

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

A Dialogue

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PREFACE

The following Dialogue is an attempt to put forward, in popular form, the chief arguments from reason by which the existence of God is proved, and to show the weakness and inconsistency of the objections most commonly urged against it. I must ask my readers to remember that the conversations as narrated are supposed to be but an abstract of the discussions which would be required to convince under ordinary circumstances a sceptic of such long standing as the interlocutor to whom I have given the name of Cholmeley. If he retreats from his position with a readiness which would scarcely find a counterpart in real life, the apparent unreality is due to the necessity of conciseness and to the opportunity that written language affords of pondering over arguments which, if spoken, would only sink in gradually, and after a frequency of repetition wearisome in print.

The treatment of such a subject as that about which I have written has another practical difficulty—that there are no two men to whom precisely the same objections occur with equal force. All that is possible for one who seeks to deal with it in popular shape is to choose out so far as he can those which are most common and most mischievous to the generality of men. His temptation is to be continually drawn off into further rejoinders and unnecessary subtleties. And in seeking to avoid this danger he is liable to expose himself to the charge of not sounding to its depths the intellectual Charybdis of unbelief.

I must therefore throw myself on the indulgence of my readers. If I have passed over any solid serious arguments, or any objections that I should have done well to meet, I will try and remedy such omission hereafter.

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROOF FROM REASON

Saville and Cholmeley had been friends almost from infancy. Together they had played as little children; together they had passed through one of the largest of the public schools; together they had gone to Oxford, and after their four years' residence there, their names had appeared in the same Class List in the Final Examination. After his degree, Saville had gone to Cuddesdon, to prepare for the work of an Anglican clergyman, Cholmeley to London, where he had previously begun to eat his dinners and count his terms at the Middle Temple. After a year at Cuddesdon, Saville had withdrawn his name from the Bishop's list of candidates for ordination, and six months later made his submission to the Catholic Church. Cholmeley meanwhile drifted in the opposite direction, and professed himself an unprejudiced inquirer.

And now the two friends met after ten years of almost entire separation. They had written from time to time, and once or twice had spent a few hours together, but there had been no interchange of ideas on the fundamental questions on which they now stood so widely apart. Saville had become a priest and an active champion of the faith both with tongue and pen, Cholmeley an Agnostic pure and simple. Yet their contrast of opinion had in no way marred their mutual affection, and now that they were

thrown together once more, the old familiarity came back as it always comes back, even after long years have passed, to those who have once been truly and really bosom friends.

They were staying in a little cottage at the head of All Saints Bay in Guernsey, whither Cholmeley, who had just returned from the Continent, had invited his friend to come and spend a peaceful fortnight of repose. Sitting after dinner by the open window, they looked out on the soft sweetness of a summer evening.

Cholmeley had been describing his experiences of Catholicity in the Tyrol, and had been expressing his admiration for the simple faith and devotion of the Tyrolese.

“You know, Saville,” he continued, “I do not in the least share in the ridiculous objections raised by Protestants to individual Catholic doctrines and practices. On the contrary, I admire them all, and consider them perfectly consistent and reasonable—Infallibility, Indulgences, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, scapulars, holy water, all the lot. I think a man is a fool who cuts one slice out of Christianity and leaves the rest.”

“My dear Cholmeley,” was the rejoinder, “in that case, why are you not a Catholic?”

“I knew you would say that,” answered Cholmeley. “Why, you see, though I admire the superstructure, I don’t admire the foundation. Or, rather. I don’t think you have got any foundation to your elaborate and beautiful edifice. What is the use of talking about being a Catholic to a man who does not believe in a God?”

“I did not know you had drifted away so far as that,” said Saville gently. “I remember at Oxford you were rather inclined to rebel against the prevalent orthodoxy. I expected to find you a bit of a Liberal, but that is very different from completely abandoning all belief whatever.”

“I am sure no one regrets it more than I do, my dear Saville,” was the answer. “I’m not at all one of those who say they rejoice in their liberty. I thoroughly sympathize with the writer of one of the cleverest little books on Theism I ever read, who after, as it seems to me, demolishing Theism from the ground of reason, mournfully declares: ‘I am not ashamed to confess that with this

virtual negation of God the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness.’ I feel just the same. I wish I could believe. I should like to believe, but inexorable logic tells me that we have not sufficient data for the solution of the problem. I have read every book in favour of Theism within my reach, Locke, Mansel, Bishop Butler, Paley, Flint, and I confess that each of them has produced the very contrary effect to that which their authors intended. It seems to me that many of them are simply unbelievers in disguise, that most of them are illogical. The arguments they bring forward are either unwarrantable assertions, or else prove nothing at all, and more often still are fatal to their own hypothesis. Take, for instance, the argument from *consciousness*, or intuition. The Theist tells me there must be a God, because he has in himself an irrefragable witness declaring with all the force of his nature that there is a God, and he lays down this intuition as a universal one. When I reply that I know a number of intelligent men besides myself who altogether repudiate the notion of any such intuition, and declare they never had any consciousness of God’s existence, he tells me that it is because they have been untrue to the voice within them, and so have lost their power of perception. In other words, he says in veiled and polite language that the only reason I do not believe in a God is because I have been an irredeemable black-guard from my youth up.”

“Wait a moment,” said Saville. “I quite agree with you. I fully allow that the argument from consciousness (mind, I don’t say from conscience) is all rubbish. To assert an intuition, or an innate idea of God, is not only a pure assumption, but an untrue assumption, and the well-meaning people who assert it are the enemies, not the friends of Theism. For God’s sake don’t set up a man of straw and knock him down, and then boast of your victory over Theism.”

Cholmeley laughed. “He is not the only man of straw. There is another equally ridiculous. Our good Theist tells me that in the human heart there is an inextinguishable craving after God, and therefore there must be a God after whom he craves. Now, in the first place, I don’t think every man does crave after God, and even

if it were so, this does not prove that a God exists, any more than the fact that every man desires a life free from pain proves that such a life is within our reach.”

“Your man of straw, although I don’t acknowledge him altogether as a friend, is this time not quite so ridiculous an adversary as you imagine. I never yet knew anyone who longed for what was a pure nonentity. It is not true that every man desires a life free from pain, at least in this world. Look at the saints and their voluntary mortifications, crying out with St. Francis Xavier, *Amplius, Domine, amplius*—‘More suffering, O Lord, more suffering,’ or with St. Teresa, *Aut pati, aut mori*—‘I would rather die than cease to suffer.’ You are wrong there in point of fact. If you mean that a man desires a life free from pain as his ultimate goal of existence, I think that this is a valid argument for future happiness in some shape or other. Where you find in men in general, so far as we know, a craving after some object, you will find as a matter of experience not only that the object exists, but that the craving is one which can and will be satisfied, unless indeed the person in whom it exists deliberately and of his own fault hinders its satisfaction. But we must not wander from our point. You tell me that you have found the arguments generally adduced by Protestant theologians for the existence of a God unsatisfactory. I thoroughly agree with you. There is not one of those I know of, from Locke to the last writer on the subject, who really establishes his position against the sceptic. In fact, if anything could have made me doubt the existence of a God, it is the utter feebleness and often the hopeless contradictions of the greater part of its modern advocates. Do you remember at Oxford how Mansel and Hamilton were put before us as champions of orthodoxy against Mill? Well, if you follow out their principles to their logical consequences, you will find that they are hopelessly entangled in the Agnostic net, and as for the rank and file of Protestant defenders of Theism, one does not know whether most to admire their loyalty to beliefs they cannot establish on any basis of reason, or to lament the evil that is done by their attempting to construct on a rotten foundation a tower of defence against scepticism.”

“Well, I am glad to hear you say so,” answered Cholmeley, “I always fancied that the stock arguments were common alike to Protestant and Catholic Theists. I am only speaking from impression, for I confess I never mastered the Catholic writers on the subject: I once made an attempt on some scholastic logician, but his mediæval sort of style and unintelligible Latin soon drove me back discomfited.”

“I do not wonder,” said Saville. “To understand scholastic logicians a scholastic training and a skilled teacher are necessary. We sadly need a series of English manuals on philosophical subjects. [1] But I hope you will not credit the schoolmen with the feebleness of the Protestant Theist.”

“You know well enough,” was the reply, “that I have a sort of innate respect for all things Catholic, but you cannot expect me to believe in a God merely because in your opinion the Catholic advocates of Theism prove their point. If their arguments are so convincing, how is it that there are any Atheists? If they prove incontestably that there is a God, how is it that men are to be found, men too of great ability and culture, men who are well versed in the Catholic side of the question, and yet are unbelievers? You are not going to tell me that they all go about with a lie in their mouth, believing in their heart there is a God and denying it with their lips.”

“There, my dear Cholmeley, you touch me on a very delicate and difficult question. You will allow me, I am sure, to tell you plainly and without offence what the Catholic Church teaches on this subject. First of all, I ask you to bear in mind the difference between a *sufficient* argument and a *resistless* argument, between one which is *convincing* and one which is *compelling*. In the one case you can manage to find some evasion, in the other you cannot; in the one case you deserve indeed to be called wrong-headed if you do not assent to the argument, but in the other to be called a simple fool. Thus the argument for the reality of early Kings of Rome is a convincing argument, but yet some ingenious people regard them as myths; whereas the arguments for the existence of the City of Peking are resistless, and anyone who said that it was but a

fable of geographers would be looked upon as having one of the lobes of his brain affected, even though on all other matters he might be very sensible and prudent. The arguments for the existence of God are convincing, not compelling arguments. You can always find what our professor in theology called an *effugium*, some way of backing out, which saves you from absolutely contradicting yourself or running counter to obvious common sense. Now comes the delicate matter to which I allude, and on which I fear you may think me narrow and uncharitable. When an argument is resistless, all rational men accede to it, but when it is short of this, but yet in itself sufficient to convince, you will find a divergence of opinion among a certain number. Granting the same amount of natural ability and the same possession of the necessary points of the argument, you will find that those who reject such an argument are (putting aside abnormal eccentricities) those whose interest it is to reject it, or who have some strong influence moving their will to reject it. Such an influence leads them to make the very most of any possible difficulty which can be raised against it, and to slur over its strong parts, or find plausible objections to them, and so they manage to convince themselves or fancy they are convinced. Take a claimant in some disputed case at law. The arguments against him are convincing, but not resistless. The Judges on the Bench are perfectly satisfied that he is wrong, yet the fact of his pecuniary interests being at stake somehow prevents him from seeing the force of the opponent's case—in good faith or in a sort of good faith he thinks he sees a weak point in their arguments. He comes to the question, in Aristotle's words, οὐκ ἀδέκαστος, not without a bribe in his pocket which warps his judgement and prevents him from being perfectly impartial. It is just the same in the arguments respecting the existence of a God. Mankind at large regard them as sufficient and more than sufficient, but there are a certain number who fail to be convinced by them, and the reason is that they too come to the question not unbribed. For one reason or another the idea of an overruling Providence is distasteful to them. They don't care about having an all-piercing Eye watching them and searching their inmost hearts, or

else they have no liking for stooping down and putting their necks under the yoke of One who claims from them absolute and unlimited submission. They crave after independence, and look out for some flaws, real or imaginary, in the arguments which establish the existence of this Supreme Ruler, who watches by night and by day, and to whom they will have to give an account of every action and every thought. By exercising a certain ingenuity and availing themselves of a number of plausible objections which lie scattered in all directions, they convince themselves that perhaps after all there is no God, or, rather I should say, they drift into a sort of doubt, which is at first a plaything of their fancy, but as time goes on manages to establish it in their intelligence, and when once it has firmly taken root there, their mental and moral struggles are pretty well over. If the lawgiver is a doubtful being, his laws do not bind and they are free. Some of them rejoice in their independence, while the better kind still long mournfully after Him whom they have banished: like your friend quoted above.”

“I wish you would explain yourself a little more clearly.”

“Certainly. Anyone who gives up his belief in God does so because, consciously or unconsciously, he finds God rather an inconvenient Person in the universe. In most cases, as far as my own experience goes, he is bribed by the desire to yield to his passions without being haunted by the disagreeable thought of a God who will punish with severity the deliberate setting at naught of His Law. I do not say that he realizes this to himself, but from early youth, perhaps from boyhood, he has given himself up to indulge desires against which the struggle was difficult and the indulgence of them easy and pleasant. For a long time there sounded within him a most disagreeable voice reproaching him with his disobedience to the God whose existence he had taken for granted from childhood. This voice he hates and disregards, and after a time is pleased to find that it sounds less clearly and at length is almost silent. About this time he somehow or other has occasion to look into First Principles. He reads some plausible defence of agnosticism, or some clever ridicule of things divine. Bribed already by his own desire to escape from the punishment which he knows

he has incurred from God, if there is a God, he moves the previous question, and asks himself whether the difficulties to Theism are not at least sufficient to make it a matter of doubt, and so to excuse him from the doubtful law which he so much dislikes and from the unpleasant consequences of breaking it. The wish is father to the thought, and the thought soon grows strong within him. Nay, when the motives for unbelief are gone, and the old temptations have disappeared, when smiling wife and rosy youngsters deck his prosperous home, still the belief in God comes not back, or if it returns at all, comes back in some convenient form which satisfies the society around him, but is no real act of submission to the Supreme Ruler whom he has defied. Now, mind, I do not say this is always the case. There is another motive which often produces the same result, and which I fancy, if I may say so, has been the case of your present position. For I know, my dear Cholmeley, how unimpeachable a moral character you always bore.”

“Saville, you always thought too well of me and judged me by yourself. I never ran recklessly into vice, but I am afraid I cannot any the more for that claim to be the spotless character you fancy. I never did anything to disgrace myself—but I think it was from prudence and self-respect rather than from any other motive.”

“I believe that is true,” answered Saville; “it is to this that I was coming. There is a class of men who have lost their sense of God from a vice far more dangerous than the vice of lust. Perhaps they have no strong temptations, or have in them that innate hatred of vice and love of purity which many an English mother hands on to her children. It is no credit to them. It is an inherited tendency. It is one of God’s best gifts in the natural order—but it has no supernatural value and may even turn to the injury of him in whom it is found. For it is often accompanied by or tends to the far more dangerous vice of pride.”

“I don’t think I know what you mean by pride,” said Cholmeley. “I rather believe in an honest pride which makes a man respect himself and be ashamed of what is dishonourable or unworthy of him.”

“I mean by pride,” continued Saville, “that inordinate desire of

one’s own excellence that shows itself in rebellion against authority, in the hatred of correction, in the tendency to justify oneself and one’s own actions, and that in spite of a consciousness of being in the wrong. When you were quite a little boy at school, you were always bent on having your own way. Do you remember how badly you treated M. Delapierre, the French Master, and how you would not apologize till your House Master told you that it was ungentlemanlike to treat a foreigner with discourtesy, and then at last you gave in? Poor Wright, too, that Master that took the Fifth for a time, perhaps he was a little hard on you, but nothing could excuse your refusal to submit to him. I never saw anyone so ingenious in resistance and so determined not to obey. You fought him in school and you fought him out of school. I do believe that at last it was because of you that he left.”

“Saville, you are wandering from the point. You undertook to prove the existence of a God, and you are bringing up school stories. I know I behaved very badly to my masters.”

“No, I am not wandering. I want to show you what was the bribe that made you a partial judge in discussing the existence of a God. You always disliked submission. You always seemed bent on having the upper hand. It was just the same at Oxford. The Dons were afraid of you. There was a quiet, determined power of resistance in you that made you refuse to put your neck under the yoke, and when the claims of God to your submission came before you, your pride rebelled against them, and sooner than acknowledge them you began to question whether they had any real existence, until at last you persuaded yourself into your present state of mind. Yet I must say this for you, knowing you so well as I do, that in all your rebellion I somehow invariably detected a sort of underlying desire to find your Master, though I am not sure that you ever succeeded. And I believe now that in your heart of hearts you would rejoice if you could be convinced of the existence of a God: who would drag you down from your throne of independence and deprive you of your unrestrained liberty of action.”

