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ARTICLE I.

A FEW MORE WORDS ON THE REVISED BOOK OF DISCIPLINE.

From recent indications we are inclined to think that the tide of prejudice which, at first, set so violently against the Revised Book of Discipline, has begun to ebb, and that the current is now changing in its favor. Objections are daily losing their force, misapprehensions quietly subsiding, and the propriety of the changes becoming more obvious; and although the mind of the Church is not yet fully prepared to adopt the book, yet, the estimate which is now formed of it is very different from that which prevailed a year ago. Even the tone of its assailants is significantly changed; instead of the bold shout of confident defiance with which they at first rushed to the assault, as if victory were as sure as the attack, they have come at length to perceive that there are weapons on the other side as bright and as keen as their own, and that if they succeed in achieving a triumph it will be after a hard conflict, and with strong misgivings as to the inherent righteousness of their cause. In this posture of affairs we have thought that

ARTICLE III.

THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE SCRIPTURES.

In the earlier pages of this Review, a luminous exposition is given of the "office of Reason in regard to Revelation."*

The bare hint of Butler,† and the fragmentary statements of Jeremy Taylor‡ being taken as merely suggestive of the theme, a new field of thought is opened, and our attitude indicated with precision towards a system claiming to be Divine. The distinction is drawn between the natural and supernatural in Revelation; between "truths which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart to conceive, which descend to us immediately from Heaven, and communicate with no principle, no matter, no conclusion here below," and "those truths which are intuitively evident without revelation—or which reason can demonstrate from premises furnished by our natural faculties." To the former class belong "the august mysteries of Christianity;" to the latter, the truths of philosophy and science.

Corresponding to this division of the subjects of revelation, a distinction is made of the use of reason. "The office of reason in the supernatural department of revelation may be positive, but *can never be negative* §—in the natural, it is negative, but only to a very limited extent, if at all, positive.

The subject discussed in the article from which these extracts

* Vol. I., Art. I.

† Analogy, part I., chap. 8.

‡ Ductor Dubitantium. Book I., chap. 2.

§ "There is one exception to this rule. When a professed revelation contradicts itself, or one which is known to be real; then reason has a negative power."—Vol. I., art. I., p. 14. *Note.*

It will be observed that this exception does not include any matter that we shall consider.

are taken, touches the scope of our present essay but in a single, though a vital point. We will confine our attention to the second of the above four affirmations, and endeavour to show that objections to revelation on the ground of its *supernatural* doctrines are not valid.

1. And, in the first place, let us remind our readers of the manifest advantage possessed by the sceptic in urging these objections, it being easy to press a difficulty which, when insoluble, can be rebutted only by a patient accumulation of proofs in favor of the system that presents it. For, as Paschal has observed, "not only is it difficult, but impossible for the human mind to *retain* the impression of a large combination of evidence, even if it could, for a moment, realize the collective *effect* of the whole."

"The truth of our religion (says Bishop Butler), like the truth of common matters, is to be judged of by all the evidence taken together. And, unless the whole series of things which may be alleged in this argument, and every particular thing in it, can be reasonably supposed to have been by accident, (for here the stress of the argument for Christianity lies,) then is the truth of it proved. * * It is obvious how much advantage the nature of this evidence gives to those persons who attack, especially in conversation. For it is easy to show, in a short and lively manner, that such things are liable to objection, but impossible to show, in like manner, the united force of the whole argument in one view." *

Let us bear in mind, however, that though it be easy to raise, flippantly, these objections, and though they impose on the shallow and unreflecting, yet they do not have any real force as arguments, unless a distinct objection be raised on every point in the teachings of revelation, and unless each objection *be absolutely insurmountable* by any rational hypothesis respecting the statement in question.

2. This leads us, in the next place, to inquire what is the

* Analogy, part 2., cap. vii.

value of the supposed presumption raised against any truth by its being implicated with difficulties that we cannot solve. We affirm this presumption to be very small, so small that almost the slightest external evidence will overbear it. This is apparent, every day, in the practical affairs of life. The case stands thus—the conclusion we ordinarily reach is, in itself, and independently of any special difficulties, only a *probable* conclusion, which has been gained by weighing the arguments on both sides. There is a conflict of testimony; reasons are urged on one side, reasons are urged on the other side; they may be nicely balanced; one side may preponderate only a little; we are compelled to rest in probability, for “probabilities are the very guide of life.” Now, when we have reached this probable conclusion, we are beset by these difficulties; but they do not move us; they cannot outweigh the evidence in which we rest. For example, a criminal is arraigned on the charge of murder; one witness swears to an alibi, and two others, more trustworthy, to the fact of the murder; we decide to accept the evidence that finds him guilty. But here rise up the improbabilities of his having committed the deed. The absence of motive, the known benevolence of his nature, the near relationship and reciprocal obligations subsisting between the parties, the prisoner’s air of injured innocence, all tend to rebuke the opinion of his guilt. But all this does not invalidate the positive proof.

So in the case of Christianity; there are the evidences in its favor; and there are the objections to *the evidences* which constitute negative arguments against it. After due consideration, we pronounce the proof sufficient and accept the truth of the system; then we are plied with the difficulties in which the subject itself is involved. Now we insist that these difficulties shall not be allowed to over-balance positive and adequate proof in favor of it.

