

THE
ATTAINMENTS OF MEN
IN
SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE,
CONTRASTED.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF REV. H. A. BOARDMAN, D.D.,

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8. 1854.

BY THE

REV. JOSEPH H. JONES,

PASTOR OF THE SIXTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

1797 - 1856

PHILADELPHIA:
JOSEPH M. WILSON,
SOUTHWEST CORNER OF NINTH AND ARCH STREETS.
1854.

CORRESPONDENCE.

PHILADELPHIA, October 12, 1854.

REV. AND DEAR SIR :

We listened with much interest to the sermon preached by you in the Tenth Church, during the absence of our Pastor, on the morning of the 8th instant. We thought it a very forcible and impressive exposition of the sentiment, that "the world by wisdom knew not God;" and we think the argument adapted to be very useful, especially to a certain class of educated and reflecting minds. Will you oblige us with a copy of the discourse for publication?

We are, with much respect,

Your friends and servants,

R. C. GRIER,

CHS. B. PENROSE,

PAUL T. JONES,

WM. H. ARMSTRONG,

WM. E. DUBOIS,

C. B. JAUDON,

C. F. BECK,

JOHN K. FINDLAY.

To the REV. JOSEPH H. JONES, D.D.

PHILADELPHIA, October 14, 1854.

MY DEAR BROTHER :

I did not have the pleasure of hearing the sermon which you preached in my Church on the last Sabbath, but I am

quite sure from the reports which have reached me, that it ought to be printed. I sincerely hope you will consent to its publication; and in so doing, you will oblige, not only the gentlemen who have requested a copy of it for the press, but also,

Your friend and brother,

HENRY A. BOARDMAN.

To the REV. JOSEPH H. JONES, D.D.

GENTLEMEN :

This discourse, on "The Attainments of Men in Secular and Religious Knowledge, Contrasted," is published in deference rather to your judgment than my own. That the request comes from those who do not sustain to the author the relation of parishioners, allows me to infer, that it is your commendable design, less to compliment the preacher, than to aid him in his work. If any among the readers of the sermon, should ask under what specious form of temptation the writer was induced to send it to the press, he can only reply, by referring them to the well-known and honored names appended to the very obliging notes addressed as above to

Yours, respectfully,

JOSEPH H. JONES.

To the Hon. ROBERT C. GRIER,
 Hon. CHARLES B. PENROSE,
 PAUL T. JONES, Esq.,
 WM. H. ARMSTRONG, Esq.,
 WM. E. DUBOIS, Esq.,
 C. B. JAUDON, M.D.,
 C. F. BECK, M.D.,
 Hon. J. K. FINDLAY,
 Rev. HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D.D.

DISCOURSE.

“The world by wisdom knew not God.”—1 Cor. 1:21.

It is not meant, by this remark, to disparage the human intellect. The apostle does not intend to speak reproachfully of man's attainments, in the knowledge of much that is highly important; neither does he discard the use of reason in the investigation of the truths of religion, however incompetent to fathom its mysteries. But as there is a vastness in the works of God, which the mind of man cannot grasp, a remoteness of some which puts them beyond the reach of his eye, so there are qualities in his character which his reason cannot discover. There have been different theories of men to account for this intellectual incapacity, and in another place the apostle gives his own. In the text, however, he merely asserts the fact, that with all his powers for acquiring a knowledge of that which is beautiful, useful, and true, he could never acquire just and worthy conceptions of the divine character.

The object of this discourse is to notice

I. THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD AS EVINCED BY THEIR ATTAINMENTS IN HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.

II. THEIR REMARKABLE FAILURE IN REGARD TO THAT CAPITAL TRUTH WHICH IS MENTIONED BY THE APOSTLE.

Both subjects of vast extent, in pursuing which our greatest difficulty is to be sufficiently short. To give a history of human attainments in knowledge, as proposed in our first inquiry, is to go over the annals of our race from the beginning.

The change wrought by the apostacy on man's intellectual capacity is not so fully explained in the Scripture, as is the effect on his moral or spiritual. What was the progress of the antediluvians in human knowledge, and did it correspond to the length of their life, we have no authentic record to inform us. Doubtless there were farmers, artificers, manufacturers, poets, orators, and physicians in the days of Adam, Seth, and Methusaleh, as there are now.

We read of workers in brass and iron, of harp and organ builders before the flood. The ark in which Noah was preserved was a monument of architectural skill, which has never been exceeded. Nor need we any other proof of their proficiency in the science of masonry, than that they should have even projected or proposed to build such a structure as the tower of Babel.