Cholmeley laughed. “I know I have been a perverse, self-willed reprobate from my youth up, but you are quite right in think-

ing that in the midst of it all I somehow yearned after one who would subdue me. Unhappily I almost always came off victor in the struggle. This has been the case whenever I have discussed the question of Theism with men who profess to believe. They could not answer my arguments, and this strengthened me in my unbelief. Very often I could answer my own arguments; in fact, I am quite ready to allow that many of the ordinary objections to Theism are not worth much. The existence of evil in the world and the eternity of punishment do not seem to me absolutely insuperable difficulties. It is the building up which is my difficulty, the constructive process by which the existence of God is to be demonstrated. If it is such an obvious matter, as Theists assert, why do they not put forward the proof of it so that he who runs may read?"

"I have already told you," answered Saville, "that the arguments though convincing are not resistless. They can be evaded, though not escaped. They have no power to persuade a man against his will, nay, there is required a certain *pia credulitas*, which means, not pious credulity, but a loyal readiness to believe, without which they do not avail. Just as no man saves his soul without his own consent, so no man accepts the existence of God if he sets his face against it."

"I am sure," said Cholmeley, "I don't want to set my face against it. I want to believe; I wish I could believe. Put before me any reasonable proof and see if I am not willing to allow it its full force."

"I will do my best," said Saville. "But first I must remind you that there are two different processes by which the intellect becomes convinced of the existence of God. The one is that which develops itself instinctively in the minds of the young. The process by which they arrive at their belief is a complex one; a number of different influences combine to produce it. I am not now concerned with the details of it, or the various elements which contribute to its formation. I am simply dealing with the fact. Somehow there grows up in the mind of children the notion of a Supreme Being external to themselves, on whom they and all

else depend, in whom are united all possible perfections, and who has an absolute right to their obedience. In other words, there grows up within them the notion of a God, often very indistinct and confused, but still always sufficiently defined to render them personally responsible to Him. Even in the most degraded savage these influences are at work, and without any external instruction the light that shines in the heart of every one born into the world gives sufficient data to enable him to arrive at the idea of a Great Spirit who rewards and punishes. This is the first process by which the existence of God is arrived at. Do you allow of its reality?"

"Yes, I think I do, but it seems to me valueless as an argument for Theism, any more than any other childish notion which wider experience and more exact thought gradually sets aside."

"I do not use it as an argument, except indirectly; I do not say that it is a process of formal logic which takes place in the childish mind; but you must allow that somehow or other it is connatural to children, and seems to come almost of itself, so much so that a denial of God on childish lips jars even on the Atheist, who as a rule has no wish that his children should imitate his example, at all events during their early years."

"That may be because the idea of God is useful as a moral lever to the unformed intelligence; but it does not follow that it has any reality corresponding to it, any more than the black man up the chimney who is to carry off the naughty child that disobeys the nurse."

"Yes, and the nurse is justly condemned by every prudent mother for the mischievous bugbear she invents, whereas all prudent men recognize the beneficial influence of the belief in a God on the budding intelligence and pliant will of those whose habits are yet unformed. But I do not press this argument. I merely notice it as I pass on to those which derive their value not from their moral usefulness or their power to persuade, but from their own inherent logical force. Again, I would remind you that though they are conclusive arguments, yet they do not force the intellect under pain of direct self-contradiction."

"My dear Saville, I am sure I don't want to be forced, I only want

to be convinced.”

“Very good; then I will begin with an argument which has often been the object of fierce attack from modern scientists, and which I allow has been sometimes urged with imprudent exaggeration by well-meaning theologians. I mean the argument from Design. It may be stated as follows. The order existing in the world, the universal prevalence of Law, the adaptation of means to ends clearly prove the world to have been framed by a Being external to it, who is possessed of the highest wisdom and knowledge and power. Such a Being must therefore have existed before the world was made. It is this Being whom we call God.”

“Forgive me for interrupting you at the outset,” said Cholmeley, “but do you really mean to say that the world bears witness to the highest wisdom on the part of the Being who framed it? Do you mean to tell me that the adaptability of means to ends is throughout the universe so perfect as to testify to an absolute perfection of the wisdom of its Author? If so, facts are all against you. Nothing in the world is perfect. Some sceptic has said that the human eye, which theologians are so fond of pointing to as an almighty piece of perfect mechanism, is but a clumsy bit of workmanship at best, and would be returned to any respectable mechanic as destitute of all sorts of appliances required for a perfect instrument of sight, and I think this is true. Look too at all the waste there is in the world, all the failures—I mean in the material order—all the feeble contrivances which do not produce the effect for which they were designed, all the beings who come into existence only to perish, all the flowers which waste their sweetness on the air, all the living creatures unprovided with the means necessary to preserve their life, all the countless objects which by their countless imperfections seem to protest against being accounted the workmanship of a perfect Being. I do not deny that there is evidence, irrefragable evidence in the world around us of which we should say, if we were speaking of the works of men, that it testifies to a designer of high intelligence. But this is very different from saying that it testifies to a designer of absolute and perfect wisdom and omnipotent power, all whose works must be perfect like Himself.”

“My dear Cholmeley, your objection is a perfectly sound one if it be urged against the direct proof of the perfection of God from the imperfection of the world around. The world is, I allow, imperfect in a thousand points. Nay, I go so far with you as to say that nothing in it is perfect. There is nothing which might not be improved upon if we look upon the immediate end for which it exists. A better organ of vision might be designed than the eye, and a better organ of hearing than the ear. Leibnitz’s idea that the world is about as perfect as it can be is an absurdity. The world is full of imperfections in the physical order. There seems to us to be a great deal of waste and a great many failures. But this does not in the least make against my argument. Nay, it goes to prove it. For you allow that if there is a God, He is a God of infinite wisdom and power.”

“Certainly, otherwise He would not be God.”

“And that He has at His disposal unlimited perfections with which He can adorn His works?”

“Of course He has.”

“And that whatever perfections He bestows there are always further perfections which He might bestow and does not?”

“Yes, I suppose it must be so.”

“Well, then, what else is this but allowing that the works of a Being of Infinite Perfection are necessarily imperfect?”

“Yes, that is quite true, but it does not altogether answer my objection. It accounts, I allow, for what I should call negative imperfections, but not for positive imperfections. I mean it does not account for the failure of many a being in the world to fulfil the end for which it was intended. The graceful flower is growing up to its perfection, when lo! and behold, the nipping frost or biting wind passes over it, and it dies untimely. The delicate mechanism of the eye finds no sufficient protection against external influences which destroy its sight. The fleetness of the young gazelle does not save it from the lion or the wolf. The rain is often insufficient to nourish the thirsty plants or to supply the wants of the living creatures upon the earth. Do not all these failures point to a Designer of limited and imperfect capacity?”

“No, they do not,” answered Saville, “they are not failures at all as regards the ultimate end for which all things exist. I allow that they seem to us to be failures, and are failures in respect of their proximate and immediate end, but this is very different from saying that they are failures with regard to some higher and more important end. When the poor sheep sees her plump little lambs torn from her ere they are full grown, would she not say that their existence was a failure? When she herself is robbed of her woolly fleece and stands shivering in the cold east wind, would she not say that the wool that was being carried off in the baskets had failed of the end for which it was made? She cannot understand the higher end that her lambs and her fleece are to subserve. So if there exists a God, removed as He is far more from us than we above the beasts of the field, can we expect to know all His designs and to see how those little incidents which seem to us mistakes are really a perfect fulfilment of the Divine plan?”

“There you are falling back on mystery. I allow that if there is a God, all that you say is a solution of the difficulty; but I am urging my objection against your proof. I do not deny that those apparent imperfections may be really subordinate to some higher perfections that they subserve, but I insist that with these apparent failures before you, you cannot derive from the world around the proof of a perfect and all-wise and all-powerful Maker of it.”

“Yes, Cholmeley, you are quite right. I fully concede that the argument from Design proves no more than this—that the world around us is the work of a Being of high intelligence and great power. I do not prove the fact of creation from it, nor do I prove the omnipotence of the Creator. All that I insist upon is that the marks of design are so unmistakable, that no intelligent man can believe that it could have come into being without an intelligent designer.”

“I am inclined to think this,” answered Cholmeley, “but you know the answer of the modern scientists. They say that this argument is worth nothing, because it proceeds from a false analogy. The intelligent designer *from* whom you argue is a human being whose intelligence consists in adapting existing materials

and existing laws to the end he has in view, whereas the Designer *to* whom you argue is supposed to have no existing materials and no laws to bind Him.”

“Yes, that is perfectly true. The wisdom of God consists in establishing the laws and erecting the materials which they govern. But surely this is a higher proof of wisdom than the mere employment of pre-existing laws and materials.”

“No, they do not allow this. They say, that the materials were eternal force and eternal matter, and that the laws grew up themselves out of the various combinations of matter and force which presented themselves from time to time under new relations and fresh circumstances.”

“My dear Cholmeley, you must be aware that here our good friends are talking nonsense. What do they mean by saying that new laws grow up? A new set of circumstances does not evolve a new law unless the law be somehow already present. The fact is that these worthy experimentalists under a cloud of words read the law into the circumstances, and then point out in what a wonderful way the circumstances have developed the law.”

“Yes, I allow that their arguments are very feeble in their process of law manufacture. But I do not see why, in the course of billions of ages, the orderly arrangement of the world should not have presented itself by the mere law of fortuitous combinations, and have persisted by virtue of its superiority to all the combinations which had preceded it?”

“That is rather an old argument,” answered Saville. “In the course of ages the letters of the alphabet tossed together at random would produce the *Iliad*—so the various atoms or molecules or forces would produce fair mother earth. But those who argue thus forget to tell us why this fortuitous combination should be persistent any more than any of those which preceded it.”

“Because of its innate superiority, by the law of the survival of the fittest.”

“But why is it superior and more fit to endure?”

“I imagine because of its greater symmetry and order.”

“But whence comes this notion of symmetry and order? Why

do we say that one order of things is symmetrical and another not? Why is the one superior to the other?"

"I suppose," said Cholmeley, "that this is founded on the very nature of things."

"But who put it there? If there is a law of symmetry and order by reason of which one state of things endures and another does not, it must be because the one approaches nearer a certain standard than the other. Whence came this standard? What is the principle on which the superiority is founded?"

"Our own intelligence is, I imagine, able to detect it in virtue of a sort of natural instinct that we possess?"

"But if we can detect it, it must have been there independently of us. Who put it there? Out of nothing, nothing grows, and you want me to believe that a fortuitous concursus of atoms developed a certain law of perfection which we are able to recognize? Whence came this law? The fortuitous atoms could not *create* it, but you say that they *developed* it, and if they *developed* it, it must have previously been in existence and must have come from somewhere. I should like to ask you another question, Cholmeley. When Mill and Bain deny all *a priori* truth and say that all our knowledge of first principles is simply the result of long experience, did it ever strike you that they assume what they profess to prove?"

"No, I don't think it did."

"When they say, for instance, that our knowledge of the law of causation is simply based on the fact that we always find it to be true, have you never noticed that they are arguing in a circle? They begin by saying that they are going to lay down certain tests by which we may distinguish *where* the law of causation is at work, and from those tests they recognize it as universal throughout the universe. In so doing they really assume what they profess to prove, viz. that there *is* a law of causation."

"Yes, that is true, but what has this to do with the existence of God?"

"A great deal. The same fallacy is here introduced under a different form. We are told that in some cases symmetry hap-

pened to be the result of fortuitous combination of atoms, and where this was so it prevailed over a condition of things in which there was no symmetry. Is not this these men's account of the genesis of the universe?"

"Yes, it is."

"Do you not see that they implicitly assume a law of symmetry, which they read into the fortuitous mass of atoms, professing all the time to believe that the atoms somehow originated the symmetry which enabled the arrangement of them to be more permanent than another, and governed all the subsequent evolutions of the universe?"

"I think they do, and I agree with you that their method of argument is a fallacious one. They have no right to talk of symmetry and order unless they can show whence the notion of symmetry and order comes."

"Whence does it come, if the law of symmetry be not already in existence as an established law of the universe? and if it has been established, who established it save an Intelligent Being to whom alone symmetry has any meaning, and from whose intelligence alone the laws of symmetry could proceed?"

"I suppose, Saville, that your argument is this. The world must be made by an Intelligent Being because the laws which govern it can only have sprung of Intelligence."

"Yes, and I say something more than this. I say that it *may* have been made by a Being of Perfect Intelligence, or, to speak more correctly, of Infinite Wisdom, and that the apparent imperfections of the world are no obstacle to this."

"But all this does not prove the existence of God."

"No, it does not, and it is one of the exaggerations to which I alluded that men urge the argument from Design as in itself conclusive. It is conclusive so far as it proves the existence of an Intelligent Being outside the world who *arranged* it. But to prove that He *created* it, that He is self-caused, that He is infinite, you must turn to another line of argument."

"What is that?"

"There are several equally forcible. Out of them I will choose

one which I think simple and telling. The argument I allude to proceeds as follows. Everywhere around us we perceive effects following from causes and causes producing effects. All the causes which fall within the range of our experience are at the same time both causes and effects. While they themselves produce some effect, they are also in their turn effects of some cause. They are called subordinate or dependent causes. There is a long series of them; each member of the series is the effect of the preceding member and the cause of the member which follows it. Every cause of which we have any knowledge has this double character. But our reason tells us that this string of causes and effects must be limited at both ends. We see the limit at one end in the ultimate effect present to us. There is no doubt about that, and we cannot help a conviction that there must be a limit too at the other end, and that we cannot go on from one cause to another *ad infinitum*."

"I do not quite see that. Why should there not be an infinite series stretching away into all eternity?"

"Even if there were an infinite series, the difficulty would not be solved, for as every member of the series is a subordinate or dependent cause, the whole series would have the same character. A number of things each of which is essentially dependent in its character, cannot become independent by their being added together."

"Why not? A number of sticks, none of which can stand upright, can do so perfectly well when there is a bundle of them."

"I am afraid your comparison will not help you. Your sticks are not essentially prone to fall. If any of them is straight enough and thick enough, it will stand perfectly well by itself, whereas all causes known to us are essentially unable to produce themselves, and therefore are dependent on a cause outside of themselves for their production. In order that the series should stand by itself and be independent of anything outside of itself, one member of it at least must be perfectly independent and self-produced. Such a cause would not be a subordinate cause at all, and would therefore have no place in such a series of causes as we are speaking of."

"I think I see that, but what is your conclusion?"

"Why, that outside the long series of dependent subordinate causes which falls within the range of our experience (whether such a series could be infinite does not matter to our argument), outside of this, I say, there must be a cause which is neither subordinate nor dependent, but in every possible aspect independent and the primary cause of all the rest—in other words, the First Cause, or God."

"Are you not getting on a little too fast? If all the causes within the range of our experience are subordinate and dependent, and have, so far as we know, a beginning in time, experience is in contradiction with the existence of any independent and primary cause, or at all events declares our incapacity to assert it as a fact, inasmuch as it is altogether beyond our ken."

"I am glad you reminded me of the objection. It is a good instance of the arguments of the so-called school of experience. My argument was this. 'All causes which fall within the range of our experience are dependent. But it is a contradiction in terms to talk of dependent causes unless they have something to depend upon. Therefore there must be in existence some cause on which all dependent causes depend and which itself depends on none.' The experimentalists answer that in making this inference we are going beyond experience, and that it is therefore an unwarranted assumption. If this is so, all argument is at an end, for they, by thus limiting our knowledge as to the facts of experience, are taking for granted the impossibility of all knowledge except of that which falls immediately within the range of sense. I think they would scarcely go so far as this; in fact, every conclusion they draw is a virtual denial of it."

