

A SKEPTICAL DIFFICULTY AGAINST CREATION.

WE think it may be said with truth that every sort of error, every false theory, every unsound hypothesis has a *point d'appui* of its own, on which all its supposed strength is based, a fulcrum on which it seeks to support its unstable equilibrium. We do not speak of the sources from which it draws its power to mislead humanity, though these might in most cases be reduced to one fountain-head, but to the central doctrine which it puts forward in its own justification, the plea which it urges in its own behalf for deserting the standard of dogmatic truth, the ground which it asserts as necessitating its own peculiar form of skepticism. The present day exhibits to us a large proportion of educated men who either have a very confused idea of God or else who do not believe in Him at all. They take their Deity such as He is (or as they suppose He must be), criticise Him, call Him to account, try to force Him into a Procrustes bed of their own construction, attempt to reduce Him to their own standard, and, when they find that He is irreducible, they pass sentence on Him and condemn Him, if not to utter annihilation, at least to banishment out of their sight and ken as a being whose self-contradictory existence they can neither logically admit nor logically deny.

This modern anthropomorphism (often veiled under a protest against its own errors) is but a reproduction of an ancient fallacy, one which Socrates denounced in the Agora, Aristotle in his lectures in the Lyceum, Cicero in his noble treatise "De Natura Deorum." Yet our modern skeptics return undismayed to the attack, and courteously, but none the less malignantly, shoot their arrows against the God whom they misrepresent and misconceive. They assert Him a monster because, forsooth, He is not simply a virtuous man on a big scale. They first rob Him of His divinity and then taunt Him with the loss of it. But their error illustrates our assertion of the unity or convergence of the forces of the foe round one single point of attack—one, too, which, we confess at first sight, looks like a vulnerable point in the citadel of truth, or, at all events, like an insoluble difficulty which the champion of truth has to transmit and cannot satisfactorily answer.

What is this difficulty? It is not the prevalence of disease and even death, for they can understand that suffering may be the means of earning an incomparable reward and that death may be the gate of life immortal; it is not the existence of sin, since men

have the sense to understand that if God has given us the fulness of free will, we must perforce be free to disobey as well as free to obey the law He has imposed upon us; it is not even the existence of hell, for it is comparatively easy to see that if the hardened sinner perseveres forever in his rebellion, he must also persist forever in his misery. The central difficulty of our times is none of these, at least primarily, but one which out-tops them all and which is a difficulty not only to the skeptic and to the unbeliever, not only to him who is on the look-out for some excuse for his rebellion, but to all who have ever given it a thought. We will go further, and we will allow that it is a difficulty such as may reasonably frighten us until we look it full in the face and recognize its true character; it is a difficulty which seems insuperable until we have discovered, on thoughtful searching, that it is but a phantom form, a spectre which may be consigned, with all errors, its companions, to the happy hunting grounds of an exploded superstition.

We will try and state this difficulty as forcibly as we can, and put it as some bitter opponent might be supposed to put it. We imagine that in his mouth it would be something as follows: "You say that God is a God of mercy, that He is Himself infinite in mercy. I can understand that the exhibition of this infinite mercy cannot be, strictly speaking, infinite, and that it is limited by the finite nature of those towards whom it is displayed and by the simple fact that outside the Infinite nothing can be infinite. But if it cannot be infinite, yet at least we might expect it to exceed the mercy of a merciful man. We might fancy also that the ideal should exhibit itself in a higher degree and with a greater generosity than is possible to the feeble imitation which does but copy it. We might expect that all that the mercy of man would do, the mercy of God would do also, and a great deal besides. Where a merciful man would have spared, we might have expected that God would spare also. Where a merciful man would have calculated the consequences of this action to the happiness of these so far as he could foresee them, and would have modified his actions accordingly, there we might at least have looked for a similar prevision on the part of an omniscient God and for a corresponding modification of His divine action in favor of those who would be affected by it. Where a merciful man would have held his hand when about to do that which he thought would, so far as he could look forward, involve others in misery and sorrow, there, at least, we might expect the all-merciful God would have abstained from what, in His perfect foreknowledge, He certainly knew would entail upon His creatures ruin and destruction. Yet this merciful God, omnipotent and omniscient, seeing all the future at a glance, know-