And although the surviving products and conquests

of mind as displayed in what the ancients accomplished. are comparatively few, yet they are of exceeding value, as demonstrating that men had then the same tastes and mental capacities as have their children now who live six thousand years after them. What libraries of literature and science, of poetry, philosophy, metaphysics, mathematics, and history, may have been buried under the ruins of their desolated cities, who of us can conjecture? But what amazing powers of mind are exhibited in the building of the cities themselves. Not to speak of the towers and temples in them, the palaces and magnificent dwellings of the rich, with their costly furniture, how great must have been the wisdom of the minds that planned and built them; that set up walls, which, like Nineveh's, constructed by a grandson of Noah, and covered by the rubbish of centuries, have been lately found by the enterprising Layard, in a state of wonderful preservation. And what was the genius displayed in that architectural prodigy of the East, the city of Babylon, if half of what we read in our scraps of ancient history be credible? What in Tadmor of the desert, the more modern Palmyra, and the abode of the splendid Princess Zenobia? And in Jerusalem, its sacred temple, which gave employment to more than one hundred and eighty thousand Hebrews and Canaanites, was seven years in building, after all its materials had been prepared and brought to its site.

costing forty-six tons of gold and silver. We are speaking of these mighty structures as the product of mind merely, as showing the power of the human intellect, to invent and construct, to explore mysteries in nature, and to combine her materials with astonishing taste and ingenuity. Indeed, nothing seems likely to be long concealed, which the wisdom of the world has penetration to reach. Its discoveries and triumphs, constitute the difference between savage life and civilized, between the nude and brutish aborigines of Patagonia or Madagascar, and the learned and polished Briton, or Anglo-Saxon. We see them in every department of art, literature, and science, in all the conditions and avocations of life, and in all possible circumstances: in the material, color, texture, and make of our garments, contrasted with the fig-leaves sewed together by Eve, or the coats of skins which were the divinely-provided substitute. We see the progress of men in the wisdom of this world in our commodious houses, compared with the caves and huts of the barbarians; in our tools, made of iron, steel, and brass, brought out of the mines of the earth, and wrought into thousands of various implements, in place of the sharpened stones and bones of the aboriginals of the island or forest. We see it in our machinery, by which the process of almost every sort of useful labor has been so incredibly shortened and perfected; in our various carriages,

our ships, and means of locomotion, which have united the continents of the earth, and made us neighbors to our antipodes. We see the wisdom of the world in our pens and books, in the stock of the stationer, instead of the papyrus, dried leaves, slabs of stone, brass or wood, tanned skins of animals, chisel, stylus of iron, and brush, the clumsy dependence of the scholars of former ages. We see it in all the departments of useful human knowledge, and in all the learned professions; in medicine, jurisprudence, and government.

What marvellous powers have been displayed in the investigations of the natural philosopher in exploring the fossil and mineral treasures of the earth. In collecting and classifying the stones, plants, animals of the land, and the fishes of the sea; in analyzing and separating the elementary principles of the air, the water, our various kinds of food, by taking in pieces all the works of nature around us, and holding up to distinctive view the several elements which compose them. And then look upward: contrast the wild conjectures and superstitions of the star-gazers of antiquity with the demonstrations of modern astronomy, by which we have as definite and certain knowledge of the phenomena of the heavens, as we have of the geography of the earth. And when we contemplate the trophies of wisdom as displayed in the discoveries of some, we are almost tempted

to offer a tribute of respect, which is forbidden to mortals like ourselves.

Think for instance, of able treatises on astronomy, and mechanical philosophy, of a system of mechanics, and a discovery of the laws of the different mechanical powers, by a child only eight years old, before he knew that any work had been written on that subject. Such a child was James Ferguson, of Scotland.

Think of the mind, that, in youth, could discover the principle of the most perfect measure of time which we possess. And yet less than three hundred years ago, an Italian lad, not twenty years of age, while standing one day in the Metropolitan church of Pisa, observed the movements of a lamp suspended from the ceiling, which some accident had disturbed and caused to vibrate.

The youth saw at once, the important applications which might be made of the thought, on the equability of motion, that had suggested itself to him. Having taken care to ascertain, by experiment, the truth of his conjecture, the result was the complete discovery of that principle which has been of such immense importance ever since, derived from the regularity of oscillations in the pendulum. This young philosopher was the Italian Galileo.