"Yes, that is true; but now I have another difficulty. Why do you assume that this First Cause is identical with God? Why should it not be an impersonal, eternal force which has developed itself under various forms and phases? Modern physicists tell us that even matter is but another form of force. Why not all else?"

"I have been a little premature, I admit, in speaking of the First Cause as God. I therefore will merely assume as proved that all things are the product of some First Cause, which is itself un-

caused but is the cause of all the rest.”

“Yes, you have proved that to my satisfaction.”

“Now I take you back to experience. Whenever we compare an effect with its cause, we find that the cause comprises actually or virtually all the perfections contained in the effect. This is not only a fact of universal experience, but it is a law based on the very nature of things. Every part of an effect as such is by the meaning of the word itself *effected* or produced by its cause. To deny this is once more a contradiction in terms. I know that Mill and the Experimental School deny this. Your friend whom you quoted as an able critic of Theism has a passage I should like you to hear, and Mill another equally conclusive. The first of these passages is as follows:

“First we may notice the argument which is well and tersely presented by Locke, thus: “Whatsoever is first of all things must necessarily contain in it, and actually have, at least, all the perfections that can ever after exist; nor can it ever give to another any perfection that it hath not actually in itself, or at least in a higher degree; it necessarily follows that the first eternal being cannot be matter.” Now, as this presentation is strictly formal, I shall meet it first with a formal reply, and this reply consists in a direct contradiction. It is simply untrue that “whatsoever is first of all things must necessarily contain in it, and actually have, at least, all the perfections that can ever after exist”; or that “it can never give to another any perfection that it hath not actually in itself.” In a sense, no doubt, a cause contains all that is contained in its effects, the latter contents being potentially present in the former. But to say that a cause already contains actually all that its effects may afterwards so contain, is a statement which logic and common sense alike condemn as absurd.’

Here if you like is a good instance of word-juggling. Notice he omits all notice of the all-important words, *or at least in a higher degree*. And then he throws dust in our eyes by the word *potentially*, which, if it means anything at all, means exactly the same as the words he overlooks. Then, having thus misrepresented his

author, and juggled in a long word in a vague and indeterminate sense, he knocks us down with a charge of making a statement which logic and common sense alike condemn as absurd.

“Now Locke is perfectly correct here, if he means by a higher degree a higher order in the universe. Every cause contains all the perfection of the effect, either actually or in this higher form. *Nemo dat quod non habet*. No cause can convey to its effect what it does not itself possess. But it may possess—often does possess—the perfection of the effect in some higher and nobler form. The efficient cause of the painting is the painter’s mind, working through his skilful hand; as present on the canvas it lacks many of the perfections of the idea which he has conceived and elaborated. Not only are the emotions, virtues, desires represented by him in the picture an imperfect realization of his conception, but the spiritual thought comes out in material form, the mental picture takes a tangible and perishable shape. The perfections of the picture are the effect contained in the ideal, not *actually* but *virtually*, and in a higher degree. It is in this way that the perfections of all subordinate causes, that is, of all things which exist, are contained in the First Cause. There is not and cannot be anything worthy of our admiration in all things around us which is not present in Him who is the Cause of all. In God there are summed up all the glories, virtues, perfections, of all created things—only in an infinitely higher and more glorious form. He contains all these *virtually*, or to use the scholastic term, *eminenter*. How could the First Cause have imparted them to the effects of which He is the cause, unless He possessed them Himself? He possesses all the varied beauties of the material universe, not under their gross material form, but under one which comprises all that is beautiful and attractive in them, and banishes all their shortcomings and imperfections and defects. Look at those clouds bathed in the golden light of the setting sun. Look at the many-dimpled ocean at our feet. Glorious and beautiful as they are, their beauty is but like a speck of dust compared with a noble mountain range, if it is placed side by side with the corresponding beauty in God.”

“I don’t quite see,” remarked Cholmeley, “how an Invisible, Im-

material Being can comprise these material beauties. Surely His Beauty would differ in kind from the beauty that catches our eye or delights our ear.”

“Yes, it does differ in kind, but at the same time comprises it all. His cannot indeed be a material beauty, but the materiality is a defect, not an excellence. In God it is purged of that defect, and thus its beauty is raised to a higher order. Even now, material beings as we are, it is not the gross matter that we admire. What is it conveys to us the pleasure that we experience as we watch the scene before us? It is the rays of light reflected from cloud and sea and striking upon the eye. Surely it is not difficult to conceive that the same effects will be produced in us when we are face to face with Him who is the Source of all Light and all Beauty, and that His Divine Beauty will not only infinitely surpass but also include all those beauties which are at present tied down to matter as it were by an iron chain.”

“Yes; I think I see what you mean. But I still feel the force of the difficulty respecting cause and effect. I am not prepared to admit that a cause contains, either actually or virtually, all the perfection of its effect. Mill puts this very well, as it seems to me. He is discussing whether it is necessary that mind should be produced by mind. He says:

“‘Apart from experience, and arguing on what is called reason, that is, on supposed self-evidence, the notion seems to be, that no causes can give rise to products of a more precious or elevated kind than themselves. But this is at variance with the known analogies of nature. How vastly nobler and more precious, for instance, are the higher vegetables and animals than the soil and manure out of which, and by the properties of which, they are raised up! The tendency of all recent speculation is towards the opinion that the development of inferior orders of existence into superior, the substitution of greater elaboration and higher organization for lower, is the general rule of nature. Whether it is so or not, there are at least in nature a multitude of facts bearing that character, and this is sufficient for the argument.’

Now is not this true? Look at the delicate and graceful form and rich glowing colours of a plant, which springs of an ugly little seed, nourished by certain external influences none of which has in it any of the glories of the living plant. Here are perfections in the effect which certainly are not to be found in any of the producing causes. There is, moreover, the well-established doctrine of the survival of the fittest and the law of natural selection, which here upsets the old landmarks, and among them this time-honoured doctrine of cause and effect.”

“I am glad you have mentioned this objection of Mill. It is the very one which I was myself going to bring forward. I should not like to say that it is a dishonest objection, but at all events it is a very shallow one. That little seed comprises within itself all that is required to enable it to develop the varied and graceful forms of the living plant. I do not say that all is already there in miniature, or that the process is a purely material one. But if you take into account, not only the material elements, but also the principle of life contained in it, the immaterial element which enables the seed to assimilate the materials from without, to utilize them and transform them into its own substance, you have present in the growing plant nothing which did not already exist radically or germinally in the seed which produced it. And as to the colours, good Mr. Mill forgets that the sun pours down upon it the brilliancy of its light, and that without that light it will be a pale sickly thing born soon to perish. As to the noble animals which are raised up out of soil and manure, they exist only in Mr. Mill’s prolific fancy!”

“You have said nothing about the development of higher forms from lower.”

“No, and I cannot enter on so wide a question. I would only lay down three principles which I do not think any Evolutionist will deny:

1. That there is no trace whatever of any production of life out of non-life in the world around.
2. That there is no certain proof of any new faculty having

come into existence, but only of the perfecting of those which had previously a rudimentary existence.

3. That although natural selection and the survival of the fittest will explain a great deal, it leaves unsoluble mysteries behind it.

Now Theism leaves no unsoluble mysteries behind it. It does not deny the law of evolution or the principles which regulate it, but it keeps it in bounds, and is on its guard against exaggerations or unwarrantable deductions from it. It lays down the principle that evolution can put into the created world nothing that was not there already, virtually waiting to be developed in due time. Now I want to bring you back to my argument. It is this. All causes cannot be subordinate—there must be one to which all else subserve. You are with me so far.”

“Yes,” said Cholmeley slowly. “But I do not see how you have upset the theory that all things are a development of Primeval Force.”

“No, I have not, if you allow the meaning of Force to be the Power of a Personal God acting according to His goodwill. But if you mean by Force, blind, mechanical, material Force, such a theory is opposed to the law of cause and effect. You are at one with me in asserting that nothing exists in the effect which is not already contained in some way in the cause.”

“Yes, that seems to me a true principle.”

“Well, if that is the case, God, the First Cause, must contain all the perfections of all His creatures—all their beauty, all their glory, all their magnificence, all their intelligence. He has created beings capable of holiness, and therefore He must be essentially and perfectly Holy; capable of happiness, and therefore He must dwell in a realm of unapproachable Happiness. He has created personal beings, and therefore He too must be a Personal Being.”

“Are you not proceeding rather too fast? Why should I not go on to say that He has created material beings, and therefore He too must be material?”

“Why, for the very simple reason that materiality is an imper-

fection.”

“But is not personality also something limited and imperfect? My experience of *persons* is of individuals whose nature is, according to your own showing, limited and dependent.”

“Yes, but not in virtue of their personality. The limitation comes not from your being a person, but from your being a created person. Personality is defined as the subsistence of a rational nature as an individual being, and this definition is applicable to God as well as to man, only for rational we must substitute intellectual. God is a person just as much as you are, only His Personality, like all His other attributes, belongs to a higher order than yours, from the mere fact that He is the First Cause of all, Himself uncaused; that on Him all things depend, while He is independent of all; that the perfections immediately known to us are the perfections of created things, while the Perfections of God are the Perfections of the Creator. But the various objections that we have started have perhaps a little obscured the general drift of my argument, which is this: It is impossible that all the causes existing in the universe should be without exception subordinate and dependent causes; there must be, from the very nature of things, one which is primary and independent—the First Cause and Source of all the rest. As every cause contains either actually or virtually the perfections of the rest, this First Cause will contain the perfection of all subordinate causes, and will be supreme above them all.”

“You have something more to show, my dear Saville, before you prove this First Cause to be God. You must show that it is not only supreme, but infinite.”

“I can do that without much difficulty. I suppose you mean by an Infinite Being one that has no limits, real or possible?”

“Of course I do.”

“All limits must proceed from some cause outside the thing limited, must they not?”

“Yes, they must.”

“And without these limits imposed from without limitation is impossible?”

“I suppose so.”

“Now tell me, can the First Cause have any limits?”

“Why not?”

“Why, for the very reason that it is the First Cause, and existed previously to all else. There was nothing outside of it to limit it. From all eternity God was without any possible limitation, and therefore Infinite.”

“Saville, you seem to me to be running into a fallacy. I allow that before Creation the First Cause had no *actual* limits, but I deny that it had no *possible* limits. In point of fact, Creation brought into existence other things beside God, and these, as existing outside of Him, would be limits of His Infinity.”

“I fancy I detect your friend Mr. Herbert Spencer there. Your objection is one of the supposed antinomies or contradictions in the First Cause which he brings forward in excuse of his professed agnosticism. It is a plausible objection, I allow, but based on ignorance, as all such objections are. It assumes what is utterly false, that things belonging to one order of being can form a limit to those belonging to a different order.”

“I do not quite catch your meaning.”

“I mean that the limited and the limiting must have some point of contact, some community of nature, else the one cannot act upon the other. If, when we sit down to dinner, I were to refuse to eat or drink anything on the ground that I was already so full of the arguments we have been discussing, that there was no room for anything more, what should you think of the reason for my abstinence?”

“I should regard you as guilty of a rather feeble pleasantry.”

“Very feeble indeed, but scarcely more feeble than Mr. Herbert Spencer’s plea that God cannot be Infinite because created things limit His Infinity. Just as arguments belong to the immaterial order, having no point of contact with the material food we eat, and therefore the one cannot form a limit to the other, in the same way the Creator belongs to a different order of being from the creatures He has made, and therefore the finite nature of creatures cannot form a limit to the Infinite nature of their Creator.”

“That seems to me a satisfactory answer to the objection. If I

understand you aright, His creatures can no more limit the Being of God than a crowd packed into a room would limit the number of angels who could be present there.”

“You have given a capital illustration of what I mean. But if in the Infinite God are thus united all the perfections of His creatures, if all else is subordinate and dependent, if He is the First Cause, supreme above all, the Creator of all, in virtue of whose fiat they first came into being, and in virtue of whose sustaining power they continue to exist, there are certain necessary consequences which follow.”

“What are these consequences?”

“Why, it follows that on this Supreme Being you depend not only for your existence, but for every breath you draw and every movement you make; that in virtue of your absolute dependence you owe Him absolute homage and obedience; that His will must be your law; that you acknowledge and rejoice in your dependence on Him; that as He is your first beginning so He is your last end; that the aim and object of your life is to praise Him, serve Him, and show Him reverence, and by so doing to become like to Him so far as the creature can be like to his Creator, to be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect. It follows too that all happiness is to be found in likeness to Him, and that the supreme felicity of which we are capable is to be made like to Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

“Yes,” said Cholmeley thoughtfully, “I think all this follows logically from the existence of a First Cause. But I am surprised that I have heard nothing from you of the argument from the universal consent of mankind, or from the moral law which conscience proclaims. I confess I have been strengthened in my scepticism by reading and hearing these put forward as conclusive arguments when they seemed to me nothing of the sort.”

“I would not say that,” answered Saville. “I believe these arguments are in themselves good, but as instruments of carrying conviction to an inquirer I confess I have not any great confidence in them. They admit of such easy and such plausible evasions. At the same time they are confirmatory arguments, and if only time

permitted I think I could put them in a way that would make the metaphysical arguments I have urged come home to you more, and appeal to you with more force as concrete realities. I will try and do so at some future day.”

“I hope you will,” said Cholmeley, “but I have had enough for the present. Just let me run over your two arguments, to make sure that I have caught your point. The first was that all the world around us gives clear evidence of its having been designed by an Intelligent Being. You do not bring forward the argument as proving the absolute perfection of His intelligence, inasmuch as the world is full of imperfections, which are, however, a necessary element even in the work of an absolutely Perfect Being, inasmuch as He always has room to add fresh perfections to His own work. But you say that the universe at least manifests a high degree of wisdom and power in Him who established the laws which govern it, for those could not have sprung up of themselves, or be due to various combinations of force and matter occurring fortuitously, but must be the work of an Intelligent Being.

“Your second argument was that all causes known to us are at the same time causes and effects, but that this cannot be the case with every existing cause, else there would be no first member in the series. There must be a Primary Cause, and this Primary Cause contains in itself all the perfections of subordinate causes, including intellect, will, personality, and is therefore a Supreme, Intelligent, Personal God, who has created all things, and for whose pleasure they were and are created.”

“Why, Cholmeley,” said Saville, “there is not much of the sceptic about the way you have put my arguments. But may I add one further consequence—I do not say of the fact, but of the possibility of the existence of a Supreme First Cause?”

“Certainly.”

“Why, simply this, that *if* the First Cause exists, He must be the source of all light, material and intellectual, and therefore, if you wish to see clearly, you will do well to ask of Him that you may see your way out of the perplexing mists of scepticism.”

Cholmeley laughed. “That is asking me to assume as a fact the

very conclusion that you have been trying to prove. Yes,” he added, “indeed I will—in spite of my old rebellion and waywardness. God knows I desire to believe, and put my neck under the yoke before it is too late. You must not expect me to turn round all in a moment, but I will carefully consider all that you have said, and you at least will, I am sure, pray for me that I may see my way clearly to the light.”