ing the destiny of all creatures real and possible, creates hundreds and thousands of unfortunate beings whom He knows full well are destined to be utterly miserable forever. He cannot plead ignorance, carelessness, oversight—since He is God. He cannot urge that as a *Provisor Universalis*, a Ruler who has to think of the general good of the community at large, it was necessary to sacrifice some victims for the sake of the rest, to merge their interest in the consideration of the good of their fellows, since to argue thus, to justify Himself on such a ground, would be to acknowledge His own febleness; it would be a confession that he was no God at all, but an ἀνίχθανος γερπιδός, a resourceless dotard who has only limited means at His disposal and has to make the best of them. You will tell us, perhaps, that it is always through their own fault that men are lost forever, that they have had sufficient and more than sufficient means for escape from the misery that they have incurred, and that they have only themselves to blame if they have not made use of the opportunities liberally proffered them. This, we allow, is true, but it is no answer to our difficulty. This is a justification of the perfect justice of God, but not of His mercy. You will tell us, again, that if they persist in an attitude of rebellion, even His display of mercy must have a limit somewhere, and the greatest rebel cannot go on defying his God without some limit to the offers of mercy. This also we acknowledge, and we allow that mercy must stop somewhere and leave justice to do its work. But this, too, does not meet our objection, for we are not finding fault with God's treatment of mankind or with His punishment of those who persistently refuse to obey Him. Our difficulty goes a step further back. We ask why He should create at all those whom He knows will, through their own fault, bid Him defiance to the cruel end, reject His mercy, scorn His love, set at nought His commands? Why call them into existence, foreseeing, as He does, their doom of eternal misery? It cannot be for His own sake, for nothing can increase, or diminish, or affect His unapproachable and infinite happiness. It cannot be for their sakes, for the boon of life is destined to be a curse to them. It cannot be for the sake of others, for the misery of some cannot be for Him a necessary condition to the happiness of others. Why, then, should He not leave them in their nothingness, possible but not actual works of His hands, present to the Divine mind as beings whom He might have called into existence, but in His mercy refrained from creating to save them from the guerdon of misery that He knew would be theirs."

We have tried to tell our objector's case as fairly as we could. It looks at first sight a strong one. We confess, when we turn to the answer, we find ourselves a little reluctant to enter upon it. Not that we have any misgivings as to the possibility of a complete and

satisfactory reply. Our reluctance arises from another cause. In the first place, there seems a sort of impertinence in being an apologist for God. When we defend any one, he is our client and we his patron, and it is not a very seemly position to be patronising God. Besides this, the temper of the true Theist is one of humble submission, not of discussion. He is forced, against his will, into the arena to fight the lion and the bear instead of peacefully feeding by the cool waters the sheep and lambs of his Master's flock. His proper business is one of adoring love, not of criticism. There rise to his lips the words of Abraham: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" and he feels a sort of satisfaction in confessing his ignorance and his inability to solve all difficulties in recognizing that, by reason of his own feebleness, God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways inscrutable. He has such a dread of what is to him the deadly sin of doubt that he shrinks from methodic doubt, which consists in putting himself as far as may be in an adversary's position in order to refute him. Add to this that he has a dread of his own weakness and fears lest the feebleness of his own intellect and his own reasoning powers should damage the indefectible strength of the cause of which he is the champion.

In spite of these drawbacks we are going boldly to make the attempt; and the fallacies underlying our opponents' plausible position are so numerous that there is not very much difficulty in repelling his attacks. The fact is, as we shall show presently, he is an anthropomorphist; from first to last he quarrels with the God of theism because he is not simply a big man. He wants to thrust upon his Creator defects and imperfections which are peculiar to the creature, to drag him down to his own level; and because God is consistent, asserts His proper position as Lord and King of the Universe, and refuses any perfections incompatible with infinity, the objector most unreasonably quarrels with Him, refuses to acknowledge Him, calls Him a cruel tyrant, or the great unknowable, even if he does not altogether deny His existence, and buries himself in the slough of a degrading atheism. Thus, for instance, when he requires the exhibition of the divine mercy to be at the best on a level with that displayed by the most merciful of men, he is at once putting on the cloak of his anthropomorphist hypothesis. For God, the infinitely good, is under no sort of obligation to display His goodness at all, whereas man is required, by precept and counsel, to carry out into practice the goodness which exists in his heart. It is true that God's attribute of mercy is the source, the foundation, the basis of His display of mercy. "*Bonum est diffusivum sui,*" good of all kinds, divine as well as human, has a tendency to spread itself beyond itself. In

