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## INTERMEDIATE MEETING, FEBRUARY 19, 1872.

THE REV. J. H. TITCOMB, M.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed, and the following elections were announced :—

MEMBERS :—William Wilberforce Baynes, Esq., 48, Moorgate-street, E.C. ; Owen Edwards, Esq., Camden Wood, Chislehurst, S.E. ; James Falshaw, Esq., 26, Castle-street, Edinburgh ; Rev. Algernon S. Grenfell, M.A. (Balliol Coll., Oxon), Parkgate, Chester ; John T. Matthews, Esq., The Rookery, Shooter's Hill, Kent ; W. Foster Newton, Esq., Bingham House, Richmond, Surrey ; Thomas Seaber, Esq., 26, Martin's-lane, E.C. ; G. Shann, Esq., M.D. (Cantab), F.R.C.P., Petergate, York ; Rev. J. R. Wood, M.A., (Principal of) Trinity College, Eastbourne.

The Rev. J. Robbins, D.D., then read the following paper, which is inserted here in accordance with a special resolution passed by the Council.

*ON FATALISM, by the REV. J. ROBBINS, D.D., &c.*

I SUPPOSE no one acquainted with the direction of popular opinion in the present day would deny the enormous influence of the Doctrine of Fatalism or necessity. There is a widely-spreading philosophy which, getting rid of the idea of a living God, or at all events of His intervention in the affairs of the world, tends to explain everything by the action of necessity ; and as it denies liberty in God, so does it also deny it in man. In the various manifestations of the human soul it sees only an effect of temperament and race. Thus it explains all religions : one small people, for instance, one only in the ancient world, believed in a God, maintained His essential unity, His moral sovereignty. It is a question of race, say the Fatalists ; the race was semitic, and the desert wherein they so long wandered was pregnant with monotheistic teaching.—Again, on a certain day in the world's history a handful of men left Jerusalem to carry forth to the world the good news of the universal love and favour of God, Quite so, say they ; that was only the effect of the fusion of Jewish

and Greek faiths, which by a natural process has produced the religion of the modern world.—Again: a Pharisee, one Saul of Tarsus, on the road to Damascus is prostrated by some power to him invisible, and from being Christ's persecutor he becomes His apostle.—Natural reaction, say they,—common enough with ardent temperaments like his. Again: in the 16th century, a monk groaning and weeping in a German convent, one day comes forth from his seclusion and proclaims to an astonished world the inaugural words of the Reformation,—“The just shall live by faith.” Oh! say they, Luther only obeyed the instinct of the Germanic races, which ever sought a spiritualistic religion, and revolted against the pretensions of Rome.

In the present day a soul renounces the world, and tearing itself from a life of dissipation and vanity, dedicates itself to the service of God in love. They can only see in this the abnormal working of a natural law to which physiology shall one day give its correct nomenclature. Here, say they, is the only philosophy of history possible, beyond these explanations there can only be the arbitrary, the unforeseen, and science ignores utterly the one and the other. I am not exaggerating; this is the predominant feeling in philosophical essays, scientific works, and treatises, the way with which men pretend to unlock the new science of the 19th century,—the critical history of religions. And since religion cannot be separated from morals, they apply the same method to both; morality also, according to them, becomes an affair of race and temperament, its only rule is nature and physical law, and on a more exact science of nature they would base what they call the true independent morality which is to be the characteristic of the future. We have hitherto believed that the true basis of morality was responsibility, so that in shaking this, morality itself was disturbed. Mistake, say they,—the feeling of responsibility is only an illusion, which must disappear with that of moral liberty, the other illusion of a being subjected to unyielding laws; and starting from this principle they see in evil only a mistake, a disease rather than a transgression, criminals are victims rather than guilty men; here again temperament explains all. The asylum must replace the prison, compassion take the place of justice. For these self-styled superior minds, moral aberrations have a singular attraction, and leaving sonorous denunciations to magistrates and preachers, they curiously study each variation of nature, they seek the fatal law that governs it, and flatter themselves they shall one day be able to enunciate it in a proposition. All this is what we are told to-day with scientific serenity, which disdains declamation. Yet look at these new

masters of morals who pretend to found on Fatalism the morality of the future; see them when they are victims of injustice, wounded in their self-interest or their pride, what do they do? Why! they are indignant, they are angry. Oh! strange simplicity—angry? with an irresponsible Being? Accuse a senseless machine because it crushes a human existence beneath its wheels? Denounce the instincts of the beast which devours because it is carnivorous? The Fatalists, when with extreme inconsistency they rise in protest against injustice of which they are victims, give the lie emphatically to their own system; they show involuntary respect to human nature, for to protest against crime is to honour man.