The case is even stronger than this in favor of Christianity. For consider the peculiar nature of the opposition to it. There is no *argument* against it, properly speaking; no *positive* evidence rebutting its claims; no proof in favor of any other

scheme. There is nothing but *objections*, first, to its *evidences*, and then to its *contents*. Should infidelity succeed in showing Christianity to be false, it would not thereby prove any thing else to be true; the conclusion would be a barren negative. It is right that these objections should be thus readily set aside by evidence, for two reasons; first, if the matter be narrowly examined, still greater difficulties will be found to exist on the other side; and in the next place, these objections are based solely on our ignorance; the difficulty simply is that we cannot explain them.

3. We are not disposed to depreciate these difficulties, considered as *difficulties*, for we believe them to be utterly inexplicable by us; they are inscrutable mysteries that no human intellect can solve. But we contend that they are not logical *arguments* against *Christianity*, nor valid *objections* to it. This will be made out, provided we can show that greater difficulties attend its rejection.

What obstacles, then, must he surmount who would pronounce Christianity to be false?

In regard to these very mysteries, he must believe that man has invented what no man can comprehend; that doctrines have been freely proclaimed and widely received for ages, which utterly transcend the highest powers of the intellect.

He must believe that the most exclusive nation in the world devised the only religion capable of universal expansion.

He must believe that a horde of illiterate slaves invented and practised the sublimest worship the world ever saw.

He must believe that a few ignorant fishermen promulgated a system of morals immeasurably more pure and lofty than that of any Philosopher.

He must believe that these rude Gallilæans formed and presented the only ideal of perfect virtue known to man; that their myth is superior in action, in speech, in purity of heart to any personage that ever lived on earth.

He must believe that they devoted themselves, soul and body, to the propagation of falsehoods, without any wordly advantage,

in spite of bloody persecutions, and at the certain peril of eternal woe.

He must believe that this religion, having such an origin, was disseminated by such agents in the face of a world in arms against it, and so successfully that it soon became well-nigh universal.

All this is a thousand times more incredible than any thing that is related in the Gospel; yet all this must be swallowed by every one who rejects the Gospel.

These are some of the difficulties that lie in the way of the whole tribe of infidel speculations; if we were to examine their systems in detail, we would find that peculiar and insuperable difficulties attend each one of them. This, however, we will not attempt.

If, therefore, it be a real objection to Christianity that difficulties attach to it, we cannot relieve ourselves by flying to the opposite conclusion. Now suppose the difficulties on the two sides to be equal, they can do no more than create a suspended judgment; and then the *positive* evidence for Christianity must be allowed to decide the question in its favor. For infidelity *has no positive* evidence to aid her cause; not only is her conclusion a mere negative, but all her arguments are negative in form. Her only weapon is objections; the only result a sceptical doubt; but the obstacles in her way that we have just stated, and the counter presumption that we have thereby raised, *annul* the force of her objections, and leave Christianity with the undiminished support of the positive evidence in its favor.

But, again, as Butler strongly insists, the difference between the nature of the evidence that Christianity presents, and the objections urged by infidelity is very remarkable.

“The evidence which sustains Christianity is all such as man is competent to consider; and is precisely of the same nature as that which enters into his every-day calculations of probability; while the objections spring entirely from our ignorance and presumption. They suppose that we know more of the Divine administration, of what God may have permitted,

of what is possible and impossible, of the ultimate development of an imperfectly developed system, and of its relation to the entire universe, than we do or can know." *

An illustration may be drawn from the objections to miracles. The evidence we have in favor of miracles is that direct human testimony on which we are accustomed to rely every day; the objections are chiefly two, either that miracles are *impossible*, or that they are *incredible*. But nothing except the greatest ignorance, or the greatest presumption could perpetrate such folly; for the first allegation limits the Almighty; the second would compel us to deny a miracle, even though one had been wrought.

There is also a striking difference between the objections urged by infidelity against *Christianity*, and those with which we have plied *infidelity*—a difference that makes strongly for revelation. The former, as we have seen, are merely the expressions of ignorance amazed at the inscrutable ways of God; the latter are precisely such objections as are employed by us in the daily walks of life, and the appeal made by them is to the common principles of nature. For example, we say that on the infidel hypothesis, the existence and the spread of *Christianity* are unaccountable: why? because they would be effects without an adequate cause. Dr. Arnold † tells us that the more he read the "Commentaries," the less could he persuade himself to consider Cæsar as their author. Is this opinion *necessarily* absurd? Is it not possible that there might be sufficient internal evidence to justify a departure from the common belief respecting the writer of those histories? If so, and no one will deny it, then it is not only a valid, but *plain* objection to say that the position assumed by infidelity in repudiating the Divine origin of the Scriptures is untenable, because an examination of their contents renders it incredible that the persons, whose names they bear, were the unaided authors of them.

* Reason and Faith, p. 377.

† Later Roman Commonwealth, p. 250.

Thus we have shown that the difficulties in the way of the infidel hypothesis are greater than those which attach to Christianity—greater in themselves, because they are more numerous, more formidable, and more palpable, and that they are not overborne, as in the other case, by positive testimony.

