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A SHORT
DISCOURSE,
 ON
NATURAL
 AND
REVEALED RELIGION,

PARTLY ABSTRACTED FROM



BISHOP BUTLER'S ANALOGY.

=====
 By *CHANDOS LEIGH.*
 =====

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RECORD

1873

The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been admitted to the membership of the Society since the last meeting of the Executive Committee, held on the 15th day of December, 1872. The names are given in the order in which they were admitted, and are accompanied by the date of their admission, and the name of the person by whom they were introduced. The names of the persons who have been admitted to the membership of the Society since the last meeting of the Executive Committee, held on the 15th day of December, 1872, are as follows:—

NATURAL

AND

REVEALED RELIGION.



IF the good are not to be rewarded; or the vicious punished in a future life, what other rule for the government of the *moral* world can be imagined? Does not a man here, unless he be quite hardened in offences, feel uneasiness after having committed a vicious action? This is a proof that such an action is not agreeable to our ideas of virtue or prudence, much less is it to be overlooked by him, who is All-wise, and All-virtuous! There is too in the world a natural Love of Virtue, but surely none of Vice. That Being who detests vice, who has given to us such a determinate declaration in favour of virtue, shews us by such a declaration that the Vir-

virtuous will have a great advantage over the
 Vicious, in a future state ! If Vice is punished
 in a great degree here, shall it not be punished
 in a greater degree hereafter ! How often in
 our worldly affairs do we not risk our lasting
 happiness for some present good ? If, indeed,
 we were not exposed to distress or misery by
 our passions, or our follies, we might perhaps
 imagine that Religion is not true, since if our
 happiness was secured to us without any Exer-
 tions on our own part, why should we be soli-
 citous, about the duties of prudence, and self-
 government ? Our happiness or misery, in
 worldly as well as in spiritual affairs, are trusted
 to our own conduct ! We are in a state of
 moral discipline ! Men are creatures of habit.
 By habit we recollect practical observations of
 service on our conduct, by habit we attain many
 things for which otherwise we should be totally
 unqualified. Habits are formed by principles
 exerted within our minds. They are strengthen-
 ed by repeated acts. Now these may be either
 virtuous, or vicious ? It is only by severe dis-
 cipline that the latter can be removed ! The
 danger of being led astray by irregular passions
 diminishes in exact proportion to the strengthen-
 ing of the virtuous principle that is within us.
 When the exercise of the virtuous principle be-

comes strong, is often repeated, and is at last intense, habits of virtue become so easy to us that they seem "a second Nature."—Who knows whether the security of creatures in their highest state of perfection may not arise from their having acquired by continual exercise, everlasting impressions of virtue, in their former state of probation?

RELIGION naturally presupposes integrity and honesty; the evidence of it is sufficient to render it the guide of our actions in pursuing our own happiness; indeed it is much stronger than the evidence of those things on which we found our every day actions. We are to act in an honest and impartial manner on the evidence that we know. This is our trial. We have a moral faculty for discerning what is right, or wrong here. May not this be a certain presentiment of the Government of God in a future state? Does it *not* more fall in with our just notions of things that men should be punished or rewarded according to their merits or demerits in another world, does it not more accord with our ideas of distributive justice that such should be the rule of God hereafter, than that Men should be punished or rewarded, by any other rule? Though it were doubtful what

will be the future consequences of virtue and vice, yet it is however credible that they *may* have those consequences which Religion teaches us they will; and this *credibility* is a certain obligation in point of prudence to abstain from all wickedness, and to live in the conscientious practice of all that is Good! There seems to be no possible reason to be given why we may not be in a state of moral probation with regard to the exercise of our understanding on the subject of Religion, as we are in regard to our behaviour in common affairs. If we had an intuitive knowledge of the truth of Religion; if we had absolute rules visibly communicated to us by God, what room would there be for the exercise of our belief? Religion reveals herself not to the careless observer, but to those who think her worthy of their attention. Some men, from their peculiar disposition, and their situation in life, may not have any temptation to commit sin, may not then a trial be made of them in regard to the exercise of their minds upon speculative points?

