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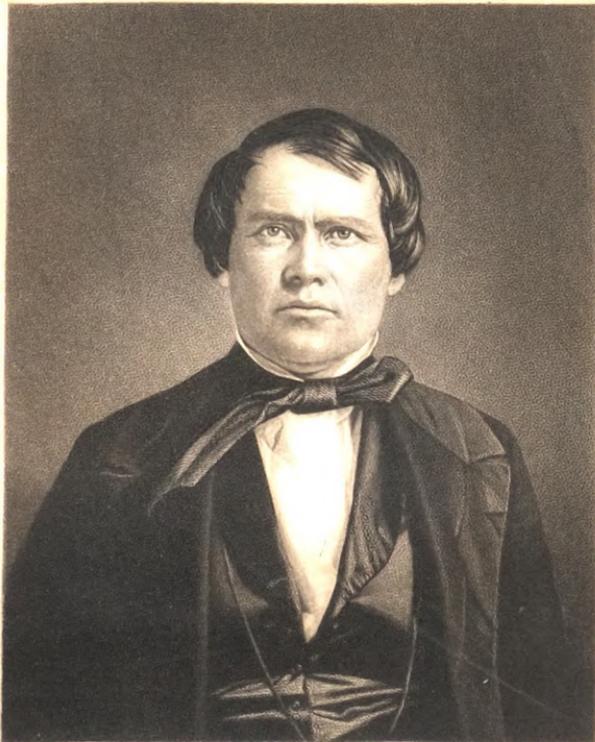
# The Difficulties of Infidelity.

BY

REV. STUART ROBINSON,

FRANKFORT, KY

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A. H. Ritchie sc.

*S. Robinson*

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, &c.—ROMANS, ii. 22, 23.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind (marg. a mind void of judgment).—ROMANS ii. 28.

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.—2 THESS. ii. 10-11.

IN the two portions of Scripture from which these passages are taken—the first referring historically to a state of things then past and still existing; the second prophetically to a state of things then future—there is presented a most profound philosophical analysis of the origin, progress, and tendencies of a rejection by men of God's revelation of himself; whether as discovered in the original impressions with which he has endowed human nature; in the works of creation at large; or in the teaching of "holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The origin of their unbelief is referred to an error of the *heart* rather than of the understanding. "They did not *like* to retain God in their knowledge;" "they *received* not the *love* of the truth." With the affections of the heart thus hostile to the truth; given over to self-conceit, vanity and presumption, the powers of the intellect become darkened. As a natural consequence, presuming to dive into "the deep things of God," they devise low and unworthy conceptions of his character and worship. As a consequence again of a degraded theology and "a mind void of judgment," the principles of morals are subverted and the passions of men left to run riot in the practice of every crime that can disgrace humanity. And then, under the combined influence of a debasing theology and a corrupt morality, the understanding itself becomes enfeebled and drivelling; its logical faculties perverted, and its perceptions blunted so as to become incapable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood. As they would not believe when they ought, they are left to believe when they ought not. While vainly contemning

the credulity which humbly receives and believes the truth; and glorying in their own imagined Pyrrhonism; they are given over—not to the utter incredulity which can believe nothing, but on the contrary, to the incorrigible and stupid credulity which can “believe a lie.”

It is the most remarkable feature of this description of infidelity, that there is ascribed to it the very absurdities which it has ever been the fashion of infidelity to charge upon believers of the “truth as it is in Jesus;” insomuch that one unacquainted with the authorship of this portion of Scripture, might well mistake it for the *jeu d’esprit* of some ingenious philosophical essayist retorting upon modern skeptics, in cutting satire, the own charges. And while those passages suggest very obviously the particular points of attack against infidelity, they suggest no less obviously, as the general method of warfare, the plan of holding the advocates of infidelity responsible for some *positive* system of faith; and then demanding that they show the consistency of this system with itself, with right reason, and with truth. Instead of confining themselves to a mere defence of their stronghold, the advocates of Christianity should often by a bold and vigorous sally, assail the enemy in his lurking-place, and seek to drive him from his “refuge of lies,” with utter and hopeless discomfiture.

The disadvantages of acting merely on the defensive for Christianity, are twofold. In the first place, it relieves infidelity from its just responsibility to the laws of logical consistency. It allows to infidels the comparatively easy task of pulling down, without ever being called upon to build up. But more especially, is this method of acting entirely on the defensive unfortunate, in that it gives currency to the very erroneous notion that Christianity is peculiar for the difficulties that attend faith in its doctrines. And the young and unwary, puzzled by the suggestion of mysteries and difficulties in *the* faith, which in childhood they have received upon trust, and captivated by the affectation of superior shrewdness and wisdom, with which infidelity sneers at the mysteries of this faith, are seduced from their steadfastness and led on step by step, at length make shipwreck of their *hope*.

It is true, the very title “*Infidelity*” by which we characterize generally the various forms of opposition to Christianity, indicates something merely *negative*. But the denial of the truth of Christianity is uniformly connected with some system or other of faith with which Christianity is supposed to conflict. Even were it not

so, has it ever been shown that by any law of reason, or by any appointment of God, one class of philosophers have it as their peculiar office to pull down and to destroy, without ever building up? If there is any obligation on the more learned portion of men to enlighten their fellows, that obligation lies no less upon those who reject than upon those who receive Christianity. It is not therefore enough to prove Christianity unworthy the credence of men. Especially is this not enough on the part of those who have set themselves up as professedly "the wise"—as a class claiming to be *the* philosophers, and the peculiar guardians of the mental and moral interests of mankind.

Adopting the method here suggested by the Apostle, of holding infidelity responsible for the reasonableness and consistency of the faith for the world which it will substitute instead of Christianity—and pursuing the general tenor of the topics of animadversion suggested in his view of the origin and tendencies of infidelity, I propose to consider :

I. The difficulties of infidelity in devising a system of theology, which shall answer the inquiries and meet the wants of man's spiritual nature.

II. The difficulties of infidelity in devising a system of ethics which shall be of purity, force and obligation sufficient to restrain and guide man as a social being, and render possible the existence of civilized society.

III. The difficulties of infidelity as a logical system—in its application of the laws of evidence to the question of the credibility of the gospel; and in constructing any theory on which to account for the phenomena of the present existence of the gospel records and the religion founded upon them, faith in which theory does not involve the most preposterous credulity.

These views of the subject comprehend generally the great aspects of the question of religion—as a question of theology, what man shall believe of God—as a question of ethics, what man shall practise toward man—as an existing phenomenon which man, as a philosopher, desires to account for. And these three aspects of the question embrace particularly the very points on which infidelity, both ancient and modern, has assailed Christianity. The substance of the objections to Christianity relates to the unreasonableness of the gospel theology, the impracticability of the gospel ethics, and the insufficiency, or logical inconsistency, of the gospel evidences. The method of argument here proposed

*assumes*, that if the gospel theology is unworthy of the faith of men, then—since some religious faith is necessary to man—infidelity should not only demonstrate the unworthiness of this creed, but supply mankind with a more worthy in its stead. If the gospel ethics are impracticable, infidelity should not only demonstrate this, but also—since society must have some system—devise a more practical ethics in its stead. If the records of the Christian faith and the church founded upon them, have not, as they profess to have, their origin in the inspiration of God, and their preservation by the providence of God, then infidelity should not only demonstrate the negative of this, but give the world some reasonable account of so remarkable a phenomena,—admitted on all hands to exist.