4. This reply proceeds on the assumption that infidelity is bound to furnish some positive system of truth in place of the religion that it rejects. And this is a fair demand. Man is a religious creature. Religion is not an artificial want, but a prime necessity of his nature. Two lines of proof sustain this; one drawn from his consciousness, the other from the facts in his history. As to the first, man's reason decides in relation to things, not only that they are true or false, but that they are good or evil; this moral sense is an elementary principle of his mind. With regard to much of his conduct he determines that it is wrong; he judges and condemns himself; he judges instantly, instinctively, necessarily. Conscience not only pronounces on his conduct, but also suggests the fear of retribution; he dreads punishment; he recognizes the vicarious nature of conscience, and anticipates a more terrible avenger; he is driven to measures for warding off the expected wrath. These measures constitute his religion; whether true or false, whether pure or corrupt, it is his religion. If man act consistently with the principles of his nature he will be religious. But again, the whole history of our race exhibits man as a worshipper. No nation or tribe has ever been found destitute of all religion—whatever else he may lack, he invariably takes care to provide himself with this. He may live without houses, without clothes, with no food except what he shares with the beasts; he may be destitute of the marriage relation, and of domestic bonds; parental affection may be extinguished, the mother may forget her sucking child; he may be without law and without government; he may have almost lost the noble gift of speech; but still in his ignorance and degradation this groveling savage has a *religion*. He is a *worshipper*—it may be of the sun, it may be of a reptile, it may be of a hero, or yet

of a graven image—but one thing is invariably true of him, he has a God, and after some ritual he adores his divinity.

Hence, it is evident that man is by nature religious, and, therefore, the demand that we make on the Infidel Philosophers is just, that they shall furnish an adequate supply to this universal want of the race. They have no right to exterminate Christianity until they shall have provided a substitute. The multitudes who now rest satisfied with the religion of Christ, if it shall be taken away, cannot remain utterly destitute; their inmost souls will cry out against it; they will seek or invent some other. It is incumbent on these, the wise men of the age, to see to it that the multitude make a proper choice, lest their last state be worse than the first. Again, this being an original necessity of our nature, it is antecedently probable that provision has been made for it by the Creator. These learned men, who claim by intellect and acquisition to be fitted to instruct mankind, are called upon to ascertain and to make known that provision. It is their duty to give us something positive, to agree upon some system which shall be better supported than Christianity by external evidence, and more clearly illuminated by a light from within. We hold them to this. Have they done it? As we have seen, every system devised by them is open to infinitely greater objections than those that lie against Christianity. But another fatal difficulty is, that all their systems are destitute of authority. Now, it is certain that men will not receive religion by force of argument. Such a thing has never happened on earth. Every religion that has propagated itself within the domain of history, has done so under the pressure of an authority which did not merely solicit, but which imperatively demanded obedience. Christianity claims to be clothed with an authority higher than that which has urged on any other religion, even the authority of an infinite and holy God. Infidelity has no authority higher than that of a cloistered student, which, with the mass of men, is none at all. The case stands thus: we have a religion that we think is fully adequate to every spiritual want, and that is supported by what we suppose to be sufficient proof. Cer-

tain men rise and tell us that insuperable difficulties environ it. We reply, that we *must have a religion*, and ask them to show us a better before they deprive us of this. They bring forth their systems; we examine them, and instead of finding them to be the perfect apparatus for the cure of souls that their authors had advertised, they are "so checkered and speckled; pieces of joining so crossly indented and whimsically dovetailed; cabinets so variously inlaid, pieces of such diversified mosaic, such tessellated pavements without cement; here a bit of black stone and there a bit of white, that they are, indeed, a curious show, but utterly unsafe to touch, and unsure to stand upon."

And besides this, they are devoid of proof; they rest upon no evidence except the speculations of the single brain that evolved them. They are wholly incompatible with each other, and mutually destructive. It is necessary to choose among them; but there are no measures of certainty except in determining that all are false; they are alike unsupported by proofs, and alike absurd. Each is the muttering of some dreamer suffering under a midnight incubus; the reverie of a man prostrate in a fit of mental indigestion, brought on by the total neglect of his proper food, the truth of God, and by a voracious devouring of unripe knowledge. These phantasies we are called upon to accept instead of the Gospel.

No! Let us have a religion which at least claims to be divine; let us listen to teachers who speak with authority, and not as the scribes! Let us not descend so low as to accept our religion from a fellow-mortal, who does not even pretend to have come from God! Let us not substitute philosophy for religion, the thoughts of a subtle but perverted intellect for a divine revelation!

