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THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

ST. MATTHEW xii. 31, 32; ST. MARK iii. 28-30.

I SHALL never forget the chill that struck into my childish heart so often as I heard of this mysterious sin which carried men, and for ought I knew might have carried even me, beyond all reach of pardon; or the wonder and perplexity with which I used to ask myself why, if this sin were possible,—if, as the words of our Lord seem to imply, it was probable even and by no means infrequent,—it was not clearly defined, so that we might at least know, and know beyond all doubt, whether it had been committed or had not. And, since then, I have again and again met with men and women of tender conscience and devout spirit who, by long brooding over these terrible words, had convinced themselves that they had fallen, inadvertently for the most part, into this fatal sin, and whose reason had been disbalanced and unhinged by a fearful anticipation of the doom they held themselves to have provoked. The religious monomaniac is to be found in well nigh every madhouse in the Kingdom; and in the large majority of cases, as there is only too much ground to believe, he has been driven mad by the fear that he has committed the unpardonable sin: although the man who honestly fears that he may have committed this sin is just the one man who has the witness in himself that he cannot possibly have committed it. If any preacher and teacher of the Word doubts whether this terrible fear broods heavily over the hearts of thousands within the pale of the Church, as well as outside it, let him put his doubt to the proof: let him give his congregation any reasonable explanation of the words

before us, and then see whether for many days afterwards he will not be thanked by members of his flock, whom he little suspected of indulging such a fear, for having saved them from a long suffered terror and perplexity.

Any minister, therefore, who knows that fear to be founded on a too literal and wholly mistaken interpretation of these words, would himself stand much in need of pardon—and might even, without much exaggeration, be said to have grazed the very edge of the unpardonable sin—if he did not, at suitable times and intervals, carefully explain what our Lord really said, what He really meant, when He spoke of this sin against the Holy Ghost.

The explanation is not far to seek, or difficult to give. For the keyword to the whole passage is the word *αἰών*, *æon*, age, which recent controversies have made quite familiar even to the unlearned: and the true rendering of the latter clause of Matthew xii. 32, as may be gathered from the margin of our Revised Version, is this: "It shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come." Now the two phrases "this (present) age" and "the coming age," which our Lord here adopts, were perfectly familiar to the Jews, and had, as scholars are agreed, a clear and definite meaning on their lips. "This present age," or "the age that now is," was the age in which they lived, with all its apparatus of religious teaching and worship, the age of the Law and the Temple; while "the coming age," or "the age to come," was that happier time of which the advent of the long-promised Messiah was to be the sign and the commencement, although it could not fully come until Jesus the Christ ascended into heaven and poured out his Spirit from on high. That is to say, by "this age" the Jews who listened to our Lord meant what we should call the *Mosaic* dispensation; while by "the coming age" they meant the *Messianic*, or what we call the *Christian* dispensation. It was in this sense,

it could be in no other sense, that our Lord used, and was understood to use, these two phrases here. So that what He really affirmed was, that there is a sin which is just as unpardonable under the Christian dispensation as it was under the Mosaic dispensation. And though as yet we have gained no hint as to what this sin was, our gain is nevertheless great; for we see at once that by replacing the word "world" with the word "age" in this passage, *i.e.* by retaining the very word which Jesus used, and reading it in the sense in which He employed it, we discharge from the passage all reference to the future world, to the future life; we learn that, so far from speaking of the state and doom of men after death, He is simply speaking of the state and doom of men in this present life, in this present world, whether they live under the Law or whether they live under the Gospel; and thus all that is intolerable in his words, all that drives men mad as they brood over them, is removed at a single stroke.

But *what* is this sin for which, at least in the present world, there is no forgiveness, or no provision for forgiveness? It is that wilful and invincible ignorance which refuses to be taught, that love of darkness which refuses to admit the light even when the sun is shining in the sky. The Light that lighteth every man *had* at last come into the world, and was burning in upon the conscience of the Pharisees through the words and deeds of Jesus the Christ. They felt his power. In their hearts they were compelled to admit that his words were true words, that his works were good works. But his words were so much truer than their own that they found in them a rebuke of their ignorance, instead of an invitation to learn of Him; his works were so much greater than theirs that they found in them a reflection on their own impotence, instead of an invitation to trust in Him. He humbled their vanity. He exposed their insincerity. Hence they hated Him, and, in

their hatred, affirmed words which they felt were true to be untrue, and attributed works which they felt to be good to the power and craft of the devil. They saw the light, and knew that it was light; and yet they loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil. Like the servants in the Parable, they said, "This is the Heir," only to add, "Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours,"—ours, and not his.

Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," knowing too the desperate moral condition from which their thoughts sprang, simply warned them that it *was* desperate. They were deliberately sinning against light, against conscience, against all that was true and right and good; in a word, they were "speaking against the Holy Ghost," the Spirit of all truth and goodness; and so long as they did that, there was no hope for them. They were closing the heavenward window of the soul; and so long as they did that, how could any light from heaven shine into their souls? They were shutting the very door through which alone the Divine Influence could approach them; and so long as they did that, how could any Divine Influence reach them? If men *will* keep their eyes shut, how should they see? If they *will* stop their ears, how should they hear?

So far, then, from giving us a dark mystical saying in which our thoughts are lost, our Lord simply states a moral truism, as we might have inferred from the casual and unemphatic manner of his speech. And the truism is that, since salvation is necessarily of the *will*, if men *will* not be saved, they cannot be saved; if they will not yield to the Divine Spirit when it moves and stirs within them, they cannot be redeemed and renewed by that gracious Spirit. Under whatever dispensation they live, they are self-excluded from the kingdom of heaven, by the one sin which is therefore called an "eternal" or "æonial" sin.

But if the saying was a mere truism, it may be objected,

what need was there to impress it on the Pharisees? of what use was it to them? of what use is it to us? Those who ask that question might be answered by another: Have you yet to learn that mere truisms, as we call them, *i.e.* rudimentary, fundamental, familiar truths, are of all truths precisely the most important; and that the greatest service any teacher can do us is to quicken them to life, to bring them home and make them potent with us, by restating them in original, picturesque, or impressive forms? Man is a sinner, Christ a Saviour, God our Father,—all these are truisms; but are there any truths so momentous as these? and can any man render us a greater service than by so stating them as to give them power over us?

Yet, instead of pursuing this retort, let me rather try to meet the question more directly, by shewing how important *this* truism was to the Pharisees, and is to us. When they were penetrated by the truth of what Christ said, and felt the goodness as well as the power of his works, and yet wilfully ascribed his wisdom and goodness to the craft and power of the devil, we may hope that, blinded by prejudice and stung by fear, the Pharisees did not altogether know what they did. They must have known that they were doing wrong, but they may not have realized that they were deliberately resisting the Spirit of all truth and goodness, the very Spirit of God Himself, and so were putting themselves out of the pale of pardon, beyond the reach of salvation. Was it not well, then, that they should be plainly told what they were doing? Was it not well they should be solemnly warned that it was *God*, and not man, against whom they were fighting? And if, conscious of some sin, yet not fully conscious of their full sin, they comforted themselves with the hope—a hope commonly entertained by the Jews—that, though the blood of bulls and of goats could not wholly take away sin, yet in the coming age, the age of Messiah, all guilt,

or at least all Jewish guilt, would be for ever purged away, was it not well that Christ should tell them in so many words that the sin of which they were guilty was one which could no more be forgiven in the Messianic than in the Mosaic age; that it was a sin—the one sin—which by its very nature shut out all hope of forgiveness, whatever the Dispensation under which men might live?

It may have been a mere truism to say that, so long as men wilfully and deliberately shut out the Spirit of all truth and grace from their hearts, salvation was impossible to them; but to throw this truism into a striking and original form, to warn the Pharisees that it *was* the Holy Spirit of God which they were resisting, and that no provision for the pardon of that sin could possibly be made whether in the Messianic or the Mosaic age,—was not that worth while? was it not to render them the priceless service of which I have spoken, that of giving new life and force to a truth so familiar to them that it had ceased to move them?

Yet that this unpardonable sin might be pardoned, that it was the sin, and not the men who committed it, which could never be forgiven, is clear: for many of the Pharisees who had long resisted the Spirit of God in Christ—and, be it remembered that even Saul of Tarsus had long “kicked against the goads” which urged him toward the kingdom—afterwards repented of their sin, received his words, believed his works, and were welcomed into the fellowship of the Church. And even of those who never knew an earthly repentance, and of their doom in “the world to come,” this passage says absolutely nothing. It leaves us to our own conjectures, our own hopes; and neither approves nor condemns those who trust that in the world to come even those who leave this world impenitent may be taught “even against their will, and by means of a larger experience, the lessons they would not learn

here ; and so be brought to confess their guilt and folly, and be taken at last—so as by fire—into the arms” of the Divine Compassion and Love.