I am not conjuring up vain phantoms, these ideas are rapidly becoming popular, although we may not happen to have come across them; our sons may some day give expression to them in the language of the schools, and the very handicraftsman who works for you may be reading them greedily, presented to him, as they are, in the most agreeable form. But, even if we do not accept the system, we may be accepting its results. How sweet to rid ourselves of the burden of responsibility! How sweet when enslaved by a passion we do not care to fly, to lay the blame on a peculiar state of circumstances or on nature! It is so convenient thus to escape the importunity of conscience to say that *we* do not do it, but it is the result of irresistible influences. In this way Fatalism will always be tacitly popular. The dogma was born on the day when the first sinner laid the blame of his act on God, and it always will remain the philosophy of sin, for it alone can give it the semblance of law.

Faith in Providence may be said to have entered the world with the advent of Christianity; up to that time men did not believe in it. Paganism admitted certain tutelary deities of the country, or the family, but above them, nay, above Jupiter himself, they placed the cold, motionless, impassible figure of destiny or fate; although the belief in a supreme God may be pretty clearly traced in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Philosophers cannot be said to have admitted that the world was guided by a beneficent Will to an end mysterious, but definite. Never were the now widely-spread ideas of progress, Divine training, providential plan, even once enunciated during the ages of human existence. The most careful search into the literature of antiquity will not bring to light a page or a line which, however remotely, indicates such a belief.

No Pagan ever heard the beatings of the universal Father's heart in his own, or in the world's history never did it occur to his mind to seek from this Father strength under trial; and when overwhelmed by misfortune his sole consolation lay in

saying that, after all, he only endured a lot like other men, which no efforts on his part could alter or mitigate, and which it was the part of a man to bear with equanimity.

Thus with the ancient world ; but need we go back so far ? Is nothing similar to be seen to-day ? Let us not revel in illusions ; we are forced to admit that, despite Christianity, belief in Fatality, which was the dominant principle of all Pagan nations, is still the creed of a vast number of our contemporaries,—does it not lie enshrined in the heart especially of the suffering classes ?

It finds expression in sadness or violence in all their greatest movements, but the most striking thing is that this creed is definitely expressed and openly avowed by thinkers and writers who hold a high place in the world's esteem ; who declare that, neither in their own existence nor in that of humanity, can they recognize any other action than that of natural laws ; they reject the intervention of Providence as a dream of man's childhood.

When such views are so openly held and advocated, it is a proof that they have made progress, and we may not lightly pass them by unnoticed. There is hardly one of us who has not at some time or other, however firm his faith, been tormented by such thoughts ; not one but has sometimes doubted whether his life was guided by a loving Will ; doubted if his prayers were heard. Temptation all the more terrible, for that it does not present itself under a definite shape, but glides into our hearts to chill all impulses of love and confidence in the loving Fatherhood of God. It is this awful phantom, Fatality, that I wish to combat in this paper ; and will it not be a victory worth gaining, if, instead of the invisible and ghostly enemy who harassed and oppressed us, we may see, however dimly, watching over our life with loving care, the shinings of the radiant countenance of the God whose name is Love ?

The first thing which hides from our eyes Providence, and leads us to belief in Fatality, is the inflexibility of the laws of Nature to which we are necessarily subjected. If we could see Nature in some sort sympathize with our emotions, saddened by our griefs, smiling at our joys, we should easily recognize the manifestation of a Father's love. It is thus children do think in their simplicity ; for them the rolling thunder is the menacing voice of God, the earth with its lovely flowers is the garden of the Lord, each bright and shining day is a festival, God makes them, to fill their hearts with joy, everything testifies to them of the presence and action of God. But now-a-days scientific examination tends to substitute for Divine action the workings of great natural laws which govern the world, and it is the

especial character of these laws to be rigid and inflexible,—to be, and to remain, always and everywhere the same. In the heavens, *e. g.*, instead of the glorious canticle in which the harmony of the worlds mounts to the ears of God, science can only see, and study, what she calls the celestial mechanism; and a French school-book but lately contained this expression: “The heavens no longer declare the glory of God, they declare the glory of Newton and Laplace.” Even of those who believe in God, how many only see in Him the first cause which put all in motion, and who then leaves all to obey unvarying laws. God gave the first impulse, or as Pascal with fine irony has said, gave the first push, and the vast machinery started in motion; everything works in a fixed and prescribed order. The worlds in eternal and majestic silence pursue their stately march through the realms of space, and our little globe, lost as a grain of sand, is but an atom in all this vast immensity. On earth’s surface, without a moment’s cessation, are the same laws in operation, laws of life and laws of death. There is a law which ordains that a given number of beings die and disappear and be replaced by others; that at each second, *e. g.*, a man should die and a man be born. All that takes place, all that must take place, and as all is Fated as statistics show, what use, says the sceptic, is there in our prayers, our groans, the simplicity of our faith? Especially, how can we think God intervenes in each particular existence, and that there is a special will, and a providential end, in all these inevitable and necessary griefs and sorrows?

