

THE EXCELLENT RELIGION.

AN ESSAY

ON THE RELATIONS EXISTING BETWEEN AGNOSTICISM, THE POLAR
THEORY OF BEING, AND THE HIGHER THEISM.

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TO
THE AUTHOR
OF
"A MODERN ZOROASTRIAN"
THIS ESSAY
IS INSCRIBED
BY
THE WRITER.

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AGNOSTICISM AND THE POLAR THEORY.

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THE EXCELLENT RELIGION.

I.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

IN the death-chamber of a dying faith, and by the ash-strewn altars of a creed outworn, the broad-browed Genius of the Western Nations stands—sadly remembering, yet trustfully hoping—watching the broadening dawn of a new era in the age of thought. The old gods are dying, and the days of their sway over the hearts and brains of men are numbered. As the pure, white light of Reason broadens over the fields of earth, the once-golden glories of the New Jerusalem fade into the dimness of tarnished tinsel, and the smoke-wreaths of the smouldering hell of a bygone night-mare roll away before the freshening breeze of morn. Over Sinai and Calvary the clouds of doubt and denial are gathering, even as of yore they gathered over the sacred brow of Olympus and the twin peaks of Delphi; and in the world's reliquary of obsolete faiths the Seamless Coat and the Crown of Thorns will ere long be placed beside the Sceptre of Pelops and the Sword of Memnon.

So, for good or ill, the old order changes. For good or ill? This is the momentous question—fraught with the destinies of millions yet unborn—which the religious pioneers of our race are to-day so anxiously asking and answering; each in accordance with his longings or his knowledge.

The Christian, whose heart is full, even to overflowing, of the sweet and sacred memories of the past, looks backward rather than forward; and, through a gathering mist of tears, he sees the dissolving rainbow of the Divine Promise fading away amid the deepening gloom of the age of faith. To him the change is not for good. Nay, rather is it for evil, heaped ever upon evil, till the awful measure of the Infidel's sin shall be full, till the Book of Days shall be opened and the brimming vials of the wrath of Jehovah shall be poured out upon a stiff-necked

and perverse generation which has heard his word, and, hearing, has not believed.*

Standing by the Christian's side, the disciple of Reason is calling upon him to awake from the dream to the deed, and to exchange the lotus-chaplet of unquestioning Faith for the laurel-wreath of the Larger Hope. With beckoning finger he is pointing away from the darkening shadows of the night behind to the deepening glow of the morning before—to where the welcome light is at last gladdening the eyes of those whose watch has been long and whose travail has been sore. To the Rationalist the old order changes for good; for he believes not that out of the swaddling-clothes of the infant can be fashioned the garments of the man. His watchword is Progress; that of the Christian is Memory. His adventurous feet are longing to tread the verdant uplands which are brightening in the dawn; but the lingering footsteps of the Christian turn regretfully towards the lowland glades where the sylvan shadows are lengthening, and the night wind is sighing through the cypress-groves of the world's Gethsemane.

So stand the leaders of men at the parting of the ways where many roads lead to divers habitations. Which will, at length, persuade his fellows to follow him; and whither will he lead them? Of the many bye-paths, whose devious windings lose themselves at last in the no-man's land of Nowhere, it is not needful to say more than this: that they do so lead to Nowhere. But three main roads there are, along one of which all men who move at all must travel. Pointing to the right hand and to the left, are two finger-posts bearing the legends, THEOLOGY and ATHEISM; while, between them, pointing onwards and upwards, is a third, on which is written AGNOSTICISM.

Who, now, are they that will take the various roads, and to what goals will their journeyings lead them? He who permits his emotions to unduly influence his reasonings will pass to the right hand and travel along the broad and easy way which countless millions have trodden before him, under the guidance of priest and presbyter.

Let us now assume for the nonce the tinted spectacles of Credulity,

* I am, of course, aware that it is no longer the correct thing, save in South London and other unfashionable purlieus of modern Christendom, to use such strong language as this with regard to the future fate of the sheep who leave the fold at the invitation of the heretical wolf. I can only seek to excuse my bad manners to those whose sensibilities I may have shocked by referring them to Mark xvi. 16, Titus iii. 10, 1 Cor. xvi. 22, Acts iii. 23, and the Athanasian Creed. These are venerable authorities whose dicta I may, perhaps, be forgiven for preferring to the diluted exegetics of an age which appears to be too respectable to be in earnest upon such uncomfortable subjects as the ultimate division of the sheep from the goats.

and follow the crowd which swarms along the *via facilis* of Theology. Behold how fair the path, how smooth and easy this pleasant way of salvation! There are no burdens to bear—only the names of burdens. Each one, as he passes the glorified Cross, lays his load of sin and sorrow at the feet of the Crucified One, whose welcoming voice still repeats as of yore: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

So we lay the burden down, and go rejoicing on our way beneath the spreading trees whose arching boughs entwine overhead, tempering the too ardent sunbeams with their shade. On either hand, hoary tower and tapering spire rise grey or gleaming to greet the sunlight; and, on the balmy air, the mellow voices of the bells float forth to call us to the soul-feast of praise and prayer in the guest-chambers of the Lord. Obedient to their summons, we enter the wide-open portals through which the organ-thunders roll out in waves of melody, mingled with angel-strains from throats of earthly singers. Within, the languorous air is heavy with the breath of incense and aglow with the tinted light which streams through many a lofty window, bright with the blazonry of saint and angel, and radiant with the rainbow heraldry of heaven.

Can we wonder that the thoughtless millions throng the way where every siren-sense conspires to charm and soften and allure? But let us press onward yet awhile through this consecrated fairy-land to yonder cross-road, where the finger-post points the way to the hill of knowledge. Many a priest and well-loved friend and kinsman bars the way, now with dire threat, and now with fond entreaty, seeking to turn us back into the easy way. Let us heed them not, though hearts may be broken in putting those loving hands aside; for it were treason to a higher faith than these have ever dreamed of to turn back now. The path is steep and rugged, and, ere long, fearful chasms yawn on either hand, and drifting mists obscure the way between. Yet on, brave heart! for above the mists the sun shines clear, and the blue depths of heaven hold no cloud.

The spectacles have fallen off, and thine eyes, unwonted to the light, are wandering and dim. But soon the summit is gained, and here, from walls of everlasting rock, wells forth the fount of the living waters of wisdom. Drink deep, and wash thine eyes that thou mayest be refreshed and see.

And now back to our fairy-land, that we may behold it with the undimmed eye of natural perception. Alas, purblind dreamers that we were! The spell is broken and the charm taken away. Like the desert mirage, our paradise has melted into vacancy, leaving behind it only the bare and ghastly reality which it veiled from our enchanted

gaze. Here, in its place, is the true *facilis descensus* of theology—a path lined with moss-grown dungeons and mouldering scaffolds, with the Bastilles and Calvarys, where, throughout unremembered ages, has been wrought the long tragedy of the martyrdom of man. Here lie thick-strewn the ashes of the funeral-pyres of the heroes who have died that the Truth might live; and here the clotted dust of ages is dewed with the blood and tears of myriads who have bled in strife which concerned them not, and wept for sorrows born of trust betrayed, and hopes belied, and wasted lives worn out in toil that gained no end.

