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The Evangelical Quarterly

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BUTLER'S ANALOGY, 1736-1936

A YOUNG lady was explaining to an interested, but not well-informed friend, that she was studying a course in philosophy. "But what is that?" said her friend, "What books do you read?" "Oh! well, books like *Butler's Analogy*." "Ah! I think I remember," was the astonishing reply, "was not he the man who wrote *Paley's Evidences* and things like that?" It is to be hoped that many are better informed than this interrogator. Yet it must be confessed that age has somewhat dimmed the lustre of the once famous books of Anglican Apologetics. Many factors combine to produce this comparative neglect. There is abroad a tendency to emulate the Athenians in hearing or producing "some new thing". Any book that is twenty years old not to speak of two hundred is supposed to have lost its claim to represent that curious phenomenon "the modern mind".

Apart from this tendency it must be admitted that the modes of thought prevalent in the eighteenth century seem sometimes strangely foreign to those that are dominant to-day. Yet we are convinced that the strangeness is superficial and that the real agreement is much more substantial than appears at first sight.

Bishop Butler is worthy of study for his own sake, and also for the sake of securing a firm hold on the truths connected with revelation, which emerged as a result of the discussion into which he entered. There are permanent elements of value in *Butler's Analogy*. Having been written in 1736 it seems fitting that some notice of it should appear in the two-hundredth year of its existence. Not many books command attention, of a fairly widespread character two hundred years after their appearance.

The full title of the work gives a good idea of its scope and purport: "The Analogy of Religion, natural and revealed, to the constitution and the course of Nature." Butler set out to establish the validity of the Christian system against a shallow optimism that seems to have its counterpart to-day.

The Deists, against whom he levelled his arguments, believed in God and in little else. They rejected as superstitious

additions to primitive faith, the cardinal dogmas of Christianity. They were advocates in theory, of the simple life. Any well-constituted individual, according to their view, who lived according to nature, had all that he needed. The business of humanity was to cultivate the present moment, to follow the gleam that our nature afforded us, and not to worry at all about a future life, a Heaven or a Hell.

The permanent value of Butler amongst many other features, resides partly in the fact that the craving for a supposedly simple solution of life emerges again and again in varying forms. Men seem to feel the weight of our complex civilization. They substitute, in imagination, a bundle of straw for the actual load of lead they are destined to bear. The advocates of simple undogmatic Gospel, so plentiful to-day, are, in relation to this particular, true successors of the Deists with whom Butler grappled.

He asks two questions which are really complementary :

1. Is Nature as simple as you would have us believe ?
2. Is Religion, natural or revealed, more complex than Nature ?

Butler does not always, in fact does but rarely press for a conclusion. He is content to leave the matter at the stage of credibility. Therein lies his strength. But therein also lies his weakness. The ordinary man cannot grow enthusiastic over a simple possibility. Butler prepared the way for the more emphatic message of the Evangelical Revival which incidentally he profoundly distrusted. It is an interesting question whether we do not need at present the cold douche of dispassionate reflection as a preparation for the new sense of glowing life which we so sadly lack.

I

WHAT DID BUTLER MEAN BY ANALOGY ?

Butler does not define his term. John Stuart Mill much later reduced Analogy to a mere recognition of certain resemblances without any evidence of invariable conjunction between the properties compared. Reasoning of this sort has little or no value. At best it sets us upon a strict inquiry as to the causes of observed resemblances. At worst it deceives us by specious similitudes. But Butler gives one limit which has often been strangely misunderstood. He quotes a sentence from Quintilian as a motto for his work which may be translated : " This

is the strength of Analogy that the thing which is doubtful it refers to another like thing concerning which there is no question so that it may prove the uncertain by the certain." A careful study of his work shows that he was not clutching at mere superficial resemblances and building castles in Spain. He shows that the course of nature, which we are invited to follow, exhibits the very characteristics which are supposed to be peculiar to religion and to discredit it. The value of the analogy depends entirely on the accuracy of the deduction. It is a system of parallel reasoning. Given A then B follows. Given C then D follows, but B and D are, if not identical, at least sufficiently akin to obviate any argument which contends that as D follows C, C must be incredible. Butler does not seek to establish the truth of religion. He is content to demonstrate its consonance with a system of nature admitted to have come from God. "It hath always", says Butler, "been allowed to argue from what is acknowledged to what is disputed again: 'It is as unreasonable as it is common to urge objections against revelations, which are of equal weight against natural religion . . . objections which are equally applicable to both, are, properly speaking answered by its being shown that they are so provided [natural religion] be admitted to be true.'"

