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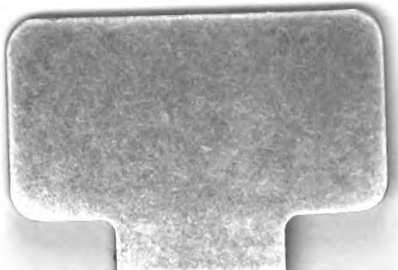
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1861  
A letter to the Lord Bishop of Oxford.





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W. B. [Bright]

THE  
SUPPRESSION OF DOUBT  
IS NOT FAITH.

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A  
LETTER

TO  
THE LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

ON HIS TWO SERMONS, ENTITLED

“The Revelation of God the Probation of Man.”

BY A LAYMAN.

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OXFORD :  
J. L. WHEELER.  
WHITTAKER & CO., LONDON.  
1861.

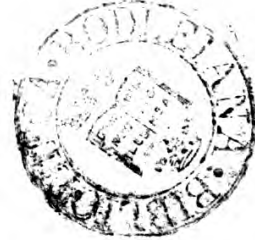


"Why may not Spiritual Experience  
and an approach to the Divine in  
Character be necessary means of insight  
into the things of the Spiritual World,  
as scientific instruments and scientific skill  
are necessary means of insight into the  
things of the Material World?"

G. Smith's on Study of Hist. p. 47

There would seem no bad answer to the  
assumption wh. prevails in this letter, that  
Reason is the supreme judge of spiritual truth.

LETTER, &c.



MY LORD,

**I**N your two Sermons, entitled “The Revelation of God the Probation of Man,” you come forward, as the Bishop of this Diocese, to teach us our duty, as servants of the God of Truth, in regard to the religious doubts and controversies now prevailing in the Church.

Your Sermons are evidently called forth by the “Essays and Reviews.” Among all the mischievous tendencies of that unlucky book, the most mischievous is its tendency to frighten people out of the use of their reason in religious matters, by making them believe that the results of conscientious inquiry must be fatal to their piety and their peace.

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The present crisis is, no doubt, a dangerous one. It owes its dangerous character mainly to the injurious action of the Established Church in checking the course of opinion, which, if left to itself, would flow quietly and calmly, but which, when dammed up, acquires unnatural force and fury. Yet the state of affairs is not quite so bad as your Lordship seems to suppose. The agony of alarm which thrills through your Sermons arises, I trust, from

Dislike of Creeds as strong in the layman  
as in 2 Jowett's Epay. See p. 4. 7. 11. 19. 21.  
THE DANGER EXAGGERATED.

an exaggerated view of the peril—not, perhaps, as it affects the Anglican Episcopate, but as it affects the mass of Christians. I wish you were in a position to see and admit that the “creeds and confessions drawn up by men,” the “Church’s terminology,” and the “authoritative declarations of the faith,” whether they or any of them be true or false, stand on a very different footing from the Christianity which was delivered to the hearers of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>x</sup> I think it too probable that very different inferences from those which you desire to suggest will be drawn by independent minds as to all the parts of our religion to which your warnings and denunciations apply, and I am therefore anxious that the range of their application should not be unduly enlarged. You are a Bishop, and are bound to maintain all that a dogmatic Church declares, by her authority, to be matter of faith. I am a layman, and shall be content to preserve the religious truth by which we live.† The inevitable effect of your language, as it appears to me, will be to taint with the deepest suspicion every article of our belief, into which you would scare us from inquiring. I fear this suspicion will fall unjustly on some matters, which, if fairly inquired into, will bear the inquiry well.

Your method of dealing with religious doubt is simple and summary. You say (p. 40) that a man

<sup>x</sup> Comp. G. Smith's two lectures on Study of Hist.  
p. 4.  
† What is meant by that? see p. 21.

ought to "fling it from him as if it were a loaded shell shot into the fortress of his soul." Those words contain in themselves the gist of your two Sermons. They are the sum of the advice which you, as our spiritual guide, have to give us at this crisis of our faith.