But let us not deceive ourselves, these are not questions that the man of science only puts to himself: the most ignorant is met by them, and they chill his heart. He is met by them in affliction, when suffering and death come, and with, rude and often seeming traitorous hand, strike down those he loves the best, his children or his wife. He meets them when he sees Nature hold on her course, peaceful and serene, when his own heart is sad as death; he meets them when he sees the sun which shone so brightly on his path, when he trod it by the side of some dearly-loved object, shine more brightly on her tomb. Oh! there is in Nature a fearful silence; hers is a book on many of whose fairest pages are inscribed the cruel teachings of “Fatalism.” Here lies our temptation, doubtless a great one, but one against which the Christian has a refuge. He believes in a God, as Nature’s Master, a creating God. Creation is the first word of the Bible; how necessary an article is it of our creed! We open it and we see, “In the beginning God created.” Thus above the laws which govern the world, we see a Lawgiver greater still, who has made, and who can as easily

unmake. And thus by faith in God, I escape the vicious circle of Fatality, and I leave it to take refuge in a Sovereign Will, from which all has proceeded.

Hence we maintain faith in miracles, and that first of all miracles, "The Creation." We do not do so to satisfy a coarse, vulgar love of the marvellous, the common tendency of ordinary minds. Christ ever refused to gratify such a curiosity as this. He condemned it in strong and emphatic terms. But I do not wish to deal with this now. The question before us is, whether Nature has a Master, or whether she has not. We must choose between Fatalism and Faith in a living God. Miracles are a most important guide for breaking the connection of seeming natural causes; they attest Divine intervention. Remove miracles, and with them you remove all faith in a personal God; you have no other master than a blind necessity. You may, if you will, call this necessity God; but to such a God you can offer neither worship nor prayer, nor can you ever expect an answer from Him. Miracles, then, are needed to enable us to escape from fatal laws; *e. g.*, Christians believe that 1,800 years ago a sepulchre gave up its dead. Is this fact without its importance? Was it only a prodigy to astonish a gaping crowd? No; for since this grave opened many have believed in life eternal: the fatal chain of life was snapped for ever; and yet nothing less than this was required to make men believe in immortality. Sceptics are willing to concede that there is in nature a vast and majestic harmony which indicates design, but they deny that man is its especial object. We are told that we are yielding to an illusion of pride when we affirm that man is under the peculiar care of God; we are told that our opinion was conceivable enough when men believed the earth was the centre of the universe; but now that we know that it and its sun, and all its system, are positively lost amid myriads of baser systems, that float through the realms of space as thick motes in a sunbeam, how can we fondly imagine that humanity plays the part assigned to it by the Bible, or that man has so vast an importance in the designs of God? This objection sometimes takes another form in the mouths of men who are willing to acknowledge that there is a God who governs the world by general laws, and who may be introduced in the greater events of history; but that any of earth's inhabitants should assume, or invoke His intervention in the common details of daily life, and think himself the object of His loving care, a person professing such a belief would be derided by them. They are willing, perhaps, to allow that His name may be used in the solemnities of worship, but object to connecting it with our petty sorrows and trifling joys, in which He can take no interest.

Thus do these modern Epicureans reason, and the language I have quoted is not that of professed atheists, but of many honest people who are proud of the name of Christians. In fact, there are but few of us who have not occasionally been troubled by such thoughts as these. Which of us has not at some time or other asked himself, "Is it possible the attention of the Most High can be directed to me? What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" How often has not the magnificent spectacle of the world inspired us with a vague feeling of terror, when we contrast its infinite grandeur with our own nothingness?

Can it be true, we say, that in this immensity of creation, in which our globe is as a speck of dust, that in this little ant-hill we call our world, among these millions who each minute are born and die, each has its mission, its part to play, its account to give? Is it true that our race has the importance we ourselves attribute to it, and that God can condescend to notice the innumerable incidents which chequer our little life with light and shade? Is my prayer heard,—are my wants known of God?

Another thing which effaces from the minds of many the idea of God's intervention in the world's affairs is its present condition, to which Christians say it has been reduced by sin, and from which we believe it will finally emerge by the destruction of sin.

How difficult is it to discover any trace of a Providential plan in history?

How can we see any design amid the dark confusion of events? How can we find the key to the moral problems they raise? What mean so many miserable failures; what was the purpose served by so many vanished civilizations?

It is no doubt easy enough for a man of optimist temperament to explain all these things superficially, and write a philosophy of history in a few chapters, and declare he sees clearly through that which to others is a darkness that may be felt; but all cannot thus easily console themselves,—all cannot hail as rising day-stars the *ignes fatui* of imagination. For them the history of humanity, with its gigantic crimes, the ceaseless sufferings of millions of beings who, far beyond our bounded ken, pursue their mysterious destiny,—all this is a dark problem which troubles them, and often makes their heart to bleed. It may be said all these troubles belong only to cultivated minds. I do not think so. I believe that beneath another form they harass and perplex the most ignorant and rude. Can we not epitomise in each existence the questions which torment us in the history of nations? Triumphant injustice! successful fraud! seemingly useless suffering! unforeseen strokes of death! are these not questions which, in the dark and solemn hour of our