At the age of twelve, Blaise Paschal, who had been purposely kept by his father in such perfect ignorance of mathematics, that he did not know the meaning of

the word, began the study of his own accord, in secret. Without the assistance of teacher or books to give him the least hint to direct him, he had advanced, before it was discovered by any member of the family, to the thirty-second proposition of the first book of Euclid, having drawn his diagrams with charcoal on the floor of his chamber. At sixteen, he wrote his treatise on Conic Sections, with so much ability, that Descartes attributed it to his father, himself an eminent mathematician, and not to the son. At nineteen, he invented an arithmetical machine, much admired for its ingenuity. At twenty-three he corrected and improved the Torricellian experiment, and soon after solved a problem proposed by Marin Mersennus, which had hitherto perplexed the ablest mathematicians of Europe.

In Dr. Pemberton's account of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy, he alludes to the interesting fact, in the Saviour's teachings, that "so many of his most valuable discourses were suggested by some ordinary circumstance of things then especially before him." Such, for example, was his use made of the fig-tree, or mountain that was near, or of persons going into their fields to reap, or some incident that occurred in his intercourse with the people. The learned writer refers to the Saviour's example, as having been copied in an humble sense by this illustrious philosopher, in opening his mind to impressions from every object around him for

the advancement of science. And who can compute the value of his intellectual labors? What must be the mind that could discover and demonstrate at any time, the grand principle which unites the great bodies of the universe? How few, comparatively, have found themselves competent even to read and understand his works; to comprehend his philosophical expositions? How profound then must be the intellect which was able to invent and write them? But rapt in those sublime speculations on space and motion, which were then engaging his thoughts, he was sitting one day in his garden, at the early age of twenty-two, when he perceived an apple fall from the tree beside him. This simple incident, witnessed by millions before and since without a second thought, suggested to Newton's mind the great doctrine of gravitation. Indeed, the nearest approach that we can make to a proper idea of the omniscience of the Creator, is by contemplating the amazing capacities of his creatures. The same thought is forced upon us that evidently filled the mind of David, when he exclaims: *He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He know?* If such be the eye, and the ear, and the wisdom of man, what must be the intellect of Him who gave him these faculties, and from whom these endowments emanate? And yet, among all these evidences of the power of the human mind, we find affecting proof of its imbecility.

While its progress in certain directions seems to be illimitable, it has been onward from the beginning, and none can predict or even imagine a termination; yet there are others in which it is foiled, and its giant powers betray the feebleness of infancy. In that grand department of knowledge pertaining to himself as a moral and accountable creature, and more especially to the Being who made him, his investigations have been fruitless. They have been characterized by extravagance, superstitious error, and falsehood. Ever since the knowledge of God was lost in the darkness which followed the apostacy, the studies of some of the wisest of mankind have been directed to this single point of inquiry, without success. A phenomenon in morals, of which we have the only solution in the repulsive doctrine of revelation, that the eye of the human mind is morally dim. That for reasons too familiar to my hearers to require a rehearsal, the true character of the divine Being is undiscoverable; or, as the sentiment is expressed by the apostle, in our text, *The world by wisdom knew not God.*

The prominent facts treasured up in the history of polytheism, by which alone this abasing truth is fully proved, are so accessible to those who are given to reading, that little can be quoted which they have not already seen. But there are other proofs among the annals of Christendom, in the examples of men who bear the Christian name, which, though more

affecting, are less familiar. These men, though born and educated under the light by which the character of God is revealed, are in the same ignorance, essentially, as others are, who have always dwelt in darkness. The practical bearings of this humbling truth are unspeakably important. Some to whom I refer, have gained a good degree of public respect and confidence, on account of their worldly wisdom and attainments in literature and science. Through their agency in the use of their attractive pens, there have been disseminated such views of this great fundamental truth of religion, as are essentially heathenish or atheistic.

II. I proceed, then, to adduce a few proofs of our second proposition, which asserts MAN'S NATIVE INCAPACITY TO DISCOVER THE TRUE CHARACTER OF GOD.

I have said that the evidence furnished by the absurd fables of polytheism alone, is conclusive, inasmuch as some of the wildest, most unreasonable and extravagant, have been invented and believed among those persons and people who were reputed wisest. Look to the nations of the East, the Persians, Arabians, Idumæans, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and others, all of whom gloried in their wisdom, and had their magi and philosophical teachers. Let us pause a moment on the last in my enumeration, the land of Egypt, once called the nurse of the sciences, and where the in-

ventive powers of the mind were as signally developed, perhaps, as among any people of antiquity.

