cause and extent of its *authority*, how can we ascertain the merits and demerits of its *influence*?) These, surely, are the questions for this age, because this age, more than any other, possesses the requisite information to answer them. The miracle of *Joshua* could not be answered until the immutable laws of planetary harmony were discovered; the cosmological theory of *Moses* could not be answered until the science of geology was developed. As these sciences have *for the first time* gained a footing among the people, even so for the first time are the people *prepared* for the examination of the questions before this Convention.

In certain prudential minds are dwelling diverse doubts respecting the *utility of conventions*, either as instruments of good or exponents of truth, more especially when

\* The Convention here alluded to, as stated in the preface, is the "Hartford Bible Convention" of 1853. By bearing in mind the fact that the author delivered the above at this Convention, the reader will understand the application of the references made to it in subsequent paragraphs. — Ed

called to the consideration of sacred themes. Most persons are educated to regard religion as too holy a matter for debate. I think that anything is too holy for *an angry* debate, but *nothing is too sacred* for calm investigation!

As every fountain declares the impurities and excellences of its own waters, so, in this Convention, where *individuality* of character is particularly encouraged, must each speaker stand, in presence of his own conscience, responsible for the utterances of his nature. This is free discussion. And my recommendation to each one is, Be watchful, lest, in the exercise of this blessed privilege, you get too much *inspiration* through combativeness instead of conscientiousness; and, in your anxiety to enforce a proposition, be careful lest your thoughts fall from the magnificent posture of *principles* to the common error of personalities. The Convention, if conducted with these simple precautions, cannot fail of doing good.

I have said that no matter was too sacred for *calm* debate. The plea that religion is too delicate and divine for analytical examination, is, in my estimation, the excuse of *unsound* and *timid* minds. My eternal motto is, "Any theory, hypothesis, philosophy, sect, creed or institution, *that fears investigation*, openly manifests its own error."

✓ We do not plant ourselves gladiatorially in the arena as mere antagonists and combatants—not as mere destructionists, extremists and infidels—but in fraternal love, as the disciples of God-given REASON, as the uncompromising advocates for universal liberty of body and soul, as *constructionists* and lovers of moderation and temperance in all things, and as unflinching *believers* in

the existence and universality of Eternal Truth. Thus armed and equipped we come forth, and call upon every individual to bring his best thoughts on the points at issue before this Convention. The plea that religion is too sacred for public discussion appears transcendently *absurd* when it is recollected that this subject is publicly debated in every pulpit in Christendom! But there is no freedom in it. Every stamp of mind is engaged in discoursing *religion* to the people. But it is all priestly and dogmatic. It is done in the *pulpit*—a consecrated battlement, where laymen, no matter how talented and accomplished, are not allowed to enter! But we come to the *freeman's pulpit*—to the public rostrum—and invite hither the victims of the other mode of discussing religion. We urge them to prefer their charges, state their grievances, put their objections; and the candid devotees of whatever creed are hefeby warned to appear before a public tribunal, and defend their theology and their interpretations of it, against the aspersions of disaffected minds.

Our course may be condemned, but let it be duly remembered that the *causes* for calling this Convention would not exist if Christendom were blessed with *Free Pulpits*. By free pulpits I mean churches where the reformer, the temperance man, the anti-slavery man, and the man of science, can go and lay his principles before the people—churches where conscience is kindly treated, where the law of individual liberty is worshipped.

Instead of this—which would do away with all necessity for Bible Conventions, and with all independent meetings for free discussion—the minister is encouraged in his efforts to denounce and defame any new movement with his accustomed dogmatism, encouraged to

prejudice the people against a matter of which they know absolutely nothing ; and then, like the despotism of the Austrian government, the pulpit official closes up as far as possible every avenue to the presentation of a defence from the parties aggrieved. And what effects do these religious circumstances develop ? I will show you. The people, conscious of having much truth, are driven at last from the pulpit of dogmatic theology to the platform of free discussion. And the consequence will be, that *the public rostrum will supersede the pulpit in value and for purposes of instruction*. Yea, our course may be condemned, as were the developments of Galileo ; but I tell you that this Convention is but *the effect* of a set of circumstances in the religious world, which even one-sided and bigoted minds must apprehend and confess. When the cause is removed, the effect will disappear.

Most persons are educated to regard religion as being too holy for public debate. But what is education ? It is an implantation of certain symbols of thought, transferred from one mind to another, as the artist paints on canvas. Thoughts are not given in this way, but the symbols or forms of expression into which the internal forces of the mind flow up. All the liquid elements of mentality are formed and fashioned in accordance with the symbols placed upon the mind by the hand of the master—just as water takes the exact shape of the vessel into which it is poured !

Is education, then, a sacred and reliable authority ? How do you know whether the writer of the Shorter Catechism was correct or incorrect ? How do you know whether the religion of Moses was right or wrong ? God speaks in the sanctuary of the living soul ! He



writes his religion upon the everlasting hills. It is simple, grand, universal. It never changes. But do symbols remain unchanged? The Old Testament idea of justice is our idea of revenge. The old conceptions of God will suit the modern devil. What though the Hindoo be educated to believe certain religious thoughts, is he therefore to be left undisturbed? Do not Christians send missionaries to place Christian symbols upon the heathen's mind? Shall we not, therefore, as Nature's missionaries, place Nature's symbols upon the Christian mind? The heathen loves his idols which man made; the Christian loves his Bible which man made; but we love Nature — physical, spiritual and celestial — which God made, and sanctifies with the undying glories of his Spirit.