I would fain ask whether this advice applies only to those who have the happiness to be in the Anglican Communion, or whether it applies to the cases of all men alike. When doubts as to the truth of his religion are suggested by a Protestant to a Roman Catholic, or by a Christian missionary to a Mahometan, is the Roman Catholic or the Mahometan bound to "fling the doubt from him, as if it were a loaded shell, shot into the fortress of his soul"? Have you ever attempted, in the exercise of your spiritual office, to make a convert to the truth? And if so, did you not find it necessary to begin by creating doubt in "the fortress of his soul"?

I confess, my Lord, I know but one way in which men can distinguish truth from error, and that is by freely admitting doubt and fairly dealing with it when admitted. A religion which should adopt your Lordship's advocacy, and say with you "fling away doubt as though it were a loaded shell," would, to my mind, pronounce itself to be incapable of undergoing the test of truth. It would say in effect, "Examine me not, for you will find me false."

You seem, in the act of preparing your Sermons for publication, to have been struck with a mis-giving of this kind. For, in your preface, you say that if you had not been pressed to publish the Sermons without delay, you "should have wished to mark out the distinction between religious inquiry into the Revelation and sinful doubts concerning it." I almost think it was fortunate that circumstances prevented you from undertaking so desperate an enterprise as that of showing how "religious inquiry" can possibly be undertaken without admitting religious doubt.<sup>x</sup>

You add "Christianity has nothing to lose, and all to gain, from the fullest inquiry, if only it be humbly and faithfully conducted." Such, I trust, is the case with regard to pure "Christianity," whatever may be the case with regard to certain additions to it. But it would be well to state what *Qu. the* Creed, you mean by a 'humble' and 'faithful' conduct of *p 2* inquiry. Do you mean that the inquirer, in commencing his investigation, is not to contemplate the possibility of his arriving at any but one conclusion?† What would such an inquiry be but a mere paltering with the God of Truth?

It would be in vain, my Lord, that, after excluding doubt by a mere effort of the will, I should attempt to proceed, in accordance with your advice to "acts of prayer and aspiration," to "devout

*\* The B. did not mean that all doubts or difficulties were sinful.  
† And does the layman mean that an inquiry*

into Christiana<sup>l</sup>vidence is to be conducted without  
what some w<sup>d</sup> call a brassing element, a wish  
to believe Christianity? or inquiry into their

meditations," to glowing ascriptions," to participa-  
tion in "the Holy Communion." All these things  
while doubt remained unsolved would be acts, not  
of religion, but either of hypocrisy, or of blind  
despair.

Your metaphor, my Lord, misleads you, as meta-  
phors too often do. Religious doubt is not a thing  
"shot into the soul" from without like "a loaded  
shell shot into a fortress." It springs up in the  
soul itself; and the more you attempt to "fling it  
away" without satisfying it, the deeper and more  
ineradicable it grows.

Religious doubt once sprung up in the souls of  
certain Jews, who had been brought up in the  
religion of their fathers,† and whom the teachers  
of that religion did all they could to retain in  
it. These Jews not only "harbored" their doubts  
but "yielded" to them, and instead of "failing in  
their moral and spiritual probation" they became  
the first disciples of Christ. Religious doubt once  
sprung up in the soul of a German monk, and he  
too instead of "flinging it away like a loaded shell"  
or plunging into the religious exercises of his com-  
munion to drown the thought of it, "harbored" it  
and "yielded" to it, and became the Leader of the  
Reformation.

You quote the words "Be not faithless but be-  
lieving," addressed to one who "was assaulted by,

without a similar bias? Such "impartiality"  
would be rather unnatural than sublime.  
† Is this a fair representation of the relation  
betw. the Law & the Gospel?

METAPHORS MISLEADING.

What  
then do  
we say  
of Mark  
ix. 24?

This is  
not al-  
ways  
so.

and had in some degree yielded to such doubts. The whole sentence is "Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless but believing." Blamable as St. Thomas's doubt was, X our Lord satisfies it by the most conclusive evidence before He bids him cast it from him and "be not faithless but believing."