Lest, however, the justness of this assumption may not at once be clear to the apprehension of any, it may not be improper here to illustrate the true state of the question—especially in regard to the first and second topics proposed, viz.: The obligation resting on those who reject Christianity, to provide some better theology and ethics for the guidance of mankind.

Man is by nature a religious creature, and therefore must have a faith and worship of some fashion. Whether reasoning *à priori* from the nature of man, or reasoning from an induction of facts in the history of the race, we arrive with *equal* certainty at the conclusion that man must have a religion. It is a truth, patent upon the very surface of human nature, that all men have a perception of moral distinction; that they judge of actions not only as wise and unwise, but as right and wrong; that they have a feeling of complacency in view of right actions, and of ill-desert in view of the wrong. This being a matter of consciousness, needs no other proof than the statement of it, in order to be believed and understood. This being the case, men will be led to *suspect*, if not logically to *infer* the existence of a Supreme Being, who in some manner shall reward the good and punish the evil—and thus is derived the idea of retribution. The point is not made here, by any means, that by logical necessity the existence of a principle of conscience leads to the conclusion that there is a God. This is not necessary to the argument. It is asserted only that the impression of a judge of moral actions within the breast of man, will very naturally suggest the *fear* of a Judge above. The whisperings of the conscience, if they convince not the understanding, will yet impress the imagination with at least a dim

conception of some supreme power. In exact accordance with this reasoning is the fact that such an impression, constituting a religion of some fashion, is found wherever man is found. To this fact historians of all ages, and philosophers of all sects bear concurrent testimony. The Scythian, the Indian, the Gaul, the German, the Briton, as well as the more enlightened Greek and Roman of ancient times, conceived of a God the Judge, and of a future existence. So in like manner the most uncivilized of modern nations, alike with those who are enlightened, agree in the common belief of a God,—and, in some fashion or other, of a retribution. Ancient philosophers of all schools—Plato, Cicero, Aristotle and Seneca unite in testifying that this was the most ancient and universal belief of all ancient nations. And the modern skeptical philosophers with equal unanimity declare their belief, that in the nature of *the* case man must have a faith. “Man,” says Shaftsbury, “is born to religion.” “Man,” says Bolingbroke, “is a religious as well as a social creature; made to know and adore his Creator, to discover and obey his will.” “If,” says Adam Smith, the friend of Mr. Hume, “if we consult our natural sentiments we are apt to fear that vice is worthy of punishment. The doctrines of revelation coincide in every respect with the original anticipations of nature.”

Now in this admitted necessity of some religion for mankind arises the first of the difficulties of infidelity. It is clear that a mere negative of the gospel—nay, even a demonstration of the absurdity of the gospel, by no means finishes this question. The solemn fact of retribution, lying far back in human consciousness, is affected by no preliminary hypothesis as to the truth of Christianity. The elements of that hell from which the gospel proposes to rescue men, lie back beyond the question of the gospel, which proposes only to be a remedy for an evil known to exist among the children of men. What then, though we have proved the gospel to be a fable? Still human existence is no fable;—nor are its fears of retribution a fable. What though we have proven the improbability of the Gospel Judgment to come? We have still not quieted the anxieties and the dread which guilt ever generates in the soul; nor have we done anything to check that flow of sorrow which human experience avers must ever follow after guilt. If man “dieth not as the brute dieth”—if, as reason would lead us to suspect, the life that now is, constitutes but the infancy of an eternal manhood in the life which is to

come—if human nature in any or all of its essential attributes is to inhabit eternity—then most clearly the duty of philosophers is not fully discharged to their race, even when they have demolished the entire fabric of Christianity, or exposed what they believe to be the shallow empiricism of the gospel prescription for the spiritual malady of the race. The hell which symbolizes that malady is no invention of the gospel theology. It exists logically anterior to the coming of the gospel, and would still exist even though the memory of the gospel were blotted from the earth. However you may jeer at the empiricism which professes to control the stealthy tread of “the pestilence that walketh in darkness;” yet when your jeers have told with their fullest effect, in overwhelming with contempt the quackery, they have done nothing toward staying the march of the destroyer, or protecting you from its deadly breath. And so the jeer, the sarcasm, the contempt, the sophistry,—nay, though it be the argument—which destroys all faith in the gospel, affects not in the least the question of retribution for sin, whose existence is an admitted fact, independent of the remedy for it. The gospel professes to come only as a heaven-devised remedy for the malady of conscious guilt, and proclaims its author as the heaven-descended physician, able to rescue from a death whose hand is already felt by every soul that feels at all, to be paralyzing all the energies of the spiritual existence. If the skepticism which scoffs at the gospel, have found another and a better remedy for the known and felt calamity of our race, then the shafts of its wit are well and wisely aimed. If it have found some “other name under heaven given amongst men whereby they may be saved”—then it is all well enough. Yet let the votaries of skepticism remember that by the necessity of the case, a mere barren negation, however plausible, will not meet the case. It satisfies no yearning of the human heart. It stills not those wailings of terror and dread, which sin causes ever to echo in the chambers of the soul. It can soothe no trouble of the conscience, for it covers not up the dread vision of retribution which gleams upon every reflective spirit.

Why then shall skepticism waste its energies to destroy the hopes of the gospel, which, even though illusive, can possibly do no injury to a race already doomed and hopeless? Why, in the mere wantonness of conscious logical strength, dash in pieces the beautiful creation of fancy, when as yet reason has nothing more

years. Such a volume would have the doctors of the earlier English and French schools of philosophy for its "Evangelists;" the exploits of the French revolutionary *savans* for its "Acts of the Apostles;"—the disquisitions of the German idealists and rationalists for its "Epistles"—and the mystic visions of French and American Eclectic transcendentalists for its final "Revelation." Provide us with such a volume, and we are then placed upon a just footing for a comparison between the revelation of faith and the revelation of reason. Skeptical criticism has made itself extremely busy with microscopic search after the "*discrepancies*" between the several writers of the Christian volume. But let skeptical criticism now try its ingenuity in finding the "*coincidences*" between the several writers of this "Bible" of reason. Let it reconcile Herbert declaring the existence of a personal God, possessed of moral attributes which are the grounds of all religion, with Bolingbroke denying the possibility of knowing their attributes, or with Voltaire doubting God's very existence, or D'Alembert asserting that God is unnecessary. Let it seek for the coincidences between Shaftesbury proclaiming the existence of a personal God as a first and necessary truth, and Spinoza declaring God to be simply the substratum of all existence; or Fichte denying any active existence of a God beyond the limits of the human soul; or Hegel announcing God is nothing; or Cousin answering God is everything! Let it harmonize the schools which teach a Providence and an immortality, with the schools which repudiate a Providence and proclaim death to be an eternal sleep! If the canons of judgment which skepticism has applied to the investigation of Christianity be just, then the application of these canons to the system of unbelief must be equally just. Tried by the rule that truth is unity and ever consistent with itself, what is the world to think of a theology that both affirms and denies absolutely the existence of God; that affirms now his personal, and now an impersonal existence; that affirms and denies the immateriality and immortality of the soul, and that both affirms and denies every point relating to either the responsibility or the great end and purpose of the present life?