man's case it *must* do so, in God's case there is no absolute necessity, only a sort of fitness and conformity with what we should naturally and reasonably expect. If God were simply to measure out to each man bare justice without mercy, man would have no right to complain, and God would none the less be infinite in mercy. The supposition is practically almost an impossible one, because God, knowing the weakness of our nature, and how necessary concrete examples are to enable us to realize abstract truths, would not, and we may perhaps say, could not, reasonably require of us that we should believe in a divine attribute which never manifested itself to us, and of which there was not a trace in His dealings with men. But the supposition is, theoretically, possible, and we can suppose God measuring out to men exact justice and nothing more, tempering His justice with no admixture of mercy, giving to each what is due to him in the way of pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, enjoyment, reward, temporal or eternal, forgiveness for the past and help for the future, but nothing whatever beyond his due. If He did so, we should still be bound to believe him a God of infinite love. Every display of mercy to man is quite gratuitous on God's part, and, consequently, the measure of it depends on His will, and is subject to no law except His supreme and inscrutable will. It is not so with His justice. He must, *ipso facto*, from His very nature be perfectly just; but perfect mercy is an expression that cannot, from the nature of things, have any realization in facts, and the amount of mercy shown to each must be now more, now less, without our being able to lay down any sort of rule. God may display none of it, as we have said; He may display comparatively little of it, justice so preponderating that mercy is thrown into the background, as in His punishment of the lost. He may display it, and in fact He does display it, in such luxuriant profusion that He appears almost extravagant in His readiness to overlook evil, sin, treachery, baseness, ingratitude; almost reckless in the magnificent rewards He showers upon one who has made some faint, puny efforts to serve Him, as where He rewards man's brief service here with the immeasurable and eternal joys of heaven. But the amount of mercy shown, whether it be less or more, or none at all, in no way affects the inherent infinity of the divine goodness, loving with an infinite love that which is worthy of such love, and with a finite love that which, by reason of its finite nature, is capable of only a finite love.

Thus it is that the essential difference between God and man comes prominently before us. Man is bound to show mercy over and above justice—not so God. Man, if he aims at perfection, must impart to others the fulness of mercy to the very best of his power. God cannot put forth outside of Himself the fulness of

any of His internal perfections. Man's mercy is developed by its exercise, and, therefore, he who strives after perfection must exert it to the utmost limit of his power. God's mercy is in no way affected by its external exercise, and He cannot exert it to the limit of His power because His power of exerting it has no limits. We have a right to judge of the amount of man's mercy by the amount that we see of it. We cannot judge of the amount of the Divine mercy by the amount that we see of it, simply because the amount we see must, from the nature of the case, be a finite amount, whereas the mercy itself is infinite, and there is, therefore, no sort of proportion between the one and the other. Hence, it is no argument in favor of God acting in this way rather than in that, that the one course of action is more merciful than the other. If it were, why should God ever punish at all? Why should He not always influence men with gifts of virtue instead of frightening them from evil with threatened punishments?

We have dwelt upon this because it is so dangerous and plausible a fallacy to demand of God a sort of maximum amount of mercy and generosity. As a matter of fact, He is almost lavishly merciful and generous, but there is no sort of reason founded on His possession of these attributes why He should display them beyond the point which is necessary to show man that He possesses them. Beyond this all is gratuitous.

To apply this to our subject. In God's dealings with men we see many cases in which He might have given more than He has. More than this, there is no single individual whom He might not have endowed more richly; no saint in heaven whom He might not have given, had He chosen, larger graces than He has given. This follows necessarily from His being God and not man, infinite in His treasures of grace, not finite. It is, therefore, for Him, and Him alone, to draw the line between bare justice on the one side and unbounded mercy on the other; all we have a right to ask of God is that He shall be perfectly just to all—that He shall give to each individual whom He creates a fair chance of attaining to eternal happiness. When He has given this, when each is provided with such means of grace, such opportunities, such assistance, internal and external, in the way of virtue, that it is not only barely possible, but well within his power to find his way to heaven, to avoid sin and practise virtue, then God has done His part, and even if through their own neglect of those opportunities all but a few, a very few, of the human race were lost, we should have no kind of right to complain against God, to impugn His justice or even to impugn His mercy. As long as every one of the lost is bound to cry out, "It was through my own fault that I was lost," so long God is justified, and His infinite perfections would be in themselves