In another passage you refer to the answers given by our Lord to certain 'questions of the curious' as warnings against employing the "intellect" instead of the "heart" in the investigation of religion. If the questions to which the answers were given were mere 'questions of the curious' they are not relevant to the present occasion. For the questions now asked are not questions of mere curiosity, nor are those who ask them mere "prying" and *In many cases they are* "carping" doubters. But to take the very first of the instances which you cite. You say, "'Whose wife shall she be of the seven' led but to the rebuke 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven.'" In this case the questioner, it is true, is gently rebuked, as his "prying curiosity" more than deserved; yet, at the same time, a complete answer is given to his inquiry. If you can produce one passage of Scripture in which X *what right has the layman to say so?*

a conscientious inquirer is bidden to suppress his doubt or fling it out of his soul unsatisfied, I will admit that you have the Bible on your side.<sup>†</sup>

Religion, fresh and pure from its divine source, shrinks from no inquiry: it appeals fearlessly to the moral reason of man. It is at a later period, when the original revelation has become overlaid with questionable additions, that spiritual guides <sup>/ 4</sup> are tempted to substitute "rebukes<sup>†</sup>" for answers, and to disparage the "intellect" of man, as though it had not been given him by his Maker to light him to the truth.

To look a little closer into your view of religious doubt. You say (p. 23) that doubts about religion are "very various in their origin and in their character." First, there are "the doubts which are the fruit of an evil life," and which arise out of "an evil interest in finding revelation to be false." You proceed to describe the moral state of doubters of this class, and certainly it is a "fearful" and "appalling" spectacle. I cannot help thinking, however, that by putting this picture of insincere doubt in the foreground, you may a little prejudice the question as to the possibility of sincere doubt, and the proper mode of dealing with it. It is, therefore, as well to remark that doubts springing from "an evil life" are distinguished from sincere doubts by an unmistakeable mark—that of the evil

*†. Was it not Our Lord's ordinary course to elicit an act of Belief before He wrought a miracle?*

*† Rebukes, then, given to "heresy" by S. Paul or S. John, prove only that S. Paul & S. John had "overlaid" the Gospel.*



§ An explicit denial of the possibility of uneth-  
sual intellectual sin.

DOUBT AND IMMORALITY.

life from which they spring. Where we find a man of pure life doubting, we may know at once that his doubts arise from a very different source, and demand a very different consideration. § And, to tell the truth, though scoffing at religion is frequently found in connexion with other kinds of vice, I doubt whether the connexion between religious doubt and immorality is so close or so frequent as divines are apt to suppose. The great periods of religious controversy, such as the Reformation, which were necessarily also the great periods of religious doubt, are not marked in history by the prevalence of great immorality, but rather, on the whole, by an awakening and an elevation of the moral as well as of the religious life. On the other hand, I need not tell you that Catholic France and Catholic Spain, while they enjoyed in the fullest measure "the great gift of calm, unquestioning, believing peace," were at the same time sinks of moral depravity and corrup-

When they well come it, it is a sign that they are at least anxious about religion: and those who are anxious about religion are seldom reckless in their lives.

then a sign that they wish to be rid of reli-  
gion — You pass next to a very different class of doubts — "doubts as to religious truth, which, instead of being the resource of evil, are the trouble of holy souls." Here I thought you were coming to the real point. Here I thought you were going to deal

\* Surely the mass of moral evil complained of in England, Scotland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is a thing to be considered: as is the moral character of the 18<sup>th</sup> throughout Europe.

with the case of conscientious doubt, and to show us how it was to be satisfied—not by stifling or suppressing it, or paltering with God and our own souls, but by an earnest search after the truth, carried on in the full trust that the God of Truth will not suffer us to be cast away for fulfilling a duty which He has, through our conscience, plainly commanded us to fulfil. But no: you proceed quietly to put these doubts of “holy souls” aside, as “the result of a peculiar constitution of body or mind,” or “the fruit of an unhappy training,” or “the bitter consequence of past sin, rising unbidden, like the black motes which in the broadest sunshine will trouble a disordered vision, even in the clearest daylight of faith or the warmest glow of devotion, which are striven with, ~~pressed~~ pressed against, and at last overcome, as the brightening intuition of ~~truth~~ <sup>prayed</sup> is gradually purged of such interrupting sparks.” <sup>faith</sup>

And you add — “Souls, thus afflicted, need the tenderest care, and the wisest and most loving discipline.” These last words are to me, I confess, ominously suggestive<sup>x</sup> of spiritual opiates, applied to doubting consciences by the hands of masters of the art, and producing too surely a “calm, unquestioning, believing peace.”