pain and anguish, ask for a solution from all? From the patriot who thinks he sees the cause of justice fall for ever when his own blood-stained banner is trampled in the dust, to the workman who, in the bitterness of his heart, says, "If there is a God he is the God of the rich man," is there any situation in which from time to time we are not tempted to ask, what is the action of God on the world and on our own life? If, as I said, Fatalism was the prevalent belief of antiquity, it is in a scarcely less practical sense the faith of our own times. Some adore it blindly, others curse it in useless revolt; but over all, whether openly avowed or secretly felt, it exercises a sinister and baneful influence. Even when under the sharp stroke of sorrow or the acute sense of injustice, man bends the knee to it, and foolishly repeats the words of Asaph, "How doth God know? is there knowledge in the Most High?" Now to deal with these objections in succession, first as to the sceptic's arguments in favour of necessity to be inferred from the inflexibility of Nature's laws. The Christian escapes the difficulty by belief in a living God who is above the laws he has made. True, we see no more miracles; the physical world in which we live is governed by fixed and unyielding natural laws, which, if we resist, crush us beneath their awful power.

Why should it not be so? God is a God of order. He has attested more than once that He is Nature's master. But can He be expected to change the mighty order of His works, to interrupt the marvellous concatenation of cause and effect to satisfy wishes, that, if so easily gratified, would too soon degenerate into caprices? He could, no doubt, grant each prayer, intervene in every event of life, to punish or to bless. But what result would follow? All would serve him by self-interest or fear; for punishment or reward would immediately follow each action. There would, in such a dispensation, be no place for love, and God would neither be served by mercenaries nor slaves; He wills that man, as a moral agent, should walk by faith, not by sight. He hides Himself from sight, to reveal Himself to faith. Sight shows us those general laws according to which His sun rises on just and on unjust alike, the laws by which Nature pursues her changeless course; but faith unveils to us, amid this general connection of cause and effect, the delicate operation of His all-watchful care in the existence of each individual, by which He knows all our thoughts, and by which no sigh of ours is hid from Him. Judging by sight, all is fated and predestined, or the result of chance,—the same accidents, the same griefs happen to all alike; but judging by faith, there is in each existence a plan, by virtue of which all that seems accidental and fortuitous, irremediably fixed, serves

a providential end of God; so that, if our sight were clear enough, we should be able to discern that all Nature's forces, though governed by fixed laws, serve, in connection with humanity, an end superior to the physical aspect of Nature, even the realization of an order, moral, spiritual, divine.

To turn to the second objection to an overruling Providence on the ground of the unworthiness of the idea that God could interest himself in the concerns of a being so insignificant as man. The objection may be drawn from Revelation itself, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" No doubt Scripture does speak of the grandeur of God, and the littleness of man, with unparalleled energy of language, but it never draws an inference favourable to Fatalism.

Listen to the language of a prophet spoken more than 3,000 years ago, in a passage so beautiful that it cannot fail to strike even the coldest imagination. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, meted out the heavens with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord? Who, being His counsellor, hath taught Him anything? Behold! the nations before Him are as a drop in the bucket." Thus did the prophet express himself, and this is the feeling that naturally prevails in man. Can any picture be more striking of our weakness compared to the grandeur of God? But what is the consequence? Isaiah draws from it: "Sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest thou, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment passed over from my God? Knowest thou not the Lord, the everlasting God, hath created heaven and earth; He fainteth not, neither is weary; He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." God is great, therefore he is unmindful of us. Such is the human syllogism.

God is great, therefore He hath respect unto the lowly: such is the logic of God. Which is the most reasonable we leave our adversaries to judge.

But it is asserted as a reproach that we thus make the lowest of His creatures the objects of His care. Is it, then, to be admitted that it is a mark of true grandeur not to occupy itself with that which is small?

Should we call a poet great who, absorbed in the plan of his epic, neglected harmony of rhythm and propriety of diction on the ground that they were below his attention? Should we call a general great who, in the arrangement of a campaign, thought he might safely neglect the details as unimportant? Do we not, on the contrary, see evident signs of true genius to

embrace in a glance, at once far-reaching and minute, the whole and the details,—to see at once the two ends of the chain? That which excites our admiration with men of genius is not only their gigantic project, but the powerful grasp with which they seize both the plan and the details of its execution. It is this kind of what we may call intellectual omnipresence which made Michael Angelo at once the most gifted artist and the most accurate mathematician; which enabled Napoleon, while tracing the plan of a distant campaign, to calculate accurately the rations of his soldiers and arrange the minutest details of each camp; by which a great writer, when carried aloft on the wings of a soaring imagination, selects the most felicitous expressions and uses the most suitable epithets.