Is not this analogous to the natural state of things here? We are often deceived by false appearances in this world; is not the same caution necessary in guarding against deception in concerns of a much higher moment? If all

irregularities, all uncertainties, were rectified here, might it not be an encouragement to idleness and neglect? God governs the World by general laws. Miraculous interpositions might produce greater evils than those which they would prevent. We cannot tell what are the means which God would employ, to accomplish his ends. We are incompetent Judges of the various relations of Nature, and we often draw false conclusions from cases which we pretend to understand and explain. How can we *dare* to fathom the depths of the Counsels of Omnipotence. We! who know not why some die as soon as they are born, why one man is superior to another in understanding, and innumerable other things. Let us firmly believe that in regard to the moral Government of God, "whatever is, is best." As childhood is a state of discipline for the age of manhood, so in the present world, we may be in a state of discipline, for a future! What prudence, what foresight is not necessary for us in steering our course through this world to enable us to avoid the many dangers which threaten our fortunes, our characters, our lives, may we not by analogy believe that, if you substitute virtue for prudence, the exercise of it is necessary to ensure to ourselves eternal happiness! Men of benevolent

dispositions have often warmed their imaginations, at the contemplation of the triumphs of virtue over vice, of that perfect order of things when all men will be happy, and when falsehood and injustice will be banished from the world. Vain as this generous theory is, it shews that there is something *moral* in the constitution of things, that, in a future world the noble hopes of the virtuous may be realised! It shews that such fond wishes are implanted in their hearts by the Author of Good! We can easily perceive how the obstructions to the exercise of virtue may be removed hereafter; and how God even here has given us indications to this intent, in uniting together by ties of mutual admiration all virtuous Beings when they meet.—Since we cannot judge of the ordinary course of Nature, unless it be by analogy and experience, how little competent are we to judge of Revelation in all its parts! (A) Those who are in doubt on the subject of Revelation, must nevertheless feel that it might be true, how serious ought they then to be about matters of such vast importance! Their fears may predominate over their hopes, but their obligations to pursue a course of right, are the same as those of the firm believer. How do we know that speculative difficulties may not be

intended to exercise the virtuous principle in our hearts. The scripture history must be allowed to be genuine till something can be brought forward to invalidate it. Till Christianity can be proved to be false, that it never can be, it is highly foolish to speak of it in a loose and irreverent manner. (B) The dispensations of Christianity are to be interpreted by *their genuine tendencies*; not by the perversion of them. Christianity is the republication of the religion of Nature free from all admixture of superstition. It vindicates the Authority of God's laws, and deters his Creatures from sin. Can you prove it to be contrary to Reason? No! Then why should shallow men go on objecting to it, because they do not see *all its fitness, the useful application of all its parts?* It gives to men light enough for the regulation of their lives. Our present state is possibly the consequence of something past of which we are ignorant! We see here darkly as through a glass! Vast is the scheme of Nature. Imagination cannot compass it. The plan of Providence reaches through Eternity past, and future. We can only perceive a link in the mysterious chain. But some *minds* are in greater darkness than others on the subject of Religion. This is no reason why they should not be enlightened.

They may be raised several degrees higher in the scale of divine knowledge, while those who are more favoured may be raised in a relative proportion. But it must be remembered that God is no respecter of Persons; that from him who knows much, much will be expected; much charity, much faith, much practical self denial. (c) Independently of Revelation we have every reason to believe in a future state. We have a sort of *intuitive* belief of it. We are capable of reflecting to a most intense degree without any assistance from the senses. Our minds progressively enlarge as we grow older, if they be cultivated. We have a vivid desire of indefinable happiness! We have a wish to know many things which in this world cannot be ascertained! But whether Death shall be with *great alterations* the continuance of a former state, or the beginning of a new, whether or not it puts us immediately into a higher and more enlarged state of things we cannot determine. We also know that there is a descent of understanding from man downwards to the lowest species of Creatures, we may by analogy believe that there is a gradual connection among beings of an higher order, ascending progressively upwards *towards* the infinite perfection of God. (d) But of this we have no positive evidence, nor is it necessary that we

should have it.—Yet events may come to pass that shall clear up and ascertain many parts of scripture, learned men may discover new truths before the “Restitution of all things,” in the same way as discoveries are made continually in the material world. When parties are formed and have power in their hands, when the leaders are venerated by the multitude, *then* deception in miracles may be practised; but that a few persons of the lowest rank should bring over great numbers to a new religion which contained nothing to captivate the vulgar, against which the powers of the world were confederated, to say nothing of the angry passions of men who would not tolerate a religion founded on the basis of the purest morality; this I say, in a great degree proves that the Christian Religion is of God. Besides, all unadorned narratives which contain nothing ostentatious, have an appearance of veracity. The Gospels are full of the sublimest truths, simply and unaffectedly stated, and the character of Christ authenticates his mission. His positive commands tally exactly with those duties which our inward monitor, conscience, inculcates. Can we suppose for a moment, that if the Gospels were not true, they would have withstood the inquisitive spirit of so many successive generations, and have triumphed