But where lies *our* danger of committing this sin against the Holy Ghost, our need therefore of the warning that, so long as we persist in this sin, pardon and salvation are impossible to us? *We* fall into this sin, must be my reply, whenever we consciously and wilfully resist the Spirit of truth and goodness ; whenever, *i.e.* we see a truth and do not accept it because it cuts our prejudices against the grain, whenever we know what is good and yet do it not, because we love some evil way too well to leave it. To speak against any form of truth or any form of goodness which we inwardly recognize as good and true, or even suspect to be true and good, is “to speak against the Holy Ghost” : and, be it remembered, “deeds speak louder than words.”

For all practical purposes we may even say that to sin against *Conscience* is to sin against the Holy Ghost ; for Conscience is the organ and voice of God within the soul ; and our Lord is here drawing a contrast between the action of God within the soul, and the manifestations of God which are external to the soul.

Sins against the Son of Man, He says, may be forgiven, although *He* is the express revelation of God and the very brightness of his glory ; for men may never have seen or never have known Him as He is. He may never have been set before them, or He may have been so misrepresented to them that it was impossible for them to accept and love Him. And in their ignorance, not having known Him, not having felt his grace and power, they may speak against Him words which they would rather have died than spoken had they known who or what He was. But when men resist the God *within* them, when they refuse to hear and obey what they *acknowledge* to be his voice, what hope is

there for them in any age, under any Dispensation? And such a voice most men acknowledge Conscience to be. Its independence, and the authority with which it speaks, compel us to reverence it. For Conscience will not bend to our caprice, our taste, our choice. It will not pronounce a thing to be true because we wish it were true, or good because we are set on doing it. It refuses to serve our humours and inclinations. It is our master, not our servant, and delivers its verdicts with an absolute authority. We may refuse to submit to them indeed; but none the less we know them to be honest and true. Try how we will, we can neither coax nor coerce from it any sanction of that which is dishonest, untruthful, impure; we cannot even silence its protest against the sin that we love best. "Do you not perceive," asks Fenelon, "that nothing less resembles *you* than this invisible judge, who instructs with such authority and condemns with such rigour?"

This voice, then, which is not ours, and which will not bend to our will, nor sanction our desires, we feel to be the voice of God within us; it is through this voice that the Holy Ghost warns, pleads, condemns, approves. And, hence, to resist Conscience is to resist God, to sin against his Holy Spirit.

And in how many ways may we all fall into this sin!

In our religious life we sin against the Holy Ghost if, as we read the Gospel, we learn that in Christ Jesus we have precisely such a Saviour from all sin and uncleanness as we need: if, as we read, I say, Conscience leaps up in approval of what we read and urges us to accept the offered salvation, and we refuse to listen because we are too engrossed with the outward affairs of life, or too attached to some of the forms of sin from which Christ would save us to part with them yet, we commit the sin which cannot be pardoned, and from which we cannot be saved so long as we cleave to it. Or, again, if after we have accepted,

or professed to accept, his salvation, we catch glimpses of new and higher truths, and shut our eyes against them because we do not want to be at the trouble of revising and recasting our theological formulas; or if we are inwardly called to new and difficult duties, and turn away from them because they would impose a strain upon us or a sacrifice which we are not willing to bear,—in thus sinning against Conscience we sin against the Holy Ghost.

Nor is there any one respect in which we refuse to recognize truth as true or duty as binding upon us, whether in the formation of our political views or the discharge of our political functions, or in the principles on which we conduct our business, or even in the spirit in which we conduct our literary or scientific investigations, in which we do not or may not fall into this very sin. For the Holy Spirit is the Spirit from whom all true thoughts and all forms of goodness do proceed. To close our eyes to any truth, to neglect any duty, is not only to shut that truth out of our minds, and not only to lower and impoverish the tone of our life; it is also to grieve and resist that pure and gracious Spirit by whom we are made one with the Father and the Son; it is to impair the very organ by which truth comes to us, and to cripple the very faculty by which we are enabled for all dutiful and noble enterprise.

Truism as it is, then, there is no truth which we more need to lay to heart than this solemn and impressive warning against closing the heavenward windows and avenues of the soul.