Such is the broad and easy way of unquestioning faith, and blind credulity in fancy and in fact. Its end is an unfathomed morass, over whose mist-laden surface circle forever in their dance of death the luring marsh-fires of promises unfulfilled, and bright-seeming guerdons which no hand has ever grasped.

Let us now return to the parting of the ways, and follow for a briefer space those who permit their impatience of apparent mysteries to divert their steps from the stumbling-blocks which beset the path of their progress to higher spheres of thought. Let us be “practical,” and walk in the way of the hard-headed, to whom sentiment is foolishness, and the name of God a scoff and a bye-word.

There are no dreams or enchantments here. All is plain, useful, and of immediate profit. We travel along a short, straight, and evenly-paved road between lines of square-built, unlovely mills and workshops, with here and there a museum, a laboratory, and a Board school. Here everyone is busy, shrewd, and intent on the Great Problem of Life: WILL IT PAY? Alas, no! It will *not* pay, for man may not live by bread alone, whether he will or not. He who treads this path to the end will find himself at last erring and straying on the barren surface of the wide waste of Materialistic Atheism, where no song of bird, or murmur of brook, or rustle of zephyr-stirred leaf, breaks the awful silence of the death-in-life, where the dead Past grins at the dead Future over the bier of the dying Present.*

And now what of the third path? It is the straight gate and the narrow way of pure reason—the *viâ media* of Agnosticism—between the swamp and the desert, leading to the pleasant pastures of the Excellent Religion—pastures broad and rich enough for the soul-flocks of all time to come.

* These two pictures may possibly be thought overdrawn by some who read these lines. To them, perhaps, they are so, seeing that all things are relative. All that I can say for what I have written above is that I write with both feeling and knowledge, for it has been my fate in the past both to choke in the swamp of Theology and to starve on the desert of Atheism.

Thus having indicated the paths which diverge at the parting of the ways, the all-important question may be asked : Can or cannot he who looks back so lovingly to the past, and whose watchword is MEMORY, turn without treason and betrayal of his faith, and walk side by side with him who looks forward so hopefully to the future, and whose watchword is PROGRESS? In other words, can Christian and Agnostic join hands over their superficial differences, and tread the way of future progress with equal steps? The answer depends entirely upon definition. We must know what Agnosticism is and what Christianity is before we can say whether or not honourable reconciliation is possible. Further, we must define the path which the Agnostic would tread, and inquire whether or not the Christian is called upon to leave behind him the true treasures of the heritage which he has received from the past, before we can say that he is or is not able to tread that path with firm and trustful footsteps.

What, now, do the principles of the Agnostic philosophy demand from those who would truly profess and maintain them? Simply this : *A man shall not say that he knows or believes that which he has no reasonable grounds for knowing or believing.* This is all, and this is enough. Who is he who cannot subscribe to these principles, and what are the reasons for his inability to do so? Can the Christian of to-day make this subscription, and still truthfully profess and call himself a Christian? Again the answer depends upon definition—upon the nature of the faith which the Christian holds. Does his Christianity, in all its essentials, resolve itself into love for the personality and into respect for the life-work and teachings of him who went about doing good ; who gave to his disciples that “new commandment”—more honoured, alas ! in the breach than the observance—that they should love one another? Does his rule of life shape itself by the goodness, the purity, the chastity, and the unselfishness which shine out from among the misty legends and dim traditions of the Gospels, even as the everlasting stars shine out through the melting haze of evening? If so, then, indeed, may Christian and Agnostic be to one another as “guide, philosopher, and friend” so far as their journeyings shall take them.

But does his Christianity centre immovably round those monuments of past credulity and present folly upon which are graven the creeds, the dogmas, and the doctrines which, fixed for all time by the fiat of infallibility, may never be altered ; and which, be they understood or not, must be accepted in their monstrous entirety on pain of everlasting damnation and torment ; then must the Agnostic bid farewell to the Christian at the parting of the ways, and leave him to embrace his

beloved eidola until he and they are covered forever from mortal sight by the drifting sands of time.

A man may not say that he knows or believes that which he has no reasonable grounds for knowing or believing; and no man has reasonable grounds for knowing or believing the fundamental dogmas of Christianity, as formulated and insisted upon with so much denunciatory eloquence by the Christian Churches.*

As the untenability of these dogmas has now been demonstrated and re-demonstrated *ad nauseam et absurdum*, and often too with more force than forcibility, I do not propose to run the risk of wearing out the patience and, perhaps, outraging the finer sensibilities of my readers by slaying the slain, or re-reducing to absurdity the *reductio ad absurdum* of impossible positions and unthinkable conclusions. Let it here suffice, then, to say that of the three props which once supported the theological superstructure—intuition, inspiration, and miracle—not one now remains standing. Intuition has been evaporated into thin air, inspiration has been discredited, and miracles—do not happen. If such facts as these could be honestly and manfully accepted by all, as they are by many who still, nevertheless, cling lovingly to the name of Christ as the title of their faith, many if not all the theoretical barriers and word-woven fetters which still hold religion apart from philosophy would be found to disappear. What, after all, are words and titles that we should quarrel over them as children wrangle over counters when a “red” is supposed to be worth five “blues,” and “blue” worth ten “whites”? Is not the intrinsic value of all equally great and equally small? Shall the sick man be left to die, while the doctors are disputing over the *names* of the nostrums which are to heal his sickness? Surely not; for it is with the facts that we have to deal, and not with the pitiful name-labels which more or less unsatisfactorily distinguish one form of truth from another. And yet how often do we find, even among so-called “advanced thinkers,” orthodox and heterodox alike, that, on the one hand, the term “Agnostic” is a stumbling-block and rock of offence—chiefly because it includes a privative prefix; while, on the other hand, the term “Christian”—simply because it includes the title of an anointed one—is to the bellicose champions of crude theories and windy heroics as a red rag to a bull of Bashan, to be greeted with many and fierce bellowings, with elevated tail and

* For an exhaustive treatment of this subject I must refer my readers to the first *brochure* of this series, “Agnosticism and Christianity,” by Samuel Laing, author of “A Modern Zoroastrian,” a work to which I am indebted for the theme of the present essay.

lowered head, and horns pointed for the charge, which mostly results in much stamping and more dust? Yet how unspeakably childish is all this "sound and fury signifying nothing;" this sounding of brasses and tinkling of cymbals, that the foolish may dance and the vulgar admire! Surely we shall lose nothing, and gain much, by honestly admitting the fact that true philosophy is the friend and not the enemy of all true religion, whether it be called Christian or not; even as it is the unrelenting foe of all theology, with whatever name it may be labelled.

To theology the Agnostic philosophy presents an unbreakable phalanx of arguments, bristling with facts and serried with syllogisms; but to religion it stretches out the strong right hand of friendship, and with her bows the head in reverent silence before the majesty and mystery which religion calls God, and philosophy the Absolute.