Let us discriminate between religion and the symbols or *vessels* which are supposed to contain it.

If we have *wrong* symbols, the shape of our religion will be also wrong! Man outgrows the clothing of his youth; may he not also outgrow the symbols of his religion? The essence of all religions may be immaculate, which I fully believe, but if the symbols containing it be deformed, does it not follow that the shape of the religion would be correspondingly defective?

If you admit the probability of this proposition — which I think you cannot escape — then, let me ask, how can you inform your own mind whether or not your religion be in the proper shape, unless you make the subject a theme for calm investigation? “Agitation of thought is the beginning of wisdom.” But you *fear* to investigate! *Anything which fears investigation openly manifests its own error.* Do you *fear* to investigate religion lest you be led away from the smile of Heaven?



What a groundless, ignorant fear ! Is not heaven illimitable as the universe ? Is not God everywhere present ? Can you be led away from a Divine Spirit who is "before all things, and in whom all things consist ?" Do you fear that by investigation you shall cease to be religious ? Nay, nay, fear not ; for true religion is the life of the soul ! The love of worship is the strongest love, although in different natures it has different modes of manifestation. Religion and human existence are one and the same in essence.

Suppose the Emperor Constantine saw fit to call a convention of bishops and laymen for religious purposes ; and suppose he and they, after much confusion and dispute, decided upon what books should be regarded as "the Word of God," and *what books* should be rejected as *spurious* gospel—thus, by virtue of *external authority*, manufacturing for the whole world, and for all subsequent generations, *religious* symbols through which the human soul commonly thinks of divine and spiritual things—suppose all this to be historically true (which it is)—let me ask : Are we not *as fully* authorized, by an example or precedent so conspicuously set, to call another convention, to consider whether any emperor or bench of bishops have a *peculiar right* to determine the shape and pattern of our religion ? Religion was not *too sacred* for investigation then ! Why should it be too sacred now ?

Still you question the *utility* of conventions for this purpose ! You think free discussions do not develop truth—that people are too combative and impetuous—that the cords of bigotry are tightened by the fierceness of opposition to it. But my reply is, That conventions are useful only as ploughs are good for the soil—they turn up *new ground*, break away poisonous weeds, and

demolish old stumps, for the subsequent planting of good seed.

Free interchange of thought and feeling is the only way to wisdom. Man's mind is developed by contact — is educated by the individualization and comparison of facts. Mind must first discover facts ; then those facts must be by themselves examined ; then they must be placed in contrast and juxtaposition ; and then, from the latter arrangement, which comes within the jurisdiction of every rational being, there flow out certain definite *conclusions* ; and these conclusions, the mind, by virtue of its constitution, is constrained to accept. Faith is the subject of volition. Like all organized bodies, human minds yield to the strongest pressure. Faith comes from evidence. "He that believeth *not* shall be damned." Should a man be damned for a thing which he cannot help ? When properly applied to our faculties, the strongest proof makes the deepest impression.

According to this certain law, let me ask : How can a mind understand *religion* without investigation. A man may be a devoted frequenter of some particular church — may have listened with delight and edification to the exposition of a certain form of religious belief — but, having never compared one creed with another, what does he know of the foundation of popular theology ?

He may read all the publications of *his* denomination — may know the Bible by heart — what does he know of real mental liberty ?

I tell you that such a man is a thorough bigot ! Should a reformer appear, this religious man, with the contents of the Bible at his tongue's end, begins his opposition by quoting texts. But as to whether these

texts rest upon any divine authority or not, he never stops to inquire, nor any one else. If the Bible says so, that is all-sufficient! Now what can such a mind know of impartiality and open-mindedness? What knows he of the glorious matrimonial principles whereby the universe was built, by which men and globes alike are regulated?

Concerning these things he is ignorant, for he would not be "wise above what is written."

And so, how profoundly does he abhor and condemn a Bible Convention! He is *sure* no good can come of it! In his opinion, it is as much as to affirm that the Bible is somewhere unsound—that it is not what great scholars and eminent philosophers have claimed for it.

Therefore the prudential bigot thinks and asserts that the only effect of a Bible Convention can be to lead weak-minded (!) persons into scepticism, and strengthen the disbelief already existing. In plain English, it is dangerous to examine a subject which, from repeated experiments, is found not triumphantly to survive the ordeal of a fair investigation!

Anything which *fears* investigation openly manifests its own error.

Of all modern suppositions, I think the idea that infidel arguments have all been fairly answered by Christian scholars is the most prominent. There is much pretension and constrained composure based upon the efforts of Christian writers. All infidel objections, it is solemnly asserted, have been exposed and exploded over and over again. And churchmen say that *all* that can now be adduced is but a rehash of old infidel arguments, which Dr. David Nelson and Leslie have completely refuted and overthrown.

I do not take issue on this point now, because I wish first to persuade you that we did not call this Convention for any such low grovelling purpose.

We are actuated by no desire to spread scepticism on religious subjects — nay, we pray and work for theologic liberty, for universal peace, for human love and brotherhood, for the kingdom of heaven on earth — hence we design to do all we can to prevent scepticism in those principles which God declares to be *the true religion!*

With this Convention (or another which it may suggest) we mean to drive the plough deep into the soil of popular theology and into the origin of those texts which priests hurl at the movements of every true reformer.