none the less admirable than if they had all been saved. His works are not a whit more perfect when He gives more grace, shows more mercy, than when He gives less grace and shows less mercy. If He had pursued the lost with graces which they could not resist, He would be not a whit more merciful than He is now in giving them grace enough, and more than enough, to enable each one of them to save his soul, though unfortunately for them not enough, by reason of their own perverse will, to overturn their deliberate resistance to the gentle influence which persuades, invites, attracts, but never compels. Deny this and you at once degrade God to a finite being, for you imply that He is bound to go to the full extent of His mercy-extending powers; and an infinite God, as having no possible limit in any of His powers, cannot go to their full extent, and, therefore, will be, and must be, always liable to the plausible objection that He, the All-Merciful, might have been more merciful, and yet would not! Paradoxes are sometimes true, and we allow that at first sight it seems a paradox to justify God's limited distribution of mercy by the fact that His supply of it is unlimited; but the logical fact is undeniable. For it stands to reason that He must draw a line somewhere, and wherever He draws it He might always have given more; and our anthropomorphist can object that He cannot be a God of infinite mercy and compassion because of this limitation of what He might give more liberally if He chose.

Here we must guard against a misconception. Good men and good Christians sometimes talk as if the reason why God's manifestation of any one of His perfections is limited, is because some other perfection comes in to place a bar to its further display, that God's anger is limited by His mercy, His mercy by His justice, and so forth. They regard the divine action as the resultant of these various attributes determining and even counteracting one another. Such an idea is, we will not say false, but very imperfect; we may say, in metaphorical language, that the arm that was raised to punish was stayed by the remembrance of mercy; we may pray to God to remember His loving kindness, to call to mind His servants of old, as we often find the Hebrew prophets doing when misfortunes threatened the sacred city of Jerusalem; we may ask that mercy may rejoice against His justice; but in all this we are using human language, which, in the very use we know, is but a *façon de parler*, a mode of addressing the Most High, which represents our weakness and feebleness better than His Divine Majesty. There is not, and cannot be, any sort of opposition between one attribute of God and another; nay, there is no real difference or distinction in themselves between one and another. It is true that there is in each and every attribute of God, by reason of its in-

finity, a *foundation* for a real distinction in our minds between one and the other, just as in the colorless light of the sunbeam there is a sort of foundation for the distinction between the various colored rays into which it separates when it passes through the prism. But in the attributes *themselves* there is no real distinction or difference. God is identical with all His attributes, and, therefore, all these attributes are identical with each other. God's mercy, justice, love, holiness, etc., are really all one and the same thing; the distinction is in us, not in God, in our way of looking at them, not in the perfections themselves. When we say that God acts sometimes in justice, at other times in mercy, we mean that the side of the Divine action which is present to our minds is what we call justice or what we call mercy; there is no real distinction, no difference *ex parte rei*, between these two actions, which to us seem to stand in such marked contrast; or, to speak more correctly, the distinction which we perceive, and truly perceive, is the result rather of the different objects which are the terminus of the divine action. The same ray of light is red or blue according to the object on which it falls; the same indivisible act of God, ever perfect in its unity, appears to us in the light of anger or of love, according to the disposition of the man on whom it is directed, and partly according to the apparent and immediate consequences by which men are always prone to judge. If God sends the Deluge, we regard it as a punishment pure and simple, as a display of God's wrath; we watch the reprobate world swallowed up by the rising waters, and we see no mercy in the awful visitation. But we know that many of those who then perished turned their hearts to God before their death; that though they had been incredulous as long as the ark was preparing, and had jeered at Noe's patient and apparently aimless labor, yet they had repented with contrite hearts when the flood-gates were opened, and that they were visited by our Lord after His death, who deigned to preach to them and prepare them for the eternal joys of Heaven. For them, therefore, the Deluge was a supreme act of mercy. So, too, it may be that, besides the handful of just men who escaped from Sodom, there may have been grievous sinners not a few, who made hearty acts of sorrow for all their evil deeds, when the agony of the falling fire flakes and the sulphurous suffocating storms reminded them of the punishment in store for those who set at naught the natural law. For these, therefore, the brief amount of expiating anguish would be a supreme mercy, an act of Divine compassion. We bring forward these instances, not so much by way of showing man's shortsighted way of looking at things Divine, but to show how the same action of God is determined in its character by the recipient; in just the same way the eternal punish-

ment of the wicked is as real mercy to those who are led by the consideration of it to avoid that which is worse than any possible punishment, the hideous, loathsome thing we call sin.