II

THE BURDEN OF HIS THESIS

is that if Nature be conceived as coming from the hands of a beneficent Creator there are sufficient elements in deduction from admitted facts to justify the acceptance of Religion as credible, even in the express details associated with revealed religion. If religion be credible the demand on our attention and regard has been established. Doubt does not remove obligation, especially moral obligation. Only positive disproof can do that. Butler displays a particular interest in disproving the then popular theory that all dogma as set out in Scripture is nothing more than a perversion of the instinct to worship God. There is still pertinence in the argument that meets directly the alleged appeal to a primitive conscience against the determinations and recorded narratives of the Scriptures. Butler avows that he takes as far as possible his opponents' own ground. He seeks to establish his principles from their axioms rather than his own. He uses with great force the method of philosophic

doubt which is one feature in *The Meditations* of Descartes. But he halts somewhat in his application of Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum*. Both in the *Sermons* and in the *Analogy* Butler appears as possessed of a mind somewhat averse to prolonged reflective investigation into the nature of thought itself. He is happier in considering what he regards as practical questions. Berkeley and Butler are poles apart in method. They are united in the desire "to justify the ways of God to men". But notwithstanding every observed defect it is surprising to discover how much of the argument has direct value still. It offers yet another illustration of the fact that thought builds slowly and lays very sure foundations.

To establish the contention that Butler is still of great value we propose to offer a running commentary on certain salient features of his work, noticing here and there affinities with modern arguments and conditions and offering adverse criticism in certain instances.

III

BUTLER ON A FUTURE LIFE

In seeking to render credible the idea of a future life Butler betrays not unnaturally the defects of his period. He argues, for example, that men can be made to see by means of spectacles and to walk by the aid of artificial limbs. This seems to him to afford evidence that our bodies are not our being. But the inevitable conclusion ought surely to be that artificial bodies could be built round the seat of life so as finally to displace the actual bodies of flesh.

His opponent, had he thought of it, might have asked why this has never been done. At what point has the halt in the process to be made? The cataract film can be removed. Cheselden had recently startled the world by successful operations for pre-natal cataract. But no artificial substitute has even yet been found for the optic nerve. The case of artificial limbs only strengthens the objection. They work much less perfectly than glasses because they are less directly connected with the nerve centres. To make the analogy complete the problem of the controlling influence of the brain, mediated through nerve function, should be discussed. Butler is wholly unaware of it.

It almost provokes a smile to find our complex bodily organism described as "large quantities of matter in which we

are very nearly interested". Emphasis is indeed very properly laid on the facts that the bulk of bodies vary at different times without destroying the identity of a particular body and that portions of a body may be lost, even very material portions, without destroying the living agent. But on the other hand, the acute problem of the organization of matter in relation to living being is missed and this is the point upon which modern objectors would insist.

It is questionable, further, whether the references to sleep and swoon are sufficiently analogous to justify his argument. The difference between these experiences and death lies in the evident transitivity of the former. They prove indeed, that a power may be suspended without being lost, the point on which Butler insists. But a complete suspension of a power seems very near to a total loss of it. The objection might be urged that a swoon offers evidence of the very close relation between bodily conditions and consciousness. Death gives evidence that this relation can be permanently severed. As we have had no experience of resuscitation the analogy favours the idea of a cessation of consciousness at death. Although he refers to Locke, Butler nowhere reveals any acquaintance with the theories of Leibniz. He sees dimly that every argument for existence after death is equally valid for existence before birth, but he goes no farther in this investigation than to compare the embryo and the developed living being.

The one argument that remains which can be developed in the interests of future existence is the fact that consciousness is a unity. Butler asserts that the living being is indiscernible. He engages in an inquiry into the actual bulk of living beings which he says, may be, for aught we know to the contrary, no larger than the elementary particles of matter which are indivisible. Modern apologists, taught by Leibniz and his many improvers, would prefer to contend that the attempt to compare two disparate worlds must end in disaster. It is as absurd to argue regarding the bulk of a non-spatial phenomenon as it would be to suggest that it must have colour.