Nor do I see how the accepted misinterpretation of this gracious warning could have obtained so great vogue among us, and wrought so much harm, but for the miserable misconceptions of the character and truth of God which have too long obtained among us, and our too common habit of forgetting, in our study of any difficult passage

by which we are profoundly impressed, the large and generous principles and convictions which can alone throw light upon it. Men are taught, indeed, to call God their Father in heaven, and to sing of his "new best name of Love": but then, as though these pious phrases were only phrases, as if they represented no real and eternal fact, they are also taught to think of Him as condemning the vast majority of his children to an everlasting depravity and torment, as only pardoning those whose pardon has been "purchased" from Him, and even—O shame to men made in his likeness and claiming to have received his Spirit!—as lying in wait to trap men in their sins, sins into which they fall unconsciously or against their will, that He may not be compelled to forgive them.

Such teaching, in its cruder and openly avowed forms, is not, happily, so common as it was, though it is much more common than some of us suppose; but its evil influence still lingers in the air and seriously affects the theological views of almost every section of the Christian Church.

What can it be but some remnant of this barbarous and blasphemous misconception of the God of all righteousness and grace which has led so many thousands¹ to fear lest, in some unknown and unintentional way, they have fallen into the mysterious sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, which puts them beyond the pale of forgiveness? Can any man who honestly entertains such a fear really believe that he has a true and loving Father in heaven? What! a Father who sets subtle and hidden snares for our feet! a Father who will not forgive us sins which we did not mean to commit, even though, when we fear that we have committed them, we repent with strong crying and tears

¹ In the week in which I wrote this brief essay I read, in the daily newspapers, of no less than four cases in which men, respected by their neighbours, were driven to suicide or madness by this intolerable fear.

and go mourning all our days! He who can think so of God, and teach men to think so, hardly deserves to have a Father in heaven. We simply wrong our Father, wrong Him beyond all telling, when we do not believe that He will take pleasure in pardoning every sin that can possibly be pardoned; when, instead of conceiving of Him as lying in wait to detect and punish us, or as making the way of transgression easy to us so that we may slip into it unawares, we do not heartily believe that He makes evil ways hard to us, saves us from the snares which his enemy and ours has set for our feet, and will not condemn a single soul that consents to be redeemed. It is not his will that one of his little ones should perish. And the passage before us, so far from quickening fear or despair in us, should inspire us with hope and courage; for it distinctly assures us that with Him there is forgiveness, even in this present life, for every sin but that of conscious, wilful, persistent resistance to his kind and saving will, and thus once more reveals Him to us as in very deed our Father and our Friend.

Nor is it only God our Father whom we wrong by these hard poor thoughts of Him, we also wrong the pure and gracious Son of Man. When we reflect on it, we cannot but be amazed and ashamed that it should ever have been possible to us to think of *Him* as here imposing an intolerable burden of fear upon us. We ought to have known that we must have read his words wrongly, even though we could not put our finger on the mistake, if we ever so read them as to find in them an indefinite warning against an undefined but unpardonable sin. It is or should be incredible to us, if we have felt any touch of his grace, that He of all men should have meant by these words what He has too long been taken to mean. That He should warn the Pharisees, that He should warn us, that even He cannot save men who deliberately refuse to be saved, cannot give the light of life to those who wilfully

shut out the light from their souls,—*this* is credible enough, for it is in full accordance with his character and spirit. But that only *once* in the course of his ministry, and that in the most casual way, in the most matter-of-fact tone, He should have referred in passing to the most fatal of all perils, and never have defined what the peril was or taught us how to escape it,—is *that* credible? Is it *like* Him? Does it accord with his manner, his spirit? We might believe it of some “child of the devil”: but can we believe it of the Son of God?

It is so utterly opposed to all we know whether of God or of Christ that, even when we did not perceive the true meaning of these words, we ought never to have believed it, except perhaps in those immature years when we scarcely knew our right hand from our left. We ought, I think, to have felt instinctively that, whatever the words might mean, they could not possibly have meant that. And I suppose we should have felt it but for the influence of that barbarous and semi-pagan theology in which most of us were trained. For the interpretation of them, which often bred fear in our minds, is quite foreign to the whole spirit of the New Testament, as well as to the character of God and the teaching of Christ. From the Apostles of the Lord we have received such commandments as these: “Grieve not the Spirit,” “Resist not the Spirit,” and even “Quench not the Spirit.” Now it must surely be admitted that to grieve, or to resist, or, above all, to quench the Holy Ghost must be even a more deadly sin than to “speak against the Holy Ghost,” if by speaking against the Holy Ghost is meant the use of some mystic formulæ of outwardly or inwardly uttered words. And yet in none of these cases, not even the worst, do the Apostles assume an unpardonable sin, or threaten those who commit it with an irreversible doom. They simply warn us against any abuse of spiritual faculties, gifts, opportunities, as