5. But aside from these special considerations, let us inquire whether man is competent to raise these objections at all. To what is he objecting? Is it to matters plain, simple and within his reach? On the other hand, it is to sublime and supernatural mysteries; it is to the higher and hidden doctrines of a system professing to descend from heaven. Now is reason

capable of pronouncing against revelation on the ground of these august mysteries? Is it not guilty of a wicked audacity in attempting to lift its feeble protest against these transcendent discoveries? Bishop Butler says that "although objections against the *evidence* of Christianity are most seriously to be considered, yet, objections against *Christianity itself* are, in a great measure, frivolous; almost all objections against it, except those which are alleged against the particular proofs of its coming from God."* If any objections to Christianity be frivolous, they are the very ones now under discussion—objections which oppose themselves to its higher doctrines. For, as was said before, a clear instance of the violation of any common and natural truth would be a valid objection, but it is far otherwise with the supernatural statements; they cannot violate any known truth, because they are confessedly above and without the circle of present knowledge. To quote the language of another, † "to justify a negative judgment upon internal grounds, there must be contradiction to previous knowledge. The very idea of the supernatural involves the idea that its discoveries are new. The field which it occupies is inaccessible to our natural faculties, and having no previous information of the subject it discloses, we cannot condemn it on account of inconsistency with known truth. The revelation, in this aspect, is the source of new ideas, perfectly independent of every other source, and it is to be expected that they should differ as widely from those derived from experience as these, in turn, differ among themselves. When truths beyond the reach of nature are announced upon the authority of God, a new world is opened to reason, a world of invisible realities and mysterious things. All may be strange and unexpected as the scenes of the moon or some distant planet would be to a traveller from earth. Still, as such a traveller would be guilty of great folly in refusing to credit his senses because the appearances before him differed from those

* Analogy, part II., cap 8

† Soc. Pres. Rev., vol. I., art. 1. Office of Reason, &c.

in the world he had left, so reason would be guilty of equal folly in rejecting the disclosures of revelation because they were unlike the discoveries of nature. We are no more competent to say, beforehand, what shall or shall not be revealed than we are to pronounce, independently of experience, upon the species of information which our senses might be expected to supply. The embryo in the womb is as capable of predicting what sort of a world it shall enter, as natural reason of predicting the things of the Spirit of God. Revelation may again be likened to a new sense, unfolding to reason a new field of ideas; and it would be no less preposterous to discredit its testimony because it was different from that of nature, than it would be to despise the information of the eye, because it differed from that of the ear. We have no natural measures of supernatural mysteries, and as they, therefore, cannot contradict philosophy or science, they cannot be judged by the wisdom of men."

6. These objections proceed on false notions of the proper limitation of our faculties. We admit the principle that "the *competency* of reason to judge in any case, is the *measure* of its *right*." Whatever reason is *able* to do, it has the *right* to do. It is a question strictly of *ability*. We deny the competency of reason to raise these objections. An arrogant notion of its sufficiency prompts to these speculations. Humility, the most emphatic dictate of philosophy, as well as a sacred duty of religion, will be the salutary lesson taught by correct views of the bounds within which reason can move.

These mysteries respect God; the difficulties presented by them hinge on their connection with him. Hence, by showing the relations of our knowledge to the Divine Being, we expose the absurdity of these objections, and indicate the legitimate bounds of our inquiries.

We lay it down as a radical truth, that in no such sense as these cavils suppose can we be said to *know God*.

The impossibility of thus knowing Him is *double*; first, as He is *infinite*, and secondly, as He is an infinite *Being*. If we know nothing of Him except that he is *infinite*, we can

demonstrate our ignorance ; and then, in the next place, we can give special reasons why we cannot know adequately such an infinite as He is.

Because He is infinite, we must fail to conceive His *being* and His *character*. In the case of the finite this latter difficulty does not meet us. We can think, separately, the qualities of man, and then embrace them all in a consummate thought, and thus present the true and adequate idea of man. But we cannot fully apprehend the Divine attributes *separately*, much less combine them in one grand conception. The *quality* of the attribute, if we may so express it, is, to some extent, appreciable by us ; but its *infinity*, which is essential to it as a characteristic of God, transports it beyond our reach.

To illustrate—we can think of power and of wisdom, but infinite power and wisdom we cannot cogitate. We can appreciate *love*, but *Divine* love we strive in vain to fathom.

Now, if His nature and perfections be necessarily presented under the character of *infinite*—if the sublime definition be true that “He is infinite and eternal in His being,” and in all His attributes, then it is evident that He stands the great representative of one pole of the *unconditioned*. But not entirely so—for, according to the aphorism of a great philosopher, “the Divinity, in a certain sense is *revealed*, in a certain sense is *concealed*.” “He exhibits himself under certain relations to us ; we only apprehend these relations, we cannot know His nature. We know Him in His relations—we do not know Him in Himself.” “He is, at once, known and unknown.”

“The last and highest consecration of all true religion must be an altar to the unknown and unknowable God”—that is to say, beyond our partial and relative knowledge of God, there stretches out a boundless expanse that we do not and cannot know.

Let it not be said that these relations *condition* God. They only limit and define our attitude with respect to certain manifestations of God, which, whatever else may be true of it, we aver is not the posture of cognition. His thoughts and affec-

tions (so to speak) are not changed or modified by these relations. To illustrate by contrast with man ; the qualities of our nature depend on the relationships that we hold for their existence. For example, the feeling of paternity cannot arise in the heart until a man becomes a father. But God, in giving us the adoption of sons and proclaiming himself "our Father," does not develop any principle of His nature hitherto dormant, but only exhibits what already existed.

In one view of the case then, God is the *unconditioned* ; in another, he is *relatively revealed*.