Now, multiply and raise this gift of genius to its highest power, ascend to its primal source, and we have God embosomed in the most imposing grandeur, exercising the most watchful providence, the sovereign Being that nothing can limit, but that nothing can escape, not even the sparrow that on a winter's night falls dead on the icy ground. We cannot, then, get rid of the idea of a superintending Providence by means of contemplating His grandeur, for the very grandeur itself furnishes a strong argument against Fatalism. But the questions I have alluded to are terrible even for the Christian, and we may not dare to attempt lightly to pass them by. Faith does not so completely illumine the darkness that surrounds us, that no mystery remains in the spectacle of the world. Yes, indeed, in history the apparent share of fate or destiny is immense, and this is the third objection. Look at the hereditary transmission of evil and suffering, the influence of matter on spirit, the inborn disposition of races and characters. Here are problems which baffle us, and again, and again, contradict our experience. Indeed, we are forced to confess that in human history there are pages after pages whose sense is hidden to us. The ways of God are ever obscure to us: He maketh dark water and thick clouds his pavilion, the walls of which our feeble sight seek in vain to penetrate. But despite the darkness, we can fix our eyes on the expression, "God is love," and this conviction we can oppose to all we see and all we hear. Nay, to the thoughts of our brain, and the sorrows of our hearts, "He is love," and thus in all His works there must be a harmony complete and supreme. Looked at from this point of view, the history of our race is no longer a vain conflict of opposing passions, instincts, and chances. Above, amid all this restless agitation, all these clashing wills, all these seeming accidents, there is, though we cannot trace it, a divine plan which leaves no place for fatality. It is true the design is

hidden, but we know it exists, and the thought is a firm support for our faith. Besides, though we cannot see the object, and, when asked to explain it, we are compelled to avow our ignorance, we must remember that it is but natural with a being limited, fallible, who can see in his brief passage over the surface of the earth but a small part of God's design. How can we—mere creatures of a day—presume to complain, because we are unable to comprehend the designs of a Being who is infinite and eternal? It was once said by an old dramatist of the sixteenth century to a sceptic who denied providential action,—“Would you pronounce judgment on the plot of a drama of which you had only seen one act? And because in that act the innocent is punished, would you accuse the author of having forgotten justice? Wait a little and see the next act. When the criminal is overtaken by the punishment he has deserved, you will say that the apparent discord is turned into harmony. Do you not see that we are but children? Who could pronounce judgment on the drama of the ages from a single scene?”

The old playwright said truly; God plays a drama the acts of which are centuries. He in whose eyes a thousand years are as one day is patient because He is eternal.

Or, to take another illustration, would you ask a soldier whose place was amid the thickest of the fight, to explain his general's plan? What need for him to understand it? He sees but the thundering charge, the flashing arms, the clouds of smoke and dust; he hears but the shouts, and cries, mingled with the deafening roar of musketry and the deep boom of cannon. For him all seems disorder and confusion, but on a neighbouring height, an eye is following the progress of the action, a watchful brain is directing the movements of each battalion. And is there not a battle going on amid the centuries—that of truth, love, and justice, against error, egotism, and iniquity? and it is not for us obscure private soldiers in the *mêlée*, to presume to explain the plan of the action: enough that God is directing it. We have to remain at the post He assigns to us, and to struggle firmly to the end. There is a scene recorded in the Old Testament which may illustrate the divine plan as carried out amid the confusion of history.

When Solomon built the Temple on the hill of Zion, we were told that all the materials for the construction of this enormous edifice were prepared far from Jerusalem, that the sound of the workmen's tools might not break the silence of the sacred city; and thus for a long period, scattered in Judæan valleys, or on the heights of Lebanon, the woodcutter felled the trees, the workman carved the stone, none knew the plan of the great Architect, each had the order to complete his own task, till the

day came when, in its majestic beauty, the Temple of God arose complete.

Here we have a striking image of the destiny of humanity. God, the sovereign Architect, constructs throughout the ages a vast and glorious edifice, whose plan we have never seen, but which will be the Temple in which we all shall one day worship. Far, far from heaven, far from the holy Zion, far from the abode of peace and glory, here in the land of our exile, the materials are being prepared; for the noise of suffering and trial must not penetrate the sky; each of us must finish at his post the work entrusted to him, renouncing all idea of comprehending the place it shall occupy in the universal harmony; for how can we, workmen of a day, presume to understand or realize the designs of an eternal God?

Enough for us to know that our work, however humble it may be, is known to the universal Master; that He has willed it, and that He will accept it if honestly done. Enough for us to believe that a day will come when the materials dispersed in a seeming confusion, which is of course to us incomprehensible now, shall be united in an order which shall ravish our delighted intelligence; then all human pain, sacrifice, and anguish shall no longer seem to have been useless; then shall be recovered from oblivion all the noble deeds of heroism and hidden virtue now seen by God alone; nothing shall then seem to have been the work of chance, or fate, in human history, or in our own individual existence. Chance shall rule no longer, and the edifice that Divine wisdom by an earthly work has prepared, shall rise in beauty, sovereign and sublime as the eternal sanctuary of infinite love. Yet there is something wanting still; doubtless it is an incomparable consolation to know that all concurs in the universal plan of God, that nothing is useless, nothing lost in any human life; but what is there to assure us it is anything more than a lovely and taking theory? How can we know that love is indeed the centre and the end of all the Divine dispensation. Too many clouds hide it for me to believe in it? Oh! if I could only for a moment hear the beatings of my Father's heart, how would I say with Jacob, "Tell me Thy name!" or with Job, "Oh, that I could find him!" or with Isaiah, "Oh, that he would rend the heavens and come down!" Yes, between the hidden God and myself the distance is too great to believe in His love. I must see Him, and contemplate His glorious beauty face to face. Well, to this desire of the soul God has responded. The Incarnation! here is the best proof of God's providence. On our earth we have seen appear and shine forth a holy love, the like of which humanity never before beheld. His love is the very foundation of the character of Jesus, the principle of all