*It is my conviction that the more a man knows, the less he believes ;* that is to say, the more we learn of the natural, the less we believe of the supernatural. Or, in other words, a wise man is seldom troubled with imagination. The reverse is also true. The firmest believer in the supernatural is one who knows but little concerning the physical laws of the world we live in. And as this vast system of natural existence is beginning to be better understood, it is easier to investigate and decide upon the asserted supernatural and miraculous, and ascertain what is and what is not entitled to the dignified title of “ plenary inspiration.”

Since the development of the sciences of astronomy, geology, chemistry, etc., it cannot be denied, I think, that there has been established *more doubt* than was ever before entertained respecting the supernatural origin and supernal authority of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Prof. Hitchcock, Prof. Silliman, and several Englishmen of scientific attainment, have labored to rescue the Mosaic and dependent records from the vortex

of utter repudiation. But what have they accomplished? They have confirmed and consolidated the bigotry and superstition of persons already in the Church. What further? They have merely convinced individuals on the *outer courts* of the sanctuary that such minds are anxious to *nurse* and foster their reputation as orthodox authors; while their productions prove to the independent thinker that they acknowledge but very little about the intrinsic weaknesses of the theology for which they so earnestly and solemnly plead.

Hugh Miller, author of "*Footprints of the Creator*," who has written as good a *plea* in behalf of his theologic faith as any churchman could, is fully conscious of the ignorance of the clergy. He says,\* "*The clergy as a class suffer themselves to linger far in the rear of an intelligent and accomplished laity, a full age behind the requirements of the time. Let them not shut their eyes to the danger which is obviously coming! The battle of the evidences (of Christianity) will have as certainly to be fought on the fields of physical science as it was contested in the last age on that of the metaphysics. And on this new arena the combatants will have to employ new weapons, which it will be the privilege of the challenger to choose. The old, opposed to these, would prove of but little avail.*" Hence the arguments of Nelson, or Leslie, or Paley, or Watson, can have no weight in the stupendous battle about to be fought between despotism and liberty.

Notwithstanding this acknowledgment of ignorance on the part of the clergy as a class, there are persons who still regard them as masters in the theologic school—

\* Page 45, American edition.

able to meet any objection which Astronomy, Geology, or Chemistry, can urge against the authority of their system. Of course it is very proper to suppose that the clergy are the possessors of the requisite *evidence* to prove the origin and sanctity of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Now we bring, not the objections of a party, but the developments of the nineteenth century, to bear upon the questions under discussion. *We are not anti-Christ* ; but *WE ARE* anti-bigotry, anti-slavery, anti-superstition, anti-supernatural, *anti-everything* which militates in any manner against the development of human love and brotherhood. And we are (or I am, at least) opposed to anything in or out of the Bible which prevents or retards the normal growth of this religion. Greek, Hebrew and Latin terms, however classic and high-sounding — a mere battle of texts — can have no possible weight in settling questions which involve the origin and veracity of a record which is already in the English language, and recommended by the American Bible Society, in its *present translation*, as being the infallible Word of God. The clergy should feel grateful to us for taking the trouble to show them the battle-field of this century.

Religion, I repeat, is not too sacred for public debate, for religion pertains to the universal conscience of man ; it is the great corner-stone of the temple of human brotherhood, and a *Convention* is the instrument most calculated to chisel it out of life's foundations. This religion is not to be found between the lids of any book. It is in the soul of human kind. It needs development. Conventions, conducted with magnanimity and virtue of purpose, will accomplish much good toward the unfolding of universal principles. Flowers can grow with

strength and beauty only when well circumstanced. Conventions are valuable, not merely for the facts, truths and arguments they spread before the minds of the people, but particularly for the freedom of sentiments, and the examples of courageous utterance in the presence of persons accustomed to pulpit monopoly. When the human mind is once freed, and the philosophy of conscientious independence is presented to it, it spreads its wings and soars to summits of thought before unknown. Reason, on the wings of faith in justice, is a bird of paradise. Its flight is outward, inward, onward, upward! And the material and spiritual universes are opened to these flights of freedom. The eagle is reason's symbol, but the serpent is the hideous type of slavery!

We contend not for partyism, but for the world. Independence of soul, based on integrity of motive, is now demanded. Let us teach

“ Each man to think himself an act of God,  
His mind a thought, his life a breath of God.”

And let us

“ Bid each try, *by great thoughts and good deeds*,  
To show the most of heaven he hath in him.”

We have no ambition to excel our neighbor in argument, for a fluent tongue can give to total errors the semblance of truth; and although the hearer might not be gifted in reply, his soul would surely remonstrate and condemn in silence. Nay, our only ambition is to be *true men and true women*; to show the most of heaven we have in us! In argument we require facts as signs to go by, and principles as truths whereby to interpret them. No anger, no uncharitableness; love only, and *independence* of soul enough to declare a living truth,



even though the “*heavens*” of popular systems fall, and the “*stars*” in the pulpits be blotted out.

“ Read the face of Nature, that God-written Bible,  
Which all mankind may study and explore,  
Which none can wrest, interpolate, or libel its loving lore.  
Here learn we that our Maker, whose affection  
Knows no distinction, suffers no recall,  
Sheds its impartial favor and protection  
Alike on all.”

The question of the *origin* of the Testaments is debatable from several stand-points ; arguments flow in from sources hitherto unsuspected.