But we must return to our immediate subject. We have been seeking to prove that God must limit His mercy from the very nature of the case, and that if it is more merciful not to create this or that man than to create him, it does not follow that God will abstain from bringing him into being as long as the man is not exposed by the fact of his creation, the circumstances of his birth, to any sort of injustice. God's own nature forbids the faintest or slightest injustice, but the amount of mercy to be shown is not and cannot be proportionate to the Divine perfection, but must be determined simply and solely by the Divine will. Even though the man is born to misery and dies in sin, his creation and his career imply no sort of imperfection in God so long as he has a reasonable chance of making his own way to heaven at last. Such a chance God gives to every one, a good, reasonable chance and something more; and man's ultimate fate, if he is lost, is simply owing to his misuse of the free will God has given him, and his abuse of the graces by which God helped him on his way.

Perhaps, however, our opponents are not satisfied with this solution. We allow, they say, that God's mercy must *ipso facto* be limited; but why should He not so fix the limit that none should be miserable forever, but all should at least be on the right side of the Judge at last? Why should He not so limit His creatures' action that none should be brought into being except those who will love and praise Him to all eternity, and not those whom He in His infinite prescience knows will forever gnaw their tongues and curse their Maker for creating them? If, continues our opponent, God's supreme majesty is not affected by the fate of His creatures, He might at least have given them what cost Him nothing: if it is the divine glory which must needs be manifested, surely the praises of the blessed are a more congenial manifestation than the curses of the lost. Why should He not have limited Himself to the creation of those to whom it will be better to be than not to be, of those predestined to at least some degree or other, greater or less, of everlasting happiness? Here we are at the very kernel of the difficulty in the form in which it strikes the popular imagination with the greatest force. It certainly is hard at first to understand what appears to be a gratuitous act of cruelty on the part of the All-Merciful. But let us look a little closer into the matter, and we shall see that the alternative of mercy which our objectors would suggest as an improvement on the existing order is simply a plea for the same degrading anthropomorphism in another form—it is the same short-sighted, feeble

argument—which would fashion a God after its own fancies that would be no God at all. For the method of action which it proposes as suitable to God is this. Objecting to His creating any one whom He foresees will be lost, it requires of Him that when He is going to create such a one He should stop short and hold His creative hand. Now this supposes on the part of God, in the course of the series of acts succeeding one another in the divine mind,—not, of course, in time, but in logical order,—a positive, actual deliberation before adopting one or other of them. It supposes God to conceive the idea of creating A and of giving him a certain amount of grace, and then to look forward to the results before putting His ideas in practice. It supposes Him to foresee that A will be lost, and foreseeing this, to put aside the idea of his creation, and to create B instead, whom He by a similar process of prevision foresees will be saved. God would have to confess that the idea conceived, the realization of which would be the creation of A, was an unfortunate one, and would have to fall back on some one more suitable to the Divine bounty. Now God in contemplating the future has before Him every imaginable result which would have followed from every possible contingency. There is mapped out clearly in the Divine mind the whole course of the world's history as it would have been if our first parents had not sinned, or if the deluge had not submerged the habitable world, or if Christ had come into the world a thousand years earlier or later, or if Xerxes had made himself master of Greece or Hannibal of Italy, or if the Protestant "Reformation" had not taken place, or if Napoleon the Great had never been born or had died in childhood or in youth. All this, with its remotest consequences to the end of time, stands out sharp and clear before the mind of God. Nay, God sees what would have been the history of each individual man if he had been subject to influences different from those which he has actually experienced—if, for instance, he had been born in China or Japan instead of in England or in France; if he had been reared among savages or Mahometans, if he had been an orphan from his infancy, if he had been rich instead of poor, low-born instead of high-born, if one or many or all the circumstances of his life had been changed; each separate result, with all the innumerable results which would have branched off from it, is foreseen by the Divine Omniscience in His infinite storehouse of possibilities. But all these things which might have taken place, yet never did take place, are simply possibilities and nothing more. When God has once stamped them with the mark of possibility pure and simple, no person in heaven or on earth can change them into actualities. God Himself cannot reverse His decree, cannot change His mind, and rescue out of the abyss of things which