In common with the true Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, and Magian, with the thoughtful and the enlightened of all climes and ages, the true Agnostic, he who feels as well as thinks, confesses reverently and willingly that in all the great faiths of the world there exist, beneath the extrinsic trappings of the Churches and Sects, those imperishable elements of eternal verity, which, for all he knows or would deny, may be the very voice of God speaking in the calm of thought which follows the storm of strife and disputation. In this connection I may, perhaps, be permitted to repeat and emphasize once more a fact which, in my estimation at least, can never be too often repeated or too strongly emphasized.

The Agnostic is continually reproached, by those who have not taken the trouble to learn what Agnosticism really is, as the apostle of a faith which is purely negative. Nothing could be farther from the truth than this hasty and foolish reproach. It is true that the conclusions of his reasonings compel the Agnostic to reply with an uncompromising negative to all assertions of knowledge or belief which cannot be justified by an appeal to reason or fact; but the utterance of this denial is by no means the last word of the Agnostic philosophy. On the contrary. With the finger of well-assured certainty and the authority of ages of mental development, it points to the region of the unknown as the treasure-house of infinite possibilities, as the potential realisation of man's deepest yearnings, and the possible fulfilment of his loftiest aspirations.

For all the Agnostic may affirm or deny, that "blank, impenetrable wall" which stands at the end of every pathway of intellectual investigation may be the veil which hides from eyes too weak to bear its glory the supernal splendour of the presence of God. Only to those who affirm that they have penetrated that veil and gazed unblinded upon

the Great Beyond, he says : Not so ; for no man can do this. Behold thy god—the shadow of thyself cast upon the wall, magnified and dim ; the projection of thine own egoity, nothing more !

In like manner also to him who, with every whit as little sanction in reason and justification in fact, so loudly affirms that beyond the wall there is nothing—naught save the infinite blank of non-being—he says with equal justice of reproof : What knowest thou of the realms which eye hath never seen and foot hath never trodden that thus thou shouldst say they are void and blank ? Even as the theologian may not with truth affirm, so mayest thou not with truth deny. When the part pervades the whole, and the plummet of finity shall have sounded the abysses of infinity, then mayest thou say with certainty, There is no God. So saying, the Agnostic takes his stand between the Atheist and the theologian in the middle way, his footsteps inclining neither to licence of affirmation on the one hand nor to licence of negation on the other, and, in so doing, the wisdom of the ages is with him.

The theologian would crowd this bright and beautiful world with ghouls and phantoms, born of the long madness of the Dark Ages of human folly ; and, according to man's belief or unbelief, he would blazon his conceptions of the hereafter with flames or jewelry, as the case may be. Unqualified condemnation of professional theology is the only verdict of its dreary and terrible history. It has turned the habitations of men into dungeons and torture-chambers, that they might become fitting ante-rooms to the mansions of eternal bliss. It has flung down the fairest flowers of human love to be trampled into the dust beneath the bony feet of asceticism, that they might the sooner bloom where no human hand could cull them. Sincerely, or with treason aforethought, professional theology, wherever and whenever it has had the power, has wrought untold and irremediable evil that hypothetical good might come of it. The evil has been done in the sight of all men ; but the good is, alas ! sadly to seek, save in the ever-widening and deepening discredit of theology itself.

Such is theology—bad enough in all sad seriousness ; but is its Atheistic antithesis any better ? Surely not ; for Atheism, carried out to its logical conclusion—as I who thus write of it once carried it out—would strip human life of all its fair romance, poetic dreams, and sweet, soul-charming phantasies, till the world of sense became a dry, rattling skeleton of articulated “facts”—a vast machine, started no one knows when or how, and working no one knows why ; an auto-motor engine, which somehow grinds out life and death, and love and hate, and pain and pleasure, to the poor, pitiful little wheels which think themselves so great and so important until, worn-out and useless for one “function,”

they drop out and are re-ground to dust and atoms for another by those vaster wheels which whirl on unheeding forever through the dust and noise and steam of that mighty mud-grinding mechanism which the Materialist calls "the Universe."*

Between these two—the theological dungeon and the Atheistic mud-mill—the Agnostic would lead his fellow-travellers along that *viâ media* which leads through the world of phenomena to the super-sensual sphere of religion. On his journey through this phenomenal world, this enchanted sense-realm of untold wonder and beauty, man may both reason and dream without fear of contradiction or paradox. On what he knows and yet shall learn, he may reason; and he shall learn enough to reason upon forever if he will. On what he does not know, and, with his present powers, never can know, he may still dream to his heart's content, speculating hopefully and trustfully upon the infinite possibilities of the Great Perhaps. Only he may not, without betraying the truth as it is in him, present to his fellows as fact that which he knows to be only phantasy; nor may he, on the other hand, condemn the dreamer who dreams other dreams than his own until this one has sinned against the trust of his fellows by offering them phantasies for facts.

These, then, are the lessons which the Agnostic may learn at the Parting of the Ways: With the Christian, the Moslem, and the Buddhist, he may revere all that reason may find worthy of reverence in the personalities and teachings of the Carpenter of Nazareth, the Camel-Driver of Mecca, and the Penitent of Chakia. With the Initiates of the universal Theism of all climes and ages, he may bow his head in

* With what awful, soul-chilling eloquence has the sad, sweet singer of "The City of Dreadful Night" described this "material" world as viewed through the smoked lens of Pessimism! The lines are horribly apposite to this portion of my theme, so I will take leave to quote them:—

"The world rolls round forever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
It has no purpose, heart, or mind, or will.

"While air of Space and Time's full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so:
It may be wearing out, but who can know?

"Man might know one thing were his sight less dim:
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

"Nay, doth it treat him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some few years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death."

reverence before the mystery of the Unnameable, and lay the tribute of his adoration upon the altar of the Unknown God. And, lastly, with the Materialist, may he investigate and classify the facts of phenomena, and, by observation and experiment, lay bare the inmost secrets of phenomenal existence; only at the marge of the sense-sphere shall he, the living mortal, pause, nor dare to tread with the irreverent feet of vain-glorious assurance that mysterious realm of the Great Beyond which can only be entered through the solemn portals of the Grave and Gate of Death.

II.

AGNOSTICISM AND THE POLAR THEORY.

OF all the problems of the present day the most momentous is that which involves the constitution of the future faith of men. As I have attempted to show in the preceding section, the faiths of the past have, to all intents and purposes, lost their efficacy for guidance wherever the progress of mental development has advanced beyond that stage at which anthropomorphism ceases to be credible and anthropocentricism becomes absurd. The removal of miracle-cults and the manifold extrinsic trappings of what has been wrongly termed supernaturalism lay bare a state of things which compels us to ask: Will the men of the future believe in anything external to the sphere of sense, and, if so, what will be their attitude towards the object of their belief? The practically universal discredit which has befallen Atheism—a fate which is only the legitimate outcome of a natural revolt of the finer sensibilities of educated (as distinguished from merely instructed) humanity from its cut-and-dried precision and irredeemable sordidness—is a practically conclusive argument in support of the belief that the aspirations of the future will extend beyond the limits of the sphere of material* sense.