Archæological evidences are numerous. Antiquity is full of facts bearing directly on this point ; but the difficulty of demonstrating the validity of historical records drives the investigator necessarily on the ground of internal evidence and inference. The proposition stands thus : Can a book have a divine origin which is self-contradictory, opposed to intuition and to fact ? Can an unchangeable God, full of harmony and divinity, be the author of a book which contains inconsistencies, examples of revenge and repentance, and inculcates antagonistic rules for human life ? One class of minds deny the existence of such inconsistencies and antagonisms between the lids of King James’ Bible, while another class affirms them as demonstrable. If they do *not* exist, we infer the *divine* origin ; if they do exist, we infer that the book is of *human* imperfection. Here is a subject for your investigation. Again, the *authority* of the Bible may be contemplated from several points : authority may be argued from the ground of utility — that it is the *best religion* in the world — that it satisfies the heart and the head — that it restrains vice and deifies virtue —



that, without the Bible, we would be without a revelation of God's will, be ignorant of the scheme of redemption, and that our civilization is dependent upon the principles thereby inculcated. But it may be argued that civilization is *not* a child of Christianity — that its authority leads to bigotry and intolerance — that *it is no better than the best part of any other religion* — that it does not satisfy but stultifies the heart, and confounds the head — that from the Bible we get our worst ideas of God — that the scheme of salvation does not save the world from sin, slavery and discords — that its authority is good only so far as its contents stand the test of conscience and of scientific principles.

One class affirms, another denies. And this is the time for a thorough analyzation of these respective positions. “Nothing extenuate or aught set down in malice.”

Again, the *influence* of the Bible may be affirmed to be mild righteousness — that thousands are joyous under the blessings of the Christian religion, while the heathen, and nations without this system, are buried in ignorance and degradation. I think this point calls for special treatment from all minds. The question is, “Is the difference between heathen and Christian nations attributable to the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon the latter?” From this question all other questions under this head *radiate*; therefore, here is a subject for your investigation.

Brethren, let us free ourselves from the sectarianism of the churches, from the mythology of the Bible, from the slavery of fear, from the chains of superstition! Reason is the sovereign of the soul, and truth is the sovereign of reason. Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good.

ALL True Religion is immutable. I wonder that any one can for a moment imagine the possibility of its overthrow. Is truth a mere circumstance? Do clouds and storms extinguish the sun? Is true religion dependent for its existence upon belief or disbelief—upon forms and organizations?

O ye of little faith! Go by the ocean's side, and behold far away the *rock of ages*. The storm-king sends his servants to battle. The clouds assemble, thunder answers thunder, from the four corners of heaven the elements rush to one centre, and the fierce tempest descends with all the pageantry of contending deities. The ocean groans with the voice of anger, mountainous waves roll forward with a mighty power; but amid all, and above all, stands yon noble Rock, erect, unmoved and unchanged. Ten thousand times ten thousand storms may rage beneath, around, above—ages upon ages may roll away—empires may rise and kingdoms fall—millions of human beings may come and go—the terrestrial ball may pursue its pathway about the parent orb—yet unshaken and immovable stands the True Religion—firm as the Universe, beautiful as Deity.

You who fear or hope that religion will be extinguished, need wisdom; go, study the constitution of the world. Contemplate the rock in the ocean, which no storms nor contention can disturb. Gaze at the sun, whose life-giving glories no clouds nor tempests can ever diminish!

But where shall we find this religion which changes not? Ah, here is the question! And when we become acquainted with its locality, how shall we *know* that it is the “true religion?” What is the rock? The answer

may be found in the New Testament. "The kingdom of Heaven is WITHIN you." That is to say, the law and the spirit—the way, truth and life—are natural to the soul of man. Yea, religion has a rock in the soul. In its elements and essences, in its inextinguishable instincts and unfolding faculties, which are true prophets and true apostles—in these find we the true religion. If this position be not tenable—if the mind of man is not the basis of true religion—then is God a respecter of persons, partial in his dealings, and the New Testament answer must be a fallacy.

We hear much lamentation concerning the fate of the Bible. In most minds, religion and the book are *one* and inseparable. "They must stand or fall together!" But I cannot think so. Cannot a man exist without a shadow? Are symbols essential to the existence of thought? Surely the letter and the spirit are not indissoluble! If they are, then well may we lament and deplore any examination of the Bible.

The idea that the Bible is the infallible word of God—that *it* is the Rock of Ages, that in *it* is only to be found the *true religion*—is fatal to itself. There is a prevailing *superstition*, generated by commentators, that the Old and New Testaments are intrinsically and extrinsically harmonious. When the whole volume is *correctly* understood (they assert), the beauty and stupendous unity of the system is clear as the sun in the heavens. But this assumption is made by persons who have the presumption to suppose that *they have seen the harmonies* of the Scriptures.

Let us reflect on this. The assumption is that the • Bible is the word of God—a supernaturally-originated and a supernaturally-inspired volume—given to man

for his enlightenment and salvation. And yet, according to the Protestant system of *private* judgment and liberty of conscience, each mind, though uninspired and in no manner supernaturally endowed, is left to read and find out the *meaning* of God in this word. While one man finds the Bible infallible, another finds it fallible ; one discovers it to be harmonious, another inharmonious ; and so come contention and criticism. I cannot but admire, in bold contrast, the beautiful logical consistency of the Roman Catholic Church. It never was guilty of trusting *religion* to the people — never committed a deed so fatal to priestly despotism as that of permitting an *unsupernatural* laity to read and interpret a supernatural book ! The *reading of the book is fatal* to the idea of its supernatural origin, also to its so-called infallible principles of religion and truth. When will Protestants fully realize their present situation ?