One kind of doubts alone remains to complete your classification—doubts “which address themselves to specific and clearly revealed points in the

<sup>x</sup> To others perhaps they will be suggestive of the most elementary duties involved in “care of souls.”

revelation, which yet, as a whole, the doubting man does not disbelieve." These doubts, too, are matter of "warning:" their course, too, is "one of weakness, both intellectual and spiritual, whilst their end, where they triumph, is misery here, and too often everlasting loss hereafter." So that, as far as appears, your Lordship entirely denies, or thinks fit utterly to ignore, the existence of such a thing as conscientious doubt. My Lord, I fear you will scarcely heal the malady of this age.

Inquiry necessarily begins in doubt, and, without free inquiry, we can have no assurance of the truth. We must "prove all things" before we can "hold fast that which is good." If your Lordship had your way, truth would, in effect, perish out of the world, and nothing would be left but blind submission to "the Church"—not the true Church, which can only be found through free inquiry,<sup>x</sup> but the Church in which each man happens to be born.

The last class of doubts, against the admission of which you warn us, are, as we before mentioned, "those which address themselves to specific and clearly revealed points in the revelation which yet, as a whole, the doubting man does not disbelieve." In this definition you speak exclusively of "clearly revealed points in revelation." I will venture to say that the man who "does not disbelieve in revelation as a whole," and yet has doubts about "clearly

\* Free Inquiry is denounced by the B. in this sense; that he denies the principle involved in rationalistic teaching, *Serm. p. 27.*

revealed points in it<sup>†</sup> will not easily be found. It will be more easy to find a man who, believing in revelation as a whole, and in everything that is "clearly revealed" in it, still has doubts about certain matters before alluded to, which your Lordship proceeds to place on the same footing with revelation;—those "creeds and confessions drawn up by men;" which "grew up gradually;" which "were drawn forth, from the implicit faith of the Church, unwillingly, at uncertain intervals, often after grievous strife and disputing;" which "have varieties in their tone and expressions;" which "upon many, and those often the deepest points," attained, "as time passed on," an "increasing definiteness of language" under "the assaults of heretics," so that "from this peculiar process the history of what is really the fixing of the Church's terminology in matters of belief often appears, at first sight, to be the fixing of its faith." I can understand that here there is "room at every turn for question and doubt," which yet, I hope, may not extend to the more vital portions of religion. *Why not* The "authoritative declarations of the faith" may, *say what* I trust, be scrutinized by the reason without detri- *is vital?* ment to "the written Word" though you would *p 2* make the fate of both the same.

As to doubts about particular points in religion itself—if they are fanciful and frivolous—and those

*† The B did not mean that "the doubting man" thought them clearly revealed; but that they were so in fact, although he did not think them so.*

you specify seem to me very fanciful and frivolous—reason, freely exercised, is their proper and effectual cure. If they are real and grave, still they must not be suppressed, but allowed their due weight, and honestly dealt with. Such is the bidding of our conscience, and conscience is either a nullity or the voice of God.

It is the suppression of conscientious doubt, my Lord, not the fair admission of it, that is really “subversive of all true faith,” and “therefore in its consequences full of ruin to the soul.” Conscientious doubt, when suppressed, eats into the soul like a cancer; and the result is not “faith” but latent infidelity and the total corruption of the moral and spiritual nature. The Roman Catholic countries in which the priesthood and the Inquisition succeeded in quenching the Reformation were instances of suppressed doubt on a large scale. What was the result? was it “faith”? or was it an outward and hypocritical show of faith, beneath which lay an ever deepening abyss of utter unbelief—an abyss which has since been revealed, to the horror of the Christian world?