If these several pictures shall have the air of a caricature, the philosophers themselves are to blame for it. Their opinions are fairly stated; and if a mere juxtaposition of their several opinions expose the absurdity of them, it but exposes at the same time the effrontery of the men who would set up their discordant opinions in

opposition to the sublime unity of that wonderful volume, which though embracing the writings of men of every variety of character, genius and acquirement; living in every different historical era through a period of fifteen hundred years, yet all teach the same God—the same providence of God—the same method of securing God's favor—the same theory of the human soul, and the same immortal destiny of the soul after the present life.

Well said Rousseau of his infidel brethren, "I have consulted our philosophers—I have read their books—I have examined their opinions. I find them all proud, positive and dogmatic, even in their pretended skepticism;—knowing everything and proving nothing, and ridiculing one another. If you count the number of them, each one is reduced to himself; they never unite but to dispute."

We have confined the argument as to the ability of Infidelity to devise a theology for the world, to *what has yet been done*. It might easily be shown if time permitted, that this is in the nature of the case *the best that can be done*. The infinite confusion of opinions which has been exhibited, arises not from the mere idiosyncrasies of individual minds, who, in spite of a true philosophy, have run into these errors and contradictions in the application of the system. They are, all of them, the natural and logical result of the very first principles of Infidelity; and are the conclusions at which variously constituted minds must arrive by logical necessity, when once they have adopted the peculiar stand-point from which Infidelity views the philosophy of religion. The fundamental controversy between the advocates and the impugnors of revelation is as to the nature of the inquiry concerning religion. Is religion a question of *fact* or a question of *reason*? Christianity regards religion as a matter of fact; its doctrines, as revealed facts; its evidences the occurrence of facts, which combine with the character of the truths revealed to prove its promulgators to have been God-sent men authorized of God to declare his will. Every form of philosophic unbelief, on the contrary, proceeds upon the assumption, in some form or other, that religion is a question of reason—resting upon the axioms and deductions of the understanding, or upon the spontaneous impressions and impulses of the human soul. Thus says Mr. Emerson in a tone of complaint: "The position men have given to Jesus is a position of authority. The Faith that stands upon authority is not Faith." Now viewing the whole matter of religion from this wrong stand-point, no other

consequence can follow than the endless contradictions and absurdities here presented. For in all these antichristian systems alike, there is the omission of one of the fundamental elements of humanity in the very first announcement of the conditions of the problem of humanity; and as a matter of course all the subsequent processes of reasoning, however just and ingenious, are unavailing to work out any definite and satisfactory conclusion. To use a simple and familiar illustration, the equations given are less than the unknown quantities whose values it is the object of the reasoning to educe. Hence, however various the starting-points of the several modern methods of metaphysical research: whether, as one school declares, the starting-point be the material, finite universe; or, as another declares, the finite conscious self; or, as a third, the infinite absolute:—however diverse the fashion of reasoning, whether empirical transcendental, ideal subjective, ideal objective, or ideal absolute; and however wide and bridgeless the gulf between the resulting systems of the universe, constructed in these several methods;—all of them alike having failed to recognize one of the fundamental elements of the problem, of necessity fail to meet the practical wants of man,—as a being instinctively conscious of his relation to some judge supreme, and of ill-desert in that relation. And in no portion of human history is there to be found a more forcible evidence of the fact that “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,” than in that portion which details the successive and contradictory phases, and the worse than Babel confusion of tongues of modern speculative philosophy;—all growing chiefly out of the refusal of all parties alike to admit a revelation from God as one of the *objective phenomena*, and the felt want of some such revelation as one of the *subjective facts* of human nature. It will not fail to suggest itself as a singular fact to any reflective student, on a survey of the whole field of speculative philosophy, all covered now with the wrecks of a hundred exploded systems; that any one of the various methods of constructing a theorem of the universe—whether the materialistic, the ideal, or the absolute,—might have satisfactorily explained all the phenomena of the universe, if the *fact* of a Christian revelation had in good faith been admitted as one of the original elements of such theory, and had been allowed its just influence in modifying the theory in the progress of its construction. With the admission of this fact, and the light cast by it upon the spiritual nature and destiny of man, almost any form

even of the earlier English or French materialism would have been adequate to account for all the phenomena of humanity and of the universe. With this fact and its consequences fully admitted, it matters very little whether we adopt as a stand-point "the me" (subjective self) of Fichte, or the "not-me" (objective nature) of Schelling, or the absolute idealism of Hegel, in our philosophical system. In either case the light derived, and the limitations imposed by this admission of an objective revelation and a corresponding subjective spiritual element in humanity, would furnish an infallible preservative against the extravagances into which all these methods have hitherto run. And the practical differences between the theories would be analogous to the difference between the undulatory and the radiating theories of light; either of them accounting for the phenomena. Indeed the most striking of all the arguments for the "necessity of a divine revelation" might be drawn from a review of the modern speculative philosophy and the clear exhibition of the need of such a revelation, to supply a missing element in every problem of the universe yet constructed. And we say it is but a proof that the mind of man is not "naturally subject to the law of God," that this lack of an essential element in the problem has not been observed and admitted; notwithstanding all the failures hitherto to solve the problem of the universe. It is held to be the sublimest of all the results of modern physical science, that in our age, the astronomer in his study should have established by abstract calculations the existence of a planet which hitherto had eluded the keen scrutiny of a thousand telescopes; and that he should have handed over to the astronomer in the observatory a *search-warrant* describing the very time when, and the place where, the skulking planet must be found; when and where it accordingly was found. And yet nothing can be simpler than the process by which this sublime discovery was reached. It was but the consequence of a prior discovery of an error in the results which should have expressed exactly the measurement of the orbit of a known planet; an inference hence, that since the process of calculation is indubitably just and its details correct—there is some element missing from the original data: hence the suggestion of the disturbing influence of some unknown planet; and hence the calculation of its place, and consequently its discovery. Why is it that precisely analogous errors in the projection of the orbit of humanity, have not long since suggested the existence of another element, overlooked in the very data on

which the whole theory is based? Why so obstinately close the eyes to the suggestion, that in the construction of the intellectual universe, Reason may not be a solitary planet moving through immensity around the great central mind, but that Faith also may, as another planet, move perhaps through the same region of the universe, and her orbit so cross that of the sister planet, or have some point of contact with it, as to render the projection of the orbit of the one impossible, without calculating the influence of the other?

It is no remedy for these errors to admit a religion of nature merely, for this is still to assert the principle that religion is not a question of *fact*, but of *reason* alone. It is no remedy either to admit revelation in part as subsidiary to reason. For experience demonstrates most clearly that however the votaries of the religion of reason may profess or even feel deep respect for the Christian revelation; or may even admit revelation at some later stage of the argument as a modifying influence in the system, and as ancillary to the work of reason; the result will in the end be the same, as though no reference at all has been had to religion as a question of fact. Step by step the votaries of a "rational Christianity" will be driven, first to Deism, then to Pantheism or Atheism. For of necessity a Christianity that consents to utter its voice only in obedience to what may claim to be reason, is of no higher force than the power which controls it. It dwindles therefore, first, into a mere hypothetical and visionary system, which can afford no solid ground of hope and comfort to the soul. Nothing then is more natural than that to a mind so disappointed in the results of its faith, revelation shall seem to be a mere excrescence on natural religion. For a like reason natural religion shall by the same process become to such a mind a system of mere empiricism, feeble in its arguments, unsatisfactory in its proofs, earthly and grovelling in its sanctions. The God of this religion, having first dwindled into an object within the reach of human reason, shall soon be degraded to the level of humanity; and finally as an unworthy and unnecessary conception,—by a higher philosophy, be banished from the universe. Hence the entirely fruitless results of all the speculations in theology which have assumed religion to be merely a question of reason during the past three centuries. The world has been kept ever astir with the "movement" of a "progressive" theology of reason, and encouraged by most confident assurances of the speedy construction of a system which

shall be adapted to the more advanced stage of humanity. There has indeed been "movement" enough. With an energy and power of genius never before witnessed, men have set themselves to reinvestigate first truths, and construct a moral system of the universe. There has been "progress," but it has been progress forever in a circle. The latest results of Infidelity in all its forms are approximating more and more to the first results of the Infidelity of the age immediately succeeding the revival of learning. And as now we trace the philosophical history of the last three hundred years, we but perform a voyage of circumnavigation. As some traveller who having toiled over mountains and seas, through sandy deserts and tangled wilderness, ever keeping his face to the east, finds himself at last precisely at the spot whence he set out, only approaching from an opposite point of the compass, so our progress over the realms of modern skeptical philosophy. We set out with Spinoza—that God is the universe, and end with Strauss—that the universe is God.