Protestants must certainly see, sooner or later, that the door which Martin Luther opened can *never be shut against* the onward march of the free-born soul ! The infallibility of the Pope is but a continuation of the Protestant idea of the infallibility of Moses, John, or Paul. If you admit the supposition of the possibility of *Isaiah's* infallible inspiration, you have then granted the premises upon which Pope-and-Priest infallibility is predicated. If God saw proper ever to inspire *supernaturally* a Jew or a dweller of Palestine, how do *you know* but he also sees it proper to *supernaturally inspire* a Cardinal or a Pope ? If God has ever inspired a paper and paste-board book, how do you know but that he now inspires the Roman Catholic Church ? If you admit the one, there is no escape from the other. As believers in the supernatural inspiration of the Bible writers, you are,

according to every principle of logical deduction, constrained to admit the possibility of all which the Catholic Church claims for itself.

But Luther, I say, in protesting against the authority of the Pope, opened a door for the final rejection of the *book-authority* upon which the first is based. Pio Nino is as likely to be a chosen vessel of God now, as Paul was in the beginning of the Christian era. The superiority of the character of one man over that of another is of no account where supernatural transactions are involved in the premises. Therefore I affirm that the Protestant idea of *an infallible Bible writer* is the firm foundation of Popish despotism, and of all the absurdities of the Catholic institution.

Persuade me that the *paper and pasteboard Bible* is the infallible word of God, and I will at once accept the *brick-and-mortar church* as the recipient and emporium of his divine favors. Persuade me that Moses, Joshua, Solomon, David, Isaiah, Matthew, John and Paul were in very truth the chosen vessels or penmen of the Supreme Being, and I promise you that I will at once accept, and would demonstrate conclusively from your principles, that the unbroken chain of cardinals and popes, extending from Peter the First to the kingdom of heaven, are as certainly the attorneys of Jehovah, and as being indispensable to all temporal and spiritual government and civilization. If Moses and Joshua and Paul are to be my *masters* in those sacred principles which bind my soul to its Author, then why may I not accept *Pio Nono* as my *master* and father in spiritual things? You who are Protestant believers in Bible infallibility, *cannot* deny me this logical inference. But you reply that I should not allow a *mere man* to rule over my conscience

— that it is yielding my liberty to the jurisdiction of despots, and placing my soul in the keeping of mere priests and teachers of religion. Verily ; but what are you Protestants doing, when you take Moses and Paul for your masters ? Surely these were mere men also - manifesting all the attributes and characteristics of human-kind — and so, why should they, any more than Clement or Alexander, be my *masters* in the affairs of my soul !

Dr. Orestes A. Brownson, editor of a Catholic Quarterly Review, a man of much learning and independence, is a very consistent and faithful exponent of religious aims and tendencies. He has travelled from Egypt, through the wilderness of scepticism, into the promised land of belief, which he is now preparing to rid of all Protestants by logical weapons. Protestants advocate the supreme authority of the Bible, but tolerate to each man the liberty of reading its pages to suit himself. Brownson, on the other hand, advocates the absolute supremacy of the Pope, and denies to man any rights. God only has rights. Man has *duties*. The Church is God's representative, and society is under its exclusive dominion. The Church grants *privileges* to governments, and governments owe allegiance and obedience to the Church. Now, this is nothing less than theological or Protestant DESPOTISM, logically and legitimately carried into practice. But how much better than this is the Popery or clerical dogmas of Protestants ? The Bible is God's representative or word, they affirm. The individual has *no* rights, but *duties* ; mind is *not* the master, but the *subject* of its teachings. The Pope regards all as *heretics* who reject his authority ! The Protestant denounces all as *infidels* who reject the authority of Moses ! The idea is simply this Protestantism is but a *child* of



**Catholicism.** By a law of hereditary descent, the parent transmits its character to the offspring ; but, as evidence of a law of progress, the child is not so wicked and degraded as its venerable progenitor.

Catholics make no more *opposition* to Free Schools, whereby *education* may be extended to all people, than do Protestants to the *free discussion* of the Bible, whereby *truth* may be elicited and transmitted to posterity. In regard to Free Schools we quote from Dr. Brownson :

“ Our enemies rely upon Godless schools — State education — as a means of checking the progress of Catholicity. We must admit they have laid their plans with *infernal* skill. The result will *not* meet their anticipations, however. The attention of the Catholic world has been directed to this subject by those whom God has sent to rule over us, and a *struggle*, which will end in victory for the Church, has begun between Catholicity and the State, to see who shall have the child.”

So speaks O. A. Brownson concerning Free Schools. But observe, when you read Protestant notices of this Bible Convention,\* that, by substituting the word “ convention ” for schools, with one or two other alterations, you will see the same spirit manifested toward us. Indeed, it is hard to determine which is the worst enemy of freedom and humanity, the party that would make *the Church* our master, or those who would give to us the Bible as a sovereign, with only *feeble reason* to comprehend and harmonize its multifarious inconsistencies. Reason is *feeble only* after having been for a lifetime subject to bondage. Protestant denunciation of Reason is paralleled by Catholic defamation of Protestantism ; the opinions of the two parties are equally valueless.

\* Reference is here made to the Hartford Bible Convention of 1853.