Descartes who made the essence of mind to be thought, and Leibniz who preferred to make thought a necessary activity of mind, lifted the whole controversy into a new sphere. Butler would have been well advised to have pursued a similar line. He believed, however, that he could sustain the credibility of

existence after death even if it were contended that the soul is material. It can scarcely be maintained that he was successful.

It may be well to point out here that Butler accepted the distinction between sensation and reflection, which afterwards served Hume so well in his differentiation between matters-of-fact and relations of ideas. According to this prevalent opinion, ideas were conveyed into the mind by particles of foreign matter. Once we got them we could keep them without further material assistance. The closer analysis which separates the purely mental element in sensation from the concomitant neuroses was only emerging in Butler's time and had not impressed him with its importance. Summing up our conclusion it would appear that the vital argument which still survives is that the soul is not only indiscerptible but the term is meaningless when applied to it in any but a figurative sense. If the word dissolution as well as discription can only be applied to the soul figuratively then the case of an immaterial substance being in itself subject to the accidents of birth or death has yet to be established.

Even Kant's criticism that a soul could perish by a form of evanescence is not in point. The analogy of evanescence is at heart spatial. Air is rarefied when less of it has to extend itself over a given area. But there are no arrears in the soul. The being of the soul depends on circumstances entirely different from the being of the body. When Huxley in a later age spoke of thought as an epi-phenomenon he fell justly under Butler's commonsense criticism, "Thus men go on with words".

IV

BUTLER ON REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

When Butler passes on to discuss the view of Natural Theology that there is a system of rewards and punishments dependent on moral conduct he finds much evidence in Nature ready to hand. All of what we enjoy and part of what we suffer is put in our own power. Future pains result from present indiscretions. Intemperance affords a striking illustration. In the course of this investigation we came across some of those shrewd observations which make the *Analogy* so thought-provoking. "Perhaps," he writes, "Divine goodness, with which if I mistake not, we make very free in our speculations, may not be a bare single disposition to produce happiness but a disposition to make the good, the faithful, the honest man, happy."

Again, "When men find themselves necessitated to confess an Author of nature or that God is the natural governor of the world, they must not deny this again because His government is uniform, they must not deny that He does things at all, because He does them constantly." Thus Butler in 1736 refuses to adopt the argument from miracle in the sense that "puts God only in the gaps of experience". Yet he defends miracles with great determination. Perhaps there is here yet another instance in which too hasty "modern thought" misinterprets its sources.

Butler employs a very wise restraint in his use of this particular analogy. He is content to lay down "the proper formal notion of government", viz.: "The annexing of pleasure to some actions and pain to others in our power to do or forbear, and giving notice of the appointment beforehand to those whom it concerns." Nature offers abundant evidence of deliberation with a view to avoid pain or secure pleasure and is therefore consonant with such a scheme of government. It makes no difference to the validity of the position if we conceive pleasure and pain to be unalterably associated from the beginning with certain courses of action, or if we imagine a momentary association by Divine power. Human deliberation which constitutes the nerve of the argument remains untouched in either case. So long as the world is a theatre for the display of the effects of foresight and of recklessness the analogy holds.

Neither would an overplus of misery in the world, supposing such to be the situation, nor the actual success of wickedness defeat the argument.

Butler, in the confidence of his logic, dares to say, "The true notion or conception of the Author of Nature is that of a master or governor prior to the consideration of His moral attributes." Few men possess the gift of following a line of reasoning to its conclusion unfettered by the bogies erected at the side of the path by interested opponents. Butler and Hume must both be numbered among the few. It is a great gift which cannot be too ardently desired by the apologist. Truth always extricates itself from difficulty. It does not need adventitious aid from us. "Grant me final causes," says Butler, "and my argument is right even if, 'ultimately', you compel me to find that the whole structure of the world is wrong." A careful consideration of the precise limits and the cogency of this chapter must prove of permanent value to all students of

apologetics. No doubt Butler had Shaftesbury in mind, who contended that an action performed in view of possible future punishment in the event of its neglect lacked moral quality. His reply, at this stage, is to point out that, even so, future punishment is annexed to certain neglects and deliberation in view of such punishments is sufficient to establish the conception of a "master or governor".