CHAPTER 2: SUBSIDIARY ARGUMENTS

Every one who has studied the workings of his own intelligence knows that it is not all at once that a discussion on an important and difficult subject sinks into the mind and produces its legitimate effect. The conversation on Theism narrated in our last chapter seemed at first to Cholmeley to be a sort of dream. The conclusions to which it pointed hovered about his intelligence, but when they sought to enter in and establish themselves there, they encountered a host of adversaries who challenged their right, some intellectual and some moral. The habits of thought which had been growing and strengthening for ten years and more were not to be dislodged so easily. The critical spirit demanded its right to play the part to which it had been so long accustomed, of a universal solvent. The unwillingness to submit, the dislike of the yoke which Theism imposes, made the thought of yielding a most repulsive one. All this put the positive arguments for a God at a great disadvantage, and there was a struggle in his mind in which the victory seemed very uncertain. On the one hand, habit and inclination, pride and self-sufficiency, stormed against the intruding convictions, and he was half angry with his friend for putting so clearly before him the arguments he

had long managed to evade. On the other hand these arguments had, after all, an ally somewhere deep down in his nature, and this, their friend and ally, pleaded their cause and demanded for them a fair hearing, and urged him not to put them aside as he would fain have done. There was something within him that told him they were true, and forced on him an unpleasant conviction that, in all his sceptical talk and sceptical thoughts, he had partly been saying what he did not really mean, partly deceiving himself as well as others—the self-deception following on and being the result of the frequent discussions in which he had urged the Agnostic arguments, often from a mere love of arguing, and a mischievous pride in trying to make the cause he knew to be the worse appear the better in the eyes of his listeners. By frequent repetition of these arguments he had unconsciously made them his own, and been influenced by them, until at length, when he said that he had ceased to believe in a God, there was no conscious lie in his mouth, though all the time there was a half-conscious lie in his heart, an uncomfortable feeling that though the ground beneath his feet seemed solid enough, it might at any moment crumble away and send him headlong he knew not where.

And now an appeal had been made to him to put off this cloak that he had been wearing, and he somehow dreaded the consequences of laying it aside. He felt like a man to whom excessive stimulants had become a second nature, and who could not face the painful effort it would cost him to abandon them, though all the time, in spite of a feeble attempt to persuade himself they were necessary, he was conscious in his inmost soul that they were hurrying him to the grave. So too in the soul of Cholmeley, two counter tendencies were at work, producing a most unpleasant struggle, the pain of which made him wish from time to time that he had never allowed the question to be reopened, and regret the candid avowal that he really wished to believe.

Saville observed the signs of a conflict going on in the mind of his friend, and wisely refrained for several days from any allusion to the subject. They talked over the scenes of their boyhood, and the various fortunes of their schoolfellows in after-life, and

had a warm discussion on the moot question whether schoolboy days afford a clear prognostic of the subsequent history of the full-grown man. This last topic led on somehow to the question of inherited tendencies, and Cholmeley had remarked rather cynically that the son of an Anglican clergyman rarely follows his father's profession, unless indeed there is a family living waiting for him, or some mental or moral deficiency seems likely to hinder his success in other walks of life. To this Saville objected as too sweeping an assertion, and had several instances to bring forward of clergymen's sons whom he felt sure had entered the Anglican ministry from conscientious motives, and whom he believed had been led to do so by the good influence of their sires. Cholmeley had answered that he did not deny that there might be developed in some family that mixture of mild benevolence and love of a comfortable easygoing life which characterized the parson, and especially the country parson, but that he did not think it right to regard the indulgence of such a natural tendency as an act of high virtue or as identical with an inspiration from Heaven. Then seeing his inconsistency, he corrected himself. "After all," he said, "perhaps there is no solid ground for distinguishing between one impulse and the other; the impulse to a life of easygoing comfort, and the impulse to a life of virtuous self-sacrifice. In the one case, as in the other, there are certain forces which impel us, and it seems to me that the forces which must ultimately prevail are those which are in the long run best calculated to promote the welfare of the individual or the species."

Saville saw that the conversation was drifting towards the subject which was uppermost in the thoughts of both himself and his friend, and resolved to encourage its tendency. "I don't quite understand what you mean," he said.

"I mean," said Cholmeley, "that I think all virtue, even the highest, is ultimately identical with utility, even where the two seem at variance, and that therefore the choice of a higher life is really the choice of a life which in the long run will pay the best."

"I don't deny that," said Saville, "but what then?"

"Why, if that is so, the so-called moral law is easily accounted

for on utilitarian grounds, and the argument you alluded to the other day from the moral law to a moral Lawgiver, from conscience to God, is worth nothing at all."

"I don't see your inference."

"Why, it is clear enough, if all virtue promotes our interest and all vice is opposed to it, that by the law of evolution there will be gradually developed in mankind certain tendencies which men call virtuous tendencies, but which are really only the natural instinct which tends continually more and more to whatever experience shows to be beneficial to us. When once any such tendency is established in us, we are uncomfortable if we run counter to it; we are haunted by a fear of the evil consequences which we know will follow from the disregard of what has become a law of our nature. This voice of conscience, as it is called, is but the inherited persuasion that one kind of action will be followed by pleasant consequences and the other by painful ones, and in that case I do not see how you can argue from it to a Personal Being whose authority it bears. If I eat something indigestible for supper I have a most unpleasant conviction that during a sleepless night or on the morrow's morn I shall have to suffer for my imprudence. In the same way, if I break any of those generalized experiences which are called moral laws, I have a similar conviction that I shall have to pay the penalty of what I have done. The only difference between the two cases seems to me to be that in the one case I argue mainly from my own personal experience, in the other from the accumulated experiences of mankind in general. In each case the painful feeling I endure has the same origin. It arises from a fear of the consequences of my own action. In the case of the indigestible supper you allow that there is no need for dragging in any supernatural Personal Being in order to account for my uncomfortable state of mind. Why then should you do so in the case of a breach of the moral law?"

"Cholmeley," answered Saville seriously, "I have already warned you that the arguments for the existence of a God, though convincing, are not resistless. Somehow or other it is always possible either to propose a fair seeming theory which will account

for at least the greater proportion of the facts adduced in favour of Theism, or else to create a mist in your intelligence, and under cover of it to evade the argument on the plea of its being a metaphysical or transcendental one, out of the sphere of human experience. If a man has the desire not to believe, depend upon it, believe he will not. Nay, I may go further, though after all it comes to the same thing, and do not hesitate to say that if he has not a positive desire to believe, believe he will not, or at least his belief will never be a firm or lasting one.”

“Don’t be angry, Saville,” said Cholmeley, “or give me up as a bad job. I think I have the positive desire to believe, at least I hope so. I put the case of the Experimentalists as strongly as I could to draw out your answer. I am sure you don’t want me to shirk the difficulties.”

“No, indeed,” answered Saville with a sigh of relief, “and the argument we are engaged upon is one which has two peculiarities which expose it to the attacks of the sceptical objector. In the first place it appeals to the internal and individual experience of each, and in this respect a little resembles the so-called argument from consciousness; in the second place it is an argument which will not stand by itself. It cannot be separated from the argument from design and from causation without being exposed to the charge of *petitio principii*, in that it implicitly assumes the very point it is supposed to prove.”

“I am surprised to hear you speak so disparagingly of it.”

“No, I don’t speak disparagingly of it. To me it is an irrefragable argument. It cries aloud within me, and as I listen to it I recognize in the voice that I hear the familiar voice of my Creator and my God. But that is very different from being able to appeal to it in the case of others. I cannot say to them: ‘Listen! do you not recognize that voice that approves or condemns your actions? does it not proclaim itself to you as the voice of God?’ To such an appeal the sceptic would answer smilingly: ‘Not a bit of it. I recognize only the accumulated experiences of humanity.’”

“Why, you are arguing on my side now.”

“No, I am not. I am only anxious to guard against the fatal mis-

take of urging an argument which is by itself unconvincing, and therefore only does harm to the cause in favour of which it is adduced. Mind, I say *unconvincing*, I do not say *inconclusive*.”

“What is the difference?”

“An unconvincing argument is one which is of such a nature that an ordinary intelligent man, who has it put before him and who has no strong antecedent prejudice, will not be satisfied with it. An inconclusive argument is one which has in itself some flaw which destroys its value. I should call the direct arguments generally adduced from Holy Scripture for the necessity of Baptism, or for the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, unconvincing arguments, but I should be sorry to say that they are inconclusive.”

“I suppose you mean that an unconvincing argument is such as that you cannot blame a man if he is not influenced by it, whereas an inconclusive argument is one by which he is bound not to be influenced.”

“Exactly, and besides this an unconvincing argument may by a little more development, or if differently put, become convincing; whereas an inconclusive argument never ought to convince, however skilfully it be put. In fact the more it is developed, the more its inconclusiveness becomes manifest.”

“Yes, but I have always heard the moral argument, as it is called, put forward as one which *ought* to carry conviction, and many a good Theist has put my back up by telling me that the reason I was not convinced by it was my own perversity and iniquity.”

“Those good Theists are partly right and partly wrong. They are right in saying that it was your own fault that you were not in a position to recognize in the voice within the voice of God. They were wrong in saying that you ought to have admitted the sufficiency of the argument from conscience in itself, apart from the other arguments by which the existence of God is proved.”

“I do not quite understand what you mean.”

“I mean that if you had been obedient to the voice within there would never have risen up within you that spirit of rebellion which marred your power of appreciating the various influences which establish, in the mind of every one born into the world, the

conviction of the existence of a Supreme and Personal Being on whom we depend and to whom we owe implicit obedience—so far they were right. But they were wrong in maintaining the thesis that the argument for conscience is sufficient of itself to establish the existence of a God against the gainsayer, if we prescind from all other arguments.”

“But is not this allowing that it is an inconclusive argument?”

“No, it is not; for if all the facts be taken into account, if we include within the range of our investigation each and every detail of the moral law, if we are not satisfied merely to take up the popular morality, but examine the higher aspects of virtue, such as are found in the saints and heroes of humanity, we shall find a great deal that no hypothesis can account for, save that of an influence within us, exerted by a Moral Governor of the Universe, whose law has been written in our hearts from our youth up.”

“But this is what the Experimentalists deny. They say that it is generally agreed on all sides that every possible act of virtue tends to the advantage of society, and the more exalted the virtue the greater the advantage that is its result. Hence they say that the law of parsimony condemns the unnecessary introduction of a Divine Lawgiver where the existence of the law, or rather of the instinct, which is promulgated in the voice of conscience, can be accounted for by a sort of natural selection.”

“Yes, and my answer to this is that their theory leaves a number of facts unaccounted for, and therefore stands condemned as an insufficient hypothesis. First of all it does not account for the feeling of self-reproach, which is entirely different from the mere dread of disagreeable consequences, and still subsists even where no such consequences are feared either to ourselves or others. Take the case of a man who by some accident which is entirely out of his own power, and involved no sort of negligence, causes the death of a friend and that under circumstances which will involve him in grave suspicion of being a murderer: there you have the elements which on your showing ought to cause self-reproach, the destruction of the life of another and the probability of disgrace and perhaps imprisonment and death to himself: yet a sens-

ible man will not take it to heart: he will have no self-tormenting thoughts, even though there should ensue to himself the most unpleasant consequences. He will have no pangs of conscience, and though he will regret the death of his friend, there will be no bitterness in his sorrow because of his own unavoidable share in causing it.”

“But now take a different case—the case of one who has taken the life of another under circumstances which make detection impossible, and, moreover, made the act no possible injury either to him who was deprived of life or to anyone else. The murdered man was a hopeless idiot, a burden to himself and to others. His death would relieve from want a wife who had long been struggling against penury and misery. To all concerned the taking of his life was an unmixed advantage. Yet all mankind would condemn the deed, and the voice of conscience would proclaim in tones of unmistakable reproach that the doer of it had been guilty of a most grave offence against an eternal law which carries its own sanction with it.”

“Yes, that is true, and I think disposes of the assertion that self-reproach merely means a dread of consequences to ourselves or others, but I do not think it sets aside the difficulty, for the utilitarians assert that what is condemned by experience is not the *fact* of causing death, but the *intention* to cause death. It is this which experience shows to be opposed to the interests of society.”

“Do you mean,” answered Saville, “that the intention to kill is universally to be condemned? If so, how about the soldier in battle, or the man who to save his own life kills the unjust aggressor, or the woman who preserves her honour at the cost of the life of her assailant?”

“No, I only mean the intention to kill where there is not some greater benefit to society accruing from the death of the person killed.”

“In that case, the instance I have just brought forward would certainly come under the exception, and the murderer of the poor helpless idiot would have an approving conscience. Yet you would agree in condemning him. Nay, the acknowledged maxim, you

must not do evil that good may come, is a distinct condemnation of the utilitarian theory of conscience. But I have a further objection to your doctrine. It leaves a large set of facts entirely unaccounted for.”

“What facts do you mean?”

“I mean the joy that the best and most virtuous of mankind find in the very actions that utilitarianism would condemn. Take the case of one who in the bloom of his youth leaves the world to dwell apart from the busy hum of life, apart with God in the solitude of the cloister. His days are given to penance and to prayer—wasted, utterly wasted, on the theory of utility. What good does he do to humanity? Even religious Protestants, who profess to believe in the power of prayer, regard such a life as at least a great mistake, but the utilitarian, if he is consistent, will regard it as almost criminal. Yet such a life brings with it a calm, unclouded, peaceful joy unknown to the busy world outside. No men happier, more cheerful, more light-hearted than those who, like St. Paul or St. Antony, live the eremitic life. According to utilitarianism, they ought to be miserable in their selfish isolation, inasmuch as they run counter to the instinct of ‘altruism,’ so necessary for the welfare of our species.”

“Do you not think that their happiness might be accounted for by the Experimental School on the ground of the benefit that accrues to mankind from the literary labours and ascetical treatises the class of solitaries has produced, and that the individual without any such idea of benefiting his species, nevertheless has a share in the happiness of those who live such a life to good purpose by spending it in writing books like the *Imitation of Christ*, even though he himself is utterly unproductive?”

“On the contrary, it seems to me that he would be utterly miserable, as one who failed of the essential end for which the solitary life could be regarded as of advantage to mankind. But your ingenious explanation is a good instance of the unconvincing character of the argument I am pursuing. Somehow or other there is always a plausible escape. Unless a man already believes in a God on other grounds, I should, as I have said, be very sorry to have to

convert him by means of the argument from conscience.”

“I do not understand, in this case, why you speak of it as an irrefragable argument yourself. It shares the vice of all arguments that assume their conclusion.”

“No, it does not. Take a parallel case. Two men are sleeping in a house far away from all human habitation. One of them has no idea of the possibility of any third inmate being there, the other knows that his own father has taken refuge from his enemies within its walls. During the night there is heard amid the darkness a gentle sound as of a human voice. Can we be surprised if the one attributes the gentle and scarce audible sound to the wind whispering amid the trees, whereas the other recognizes not only the distinct speech of rational man, but the familiar voice of one whom he fondly loves? Would not the former quote a hundred natural causes which might have produced such a sound—some animal hard by, or mere imagination, or some of those mechanical effects which often strangely counterfeit articulate speech? Would not the latter take the sounds he had heard as a proof of his father’s presence, and if any should argue with him that at the time his father was not there, would he not rely with all confidence on the voice that had sounded in his ears, even though he had had no visible evidence of his father’s presence?”

“Yes, he would certainly; and I think your parallel is a just one. But it goes to prove that first of all you must establish on other grounds the existence of a Supreme Being, and then, and then only, can you appeal with effect to the voice within as an evidence confirmatory of your conclusion.”

“That would be so if our beliefs were always based on a process which we can state logically. There may be gaps in the proof we bring forward, and yet we may be justly convinced by it. *Non in dialectica placuit Deo salvum facere populum suum*. I should be very sorry to say that the dictates of conscience are unauthorized until all the links in the argument are made up. A man can often appeal to a process as satisfactory to himself, even if it cannot be put before others in a syllogistic form.”

“I only meant that it cannot be appealed to in controversy as

against one who chooses to deny its authority.”