That there will be a faith of the future, which, while it will be based on knowledge, will soar far into regions where knowledge is impossible, I, for one, firmly and hopefully believe. A world without faith would be like a world without an atmosphere, soundless, colourless, and lifeless. The fierce light of unrefracted knowledge would beat down upon an arid scene of monotony, which would embrace only two variations—

* This term “material” is used throughout this essay in its purely conventional sense, and is intended simply to indicate that which we cognise through the medium of the senses. What this is *per se*, and what the media are through which it is cognised, the writer knows not, and hence cannot presume to teach his equally ignorant and equally learned readers.

from light to shadow, from white to black—whose ever-succeeding alternations would themselves be of the very essence of monotony. Everything would be either *so* or *not-so*, and all questions—if there were any—would be settled by Mathematics—from which the kindly fates preserve us!

Now, there can, I think, be very little doubt in the mind of anyone who stands abreast of the thought of to-day that the Agnostic philosophy is destined to exercise a wide and deep influence in the shaping of the future faith. Whatever may be the outward professions which are uttered in obedience to the dictates of complacency, social or pecuniary interests, or mental timidity, there is no denying the fact that in the present day all who are capable of abstract thought really maintain towards the ultimate problems of existence an attitude which is simply and purely Agnostic, in so far as it is an attitude of suspended judgment. The old solutions of the eternal problem have turned out to be no solutions at all. Those who advanced them attempted to prove too much, and so have laid themselves open to the imputation of having proved nothing. As a natural consequence, the world, thrown back once more upon first principles, turns to those who have been instrumental in destroying the old conceptions, and asks them with well-justified insistence what they propose to give in the place of that which they have taken away. The answer to this question contains the delineation of the faith of the future. That this faith will be identical with the Agnosticism of the present does not appear to be either possible or desirable. Agnosticism is a philosophy, a codification of correct thinkings, and, as such, it is as perfect as man's present powers permit it to be. But we want something more than this when we ask for a religion. The most perfect manual of Agnosticism that the combined talents of all living Agnostics could compile would be of no more use as a guide of life and conduct than the first book of Euclid would be. Common honesty compels me to confess with sorrow that I have known more than one professor of this perfect philosophy whose moral rectitude has been in inverse ratio to his philosophical acumen. Unhappily, correct thinking is not the inseparable correlative of correct living, and there is nothing to prevent a philosopher whose flights in regions metaphysical are marvels of grace and precision being a very contemptible creature when crawling about among his fellows on the surface of the earth. Philosophy, then, concerns thinking, and thinking alone. If we seek for a guide in life and conduct, we must turn to Religion. But what religion? This is the question, the answer to which I shall attempt to forecast, more or less imperfectly, in this and the following section.

Of one fact we may be quite certain : the religion of the future will be the lineal descendant of the religions of the past and present ; in other words, it will be a product whose factors are existing to-day. Neither mentally nor physically is there, or will there ever be, anything essentially new under the sun. Selection and combination of pre-existing elements is the limit of mental as well as of physical constructive power. When we come to examine and to classify the presently existing factors with which we have to reckon in a calculation as to the composition of the religion of the future, we find that they are four, which may be arranged in Polar order as follows : Theology ; Theism ; Agnosticism ; Atheism. These factors represent the gradations of the religio-philosophical scale of intensity from the positive to the negative extreme. Of these four elements the first and the last may be dismissed from our calculation in very few words, after what has already been said. As in the case of that mysterious mode of energy which we call electricity, the positive and negative sub-modes or manifestations cannot, in the nature of things, exist independently and without ultimate neutralisation resulting in the establishment of necessary equilibrium ; so, in the case of that other equally mysterious mode of energy called thought, the positive and negative differentiations cannot co-exist save in tendency to mutual neutralisation and resultant equilibrium. Theology, in pure reason, cannot exist ; for a universal affirmative is unthinkable save in relation to omniscience, which is also unthinkable. Atheism, likewise, is impossible ; for, if a universal affirmative predicates omniscience, so also does a universal negative. The two extremes are thus impossible modes of pure reason—that is to say, they are both irrational. Ample proof of the truth of this statement may be found in the domain of experience, where we find theology exploded, and Atheism discredited in the conclusions of the best minds of the age—the former being justly regarded as the *credo* of the mentally feeble, and the latter as the shibboleth of the mentally vulgar.

The extremes *per se* being found to be impossible modes of thought, we have now to deal with the means—Theism and Agnosticism. It is in virtue of the fusion of these two modes of thought and feeling that the faith of the future must have its being, if it is to exist at all, for the simple reason that there are no other elements out of which it can be fashioned.

It would be beside the purpose of this essay to enter into the detailed proof of the conclusions upon which the Agnostic position rests, and I shall, therefore, content myself with simply stating those conclusions, and pointing out their relation to the Polar Theory of Being, considered as the philosophical substratum of the Excellent

Religion.* These conclusions embody the fundamental principles of human thought, and no man can deny or even question them without at the same time either denying or transcending his own thought.

First in natural order stand the axioms which define the limits of human knowledge. They form, as it were, the delimitation of the Knowable from the Unknowable, and so mark off with a rigid line the domain of relative certainty from the regions of more or less-rational speculation and hypothesis. The axioms of delimitation may be set out as follows:—

1. All human knowledge is relative—that is to say, man possesses no knowledge save that which consists in the relations existing between the subject-self (*ego*) and object-notself (*non-ego*).

2. Subject and object are, *per se*, inscrutable to man.† He knows them only as stimulus (object), and that which responds to stimulus (subject). Perception and conception, sensation and consciousness, consist solely for man in the activity of response to stimulus.

3. Immediate knowledge of the ultimate facts of existence is unattainable by the present powers of man. In the last possible analysis all “facts” are resolved into constituents, which defy man’s acutest powers of examination.‡

4. Man can know causes only as effects of antecedent causes—*i.e.*, he knows cause and effect only in relation to each other.

5. Man can only reason from effect to cause, and not *vice versa*, unless he first *assumes* the cause; in which case the assumed cause must be in strict relation to the effect which it is intended to account for, and from this effect he must reason back to that cause.

* To those of my readers who may be unfamiliar with the processes of reasoning which conduct to the conclusions of the Agnostic philosophy, I cannot do better than recommend a careful perusal of “Agnostic First Principles,” by Albert Simmons, and (subsequently) “Agnostic Problems,” by Dr. Bithell. From these two admirable volumes the general reader will learn all that any one can teach him, unless, indeed, he is prepared to devote years of study to the subject. Both are obtainable from the publishers of this pamphlet.

† “The antithesis of subject and object, never to be transcended while consciousness lasts, renders impossible all knowledge of that Ultimate Reality in which subject and object are united” (Herbert Spencer, “Principles of Psychology,” i., 272).

‡ Just as “matter” in the last possible analysis of theoretical chemistry evaporates into “elemental atoms,” which are utterly unthinkable, so do all the phenomena of consciousness—knowledge, volition, responsibility, etc.—up to the supreme phenomenon of personal identity itself, resolve themselves into constituents of the nature of which we cannot form the faintest conception that will stand the test of a moment’s thought. Like the “atoms” of chemical “matter,” they are elusive, impossible, and unthinkable.