Thus he administers a rebuke to the sentimentalists of his age which is equally stimulating against the sentimentalists of to-day. If a man steps on an upturned tin tack neither self-love nor benevolence will prevent him getting a pain in the foot.

V

BUTLER ON MORAL GOVERNMENT

There is clear evidence, then, of a system of Government, but is there evidence of moral government? Attention has already been directed to the significance of the distinction here made. It is a tribute to Butler's genius that he was able to avoid the pitfall here which has entrapped so many. Modern theology is often largely sentimental and needs the very lesson here enforced. Butler assumes the existence of God. That is a common point between him and his opponents. But he is content at the beginning with the bare assumption of God's existence and builds upon it by patient inquiry, such moral characteristics as the analogy of nature seems to justify. In much modern writing not only is the existence of God assumed, but a very artificial conscience is made *a priori* the condition governing His activities. We use the term artificial in no depreciating sense. We intend to imply that the standard which is incontinently applied to judge the activities and attributes of the Eternal is the creation of a long train of cultural experience and also the repository of many inherited prejudices. Butler avoids the tempting short cut and provides an example for his successors. God may be a Governor and yet not be moral, or may not after such evidences of moral government as would prove convincing to men situated as are the dwellers on earth, He found himself in the midst of a weary world. The tense days of the sixteenth century had ushered in a revolution in thought that called Europe to arms.

The new principle of religious toleration, itself imperfectly understood was, paradoxically, forcing its advocates to wade through blood for its establishment. The battle had been

nearly won in Butler's time. Only a few strongholds remained in possession of the enemy of toleration. But reflection surveyed a recent past and said "We are a sorry company. Rights are trampled upon and right is disregarded." "Does God care?" The reflection was of a very partial character. It only contemplated the ruin and the mistakes. It neglected to evaluate the sincere effort. With that simulated impartiality which is always a feature of confused thought it cried alike to disciples of toleration and intolerance, "Look at the mess you've made." The mistakes of the righteous, and they were neither few nor unimportant, were cast in the same category as the wickedness of the vicious. The so-called "man of thought" attributed all the evil to dogmatic religion, and called to Romanist and Protestant in deadly grips. "A plague on both your houses." The ordinary man, eager to relieve himself of responsibility in a day of doubt and difficulty urged that if God were indeed there He would intervene. The Deist was quick to reply "God is in nature, but not in religion, follow nature."

Butler enters the lists and asks for a dispassionate consideration of the whole matter. Is there evidence of moral purpose in nature? His answer is a model of cautious reasoning. "Let us", he says in effect, "get rid of pre-conceived notions. Let us believe that absolute benevolence, however amiable in itself, may not be the constitution under which things are conducted, or rather of God's relation to them. God may have an interest in virtue and vice and may be disposed to make the virtuous happy. Suppose this to be the case and evidence is discoverable in nature of this intention." He lays aside the sense of uneasiness which accompanies certain kinds of action. It is difficult, if not impossible, to frame a calculus by which to estimate the degrees of uneasiness on the one hand and satisfaction on the other which result from different forms of action. He proposes, therefore, to take a wider view and seek for perhaps less convincing but more possible methods of establishing the tendency to promote the happiness of the virtuous. He points out that there is nothing chimerical in the idea itself. In his own phrase it "falls in with our natural apprehension and sense of things". Nor is evidence really lacking. Certain results such as tranquillity, satisfaction and external advantage are the natural consequence of prudent actions. Contrary conduct brings many inconveniences and sufferings. Organized society

punishes vice as such. We have an inward sense of difference between an experience of misfortune and of wrong done to us. It is true that virtue is sometimes defeated, but so by a conjunction of accidents, it may happen to reason against brute force. What Butler insists upon is that virtue *as such* is rewarded, vice *as such* is punished. Nature, therefore, offers evidence that its Author is not indifferent to virtue and vice.

Two questions arise ?

