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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, MONDAY, MAY 24, 1869.

THE REV. WALTER MITCHELL, V.P., IN THE CHAIR.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I regret to have to announce the decease of one of the oldest members of our Council, who has always taken a warm interest in our affairs, and who has also been of especial value to us in all matters in which a clear, business-like head was required. The Council have just had the mournful duty imposed upon them of passing the following resolution :—

“That the Council have heard with deep regret of the decease of their friend and colleague, Mr. J. J. Lidgett. They desire to place on record their sense of the services rendered by him to the Victoria Institute, and of the continuous interest which he manifested in its objects and proceedings; and they hereby beg to offer their respectful condolence to his widow and family.”

I am also requested to announce that the usual business relating to the affairs, accounts, &c., of the Institute, has been unavoidably delayed for a few weeks, until a Finance Committee which has been appointed are enabled to draw up their report. Unfortunately, our Hon. Treasurer has been detained on the Continent for some time longer than was expected, and that has caused some difficulty in making up the Balance Sheet; but I hope that, by the end of the Session, a very satisfactory balance sheet will be laid before another general meeting of the Society, to which the present meeting will be considered as adjourned. It is now my duty to call on the Rev. Dr. Robinson Thornton, one of our vice-presidents, to deliver the annual address for this year.

The Rev. Dr. THORNTON then read the following :—

## ANNUAL ADDRESS.

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 THE CREDULITY OF SCEPTICISM.

**M**AN *must believe something.* This is a truth which no one who has any acquaintance with the workings of human intellect or human affections can venture to gainsay. Man must assent to something beyond the limits of that world which comes beneath the observation of his own sense

and perception. He cannot repress a desire and a readiness to acquiesce in some one or two propositions at least touching things extra-sensual, things high and beyond mortal ken. Just as in earlier years we sit by the seaside, and gaze on the fantastic forms that rise up from the horizon, till we seem almost to wander among the cloud-palaces of dreamland, and repose ourselves in the cool shade of some vapoury recess, that shows as though it were set in the midst of an ocean of rosy light,—so in our later thought-years our minds seem irresistibly to float away from earth, and rest in some shadow, at least, of the Infinite. Yes, man must believe something; and with many it is a far greater effort to disbelieve than to believe, a task of far more difficulty to withhold than to yield assent. Some will say that this arises simply from that mental indolence which accepts recklessly rather than undergo the labour of examination. Others may argue that what was formerly said of Nature is really true of mind, that it abhors a vacuum, and had rather fill itself with the untrue than not be filled at all. However we may choose to account for the fact, it still remains the same; the would-be unbeliever cannot disbelieve: he cannot cut himself off from the whole region of the Unseen: he must assent to something.

Hence the Credulity of Scepticism.

Let us examine carefully what these two words mean. It is an evident truth, which is nevertheless well worth repeating, that four-fifths of our disagreements in science and philosophy, and nine-tenths of those in religion, arise from carelessness and want of precision in the use of words. Controversy shelters itself and grows gigantic behind the mists that rise from equivocal and undefined terms.

1st. What is Scepticism?

Etymologically it signifies "a habit of examining." In itself this habit would be the reverse of injurious; a sound and enlightened scepticism would appear to be the only means of solid advance in philosophy, and a defence of, rather than an offence to, Religion. We know that the scepticism of Hume did overthrow, in this country, the old Aristotelian dogmatism, and led to a philosophy based on sounder principles,—that of Reid. Such was perhaps the first meaning of the name as applied to and accepted by early philosophers, who dared to doubt and examine where doubt was reckoned a treason:

*Nullius addicti jurare in verba magistri.*

But there arose sceptics in philosophy subsequently specially known by that name, who carried their doubting and examination farther than this salutary process of testing again the