Yet with all their secular wisdom, they were the grossest fools in religion that the world ever saw. They worshipped not only birds, beasts and reptiles, such as the ibis, sheldrake, the ox, and other quadrupeds, the serpent, crocodile, and scarabeus, but even the lotus, leek, and onion, which gave occasion to Juvenal, the Roman satirist, to call them "the pious people, whose gods grew in their gardens." Nor was it materially better among the Orientals generally, where pyrolatry and ophiolatry, or the worshipping of fire and of serpents, was incorporated with monuments and imprinted on medals, which have been preserved to the present, as curious relics of antiquity.

But the great lights of the pagan world were their philosophers, men of study, of letters, and often men of mighty mental powers, such as have been surpassed by none in any age who have lived after them. If the knowledge of God could be discovered by any, we should have found it with them; but the few fragments of their productions which have come down to us, are enough to prove their utter failure. On every topic of moral and religious truth they were more or less divided. Varro says, that they had nearly three hundred opinions concerning the chief good, though ignorant alike of the character of the true God. By one sect or school, he was regarded merely as a great first

cause, or as the first wheel in a series of wheels, and not different from the rest of the links that succeeded him. Another held that there was no God, but a kind of fatalism pervading heaven and earth, which necessitated fixed results; but that there was no controlling intelligent power. The Epicureans taught that God was a being wrapt in selfishness and self-complacency, and perfectly regardless of all that was doing in the world which involved the welfare of its intelligent creatures. A fourth believed that there was a multiplicity of gods, myriads of them superintending the world, as among the Athenians, of whom the satirist Petronius, a cotemporary of Paul, said that it was "easier to find a god than a man among them." Some of the objects of heathen worship, moreover, were the greatest monsters in crime that ever walked the earth. One was a thief; another, a mere sensualist and drunkard; a third, a dissipated and abandoned courtesan; and a fourth, a savage that gloried in battle and bloodshed. Nor is there a lust in the human heart, nor a vice in human conduct, which was not positively deified, and which did not more or less characterize some one or all of the gods in the pantheon of antiquity.

And what was the intellect of these worshippers of canonized depravity? What their wisdom and capacity for discoveries in arts, literature, and science? Need I say that the region in which these moral

abominations prevailed was the country of Homer and Hesiod; of Sophocles, Euripedes, and Theocritus; of Plato and Socrates! of philosophers and poets the most distinguished that ever adorned the history of mankind. These miserable, wicked, and filthy gods, were worshipped in the very country where such splendid scholars lived; where Homer and Virgil sang, Plato discoursed philosophy, and Demosthenes and Cicero pleaded with unsurpassed eloquence! In the very country that gave birth and education to artists, which the moderns admire but cannot approach; whose paintings and statues are still the masterpieces of the world!

In the philosophic poem of Lucretius, "On the Nature of Things," we see the exhibition of masterly genius, throwing around the atheistic tenets of Epicurus and Empedocles, then prevalent at Athens, all the attractions of an enchanting pen, that made him the rival of Maro; and though said to have been written in a state of delirium, caused by a poisonous philtre taken unconsciously, yet it doubtless exhibits the religious opinions, which this distinguished poet and philosopher had deliberately formed, in his days of mental saneness. And that after his death, the serious-minded Tully, who sometimes wrote so devoutly, could have volunteered to revise and publish such effusions of shocking impiety, notwithstanding their classic elegance, awakens painful fears that even his

own views of the gods were more vague and unsettled than would be inferred from his well-known work, "On their Nature." And has mere philosophy or poetry discoursed more wisely at any period since, or is it better in the heathen world now? What is the response to such an inquiry from the Hindoos, whose recognized gods amount to the enormous catalogue of not less than three hundred and thirty millions? What from the people of China, who have gods in every house and in every grove, and which are manufactured by themselves? When in China, Gutzlaff, the missionary, saw it written on sign-boards, "gods made and repaired in this house." Can anything be conceived of the human mind more stupid and sottish than this? And yet these Hindoos, in mathematical science, are among the most accomplished people of the world. They are supposed to be the first inventors of the highest branch of it, the differential calculus; and the discovery of the mariner's compass, and of gunpowder, is clearly and plainly attributable to the Chinese.