(1) What about Persecution :

(2) Might not things always go on in this mixed way with a tendency to reward virtue always marred in accomplishment ?

With reference to persecution Butler admits the difficulty, but replies that the relation of persecution to the suppression of virtue is not a necessary relation. Men may mistake the good for evil, but they do not punish the good as good, but because they imagine it to be evil. Butler here raises the instance of the Antagonism that sometimes emerges between an individual conscience and the general moral standard of an age. He does not pursue the point. No doubt he did not regard it as germane to his immediate purpose. Yet it is one of the most startling illustrations of the present imperfection of our ratiocinative powers. Ambrose, for example, is reputed as a saint, yet he resisted what seems to us the very just demand of the Emperor Theodosius that reparation should be made to certain Jews for the malicious burning of their synagogue. Butler argues that the good find a difficulty in combining. He might have added to his argument the fact that the good are not wholly good. He makes some use of this in the *Sermons*, but passes it over in the *Analogy*. It constitutes a big element in the fact that "things go on in a mixed way" which is the second objection that he faces. Butler in reply depends on the fact that a natural tendency which is only hindered by accidental causes must ultimately become effective. This is the well-known modern argument of final faith in rationality. It is the optimistic outlook on life.

Butler, however, adds to the conception of the rationalist the deeper idea that God Himself, the Eternal Reason, is the Author of the natural tendency under review. God thus becomes the final Guarantor of ultimate victory.

Some such attitude seems necessary if we are to preserve a well-founded optimism. It is here that the failure to note the

presence of error and wrong in the virtuous tells against the completion of the argument. If the good are not wholly good, how are they to attain to perfection? Butler would ultimately reply that there is perfection in God which He alone can communicate to His creatures. He comes very near to this position in the latter part of the *Analogy*. He touches the note of pessimism when he writes: "We are an inferior part of the creation of God. There are natural appearances of our being in a state of degradation."

VI

BUTLER ON PROBATION AND MORAL DISCIPLINE

The two chapters dealing with a state of probation and a state of moral discipline are in the nature of corollaries to the main thesis already developed. Certain particulars in the exposition are worthy of at least a passing notice. The distinction between self-love and the passions, so important for the theory of the *Sermons*, emerges again here. Butler writes: "Particular passions are no more consistent with self-love than they are with virtue and religion." Butler comes to close quarters with the shallow sophist who calls on his disciples to follow nature. What is meant by nature? Is it to yield to a series of impulses each one dictated by the caprice of the moment? Or is it a regard for our development according to a scheme of reason? On the latter theory reason exercises a salutary control and imposes at times an inhibition upon the outgoings of particular desires. If you adopt this latter view, argues Butler, you will find yourself at times in conflict with urgent impulses to gratify which would be to run counter to the dictates of prudence. Hence the restraints of religion, against which such exception is taken, may turn out to be the dictates of our highest prudence. Butler adds that if we take in the consideration of a future life then religion and true prudence are coincident. The bearing of this line of thought on the trivial objection that there is something unworthy in men being intent on saving their own soul is so obvious as not to require any further expansion.

The natural difficulty of following nature in a rational manner due to the possession by us of possibly uncontrolled passions is greatly increased by the actions of others upon us.

By wrong education, bad example and so forth. So far is this from being a peculiar effect in the religious world it operates with equal force in our temporal affairs.

A most valuable distinction is drawn between active and passive habits. In the course of this argument Butler was led to recognize the complex nature of apparently simple vision. He erred in over-stating the power of simple perception. He draws an absolute line between perception and judgment while the truth is that every perception has in it an element of judgment. Nevertheless he deserves a meed of praise for his acuteness in discerning a power akin to habit in what seems to the ordinary man a direct appreciation of an external object as it exists outside the mind. Locke and Molyneux were before him in this matter and no doubt directed his mind to the problem. But the ethical conclusion is of greater importance. "Going over the theory of virtue in one's thoughts", talking well, and drawing fine pictures of it, this is so far from necessarily or certainly conducing to form a habit of it in him who thus employs himself, that it may harden the mind in a contrary course and render it gradually more insensible, i.e. form a habit of insensibility to all moral considerations. It is not wholly impertinent to suggest that in these days of continuous round table conferences, grave heed should be paid to this warning.