Here then, in short, are the theological difficulties of Infidelity. Such is the constitution of man, that he must have a positive faith. If Christianity as a system of faith be held either insufficient or defective, it behooves those who hold it such to make a better provision for the wants of the world. In this provision there should be at least a reasonable degree of unity and consistency. But you have exhibited nothing but a congeries of opinions, boldly announced indeed and obstinately defended, yet all contradictory and equally worthless. Truth is unity—truth is ever consistent with itself. But you have never yet united in a single article of faith. Each successive speculation destroys that which preceded it. You claim *progress*, and ever hold out hopes of a glorious goal to be reached—yet march in solemn procession ever in a circle and leave your followers at last, just where you found them—with no God to worship—no retribution to fear—no immortality to hope for—and not a single inquiry of their spiritual nature answered.

II. The ethical difficulties of Infidelity may be discussed within much narrower limits. They are of such a character as to be obvious upon a mere suggestion even to minds little accustomed to abstract reasoning. And the relation of this to the former branch of the argument is so intimate, as to be rather in the nature of a corollary from it. At the same time this view of the subject is in many respects more important than the former;

especially from the fact that the necessity of morality to the social existence of man is far more generally appreciated by the mass of men—and the subject appeals more directly to their present and obvious interests. It will be necessary however to confine this branch of the subject to a mere outline and illustration by way of specimen of the argument.

We deem it unnecessary to go into an argument here to prove, that the Infidelity which rejects Christianity, and consequently the moral system of Christianity, is to be justly held responsible to supply some other system of morals for the government of men. All the reasons which have been exhibited already in establishing the obligation of Infidelity to furnish the world with a religious faith, apply here with still more palpable force. Nor is it needful to prove that some moral system, of higher sanctions than the mere penalties of civil and social law, is essential to the very existence of men together in a state of society ; for this point is fully admitted by all enlightened skeptics—and were it not, the sad experience of the world would attest it beyond dispute.

From the very nature of the principles of morals—as arising out of the conviction of the relation of man to a Supreme Being—it is obvious that the view of the creed, of skepticism on the subject of God and man's relation to God as before presented, is utterly incompatible with any higher law of morals, than that which appeals to the mere selfishness of men. Without the firm conviction of the existence of a moral Ruler—which conviction as we have seen, is impossible under any of the skeptical systems of philosophy—there can be no such things as *moral laws*, except in the most vague and metaphorical sense. Every man under this system is responsible to his own mind only—if responsible at all—for the moral character of his actions. And therefore the only guarantee which society can have against the graspings of his selfishness—the prompting of his lusts, or the impulses of his passions, save so far as his actions are done in open day, is in the fear he may have of his own mind. But why shall he fear himself, if a reasonable prospect of impunity from the vengeance of law offers, and a strong temptation of immense present advantage? He need fear no self-remorse ; for Infidelity has relieved him from any fear of an avenging Judge, and conscience having now neither law to appeal to, nor Judge to threaten with, must of necessity dwindle into a mere blind instinct, whose cowardly

shudderings are as unmeaning and as little to be regarded, as the twitchings of a shattered nervous system.

As to anything like positive *virtue*, in any sense higher than mere temporary expediency, it is obviously impossible under any pure form of the skeptical theology. There is neither room for the play of any of its emotions in the soul; nor any standard for the test of its character; nor any motive to the performance of its appropriate actions; nor any support in the trials which it must undergo in the accomplishment of them. Once mankind generally have begun to doubt or to deny the existence of a moral Ruler and a future state, then all that cultivation of the moral taste which the received notions of man's relation to God necessarily tends to promote, must soon be abandoned. All reverence for humanity is destroyed. All motive to heroic actions is taken away. All deeds of disinterested kindness, all aspirations of a lofty and self-sacrificing Patriotism cease to form part of the history of the race. The tale of romantic chivalry shall be superseded by the narrative of successful trading; the tale of devoted love, by the handbook of the art of seducing; all political science shall be reduced to a question of physical power; morality becomes a mere question of profit and loss—and the account with conscience may be kept by day-book and ledger. There being no other protection between each man and danger, than a law which can guard only against open acts, and which can condemn only for deeds of guilt *proven* to have been done, each man becomes fearful and suspicious of his fellow; this constant fear and suspicion begets cowardice; and cowardice begets cruelty. The struggle of mere brute force for the mastery now begins, and continues, till the "last man" shall remain alone on all the earth. We have not the space here to develop fully the logical connection between the skepticism which banishes the idea of a Providence and retribution from among men, and the utter destruction of human society. If however any one fail to perceive at once the connection, he needs only to pursue his own reflections a short space, to find that the conception of a God and a future existence underlies the whole field of those human impulses and human sympathies which connect man with man in society.

It is very true that these results have not very extensively followed the speculations of skepticism hitherto. The reason why they have not however is the restraint still held over men, by that revelation which infidelity has professed to despise. Men are more

easily led astray in matters of speculative opinion than in matters relating to their practical welfare in the present life. Hence many who have adopted the theory of skepticism as a theology have been very slow to adopt the system of practical morality which necessarily flows from it. And thus a great portion of men act in the teeth of their creed; and while they join in the cry against the theology of the gospel, think it best to let the world abide by the morality of the gospel.

But we have not to rely merely on logical deductions to prove that the theology of modern infidelity must lead to a subversion of all ethical principles. These deductions have been made for us in many cases by the skeptics themselves. And all that is needful to the exhibition of the ethical difficulties of infidelity, is a reference to the moral principles which it has formally announced. Mr. Hobbes, in perfect consistency with his Theology, utterly repudiates the common distinction between right and wrong, as incompatible with the view of man as a creature of sensation, to whom such ideas must be mere phantoms. While Spinoza, from the very opposite section of philosophy, affirms the same conclusion, on the score that God being the universal substance, all that happens must so happen by the energy of this substance, and therefore there can be no room for the distinction between right and wrong in actions which all alike have their origin in God. So in later times the French successors of Hobbes—Voltaire, Diderot, and D'Alembert—preached the morality which Robespierre, Danton, and Marat practised. Denying any moral distinction in actions, Diderot claimed for every man the right to do as he pleases, and to choose according to the instincts of his nature. Volney, in full consistency with the theological system of the whole materialistic school, held self-preservation to be at once the ground and the end of all morality—that to be right which ministers pleasure and prolongs life—that to be wrong which inflicts pain or shortens life. So reverting again to the opposite school of idealism—Fichte affirms that holiness and sin are only seemingly such, because of our peculiar constitution, and holiness and sin are mere pictures of the brain having no inherent, absolute nature. Schelling subverts all moral obligation, by the dogma that everything, as by a blind fatality, must develop itself precisely as it is developed. In the system of Hegel which deifies the thinking principle in man, or that of Cousin with its divine humanity, there is in the nature of the case no room for the ordinary conception of morals; for why should a

divine humanity dread sin or strive after rectitude? From these specimens we may see that so far as concerns what we may term the systems of pure and positive infidelity, both material and ideal, the subversion of all moral distinctions is not left to mere inference. The deductions are boldly made; and taking them as so made, we defy the ingenuity of man to devise a society which could exist a year under their practical development.