“Yes, that is perfectly true. But for myself the voice within is its own proof even before dry logic has established the reality of the source whence it proceeds. But when I have argued out the matter, and reason has taught me the existence of a God by a formal proof, this voice does not merely confirm my conclusion. It gives it a living reality. It brings it home to me with an irresistible force. It clothes with the garb of life the dry bones of a transcendental fact. It impresses on my imagination what my reason is compelled on other grounds to admit as true. It gives a practical force to what otherwise would remain in the barren field of speculation. It banishes once and for ever the dread of being caught in the meshes of some subtle fallacy. The Supreme Ruler of the universe becomes *my* Ruler, exercising His right of command and passing sentence as a judge—holy, powerful, all-seeing, retributive[1]—on my every action and my every thought. There is woven into my life not only a conviction, but a consciousness of an ever-present God. In the voice of conscience He dwells in me, speaks in me, upbraids me, encourages me, approves me, condemns me. It is the voice of my Friend, and yet my Master, of one whom I love and whom nevertheless I fear, of one who pleads with me, and yet speaks in tones of authority, of one on whom I continually depend, and yet who rewards me for each voluntary act of dependence. I cannot put into words the sweet persuasiveness of that Divine voice. I cannot, and do not, urge it against those who hear it not. Yet, after all, hear it they must, in spite of themselves, and hearing it I do not believe that they can ever shake off entirely the half-stifled conviction, the secret dread, that its accents are the echo, not of the accumulated experiences of mankind, or the natural desire for what tends to their advantage, but of a Personal Being whom, at least in early youth, they recognized and feared, even though now they may have managed to ignore Him and persuade themselves that if He exists at all, He is beyond the ken of mortal men.”

“I have often heard atheists and agnostics confess that they never could quite emancipate themselves from the superstition of their childhood. And I am not ashamed to confess, my dear Saville,

that when my words have been the loudest, my heart has often been of the faintest, and there has echoed within me a sort of self-reproachful remonstrance which I could not account for, and would fain have been rid of.”

“I am glad to hear it, for it shows that the grace of God was at work in you, in spite of all your rebellion. But I want you now to be clear about the employment by the Catholic Theist of this argument from conscience. First he establishes his position logically from acknowledged principles of reason, and then he appeals to the voice within us as admitting of a far more satisfactory explanation on the principles he has laid down and the conclusions he has arrived at, than on any other *a posteriori* hypothesis of inherited tendencies and accumulated experiences.”

“Yes, that is all fair enough; and I suppose he first proves his point by the argument from causation that you explained to me a few days since.”

“Yes, that is the staple proof. There are several others, or rather several ways of putting the same argument. But they all come back in the last resort to very slight modifications of the argument from causation.”

“Can you give me an instance of the sort of argument you mean?”

“Oh, yes; there is the argument from the contingent and the necessary, as it is called, which may be stated thus: Everything around us is transitory and contingent, that is to say, we are compelled to admit the possibility of its never having existed at all, and can place ourselves mentally at a time when it had not yet come into being.”

“But what if the world is eternal?”

“Even if it is, that does not make any difference. I am merely speaking of what we can conceive as *possible*.”

“Well, what then?”

“Why, if this is the case, we can conceive a universal vacuum, a primeval blank, and I should like to know how out of its barren womb anything real or possible could ever have proceeded, unless side by side with it there existed a First Cause, an Eternal, neces-

sary Being. If you can think all things out of existence, how could your supposition provide for their being reinstated?"

"That is quite true, unless you believe the world to have existed from all eternity. That seems to me to meet the difficulty."

"Yes, and for this reason I say that the argument really falls back on the argument from causation, which proves that the necessary Being existing from all eternity must have contained all the varied perfections of existing things, including Personality, Intelligence, Free-Will, and, beside them all, one other perfection which differentiates the First Cause from all other causes, and renders the hypothesis that the world itself is the First Cause an irrational and self-contradictory one."

"What perfection do you mean?"

"I mean the perfection which is implied in the very name of First Cause, viz. independence in Its actions, independence in Its relations to things outside of Itself, independence in Its very existence, so that It and It alone is the source and origin of Its own being. It is in this attribute of self-existence that all the other attributes of the First Cause are rooted. It is because God, the Cause of all, is Himself uncaused, and has from Himself, and Himself alone, His own being, that He is the Eternal, Immutable, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Infinite God."

"Yes, all this seems reasonable enough. But do you rely for your proof simply on the argument from causation under its various modifications?"

"Certainly not on it alone, though it seems to me the simplest and most satisfactory line of proof. But it has plenty of friends ready to come in and confirm its conclusions on very different grounds. The argument from design steps into the witness-box and bears testimony to the traces of a directing intelligence which lie scattered everywhere throughout the universe; and the argument from conscience recognizes in this necessary Being, in whom all perfections are summed up, the Author of that voice which speaks in such unmistakable tones of approval or condemnation when the moral law is observed, or is violated. Then, moreover, there is another argument which I have not as yet even

mentioned."

"What is that?"

"The argument from the general consent of mankind. Go where you will; north, south, east, or west—to nations the most civilized or the most barbarous—to the fair-haired Teuton or the swarthy Ethiopian—to the most energetic or the most apathetic—to those whose intellectual activity has weighed and sifted on strict philosophic principles every article of belief, or those who seem barely to overstep the line which separates rational men from the beasts of the field—go to the frozen regions of the north or the wild luxuriance of the tropics—and everywhere you will find a firmly rooted belief in a Supreme Personal Being, the Author of the Universe, to whom man is responsible, and who will reward virtue and punish ill-doing. The belief may be a vague one, it may be overlaid with hideous superstitions, it may have degenerated into false notions of a Deity, so fantastically perverted that those who hold them are rather devil worshippers than adorers of the true God. But, nevertheless, there it remains, and whatever the caricature which has taken the place of the reality, the very caricature bears witness to the universal instinct of mankind that there is outside of this tangible, sensible, material world, a world in which there reigns supreme an Invisible Being, all-powerful to save and to destroy, whom to serve is to fulfil the end of our existence, and whom to obey is the only road to peace and prosperity."

"But is there evidence of such a universal belief? Do not scientific travellers tell us that there are islands in the Malay Archipelago and the South Seas whose inhabitants show no sign of any belief in a God?"

"Even if this is so, it does not interfere with my argument. I said that it was a *general*, not a *universal* belief. It may be that there are tribes so utterly degraded and given over to vice and ignorance, that those who belong to them for the most part have lost before manhood or womanhood arrives their perception of things Divine. They do but reproduce the type described by St. Paul,[1] and which was common enough in ancient Rome. They do not like to have God in their knowledge, and so God gives them over to a

reprobate mind. They disobey the voice within them, and cease to hear its warnings. They become unable to rise from the visible to the invisible, from the creature to the Creator, and sink down into that unhappy ignorance of God in which they are not alone in the present day. But these are but the exception that proves the rule, and even they have each and all deliberately shut their eyes to the light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world.”

“This might account for many instances, or for most, but I do not see how it accounts for the total absence of any idea of God, however vague, in the minds of a whole tribe of savages.”

“I do not believe that there is any tribe thus destitute of all knowledge of God, and those who have made the most intelligent and thorough investigations confirm what I say. It is not the chance visitor touching at a savage island whose testimony we should accept. I do not think the evidence of anyone is of value unless he has spent months or years among those whose beliefs he professes to fathom. What opportunity has a mere passing traveller of arriving at the mind of a savage? Sometimes he speaks through an interpreter, and sometimes he relies on his own imperfect knowledge of the language—partly by words and partly by signs he makes his rather unintelligible inquiries. It is ten to one that his interlocutors are either frightened out of their wits, or anxious to propitiate the stranger, or more anxious still to be rid of him somehow. He asks his question, and the natives not having the faintest idea of what he means, shake their heads in evidence of their perplexity, and the scientific traveller comes away, and triumphantly reports that his personal inquiries, made with the greatest care in various parts of the Pacific, have convinced him that there are numerous tribes absolutely ignorant of any idea of a God. Who can refute him? He is a distinguished man, and his words, deservedly of weight in scientific questions, unfortunately carry weight in matters where his knowledge is anything but scientific. He publishes the preconceived hypothesis which he has carried with him to the savages and brought home again, as now an undoubted fact, and we hear your friend who professes to have examined Theism candidly declaring that ‘the argument from the

general consent of mankind is so clearly fallacious, both as to facts and principles, that it is quite unnecessary to notice it.’ ”

“You have not shown that it is not fallacious in principle. You know that the sceptics attack it, even allowing the universality of the belief, on the ground that it does not follow that, because the great mass of men are led by certain plausible arguments and surface analogies to hold a certain belief, it is therefore true, any more than the once universal belief that the world was flat and was the centre of the universe. Exact thought they allege is gradually upsetting the hypothesis of a Personal God, just as it upset the Ptolemaic system.”

“I told you,” said Saville, “that I do not rely on the argument from universal consent as a means of refuting the agnostic, but nevertheless the objection to it abounds with fallacies. The Ptolemaic system was at once relinquished by all men of intelligence as soon as certain facts inconsistent with it were established, whereas Theism is the prevailing belief among the great mass of educated men, philosophers, men of science, ‘thinkers’ (to use a cant word which I abhor). As knowledge increases it becomes more firmly rooted, and men of the greatest genius find in their daily experience fresh proofs of a fact which they could no more deny or doubt than they can deny or doubt their own existence.”

“Yes, this certainly tells in its favour; but to those who think little of authority, and assert that the ‘thinker’ should think out for himself his every opinion, and accept none unchallenged, however great the genius of its supporters, the belief of distinguished men carries no great weight. Mill, after giving a list of distinguished men who were all Theists, adds: ‘To a thinker, the argument from other people’s opinions has little weight. It is but second-hand evidence, and merely admonishes us to look out for and weigh the reasons on which this conviction of mankind or wise men was founded.’ ”[1]

“There is an element of truth in this. Yet he would be a bold man indeed who would set up his own individual judgment against the consent of the whole world, or even of the men eminent in that branch of knowledge to which the subject in dispute

belongs. But there is another element in the matter that good Mr. Mill does not take into account. He does not inform us of a further consideration which gives to the opinions of these eminent men who are upholders of Theism a paramount weight and authority, and which some non-believers confess with mournful sincerity. It is not so much the preponderance of *intellectual* men on the side of belief that is decisive in its favour, as the preponderance of *virtuous* men. The sceptic is compelled to allow that all the heroes of humanity are against him—all those who have the truest claim to the admiration of mankind for their lofty deeds and pure lives and self-sacrificing devotion, are without a single exception Theists. On the other hand, among agnostics and atheists, you may find many men of ability, but none of whom you can say that their generous, self-denying, noble life, was the admiration of their contemporaries, and will live after them in the grateful memory of their country and their friends. Take the names which rise to our lips: Tom Paine, Voltaire, Comte, Renan, Bradlaugh. What a list! What a contrast to the friends of God! I do not say that their lives were always openly flagitious, or that they were destitute of many natural virtues and good qualities. But if he cannot be wrong whose life is in the right, if there is any connection between a virtuous and unselfish life on the one hand, and the attainment of truth on religious matters on the other, if he who obeys the moral law receives light denied to him who breaks it, it is impossible to deny that scepticism, in virtue of its close alliance with a low morality and a sordid selfishness, is relegated to the region of darkness, where shadows are mistaken for substances and falsehood is undistinguishable from truth.”

“Yes, indeed it is so, and to be frank with you, I have always found that offences against the moral law, and a desire to be free from its restraint, made me inclined to search out arguments favourable to unbelief. What you said at the beginning of our discussion was perfectly true. I was always conscious, or half-conscious, when I was boldly attacking God, that my attack derived its force from my desire to be rid of His most inconvenient demand on my obedience. Sometimes it was the moral law that I should

have liked to see abolished, sometimes it was the sense of dependence on an external authority that I desired to be rid of, lust or pride, always one or the other. I would not curb my passions, and I was unwilling to own that I had a Master over me.”

Saville could not refrain a smile. “*Habemus confitentem reum*. I knew all this well enough, at least I guessed it, long ago. Thank God that you acknowledge it now. Do you know, Cholmeley,” he added seriously, “that I think there are some people whom God seems determined to save in spite of themselves, and it seems to me that you are one of them. Such men don’t seem able to go wrong in the end, however hard they try. They may go utterly astray for years, morally and intellectually; they may even have professed themselves sceptics, and sometimes actually joined in a propagandism of iniquity. But somehow God is too strong for them in the end. All their lives through their conscience will not let them alone. It pulls at them, and pulls so hard that they must perforce give way sooner or later. God arranges events so as to drag them back whether they will it or no. They play a perilous game, and if they do overstep the line, and try His mercy too far, God help them! But, nevertheless, it is wonderful what He will put up with from those who are the special objects of His love.”

“Perhaps you are right there,” answered Cholmeley. “Something has always been dragging at me. I was never perfectly comfortable even where I believed that my arguments had some weight in them. I was honest in a sense. I did not see my way out of the reasons I adduced. But there was always a note of dissonance—something jarred on me in Mill and Bain and Herbert Spencer and Huxley. Just as in Catholic doctrines I found an indescribable harmony, even though I did not believe them, so in the infidel tenets I recognized a prevailing element of discord, or, if I may change my metaphor, in the one case it was like stroking gently the smooth fur of a cat, and the other like rubbing her roughly the wrong way. I must say this for myself, that I do not think I should ever have got off the line as I have if I had been brought up a Catholic, instead of having to identify orthodoxy of belief with a lot of contradictory nonsense I could not accept. I was drawn towards Catholic beliefs

from the first, and if I had been as faithful to my conscience as you were in early life I dare say I should have followed your example long ago. When I asked you down here it was not merely for the pleasure of your company as an old friend, but because something seemed to tell me that you had a message for me to which I should do well to listen. And, please God, I *will* listen.”

Saville’s eyes filled with tears. “My dear Cholmeley,” he said, “you cannot think what a happiness it is to me to hear you speak thus. I do not want you to be in a hurry, but quietly to think over this fundamental question that we have been talking over. And now I do not hesitate to add what I said before with some misgiving: Pray God with all your heart that you may not strain His mercy too far.”

“I hope not,” said Cholmeley. “But I want to ask you one thing more. I want you to put the arguments for the existence of God in what you consider their natural order.”

“I do not think there is any natural order. It varies with different individuals. But to my mind the first notion that presents itself is one of dependence. I cannot help recognizing in myself that at some time or other I did not exist, and that I somehow came into being. This suggests the idea of causation, and leads me up to a First Cause, on whom I ultimately depend for my being. Looking around I find that all else seems to share this dependence. Everything is the effect of some cause, and this cause again of some other cause, and so on till we come at last to a First Cause on whom all else depend. Then comes the further question: What sort of a Being is this First Cause? If from Him comes all that is good and beautiful, if all perfections are derived from Him, He must sum up in Himself all possible perfection. Then again I look around me, and I recognize the beauty and order of the external world, and I admire in it a faint reflection of His Divine beauty, and the various excellences of created things help me to realize the uncreated perfections of the First Cause to whom they owe their origin. They lead me up to Him. They are the rays pouring forth from the sun, the drops of water testifying to the glories of the boundless ocean of His love. Next I look within, and listen, and there I hear a voice

which speaks to me with an authority that I cannot gainsay, and from which I am unable to escape, reproaching me when I transgress its precepts, and approving when I obey. It has all the characteristics of a Personal Voice. Sceptics may invent far-fetched explanations of it, but still the conviction remains that it is the Voice of One who is my rightful Lord and Master, to whom I owe absolute and entire allegiance, and who will reward or punish me according as I listen to it or not. Then once more I look around me, and the transitory character of all around me, and of my very self, impresses itself on my reflective mind. All this universe around me, whether it be eternal or not, at least might never have existed. In that case was there nothing but a blank vacuum? If so, how could the existing universe have sprung out of its empty nothingness? And thus it comes home to me that this First Cause, this Being of absolute perfection, this Supreme Ruler of the universe, this Lord and Master of mankind, must have existed before them all; that He shares not their transitory or contingent character, but must be a necessary Being, who existed from all eternity, and from His very nature must exist to all eternity unchanged and unchangeable. Last of all I compare notes with other men. Almost all share the conviction at which I arrived. Some few do not. I weigh the claims of the advocates and the opponents of Theism. On the one side I find the great mass of mankind; on the other an insignificant minority. I go further and examine into the moral character and general tone of those who lead the van of the opposing camps. On the one side I find the heroes of humanity, those who live a life of self-sacrifice, who are the enthusiasts of virtue and who are ready to lay down life itself for the sake of that God whose existence is to them as certain as their own. On the other I find those who are in general a villainous and abominable crew. I find among them all the filthy things that shun the light—selfishness, lust, greed of gold, petty meanness, every kind of vice. The most respectable of them are but a handful of self-sufficient theorists, full of pride and vainglory, while the rank and file are corrupt beyond description. Joyfully then I cast in my lot with the friends of God; joyfully I recognize my dependence on Him; joyfully I listen

to the accents of that soft whisper which is the voice of my Father and Friend; joyfully I admire in Him a perfection which sums up all the perfections of created things; joyfully I contemplate His attributes and try to realize in my poor feeble fashion how He is the First Cause, Himself uncaused, the Creator and Lord of all, Himself uncreated and Supreme, the Friend and Father and Lover of us His children, though He in His self-contained felicity has no need of our friendship and derives no benefit from our love—the Infinite, Incomprehensible, Omnipotent God. I do not think I could live if I did not believe in God and love Him. Truly indeed does your candid friend say that with the negation of God the universe has lost its soul of loveliness. What would the world be without God but a miserable blank of hopeless despair?”