You smile at “the habit of subjecting the written Word and the authoritative declarations of the faith to the scrutiny of each man’s intellectual faculties.” “It promises to make the faith so rational; to give every man so good a reason for the hope that is in

Is it wrong of the B. to exhibit the guise in  
wh<sup>n</sup> a Temptation comes? Comp. 2 Pet. ii 19.

him; to be so free from all forcing of doctrines on him, that it naturally wins to itself young and ardent minds." Surely to be able to give a good "reason for the hope that is in us" is not a consideration which your Lordship would think it proper to dismiss with a smile.

You proceed to limit and, as it seems to me, pretty nearly to eliminate the function of reason in judging of the truth or falsehood of a religion. I will not attempt to deal in detail with your position, which, I confess, I do not very clearly comprehend. You appear to me to have been studying the arguments of a certain Bampton Lecturer, now reputed the great champion of orthodoxy, and to have adopted from him the theory that we are not to judge of the "contents," but only of the "evidences" of a revelation: in other words, that it signifies nothing how repugnant to our reason or our moral sense a religious doctrine may be, provided it be offered to us by "authority." If you will examine this theory rather more closely, you will find that it utterly annihilates all the internal and moral evidences of religion and forbids us to give Christianity any preference on account of its "intrinsic reasonableness" over the superstition of the Hindoo. I cannot think that either the Bampton Lecturer or you have taken a very auspicious method of commending the reli-

as to this  
see Man.  
rel', 8<sup>th</sup>  
Lecture,  
throughout.

Compare G. Smith's very one-sided representation  
of Maudsl.

gion which you defend to the acceptance of moral and reasonable beings.

You observe that the Christian revelation "teaches nothing merely to gratify our curiosity," and that, "in this respect, it is the exact opposite of nature," inasmuch as "the handwriting of the Creator, in His works of Nature, seems to be imprinted on them for the very purpose of stimulating our curiosity, and training and rewarding our powers of investigation and discovery." Is it not strange, that one part of the Divine Government should be the exact opposite of the other? Is it not strange, that the wisdom of our Maker should "train and reward" powers of investigation and discovery; and that to exercise these powers upon the only subject worthy of a spiritual being should be a mortal sin?

*Not so  
very strange,  
considering  
the prov-  
ince &  
subject mat-  
ter of  
revelation*

What are the doctrines given to us on "authority"? This your Lordship must distinctly tell us, in order that we may know what are the matters about which to doubt is "ruin," and be able to determine the exact line where free inquiry ceases to be a conscientious duty, and becomes a mortal sin. The Church of Rome will not allow her members to doubt about the doctrine of Transubstantiation or the Seven Sacraments. She would certainly tell any child of hers, who should indulge a habit of free inquiry on those points, that such a habit was "subversive of all

Does Reason, then, find out for us, by its own powers  
of judgment, the doctrines of Christianity? Here again  
is a passage which implies a non-reception of peculiar  
true faith, and therefore in its consequences full dogmas.  
15

MUST DOUBT BE UNIVERSAL?  
of ruin to his soul." Yet your Lordship, as a  
Bishop of a Reformed Church, would hold doubt  
as to these doctrines to be most salutary, and  
encourage free inquiry respecting them to the  
utmost of your power. Thus we come back to  
the question what is the Truth; and that question  
can only be determined by the free use of the  
reason which it has pleased our Maker to bestow  
on us for the purpose. The human reason, like  
the human eye, to which you compare it, may,  
as you say, be "diseased" in a particular person.  
But if the "eye" is not to be "the judge of the  
existence of colour," what is? And what, but rea-  
son, is to be the judge of truth?