The more practical English freethinkers had the ingenuity to save—or at least making a show of saving—the principles of morals, while they aimed to subvert the theology of Christianity. In the true spirit of his philosophy Mr. Hume merely *doubted*, in regard to morals. The greater portion of the English skeptics, as if to avoid the ethical difficulties of their less practical brethren, have been inclined to elevate natural, as they depreciated revealed religion; and thereby, as they imagined, preserve the sanctions of morality harmless. Thus Herbert, Bolingbroke, and Shaftsbury, while decrying the Christian theology, yet claimed to be the devotees of a religion of nature, and pre-eminently the instructors of mankind in the principles of morality. But the same suggestions which we have made above as to the intrinsic feebleness of a mere natural religion, apply in all their force to the morality which has its foundation alone in the reasonings of natural religion. If religion—any religion which is adapted to the actual state of man and his wants—must be a question of *fact*, rather than of *reason*, then also the moral principles which shall guide men aright in the matter of duty, must have a like positive ground in order to give them efficiency. As a religious faith which has no other ground than the speculative reasonings of men, is not adequate to comfort and sustain the soul in the hour of darkness and affliction, because it is not of authority and is not positive—nay more, because its ground cannot be comprehended by the great mass of men; so neither can a practical morality, which is merely inferential, and depending for its development upon the subtle reasoning of mere “scribes,” be of positive obligation sufficient to restrain the passions of men in the hour of temptation—nor serve as an ever-present, authoritative guide to the conscience, in its practical judgments of the every-day actions of life. Just as the merely natural religion has ever a tendency to evaporate into subtle hypothesis and dreamy sentiment, so the morality which derives its sanctions and its energy from natural religion alone, is ever prone to lose its seat as judge in the court of conscience; and descend to the arena

of debate with reason, as to its authority; and finally be hooted out by the passions, as a disagreeable and impertinent intruder. To illustrate by a single case, the vagueness of the morality,—Bolingbroke sums up all practical ethics in this rule: “So regulate your appetites as will conduce to the exercise of your reason, the health of your body and the pleasures of your senses, all taken and considered together; for herein all true happiness consists.” Imagine now the philosopher to come in contact with some creature of ignorance, passion, and proclivity to vice. The sage reproves his vices and discourses in lofty strains of the *pleasures* of virtue. But pleasure to any man depends much upon his tastes. Imagine the devotee of sin to reply—“My lord, your *tastes* and mine differ—and you know there is no disputing about taste, you pursue what is the path of pleasure to you in the pursuits of speculative philosophy, I not having either your genius, education or peculiar turn of mind, pursue what I conceive to be the ‘pleasure of my senses’ in a reasonable and healthy indulgence of what you are pleased to term vices.” Is not the question finished? Unless there be motives to virtue clear enough to be comprehended by every capacity, and strong enough to over-ride the strength of passion—and of certainty far beyond the reasoning of a mere philosopher, there can be no such thing practically as morality for the great mass of men.

Another recourse of infidelity to relieve the system from its ethical difficulties—one very common with the popular infidelity of our own day—is the method of separating the theology of the gospel from the morality of the gospel, and while rejecting the former to eulogize and recommend the latter. Some distinguished skeptics have attempted to select out and reduce into system the moral precepts of Jesus, throwing all else in the gospel aside as worthless. If however the view which has been taken of all morals as founded upon man’s relation to God and a future life is correct, this method of infidelity is peculiarly absurd. The morality of Jesus without the theology of Jesus, is but “the play of Hamlet with the character of Hamlet omitted.” If the theology of Jesus is wrong, his morality is groundless. It has no authority save the mere name of a mere man, who on this supposition, claimed to be what he was not—it is a morality inconsistent with itself and with reason. Surely skepticism must be reduced to a great strait, that it should resort to such a device. It is a plagiarism of a rare

fashion, that first renders an author's views worthless and absurd, and then steals them from him!

These mere suggestions must suffice as an illustration of this branch of the subject. The sum of the whole matter as to the difficulties of infidelity in this view, is that practically it leaves the world without morals, and therefore without the means of social existence. For however some of its advocates talk of moral duty as derived from the light of nature and the deductions of reasoning; however others may extol morality and offer to patronize even the strict system of the gospel, yet infidelity as a system has and can have no principles of ethics which can be comprehended. It has neither the foundation nor superstructure for the guidance and enforcement of practical duty. As in its theology it either denies or doubts of a personal and moral God of providence; denies or doubts any true immortality of the soul; denies or doubts a future retribution of happiness for the good, and misery for the wicked; so it practically excludes God from all its theories of ethics—one resolves all morality into self-love; another into what is useful to society; another declares that to be right which he thinks right. There is no personal duty which some one of them does not impugn; no bond of human society which some one does not burst asunder. Having effaced the distinctions between good and evil, and dug up the very foundations of morals, they give over society to the weak and blind guardianship of civil law—as its only protection against all the selfish interests, and all the base passions which belong to an uncultivated and unrestrained humanity.

III. The logical difficulties of infidelity, which yet remain to be considered, are so numerous and so various in their character, that anything beyond a mere indication of their general character, is impracticable within our present circumscribed limits. This is the less to be regretted, since on this branch of the subject, the simple suggestion of the points in their proper order and classification will exhibit the full force of the general argument.

Adhering to the definition of infidelity as comprising all forms of speculative belief which reject the Christian Revelation, the logical difficulties that pertain to it might be classified under three general heads, as relating to the three general forms of unbelief—the Atheistical, the Pantheistical, and the Deistical. Our argument confines itself mainly to the last. For the logical difficulties of Atheism are in themselves so obvious and so insuperable, as to have created a very general doubt in later times whether, except

in the case of partial insanity, any man can be an absolute Atheist. The difficulties that meet the theory of an uncaused and ungoverned universe at the first outset, and which follow it with increasing power through every stage of its reasoning, render this scheme possible of belief only to minds "already given over to strong delusion to believe a lie." The sum of the improbabilities in this creed—according to the almost universal admission that every effect must have a cause—is absolutely infinite at the very outset. The marks of design in every physical phenomenon that meets the eye—the hand, the ear, the heart—every member of every living body that exists—indicating that it has been formed by some wise designer—are all so many individual protests against the Atheist's creed, that all is the work of *chance*, or of a blind unintelligent necessity. Yet the sum of these innumerable phenomena is by no means the exponent of the degree of improbability that arises against this system. For each individual member, of each individual creature, having certain fixed relations to each other member, of proportion, harmony, and fitness, becomes (to use a mathematical form of expressing it) only the root of a power, whose index is the number of such members of each creature that exists; and therefore the true expression for the degree of improbability, at this stage of the argument, is the sum of all the members of the innumerable living existences of the natural world, raised to a power whose index is the expression, for the number of organs in each individual of all the infinite number. Nay, this expresses not yet the degree of improbability—for each of these individual existences has a relation to the system of which it forms a part; which relation is just as unlikely to have been determined by chance, as that by chance, any member of any individual creature should have been formed as it is; and therefore the expression for the degree of improbability at this stage of the argument is again to be multiplied by the infinite improbability, that in any other way than by a designing mind the relation of infinite parts to an infinite whole could have been so nicely adjusted; since one chance mistake in the happening of its construction must have destroyed all this harmony of relation. And now while the mind is yet laboring under the stupendous difficulties which the ordinary visible world thus heaps upon any theory that denies a first designing cause; astronomy comes in to multiply the already inconceivable sum of improbabilities, not merely by the number of other worlds in the systems to which