over all obstacles? Do not the Jews remain an outcast and wandering people to the present day? Does not profane history inform us that Julian endeavoured in vain to rebuild Jerusalem which Titus had destroyed? Is not the Christian Religion day after day gaining new proselytes in every corner of the earth? What positive proofs are there that the miracles of Christ and of his Apostles are not true? All who saw these miracles could not have been deceived. They were facts which came under the immediate evidence of the senses. To say that miracles could not have been worked in former ages because they were not agreeable to the known order of things is ridiculous. Should we not have considered the powers of magnetism and electricity to be impossible, if we did not know that they existed? It is useless to bring forward as an argument against Christianity that in earlier times miraculous gifts have been abused! Have not the gifts of memory, eloquence, and freedom been abused? As the most wholesome medicines if misapplied are hurtful to the constitution, so the wisest doctrines may be "strained from their fair use" and perverted! This only proves, that men as free agents are accountable beings, and that it is left to them to be "wise unto salvation." If men will only consider Christianity as a sport, or sub-

ject of mirth, if they only attend to signs, forms and representations, not to things intended by those representations, they are incompetent to examine the truth of the Christian Religion. Levity, carelessness, and ignorance incapacitate them for such noble investigations. Many men neglect Religion upon *speculative* points of infidelity. They do not merely neglect, they ridicule and blaspheme Christianity. They act as if they could *prove* the falsehood of it. They actively set themselves against it and cultivate the principle of Irreligion in their hearts. They reject evidence much stronger than that which in matter of history and science they believe. They are predisposed to think that the system of Christianity is false, because they do not, as it were, by inspiration see the truth of it. They are thus *fortified* against all evidence. If Religion is liable to enthusiasm, which however cannot account for the testimony of facts seen though it may account for opinions; for surely enthusiasm can never balance human testimony, which is the natural principle of action; may not a want of faith arise from humour, affectation, vanity, or a captious love of disputation? Will unbelievers undertake to say, that a common relation of such variety, extent and antiquity, as that of the Christian Religion, which

has *never been confuted*, is only bottomed on enthusiasm? Would men have been *such enthusiasts* as to have laid down their lives in attestation of facts that, be it remembered, proved the truth of a religion that opposed their own prejudices? Men too who were mostly of cold tempers, greatest capacities, and least liable to prejudice, have from time to time asserted that the evidence of the truth of Christianity were conclusive.

NOTES.

(A) "The presumption unquestionably is that there is one great *moral* system corresponding to the material system; and that the connections which we at present trace so distinctly among the sensible objects composing the one, are exhibited as so many intimations of some vast scheme comprehending all the intelligent beings who compose the other. In this argument, as well as in numberless others, which analogy suggests in favour of our future prospects, the evidence is precisely of the same sort with that which first encouraged Newton to extend his physical speculations beyond the limits of the earth."—*Stewart's Elements of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, Octavo Edition, page 422.

(B) "The great received articles of the Christian Religion have been so clearly proved from the Authority of that Divine Revelation in which they are delivered, that it is impossible for those who have ears to hear, and eyes to see, not to be convinced of them. But were it possible for any thing in the Christian Faith to be erroneous, I can find no ill consequences in adhering to it. The great points of the Incarnation and Sufferings of our Saviour, produce naturally such habits of Virtue in the Mind of Man, that, I say, supposing it were possible for us to be mistaken in them, the Infidel himself, must at least allow, that no other system of Religion could so effectually contribute to the heightening of Morality. They give us great ideas of the dignity of human Nature, and of the Love which the Supreme Being bears to his Creatures, and consequently engaged us in the highest acts of Duty towards our Creator, our Neighbour, and ourselves."—*Spectator*, No. 186.

(C) See the beautiful Paper in the *Spectator*, No. III. It is written by Mr. ADDISON. After considering the several proofs of the immortality of the Soul, this excellent Author proceeds thus:—"How can it enter into the thoughts of Man that the Soul which is capable of such immense perfections, and of re-

ceiving new Improvements to all Eternity, shall fall away into nothing, almost as soon as it is created? Are such abilities made for no purpose? A Brute arrives at a point of perfection that he can never pass. In a few years he has all the endowments he is capable of; and were he to live ten thousand more would be the same thing he is at present. Were a human Soul thus at a stand in her accomplishments, were her faculties to be full blown, and incapable of farther enlargements, I could imagine it might fall away insensibly and drop at once into a state of Annihilation. But can we believe a thinking Being that is in a perpetual progress of Improvements, and travelling on from perfection to perfection, after having just looked abroad into the Works of its Creator, and made a few discoveries of his infinite Goodness, Wisdom, and Power, must perish at her first setting out, and in the very beginning of her inquiries?