inevitably detrimental to our spiritual life. They warn us against being false to truth and duty on the ground that to be untrue to any truth is to resist the Spirit of all truth, that to be unfaithful to any duty is to resist, and may be to quench, the Spirit of all grace. Yet if they had held our Lord to mean what the Church has taken Him to mean, if they had drawn the ecclesiastical distinction between venial sins and mortal sins, and knew that to grieve, resist, or quench the Spirit was a mortal sin which could never be forgiven,—would they not have told us so? ought they not, were they not bound, to tell us so?

On the whole, then, I think we may say, without hesitation or reserve, that the old, and still too common, reading of these words which has perplexed and tortured so many of us, and which has driven so many poor souls to madness or suicide, must, on the very face of it, be a wrong reading, since it is utterly opposed to the very character of God, to the mind that was in Christ Jesus our Lord, and to the whole spirit of the Apostolic teaching: while the new reading of them is commended to us by all we know of God the Father, of the Son of Man, and of the general drift of the New Testament Scriptures.

There is still in some minds, however, one difficulty in the way of accepting this new reading which must be met, and which I meet the more cheerfully because it will give an opportunity of noticing what is peculiar in St. Mark's report of this great saying; viz. the phrase "*Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin.*"

The difficulty I am told is this. "When we read of a sin that cannot be forgiven whether in the Mosaic age or the Christian, we naturally assume our Lord to mean that it cannot be forgiven *even when it is repented of*; for *no sin can be forgiven men until they repent*; and

our Lord is here drawing a distinction between one sin and all others. What, then, can this distinction be but this: that, though all other sins may be forgiven when men repent of them, this sin *cannot* be forgiven, let them repent of it how they may?"

Considering how most of us have been trained to think of God and the things of God, that perhaps is a very natural, and even a reasonable, objection to take, though I should have thought that any reflective man would feel that it involved him in still greater difficulties than any it removes. For, first of all, *Christ* does not say that this sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be forgiven "even when men repent of it"; it is we who supply that terrible qualification, and thus read our own meaning into what He said. And, then, as we have just seen, to assume that any sin—and, still more, any sin not so clearly defined that we can be sure whether we have committed it or not—cannot be forgiven when we repent of it and renounce it, is to frame an assumption which runs right in the teeth of all we know of God, of Christ, and of the whole spirit of the Gospel as taught by those who knew Him best.

These are considerations so large and weighty that, of themselves, they might well make us pause and retrace our steps. But we may meet the objection much more directly. We may ask those who urge it: How do you know that there are no sins which God will not forgive men even *before* they repent, and even though they should never repent, at least in this present life? We may suggest that our Lord is here drawing a distinction between outward overt transgressions which may be forgiven us on, or even perhaps apart from, repentance, and the inward sinful principle which can never be *forgiven*, but must be renounced and cast out.

What is the sin which our Lord Himself compares,

or contrasts, with the unpardonable sin? It is the sin of speaking against Himself, the gracious Son of Man. But what is it to speak against the Son of Man? To speak against the Son of Man is to speak against, to reject, or deny, the revelation of God's truth, will, and love made in and through Him. It is to deny that there was any manifestation of God in the God manifest in the flesh; in more modern phraseology, it is to deny that there is anything divine in the Christian dispensation and faith. That, alas! is a sin only too common in our own days. There are intelligent and learned men only too many, and men whom, judged by any other standard, we should all pronounce to be honest and good men, who deny that God has ever given any immediate revelation of his will to mankind, who even doubt both whether any such revelation be possible and whether there be any God to make it. It is worse than useless, it is a mere crime against our own reason and conscience, to denounce these men as wilful and notorious sinners, or to assume that they are impelled to speak against the Son of Man by base and guilty motives, because their deeds are evil. Sinners they are indeed, and must be, for all have sinned. And some of them may be sinners in this special sense, that they have taken it on themselves to reject the Christian revelation without any due examination of evidence, without due consideration of its claims. But, on the other hand, who can doubt that some of them are just as honest in rejecting as we are in accepting it? They may have been blinded by intellectual prepossessions or an inherited bent of mind: but are we to blame blind men because they do not see, and to accuse them of a wilful rejection of the light that shines from heaven? And if we do not, will God?