philosophic coins which had been so long passing current with so little claim to be regarded as true metal. Among the crowd who followed in the train of Alexander the Great into the unknown regions of the Five Rivers, beyond the Indus, there was a dreamy, thoughtful man, with quiet simple tastes, who, while others gave way to excitement or terror, calmly pondered on the new phases of Life and Being which opened upon him. He conversed with Persian Magi and with Indian Gymnosophistæ; he heard them chant the precepts of Zerdusht, the ancient hymns of the Veda; he heard them tell of Ormuzd the all-loving, of Indra the all-encompassing; and as he compared their teaching with what he had heard from his instructors Bryson and Metrodorus, and read in the fascinating books of Democritus, the sad thought flashed across his mind, "Can we ever know? How can we dare, while we gaze on the ever-varying phenomena that pass before our view, to assume that there is any reality, any fixed substratum underlying them all; or, even granting that there is, how can we venture to suppose that we are able to bring to bear upon it a power of comprehension sufficient to enable us to judge of it? Is our mind competent to deal with the Unseen?" This was Pyrrho the Sceptic. His *Scepsis* was not the doubting and careful sifting of truths up to his time regarded as axiomatic, but the turning of the intellectual gaze inward upon the instrument of understanding itself, and pronouncing sentence against it; or, more strictly speaking, declining to pronounce sentence in its favour. "How do you judge of the Unseen?" he asked. "You say you have a Criterion within you, an instrument for determining the Beautiful and the True, for discriminating between the Good and the Bad, the Ethereal and the Worldly; how do you know that this Criterion is correct? How can you be sure that it may not mistake the False for the True, or fail to detect the reality of Being under the unreality of mere appearance? Still more, if in things finite your Criterion be so untrustworthy, how can you possibly venture to apply it to the Infinite?"

The question remained unanswered. It was not yet time for Immanuel Kant to appear.

The word Sceptic, however, is applied, at the present time, not to philosophy, but to religion. It is not used to signify one who examines the truth of what is presented to him for acceptance, nor yet one who argues that he has no faculty which can be relied on for the apprehension of higher Truth: it signifies one who rejects the probability, if not the possibility, of communication between God and man; and especially one who repudiates the divine origin and authority of a certain

Book, or series of books, for which alone is made the claim that it is such a communication. There is no need to endeavour to fix the origin of this religious scepticism. From the very first appearance of the very first portion of this Book there must have been, and we know there were, sceptics, of the school of Jannes and Jambres. And as time went on, and yet more parts of the Book appeared, and were held as further utterances, in grander and clearer tones, of the voice of the All-wise, sceptics must have multiplied and did multiply. But we have not here to do with those of old, who having breathed the atmosphere without, thick with the mists of error and the night of human ignorance, could not bear the purer breezes that emanated from the Great Teacher's finished work. We are concerned with those who in our own time have fancied they have found reason for rejecting as untrue what others hold to be God's Revelation to mankind.

There is another word in the title to be defined. What is Credulity?

Etymologically, the diminutive termination of the word *credulus* would lead us to imagine that some slight insinuation of contempt was intended in every case where it was employed. And this appears to be the fact. The credulous is not one who believes only, but who believes where he might be expected to disbelieve; where the majority of thinking people do not believe; and where the belief is itself no proof of the fulness of his reasoning powers. And thus we get to the true notion of credulity. The credulous person, as contrasted with the rational believer, is one who yields assent upon grounds which are not adequate to produce rational belief. Belief is properly defined to be the assent to a proposition as proved by testimony. It is a species of *opinion*. Opinion being the assent to a probable proposition, as such, Belief is the opinion which assents to a probable proposition proved by that special kind of probable premiss which we call authority, or testimony. Now, as Bishop Butler clearly shows, it is almost always a man's duty to act upon opinion or belief. In fact, if we waited for knowledge founded upon demonstration before we acted, we should in most cases not be able to act at all. But (to use the bishop's own words) "probable evidence is distinguished from demonstrative in this, that it admits of degrees." To ignore these degrees, and fancy one probability as good as another, is to fall into the fault which, when committed in the matter of *evidence* or *testimony*, we call "credulity." This word then signifies the habit of assenting to propositions proved by weak or insufficient testimony; to propositions *à priori* improbable, of which the improbability is

not diminished by well-attested *à posteriori* considerations; the habit of accepting the less probable in preference to or equally with the more probable, the inferior testimony as more cogent than or equally cogent with the superior. We must not call a person credulous who assents to testimony, *because he does so*; we cannot apply that reproachful term to him unless he assents to inferences in themselves improbable, or only slightly probable, and resting on weak and unsifted testimony. The Mahometan, for example, is credulous, not for accepting the Koran in the first instance, but for accepting it on the unsupported testimony of Mahomet, in spite of the intrinsic improbability of much that it contains.