His acts and all His life, and Jesus who shows it to the world declares, with the authority of a sovereign, that He is the Incarnation of God, and that he who sees Him sees the Father; and thus souls come to Him, drawn by an attraction irresistible. Ask them why the words of Jesus are of such sovereign authority. Why His cross, above all, the supreme exhibition of His love, sheds a light unparalleled on their own, or the world's history. They could not perhaps tell you, but they feel it is because on this cross God had written His name, and has revealed by it the secret of His ways. Listen to what God says by it. "You ask My name. I am Justice, I am Holiness, I am Love. Oh! human conscience, thou hast felt me without knowing me. Thou hast sought me, each time thou didst love the good, the just, the beautiful, and the true. I am Holiness, and Justice, and I could have reigned by crushing all resistance, for Mine is the power, and the sovereign dominion over ages, and ages; but because I am Love, I would not have such a reign as this; I would draw hearts to me by a free attachment, and ask of them a voluntary obedience. And thus My Son came to earth humbled, abased, but by this cross to which the world nailed Him, I draw, and will draw, all men to Myself. Thus shall come my reign,—not the reign of terror and of force, for, as in the desert of Horeb I taught my servant Elijah, I am neither in the devastating storm, nor in the devouring fire, nor in the heaving earthquake. No! My voice is persuasive and sweet. I say, 'Come to Me; I neither break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking torch while yet a spark remains.' I call all men to Me, to this tend all the plans of My providence. This is the secret of history, the explanation of all my designs."

Is not this the language and teaching of the Cross, though the world does not understand it. I know it often repels it; but, in spite of it, some ray of light Divine penetrates the darkness, and enlightens it. And we see this especially in one particular. Progress, the great law of our race, was not believed in, nor thought of till the Advent of Christianity. Now, what is progress in its highest sense? (I do not mean refinement of luxury, enjoyment, and comfort, which attest the decline quite as much as the civilization of nations.) What is progress if not the realization of a Providential plan in history? It is a striking fact that people never believed in progress till the Cross. A Divine plan has only been believed in since God told us His name by writing it on Calvary. General faith in progress, which, while Pagan or Mahometan nations are stationary or reactionary, gives a future to Christian nations, and makes men try to win the world to their belief; this faith is a fruit of the Gospel. The world at large only believed

in Providence from the day of the Incarnation up to that time, as I have pointed out; its religion was Fatalism. Even among the Jews it was only by force of miracles that people could be made to believe in the intervention of God. But, from the day when men have felt the heart of God beat in His Son, when they beheld Him, who is the revelation of the Father, men believed that God loved, and would not abandon them to a fatal destiny. Now, just see what a change in our views takes place the moment the stupendous fact of the Incarnation casts light on our deep darkness. We say to ourselves, on first contemplating our little earth lost in the vast universe, "Can it be possible the eye of God can see it?" And, now that I know that among so many thousands of worlds, it has been the object of the love of the Most High, the abode of His Son, the theatre on which His highest love has been displayed, can we now say, that any number of worlds are worth that on which have fallen the tears and the blood of His Son? How willingly can we now say, in sympathy with the Prophet, "O little Earth, smallest star-planet, lost amid the immensity of the universe, yet thou art the most glorious of worlds, for out of thee came the Saviour, the Son of the Highest! Yes, in thy celestial journey across the realms of boundless space, angels salute thee, for in the whole universe they see no spot surpassing thee in brightness. Let them wander through the star-spangled heaven, whose splendours announce the glory of God; let them pursue their course through His wide domain, and contemplate the magnificence of His handiwork. They will never find anything more grand than Divine love, which immolates itself; and the light of all suns will pale before the ray which shines from the Cross. O Earth! blessed art thou, for from thee has come forth the Saviour." We seemed to say, what is the secret of the Divine will? and what is the meaning of these extraordinary dispensations which blind and confound us? But now God has answered us, we have seen the Cross triumphant. We know across all that bewilders and troubles us the Kingdom of God advances, and will finally subdue the earth. But not only are the destinies of humanity at large illumined by the Cross, but the individual history of each one of us. The Cross tells us the value of a human soul in God's eyes, by showing at what a price God has redeemed it. And when we believe in that love, and when we know the value of our soul, how can we doubt the goodness of Providence? Is not this precisely the energetic reasoning of St. Paul? "God, who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, shall He not with Him freely give us all things?"