It is a common habit, I might say a common  
art, of the opponents of free inquiry, to tell us  
that if once we begin to doubt, there is no end to it;  
that to doubt of anything is to doubt of everything,  
and be swallowed up in an abyss of scepticism; in  
a word, that religion is a pill which must be swal-  
lowed whole\* But this is a logical weapon which  
may be used equally in defence of all creeds, true  
or false. "Once let the mind, instead of receiving  
humbly, begin to doubt, and doubt will be every-  
where. The struggles of such a soul in the un-  
certainty around it are like the plunging of the  
maddened herd into the boundless morass. Every

\* A singularly decent representation.



effort engulphs in the quagmire more of the surrounding sward, and sinks the powerless victims in ruin." This is exactly the sort of language with which Roman Catholic priests endeavour to terrify those who, instead of "receiving humbly" all the Church tells them, "begin to doubt," and to look out for a more reasonable religion. Dr. Newman will prove to you conclusively, as he thinks, that if you doubt the infallibility of the Pope, you must abandon your belief in conscience and in God. One of Dr. Newman's leading disciples declared that if he ceased to believe that the Virgin Mary was the highest of created beings, he should be obliged to give up the whole of his religion. I recollect, while the Gorham controversy was going on, reading a pamphlet in which it was shown that a mother could not love her child unless she adopted the Bishop of Exeter's theory of Baptismal Regeneration. The world solves these difficulties for itself in a practical way. Men doubt and freely inquire about many things which an Anglican Bishop thinks indubitably necessary to salvation, without being driven to "suspect the testimony of their senses," or to "doubt of their own existence," or to "question the reality of love between parent and child, between husband and wife." It is a happy thing for us that it is so. If nothing in religion or affection were more certain than your "authority," we should be in a "boundless morass" indeed.

You tell us that in the process of doubting “even the intellectual powers suffer grievous wrong,” for that, “by degrees, doubt eats out the very power of weighing evidence, and a baffling sense of universal uncertainty, like the oppressive presence of a fog, benumbs the acting of the intellect.” I am somewhat surprised to hear that the intellectual powers are impaired by being exercised about the highest truth: nor can I understand how the power of weighing evidence should be destroyed by free inquiry or preserved by blind submission.†

The intellectual evils which you describe, my Lord, as well as the moral evils, are the natural consequences, not of conscientious inquiry, but of suppressed doubt. Suppressed doubt it is that does wrong to the intellectual powers as well as to the heart, that produces a baffling sense of universal uncertainty, benumbs the acting of the mind and turns the whole man into a living lie. Once renounce the allegiance of the God of Truth, as you do by suppressing a doubt which your conscience bids you satisfy, and you will remain “benumbed” mentally as well as morally till your allegiance is renewed.

You proceed to paint in appalling colours the miserable condition of a doubter. We shall all allow that the condition of a doubter who has fallen not only into doubt, but into “the meanest

† Here it is implied that the Reason is fully and without limitation to judge about the truths of the Gospel.

sensuality and the merest animal excitement," is miserable indeed. But I can believe, and the New Testament warrants me in believing, that great distress and even agony of mind may arise from the working in the soul not of the Spirit of Evil, but of the Spirit of Truth. You say you have "more than once been called upon to heal" such a "moral sickness" as you describe. I wish your Lordship may not have mistaken the beginnings of health for a deadly sickness and "healed" your patients, too effectually, of the love of religious truth.

Finally, you draw forth the last and most tremendous weapon from the armoury of rhetorical terrors and paint, with all the power of your great eloquence, the doubters death. Unhappily this "death-bed" argument is one which may be used in the service of error as effectually as in the service of the truth. An Italian Friar will draw you a picture of the dying moments of an Anglican "heretic" quite as terrible as this which you have drawn of the dying moments of a "doubter," though in a somewhat coarser style. I remember a passage in the writings of Dr. Newman in which he sets forth the hopelessness and perplexity of a man dying without the consolations of the Infallible Church in colours so vivid as almost to constrain one to become a Roman Catholic. We are here in the region of imagination, where each controversialist may draw

as largely on the store of fancy as he pleases ; and “the fiends of the pit snatching at the souls” of the opposite party are the common rhetorical property of the defenders of all creeds.