The Hindoos, moreover, have most of the English literature. They have Shakspeare, Milton, Addison, and Johnson, all translated into Hindostanee. More than all, and worst of all, they have English infidelity: Hume's Philosophical Essays, are among their popular works, which Hindoo wits and scholars read with much avidity. Dr. Duff says, that on the banks of

the Ganges, he has debated with learned Hindoos, some of the most abstruse questions of metaphysical science that have ever been agitated in the highest schools of Christendom.

But the most affecting examples of this moral blindness are found within the precincts of nominal Christendom, where the light of Revelation has disclosed the true character of God, but the eyes of men have failed to see it. Indeed the hallowing influences of sacred truth rejected have served only to make their minds blinder, and their hearts harder.

Lord Bolingbroke, who doubtless partook of the sacraments of the Church of England, at least while chancellor of the exchequer and secretary of state, did not know the God that he thus hypocritically worshipped. This celebrated statesman and scholar maintains, that the only attributes of God are his power and wisdom; and that a superintending Providence is an absurdity too great to be imagined.

David Hume had the privilege of first seeing the light in Edinburgh, then the residence of some of the best scholars, and most eminent Christian divines; but though spared to the age of threescore years and six, this unhappy man never knew the Being that made and preserved him. In his writings, carefully reviewed and prepared by himself, but not all published till after his death, he declares that it is unreasonable to believe in a wise and good God; that

the notion of future rewards and punishments is a mere invention of priestcraft.

Edward Gibbon, with the best advantages for religious instruction in early life, never made such a discovery of the truths of Revelation as to retain and obey, when tempted to set them at nought. Thus he became a wandering star in the hemisphere of religion, a proteus and a pendulum, vibrating between Protestantism and Catholicism: now a Protestant, then a Catholic; then a Protestant again, and finally an infidel, like Julian in his apostacy, afraid to be left alone.

Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher, who maintained that vice and virtue, Creator and creature, were all terms invented by man, but not founded in reality, was the son of a clergyman. But darker still, in some respects, were the understandings of Voltaire, D'Alembert, Mirabeau, and Diderot, of Catholic Christendom, who boldly avowed their disbelief in any God, any responsibility of man, or any rewards or punishments in a world to come.

But of all demonstrations which the history of human wisdom betrays of its moral incapacity, none shock us so much, and are more atrocious and dreadful, than those which are furnished by the scholars of Christian Germany. Men who boast of being the thinkers of the world, with minds of unsurpassed acuteness and strength, enriched with treasures of

every sort of useful human knowledge, and even devoting their life to the study of the Scriptures, aided by the critical and exegetical labors of others, having at hand the best apparatus for successful investigation of the originals which the wisdom of man has ever provided, and yet utterly mistaking the first, and simplest elementary truths which the Bible teaches. Some of the wisest, the most learned among them, men whose impression on the nation is widest and deepest, have not discovered even the being of a personal God. The very divine who has written an elaborate life of Christ, contends from the beginning of his book to the end, that such a being as Christians believe in, called Christ, never had an existence. He admits, it is true, that such a person as Jesus lived and died, who believed himself to be Christ. But that the historical Christ of the gospels was no person at all; was nothing more than the notions, and expectations and superstitions of the popular mind, personified at the time when the Messiah was expected. The God of the Bible, with him, was only "a process of thought." Apart from the universe and out of this process, which is eternally unfolding itself in the mind of man, there is no God. Such is the pantheistic faith of one of the most learned divines of Germany, who still occupies without disturbance a pulpit supported by the government.

No person uninformed in the religious history of the

learned class among the Germans, can have any conception of their spiritual blindness. Of the extravagant, audacious, and blasphemous outpouring of elaborated infidelity, under the various forms of Pantheism, Naturalism, Spiritualism, Transcendentalism, &c., from the churches and the press, from the colleges and theological schools of this land of unsurpassed intellectual light, but moral darkness.

As if inspired from beneath to revive and restore the work of Satan, they have exhumed and brought again upon the earth the buried and forgotten heresies and *lies spoken in the name of the Lord* in former ages. Thus, even these daring impieties of the German mind are not new. They are but little more than a remoulding or concoction of the materials furnished by other eminent scholars long before them. They are but the counterparts and caricatures of the darkest and rudest ages, a reproduction of their mistakes. Hence it has been well remarked, that the far-famed schoolmen, the dark writers of the Dark Ages, threw light upon the philosophical writings of Germany. They admire what the rest of the world have rejected, and in their backward march, revert to the ancient standards, and replace the idols that have been forsaken. The atheist Spinoza is thought now to be an accomplished philosopher, and Thomas Aquinas an undoubted authority, that learned, but most mystical and papistical writer, in defence of whom, Henry VIII.

composed the book which procured from the Pope the title of Defender of the Faith.