6. A *first* cause is unthinkable, for the reason that the effort to conceive an uncaused cause (*i.e.*, an effect which had no cause) breaks in consciousness the essential sequence of cause and effect.

After the axioms of delimitation have been set forth and assented to, it is allowable to define the nature and scope of relative knowledge by means of the equally valid and necessary axioms of demonstration. These develop the positive aspect of Agnosticism as follows :—

1. Consciousness is the proof and criterion of existence for man.

2. All that exists for man is all that he is conscious of, objectively and subjectively.

3. All that of which man is objectively conscious has, for him, a real and positive existence in relation to the object-world, or *non-ego*.

4. All that of which man is subjectively conscious has for him a real and positive existence as certain to him as the fact of his own thought, in virtue of which his relation to the subject-world is maintained.

5. Rational conscious existence consists, for man, in the harmonious correlation of the facts of the object-world with the facts of the subject-world.* In such measure as the harmony of this correlation is disturbed in the case of each individual, so does the mentation of that individual become irrational.

6. From the primary facts of consciousness, subjective and objective, man is capable of building up conceptions which are, to him, purely subjective, but which are, nevertheless, for the conceiver, existences as real as that thought in virtue of which he is capable of forming the conceptions.

7. These conceptions are valid or invalid, imperative or optional, for *all* men, according as they more or less completely coincide with the necessary inferences from the primary facts.†

8. All possible valid conceptions are ultimately referable to three imperative categories of thought, which are :—

a. SPACE, the category of extension, limited, to man's present powers of perception, to tri-dimensional extension.

* We cannot, of course, know the object-world apart from the subject-world ; but we have familiar examples of the latter partially dis severed from the former in dreams, trances, and delirium, which may be described as *irrational* conscious existence.

† Thus the axioms of geometry are conceptions built up of the primary facts of extension and position, and they are binding on all men because they coincide with *all* the inferences from the primary facts. So, too, after their kind, with the three laws of thought and the elementary properties of number.

- b.* TIME, the category of succession, limited, to man's present powers of perception, to bi-directional extension, past and future, fused in immediate presentment as present.
- c.* POLARITY, the category of contrast and compensation, the all-pervading principle of conditioned objective existence, and the essential mode of subjective activity.

9. The categories of space and time are the necessary modes of all conditioned objective existence. The category of polarity is the necessary mode of *all* conditioned existence, subjective and objective, mental, moral, and material.

10. In the necessity and universality of the principle of polarity consist that *nexus* between the subjective and objective spheres of existence and that correlation of mental, moral, and material phenomena which are absolutely essential to the formulation of such a theory of being as shall prove adequate to the satisfaction of the rational *and* emotional cravings of human nature as we find it at present constituted.*

Having thus laid down the axioms which *must* be accepted by all who shrink from denying that thought which alone enables them to deny, I will now proceed to supplement them with those postulates, which *may* be granted by all who have accepted the axioms, and which, I venture to believe, will only be rejected by those who are driven into licence of denial by the prejudices of Atheism, or into licence of affirmation by the prejudices of theology. Before stating these postulates, however, it will be well to answer, in anticipation, the very natural and relevant question: Why do you need these postulates, and to what end do you ask that they shall be granted? To this query I reply:—

Because we know that all possible knowledge is relative, and because the very knowledge of this relativity compels us to infer, from the fact of appearance, that behind appearances there is that which appears.

Because it is in the essential nature of man to seek to transcend, by subjective means, that objective knowledge which is concerned solely with phenomena.

Because in this effort are employed the noblest faculties of our rational and emotional nature—faculties which seem, indeed, to find their most fitting function in making this effort.

Because the best minds of all ages and climes have, without exception, either admitted or insisted upon the necessity for a more or less

* This axiom is all-important to the purposes of this essay, and the reader is requested to bear it especially in mind when reading the third section.

definite religious system and rule of conduct for man in the aggregate.*

Because it is also admitted under the sanction of universal experience that, for the vast majority of mankind, such a system is only valid and operative when framed with immediate reference to those higher powers which so manifestly mould and influence the individual and aggregate destinies of humanity.

For these reasons, then, the reader is asked to grant the following postulates, which, in conjunction with the foregoing axioms of delimitation and demonstration, form the philosophic basis of the Excellent Religion :—

1. That the universe of phenomena, as cognised by man, exists, for him, as the manifestation of absolute energy.

2. That this energy can never be known to man *per se*, save in so far as man *is*, by virtue of his very existence, the embodiment of a mode of this energy. †

3. That since man, to exist at all, must be a mode of the absolute energy, the universally human instinct of adoration and reverence may be reasonably viewed as the necessary response of conscious relative being to the stimulus of that absolute being which is the final fact of consciousness.

4. That the absolute energy is manifested to the relative mode solely in the relations subsisting between them as stimulus and response to stimulus.

5. That the manifestations of absolute energy are, for man, wholly included in the essential category of Polarity, and so proceed phenomenally as positive and negative modes, opposite in function but identical in essence. ‡

6. That the positive mode of the absolute energy works through the

* To this it may be objected that many of the foremost philosophers and scientists of the present day do no such thing. For my own part, I doubt the fact save in relation to the further fact that no religious system at present exists to which their scientific knowledge and philosophical training permit them to give an honest adherence. Another answer to the objection is contained in the significant fact that not a single acknowledged leader of scientific or philosophic opinion will permit his name to be associated with the anarchical violence of that literary nihilism which is known to English society as "Destructive Secularism."

† This postulate is, of course, simply a re-statement of the favourite aphorism of Bruno of Nola : "*Est Deus in nobis.*"

‡ For example, consider that manifestation of energy which appears phenomenally as electricity, under the two modes, positive and negative, + and —, which are opposite in function, but identical in essence, since both are modes of the same manifestation.

moral sphere for good, and that the negative mode of the same works through the moral sphere for evil or not-good.

7. That the experience of mankind in the aggregate justifies the *belief* that, in the moral sphere, the positive constantly overcomes the negative by conversion, and the consequent *faith* that the operation of the positive mode or good principle tends towards the ultimate establishment of such harmony between sentience and environment as will result in perfect beneficence and happiness.

8. That, since phenomenal existence is manifested to man in series of organic structure ever progressive in complexity; and since a higher degree of complexity ever corresponds to a more complete adaptation of structure to function, and function to environment; and since these conditions find their climax in volition, guided by consciousness, it is reasonable to infer that the power, of which these conditions are the manifestation, is itself a conscious power, acting in virtue of volition.

9. That, as the positive, good, constructive, or progressive mode of the absolute energy is inferred to culminate in supreme consciousness and will, so, by the Law of Polarity, must its opposite, the negative, evil, destructive, or retrogressive mode of the absolute energy, be considered as unconscious force, acting blindly in opposition to the positive or consciously beneficent mode.