The final cause of habits is to render us fit for the various experiences that meet us in life. They prove that we have a capacity for moral discipline and improvement. They actually illustrate the fact that in certain directions improvement is in process. An analogy therefore lies to hand for that assertion of probation and discipline for a future life which is part of the declaration of religion. The very wickedness of mankind is a witness to the need of such moral discipline.

VII

BUTLER'S THEORY OF A FALL

The consideration of the relation of habits to the affections, using the latter term in Butler's sense of a disposition towards the gratification of a particular desire led him to suggest a theory of a fall which has been much used and highly approved. There is a clear distinction between any special appetite and our general

moral understanding. A sense of the fitness of things will not prevent a man from feeling hungry. Hence at any moment an appetite may secure satisfaction for itself at the expense of the moral understanding. Although the affections are subject to the moral principle, the occasions which excite them are quite independent of it. Hence a temptation may arise at any moment to gratify a natural appetite unlawfully. The explanation thus offered has the value that attaches to all careful reflection. It opens up important avenues of thought. Nevertheless it does not satisfy every requirement of the case. It looks like the assertion that the explanation of a mutiny is a break down in discipline. The proper proportion of authority over controlled though semi-lawless propensities resident in the principle of virtue is just assumed and afterwards implicitly denied. If the man is rightly constituted the principle of virtue is supreme. Yet *ex hypothesi* this regnant power is de-throned by an innocent appetite which by the process of dethronement becomes noxious. Butler discovers a safeguard in habit. But his safeguard labours under the disadvantage of being initially weak when it is most essential that it should be strong. To yield to a desire with a consciousness of its unlawfulness is already to exhibit a defect in the moral will. Butler mistakes a description of a fall for an explanation of it.

On the other hand, if a necessary indeterminacy of the will be conceded, so that it is possible, although not inevitable, for the man to subordinate his moral judgment to the demands of appetite in a given case, then all that Butler submits regarding the power of habit becomes at once operative. The act of yielding creates a facility for further concessions. The act of resisting stabilizes the moral judgment. It is possible to employ much of the argument in defence of the Bible doctrine of man's fall.

VIII

BUTLER ON THE OPINION OF NECESSITY

The last chapter in Part I of the *Analogy* deals with the opinion of Necessity. It is difficult to gather the exact opinion which is here assailed. The following sentence is the nearest approach to a definition: "Everything and every mode and circumstance of everything is necessary and could not possibly

have been otherwise." But this definition, if it is to be taken as such is wide enough to include opinions of necessity of the behaviourist type and opinions that leave full room for the play of moral motives. Butler grasps the latter fact and compels his fatalist opponent to acknowledge that he means by necessity "an agent acting necessarily". He assures us that the fatalist would not wish this to be his meaning. Why he does not say.

Butler himself adopted the then popular theory that "power to the contrary" in every choice constituted the very essence of freedom. He does not seem to see that his own doctrine of habits, another way of declaring that progress is conditioned by diminishing "power to the contrary", raises serious questions as to the adequacy of this view. He speaks of the existence of God as being necessary with a necessity before design. He is content to urge that this is a unique necessity and never passes farther to inquire if it is inconsistent with freedom in God.

The whole argument terminates in the unsatisfactory conclusion that the opinion of necessity is practically false. But a device between the mind and the fact creates a painful indeterminacy in his reasoning. He is convinced that a fallacy lurks somewhere in the necessitarian argument he seeks to combat, but he never succeeds in bringing the fallacy to light.

At every stage in the development of his theme he manifests a great reluctance to engage in deeper speculative philosophy. Had he analysed more closely the meaning of the word necessity and distinguished between external compulsion and the inevitable expression of a being's proper nature he might have approximated to the views of Augustine whom he quotes in another connexion.

No doubt there were men in Butler's time as there are men to-day, who employ his own phrase not in his sense. Such men would insist that the fact that "These are as they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be" proves that the order of events does not lie in our individual choice and therefore we are relieved of all further responsibility to God or man. But it is honouring such vapourings too highly to call them "opinions of necessity". They are really unreflecting repudiations of felt obligations. They are not only practically false but speculatively untenable. They deny, in the face of all evidence, the existence of such elements in the composition of things as deliberation, with choice. Butler has the merit of seeing this though he saw it, as in a glass, darkly.