The fault may be *ours*, rather than theirs. We may have turned the very light into a darkness. We may so

have misrepresented our Master to them that, instead of seeing Him as He is, they may have seen only that imperfect and misleading image of Him which we have made in our own likeness. If, as we sometimes confess, there lives more truth in honest doubt than in half our creeds, how are we to condemn men who honestly doubt because we have only placed the half, and the baser half, of our creed before them? If a man has honestly doubted, if he has followed the inward light and been true to the inward voice, and he should die before discovering that Christ is other and better than he knew, that He is indeed the true light of every man and the very brightness of the Father's glory; if, that is, he should never repent in this world of his sin in speaking against and rejecting the Son of Man, will *his* sin never be forgiven him, or will it not, rather, never be counted against him, however heavily he may reckon it against himself?

On the other hand, if a man has *not* been honest in his doubts and denials; if, besides sinning against the God without him who sought to reveal Himself to him, he has also sinned against the God within him; if when Reason or Conscience said, That is true and you ought to believe it, or, That is duty and you ought to do it, he has refused to accept the truth or do the duty which he felt to be clothed with Divine sanctions; if he has consciously shut out the light and refused to walk in it; if, in the language of our passage, he has added the sin against the Holy Ghost to the sin against the Son of Man, and if he should leave the world without repenting of his sin, how can we deny that he has put himself outside the pale of forgiveness by making forgiveness impossible? What may become of him in that other, future, world, we cannot say, we are not told, though we are still allowed to cherish the hope that new moral forces may be brought to bear upon him and may take effect upon

him; all we can be sure of is that so long as he deliberately shuts out the light, the light cannot reach him; that so long as he refuses to part with his sin, he cannot be saved from his sin.

Our reasonable conclusion would seem to be, therefore, that our Lord is here affirming that sins of ignorance, honest sins (such as those of Saul of Tarsus), sins which do not impair fidelity to the truths and duties which men feel to be true and right, will be forgiven even though, in this life at least, they should never be recognized as sins or washed away in tears of penitence (as I suppose St. Paul's sins would have been had he died while "thinking to do God service" by blaspheming and persecuting the Son of Man); while the one sin which cannot be forgiven so long as men cleave to it, the one sin which is eternally a sin and which adds a damning guilt to all other sins, is the sin which makes salvation necessarily impossible—viz., the conscious, wilful, deliberate, and persistent opposition to the voice of reason and conscience, that is, to the voice of God within the soul. And that surely is both reasonable and just; for who can complain that he is not saved so long as he refuses salvation by deliberately resisting the Divine influence which can alone redeem him from his sins?

So that our conclusion of the whole matter is this. The one sin which hath never forgiveness is that which alone lends guilt to our transgressions—a conscious and wilful resistance to what we feel and admit to be the pure, kind, saving will of God. Any man, therefore, who is now willing to submit, and even earnestly desirous of submitting to and obeying that Will, may be sure that he has not been "guilty of an eternal sin," or that he is no longer guilty of it; any man who now wants to be saved may be quite sure that he is not beyond the pale of salvation, let his sins have been what they will.

And perhaps what we all most need to lay to heart as we study this difficult theme is, that, by every inward act of resistance to the Spirit of all truth and goodness, we are tending toward the state in which forgiveness, and therefore salvation, become impossible to us. An unfaithful Christian, an untruthful, dishonest, worldly-minded, selfish, or sensual believer, is in a much more perilous condition than the man who, while he ignorantly rejects the Christian Faith, is true to conscience and duty—true, that is, to the voice of God, even though he does not recognize it as the voice of God. And I, for one, would rather be an agnostic, walking sorrowfully but faithfully under the burden of life, with no heaven above me to shed down strength and consolation, and no hope of immortality to allure me along the steep and difficult path of duty, than I would be a Christian learned in all the creeds, and for ever prating of my immortal hopes, yet living as though I had no Father on high, and no outlook beyond the narrow bounds of earth and time.

S. Cox.

STUDIES IN THE MINOR PROPHETS.

III.—AMOS.

LORD MACAULAY, in his celebrated essay on Milton, put forth the theory that the poetry of a nation belongs to its stages of incipient culture. He himself lived to retract that opinion, yet there was probably a truth at the root of it. It seems to us that poetry has indeed something to do with the beginning of things. It may be as perfect in an age of civilization as in an age of primitive culture, but, alike in the one case as in the other, it must find its stimulus in some new experience.

Poetry, we should say, is generally the child of reaction.