The rational divines of Germany have got rid of everything supernatural in the Bible, by the easy belief that all the miracles there recorded happened quite naturally, in the ordinary course of events. While the philosophic Theists are divided in opinion, whether to admit the existence of the deity upon the hypothesis of Kant, who left a blank place for him in his theory; or on the promise of Fichtè, who pledged himself to create him in his next lecture, or on the prediction of Schelling, who, though he doubted that Fichtè was as good as his word, nevertheless pointed out the time when the deity would begin to exist.

Such shocking speculations of learned men of a Christian name could never be quoted from the pulpit, except, as Paul mentioned their types in his time, for the purpose of showing that *the world by wisdom knew not God*. But these are the very philosophers, so called, against whose influence the apostle warned the Colossians. Some of them, alas, clothed in the vestments of the sacred office, and others devoted to the study of nature like Baron Humboldt, whose great work, entitled *Kosmos*, no man of science with Christian sympathies, can read but with mingled emotions of admiration and sorrow. A work of prodigious learning, in which the author traverses the visible universe. He exhibits the phenomenal harmony of the heavens, discourses on the

works of the Creator, from the remotest nebula to the minutest organism, and all this without the slightest allusion to his existence. Having travelled over a considerable portion of the earth's surface, and made himself acquainted with all that is at present known of the natural phenomena of the earth and the heavens, he discovers no traces of the agency of a personal God. At the age of fourscore years and five, this venerable scholar acknowledges no higher power or influence, than "inherent material forces acting under the government of a primordial necessity." Divine providence is interdicted, and this goodly universe moves onward, unfolding its forms of life and grandeur, without the hand of him that made it.

Such are a few samples taken at random from the moral and intellectual history of man, to sustain the doctrine of our apostle. Facts which demonstrate at once the amazing strength of his mind, and its spiritual blindness. And in view of such premises, it would seem hardly necessary to draw the formal conclusion which the hearer must anticipate,

I. THAT A SPECIAL REVELATION FROM HEAVEN WAS NECESSARY. If the efforts of human wisdom, for six thousand years, had failed to discover the character of God, may we not legitimately infer, in spite of the denials of scepticism, that it could never find it out at all? Sir Isaac Newton, who lived seventeen hundred

years after Christ, had no more intellect than Aristotle, who flourished three hundred years before him. And had the English philosopher been cotemporary with the Grecian, he had doubtless been as atheistic in his religion.

The same is true of all the great principles of moral and religious duty. The insufficiency of reason or mere natural light to discover these, has been proved by the same evidence which establishes its inability to find out the former. Whatever the cause, says Mr. Locke, it is plain, in fact, that human reason, unassisted, has failed men in its great and proper business of morality. It never, from unquestionable principles, by clear deductions, made out an entire body of the law of nature. But a perfect system of morals, which the wisdom of philosophers could not invent in all past ages, was furnished, says this profound Christian scholar, by the apostles, a college made up, for the most part, of ignorant but inspired fishermen. But what made this difference between Socrates and Simon Peter, between Aristotle and Newton? And if the former, with all their worldly wisdom and learning, *knew not God*, how did it occur that the apostle made this great discovery without them? Answer this question properly, and your reply concedes the necessity of a special revelation.

II. Another great doctrinal truth, which the fore-

going facts establish, is the NECESSITY OF SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION.

We have seen, that even under the light of the gospel, human wisdom has not preserved men from as gross mistakes concerning God, as others have made without it. The glorious truth of which Paul speaks, is not hidden from man for want of light merely, but of the faculty of vision. So that while the Pagan is destitute of both, the nominal Christian may be as effectually hindered from perceiving God's character and attributes by the want of the latter. If a blind man stumble at midnight, he would walk very little better under the light of a meridian sun. He needs more than light, to enable him to perceive his way. Why can David Frederick Strauss, an ordained and accredited preacher, find no other God revealed than a "process of thought," in the same Scriptures where Richard Baxter discovered "a Spirit infinite, eternal, unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth?" Tell us, ye boasters of natural light, and of the sufficiency of human wisdom, what is your explanation of this moral paradox? this difference between the German and the Englishman! Or, why have the mantles of Staupitz, Farel, Jonas, Melancthon, and Luther, been, sacrilegiously usurped by the God-denying priesthood of modern Germany? Both read the same Scriptures, and enjoy the same light of revelation! What solution does the

moral sense of the world offer, or philosophy, or any other oracle than that of heaven, which declares that *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are Spiritually discerned. Except a man be born again,* be enlightened by the Spirit of God, and made a new creature, he can neither see Him, nor become a member of His kingdom.