Under this distinction we propose to show the absurdity of these objections to a system claiming to be Divine, by proving, first, that considered as *unconditioned*, we know *nothing* of Him ; and secondly, that considered as *revealed*, we do not know *enough*.

The *unconditioned* cannot be an *object of thought*.

God is infinite—the infinite and the absolute, as defined by Hamilton, are the species and extremes of the unconditioned. It is a high principle of a correct philosophy that the unconditioned cannot be *immediately* known ; that our knowledge is only of that which is conditioned.

That which is limited by *space*, unless it be absolutely limited, that is, confined to the smallest portion of space possible, is conditioned ; if it be thus *unconditionally limited* it is called the absolute ; if it be unconditionally *unlimited* it has traversed the entire meridian of the conditioned, and stands at the other pole of the unconditioned, and is called the infinite. So, that which is limited by time, unless it be bounded by the smallest possible portion of time, is conditioned. And so, also, that which is comprehended in *thought* is conditioned ; for "to think is to condition." At the two extremes of the range of human conception, stand the infinite and the absolute ; on the one hand that which transcends our powers by its vastness, and on the other, that which avoids our curiosity by its littleness—as by a faint analogy, in the material world, the starry spheres surpass our observation, and the final atoms elude it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that because the infinite

and the absolute, occupy identical relations to thought, they sustain similar relations to existence; nor, on the other hand, because neither of them can be realized in thought, that neither exists. They are contradictories. The doctrine "of contradictories is the highest principle in Logic, it is, that of two contradictories, both cannot, but one must be true." We may not be able to conceive of either, but one may be shown to be false, and hence the other must be true. For example, man's *moral liberty*, and the doctrine of *fate*, are both inexplicable and inconceivable; yet, the latter being shown to be false as traversing our sense of responsibility, the former must be true, though it still remain inconceivable. But further, of these two species of the unconditioned, whatever is true of one, is false as respects the other; for example, if one exist, the other *does not* exist; so that though they bear the same relation to thought, they sustain exactly opposite relations to existence. Now we know, for a multiplicity of reasons, that the infinite exists, hence it follows necessarily that the absolute does not exist. In our thinking, both are arrived at by the law of "mental impotence;" they are negative ideas, and neither can be positively construed to the mind. But the absolute is nothing more than a negative idea, an "imbecility of the mind," while the infinite, beside this relation to thought, has a real and substantial existence among things. Then, on the principle that the knowledge of contradictories is one, it follows that we know as much of the absolute, which is proven to have no existence, as we do of the infinite, *i. e.* nothing.

Let us observe, in the next place, a striking fact which meets us at the outset; amid all the speculations of the world, man has never made any advance in his knowledge of the infinite, whether infinite space, or infinite duration, or infinite degree, or the nature of God—using the term "*nature*" to express the correlation of his attributes, and not the underlying essence, nor the relations of his attributes to us. Indeed, the best among the ancients as, *e. g.*, Aristotle, denied the infinite (unconditioned) to be an object of thought.

Again. In the arguments by which we prove the existence

of God, consider the state of the conclusion reached ; we first establish a negative proposition, and then, by the great law previously adverted to, infer its contradictory. To illustrate by the most direct and the most abstruse :

The argument from design simply enables us to deny the causeless existence of the world, and thus compels us to receive its contradictory, creation, which necessarily involves an intelligent agent. We are placed in a dilemma ; we behold the universe, we must either say that it exists without a cause, or that it was created. To admit the first would run counter to the law of causality which, though variously explicated by Philosophers, is a fundamental principle of our nature ; hence we must affirm the latter.

We cannot conceive either of an absolute beginning or of an eternal existence, and though knowing that, as contradictories, one must be true and the other false, we might not be able to determine between them ; but if the former be shown to be ultimately in conflict with the same causal law, then along with its falseness the truth of the other is proven, for "the knowledge of contradictories is one."

Further. A presumptive argument is afforded by the present state of this question in Philosophy. There are four systems of the philosophy of the unconditioned ; two deny that it can be known, or conceived, viz: the systems of Kant and Hamilton ; of the others, one affirms it to be cognisable, but non-conceivable ; the other, that it is both cognisable and conceivable ; but these affirmations are made on grounds that are demonstrably either false and absurd, or self-contradictory. The first of these two is that of Schelling ; his position is, "that the unconditioned is cognisable, but not conceivable ; it can be known only by a sinking back into identity with the absolute, but is incomprehensible by consciousness and reflection," which are only of the relative and different.

He admits that we cannot apprehend it by the ordinary faculties of the mind, but postulates a higher and extraordinary power by which we realize the absolute. We must lose sight of all we know by consciousness, must lose consciousness

itself, and being transported out of the world, and out of ourselves, we become absorbed into the infinite.

As described by a great critic, "this theory founds philosophy on the annihilation of consciousness, and on the identification of the unconscious philosopher with God." To reach the point where this sublime faculty of intuition shall meet and become identified with the absolute—"by abstraction we annihilate the object, and by abstraction we annihilate the subject of consciousness." But what is his emphatic question—what remains? The condemning answer is—"nothing." And further, this scheme, having destroyed the bonds of nature, utterly fails to connect the finite with the infinite; and so, also, it is unable to show how the knowledge acquired by intuition is conveyed to consciousness.