After so striking a proof of His love, may we not expect a

Father's most devoted care and tenderness? Why should we doubt the merciful intention with which all Divine acts are guided, even those which confound our intelligence, and break our hearts? What affliction is there whose darkness the cross cannot illumine, and whose bitterness it cannot soften? So reasons the Christian, and remember that what I have said of nations applies as strongly, though perhaps still less visibly, to individuals. We only believe firmly in Providence, when we accept the cross.

Apart from the faith of Jesus Christ, you may meet with bursts of sincere piety, a touching submission to the will of God, a trust more or less in His love; but when you see a man who believes firmly in the intervention of God in his life, a man who declares that all his grief has divine education for its end, a man who can give thanks amid severe affliction, you will never be mistaken in calling that man a Christian. But here the spirit of doubt I am dealing with takes a new form, and wields another weapon. We are told it is a wild delusion to suppose the Church can be the centre of all the Divine plans, and that humanity can have ever been the object of such a miracle of love as the Incarnation. Christians who believe the heavens were shaken to effect their salvation, and that all things work together to realize their hopes, the glory of their God, are accused of pride. Why! what pride can there be in believing God in placing us on the earth had an evident object, that object being His service? What pride can there be in believing the free obedience of one loving heart is more acceptable to God than the enforced submission of *all* creatures who serve Him through necessity? What pride in believing that in order to obtain this obedience His love recoiled at nothing, not even the most unheard-of humiliation, not even before the sacrifice of the cross? Thus we are called proud when we wish to make our life depend immediately on Him from whom we have received all, when we trust the voice of conscience on Divine holiness. We are accused of pride when we believe nothing is indifferent to God in our life, and that He is grieved and hurt by our selfishness and sin. We are called proud when we think that His mercy exceeds His justice, and when we suppose it great enough to reach even to the gift of Himself. Proud when we believe that His Father-like tenderness is vast enough to comprehend all in its wide embrace, and to know, and count the sorrows, and sufferings, even of the humblest of His creatures. Proud, indeed! in our inmost confidence that in all His ways towards us nothing is chance, all is love. Proud! but those who reproach us with pride, have they ever seen how much is covered by their pretended humility?

But it has been said by some, if God foresees all, and directs everything to an end, which, though not pre-ordained, is yet over-ruled, and controlled to a certain extent independently of us,—what is the use of prayer?

It is a grand instinct, however, which prompts a feeble, finite being to draw near to the Author of its own and the world's existence. We are ready to admire the silent law of gravitation, which draws every atom of matter to its appointed place,—the hidden force which enables us to flash our wishes (in a few minutes) half across the globe,—and can we not admire the soul's effort to return to the fount of life, and to enter again into spiritual communion with its Creator?

One cause that has tended to throw discredit upon prayer, and bring it into disrepute, is the numberless perversions of which it has been the subject, at the hands of Buddhists, Thibetans, and others, who even in Europe have imagined its force lay in repetitions mechanically performed, and valuable only from their frequency,—forgetting that no human father would require such a homage, and that God asks the heart, and that prayer, to be worth anything, must be an act of the soul. What then is its use? Most men, however sceptical, admit its action, but on whom is it exercised? Is it confined to ourselves, or does it extend to God? They tell us it is wrong to expect to modify the course of nature, and that the great use of prayer is to teach us resignation to the actual state of things.

But if prayer is valuable only by virtue of its reflex action, why, in times of danger either to ourselves or others, should we offer up prayer? Let us appeal to mankind not when spoiled by sophistry, but when they pray from the first outpouring impulse of the heart. Is it only to raise himself nearer to God, and learn resignation, that the shipwrecked mariner lifts his anguished eye to heaven, and calls for mercy in imploring tones?—that the mother, watching by her dear one's couch, makes her agonized appeal to God to spare that loved one's life?—that the starving father prays for his craving little ones?—or that the sinner wrestling with a strong temptation prays that help may be sent down to him? Do none of these expect to influence the Divine Will? Do all believe that there is none that can answer, nor any able to save? No one can say so,—the veriest unbeliever in prayer, can only say,—such are the victims of illusion. It is strange, however, that the illusion should be universal, and that no education or influence can eradicate it; and that in the various crises of the history of each individual it ever re-appears.

We argue then, that the feeling must have been implanted by God! and God could never have created a hunger He never

meant to satisfy, or a thirst He never intended to assuage; nor could He say to His creature, "Thou shalt ever ask, but I will never answer." We may safely believe, then, that God will and does reply to desires of His own implanting.

Christ has revealed to us the true love of God, in re-opening access to Him. Christ has taught us, in noble and elevated language, all we know. He banished for ever all gross, mercenary, and superstitious ideas; it cannot be said He ever encouraged spiritual presumption. What then is His idea of prayer? Does He consider it merely an elevating of the soul?—a spiritual exercise? Rather, does He not ever assume that prayer modifies events, and that success depends on the intensity of our faith? Look at the bold images He employs—the unjust judge; the selfish friend. And besides Christ's direct teaching, look at the general inference from Scripture: Abraham's prayer for Sodom; Jacob's struggle with the Angel; Christ and the Canaanitish woman;—in all these cases prayer is shown to us a sovereign act, influencing first ourselves, then others; and so proceeding onward to outward events, and the course of the world.