10. That, even as man consciously partakes of the essence of the conscious mode of the absolute energy working for good through the moral sphere, so does he share the power which sways the moral world, and so, in corresponding degree, is he responsible for its good government—not only to his fellow men, but also to that aggregate of the conscious power which tends to goodness through conversion of evil, and to the supremacy of positive consciousness over negative unconsciousness in virtue of the conquest of blind evil by volitional good.

A careful perusal of the foregoing axioms of Agnosticism and postulates of the Polar Theory of Being, will, I trust, make plain to the reader the various inductive steps by which the Polar Theory leads up from the conclusions of the Agnostic philosophy to the generalisations of the Excellent Religion, or that system of dualism which was thus named by its Founder, who, thirty centuries ago, conferred upon it a title of which the progress of modern thought and science demonstrates the validity at every step it takes, and with every new generalisation at which it arrives. In the following section I shall attempt to expound the true doctrine of the Excellent Religion, and to apply it to the elucidation of the moral problems and to the satisfaction of the moral needs of the present day and generation.

III.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE EXCELLENT RELIGION.

“Est Deus in Nobis.”

HAVING in the previous section indicated the philosophical basis of the Excellent Religion, it will now be my endeavour to delineate the superstructure of this faith of the future, towards which, as I believe, the footsteps of all who value the religion which unites more than the theology which separates will tend more and more directly and trustfully, as the religious pioneers of our race leave farther and farther behind them the shadow-realms of the Past, and approach more and more nearly to the confines of that Better Land over whose shining peaks is breaking the dawn of earth's brighter To-morrow.

The conditions of man's mental being compel him to reason from what he knows to what he does not know. Now, as has been shown, he knows phenomena and phenomena only, and from them he may reason to their probable or possible source or *raison d'être*; but he must do so in the full knowledge of the fact that his conclusions can never be final—that he can approximate to final truth, but, as at present constituted, never reach it. From what has been already said, it will be seen that Agnosticism is concerned solely with pure reason; that its processes are purely rational, and lead to conclusions which *must* be accepted, whether they be in accordance with the inclinations of the reasoner or not. Its axioms are as self-evident, its methods are as rigid, and its conclusions as inevitable as those of geometry.

So far so good; but we cannot thus proceed far enough. Man is, or should be, a reasoning being; but the being who *only* reasoned would be nothing better than a precise kind of clock-work automaton, which might make a good mathematician, but which would never make a man. We have heretofore been concerned with the rational, and now we have to deal with the emotional factors of man's being—factors whose omission from our problem would vitiate our reasoning altogether.

Man not only thinks, but feels, and to reckon without his emotional faculties would be as unphilosophical as to reckon without his rational faculties. Now, viewing man thus in the dual nature of his mental being, the question arises : If the rational faculties find in Agnosticism the sphere of their proper activity, in what sphere do his emotional faculties most naturally operate? To this question I conceive the answer to be : Theism. But by theism I do not mean that blindly convenient cocksureness which asserts the existence of a suitable god, and then argues from that "fact" to the conclusions most palatable to its own vanity and most consonant with its own ignorance. Far be such foolishness from me ; for this theism is only theology strained through a sieve. I mean a Higher Theism, a religion which satisfies the aspirations of emotion without violating the sanction of reason ; which does not teach man to pick and choose among the facts of life, but to take all these facts, good and bad alike, into account, and do his best to reconcile them in accordance with his faith. I mean, indeed, such a theism as will conduct men towards the presence of the Unknown God along lines which shall be, as it were, projections of the lines of pure reason beyond the sphere of positive knowledge into the realms where knowledge must give place to faith which rests on knowledge.

In accordance with the demands of Emotion—equally positive and equally imperative, be it noted, as the demands of Reason—we must now leave the sphere of fact for the sphere of faith, the domains of knowledge for those of belief. We have established and defined our philosophy ; we would now construct our religion—not as a thing apart from our philosophy, but rather as a conclusion arrived at by its help and through its processes, even as Action is shaped and determined by the alchemy of Thought.

There are those who are of opinion that between religion and philosophy there is no essential bond ; that they are not the wedded guardians of the soul—loving and faithful guides from the realms of sight and sense to the brighter realms of hope and faith ; but that they are enemies to the death. Those who think thus do not believe that the tender, star-eyed maid, whose white-winged feet hover on the mysterious marge of the Unknown, and whose golden tresses gleam with unearthly sheen in "the light that never was on sea nor shore," is a fit mate for the stern warrior who stands, for Truth's sake, against old Error ; the champion on whose broad brow shines the helm of Intellect, whose breast is guarded by the impenetrable shield of Reason, and whose strong right hand grasps the long, keen sword of Logic. To change the metaphor, these are they who would have us believe that the super-

structure is all and the foundation nothing ; that aisle and column, rounded dome, and tapering spire, are all that are needed to frame the fabric of a church. These are they who have never laid to heart the meaning of him who spoke the parable of the house-builders. True it is that they who only see the sunlight flashing over dome and spire, and streaming through the painted oriels in floods of rainbow glory, think but little of the cold dark rock beneath their feet, or the mighty buried courses of hewn stone which rest upon it, laid down stone by stone and course by course with patient skill and tireless toil. Yet, when the flood arises and the storm beats down, and still the edifice stands fast, then may even these thoughtless ones pause and think how, but for hidden rock and buried course on course of stone, those white walls would crack and gape, how yon towering spire would sway and fall, and how yon shapely dome would sink in shapeless ruin to the earth.

Thus it is with the concrete, and thus, too, does the universal law apply with equal force throughout the realm of the abstract. As with the church, so with the faith ; as with the shrine, so with the conception of the god ; as with the altar, so with the cultus—deep down in the dark bosom of things, on the living rock that remains forever, let the immoveable foundations be laid, and then let the fabric of the superstructure rise fair and strong to greet the sunshine and withstand the storm.

Where, now, shall such a church, such a faith, and such an altar be found ? The gods of Egypt are dead, and the Muezzin's call to prayer rings over the fields where sacred Apis grazed. The Acropolis is a wilderness of ruin, and the Oracle of Delphi is voiceless. Where the Alban Fathers sacrificed to Jove the Christian eats his god in memory of his death. Where Buddha preached Mohammed reigns. Where gleamed the Crescent falls the Shadow of the Cross ; and where the Pilgrim Fathers sang their hymns to the cadences of the waves that beat on Plymouth Rock the rival jargons of a thousand sects, from Catholicism to Mormonism, laugh to scorn the peace on earth proclaimed by the angel-choirs of yore to the shepherds of Bethlehem, The mosque of Omar dominates the city of David, and the chosen people is scattered over the earth like sheep without a shepherd, straying on the wintry hills of Time. Creed after creed has been erased by the hand of force, corrupted by the impurities of luxury, or rent to fragments by the savage fangs of schism. Altar after altar has been overturned, and faith after faith has been withered by the fire of criticism, or calcined in the crucible of science.

So thirty centuries have passed ; but the fires that were kindled

upon the altars of the sun amid the snowy peaks of Elburz, when Zoroaster* proclaimed the doctrine of the Excellent Religion still cast their glow undimmed over the wide field of modern thought, and still may be kindled at these eternal fires the torch with which the truth-seeker of to-day may explore the dark caverns of the mystery of Being.