Thus this doctrine, if tried by common sense, is absurd; if by philosophy, is false; if by religion, is blasphemous.

The next system attempting to afford man a knowledge of the infinite is that of Cousin.

He tells us that we know the absolute, as we know the conditioned, by "consciousness and reflection;" that in the very act of apprehending the finite, our minds rebound and grasp the infinite; thus appears the radical vice of his system, viz: that he construes the finite and infinite as contradictories, whereas they are only contraries. This error vitiates his whole discussion.

But, further, he is plainly self-contradictory. For example, he says, "I can conceive God only in his manifestations, and the signs which he gives of his existence."* This observation is just and true; and we draw from it the inevitable inference that we cannot know God in His infinitude; for, as our author himself says, "in order absolutely to comprehend the infinite it is necessary to have an infinite power of comprehension, and that is not granted to us. God, in manifesting himself, retains something in himself, which nothing finite can absolutely

* *Hist. Phil.*, 2 Series, vol. 1, p. 21. *Note.*

manifest; consequently it is not permitted us to comprehend absolutely.*

Now we take this to be a statement of the truth expressed by us previously, that "God is both known and unknown," and which is shortly after explicitly enunciated by him in the terms, that God is at once the living God, and the God concealed, "*Deus vivus et Deus absconditus*," and it follows irresistibly that it is His infinity which lifts Him immeasurably above our comprehension. But, at variance with all this, our author, on the same page, utters the remarkable and inconsistent declaration, that "we have the most precise idea of infinitude." Now, we feel certain that he cannot reconcile this collision of sentiment without—as indeed he has done—making his infinite nothing more than an indefinite; his absolute but a relative.

But again, he says "God is essentially active and creative," *i. e.* God is an absolute cause, *i. e.* we cannot conceive of Him except as "active and creative;" but action and creation are conditions. Now, the infinite cannot be conditioned; hence it is not as infinite that we can conceive God, *i. e.* the Divine infinity is not an object of consciousness. Thus, in order to connect the infinite with the finite—God with the world—he must condition the infinite, which is a contradiction in terms.

All this, and more, will be found exhibited by a writer already repeatedly referred to, in a review of a work of this author, preceding and introducing the one from which our excerpts are taken. He proves most conclusively that "the restrictions to which Cousin subjects intelligence, divine and human, implicitly deny a knowledge, even a conception of the absolute, both to God and man."

Thus, these two systems fail to subject the infinite to our conception; every scheme making a similar attempt may be fundamentally identified with one or the other of these. Hence

* Cousin's Hist. of Mod. Phil., vol. 1, sec. 5. Note 1, p. 104. See also, Cousin's Elements of Psychology, p. 580.

we conclude that if the unconditioned be cogitable, philosophy has utterly failed to articulate the method ; and this we present as a presumptive argument against its possibility.

In the next place, our ability to conceive the unconditioned *may be tested*.

Let us endeavor to form the conception of the unconditionally unlimited—that which is so great that it cannot be any greater—of a whole that cannot be conceived of as the part of a still greater whole. So, on the other hand, let us strive to realize the unconditionally *limited*—that which is so small that it cannot possibly be any smaller—a part that cannot be conceived of as a whole, embracing other parts. Let us attempt to pursue the infinite divisibility of matter ; or, let us conceive a universe so vast that we cannot add to it another world. We sink prostrate under the superhuman task. In striving to attain to the infinite, we only reach the indefinite—“ than which no two ideas are more opposed.”

Endeavor to think of infinite time ; we add year to year—century to century, millenium to millenium, and at last only reach an indefinite ; for we can still add another period to it, we can double it, we can quadruple it.

But again. We cannot realize a million of years, much less *eternal duration*. We can express, by a few figures, ideas of number which the mind will in vain strive to grasp ; how then shall it embrace that which all numbers fail to convey ?

But again. Suppose the mind able to retain and comprehend these ideas of time, and let it, with every successive act of thought add millions to billions, it is clear that *eternity* alone will afford scope to gather, and to express, the infinite conception. Hence, to say nothing of his powers, the limitations on man's existence debar him from the idea of the infinite. He must, himself, be *eternal* (not simply immortal, because this involves the idea of *beginning*, and of the lack of completion) ere he can compass the idea of eternity.

Think of *infinite space* ; however we enlarge our conceptions of the extent of space, we are still able to think of a surrounding space beyond ; and if we embrace that, a still wider

circle expands; and encompassing that, a still mightier circumference meets us, and we feel that the final periphery must be infinite only because we utterly fail to compass it.

If neither infinite time nor infinite space can be conceived by us, how shall we comprehend *Him* who filleth *all time* and *all space*?

To quote the language of the great Philosopher* whose guidance we have followed for some time, and from whom we now part—"Thought necessarily supposes *conditions*; and as the greyhound cannot outstrip his shadow, nor the eagle outsoar the atmosphere in which he floats, and by which alone he may be supported, so the mind cannot transcend that sphere of limitation, within and through which, exclusively, the possibility of thought is realized."

This closes the evidence for the first proposition—that "God, as *infinite*, cannot be an object of thought."