Let us take the objections: Prayer, they say, cannot be efficacious, because, if it were, it would change the course of Nature. As before observed, all the researches of science tend to establish the permanence of natural law; why should we pray for fine weather, or rain, when we know that both depend upon meteorological laws? why pray for the preservation of human life, when statistical returns show for every given period an unvarying proportion of births and deaths?

We are asked to leave prayer to children, who think each fine spring day made for their own especial gratification; and under this objection, they look upon our faith as crushed. But if it be true that the laws of nature are incapable of modification, why should men who reason thus take any action? why seek food? why sow? build? or plant? Each act is in flagrant contradiction with their system. You cannot modify the course of Nature, says the sceptic; nevertheless it is done every time a stone is lifted, or a house built; for the time, the laws of gravitation are suspended and varied; the same is done every time a tree is grafted, or new life introduced to a diseased member of the body.

Man is ever transforming into forces of life the crude powers of Nature, which would otherwise have spread devastation and death. Man does the same when he extracts healing remedies from poisonous plants. Man does all this—nay, more; he often, by his own unruly will, resists the will of God, and delays material and spiritual progress till the dawn of the per-

fect day; and yet, when we would pray, there are some who would stop the impulse by alleging the inflexibility of Nature. What! my intelligence can direct the hidden forces of Nature to work an end subservient to purposes of usefulness; and shall my soul alone be powerless? The fact that we can control the powers of Nature is beyond dispute, and yet, if this be admitted, fatalism falls to the ground.

Sceptics may reply that man's power to modify the course of Nature is visible and appreciable, and that there is no relation between this and the doctrine of the influence of prayer, which is and must remain wholly invisible. But that is not the question—which is, Can man modify the course of Nature, or can he not? The invisible mode of the action of prayer is beside the argument; for how few operations which we know take place can we comprehend? How does spirit act on matter? How, or why, does the movement of my hand obey the volition of my intelligence? Here is a question which baffles learned and simple alike. When the farmer casts his seed into the ground, does he understand the germinative process? Of course he does not, neither can the most learned man of science explain it to him; yet he trusts his grain to the ground confidently.

Neither do we know how prayer acts; but we may safely leave the result to God, certain that each spiritual seed will find its own furrow, and bear an appropriate and abundant harvest.

And, after all, who are the unbelievers in the efficacy of prayer?—who are its opponents? The Sceptic and the Atheist—the very persons who never pray, and, consequently, are utterly unable to testify as to the results of prayer. Indifference or lukewarmness in the act, coupled with a want of reverence to the Dispenser of all Gifts, must ever of themselves be fatal to the realization of the petitions of prayer. We must pray and not faint, pray in faith, nothing doubting.

The very essence of prayer consists in an implicit belief that the person addressed, whether human or Divine, has the power to grant its petition; and, indeed, how do we know that, beyond the laws that human ingenuity and science have discovered, there may not exist occult laws framed to meet and govern every conceivable variety of circumstance, and which laws are only called into operative action by spiritual and submissive faith, belief in God's love, and humble acknowledgment of His Omnipotence?

It may be one of God's laws that a petition for spiritual advancement (in contradistinction to one of mere personal aggrandisement), if presented in humble faith and dependence upon God's love, may be accorded, which, without that prayer

would have been withheld. We must ask to receive: God has commanded it as a duty, and appointed it as an act of homage to His divinity.

A familiar instance of the effect or action of prayer is seen in the relationship of parent and child. How often does the child importune its parent for some gift or gratification that it has set its heart upon, but which the parent knows would be immediately or prospectively injurious! How does that child interpret the refusal or intentional silence of its parent? Undoubtedly, at first, with annoyance and displeasure, perhaps mingled with doubt as to the genuineness of the parental feeling; but when of age to appreciate such caution and watchful care, it sees an overruling protection, a benevolent guardianship, a jealous love in the apparent unkindness of the act.

In fact, there does not exist a more graphic, concise, and illustrative definition of our views of the nature and effect of prayer than is found in our Lord's parable of the Publican and Sinner, with which I shall conclude my observations on the subject.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,—God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

"I tell you," says Christ, "this man went down to his house *justified* rather than the other."

A discussion ensued, in which the Rev. C. A. Row, Rev. G. Henslow, E. Haughton, Esq., M.D., Kazi Shehbuddeen, the Rev. T. M. Gorman, and the Chairman took part. The Rev. Dr. Robbins having replied, the meeting was adjourned.

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NOTE.—The paper read and discussed at the Meeting of the 4th March, 1872, is inserted in Vol. VI., because it took up some arguments in Sir John Lubbock's recent work, which had not been dealt with in another paper in that volume (see Vol. VI. p. 1).