Ah, says godly Berridge, author of *The Christian World Unmasked*, human science sometimes keeps men out of mischief, trains them up for civil occupations, and oft produceth notable discoveries, which are useful to the world, but never can lead the heart to Jesus Christ, nor breed a single germ of faith in Him. The Saviour's 'little child,' and the apostle's 'fool,' instruct us how to seek heavenly wisdom; not by drawing it from human brains, or heathen folios, but by meekly going unto Jesus, as a 'little child,' to be taught, or as a fool, to be made 'wise.' This language and manner are characteristic of their learned and heavenly-minded, though eccentric author; but the sentiment itself is only a repetition of the doctrine of our text.

III. MY THIRD AND LAST INFERENCE FROM THE SUBJECT, IS MONITORY.

The history which we have reviewed of human degeneracy, admonishes us of the danger of our own. It shows us that such is the downward tendency of our

nature, that the strongest powers of our mind, and conscience, too, are not strong enough to resist and arrest it. That the ancient world were so devoid of the knowledge of God, was not because his character had not been revealed. The apostle Paul, in writing to the Romans, denies that this was the cause of the superabounding ignorance and polytheism. But *That, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.*

The apostle's account of their declension is, that it was gradual, self-procured, voluntary, and the result of culpable neglect. So it has been with every other people, once illumined by the light of Christian truth, who, like the seven churches of Asia, have relapsed into darkness, and at length had even the candlestick of ordinances taken away. It is true of Geneva, whose pulpits, once filled with the disciples of Calvin, are now profaned to so great an extent, by the cold and Christless philosophy of Socinus. It has an awful exemplification among a large proportion of the people of Luther, whose departure from the truth, though

slight at first, has been like the divergence of lines forming an angle. Their distance from God has been wider, in proportion to their advancement. And what an affecting illustration of the insidious, leaven-like progress of error, does the past half century present in many of the churches of our own country, which were nurtured in the faith of Knox and of the Puritans. What, then, can teach us more plainly than these impressive facts do, the duty of watching, with intense vigilance, the very beginnings of apostacy? To resist, at the outset, all temptations, whether coming from the pulpit, the popular lecturer, or the press. I am well aware how much the monitions of the preacher are weakened, by the consideration that he is an alarmist by profession; yet his voice, however feeble, should not be silent. And although the friends of truth may feel secure against the attacks of its open assailants, but its covert foes are more in number, more circumventive and dangerous.

Our religious people perhaps imagine themselves sufficiently *rooted and grounded in the faith* of the gospel, to treat with proper disdain, the atheism of such men as Owen, and Carlyle, and Combe, and Newman, and Parker, and the author of the *Vestiges of Creation*, while the same moral poison, only diluted, may be successfully administered under other forms. Among these, we may mention the writings of some of the most gifted authors of the day, who, though

not reputed infidel, are certainly characterized by the absence of everything which palpably recognizes the will and providence of God. Others adroitly ignore all the distinctive and fundamental truths of revelation.

Take for one of the fairest examples of the former class, the writings of Maria Edgeworth, who has so cautiously combined the features of her characters that the predominant expression is generally what it ought to be. She has shown us, not vices ennobled by virtues, but virtues degraded and perverted by their union with vices. And yet none of her motives are evangelical; but pride, honor, generous impulse, calculation of temporal advantage, and custom of the country, are convened along with, we know not how many other grave authorities, as the components of her moral government. Her success has been great in the sense of her admirers; but had she availed herself more of considerations drawn from religion, it would have been incomparably greater. "She has sometimes stretched forth a powerful hand to the impotent in virtue; but had she added, with the apostle, *in the name of Jesus of Nazareth*, we should have almost expected miracles from the touch." The grand objection, as Foster, already quoted, says, to this polished and popular class of writers is, that they leave the reader totally ignorant of what the human race were made for. He finds nothing in all their

works to repress the surmise, that such a question would completely baffle them. Whether men are appointed to any future state of sentient existence? and if so, is it to be a fixed state, or a series of transmigrations, a higher or lower state than the present? Is it a state of retribution? and is there a supreme Power that presides over the succession and condition of the race? or is not the species, with all its present circumstances, and what becomes of it hereafter, the production and sport of chance? are all questions which seem to be undecided in the minds of these ingenious moralists.