Bear in mind precisely what we are attempting to show—not that we have *no* idea of God—for as we shall see presently, we have many sublime and blessed ideas of Him. But the general proposition is, that our idea is *inadequate*. This is proven by two lines of reasoning—the one just passed over, which points out a certain quality of the Divine Being, viz: *infinity*, and affirms that we are unable to form any conception of it. To illustrate, we can conceive of *space* and *time*, they are necessary conditions of thought; but of infinite space and of infinite time we cannot conceive. *Infinity* every where staggers us. The inference is that as this characteristic of God is absolutely hidden from us, the clearest view of other features in His nature would still leave Him partly shrouded in mystery; our conception of Him as a great whole, would still be defective.

The argument on which we now enter tends to show that even of so much of His character as we do know, our notion is necessarily *imperfect*—that in this sense we cannot know Him fully.

* Sir Wm. Hamilton. Philosophy of the Unconditioned.

The final conclusion will be, that as in one view He is entirely beyond our reach, and in another only imperfectly known, we are incapable of judging of His character, and purposes, and ways.

We cannot, in any sense, know God *fully*.

We know any thing only *relatively* and phenomenally ; we know nothing absolutely. For example, we know nothing more of matter than its properties ; and only such of these as display themselves ; we know nothing of that of which these are the qualities—nothing of its *essence*. It is only by a psychological necessity that reason affirms its existence ; it is only from direct revelation that faith receives the statement.

And so of mind, we know nothing of it except its qualities, and these only as they are manifested. We know and can know nothing of the substance in which they reside. We can pronounce no judgment on these exhibitions unless they bear some relation to previous exhibitions. Our knowledge of the gravity of matter does not enable us to affirm, or deny, respecting its expansibility ; but our knowledge of its extension fits us to deny its absolute compressibility.

Our acquaintance with the relations of the mind to truth in general, and to moral truth in particular, may enable us to determine whether the judgment and conscience are to be distinguished, or are identical ; but this investigation contributes nothing directly to contravene or establish the facts respecting memory. So, also, we know the Deity only phenomenally, the attributes we ascribe to Him (independently of Scripture) are but generalizations of his various modes of action. We know what He is, only from what He has done.

If, now, He should manifest qualities new and different from any before exhibited, we possess no measures by which to judge of them, or, if in a new procedure attributes formerly known should be developed in connection with others hitherto concealed, we are not competent to pronounce what modification of action this fresh adjustment will entail.

Now, the Gospel is a new and an extraordinary display of

the Divine perfections; hence, we are disqualified from pronouncing against it, either as false or absurd.

The notion that our ignorance of God, and His purposes, is entirely owing to our earthly and fallen state, and that when disembodied and glorified, we shall know these mysteries perfectly, or even approximate a clear conception of them, is entirely assumptive. We yield our opponents too much in admitting it. Philosophy and religion alike rebuke the opinion. Instructed by the one, and armed with the other, we drive our enemies from the out-posts of infidelity, into the very citadel of *Atheism*; for, as a heathen writer says, "a God known would be no God at all."

Our present untoward circumstances are undoubtedly hindrances; but a permanent and immovable barrier is found in the limitation of our faculties; a limitation attaching to us as creatures. We can never fully know, because we shall always be finite. As Christians, we are confident of the correctness of this principle, which we urge resistlessly against our adversaries, because it accords with the statements of Scripture respecting another and higher order of intelligence. Peter, referring to the exhibition of the Divine perfections now being enacted on earth, says, "which things the angels desire to look into;" and Paul, in speaking of the mystery which, from the beginning of the world, had been hid in God, and of the manifold wisdom involved in it, and of the eternal purpose embracing it, declared that all these things are to be made known to the heavenly principalities by the *Church*. It follows from this that the lofty intelligences of heaven are dependent on the transactions of earth for fuller insight into the perfections and nature of God.

Now, while this excludes the possibility of such attainments in the heavenly state as we sometimes dream of, it furnishes important hints respecting the relation of the highest created intelligence to the infinite Being. It is evident from the passages quoted that they do not directly gaze upon and conceive the nature and attributes of God, nor fully comprehend His works and designs; but that by earnest study of the develop-

ment of His plans, they catch glimpses of Him, who, to them, as to all creatures, is unknowable and inconceivable. We also infer that there will be no radical change in our method of acquiring knowledge; we shall possess increased facilities, both by reason of personal improvement, and a more advantageous position, but the conditions of thought will remain essentially the same.

God is infinite; but this is not a conclusive expression of Deity. He is not only infinite, He is also a Spirit; He is not only infinite, but power, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness and truth are attributes of His nature. True, infinity may be predicated of every thing appertaining to God—His love is infinite, His justice is infinite, His power is infinite, His wisdom is infinite; but infinity does not destroy these qualities; it exalts them, and renders them perfections. God, then, is something else than simply infinite—this is our loftiest idea of Him, *He is God*; that is, by whatever we ascribe to Him as God, other than infinity, He is distinguished from other infinities—space, time, and degree: even as by infinity He is distinguished from whatever is limited.