this world stands related, and then by the imagined number of systems, but by the products arising from the multiplication of the number of worlds into the number of the relations of each, and that by the product of the number of systems into the number of the relations of each. In like manner, the microscope opening up a new world in each minute particle of this world as seen by it, comes in with its discoveries to swell the infinities which already express the chances against Atheism, by multiplying all these again into the product of the infinite number of the individuals within reach of the microscope, by the number of the relations of each to its system, and of each to each other! An intelligent reception of absolute Atheism is impossible.

The Pantheistic systems of unbelief—alike those which are constructed after the subjective (“me”), the objective (not-me), or in the logical process (ideal absolute) theories, avoid the difficulties of the older and more matter-of-fact systems of Atheism only by keeping out of the reach of ordinary earthly reasonings. While soaring in their Ixionic flight, they rise beyond the reach, when having suffered the Ixionic fall, they sink beneath the contempt, of common sense thinkers; and have therefore generally passed unanswered as to their religious difficulties. It is obvious that all the modern Pantheistic systems, denying in substance, any intelligent personal First Cause instead of removing out of the way, only manage to roll forward the stone, over which Atheism falls and is broken, a step or two farther into the dark. If the thinking “I,” is the only God, whence then the material universe? If the “not-I” or the external universe, be God, whence the distinctive “I?” Or if God be the logical process ever developing,—by what twist in that process does thought develop matter? It is unphilosophical to assume the existence of any material universe at all;—then it is at least philosophical to ask: How came unphilosophical minds by the notion, that there is such a material universe? If the world do not exist as a phenomenon, yet the *notion that it does exist* is indisputably a phenomenon, at least to us who think so. If Pantheism, by disputing the premises, may avoid the obligation to suggest a first cause for the existence of the world, it cannot avoid the obligation to suggest a first cause for the very generally prevailing notion that there is a world.

It is more important, however, to complete our view of the subject, that we invite your attention more particularly to the difficulties of that form of infidelity which aims directly to subvert, and

overthrow Christianity, by attacking the evidences of its Divine authority. This brings us to notice, in conclusion, the logical difficulties of Deism, as exhibited in its assaults upon Christianity. This branch of the subject naturally divides itself into three topics: the logic of the skeptical criticism as applied to the authenticity and credibility of the gospel records; the logic of the skeptical arguments against the subject matter of those records; and the logical absurdity of the theories on which skepticism proposes to account for the resultant phenomenon of those records; namely an existing Christianity in the world.

In reference to the criticism whereby skepticism has attempted to impeach the veracity of the sacred writings, which is a primary question on the whole subject, we have room for a single illustration. It is a question which cannot fail to occur to any reader of those commentators who have impugned the veracity of the sacred authors; why is skepticism so much more hostile to these than to any other authors of the same age in history? As narrators of facts, as historical witnesses, wherein is Tacitus superior to Luke, or Livy to Matthew? As authors on the philosophy of religion, why shall Cicero "*De natura Deorum*," be treated with respect and even reverence; while Paul "*De justificatione*," is thrown in disgrace out of the circle of ancient philosophers? As beautiful philosophical "reminiscences," why shall Xenophon's account of the last conversations and the death of his master Socrates, call down the applause of the schools, while John's account of the last discourses and the death of his master Jesus be classed with the reveries of fanaticism, and turned from with contempt? If the works of Tacitus, Livy, Cicero, and Xenophon, are known to be authentic, from the method of their transmission to us, and by reason of an accumulation of proofs in their favor, from external facts of all sorts and internal confirmations—far more so Luke and Matthew, Paul and John. If it be said that Matthew relates incredible events—so does Livy. If Paul deals in dark speculations about religion, so does Cicero. If John was a blind and devoted partisan of the persecuted Jesus, so was Xenophon of the persecuted Socrates. Where then is the logical consistency of that criticism, which, when it sweeps off at one stroke these writers of the New Testament, does not at once make a "tabula rasa" of every page of ancient history?

The same general remark will apply to that microscopic criticism which has paraded before the world its discoveries of the

discrepancies between the sacred writers. Laying hold of a series of biographies of the life and actions of Christ by four different writers—biographies remarkable for their minuteness of detail—relating chiefly the events of three years—describing the journeys, the public discourses, the private intercourse, the table-talk of an individual—this criticism discovers and parades in triumph—one as evidence of “forgery,” another as evidence of designed fable—that one evangelist affirms a certain event to have occurred at the *sixth* hour, while the other affirms it was the *ninth*; that one says, Mary anointed the Saviour’s *feet*, another, that she anointed his *head*; that one quotes as the inscription on the cross, “*This is the King of the Jews,*” while the other quotes it, “*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.*” These instances of such criticism are not selected out for their insignificance, with a view to caricature, but are taken at random, as a fair average specimen of the “discrepancies” which the combined skeptical acuteness of the vulgar Paines and the accomplished Strauss’s have been able to discover in the sacred writings. Now we do not aver that minute criticism is in its nature illogical; nor even that such “discrepancies” may not furnish logical grounds for invalidating the testimony of these historians. But we have a right to aver, that if this criticism is just as against the credibility of these historians, and therefore renders it probable that the whole story is a fable—then it is equally just as against any other historians, and renders equally probable the fabulous character of all discrepant writers. Let the critics of this school only be consistent. Because Clarendon affirms that Strafford was condemned on Friday and executed the same day, while Burnet affirms he was condemned on Friday and executed on the following Monday,—let it be declared to be the logical inference that both these histories are forgeries, or at best but allegorical myths of the excited revolutionary era in England; and that Strafford was no real personage at all, but a mere *nebulous idea*, which, after long revolving in the English mind, gradually *condensed* into a solid conception in the legends of Clarendon and Burnet. We remember to have heard two veterans of the American Revolution, discussing some movement of American troops in the battle of Yorktown, in which battle both though then very young were actors. One spoke of the peculiar movement, as being yet fresh in mind as the events of yesterday, and that it occurred just “*after dinner*,” the other, who claimed to retain a no less vivid impression of the events of that memora-

ble day, persisted in affirming that the movement in question occurred immediately "*after breakfast.*" Now according to the critical laws which skepticism applies to the Scriptures, the logical inference would be a grave doubt, as to whether such a battle ever occurred; and whether Washington and Cornwallis were not mere "mythical" ideas, which, floating in the minds of the American people in that "heroic" and legendary age—representing, perhaps, the conception of a great national deliverance and a great national desolation—had at length taken definite forms in the minds of these old men. So of many other aspects of this criticism—what shall be said of the popular skeptical canons for the testing of prophecies by comparison with the record of their fulfillment? Hear the grave announcement of Dr. Strauss: "Whenever we find a narrative which recounts the accomplishment of a long-expected event, a *strong suspicion* must arise that the narrative owes its origin to the pre-existent belief that the event would be accomplished!" That is, when reduced to its simplest expression—events which are expected are less likely to happen, than those which are unexpected—therefore the narration of the occurrence of any event which was expected must be held to be suspicious. In fact the whole canon of the recent infidel tests of genuineness, may be summed up in two rules. 1. If the accounts of two evangelists agree exactly, neither can be real history, for they obviously both borrowed the story from some current fable. 2. If they differ in any particular, both are false—for two contradictory reports must obviously be untrue. Nor is this criticism very sparing in the application of its canon. Matthew's report of the sermon on the Mount is affirmed to be spurious because it contains more than Luke's; and Luke's is of course unworthy of reliance, because it contains less than Matthew's!