(D) Come to the beaming God your hearts unfold!
 Draw from its fountain life! 'Tis thence, alone
 We can excel. Up from unfeeling mould
 To seraphs burning round th' Almighty's throne,
 Life rising still on life, in higher tone,
 Perfection forms and with Perfection bliss.
In universal Nature this clear shewn,
Not needeth proof: to prove it were, I wis
 To prove the beautiful world excels the brute abyss.

THOMSON.

(E) The miracles there recorded, (*i. e.* in the Christian history) were wrought in the midst of enemies, under a government, a priesthood, and a magistracy decided y, and vehemently adverse to them, and to the pretensions which they supported. They were Protestant miracles in a Popish Country; they were Popish miracles in the midst of Protestants. They produced a change; they established a society upon the spot adhering to the belief of them; they made converts; and those who were converted gave up to the testimony their most fixed opinions and favourite prejudices. They who acted and suffered in the cause, acted and suffered for the miracles, for there was no an-

terior persuasion to induce them, no prior reverence, prejudice or partiality to take hold of. Jesus had not one follower when he set up his claim. His miracles gave birth to his sect. No part of this description belongs to the ordinary evidence of Heathen or Popish miracles.—*Payley's Evidences.*

There is one case where the strangeness of the fact lessens not the assent to a fair testimony given of it. For when such supernatural events are suitable to ends aimed at by him who has the power to change the course of nature, there under such circumstances they may be fitter to procure belief by how much the more they are beyond or contrary to ordinary observation. This is the proper case of miracles which well attested do not only find credit themselves but give it also to other truths which need such confirmation.—*Locke.*

If the facts recorded in the Gospel, the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ had been patronized and attested by the Chief Priests and Rulers of the Jewish Nation, it would undoubtedly have been pretended that they had political designs in view, and that considering their authority and influence, they might more easily impose those things upon the multitude. On this view of things the evidence of those important facts would have been far less convincing than now it is. And therefore the Divine wisdom hath ordered it far better in appointing that the first witnesses of the Gospel were not the worldly wise, mighty, or noble, but persons of mean condition, and yet of honest characters, without power, authority, or interest.—*LELAND.*

God formed us social Creatures, now we cannot act as social Creatures, without some degree of mutual trust reposed in one another; and no mutual trust can be reposed in one another if those are not to be depended upon, who gave as the Apostles, and Primitive Martyrs did give the strongest proofs of their integrity. The numerous Converts to Christianity in the first century could not have believed it to be true, if it had been false. For not to mention other Things they must have had an inward consciousness whether they had received those miraculous gifts or not; for the abuse and misapplication of which St.

Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians reproves and censures them. They must have had an *absolute* certainty, supposing no extraordinary Gifts were communicated to them, that He from whom they received their religion and whose Epistles as appears from St. Peter and others, were universally read as of divine Authority, was a shameless Imposter. And yet they could not have professed a belief of it, knowing it to be an Imposture, at a time when Christians were of all men the most miserable without any prospect of worldly honours or Advantage but with a certain expectation of exquisite Torments, except upon a Supposition that they loved misery and avoided happiness as such. In a word, Society must disband upon the same absurd Principle whereby some labour, the subversion of Christianity viz. the Denial of the Force and Validity of moral Certainty.—*Seed's Sermon*—Improbabilities non sufficient to invalidate moral Certainty.

And now having mentioned Scripture, I cannot help observing that the Christian is the only religious or moral institution in the world that ever set in the right light, these two material points the essence and the end of virtue; that ever founded the one, in the production of happiness, that is universal benevolence, or in their language charity to all Men, the other, in the probation of Man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime, and magnificent as was the philosophy of the ancients all their moral systems were deficient in their two important articles. They were all built on the sandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or enthusiastic patriotism, and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory, foundations which were by no means able to support the magnificent structures which they erected upon them; for the beauty of virtue independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonsense; patriotism, which injures mankind in general for the sake of a particular country is but a more extended selfishness; and really criminal, and all human glory but a mean, and ridiculous delusion.—Free Inquiry into the nature and origin of Evil.