Cholmeley was silent, and for a long time made no reply. At last he said, “Saville, you were always the best friend I had in the world. I think to-day you have established our friendship on a firmer basis than it ever had before.”

CHAPTER 3: POPULAR DIFFICULTIES

The words of a friend whom we respect and love often have a power to carry conviction which would not be possessed by the most logical and irrefragable arguments, if they were not backed by the gentle persuasiveness of personal affection. The listener receives them as a man receives a visitor who comes with a letter of introduction from some one whom he greatly esteems: they have every chance of reaching the centre of the intelligence because they come with a favourable recommendation from the will. This advantage does not interfere with the impartiality of the judgement; it does not warp the decision of the intellect; it only enables arguments, which otherwise would remain unheeded, to obtain a fair hearing, and ensures a patient consideration for doctrines or opinions which would otherwise be dismissed abruptly.

So it was with the good influence exercised by Saville over Cholmeley. Cholmeley knew his friend’s ability and the unprejudiced calmness of his judgment. He knew that he had made great sacrifices for conscience’ sake: during the hours they had spent together he had been struck with the spirit of peaceful happiness, of which his conversation and demeanour gave the clearest proofs. He could not help contrasting it with the trouble and perplexity of his own mind. In his friend, solid unshaken convictions; in

himself, shifting, unsteady opinions. In his friend, a consistency of belief, a unity of thought; in himself, a mass of inconsistency which he could not conceal from himself, and a variety of hypotheses which clashed most uncomfortably one with the other from time to time. In his friend, definiteness of conception and clearness of statement; in himself, indefiniteness, mist, obscurity. In his friend, a set of principles which governed all the details of his daily life and gave the tone to all his actions; in himself, no principles worth the name, but a series of guesses to some of which he firmly held, though to the large majority he gave only a sort of half assent, and accepted them provisionally, until he found something better. Above all, in his friend, a continual cheerfulness, an unflinching peace, a most delightful habit of throwing off troubles or looking at the bright side of everything, which strangely contrasted with his own fits of gloominess, his critical spirit, his tendency to fix upon the unfavourable side of persons and of things. All this impressed him more and more during the fortnight that they were together, and he recalled again and again the well-known words of the Philosopher: "To those who know there is a sweeter life than to those who seek."

After they had parted company, the words and the influence of his friend seemed to sink in more deeply even than when they were together. Once more the familiar words of the *Ethics* recurred to his thoughts: "If truth," as Aristotle says,[1] "is one, and error many, if there is only one way of being right, and countless ways of being wrong," there can be little doubt that Saville is right and I am wrong. He puts before me a consistent, compact, logical system to which I can only oppose objections and difficulties which would engage in internecine strife if they were not occupied in attacking the common foe of Theism, besides many evasions which in my heart I often do not accept. How can I deny the force of his reasoning, so different from that of the well-meaning Theists whose panoply had always some convenient gap where I could thrust in my spear. He appeals to my reason, and my reason cries out within me that he has truth on his side. He is moderate and sensible; he does not urge as conclusive arguments which do not

really prove; he does not abuse me or tell me that I am wilfully blind; he does not hurry me; he tells me to wait and think and pray.

So weeks ran on, and Cholmeley did not neglect the advice, and moreover made a good resolution to fight against the storm of passion which had from time to time swept him away, and to avoid the company of those who might lead him into his former evil ways. It was not an easy resolution to keep, but he kept it nevertheless, and found that as in former times the indulgence of passion had helped gradually to obscure and obliterate the belief of his early years, so now the successful struggle seemed to dissipate the mist and gradually to clear his mental vision of the fatal haze that had shut out Heaven from his sight. Gradually he began to say to himself, "I wish I believed. I think I believe. I see good reason why I should believe," and unconsciously he found himself uttering the words, "O my God, help me to believe." Yet from time to time there was a reaction. The difficulties of belief seemed insuperable; the objections he had so often urged against belief, and which he thought would sleep quietly in their graves, slain by the sword of logic and of growing faith, came out of their tombs and haunted him like horrible spectres, crying aloud in his ears, and challenging him to banish them if he could. After several days' perplexity he sat down on one of those occasions and wrote the following letter to his friend:

Inner Temple.

My dear Saville,—I have been thinking a great deal, since returning to London, about the various subjects we discussed together. I think I can accept the conclusion to which your arguments lead. I really can honestly say from the bottom of my heart, "I believe in God," but it is indeed *from the bottom of my heart*, in that my belief lies concealed deep down, quite out of sight, without any sensible realization of it. It has to struggle up through a host of foes which threaten to choke it on its way. The old objections come out of their lurking-places and oppose it with vivid and menacing hostility. I know they are old objections, but I do not think I ever found a satisfactory answer to them. Perhaps

you will tell me that I ought to gulp them down, and make an act of faith in God quite irrespective of them and ignoring them, but somehow I cannot do this with any satisfaction. I am still an inquirer, and an inquirer is bound to face the foe, not to avoid him. My chief difficulties are these:

1. How is all the misery and wretchedness in the world compatible with the infinite goodness of God?
2. How can a just and merciful God have created Hell?
3. How can such a God leave hundreds and thousands without any means of knowing or loving Him, surrounded by vice and crime and paganism, so that practically without any fault of their own, or comparatively little, they are sure to lose their souls?
4. How can He have created those whom He knew, in virtue of His omniscience, would be utterly miserable to all eternity?

I hope you will not think, because I put forward my difficulties, that I am lapsing into my former scepticism. On the contrary, I begin to see, as I tell you, the light in the distance with an ever-increasing clearness; only before I arrive there I have these obstacles to surmount, these spectres to slay which I have so long harboured, and which haunt me still. I must get rid of these before I arrive at any final decision. I am sure you will be patient with me in my search after truth and after God. May I run down and have a talk with you in the course of the next week or so?

Saville, in reply, invited his friend to come and stay for a couple of days at his modest presbytery. "You are a nice fellow," he said to him on his arrival, with familiar banter, "to expect of a poor hard-worked priest a solution of some of the deepest mysteries that can be found in Heaven and earth." But they soon fell to discussing the subject that was uppermost in the minds of both, and it was Saville who opened fire.

"I remember," he said, "when we were at Oxford, some Biblical difficulties were once started at a dinner-party at Balliol. Some one who was present, and who had been arguing against the possibility of solving them, was asked in that case how he could in reason accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God? *'In reason?'* was the

answer, 'I don't accept it in reason, I swallow it down like a pill.' You seem to think, Cholmeley, that I want you to do the same with Theism, to swallow it like a pill, to gulp it down with all difficulties, soluble and insoluble. I want nothing so ridiculous and so impossible. All I want you to do is to accept what your reason deliberately approves. I don't want you to accept anything which really runs counter to your reason."

"But does not the Catholic Church teach that faith comes in and sets aside reason, reversing its decisions and compelling it to accept propositions against which it indignantly protests?"

"Most certainly not," said Saville warmly; "if it did it would cease to be the teacher of Truth and would become a teacher of abominable lies. Faith, it is true, takes the place of reason, and in this sense may be said to set it aside—it affords a higher sanction to that which reason approves as true. But if you mean that it contradicts reason, or runs in the teeth of reason, or condemns what reason approves as true, or approves what reason condemns, you must have a very strange idea of the relations existing between reason and faith."

"My dear Saville, I always regarded the Catholic Church as the most consistent and reasonable religion in the world, but I never knew it went so far as this. Even now I don't see how you can possibly maintain that it is reasonable in its account of the attributes of God. I am quite at a loss, for instance, to know how you can make out any case, on grounds of reason, for the mercy of God who fills the world with misery and kindles the eternal flames of Hell."

"Wait a little," was the answer, "there are one or two preliminary remarks I should like to make. First of all, I want to show you that it would be rather absurd and unreasonable if these difficulties did not exist. So far from being an obstacle to my belief in a God, I find in them a confirmation of it."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that if God is an Infinite Being, He belongs, in virtue of His Infinite Nature, to a different order of things from all finite beings, and therefore it would be quite unreasonable to expect

that we should fully understand the Divine method of government, or should be able to see the motive causes which underlie the action of God.”

“Is not this to fall back on the ‘mystery trick,’ and to tell us that we must shut our eyes and admire in God what we should condemn in an ordinary man?”

“No, it is not; because while I admit the mystery and the inscrutable character of the ways of God, I deny altogether that you can find in the action of God, as known to us, anything incompatible with the absolute perfections of an Infinite Being. Nay, I go further, and say that whenever the Divine action appears to compare unfavourably with the action which would be expected of a perfect man, the difference arises from the necessity of the case, from the fact that the one is Infinite and the other finite, that the one belongs to a higher and the other to a lower order of being.”

“Do you really mean to allow the action of the Being of the Higher Order compares unfavourably with that of the lower? Is not this simply to degrade God below the level of man, not to place Him above it?”

“My dear Cholmeley, I never said that the Divine action compares unfavourably with that of man. I only said that it *appears* to do so. Let me illustrate what I mean by an example which is very much to our point. You allow that a man ought to aim at being as merciful as he possibly can, that there should be no limit to his mercy as long as it does not interfere with his duties of justice to others.”

“Yes, of course he ought. The more merciful the better as long as it is the genuine article, mercy real and true.”

“Yet the most perfect of men can only show a limited amount of mercy, however perfectly he may cultivate the virtue.”

“That follows from the limitation of his finite nature, it is no fault of his. Yet he is bound to go as far as he can in exercising mercy.”

“Well, now, transfer your thoughts from finite man to the Infinite God. He has all perfections to an infinite degree, has He not?”

“Of course He has.”

“And therefore is a God of infinite mercy—an All-merciful God if you like. There is no end to the mercy He can pour forth from the treasure-house of His Divine Nature.”

“I do not see the drift of your argument.”

“Why, it is simply this. The merciful man who seeks to imitate a perfect ideal exerts to the utmost his faculty of mercy, he throws into his merciful actions all the mercy at his disposal. In so far as he fails of this he is not perfectly merciful. A merciful God, inasmuch as He has an infinite store of mercy, cannot exert it to the utmost on His finite creatures. Their very finitude limits His mercy. He must, from the very nature of the case, draw the line somewhere. He never can exert to the utmost His faculty of mercy.”

“Yes, that is true enough, but what then?”

“Well, then you get this contrast. A perfectly merciful man is bound to be as merciful as he can; a perfectly merciful God cannot be as merciful as He can. The one is under an obligation to exert His faculty of mercy to the utmost, the other cannot possibly exert His faculty of mercy to the utmost. Stop where He will, He can always add fresh mercy and this without end.”

“That seems to me true and reasonable. But if there is this necessary limit to the mercy of God, where is it to be drawn? Is it determined by the Divine will, or by the nature of those on whom it is exercised?”

“Don’t be in a hurry. I want you first of all to appreciate the shallowness of the common objection that a merciful God, in virtue of His infinite mercy, is bound to be unlimited in His mercy, and if He is not He contrasts unfavourably with a merciful man, whereas it is just the opposite. I assert on the contrary that a merciful God in virtue of His infinite mercy *must* limit that mercy in its external exercise, else He would not be God, but only a sort of man on a big scale. After this comes the question, What is to set the limit to His mercy? and to this I answer that the only possible limit is the will of God Himself. If God’s action were determined by anything outside of Himself He would not be God. At the same time it is true to say that God’s mercy is in some

sense limited by sin, and by the punishment of sin which justice demands. Even among men the mercy of a ruler must have limits. He would become an object of contempt to his subjects if he went on forgiving every sort of offence against his authority, without any restriction. But what is any offence against human authority compared with the offence against Divine authority involved in sin? It is because we do not appreciate the nature of sin, because we cannot understand its vileness, its hideousness, its almost infinitude of evil, that we do not appreciate the wonderful patience of God, His astonishing forbearance with sinners, His reluctance to punish them as they deserve, His almost extravagant liberality in the bestowal of His mercy.”

“Yes, but if He has this unlimited mercy at His disposal, is He not *bound* to exercise it very liberally?”

“No, not bound. In virtue of His Divine Nature He must be perfectly just, but the line of strict justice once passed, the amount of mercy to be bestowed must depend simply and solely on the will of God Himself. In point of fact, He *does* bestow mercy with Divine generosity. He opens the treasures of His love and lavishes it upon His children without stint, and I had almost said without limit. They deliberately outrage and set Him at nought, and He winks at the offence. They rebel against Him, and instead of punishing them as they deserve He seeks to win them back by the sweet suggestions of His grace. They return unkindness for His goodwill and insult for His fond affection, and yet He does not turn them off, but exercises a God-like ingenuity in seeking out means to gain their love. I confess, Cholmeley, the longer I live the more I am astonished, not at the limits of God’s mercy, but at its unbounded extent. I am unable to understand how He, the God of Justice, can go the lengths that He does in showing forbearance with the most ungrateful and most rebellious. But all this is done of His own gratuitous longsuffering and compassion. If He were to draw the line after the first deliberate mortal sin, or at all events very far short of where He draws it in point of fact, we should have no reason to complain, and He would be none the less a God of infinite love.”

“Saville, I don’t think I quite agree with you. In my own case

I allow it is true, and I wonder at God’s forbearance with such a perverse ungrateful brute as I have been. But in the case of others I do not see the force of your remarks. I am inclined to think God is very hard on a great many.”

“I dare say you do,” rejoined Saville, “for the very simple reason that your own case is the only one in which you have any knowledge of the facts. I never found anyone yet who when he talked honestly did not confess the same as you do about himself, however loud in his denunciation of God’s hard treatment of others. As for myself, it is one of the mysteries of the universe how God has almost compelled me to love and serve Him by the graces and favours He has heaped upon me.”

“Yes, but you deserved them. Don’t shake your head. However, I don’t want to dispute that point. But I do dispute the generosity of God to all the poor wretches who grow up in vice and filth and misery. I cannot understand even the justice—not to say the mercy—displayed to the poor children who never have a chance of virtue. Is it generous, is it fair, to let them be reared amid every sort of iniquity, and then to punish them eternally because they copy the example of their elders and live a life of crime and vice and immorality, when they have never known anything higher or better, and have sucked in iniquity almost with their mother’s milk?”

“My dear Cholmeley,” answered Saville, “don’t dress up a spectre and then find fault with its ghastly ugliness. You are getting indignant about a perfectly imaginary case. *If* God punished those who had never had a chance of virtue, because they did not practise it, He would indeed be unjust. *If* a single human being ever lost his soul and was miserable to all eternity, except through his own fault, he would indeed be an unanswerable argument against the goodness of God, nay, against the whole Theist position. You are building up an edifice that lacks all foundation. Your accusation against God is based not on what is the case, but on what you fancy must be the case. In point of fact there is not one of all those who have died in enmity with God who will not have to confess that he has been treated not only justly but generously.”

“How do you know this? It seems to me that you have no more right to assert it than I have to deny it.”