might have been but are not to be, what He has once regarded as a pure possibility. We cannot picture God as placing before Himself, over and above actualities and possibilities, that third class which is continually present to human intelligence, the class of contingencies, of things which are still undecided, and which may or may not be things about which we are not sure and respecting which, if it is in our power to bring them to pass or not to bring them to pass, we have not made up our minds. Any one can see that it is an absurdity to suppose a God who has not made up His mind respecting some action which He is contemplating—nothing can be more ludicrous than to picture Him as turning the matter over before He decides, or looking forward to the consequences of His action before He makes the contingent actual. Yet this is what our objectors propose in the Deity whom they desire to substitute for the Omnipotent and Infinite God of Theism—they want to set up a stupid old man who does not know his own mind, who makes mistakes, and afterwards is sorry for them, who proposes to create one man, but on looking forward to the unfortunate consequences of the act of creation, or foreseeing by means of His Omniscience that the poor fellow will through his own fault be lost, puts aside the idea conceived in the Divine intelligence and creates another instead whom He foresees will save his soul. There is something almost amusing in this improvement on the God of Theism that the inconsequent skeptic proposes to set up in His place. This new Divinity, more perfect than His predecessor, is to revolutionize the mode of managing the world—the old gods of paganism are replaced by the God of the Christian, their voices are silent and they belong to the past. And now He who succeeded to their place is gone, having encountered one mightier than Himself.¹

The method of procedure which God is to adopt is as follows, according to our intelligent objector. First of all, He is to conceive the idea of creating A, then He is to exercise His power of prevision in order to discover what A's eternal destiny will be. If A proves a success and reaches heaven, then all is well. God may be allowed to create him. But if he proves a failure, if, in spite of all the chances given him, the graces bestowed on him, the warnings, threatenings, chastisements, he will persist in rebellion till the end of his probation, if he will defy God and refuse to submit to Him, then God must draw back from His abortive design. He must cry, "I made a mistake! I certainly intended

¹ Cf. Æsch. Ag. 168-71.

οὐδ' ὅστις πάροι Θεοῦ ἦν μέρα;
οὐδέν ἂν λίσσεται πρὶν ὦν
θεῶ; δ' ἔπειτ' ἔψυ τριακ' ἄλλο; δέχεται τυχεῶ;.

to create A, but I see now that my work would have been a failure. Forgive me this once. I will try to turn out a more successful specimen of humanity in my next attempt; if I do not, if I am again unfortunate in my endeavor, I can but once more apologize for my abortive design, before I have launched upon the world of actuality another being destined to perish. I will go on putting before myself possible beings one after another, till I am so fortunate as to hit upon one whom I foresee will be saved, and then, and then only, will I issue the definitive fiat of creation!"

When put thus barely, the absurdity of the objection is clear enough. But, unfortunately, we in our conceit and pride

See not the feeble incapacity
Like to a dream, in which poor purblind man
Lies wrapt and bound. Never can mortal's scheme
O'erpass the harmony ordained by Heaven's King.

God does not and cannot create this or that individual with a view to the consequences of creation destined to ensue from his obedience or disobedience to the law of his nature. He cannot do so without forfeiting the supremacy of His divine perfection. God creates because the creative act is in itself good, and the being created is good, and the end for which he is created is good, as regards the Divine intention, though, through the free will which belongs to him necessarily as man, he can frustrate that intention and fail of attaining to that end. It would be degradation to God to require of Him that He should look forward to what will be in point of fact the termination of that individual's career, shaped as it will be by the act of the created being, and that He should regulate His divine action by the foreseen whims and perversities and sins and rebellions of the creature. He cannot be tied down to make or abstain from making according to these contingent consequences without thereby ceasing to be, in the mind of him who would impose such an obligation, a being of infinite wisdom; for by this necessity of reason He would exhibit Himself, not as one that doeth all things well, but as a clumsy workman, an unskilful and inconsiderate craftsman, a bungling designer of his own handiwork.