As preached in its original purity by the ancient Iranian prophet, the Excellent Religion was a system of pure Theism, based upon the conclusions of pure Reason ; and so exact were the methods of observation and induction used by him in the formulation of his religion that, were Zoroaster to return from absolute to relative being, he would find that the validity of the primary hypothesis upon which he based it has survived intact the storms and changes of three thousand years, and has never been impugned by a single fact of history or a single true generalisation of philosophy.

Is there any other theory of being, any other system of religion, which can present such claims to our adherence, and give such unimpeachable assurance of the justification of our faith, as can the Excellent Religion ?

Is time the test of truth ? Then is this religion true ; for the essential doctrines of the Iranian sage, † formulated 600 years before Socrates argued and Plato reasoned, might, save for their Oriental imagery, have been garnered from the rich harvests of the ripest thought and scholarship of the modern world. Is reason the test of truth ? Then is this religion true ; for the aggregated reasonings of thirty centuries have but justified its methods and ratified its conclusions.

Modern science is the deed of which Iranian Dualism was the dream ; and, like science, the Excellent Religion points to deeds as the only true and legitimate realisation of all dreams of profit and happiness. Above all others, it is the cultus of purity, attained through conversion of evil into good.

Within the communion of the Excellent Religion there is no caste among men to divide them one from the other. All here are equal from the religious point of view ; all are equally called *the Pure* ; and every man is the priest of his own household. Here are no temples,

* There were certainly two, if not more, Iranian prophets who bore this name. "From an ancient Hindoo source we learn that 'Zoroaster was the title of the spiritual teachers of Ahura Mazda.....there was a series of fourteen of these teachers'" ("The Mystery of the Ages," by the Countess of Caithness, p. 117). The Zoroaster who preached before King Gustasp in Balkh lived about 600 B.C., while the author of the early portions of the Zend-Avesta probably wrote about 1,200 B.C.

† See axioms and postulates in the previous section.

nor any other ceremony than the converse of souls and the preaching of wisdom. Here is no mythology nor extravagance of imagination; for all that is good in religion is true, positive, serious, and strong. In holiness is all true force and vigour of wisdom and good sense.

The unsurpassed and ever-living law of life which marks out the true path of a blessed future is simple and in all things humane. It is the law of heroic strife, of the unfailing effort of good against evil, of the life of pure light in work, and the doing of justice. The morals of this law are the morals of the man and the worker, not of the idler or the dreamer: the morals not of abstinence, denial, and lethargy, but of ever active, ever fruitful energy. All the law of life is comprised in this only: Be pure that thou mayest be strong; be strong that thou mayest be pure.*

Were any one to ask, Which is the most perfect theory of being? the answer would be, That which affords the most approximately correct answers to those three terrific questions which in all climes and ages, in accents more or less distinct, man has asked first himself, and then the priests of his gods: What am I? Whence do I come? Whither do I go? It is in vain that Reason wrestles fruitlessly with these problems; in vain does Philosophy demonstrate that Reason can never arrive at a complete solution of them; and in vain does Science point in silence to her lamp burning dim amid the shadows of the realm when man may not walk by sight.

Again and again, forever repeated through the ages, do these eternal questions recur; and forever is man impelled by some secret spring of his nature to seek and to strive for the knowledge which shall include the answer to them.

This is the God-hunger of Humanity, and it is only the statement of a fact to say that it is as keenly felt by the best of the men of to-day as it was by those who sought to trace the tresses of Isis streaming among the stars which shone on Nilus forty centuries ago.

What answers, now, does the doctrine of the Excellent Religion give to him who asks these questions? Ask, reader, and thou shalt learn!

What am I?

Thou art, for thyself, all that is, all that has been, and all that ever shall be. Thy being is a conditioned manifestation of that absolute energy which contains the potentialities of all existence, past, present, and to come. In thee, under the universal law of contrast, contend for mastery the two opposing modes of conditioned energy, positive

* Adapted from "La Bible de l'Humanité."

and negative, conscious and unconscious, volitional and blind, which shape thy course to good or evil, as either overcometh the other. Wilt thou be good and do good? Then shall thy Will with sight direct thy strength, and as the light dispels the darkness, and heat the cold, so shall thy seeing Will overcome the blind lust of passion, and the light of growing knowledge dispel the glooms of ignorance amid which thy soul erred to do evil.

Whence do I come?

From the infinite abyss of unconditioned absolute being hast thou, a conditioned mode amid myriad others, like in kind, but differing in degree, proceeded in virtue of the supreme law of the conditioned, the law of conflict in contrast, in order that, in thee and through thee, the volitional should strive with the blind, the conscious with the unconscious, the good with the evil, unto the perfect end of the all-converted—the knowledge that shall know no ignorance, the love that shall know no hate, the light that shall know no darkness.

Whither do I go?

Look around thee; for all existence is eloquent with the answer. The fire-clouds floating in the abyss of space evolve into flaming suns and circling planets; the life-pregnant beams stream forth; and day and night succeed each other on a million rolling worlds. The waters are divided from the land, and, lo! each teems with living things after its kind. Organism succeeds organism in ever-increasing complexity of adaptation to its environment, until, at length, triumphant Will grasps the sceptre of Force, and sways the unconscious at its bidding. Of all this thou art the ultimate product and crowning glory; and, since thou art embodied Will, is it not for thee to decide whether thou wilt ascend yet farther or return to the depths whence thou hast climbed?

In all things thou seest Progress as the law of conditioned being—from the fire-cloud to the world-system, from the acorn to the oak, from the seed to the harvest—and shalt thou, the highest, be the pitiful exception that would place thee lower than the lowest? Beyond the grave thou canst not see—peradventure the light would blind thee if thou couldst—yet be of good cheer, knowing good from evil, and having power for good if thou wilt use it. The chain of the Past has no link wanting; shall the chain of the Future be broken—and for thee? Unless all life is a lie, and all progress a delusion, this truth, at least, shall be true of thee: Where thou shalt leave off, there shalt thou begin again. High or low, in goodness or in evil, in knowledge or in ignorance, where the Angel of Death shall find thee here, there shall the Angel of Life meet thee hereafter. See thou, therefore, to it that he shall find thee rather in goodness than in evil.