“In that case we are both arguing in the dark, and you at least have no right to bring your assertion as an argument against God. My counter-assertion is worth as much as yours, even if we are both talking at random, but in point of fact I am not talking at random. I am speaking from facts within the circle of my own knowledge. Take one of them with which you ought to be familiar. Once upon a time there was a child brought up among robbers and trained himself to the same lawless life. His career of crime ended in his apprehension and conviction, and he was sentenced with one of his companions to die a shameful death. What chance had such a one of saving his soul? If you had known his history and seen him led out to execution cursing and blaspheming, you would have said: ‘Poor fellow! what chance has he had?’ Yet this man died the death of a saint and went straight to Heaven, and is commemorated in the Roman Martyrology on the day on which our Lord died side by side with him on Calvary.”

“Yes, but this was a single and exceptional case.”

“Another of your gratuitous assertions; and I do not hesitate to add a false one too. I think there are indications, I do not say proof positive, that at the last moment of life God makes an offer of mercy to all who have not already deliberately and wilfully barred the way to His grace. It is a fact which experience has proved to be true in a great number of well-authenticated instances, that before the soul quits the body the whole of life flashes in an instant before the mental vision. At that moment I believe that every one has a last chance of submitting to God, of choosing Heaven or Hell, and that many a poor outcast, steeped to the neck in vice and all abominations, nevertheless at the last has the grace to make that necessary act of submission and sorrow for sin which opens the door of Heaven and crowns the soul in reward for that one flash of repentant thought with the joy of Heaven to all eternity. The epitaph of the poor fox-hunter:

Between the stirrup and the ground

He mercy sought and mercy found,
might, I fancy, be written in other words over the grave of many a poor thief and prostitute.”

“But is not this demoralizing doctrine and one which would encourage men in vice?”

“Why, Cholmeley, you were just now arguing against God’s mercy, and now you are turning round and saying that He is too merciful. No, it’s not demoralizing, for the simple reason that he who perseveres deliberately in sin, trusting to this last chance, will lose the power of availing himself of it. It will not help the hardened reprobate—but it will help, nay, it will save hundreds and thousands of those whom the world regarded as hopeless. ‘The last will be first and the first last!’ Heaven will have strange surprises for us. The Day of Judgment will among other ends serve as a complete justification of the Providence of God. It will show us how every one who ever came into the world had not one chance but many: how no soul will be lost except through its own fault, and how the punishment, terrible as it will be, will be altogether short of what was deserved.”

“There you come on another of my difficulties. I do not see how a momentary action can ever deserve a punishment which is eternal. There is no proportion between the two. It is not just (to say nothing about mercy) to visit an offence which is past and gone in a moment with misery that lasts for ever.”

“I am a little surprised to hear you urge such an objection as this. I know it is a very common one, but I think, if I may say so, that it is scarcely worthy of your intelligence. The moral character of an action is not measured by its duration, nor do its consequences depend on this. There may be an immeasurable intensity of guilt in a look or a movement or a thought. A single word or glance may create a permanent and irredeemable breach between two bosom friends. Some acts are of their own nature irreversible—suicide, for instance. The final act of impenitence is a sort of moral or spiritual suicide. It is a deliberate wilful rejection of God, and that to all eternity. It is a renouncing of His friendship for ever. It is

a conscious act of permanent separation from Him with all that such a separation involves. Is it not fair and just that after such a deliberate act (the last, too, after many similar ones going before) the man who makes it should be taken at his word?"

"Well, yes, I think it is, whenever he thoroughly knows what he is doing. But what are we to say of those who commit sin out of sheer ignorance that it is sin? of those whose vicious education has so perverted their conscience that they are not to blame, or scarcely to blame, for their rejection of Truth or for their breaches of the moral law?"

"My dear Cholmeley, you need not be alarmed about the fate that will be dealt out to those who sin, not through malice, but through ignorance. No human being will be separated from God to all eternity unless in this life, out of sheer malice and in the full consciousness of the guilt of what he was doing, he deliberately turned his back on God, outraged His Majesty, rebelled against His dominion, and rejected His love. For such, and for such only, is the misery of Hell reserved for ever."

"Really, Saville," said Cholmeley, "you make Hell quite reasonable. Still, I do not see how a merciful God could create such a place as Hell at all."

"I do not admire your assertion that God creates Hell. There is a sense in which it is true, but it seems to me more true to say that man creates it for himself. Hell is the necessary consequence of a complete separation from God. It is the agony of an intense longing after Him joined with an intense hatred of Him; of an unsatisfied craving after One whom we know to be the Source of all possible joy and happiness, and whom we have for ever forfeited through our own fault. It is the agony of an immortal soul and an immortal body craving after an activity which they never can again enjoy, beating against the bars of their moral prison-house; it is the agony of a struggle between desire and hatred, the desire never to be fulfilled, the hatred utterly feeble and futile, except to heap up misery and anguish on him in whose breast it dwells. Look at the intensity of misery that follows in this life from disappointed love: see how the torment is increased if love

and hate be mingled together. See how the anguish becomes still more unendurable if it is the result of the folly or guilt of him who experiences it. Why, men look upon all else as insignificant as compared with this. What do they reckon of bodily pain or physical torment side by side with this mental and moral agony? It often leads to madness, idiocy, suicide. Yet all this is by reason of a disappointment, the effects of which they know will at most last but a few years. How then can we ever estimate, how can we form any idea of the torture of a separation in which each element of pain is multiplied indefinitely, and which moreover is to last for ever and for ever? Why, the most terrible physical agony that we can imagine would be as nothing compared with the pain which is the necessary and natural result of separation from God."

Cholmeley sat silent for a few minutes. "Yes," he said, "that is all true, and certainly gives me quite a new face on the question of Hell. But two objections occur to me. If this is so, why do Catholic writers lay the chief stress on the physical torments of Hell? on the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? on the flames that feed upon the bodies of the lost without consuming them? on the darkness and the red-hot prison-house and the different kinds of punishment inflicted on the various senses? If all this is of minor importance, why put it in the forefront?"

"My dear Cholmeley, you must be aware that a wise man who desires to persuade his audience chooses not the arguments which have the greatest weight in themselves, but those likely to tell the most on those he is addressing. Now the mass of men are able thoroughly to appreciate physical pain. They know it by experience; but few of them can estimate the intensity of moral suffering. And if they can, yet they cannot realize how all possible anguish is involved in the loss of God. Fancy a preacher addressing an ordinary half-educated or uneducated congregation as follows: 'My brethren, picture to yourselves the misery of losing God; of being His enemy for ever; of having no chance of ever beholding the Beatific Vision; of being cut off from Him who is the Source of all joy and happiness and delight.' What impression would this make on a popular audience? The ordinary sinner would comfort

himself by thinking that he had been separated from God the greater part of his life without any very painful results, and he could not understand a state of things where the consequences would be the intensity of anguish described by the preacher. Very different is it with physical suffering. Tell a man, educated or uneducated, to thrust his finger into the flame of a candle and hold it there if he can; tell him to try and realize the effect of being plunged into the stream of molten metal that pours out from the furnace of an iron foundry, and remaining there with a body capable of the anguish but incapable of death. Ask him whether any sinful enjoyment or bodily pleasure is worth the chance of such a fate as that to all eternity, and you will produce a very different effect: his imagination and memory will come into play and he will dread the lesser agony with a fear which with God's grace very often will have the most salutary effects on his after-life."

"True enough," said Cholmeley, "I must confess you are right. But my other difficulty is more serious. If separation from God is far worse than being plunged into a sea of molten fire, how is it that men who are separated by the greatest possible distance in this life have such a very comfortable and happy time of it? I know pious people say that they are very miserable under the surface and have no peace of heart, but are consumed by a secret despair; but all I can say is, that if they are, they have a wonderful power of concealing it, and putting on a mask of gladness. Why, some of the cheeriest men I know have thrown off God altogether."

"Quite so," said Saville. "I myself always feel inclined to be impatient when good men talk rubbish about the misery of the wicked. Do not mistake me. The wicked are utterly miserable in that they have in them the root of all misery; but thousands of those who have forsaken God are certainly not conscious of their misery. They are prosperous, self-satisfied, contented with themselves and all around. They have their qualms and dark moments, and their happiness is not of the highest type; but on the whole their lives are often very pleasant ones. You ask how this can be, or rather since this is true, how the chiefest misery of Hell can be enmity with God and separation from Him. Let me answer by

a parallel case. Suppose that a man were to be shown a number of photographs of a very beautiful person, all of which resemble her more or less. He reads her works, admires the pictures she paints and the wood-carvings she executes, he has also some correspondence with her. Do you think that such communications as these would, under ordinary circumstances, engender in him a very intense feeling of love?"

"No, I don't suppose it would."

"Or that it would cause him great sorrow or misery if he quarrelled with this friend?"

"No, he would not, I fancy, take it to heart."

"But now suppose that he was brought into contact with her and had the opportunity of realizing the intensity of her unrivalled beauty, the grace, the majesty, the winning gentleness, the sweet attractiveness of her nature, if he found in her the realization of his highest ideal and one who would satisfy all the cravings of his heart, if he conceived for her in spite of himself a love which made the world beside colourless and distasteful to his nature and all the longings of his heart, would not this make all the difference? Would not the appreciation of her perfect loveliness fill his heart with a yearning inexpressible to be with her all his life long? Would not separation from her cause a degree of misery proportioned to the delight and happiness that he knew her society would bring him? Would not dark despair come over his soul if she cast him off for ever, and that through his own fault, with expressions of hatred and contempt?"

"Yes, certainly, but what then?"

"Apply this to God. Here on earth we see and admire God in His works, but Him we see not, and so we know not what it is to lose Him. But at the Judgment we shall see His Divine Beauty, not in the Beatific Vision, but under the transparent veil of the glorified Humanity of the Incarnate Son of God, and beholding this we shall yearn after God with an unspeakable yearning, and the knowledge of what we have lost through our own fault will fill us with intolerable anguish. This will be the worm that dieth not, far worse even than the fire that never will be quenched."

Cholmeley made no answer for some time. At length he said, "My dear Saville, if all Theists were like you, with a reasonable and sensible explanation of the dogmas of religion, I think the agnostics and atheists would have a bad time of it. Now I see why you would not allow that God created Hell. But there seems to me one consequence from your theory which is not exactly orthodox. If the agony of Hell is a sort of necessary consequence of the loss of God, and not a positive infliction on God's part, what becomes of the physical fire of Hell? You don't mean, I imagine, that the agony is simply mental and moral, and there is no physical agony, and that the fire is merely metaphorical, and not real?"

"No, Cholmeley, the fire is real fire; and in this real fire the bodies of the enemies of God will be tortured to all eternity. But when we speak of real fire, we do not mean fire with all the characteristics of the fire known to us upon earth. On earth fire has to be continually fed with some combustible material, whereas the fire of Hell needs no such food for its maintenance. It will never fade away or be extinguished. On earth again fire gives light, whereas in Hell there will be nothing but the blackness of darkness for ever. On earth fire ministers to our comfort and happiness, it is only under certain circumstances that it is a source of pain, whereas in Hell it will do nothing but torment."

"But in this case, how can you call it real fire? Does not St. Thomas say that the fire of Hell is identical in nature with the material fire that we are familiar with on earth?"

"He says that at least it is the same in its *effects*. That is to say, the pain it inflicts is of the same kind as the pain produced upon our material bodies by material fire here on earth, in so far as anything in this life of dulled perception, limited as it is by the finite and perishable character of our mortal bodies, can correspond to that which belongs to the quickened and intensified life of a body which is imperishable and immortal. As here no pain is so intolerable as the pain of fire, so in the next world the pains of Hell will not only surpass all the agony endured by those who suffer the most in this life but all the agony that we can picture to ourselves if we multiply a hundred times over all the pain that mortal man

is capable of enduring. But we must not wander from our subject."

"I do not think we are wandering. The nature of Hell-fire was one of my difficulties against the existence of God. You have done a great deal to remove the difficulty. But there is one point that you have overlooked. It may be true that in Hell the bodies of the lost will be tortured by a real fire after their bodies are restored to them at the Judgement, but how can it be so now? How can the fire which is of a nature adapted to affect the material body, and the soul only through the medium of the body, torture the immaterial soul, separated as it is from its body until the resurrection?"

"I am glad you reminded me of what is a very real and very reasonable objection. It is one that is difficult to answer. It always must remain to some extent a mystery which we cannot explain."

"Saville, I thought you had done with talking of mysteries. I am not fond of mysteries. They always seem to me like an evasion of a difficulty that we cannot solve."

"My dear Cholmeley, please don't talk nonsense. If the recognition of mysteries that we cannot solve is the evasion of a difficulty, we have no alternative but to give up the world unseen altogether, and fall back into the slough of materialism. Even then, besides the contradictions in which we shall involve ourselves, we shall scarcely be free from those mysteries to which you object. Nature is full of mysteries. The material world is rife with them. We cannot get rid of them; and our only chance of reconciling ourselves with them is to confess the fact, and allow that the explanation is beyond us."

"But is not this to run counter to our reason?"

"Not at all. It is essentially in accordance with reason. Take the case in point. You ask how the material fire can possibly affect directly the immaterial soul? I answer by another question. If this impassable gulf separates the material from the immaterial, how is it that the immaterial soul suffers with the sufferings of the material body? My nerves are out of order, and my soul is tormented by empty fears, anxieties, scruples, self-reproach. My liver is deranged, and my hopes for time and eternity seem black and hopeless. Dyspepsia lays hold of my digestive powers, and I lose

all the brightness of my soul and all the energy of my immaterial intelligence.”

“That is because body and soul are united together into one perfect whole. They are not separate like the tormenting fire and the soul which it torments. There is not therefore the same difficulty in understanding how one can affect the other.”

“Not the same difficulty! There seems to me a much greater one. If the immaterial cannot affect the material, how much less can it be united to it! If there is such a gulf between them that the action of the one cannot reach the other, how far stranger and more mysterious is the uniting together into one composite whole of the material body and immaterial soul! Surely, Cholmley, if you believe yourself to be a composite being made up of the gross slime of earth and Divine fire from Heaven, harmonized into a wondrous unity, you are believing in what is a hundred times stranger and more surpassing our power of imagination, than when you admit the power of the element of fire (whatever it may be), when supernaturalized and freed from its earthly grossness, to affect the souls of men when they exist for a time apart from the body.”

“Well, if you put it in that way, it is reasonable enough. I certainly do believe in the union of body and soul, and I know by experience how each is affected by the other. So I suppose I may as well believe in the power of the fire to affect the soul without more ado.”

“You may indeed, especially when you remember that it is not merely earthly fire that torments the spirits of the lost, but a fire suited to and in unison with the world in which it exists. But have you any further difficulties on this subject?”

“Yes, I have. I want to ask you whether Hell is a *state* or a *place*? I have read some very funny story about a man seeing the soul of one of his friends shot out of Mount Vesuvius, only to fall back again into the volcano. I know this is only a kind of pious pleasantry, but unless I am mistaken, learned theologians have seriously maintained that Hell is situate in the centre of the earth. Of course it may be so, there is nothing in the nature of things to

render it impossible; but it seems to me rather a gratuitous assertion. We are told that the earth will one day be burned up, and to create a new world as the permanent abode of the lost is surely a still more unnecessary hypothesis. Altogether, the whole notion is mediæval and childish.”