Even man is not bound to look forward, and sometimes is bound not to look forward to the consequences which he may foresee will result or are likely to result from this or that action. If we knew that a million souls would be lost by our refusal to tell a lie in a

¹ οὐδ' ἰδεῖν οὐκ
ἐπιγνοῦσαν ἀδικίαν
ἰσθνεῖν ἢ τὸ φῶς
ἀλαθὲν γένος ἐμποδιζόμενον; οὐποτέ θνητῶν
τὰν Λιθῶν ἁρμονίαν ἀνδρῶν παρεξίασι βολαί.—*Kæch. Crom.*, 545-51.

case where there was a clear obligation to truth, the ruin which the sinful lie might avert would not be any justification for telling it. "Fjat justitia, ruat cœlum." We must perform our obligations, even if all the inhabitants of Paradise were to be thrown down into the flames of hell by our own persistency. It is only when the performance or non-performance of the action is itself indifferent, or, at all events, is not essentially bad, that we can perform it or not, according to the consequences we foresee from it. If we foresee that by reproofing a blasphemer we have a chance of bringing him to a better state of mind, then we shall do well in taking on ourselves the charitable but painful task of reprimand. But if, on the other hand, we foresee that it will probably only lead to fresh blasphemies, then we had better hold our tongues. If we foresee that the action, in itself indifferent, of walking down a particular street will lead us to a tempting gin palace, into which we know from long experience that we are certain to enter, and having entered to drink to excess, then we are bound to turn our feet, if it be possible, in some other direction. If we foresee that by retiring to the chapel to pray we shall annoy and irritate our father, who wishes us to pass the time in reading to him some harmless and entertaining story, then it is far better to set aside the peaceful communing with God for an employment which, however inferior in itself, has the superior claim from the fact that it will amuse and satisfy the old man's fancies.

But this duty of prevision is the consequence of the subordinate position which we occupy in creation; it is because our actions derive their character from their conformity with, or disagreement from, the commands of a superior who has a right to command, that we are bound to forecast and see whether they will tend to the carrying out of His will, or to a transgression of His laws. But the irresponsible superior is not so bound—cannot be so bound. He cannot, indeed, transgress the perfection of His own nature. He cannot do anything which is of itself unjust, unmerciful, unkind. But, outside of this, no other condition can be imposed on Him consistently with a recognition of His God-head. We cannot, consistently with His position as King and Lord, ask of Him a prevision of consequences, when these consequences derive their painful character from the fault of the subordinate agent, and not from any law which the Creator has imposed upon the creature. We cannot even admit that such consequences influence or determine His divine action. What God does is good, because God does it; what God makes is good, because God makes it. It is the exercise of the Divine Will, supreme, omnipotent, irresponsible, which confers upon the external act or work its perfection, inasmuch as it is in virtue of its being the act or work of a God,

an inadequate reflection of His divine beauty which manifests itself more or less in it. Nay, it is not only good, but best, nay, the best thing possible, simply because God wills it, and wills by it to promote His glory just in that degree which shall seem good to Him. If it is God's will that some event should take place by which His glory should be promoted to an extent which we may formulate as 10, then it is far better that this event should come about than that some other event of which the consequences might be formulated as 100, or 1000, or 10,000, or 1,000,000. It is better that the being created by God should glorify God in the way which is in accordance with His supreme will, rather than in some other way not in accordance with His supreme will, but which is, nevertheless, to speak in human fashion, more fruitful of glory to God. It is better that a little child should gasp out its little soul after an hour of life, if such is the Divine decree, than that it should serve God and promote His glory during fourscore years of unbroken fidelity, if God has not so ordained. It is better that a man should be created whom God foresees (permitting, not willing, the sin) is about to spend his life in an unbroken course of transgression and disobedience and rebellion against the Divine Law, if God's will is to create him, than that a future saint should come into existence under any other circumstances; otherwise the will of God will not be the supreme law of the universe and the fulfilment of His divine pleasure the pattern of all perfection, the standard, the ideal, the sum and substance of all that is good and to be desired outside of His own divine nature. Otherwise you degrade God, compel Him to modify His arrangements by reason of human perversity, exhibit Him in the ridiculous and impossible character of a short-sighted, clumsy designer, a master-builder who foresees that the design he has conceived will fail of its end, and so abandons it.