The “doubter’s death,” however which you depict, concludes the life of a sensualist as well as a doubter, of one whose “humanity” had “resolved itself into the hateful grossness of the meanest sensuality and the merest animal excitement.” The deathbed of a gross and hateful sensualist is sure to be horrible, whether, in matters of religion, he was a scoffing sceptic or a careless bigot.

But then you refer to a real case which you say fell under your own observation ; and this case is not that of a sensualist, but that of an ardent and generous youth, the simplicity of whose religious faith had been destroyed by the influence of a rationalist tutor. This youth, you say, died “in darkness and despair” before the eyes of the tutor who had suggested his doubts, and, at the last moment, was unable to remove them.

My Lord, I can well believe that some mischief has been done by tutors who, being entrusted only with the education of their pupils, overstep the proper duties of that trust, and indulge in the seductive habit of influencing immature and ardent minds. I can well believe that much religious perplexity and distress, as well as much intellectual weakness, has

resulted from such tutelage. It is corrupting and enfeebling to the character and understanding of the tutor, as well as to those of the pupil. I would have both teachers and preachers, as they would remain men of sense and ministers of truth, beware how they fall into the habit of addressing themselves, in matters of controversy, to the feelings of the young.

Before, however, I draw any inferences, affecting my duty in regard to the pursuit of religious truth, from that which passed in the harrowing scene you have depicted, I should like to see the scene itself through the calmest and clearest medium. I cannot help feeling that the atmosphere of your eloquence though it tints everything with the most effective hues, being very much heated by alarm and agitation, must be somewhat hazy, and that it may distort the objects which are presented through it to our view. Was any cool-headed (I do not say cool-hearted) witness, a sensible physician for instance, present at this death-bed, from whom we might obtain a plain, unadorned account of that which actually occurred? The tutor, it appears, was there: I should like to hear his version of an affair in which he was so deeply compromised. I should like to know, too, exactly in what manner the case was treated. Was the dying youth bidden simply to turn his thoughts to the true source of

hope and comfort, or was he perplexed with "the Church's terminology" and the "authoritative declarations of the faith"? The dying mind cannot find energy for many thoughts. One is sufficient for its failing powers. I shall perhaps compromise myself in your Lordship's eyes by the admission, but I am reluctant to believe that any one who had really sought the truth in simplicity of heart, as it seems this youth had, though he unhappily failed of finding it, was allowed to die "in darkness and despair." There is a ray which, I cannot help thinking, would have dispelled that darkness and chased away that despair, if it had only been allowed free admission to the heart of the dying man. It is a ray which has lighted the darkness of many a "doubting" servant of God, and the sun from which it radiates is the Father of Truth.

To conclude, my Lord, I repeat that the suppression, or, to retain your phrase, the "flinging away" of conscientious doubt does not lead to faith but to utter infidelity; and that if you could succeed in leading the English nation by that course, you would lead it, as other nations have been led by the same course, to moral and religious ruin. I agree with you in thinking that "the Revelation of God is the Probation of Man," but I differ from you,† inasmuch as I think that the probation is not

† There is here another rhetorical evasion. He did not deny (of course) that the probation must be gone through; it is manifest to any reader of his sermons that he made the probation inevitable.

*it was to be gone through, on a certain principle, w<sup>h</sup> w<sup>d</sup>  
be a means of safety.*

to be shunned but to be undergone. Suppose we are passing together at this moment through the Valley of the Shadow of Doubt, our duty is to encourage and assist each other in pressing onwards towards the light, which, distant though it may be, faith, reasonable faith, assures us we shall find; and to fortify each other, as we pass along, alike against the mocking voices of sceptical levity and the fatal promptings of lethargy, hypocrisy, and despair. Fear not, my Lord: he must have read the history of those great religious "probations" of humanity with a careless eye who has not learnt that their issues are in the hands of God. Your alarm, with your present sentiments, would have been just as great at the first preaching of Christianity or at the commencement of the Reformation.