IX

BUTLER AND THE CASE FOR REVEALED RELIGION

The second part of the *Analogy* sets out the case for revealed religion. Again Butler makes use of the pessimistic outlook of the age. He argues that the present condition of the world is evidence that natural religion is not sufficient for the establishment of righteousness. Revealed religion republishes the demands of natural religion and calls into being a community—the Church—charged with the responsibility of answering these republished demands. He regards miracle and prophecy as two main authorizations of revealed religion. There can be no presumption against revelation at the beginning of the world because as yet there is no system of Nature. Such a revelation could not in strictness be called miraculous. Again there cannot be a presumption against the miraculous from the settled course of nature because if revelation be intended to instruct mankind it must have its own peculiar attestation.

In meeting objections against the miraculous Butler, as has frequently been pointed out, falls into the error of confusing the presumption against a particular fact with the presumption against an unusual and disturbing fact. This is the more surprising as his whole claim is based on the analogy of nature. Yet in this instance he allows himself to disregard the natural weight attaching to experience. It is true as he states, that there are a million probabilities against any one individual being born, living and dying at particular specified moments. But there is no improbability attaching to the general proposition that people are born, live and die at all moments. This is consonant with general experience. We express no surprise, therefore, at the statement that Julius Caesar was born at a particular era in the world's history. We would want convincing evidence, however, for the further assertion that he was born on Tuesday at twenty minutes and five seconds after midnight. But there is an antecedent general improbability against the truth of the statement that Julius Caesar rose from the dead. It is this antecedent presumption against miracles based on general experience which makes the demand for stringent evidence eminently reasonable.

This weakness is largely redeemed by pressing, as we have noticed, the fact that revelation being designed for the instruction

of mankind raises a general presumption in favour of special attestation and so prepares as it were the way for the recognition of its peculiar evidence in miracle and prophecy. He also urges with reason that in a long lapse of time special occasions might reasonably occur which would make the emergence of miracle more consonant with the circumstances peculiar to these occasions. This is more akin to the modern defence of the miraculous which lays emphasis in the long tracts of non-miraculous history described in the Old Testament. The Lamarckian theory, for example, posits a period in the earth's history when its fluid state enabled large portions of matter to become detached from the major mass. The law of gravitation used now renders such a circumstance impossible, not because the law altered, but because the fluid mass has cohered and rendered operative in larger measure the centrifugal and centripetal forces that keeps the solid bodies in fixed orbits. An unusual condition cannot be measured by usual experience.

X

BUTLER ON MORAL DIFFICULTIES IN REVELATION

Following a healthy agnosticism Butler reminds us that we are not competent judges of the exact nature of revelation. He guards himself against the retort that this is to decry reason by observing that there is a difference between partial and total ignorance. Because reason cannot competently judge of all things we are not permitted to say it can judge of nothing. There is much in revelation that is submitted to our judgment on which portion it is our duty to exercise the faculty God has given us.

He deals incidentally with moral objections against certain commands, e.g. the destruction of the Canaanites. He regards such objections as frivolous and meets them with a positive argument. In all such cases he contends the positive precept alters the nature of the act. It is at least worthy of consideration that an exact reasoner, whose temper is already known from the instances cited in this article, finds no difficulty in what may be called the stock-in-trade of modern liberal theology. He does not even supplement his defence by the consideration that a moral revolt on the part of Israel against the iniquity of the

Amorite was to some extent created by the order of extermination. He contents himself with observing that an occasional action of this sort, under the direction of a positive precept is not sufficient to create a habit of revengefulness, treachery, ingratitude. Butler has sufficient contempt for what are now regarded as grave moral problems to write that "they are sometimes weakly urged as immoral".

The question that faces the modern objector here is "Has any further evidence accrued since Butler's time to strengthen the weight of the objection to such incidents?" If the answer is in the negative by what process of reasoning can it be demonstrated that Butler's attitude is false? Butler admits that such instances may mislead the weak and enthusiastic, but points out that an objection of this sort is an objection against the general constitution of nature. Butler saw clearly what modern expositors frequently miss, that the actual facts of war and slaughter are more difficult of explanation than any command to put war and slaughter into action. Given a community where evil abounds and such commands may be necessary in relation to such a community. At least quite thoughtful men argued in this fashion in 1914. To boggle at the command and leave unexplained the evil which occasioned it is not to argue soundly.