From this another consequence follows, that there is no such thing as a failure in God's creation. The creation of those who are lost forever is no more a failure than the existence of some rare and gorgeously painted butterfly is a failure because, forsooth, it has scarcely escaped from its chrysalis stage when it is caught in the tropical forest by some eager collector, and sacrificed to adorn the museum of some far-off city. Those who are condemned to the eternal punishment of hell, fail, it is true, of the vision of God; they fail of the only thing in the world which renders life worth living; they fail of the end for which He destined them apart from any action of their own which should frustrate it. They fail of virtue, they fail of that which alone can satisfy the yearnings of their higher nature, they fail of the only fount of happiness which can slake their thirst after God. But their life, though a failure in

regard of themselves, is not a failure in respect of God. It would be no more a failure in the eyes of an unprejudiced looker on—say an angel watching the scene—than the short-lived existence of the moth adorning the collector's museum is a failure in the eyes of any intelligent man. For the ultimate end of human existence, the ultimate reason why man is born into the world, is not his own happiness, nor the attainment of that which is to him the only centre in which his activity can find repose, nor the brilliant display of human virtue, nor even the service and praise of God, but the manifestation of the Divine attributes in a greater or less degree, in this way or that, according as God shall please. It is because God necessarily receives an accidental glory from all His dealings with His creatures that these creatures were primarily created. From His rational creatures God derives the greatest glory, whether they obey or rebel, whether their relation to Him is one of submission or revolt, still God is glorified, He is glorified by the punishment of the rebel as well as by the reward of the saint. If the latter is a more brilliant manifestation of the Divine glory than the former, we must remember that God is never tied *ad optimum*. One man freely submits, and his relation to God is one of honor and praise, and a crown of eternal joy; another freely rebels, and his relation to God is one of dishonor and contempt, and the agony of an eternal separation from all good—in each case God receives the honor that is His due. In each case the creation, the life, nay, the eternal destiny of man is a success as far as God is concerned, because it manifests one or other of the Divine perfections. There is no such thing as a failure in God's universe, and there cannot be.

But here we fancy our objector replies: "Granting all you say, granting that human existence is a success as regards God Himself; granting, too, that if He creates rational beings at all, He must create them free to choose their own ruin, if their perverse self-will refuses to bend the knee to God; granting, also, that God cannot from the very necessity of His divine nature hark back on His own designs and abstain from the creation of those whom He foresees will be lost; still, *why should God create at all?* It makes no difference, you tell us, to the unapproachable and supreme happiness of God whether He creates or not. Why, then, should He embark on a work which brings to Him no profit and plunges into the misery of eternal fire hundreds, thousands, millions, of the creatures He professes to love?"

We have, we fear, outrun the length to which we intended to limit the present article, and we must therefore postpone to some future time the solution of this further difficulty. But we have already furnished the intelligent reader with at least one key to it.

For if God cannot be required, consistently with His divine perfection, to regulate and modify His creative action by the consequences which follow from it, how absurd and self-contradictory it is on the very strength of these Divine perfections to exact of Him to abstain from creating altogether. If the beings created were involved in eternal misery without any fault of their own, we could understand the difficulty of creation, but when they of their own free will simply reject the happiness offered them—how utterly unreasonable to require of God that He should be baffled of the creative act, good in itself and tending to good, because, forsooth, the being created chooses to turn the good wine to poison, to use the means given him for the attainment of eternal happiness in order to purchase for himself eternal misery. Unreasonable, then, it would be, and self-contradictory; and, as we hope we may show hereafter, unmerciful as well.

To go back to the difficulty which we stated at the opening of the present paper: No one can assail the justice of God in that He creates those whom He foresees will, through their own fault, be lost; no one can assail the degree of mercy which He exercises towards them without first robbing Him of His divine nature. No one can ask Him to abstain from creating them without falling into the same absurdity of substituting for an Infinite God one who is finite and subordinate. No one can reasonably demand of God that He should contradict Himself. Yet this is what the objector virtually demands of Him, and when he refuses to accede to a demand which is in contradiction with His divine nature, the unreasonable and purblind mortal threatens to withdraw his allegiance from his Creator, and exclaims in the words of a modern infidel: "Such a God I cannot and will not obey."