We must hasten on, however, to make at least a passing observation on the second point suggested; the application of the skeptical logic to the subject matter of these records. The first peculiarity which will strike the student of the infidel arguments on this point has reference to the connection between the credibility of the record and the subject matter of the record. When we have pressed the point, as above, of the *credibility* of the sacred historians, especially their obvious equality, in this respect, with any profane historians of the corresponding period, the reply ever is—that the events recorded by the sacred historians are in themselves incredible, and *therefore* the relators of them are unworthy of

credit. When, however, under this second head we would press the force of the testimony in favor of the miraculous occurrence, we are met with grave *doubts* as to the *credibility* of the witnesses. Now these two questions are most clearly altogether distinct, and that is a singular logic which admits of such shifts to save a point. It is but re-enacting in the trial of his gospel, the trial which Jesus himself had at the tribunals of his country—being tried on one charge, and found guilty on another. Not a whit less was it a mockery of justice, to try him in the Sanhedrim for the crime of blasphemy, and then condemn him before Pilate for the crime of sedition; than it is a mockery of logic thus to shift ever the issue—when after finding by no power of device of subtlety aught evil to say against the absolute integrity of the witness, to condemn him for the extraordinary character of the event which he attests—or when as philosophers debating the extraordinary event which he relates, to re-indict the witness in the teeth of his former verdict of acquittal, for bearing false testimony. Does not every man see that the character of the witness for veracity is one thing; and the nature of the event to which he testifies is altogether another thing? Yet on this very confounding of issues has modern Deism erected, in large part, its accusations against the gospel.

A very similar logical inconsistency runs through most of the deistical argument on the whole subject of the relation of miracles to the doctrines announced by those who wrought the miracles. The design of a miracle, as we conceive, is by no means to establish anything *directly* or *primarily* in regard to the character of the *truths* delivered by him who performs the miracle. It is but the external *seal* of a divine commission which attests the right of the bearer of it to teach as from God. It is just in harmony with the great gospel idea of a religion of *fact*, as that which alone can meet the wants of men. And it is this attestation from heaven to the authority of the teacher, that gives the gospel its peculiar adaptedness to the wants of men. It becomes thus a positive faith—a religion of fact. Aside from this, however, this method of revealing the truth through teachers, with commissions so attested, has a great advantage, in that hereby the world is protected from “false Christs.” For a distinct ground of evidence is herein set forth, which by its *concurrence* with the intrinsic excellence of the truths taught, and the honesty and purity of the teacher, makes it demonstrable beyond mistake that the religion so taught is of God. Accordingly Jesus appealed ever to these three things

as evidence of his trustworthiness as a teacher; the character of his doctrines, the holiness of his life, and the miracles which he wrought. The truths which he taught commended themselves to their consciences, his own character was in harmony with his doctrine, and forbade the supposition of any sinister or selfish motive in teaching as he did; and the signs and wonders which he did attested his authority to teach as one come from God.

Now it will be found that the deistical argument against the subject matter of the Christian records, never yet has met the Christian evidences as presented in this *concurrent* argument. Either strangely confounding these three separate though concurrent lines of proof, or not less strangely separating one from the rest and presuming the argument to rest upon that alone, the impugnors of Christianity create ever false issues, or shifting the issue from one to another point, as the urgency of the case may seem to demand. They declaim against the doctrine of the gospel—especially its “mysteries,” but when so doing, first separate these doctrines from their place in the scheme of revelation, and, leaving out of view the facts which attest their claim to be divine, deal with them as though truths of merely human origin. They impeach the honesty and veracity of the teacher—but in order so to do, first separate them in thought from the sublime truths which they taught, and the wonders which they did. They cavil at the miracles, but in order to give the cavil any force they must first separate the miracle as a simple phenomenon from the intrinsic excellence of the doctrine, taught by him whose commission it was the purpose of the miracle to attest. These must suffice as illustrations—they are fair specimens of the whole method of infidelity in dealing with the gospel.

It now remains that the logical absurdities of Deism when called upon to account for the existence of Christianity as a philosophical phenomenon be summed up very briefly.

There is at least one point in the whole matter upon which the friends and the enemies of Christianity may come together, and in regard to which even skepticism itself will have no doubts. *Christianity exists.* It is one of the phenomena of the world's history; and one important enough to merit at least some attention, simply as a subject of philosophic inquiry, if for no higher reason. The believers in Christianity have a theory on which they account for this phenomenon. In a manner exactly analogous to that in which they logically trace back some of the peculi-

arities of modern governments—as the habeas corpus, and trial by jury, to a certain era in history, and a certain Saxon race, as their origin,—they trace the present existing Christian religion back to a period 1800 years anterior to the present, and to a certain person called Christ, from whom it derives its name. Their logical process is in substance:—This system of religious doctrine, ordinances, and government is now wide-spread over the world. It did not have its origin in the last age, for that is absolutely impossible, being contradicted by every fact in history. It did not have its origin in the age before that, for that is equally impossible, and for the same reason. It could not have originated in any age between the last mentioned and the period we have assigned to its origin—for such a supposition does violence to all the facts in the world's history, and no less violence to known principles of human nature, which absolutely forbid the supposition, that men would submit to have such a yoke put upon their necks by those who must be palpably known to be impostors. It originated therefore at the period, and under the circumstances which it claims for itself. To this theory infidelity demurs,—not so much from any objection to the train of reasoning, as to the conclusion; which conclusion it avers is encompassed with difficulties so great, that nothing but a credulity that defies all reason can overcome them. Let infidelity then devise a theory attended with less difficulties. In answer to this demand a multitude of theories have been proposed, the most important of which may be reduced to four:—

1. Christianity originated in priestcraft and imposture during the “Dark Ages.” This is the vulgar Horn-book theory.

2. It originated at the period to which it refers itself, but was then the work of imposture and falsehood. This is a theory of a portion of the French and English infidelity of the last century.

3. It originated 1800 years ago, not in imposture, but in the ignorance of well-meaning enthusiasts, who testify truly to the occurrence of events, but were prone to attribute natural events to supernatural causes. This is the theory of rationalism, of which Paulus may be taken as the exponent.

4. It originated 1800 years ago. Yet neither in imposture nor in the ignorance of mistaken men, but as all other fabulous religions, in legends and “myths,” which were designed by their authors to convey great moral truths under the guise of allegory, but these were mistaken for fact and reality. This is the celebrated transcendental theory of Strauss.