Father Gavazzi comes to our country, and lifts up his eloquent voice against the despotisms and abominations of the Romish Church. But he is in bondage, and can do nothing more than delight a Protestant audience. He cannot do the "work of destruction," because he stands intrenched in *Protestantism*, which deserves the same fate. He cries out against the *ignorance*, the *idolatry*, the *slavery* of Catholicity; but against *Protestant* ignorance, idolatry and slavery, his voice cannot be raised, because the receivers of his messages are composed of the latter party. He affirms that *Catholicism is too narrow* for his soul. With a soul so expanded beyond the circumscribed confines of Pius the Ninth, I wonder how he can breathe the confined air of Protestant bigotry and superstition! I can see *no difference* between the *infallibility* of the Pope and the infallibility of Paul. But we have *political* freedom under Protestantism, which the Church of Rome denies to its subjects. Very true; but how came this blessing? It was first established through the instrumentality of the greatest despot, *Henry VIII.*, that ever ruled over mankind. But in our blessed land let us raise the hymn of gratitude to Thomas Paine, Jefferson, Franklin, and many others, who were the sworn friends of liberty and of free principles. Let it be remembered that the *political* and *other* blessings of America are not owing to any exertions on the part of priests, nor to any logical application of the doctrine of *Bible infallibility*, upon which Protestantism rests.

In a recent letter to *the clergy of all denominations* I affirmed that the Battle of the Evidences of Christianity is to be fought on the broad field of scientific and positive principles. The old metaphysical ground of idealistic



impossibilities — such as what and where is God ? what and where is spirit ? what and where is heaven ? — are now scarcely admitted into the arena. But the mountain torrent of civilization has dashed along regardless of religious and mythical obstructions, and with each succeeding wave there comes to our land a *new discovery* in some department of creation. The progress of scientific discovery, in one brilliant day, is carrying the war into the very *heart* of biblical authority. The positive and unavoidable deductions of astronomy, of ethnology, of archæology, of hierology, of physiology, stand in startling opposition to nearly all the assumptions of popular theology pertaining to Bible infallibility. I will presently bring this fact more distinctly before the reader.

The scientific education of the Protestant clergy is so utterly neglected, while preparing for the ministry, that they usually enter the field of labor without the proper implements of spiritual husbandry. Consequently, having read the standard works on theology, and one or two books in reply to “ infidel objections,” the young minister is apt to entertain several inflated notions respecting the perfection of biblical wisdom. Sometimes we hear them preach thus : “ The Bible has stood the test of ages. No closeness of inspection, keenness of investigation, or stricture of criticism, has been able to defeat its claims. Moses’ account of creation is simple and sublime. The volume of destiny is suddenly thrown open ; time is proclaimed ; creation arises ; and a new race of intelligence appears on the scene. Nothing can shake the plain narrative of Moses. The Bible is perfect in all its parts — full of excellences — and, taken as a whole, is without contradiction or inconsistency.”

Most congregations accept this as a tenable doctrine

Children grow up with this conviction, and so the Protestant notion of *Bible infallibility* is kept alive and before the people. But now is the time to investigate these positions, because never before was the world so full of scientific discovery.

In the light of the nineteenth century the Mosaic account is notoriously unsound and fallible. We have a vast number of cogent reasons for rejecting the divine authority of Genesis. Let me ask your attention to a few of them.

*First.* "In the beginning God *created* heaven and earth." There are several philosophical objections to the truth of this statement. It is found that matter, though changeable, is *indestructible*—not a particle can be put out of existence. Chemists have tried the experiment in vain. Hence Nature declares that matter is *eternal* substance, and could not have sprung from nothing. The *creation* of matter implies the bringing of *something* into existence from *nothing*, which proposition no healthy mind can for a moment entertain. Here is one reason why we object to the Mosaic account.

*Second.* "And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night." Aside from the supernatural operation here implied, there are very strong scientific objections to this statement. But first let us notice the *internal* contradiction. You will observe that there were three days and three nights *before* God put "*lights* in the firmament of the heaven to *divide the day from the night.*" Before the creation of a "greater light to rule the night," how, let me ask, could there have been "evenings and mornings?" But this objection is trivial in comparison to the following.

It is asserted that "darkness was upon the face of the deep" — that God said, "Let there be light, and there was light" — implying the absence at first of *all* light from the universe. This is in direct *antagonism to all the positive* discoveries of the age. "The celebrated speculation of La Place, now very generally received as probable by astronomers, concerning the origin of the earth and planets, participates essentially in the strictly inductive character of modern theory. The speculation is, that the *atmosphere of the sun* originally extended to the present limits of the solar system ; from which, by the process of cooling, it has *contracted* to its present dimensions. There is in La Place's theory," says Mill, in his system of Logic, "*nothing* hypothetical ; it is an example of legitimate reasoning from a present effect to a past cause, according to the known laws of that cause." Science demonstrates that first heat, *light* and electricity were in existence *before* the earth was formed ; but Genesis makes the earth to exist *previous* to light ! Nature and the Old Testament are here at war with each other. Which shall we believe ?

*Third.* The Mosaic account is unsound because it teaches that the heavens and earth, and all that in them is, were made all *perfect* at once. "The Almighty voice is addressed to chaos. Confusion hears it, and wild uproar stands ruled. The waters subside ; the verdant landscape is seen ; songs burst from every grove ; and stars, bright, rolling, and silent-beaming, are hurled forth from the Almighty hand." And Genesis also affirms that man was more pure, perfect and wise — more in unity with heaven and its Author — than the race is to-day !