But as I said at the outset, man must believe something. He must assent to something upon testimony; he must be either a rational believer, or credulous. He cannot—much as positivists may endeavour to force him—expunge from his mind all that belongs to the region of the Unseen, where authority and Revelation, the Law supported by the Testimony, take the place of axiom and maxim. Hitherto the Sceptical school has accused us of credulity. We propose to turn the tables and fling back the accusation against them. They believe something, as we believe something; but the object of their belief is more improbable than ours, and the testimony on which they believe it weaker than we produce in support of our own side.

Somewhat of this credulous incredulity may be seen even in the school of Philosophical Scepticism. "We have no power," said Pyrrho and Timon, "to judge of the True and the Beautiful. The Criterion fails." But whence came this power to determine our want of power? If we are able to decide upon the untrustworthiness of our Criterion, then we lay claim to a higher Criterion still, the Criterion of the Criterion. "We assert nothing," said they, "not even that we assert nothing." This however is itself an assertion, involving the exercise of a higher Judgment,—the Judgment of Judgment. Here the sceptic philosopher shows his credulity. Instead of holding that we have a faculty, limited perhaps, but still a faculty, of deciding on what is brought before our mental sight; instead of accepting the testimony borne to the existence of this faculty by his own daily consciousness, and others' daily course of action, he prefers to lay claim to the possession of a superior faculty, which can try, and convict of incompetence and falsehood, and condemn to perpetual rejection, the judging power. And of the existence of this superior faculty he brings forward no testimony whatever. He disbelieves against probability and the sense of mankind; and believes without

probability and without authority or proof. Here is credulity even in philosophical scepticism. Indeed, as an acute writer has observed, "for an absolute sceptic to argue at all is a piece of folly, only second to the folly of those who argue with him. If there is no credence to be given to the working of our intellectual power, the former, for consistency's sake, might spare himself the trouble of using them against the belief of his neighbours; and the latter might, with equal propriety, avoid the useless task of arguing with one who professedly has no faith in argument. The sceptic, in fact, writes at once his own defence and his own reply." This Huet and Pascal saw, and had recourse to Religion to extricate them from the difficulties into which their philosophy led them. This other sceptics, less happy than they, saw also, and wandered in the clouds of mysticism, doubly and trebly credulous in their incredulity; Van Helmont, and Poiret, and Swedenborg, dreamed on, saying beautiful things sometimes in their sleep, but showing in the very beauty of these disjointed utterances how true it is that man must believe much, to disbelieve at all.

But we are not concerned so much with the philosophical as with the religious sceptic. This Institute does not propose to combat the errors of those who distrust themselves, but with the far more dangerous errors of those who trust themselves and distrust their God. The religious sceptic, we argue, is more credulous than the believer. The admission of the existence of a Supreme Being at all involves, of necessity, the admission of His benevolence. At least it would be the height of credulity to hold that a Being superior to us in knowledge and wisdom, and, in some sense at least, the author of our being, should be absolutely without a will as regards His creation, or entertain a feeling of malevolence. It was a refined credulity which said, "to make worlds is Jove's pastime," just as it was a gross credulity which invoked Mars as "*nimis longo satiate ludo*," or in the wilder words of an older poet, the dramatist of superhuman existence, spoke of Zeus as neglecting poor miserable men, and rejoicing in the suffering of his own friend and councillor. If, then, the Deity is benevolent, it is antecedently probable that He would exercise some kind of supervision over His creatures,—preserving the life of the living, fostering the growth of the growing, guiding the intellect of the reasoning. In short, we may expect from Him a course of Nature and a course of Revelation: a course of Nature, for the orderly maintenance of that being of which He Himself is the Great First Cause; a course of Revelation, to guide the rational creature to those higher

truths which lie above his own perception, those truths which have respect to the relations of the created with the Creating Mind. This, I say, is an antecedent probability, as our own Bishop Butler shows. It is to be expected from a Benevolent Ruler, that He should benevolently make some communications concerning Himself; and the expectation is confirmed by the analogy of our own dealing, where the superior invariably conveys directions to the inferior, and the more so where the information is such as the inferior, unassisted, would be unable to procure. But the bolder sceptic denies this. A Revelation, he says, is improbable. In spite of analogies, he accepts it as a greater probability that the Supreme should not, than that He should, reveal anything to man concerning His nature and will, more than might be read in His works. Which is the more credulous, he who holds that the Benevolent will limit His benevolence, or that He will not do so? he who asserts or he who denies that the Supreme One guides the intellect He has made? he who holds or he who spurns the sentiment, "Deos didici securum agere ævum"?