Now, not to speak of the difficulties arising out of the utter contradictions of these several theories; take them one by one, and we hazard little in saying that it requires infinitely more credulity to receive any one of these theories as true, than would be needful to swallow all the contradictions and mysteries that skeptics are wont to ascribe to the Christian faith. There is, however, now space for only a single paragraph in regard to each of them.

As to the theory of priestcraft and imposture in the dark ages, there is this insuperable difficulty. The conditions of the problem are contradictory. It is necessary to suppose at one and the same time, an acuteness, shrewdness, genius and capacity in the impostors altogether unparalleled; and at the same time a darkness and stupidity of the people in the ages that produced the impostors *darker* than history takes any account of. Now great men have generally partaken somewhat of the character of the age that produced them; but this theory supposes the darkest and stupidest age in the history of man, to have produced impostors of a genius, a daring and an intellectual grandeur, before which all the illustrious names of the world's best and brightest ages sink into utter insignificance. That an age stupid enough to have been so imposed upon, should have produced such impostors is a greater wonder than any wonder the impostors ever devised.

The second supposition—of imposture and falsehood 1800 years ago—involves all the absurdities of the first, with the additional difficulty of not having the "*dark age*" in which its impostors might play off their fantastic tricks. The detail of absurdities to which this theory leads, is so long as to defy any ordinary limits. The singular paradoxes which its impostors exhibit in their characters; the union of pre-eminent villainy with transcendent purity—of low artifice with heroic chivalry—of more than satanic acuteness and forethought in arranging prophecies and their fulfilment—with a stupid thoughtlessness, in exposing themselves to detection by unnecessary reference to names, places, and dates, and unnecessary letter-writing,—which would disgrace the flimsiest demagogue,—who is always shrewd enough to "*cover up his tracks*;"—all these with an hundred other absurdities to which this supposition drives us, mark it as the product of mind utterly "void of judgment," and as the faith of one "given over to strong delusion to believe a lie."

The third supposition—of ignorant integrity—while at first sight less glaringly inconsistent, yet seems so only because it has the

advantage of more cautious and less plain-spoken advocates. When however the system is fully and fearlessly developed by such men as Paulus—who seem to have been happily constituted by nature with no perception of the ridiculous—we find paradoxes fully equal to the “impostors” of the former supposition. When men gravely interpret the narrative of restoring sight to the blind, as simply the modern operation for cataract, only a little more rapid—or that of restoring speech to the dumb, as but a rapider operation of the present German system for teaching the dumb to speak—or that of Jesus calming the winds and waves, as meaning simply that by some now unknown mesmeric power he magnetized them—we may, without any disrespect to great learning and acuteness, be disposed to laugh. When, however, it comes to describing the doctrine and ethics of Jesus as remarkably *pure for the age and the circumstances*, yet only such as even a self-deluded impostor with good intentions may be conceived to have developed, we shudder at the postposterous impiety.

The supposition of an origin of the gospel in mere “legend” and “myth,” which the stupidity of every age since has mistaken for veritable history and real transactions, is one about which the first “*difficulty*” must be to conceive it possible for the human mind to have devised it. Indeed we are not sure, but that we feel prepared if challenged to the task to show, that there are this day more imposing difficulties in believing the proposition, that a certain Dr. Strauss lived in Germany who projected this theory of the gospel, than in believing the proposition which asserts the most remarkable miraculous event in the gospel. Yet there is conclusive evidence, and therefore in consistency with our system of logic we are bound to believe, that a German Doctor has lived, who gravely propounded to the world the opinion—that the personage described by the evangelists, was an allegorical personage;—that these writers do not *mean* to relate real occurrences;—that the hero of their story is simply a condensation into a concrete form of certain nebulous ideas of the “legendary age” of the Jews;—that this fabulous legend or “myth”—unlike all other legends which vanish from the earth as soon as an age of writing commences,—(as ghosts at the coming of the dawn) out-lived the age of writing; nay absolutely obtruded itself upon the Augustan age of the Roman Empire! Nay more, in that age of lawyers and critics, who had reduced the laws of evidence to a science—in that age of skepticism and keen scrutiny—in the face of a learned priest-

hood on the one hand, and of skeptical sadducees on the other, and in spite of the prejudices of a people celebrated for their fanatical attachment to their religion;—this wonderful “myth” was mistaken for truth—yea, was adopted with zeal as a religion—was embraced by such numbers as soon to revolutionize the religion of the country that gave it birth;—yea, in spite of the bitterest opposition and persecution, it spread and obtained power till it revolutionized the Roman Empire! This, surely, forms a fitting *finale* to “the difficulties of Infidelity.”

From the whole view of the subject thus presented in mere outline, it is plain that whatever may be the justice or the injustice of the charge of illogical, stupid credulity so often hurled at Christians, it ill becomes infidelity to make the charge. Had it been consistent with the limits of this argument, it would not have been difficult to show by a comparison of each of the skeptical systems, as they passed in review before us, with the Christian system, that it requires far less sacrifice of reason and common sense, and involves far less credulity to receive, than to reject Christianity. That so far as concerns the larger portion of the skeptical systems, any faith in them involves a degree of credulity so utterly preposterous as to be indicative of a “mind void of judgment” given over to “believe a lie.” Whilst so far as regards the very best of the skeptical systems, the mind which can work its way through all the difficulties that inhere in them ought to find little trouble with even the greatest difficulties of Christianity. The mysteries of Christianity all lie in a region where finite reason cannot, in the nature of the case, be expected to reach them. The mysteries of infidelity, equally inexplicable, originate merely in its own self-contradictions. The religion which Christianity offers to the world is a religion of *fact*, which the learned and the ignorant alike can comprehend. The religion which infidelity presents, where it presents any religion at all—is a religion of subtle and refined speculations beyond the comprehension of all but a few learned and acute thinkers. The sanctions of Christianity appeal directly to man’s conscience, and to his instinctively felt relation to God as his Ruler and Judge. The sanctions alike of all the systems of skepticism, to the lowest views of his self-interest. The evidences of Christianity, aside from the intrinsic fitness of its doctrines to his spiritual nature, rest upon *facts*, the force of which any man can comprehend. The evidence of any system of faith provided by skepticism must rest upon subtle and refined deductions, of the correctness of which

even the most learned can never feel absolutely certain. The authoritative standard of Christian faith presents a *unity*, absolutely miraculous, between men of every variety of natural gifts, extending over a period of fifteen hundred years. The *diversities* of skepticism are almost equally wonderful, but only as exhibiting the endless vagaries of the human mind. Christian philosophy with its fundamental fact admitted concerning a revelation, can explain on almost any theory the phenomena of humanity and of the universe. Infidelity repudiating that fact, runs into every conceivable absurdity in the attempt to construct a theory of the universe. Christianity contains mysteries. Infidelity exhibits endless contradictions. Christianity teaches doctrines which excite the hostility of the human heart. Infidelity promulges dogmas which do violence to the human understanding. Christianity is accused of setting at naught the laws of reason and of evidence; and of opening a door to all manner of imposture upon the credulity of the world. Infidelity subverts all the laws of evidence, and if consistent with itself, makes all history one vast blank. In its sublimest results it leaves man's soul doubtful of its own existence, without moral principles to guide and enlighten it—man's intellect to become "a mind void of judgment,"—and the whole race of man to an eternal orphanage, wandering forever the sport of a fitful chance, or—what is no better—left to the guidance of certain blind "natural laws," or to the iron rule of a cold and heartless destiny.