God is not identical, in our conception, with infinite space and duration; yet they are infinite. Now, in what is God distinguished from other infinities? In two ways—by attributes, and by relations. These, considered as *qualities* and *relations*, we can partially apprehend; considered as *infinite*, we cannot apprehend them at all; and considered as the attributes and relations of *an infinite Being*, our notion must be utterly inadequate.

God is a spirit, and has manifested the attributes of power, wisdom, justice, goodness; these are clearly seen from the creation of the world; being understood by the things that are made; so that men are without excuse in their ignorance and sin. And they are revealed in His word with fuller light, and greater emphasis; and thus impose on us the highest obligations to render the correspondent duties.

We conceive and feel these attributes as substantial and sublime realities; yet we are deeply conscious that our notion

of them falls far below the reality. And the comparatively feeble impressions they make on us, show that they have never been pressed on our minds with their full weight; still these attributes distinguish Him from other infinities, and give us the idea, not of space, or of time, or of degree, but of *God*.

In the next place, God sustains to us the relations of Creator, of Ruler, of Judge, of Saviour, of Father; no other infinite is capable of such relations, and in apprehending these relations, we embrace the distinctive characteristics of God.

It is our glory and happiness that we can contemplate Him in these lofty and lovely attitudes. But we have not exhausted their significance; we do not know all that is meant by these gracious terms. We count not ourselves to have apprehended, but are continually reaching forth unto those things which are before, and pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. And let us remember that this confession of ignorance is made by an inspired Apostle, who had conversed face to face with the Son of God, who had been wrapt to the third heaven, and permitted to witness mysteries which it was not lawful to disclose. He comes from the immediate presence of God; his spirit radiant like the face of Moses, with celestial brightness, and under the impulse of the Divine Spirit tells us that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for them that love Him. And this is our conclusion—that we only know in part.

But it may be asked, can we appreciate these relations without knowing Him fully? *We can!* We may know *so much* of Him without knowing all. We recognize the sun as the light of the world, and the centre of our system, and yet Astronomy fails to describe the nature of that glorious orb; and cannot tell whether it be a world on fire, or an opaque body surrounded by a luminous and heated atmosphere, or whether the vast conflagration be supplied with combustible matter by the constant falling in of comets.

The child loves and recognizes its father, but may be utterly unaware that he is a powerful statesman, a profound scholar,

or a mighty captain. It knows his relationship to it; it feels the tenderness he lavishes, but of his great schemes, lofty thoughts, and gigantic labors it is entirely ignorant. So we may know what God is to us, but we do not know what He is in Himself, or even what relations He sustains to other creatures. If the instruments of investigation fail us in the one case, the power of thought may be lacking in the other; if we deny this, we must claim ourselves to be infinite.

If, in conclusion, it be asked why such insuperable difficulties are allowed to baffle us, it may be remarked, in the first place, that it could not have been otherwise. Every created being must be finite; that is to say, no creature can embrace the whole of knowledge, for knowledge is infinite; hence the barrier exists in himself, and though the present obstacles should be overcome, others beyond will meet us; the only change possible would be to remove them to a little greater distance.

In the next place, we can perceive why they are placed at the threshold of our being. They constitute a salutary discipline by teaching us the lessons of humility and human weakness. It is proper that these wholesome instructions should be conveyed to us at the outset of our inquiries, otherwise, man's arrogance, being unimpeded in the beginning of its course, would acquire a resistless force. And, in the next place, were the lessons removed too far from us, but few would reach the point of instruction; the voice of rebuke to human pride would fall upon the ear of a solitary thinker here and there, instead of being sounded in the hearing of every man who thinks at all. As most men derive their notions of the summit of Mont Blanc, not from personal observation, but from, it may be, the exaggerated accounts of more adventurous travellers, so the doctrine of the limitation of our faculties would not be received as an universal truth, but simply as the uncertain report of some philosopher who had been in the clouds.

But while Christianity presents these sublime mysteries in such an aspect as to rebuke the arrogance, and to pour contempt on the pride of the unbeliever, she holds them out to

the true children of God as the objects of their faith, veneration and love. Like the pillar of fire, they illumine the pathway of Israel, but shed thick darkness on Israel's foes.

As the ancient mysteries were carefully shrouded from public gaze, and none but the initiated were permitted to behold their awful secrets; or by a more fit comparison, as only he who was appointed of God, could enter the Holy of Holies, where dwelt the dreadful Shechinah, so, "no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." Thus it is that that marvellous thanksgiving fell so naturally from the lips of Him who stood with little children in his arms, caressing and blessing them, but spurned from his presence the lordly Sadducee, the sanctimonious Pharisee and the haughty Scribe: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."



ARTICLE IV.

PRESBYTERIAN PREACHING AT THE SOUTH.

The Presbyterian Church maintains its ancient repute for the soundness of its doctrines, the excellence of its polity, and the learning of its ministry. Its attention to education, and its adaptedness to the religious training of the young, now as formerly, commend it to the favorable consideration of all intelligent persons. Its firm conservatism in these days of novelties in politics, morals and science, gives to it a strong hold upon the sympathies and the judgment of the public. It is still a bulwark against error, and a standard against iniquity. Its government still illustrates the dream of civil perfectibility—strength in administration, with popular representation. It rejoices still in its historic renown. It still points without ex-