One word more. I have intimated that I agree with you in lamenting the publication of "Essays and Reviews," though on somewhat different grounds. But the main object which I presume the writers had in view is one which imperatively demands your Lordship's consideration and that of the other rulers of the Church. The enlarged liberty of thought within the pale of the Church which these clergymen have indiscreetly attempted to usurp ought to be conceded to all of us by lawful means.† If it is not conceded to us, the days of the Established Church are numbered. The reli-

*du. bec.  
they are  
too out-  
spoken?*

*† If this be so, the layman must surely regret his  
adhesion to the 39 articles - if he has adhered to them.  
And are we to have a Church w<sup>h</sup> will teach nothing*

(e.g.) as to Theism beyond B. Powell's essay?

gious intellect of the age is turning away in despair from her obstinate dogmatism. Not only those of the highest intellectual gifts among the younger men here, but those of the highest spiritual aspirations, refuse, on conscientious grounds, to enter the spiritual calling. This is a fatal sign, and one which, if you are not absolutely hardened against "doubt," ought to make you seriously doubt the soundness of your present position, and promptly consider the expediency of relaxation. I would not hold out false expectations. I do not believe that any concessions you can make will render the Church, as an Establishment, immortal. I do not doubt that the time is rapidly approaching when all men will see that the protection of particular religious opinions by the State is a thing not to be justified or endured; that the faith needs and can accept no "defender" but One; and that religion can be "established" only in the hearts and minds of men. I should not myself perhaps be very sorry if that time were come; if all State interference in matters of opinion were to be forthwith removed; and if perfectly free course were at once to be given to the truth.† But I can well believe that there may be reason on the side of those who desire, on practical grounds, that matters should take a different course; who think that an immediate change in that which is so ancient and so deeply rooted

2, 4,  
7, 11,  
21.

Is the Church  
to mould  
her belief  
by the re-  
quirements  
of B A's  
in this  
or that  
year?  
all this  
proceeds  
on a  
simple  
petitio;  
that  
Doctri-  
nal Truth  
is a thing  
of noight.

\* Suppose some secular revolutionist were to say that justice needed no defender, &c.  
† In what points is it not given?



would give a perilous shock to the religion of the people; and who wish to see the Established Church enlarged and emancipated rather than removed. Relieve us of the tests by which consciences are oppressed and corrupted. Cease to denounce everlasting perdition against all who do not pretend to believe dogmatic formularies which no human being can pretend to understand. Remove from your ritual, or at least render optional, such things as are causes of offence to a large portion of the Church. These concessions will at least avert the danger which at present threatens you from the desperate struggles of powerful and conscientious minds pent up by your dogmatism and craving for air and light. They will enable many to become clergymen who now shrink from doing so, and thereby save the Church from the still greater danger of losing all that can command the sincere allegiance of the people. They will at the same time add to your moral strength as proofs of charity and true Christianity on the part of those who make them. But if you are determined, as from your recent language and conduct I fear you are, to refuse all concessions, and to employ your astonishing abilities, your magic eloquence, and the commanding influence of your personal character in maintaining a stationary, or rather a retrograde policy in the Church, I think

you will speedily find that you have brought heavy responsibilities on your head. The nation with which you have to do is the nation which produced Wycliffe; and those who have failed to show it reason for their doctrines and practices have never yet succeeded in convincing it that it was wisdom or piety, or anything but folly and impiety, to be wilfully blind.

I am, my Lord,

Your obedient servant,

A LAYMAN.

Oxford, April 12th, 1861.

- Observe several points ;
- (1) a certain degree of ignor. elenchi in this letter. The Bp is mainly dealing with doubt as tampered with and welcomed by irreverent minds ; not with doubt as exercising religious minds.
  - (2) the hard unspiritual view taken of all the processes connected with religious belief - as if they were simply intellectual ; as if they could not be affected by devotion or ind devotion ; as if there could be no ring of the intellect, no limits to its authority. (by a pet. princ.)
  - (3) the bitter dislike evinced for doctrine properly so called ; and the assurance with which a person who does not believe certain Church dogmas calls on the Church to give up her belief.
  - (4) the free recourse had to a supercilious and ad captandum rhetoric, which does not conduce to be always devoutly respectful.