We do not presume to say, that such productions are wholly noxious in their tendency, but their great defect should be generally known. No book, however suited to engage the mind and amuse the fancy, can be commended to others, even for its morality, in which the grand and only effectual motives to a life of virtue and Christian holiness are wanting. But among the issues of the press, at present, are others even more attractive and more widely diffused, whose pernicious influence, however positive and great, is detected or even suspected by few.

The world of letters feel themselves greatly indebted to a polished writer, whose house in London is the central rendezvous of what is called the New School of Unbelievers. Among these are some of the most admired wits in the fashionable circles of society,

and whose poetry and fictions in prose are doubtless possessed by some who hear me, and read and praised by thousands who are not aware of the antichristian principles of the authors. We have lately seen a list of thirteen, of more or less notoriety for their published works, in some of which they boldly repudiate the doctrine of a risen Christ. A jealous observer and chronicler of passing events, has noticed the influence of these infectious writers on cotemporary English literature, in a melancholy lack of Christian thought and feeling.

The last and most beautiful poem of the poet laureate of England, Tennyson, exhibits, he says, a soul in a perpetual struggle with temptation and gloomy doubt. The Howitts, so much admired by many, have long ceased to have any connection with the Society of Friends, to which they once belonged. They have no definite creed; they never attend any place of worship. So far as any system of belief can be gathered from their writings, it is a mingling of Unitarianism with the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg. Fredericka Bremer, another star in this galaxy of talent, is pantheistic; if she were not so herself, she could not praise so extravagantly those who are. And the ablest historical work on Greece which has ever been written, according to some critical journals of the day, which is to be a standard in our seminaries of learning, is the work of one whose religious

sympathies are said to be with the author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Nor can any man of Christian feelings glance at the lauded writings of modern English scholars, without being pained to see how few nobly and cordially recognize the great truths of Christianity. Fifty years ago, the alarm was given by the giant pen of John Foster; but the evil which he so powerfully exposed at that time, is much greater now. Such strictures on the secular press, will be received, I trust, not as mere literary criticism, but as salutary cautions suggested by the times, and which, it is becoming the pulpit to utter. If it be the preacher's province to admonish the unsuspecting of the injurious influence of bad men, how much more needful the warnings against bad books, which travel farther, live longer, and continue speaking to successive generations after their authors have been dead for ages. Ten thousand agencies are scattering over our land these seductive prints, whose irreligious principles are so masked, that their readers do not see, though they are made to feel them.

The time has come when fiction is more attractive than truth, romance than the sober realities of life. The proselytism that is made the chief study of corrupt religious sects, and of infidels, is prosecuted less by open argument than by intrigue. Imagination and genius captivate the crowds, and procure applause and wealth, while *Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth*

her voice in the streets, and in the openings of the gates, but her counsels are not heard. The ambassador of Christ with a message from heaven, is only tolerated by the masses, and appreciated by the few, while our lyceums and most capacious halls for literary and musical entertainment are filled to repletion. They are the weekly resort of many professedly Christian men, who forsake the social religious assembly, and listen with delight, not suspecting or heeding the corrupt principles of too many who address them. It matters little with most, who is the man of literature, or of wit, to whom they listen, whence he comes, and what are his moral or religious opinions, if he have parts and brilliant gifts to entertain them. Thus some who have been received and heard with great acceptance among us, are men notoriously hostile, not to Christianity merely, but to the Bible as coming from God.

The man of genius who within a year returned to his own land from his literary excursion to this, much enriched by the contributions of crowded assemblies, is one of the thirteen Magi of London to whom I have referred as scoffers at the *old wives fables* of a "divine book-Revelation."

Another of these admired lecturers among us, who like Balaam, was called from the East, denies in some of his published writings the personality of God.

The wildest dreamers of Germany have not issued vagaries of mind and heart more offensive and dan-

gerous than his. And yet the institution by which he was invited and caressed, is sustained by Christian gentlemen!

And whither, I would ask, in conclusion, do all these influences of the prostituted press, of the secret club, and of the sceptical lecturer tend? Are they working no evil? Do they excite no apprehension in the minds of religious parents? Or should they not effectually open the eyes of a Christian people, like ourselves, to the truth contained in the words of our apostle? And may we not see in the survey we have taken of the past, a fulfilment of what is written, *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? And is not the foolishness of God wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men?*