In absolute refutation of all this, how explicit are the

positive declarations of universal nature ! The *first* types of vegetation, the *first* indications of animal life, the *first* things performed or invented by mankind, were rough, crude, incomplete, and in every respect *inferior* to after developments. All things—trees, fish, birds, animals—grow from incompleteness to perfection, from rudeness to refinement, from the imperfect to the beautiful. And must all the declarations of Nature be overruled by the authority of a book whose origin is Eastern and mythical ?

*Fourth.* We object to Genesis because of another *internal* contradiction. The book asserts that “ God saw *every thing* that he had made, and, behold, it was *very good*.” If God saw *every thing*, and pronounced every thing *good*, let me ask : Who made the *wicked serpent* that tempted Eve ? If this animal was more subtle than any beast of the field, having the devil in him, who created them ? Who was it that made and pronounced every thing *good* ?

*Fifth.* Genesis cannot be a true report of creation, because, instead of coinciding with the revelations of universal nature, which prove the *gradual* formation of the globe by a cooling-off process, the progressive introduction or development of plants and animals on its surface by a natural method of growth, the account teaches the particular, the sudden, the miraculous, the incomprehensible creation of everything in six literal days.

*Sixth.* Genesis *cannot* be a true report, because it contradicts the positive declarations of Astronomy. According to our system of chronological calculation, Moses makes the heavens and the earth about six thousand years old. But astronomy declares that *light* requires *three hundred thousand years to travel* from one of the

fixed stars to our earth ! This one fact alone proves that those orbs have been in existence three hundred thousand years ! But you answer, " that all things are possible with God." Paul denies this (Heb. 6 : 18), and affirms by two *immutable* things it is impossible for God to lie. In this I believe with the apostle, for I cannot think that the Spirit of this beautiful universe is *capable* of an inconsistency !

*Seventh.* Genesis cannot be a true report, because it belittles our ideas of God. The extent and grandeur of the universe, the resplendent objects and countless assemblages which people the empire of being, cleanse and purify the mind of all contracted notions of the Deity and his government. But Moses destroys all consistent ideas of an omnipresent energizing Spirit, by describing him as a man making the universe in six days, and, being fatigued, as *resting* on the seventh ; and not only so, but as " walking in the garden in the cool of the day " — as any common Egyptian god would be supposed to do — with hands and feet, and a limited power of vision. " Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of an *omnipresent*, omnipotent, omniscient Spirit. And an *omniscient* Being, unable to find the guilty pair among the trees of the garden, began to call unto Adam : " Where art thou ? " And, after the creation was getting along altogether too fast and wickedly for the Creator, then, again, like an Egyptian god (Gen. 6 : 6), " it *repented* the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Now, all this is vastly too human and insignificant to be applied to the omniscient Spirit of this Universe. Every man, Christian or Pagan, when in his right mind, totally rejects the narrow and cramping idea of God advocated in the book

of Genesis and elsewhere. "A universe," says Rev. Thomas Dick, "vast, boundless and incomprehensible, is just such as we ought *naturally* to expect from a Being who is infinite, eternal and omnipresent; whose *power* is uncontrollable, whose *wisdom* is unsearchable, and whose *goodness* is boundless and diffusive. All his plans and operations must be, like himself, vast, boundless and inconceivable by mortals." Now, I submit *that this idea* is not applicable to the Mosaic God of creation!

*Eighth.* The most advanced thinkers among the supporters of the Mosaic theory have, as I am fully aware, made a virtue of necessity, by abandoning the idea of *six literal days* of creation, and accepting, instead, the geological interpretation of epochs or "ages." The most learned of modern Christian writers say, that the term "evening and the morning" must be accepted *figuratively* to mean the "ending and beginning" of indefinite stages of creative development. Very well; there can be no objection to putting a little *new* wine in an *old* bottle, if therefore the wine will but be more acceptable to creatures of habit. But here comes a trouble of inconsistency. If we are now to receive the six days as *figurative*, how shall we regard the *seventh day*, on which the Lord rested? If the six days signify "ages," what does the seventh day mean? Why are we inconsistently and hypocritically keeping *one day* in each common week as the day hallowed by the repose of Deity, while, in our theory, we are compelled to accept the *six days* as uncertain, immeasurable, indefinite strides of creative development? Here, again, the *positive* principles and deductions of a philosophical theology stand in direct antagonism to the accounts of Moses.

There are before my mind *eighteen* other reasons, all



equally cogent, going to invalidate the divine authority and intrinsic correctness of the very first chapters in King James' Bible. But we will let them pass, and ask attention to the *origin* of those chapters.

It is a singular and significant fact, that there is not a line in Egyptian history alluding to the existence or prodigies of Moses. The Egyptians were a cultivated people. Like a chain of mountains, their wonderful pyramids extend far behind the period set to Noah's *flood*, without so much as *mentioning* such a marvellous catastrophe or event. Recent ethnological discoveries carry us into the remote past, or *eight thousand years* from the present time, making the Egyptian nation, with signs of the existence of a still *riper* civilization previously, two thousand years older than Moses sets to the creation of man. The hierologist is sustained by Chinese records, and the later of geologic sciences.

And, what is still more remarkable, the thrilling mythic and simple orphic sayings and verses of Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and Greece, are, in conception, and mostly in phraseology, *identical* with the *first part* of the book of Genesis. And when the hieroglyphic characters of Egypt, Tartary and Africa shall have been perfectly deciphered, it will be found, I think, that the cosmologic and demonologic relations of Moses were in existence nearly *two thousand years* before such a people as the Jews had begun to be. These discoveries, however, will be tardily introduced, because every traveller and antiquarian knows that he is writing books to be read by Protestant and sectarian readers.