I have elsewhere described the Excellent Religion as a pure Theism, and it is now time that I should justify this description. By a pure Theism I mean a religion whose God is wholly and purely good. Now, a good god cannot in any sense, direct or indirect, be the author of evil —no, not even of *apparent* evil, for that is evil *to us*, and, hence, the conscious author of that evil is, *to us*, evil in the measure and degree of the evil as we perceive it. And, further, if the moral law means anything, and if God is a moral being, then God is morally responsible to us for that measure of evil which we perceive by suffering it. But the god who should make sentient beings in the knowledge that they would suffer, even for a moment, from the presence of evil which he had permitted to be, would be either volitionally impotent or morally imperfect; while a god who with prescience should “create” or “design” such a ghastly tragedy as human life (viewed from this standpoint) has been and is, when he might have refrained, would be a monster whom it were the grossest flattery to call a devil. The pitiful excuses of “free-will,” “discipline,” “you would understand if you saw the whole plan,” etc., can only be described as worthy the worshippers of such an infernal deity.*

The God of the Excellent Religion is no more responsible for the existence of evil than (to use a very humble illustration) the positive mode of electricity is responsible for the negative mode; for this doctrine recognises no irresponsibly responsible despot who made all things for his own greater vain-glory, and then set half creation writhing in agony, that it might be “disciplined” up to the state of excellence in which Omnipotence could have placed and maintained it to begin with. On the contrary, this doctrine postulates the aggregate consciousness of the universe, and then, returning to the original and only true meaning of the term “god,” idealises this Supreme Consciousness as the Good Principle of Existence, working volitionally against the aggregate unconsciousness, and ever overcoming it by conversion into consciousness. Further, in so far as men are volitional conscious agents overcoming by conversion the blind forces of “nature” without them and within them, in just such degree is the aphorism of the

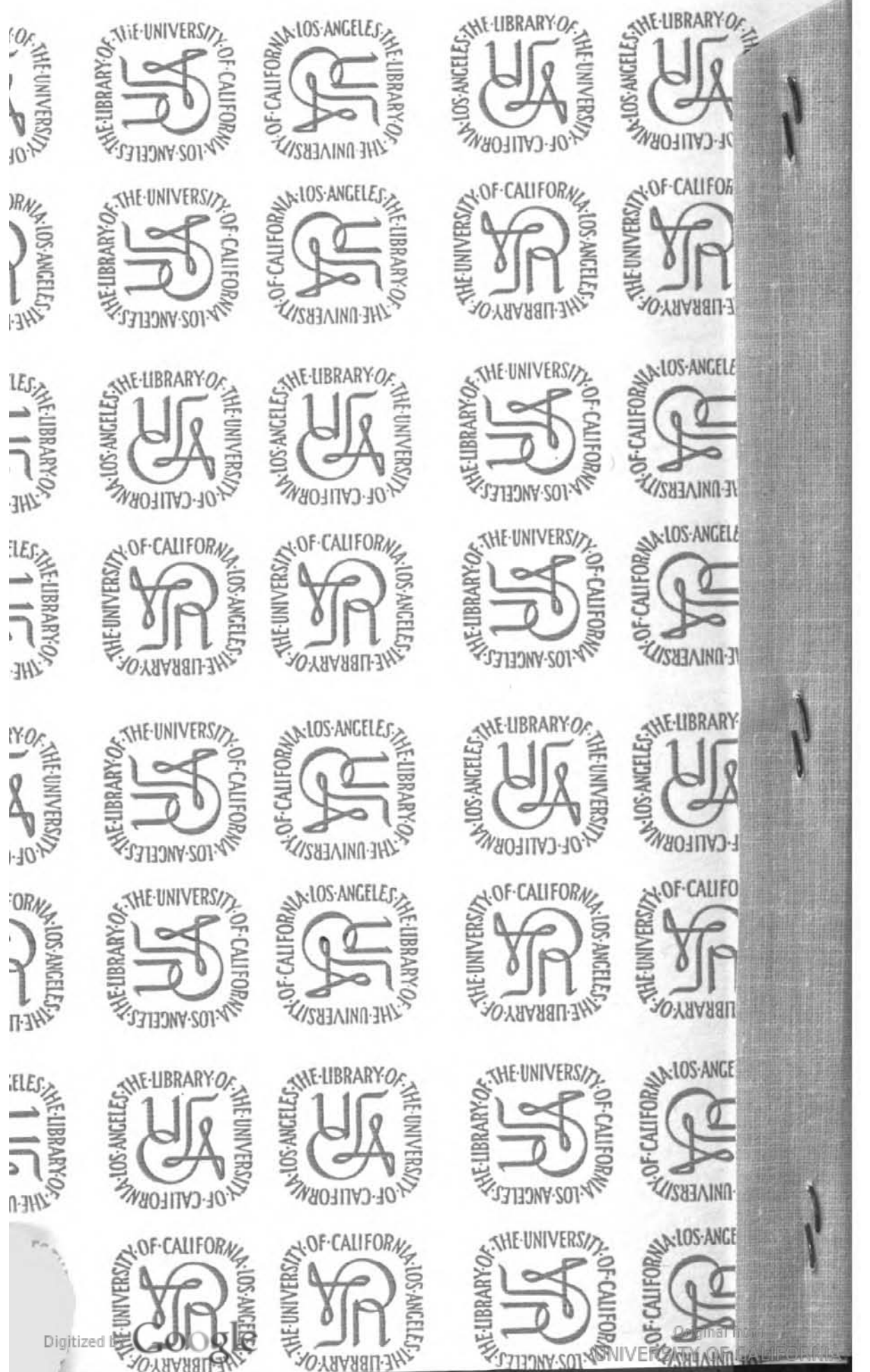
* This is not a controversial essay, and, hence, it would be out of place to discuss further the hideous problem involved in the dilemma of Divine Omnipotence and Human Free-will (which are mutually exclusive terms, let apologists say what they may). I will, therefore, content myself with asking my readers what they would think of a *man* who sent a child into a powder-magazine with a box of matches, and then *damned it to all eternity because it blew itself up*? And this, too, to “discipline” the child, who, having “free-will,” need not have struck the fatal match unless it had “willed to do so”! What a mockery of even human justice!

Excellent Religion—*Est Deus in Nobis*—true of them and for them. In other words, the God of this doctrine is the subjectively-realised ideal of all that is good, pure, positive, and intelligent in man and the universe. All else is evil, impure, negative, and ignorant, to be striven with and overcome by conversion, as consciousness overcomes the unconscious, and volitional strength prevails over blind force.

This, then, is the sum of the doctrine of the Excellent Religion : Let Reason, free and fearless, scan and probe and test all that intellect can comprehend within the sphere of phenomenal fact, discovered and to be discovered ; but on the marge of the phenomenal the footsteps of investigation shall pause, nor vainly seek to pass that impassable barrier which, translucent as crystal, yet unbreakable as adamant, divides the phenomenal from the noumenal, the Relative from the Absolute. Yet this is not all, for, even as sight is not the only sense, so is not reason all the power of man, nor the sense-world all the realms that he may range. Above mechanical reason stands moral consciousness, and the final fact of moral consciousness is God—uncomprehended, yet apprehended—the Supremely Conscious Power which, forever hid from finite sight behind the veil of appearances, wills and works for good through conversion of evil unto the perfect end.

Towards this goal, which imperfection cannot see, but which the consciousness of ceaseless progress bids him hope for, let man in steadfastness pursue the path which Duty marks with rule and line, and which Love and Hope adorn with fadeless flowers, till the kindly hand of Death at last shall lift the veil, and the pilgrim shall pass from the shadows and half-lights of Relative Being into the cloudless radiance of that Eternal Reality of which all things now known to sense and sight are but the transient appearance.







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