“I would not call it childish, nor particularly mediæval. It is true that it is put forward by theologians as a probable opinion, and that some of them lay great stress on the fact that it is a *place*. And a place it must be when we come to think of it, because the bodies of the lost will be there, and bodies necessarily imply some sort of local abode. But this assigning to Hell of a place in the centre of the earth, seems to me to be an expression which is *virtually* true, and which conveys a true idea to the popular mind. It is meant to impress upon us the depth of the dungeon, the absence of all light and of all liberty, the intensity of the scorching withering heat, the complete oblivion which will be the lot of those who have separated themselves from God. It is like many other dreadful things which are said of Hell and which are true, inasmuch as the very worst that can be said of it is contained in the far more dreadful reality. Thus it is a *prison*, inasmuch as a prison implies a complete loss of liberty. It is a *prison-house of fire*, inasmuch as fire implies the worst kind of torture imaginable. It is, moreover, a *lake*, or pool of fire, inasmuch as the torturing element surrounds and encompasses those who suffer in it. It is, moreover, a *place of darkness*, in that no ray of light breaks in on the hideous monotony of eternal misery of the lost. The unhappy beings there are said to shriek and howl and pour forth incessant cries of anguish, and gnash their teeth, and beat their breasts, and blaspheme God—not that these expressions need be literally and actually true, or that there will be really any sounds to break the silence of never-ending despair, but because these modes of giving vent to intolerable agony are the common means by which men on earth convey to their fellows the intensity of their anguish, and therefore they are the nearest approximation which is possible to human language, an expression of the condition of the lost in Hell.”

“But that makes all these terms a kind of metaphor.”

“No, it does not. There you make a philosophical blunder very common among all who have not carefully studied the distinctions of Catholic philosophy. In a metaphor we apply to one order of things an idea which properly belongs to another. We use an expression, for instance, of things immaterial, which is limited in its strict sense to things material. Thus if I talk of ‘walking steadily along the road to Heaven’ as a synonym of perseverance in virtue, I am introducing a metaphor. The idea of *walking* is an idea belonging to things material, so too is *road*. But when I use an expression which conveys an idea applicable literally to its object, there is no metaphor. Thus when I call Hell a prison, there is no metaphor, because a prison simply means a state of involuntary confinement, and it is literally true of the lost that they are compelled to remain there very much against their will. Hell is a prison in the proper sense of a word because it is a prison in its effects, and those confined there are prisoners, even though there are no doors, no bolts, no locks. Walls and bars and bolts are not essential to a prison. Blackwell’s Island in the Hudson is none the less a prison because those confined there are not shut in by any material appliances. When I speak of the lost as being plunged in a lake or pool of fire, I am again using the words in their literal, not their metaphorical sense, because the suffering to which they are condemned is in its effects literally the same as that of being immersed in fire would be to us. It is true that there are many expressions used of Hell which are on the borderland between the literal and the metaphorical, but this does not affect my main contention, which is that the eternal punishment of the lost includes in itself all the suffering which we describe by the terms employed.”

“Do you extend this to what is called in Scripture ‘the worm that dieth not’?”

“I think the more common opinion is that this is a metaphor. I am glad you reminded me of it, because it brings out clearly the distinction between the metaphorical and the literal. The worm of remorse gnaws the soul just as a material worm gnaws the body: there is therefore the necessary transference from the material to the immaterial order which constitutes a metaphor. But the ‘fire

that shall never be quenched’ is material fire, and works its effect on the soul in quite a different way. The one causes mental anguish, the other physical; the one produces suffering which in this world acts independently of the body, the other suffering which here on earth acts on the soul through the body. But really we must not allow ourselves to run off into subjects which bear rather remotely on our main thesis. What we are discussing is whether there is in the idea of Hell anything incompatible with the infinite perfections of God.”

“Don’t grudge me the digression, Saville; you have opened my eyes on a good many points where I was all in a muddle before. But there still remain two difficulties unsolved. Even if Hell be in accordance with reason and the necessary result of offending God, I don’t see why this world should be so full of misery—a misery too which falls, or seems to fall, indiscriminately on good and bad alike, on the innocent and the guilty, on the spotless child and the hardened reprobate. I have often read Mill’s words with a sort of sympathy:

“ ‘Nature impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, casts them to be devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones like the first Christian martyr, starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold, poisons them by the quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of other hideous deaths in reserve, such as the ingenious cruelty of a Nabais or a Domitian never surpassed. All this, Nature does with the most supercilious disregard, both of mercy and of justice, emptying her shafts upon the best and noblest, indifferently with the meanest and worst; upon those who are engaged in the highest and worthiest enterprises, and often as the direct consequence of the noblest acts; and it might almost be imagined as a punishment for them.’[1]

How do you reconcile all this with the justice and mercy of God?”

“My dear Cholmeley, let me ask you a question in return. If some one were to offer you £10,000 a year and perfect health, a successful career, and a long and happy life, on condition of your

receiving with patience one stroke of a lash, should you consider the bargain a hard one, or condemn the justice or mercy of him who inflicted the blow, even though for a moment it was rather painful?"

"Of course not; but a momentary blow is very different from the protracted misery that many suffer for long years."

"Yes, and a life of wealth and happiness is still more different from an eternity of happiness in Heaven. Why, if we had to endure ten thousand years of the keenest suffering imaginable, instead of some seventy years at most of mingled joy and sorrow, our bargain would be a most magnificent one. Even then it would be an ocean compared with a drop, an unending vista of perfect joy compared with a vanishing fit of sorrow."

"That is all very true, but, if God is omnipotent, why should there be any sorrow at all?"

"Tell me, Cholmeley, have you never experienced, when some pain ceases, that the departure of the pain is in itself a pleasure? The relief is a sort of satisfaction, apart from any positive enjoyment that takes its place."

"Certainly I have often observed this."

"So that when pleasure succeeds pain there is a double source of delight: the presence of the pleasure and the absence of the pain experienced before."

"Yes, that is undeniable."

"Apply this to the case in point, and remember that in Heaven there will be always present to us the same leaping of the soul, the same exulting delight that took possession of us when first we exchanged the sorrows of life for the joys of Heaven. There will be no fading away of the joyous memory of sorrow past, but to all eternity there will be the double element of delight, in that 'there shall be no more sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain,' and that in addition to this there will be the chalice full to the brim of all the happiness that our soul can possibly contain. If there had not been the previous pain, one of these elements of joy would be absent, and God, if He gave us a painless life, would be bestowing upon us what would not be such an unexceptionable

boon after all. Mind, I do not say that this is the only, or the chief reason why we have to endure sorrow and pain on earth, but it is a reason quite sufficient to answer your difficulty."

"You are most ingenious, Saville, in turning all my objections to arguments in your own favour. I suppose, according to you, the more miserable a man is here, the more he will appreciate the absence of any sort of misery or suffering in Heaven. That ought to be a consolation when a poor fellow is in trouble. But I have still one shaft more in my quiver. If you give me a satisfactory answer to my last difficulty, I am quite ready to give in for good and all."

"I know what you are coming to, to the objection which is, at first sight, of all objections the most formidable. You are going to challenge the mercy of a God who creates men whom He knows, in virtue of His foreknowledge, will lose their souls, and suffer to all eternity the torments of Hell."

"Yes, that is just what I was going to say."

"But you will be glad to hear that the very fact that God does not look forward, does not alter the arrangements of His providence because the perverse will of man frustrates His intentions of mercy towards them, is one of the proofs of His Divinity."

"How can that be?"

"I think I can make it plain to you. Let me first ask you, what is the rule which governs the actions of a good man?"

"I suppose you would say that it is conscience, or right reason, or the will of God as known to him."

"Should you not also say, that he also ought to calculate the effect of what he is about to do, and shape his course accordingly?"

"This is only a secondary motive, for how can we ever tell whether the results of what we do will be good or bad?"

"You would not allow that a good action always produces good results, and a bad action bad results?"

"Saville, I think you are trying to catch me. I am not a utilitarian. We ought to act in many cases altogether independently of results, and look at our actions in themselves."

"Very good. But are there not very frequent instances in which our only guide, or our chief guide, must be the results we foresee

as probable?”

“Yes, of course there are. But this is only where there is not anything in the nature of the action which decides its character for good or evil.”

“Then there are two kinds of actions. In the first we are determined by the goodness or badness of the action in itself; in the second by its probable consequences.”

“Yes, and the probable consequences give the character of goodness or badness to the action.”

“In the former class, I look at the action, perceive its character, and accept it for its own sake; in the second, I look at the action, forecast its consequences, and accept or reject it according to the nature of those consequences. In the one case there is an immediate apprehension of the goodness or badness of the action; in the other there is a far more elaborate process. I have to look forward, and calculate, and take into account all sorts of circumstances which may affect the results of my action. I have to test its consequences as far as I can, and if my first impression in favour of it is reversed by my more careful consideration of what seems likely to follow from it, I have to confess that I was a little premature, and was mistaken in approving to myself what I had subsequently learned to disapprove. Now suppose that you have had presented to you an action good in itself, but which seems likely to have prejudicial consequences, what then?”

Cholmeley seemed puzzled, but after a moment's thought recovered himself. “Saville,” he said, “you twitted me the other day with a fallacy in which a disputant put an impossible case, and then challenges his adversary to explain it. It seems to me that this is what you are doing now, and I answer you with your own scholastic phrase, *Nego suppositum*. I deny the possibility of your supposition: an action good in itself and under all possible circumstances cannot have bad consequences, at least in the long run.”

“But do not many actions good in themselves produce very unfortunate results?”

“No, Saville, I do not believe that they do. These unfortunate re-

sults spring, not of the good action, but of some other cause which intervened and hindered the original action from producing its natural and proper fruit.”

“And if this intervening cause was a voluntary agent, on whom do you imagine these unfortunate results would chiefly fall?”

“To tell the truth, Saville, I am inclined to think that the sufferer ought to be, and would be, the interposing agent, especially if there was any wrongdoing on his part by which he frustrated the original tendencies of the good act.”

“Would the original doer still keep the beneficial results properly belonging to his act?”

“I think he would keep some of them, though perhaps not all.”

“And the action would not be a failure in itself?”

“I do not think it would. Even the evil consequences entailed on him who had marred it would be an act of retributive justice which a wise man would not altogether regret.”

“Now let us transfer our thoughts from man to God. You will allow that every action of God is good in itself.”

“Of course it is.”

“And therefore its consequences must be good?”

“Yes, it must.”

Cholmeley saw that he had been led on to answer his own objection, and wisely determined to carry the war into the enemy's country. But he did so with rather a faint heart, for he saw that he had already conceded implicitly what he still professed to attack.

“Saville,” he said, “you seem to me to be assuming the very point you profess to prove. First you say that the action of God is good in itself, and then that it must be good in spite of the evil consequences that follow from it, just because it is good in itself. I suppose you want me to admit that in itself it is rather a desirable thing that a poor sinner should be miserable to all eternity. I answer that the action of God may become bad, or at all events less good, because of the consequences, whatever its previous character apart from these consequences.”

“Then you would assert that the action of God, like that of man, sometimes depends on the consequences to which He looks for-

ward, inasmuch as they mar the character of the action which is good in itself.”

“Perhaps I was wrong in saying that God’s action is always good in itself, for He differs from man in this, that He can always look forward to the most remote consequences of His action, and surely if He foresees that these consequences would be unfortunate, He would in virtue of His mercy prevent them, even though they might be but the just punishment of evil deeds done by one who brought the evil results on himself through his own fault.”

“But in this case what is the alternative you would suggest?”

“I think a God of mercy, foreseeing as He does the consequence of creating this or that individual, would abstain from the act of creation when He foresees that the man would, even though it be through his own fault, lose his soul and be eternally miserable in Hell.”

“No, Cholmeley, such a proceeding as you advocate, so far from being a perfection in God, would be unworthy of His Divine Majesty. It produces in me a sense of want of proportion. It would imply that God’s act of creation should be determined by something else than the Divine will to do an act which is good in itself. It would lay a sort of obligation on God which would preclude Him from doing that which in itself is good.”

“But surely it would be more merciful not to create than to create one who is to be eternally miserable.”

“Of course it would, but God does not and cannot always adopt the more merciful of two alternatives. As we have agreed already, every act of His might, if He had so chosen, reflect more of the Divine perfections than it does, and this for the simple reason that His perfections are infinite, and no act can exhaust all His possibility of love, mercy, compassion, etc. All that we can expect of God is that He should be just, and the amount of mercy added to His justice simply depends on the Divine free-will. From the very nature of the Infinite God, He must always give less than He might.”

“According to you, then, some acts of God would be more and others less perfect.”

“No, not at all. Every act of God is absolutely perfect, because it

is the act that He has chosen to perform. It must be good in itself: it must in some way reflect some of the Divine perfections, but whether it reflects more or less, it is always a perfect act, because it is the act of God. Nor is its perfection in any way marred by the fact that he to whom God gives some good gift abuses the gift instead of using it as God intended he should.”

“If I understand you rightly, you mean that God does what is good in itself, and the consequences which follow to the individual through his own fault do not diminish the perfection of the original act.”

“Yes, that is exactly what I mean. The plan of God’s Providence is to do that which is good in itself, even though the creature may misuse what God has given him; in other words, God is independent of every other consideration save that His action is good, and therefore must from the very nature of things have consequences which are also good. These consequences must ultimately further the design of God in the universe He has created, which primarily is and must be the glory of God and nought else.”

“But how can the misery of the lost further God’s glory?”

“Not their misery, but the evidence they afford of God’s unspeakable hatred of sin. This is the fact that is proclaimed by an eternal Hell, that God hates sin with a hatred that has no bounds or limits. Thus God is glorified even by the unhappy career of one who through his own fault lives in sin and dies in misery. ‘God hath made all things for Himself, yea, even the wicked for the evil day.’”

“I suppose this is what you meant by saying that the consequences of God’s action must always be good because His action is good in itself?”

“Yes, God’s part in the history even of the lost is all good, and therefore the consequences must in themselves be good. Even to the unhappy man who forfeits Heaven, the only element of evil is that which he himself has introduced. To all eternity, in spite of himself, he will have to cry out: ‘The works of the Lord are perfect, and all His ways are judgments: God is faithful and without any iniquity, He is just and right.’[1] But I think you must have had

enough of theology for the present.”

“I have certainly had enough to think about for some time to come. How can I ever thank you sufficiently, my dear Saville, for your patient explanation of difficulties which I dare say seemed to you unreasonable?”

“Unreasonable! not a bit of it. They are difficulties sufficient to puzzle the wisest of men. Nothing but the grace of God and the light He is ready to give to all who ask for it, would ever supply a satisfactory solution of them. I am very glad if I have been any sort of use to you in your search after Truth. But do not forget that he who searches by the light of reason alone carries but a sorry torch. God must help you if you are to find that which you seek.”

“I know that, Saville, and you may reckon on my neglecting no means within my reach. Even at the risk of assuming the question to be proved, I will pray God in His boundless mercy to have mercy upon me and aid me in my quest.”

“So do, and God speed you.”

A few weeks later Saville received from his friend a letter, in which he asked where he would find the best summary of Catholic doctrine. Saville sent him the Penny Catechism, and told him to read it from cover to cover. “Do not trouble yourself about any more elaborate works. If there is anything in it you do not understand, I shall be very pleased to explain.”

Another week passed, and Cholmeley wrote back as follows:

“I was amused at your sending me the Penny Catechism. I rather expected you to tell me to read Perrone or parts of St. Thomas. But I have done as you told me, and I firmly believe every word of it... I don't see how a convert to Theism, if he wishes to be consistent and logical, can stop short of the only form of Theism which is perfectly reasonable and consistent. You have convinced me of the foundation being true, and I told you from the first that the foundation laid, I did not expect much difficulty about the superstructure.”

Saville's heart leaped within him at reading his friend's letter, and it was not long before Cholmeley was once more housed in

the quiet presbytery. A few more talks, no longer arguments but simple instructions in Christian doctrine, and he found himself anxious that his reception into the Church should be no longer delayed. Saville was willing enough: heard his confession, received him into the Church before dinner, and as they sat by the fire that evening, Cholmeley gave vent to his thoughts as follows: “Saville,” he said, “I often heard converts say that they found a new meaning in Holy Scripture after they became Catholics. There are a couple of texts that are running in my head and of which I think this is true. ‘Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.’ ‘Whereas I was blind, now I see!’ ”

Proof