Richard, in his work on Egyptian mythology, repudiates the idea that Moses was inspired to write the Pentateuch. He says : " The five books of Moses carry

with them *internal* evidence, *not* of one sole, connected, original composition, but they bear evidence of being a *compilation from earlier annals*. The genealogical tables and family records of various tribes, that are found embodied in the Pentateuch, bear the appearance of documents *copied from written* archives. They display no trait which might lead us to ascribe their production to the dictates of immediate revelation." The first ten chapters of Genesis, which contain an account of creation, are nearly two thousand years older than the Jewish nation. The pyramids and obelisks of Egypt, and the hieroglyphic records on the land of Tartary, will, when fairly brought to the light, reveal the Oriental parentage of the books of Moses.

Perhaps you think me too far in advance of discovery. The celebrated Mr. Gliddon, in his carefully written work on "Ancient Egypt," says: "There is no reason for supposing that other cotemporary nations\* did not possess, in those earlier times, similar records; nor is there any reason why other cotemporary nations should not have chronicled all great events, and handed down, as far as ourselves, some of the annals of *those events* on which the Bible, during an interval of *four hundred years*, is strictly silent." Two books, one entitled the "Wars of Jehovah," and the other "Sepher-Hajasher," have been found, which our Bible does not contain. How came these omissions?

Intelligent Christians acknowledge that the present antiquated mode of biblical interpretation cannot withstand the positive deductions of all the sciences and discoveries of the age. Regarded as a record of physical

\* That is, nations existing at the time of the Israelites.



events, the Mosaic history cannot be sustained. Hence many minds are driven into spiritual or symbolic interpretation. The creation of the world, the garden of Eden, the temptation and fall, the deluge and tower of Babel, are received by many as symbolic relations — as types of spiritual experience and events — referring equally to nations and individuals. Swedenborg, distinguished for his historic and scientific knowledge, declares, in his commentary on the Jewish Testament, that these events and accounts can be understood and supported only in a *figurative* or spiritual sense — implying that a literal view of them, as entertained by New England clergy and laity, is at once absurd, untenable and unsupportable by nature, reason, intuition and history. It would consume our time to present Swedenborg's science of correspondences; but enough is adduced to show what reasonable men and scholars think of the Mosaic account. Swedenborg affirms that the early Scriptures were written in correspondential language, of which the hieroglyphic scriptures of earth are vestiges. Every figure *symbolized* some particular idea. Thus, as some writer remarks, a *beetle* did not stand for a beetle only, but also for the *world*; an *asp* corresponded to *royalty*; the *eagle*, to *courage*; the *lion*, to *strength*; a *ram's head*, to *intellect*; a *duck*, to a *doctor of medicine*; and a *goose*, to a *doctor of divinity*.

The idea that the Bible is a connected whole, without contradiction or inconsistency, is a superstition of the Protestant priesthood. The intelligent and accomplished Jesuit entertains no such untenable opinion. He depends upon the external despotisms of organization, and upon the attractions of a well-regulated and venerable ecclesiasticism, for the success of his design upon the

religious liberties of humanity. Protestantism and Catholicism deserve the same condemnation. They differ, not in the character of their notions respecting infallibility, but in *degree* only.

The Catholic idea of Pope and Church infallibility is simply an elongation or extension of the Protestant idea of Old and New Testament infallibility.

The two parties are, in theory and theology, equally *foes* to the interests and liberties of the world. And I have shown, I think, that *one* should not be allowed to impose any more restrictions on the soul of man than the other ; that is to say, neither is good enough to merit the support of intelligent, benevolent, free and conscientious minds.

Have I said anything against true religion ? Because I reject the infallibility of Paul and the Pope — the infallibility of a book and a church — am I therefore irreligious ? The Old Testament is a statement of the ideas and events of the Patriarchal Age — the era of Force ; the New Testament is a statement of the ideas and events of the Transitional Age — the era of Love ; the two, combined, formed King James' Bible. But let me ask — why should the statement of one age *remain* the statement of all ages ?

Can religion be based on a book ? This idea has obtained among Christians ; hence they imagine the heathen to be benighted, and *without* religion ! Is God a respecter of persons or nations ? Far from it. True religion, like true anatomy and physiology, is *older* than books ! There must be a religion *older* than the Bible , a God *better* than it declares.

Did Newton learn astronomy in books ? Did Jesus learn intuition and love of all human kind from the

prophets? Is there no inexhaustible fountain from whose flowing rivulets each soul may freely drink? Does the same God not always inspire and nourish? What would ye think of a man who does all his *farming*, *ploughing* and *planting*, by *reading books* on Egyptian and Roman agriculture? The land before his eyes would meanwhile grow *thorns* and unwholesome vegetation. What, then, do ye think of Christians who bid their followers to *read* and *believe* King James' version of the Testaments, to the end that they may be *religious* and acceptable unto God? He who would not "be wise above what is written" (in any book) is a miserable pagan, engaged in blindly loving his ideals, and needs philosophic culture. For is there not a law, a science, a principle of justice and equity, in man's mental economy, *superior* to all writing? Let every son and daughter of nature be developed to the *fulness of the structure of the perfect man* — let society develop the kingdom of Justice and Freedom within each soul and family — then you will see a manifestation of TRUE RELIGION.