XI

BUTLER ON THE PLACE OF MIRACLE AND PROPHECY

It is further worthy of notice that the existence of miracles, the miraculous success of Christianity and the genuineness of prophecy are the three points selected by this cautious apologist as the vital features which have to be destroyed if the existence of revelation is to be desired. He declares that there are other elements in the Christian system worthy of attention, but maintains they should never be discussed except in relation to miracle and prophecy. Again it may be asked, Has the position materially altered since Butler's days? Following his own method we would add: The question is not have men altered their method of presentation, which is nothing to our purpose, but have the actual conditions governing revelation itself and its mode of communication, undergone any material change within the last two hundred years? If the answer is, as it must be, in the

negative, on what grounds other than those of sentiment is there justification for the modern depreciation of the lines of evidence which Butler regarded as vital? We are certain that his cold reason could reckon little of such generalizations as "we have thanks to modern criticism, an entirely new outlook on the whole question of Biblical study". He would retort "Can the miraculous nature of the Incarnation be denied?" Is it not analogous to the whole course of nature to expect that a miraculous revelation should be attended by miracles?

XII

BUTLER ON A MEDIATOR

Following further the principle of what we have called a healthy agnosticism, Butler devotes a chapter to showing that Christianity is a scheme imperfectly comprehended and leads us to the central position of his defence, viz. the analogy in nature for the revelation of a Mediator.

In this chapter Butler shows his strength and his weakness. He adopts without investigation, the current Arminian theory of the Atonement. Certainly there is no real analogy in nature to support the suggestion that "The Mediator obtained for us the benefit of having our repentance accepted unto eternal life," nor yet for the further declaration that through His efforts we are "put into a capacity for salvation". On the other hand his robust commonsense traces out real affinities between our natural moral constitution and the scriptural declarations regarding the purposes of our Lord's life and death. He does not hesitate to place our Lord's sacrifice in direct relation with the Old Testament Jewish sacrificial observances. If there is no relation it might well be asked Why was the Mediator of the Seed of David?

Butler points out that our well-being depends in measure on the instrumentality of others. There is further a moral obligation to help even the undeserving. He declares that it is a rash presumption to imagine that the world could be constituted without misery or evil. It is a matter-of-fact that reliefs are provided so that the consequences of men's rashness are often averted through the interposition of others. We are unable, unaided, to effect our deliverance from the consequences

of our own actions. Even behaving well for the future, while not useless, is not sufficient, to trammel up the consequences of the past. Our repentance, however sincere, is also inadequate. The existence of sacrifices is man's witness to this truth. Not only is all this evident from nature but it is also apparent that the innocent frequently suffer for the guilty. Not only so, but this suffering has sometimes at least a remedial efficacy. Butler here interposes the observation that our innocent suffering is frequently necessary whereas our Lord's was entirely voluntary. He concludes a closely reasoned defence of mediation with the crisp sentence, "vicarious punishment is a providential appointment of every day's experience".

In this connexion Butler has but thinly veiled contempt for the argument that the appointment of Christ to suffer for the sins of the world "represents God as being indifferent whether He punished the innocent or the guilty". He speaks of "the extreme slightness of all such objections" and has no difficulty in showing that they are an assault upon our experience of the constitution of nature.

Two further chapters deal with objections against Christianity and the particular evidences for it. He concludes with a defence of the argument from *Analogy* from which some phrases have been quoted earlier when we endeavoured to fix Butler's meaning of his own term. Butler anticipated Strauss's objection to the lack of universality in Christianity. He sanely observes that the fact that light is given to a few is not destroyed by evidence as to the darkness of the many.

The chapter on the particular evidences of Christianity is a masterly summary of the main features of Bible history together with some sound observations on the nature of prophecy. Such is Butler's *Analogy*. If we have succeeded in our sketch of this old work we have shown that it must always remain a precious possession to those who value a fearless examination into the nature of those things most surely believed among us.

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