But our sceptic, possibly, does not go so far as to deny the possibility or even the probability of a Revelation. But when we come to the question whether a Revelation has been made, and, if made, where it is, then "altum silentium." There is a book, or set of books, which is believed and has been believed by many to be this Revelation. It has been considered to be, and in fact professes to be, a history of the dealings of the Deity with mankind, so far as bears upon their final destiny, together with certain models or suggestions for devotion, axioms relative to things divine, precepts for action, and some hints as to the direction of the Divine scheme in years yet to come. It is not antecedently improbable, our sceptic admits, that such a communication should be made, and in fact it is very much what we should expect to have made. "This is what I have done, these are hints as to what I shall do; these are rules for communicating with Me, these are laws to regulate your conduct towards Me and one another." Still, reasonable and probable as all appears, it is rejected. This is not THE communication which the Creator made. Now, supposing the probability of a Revelation granted, let us see what is the logical position of the sceptic as contrasted with the believer. The latter argues:—These books are much what we might have expected a Revelation to be. They contain difficulties, and we might, *à priori*, suppose that the will and word of the Creator would not be always easily intelligible to the created. They are not the definite, dogmatic

statements, cut and squared after human rules and laws of thought and speech, which would have proceeded from a human author; they are just in the form in which a superior intelligence might have been supposed likely to cast them, if He desired that human intellect should exert itself to learn about Him, and yield Him not a lazy, but a rational service. There is a very respectable and satisfactory chain of testimony which fixes these books to about the ages at which they are ordinarily stated to have been proposed to the world. The sanctity which has continually been attributed to them, must have prevented any serious alteration, omission, or interpolation, being made in them. And therefore I believe that they are indeed the Word of God.

There is no credulity here. The antecedent probability is responded to by an intrinsic suitableness, or at least an absence of unfitness, and confirmed by an adequate amount of testimony. Wrong or right, the believer has plenty of grounds for believing.

Now look at the case of the sceptic. He admits that it is not improbable that the Supreme Being should bestow upon man a Revelation, but declines to allow that this Revelation is to be found anywhere. He considers that a certain benefit is to be expected from the Benevolent Author of Nature, and then, when asked to recognize it, asserts that it is nowhere to be found. Surely it requires more credulity to hold that the Deity is likely to do a certain thing and has not done it, than to believe that He has.

But we press the matter further. The Bible, as we term it, has been accepted in its totality by a large number of educated and thinking men; indeed, we may say, for the last ten centuries and more, by the great majority of educated men in the world. It has also been singularly preserved. Enemies have endeavoured to destroy it, and enemies and well-meaning but injudicious friends alike to corrupt it; but it remains still. Other works have been preserved indeed, and from remote ages: but no enmity was excited against them; they contained no precepts distasteful to mankind, no accounts of the quailing of human might before weakness, when strengthened by the Most High. The Rig-Veda had no adversaries. The Zend-Avesta provoked no wrath nor jealousy. The poems of Homer were the glory of the Hellenic race. There was every reason why these should be preserved, just as there was every reason why our Sacred writings, Jewish and Greek, should be destroyed. Here is a remarkable fact: the sceptic himself cannot deny it. These books have been largely regarded as sacred, and have been

strangely preserved; how can we account for it? If we admit that they *are* sacred, the difficulty vanishes at once. They have been considered holy, because they are holy. The same Deity who caused them to be written, has caused them to be accepted, and has insured their preservation. There has been a special protection and a special barrier round them, like the shield of Pallas in the hand of Perseus, at once a light and a defence, a buckler to protect from harm, and a mirror to show the truth. There can be no credulity in acknowledging that these books are Divine, because they are not only such as we might look for, but also in the same condition in which we might expect them to be. The sceptic, however, prefers to hold that these books are not what they claim to be; that they are either pure inventions, or contain a grain of God-sent truth hidden under a bushel of humanly-devised fable. He prefers to believe that thinking men and unthinking men have joined together in accepting and retaining such false claimants of the honour of coming from above. He prefers to maintain that accident, not Providence, has preserved them; that men have been so inconsistent or so infatuated as to reverence without reason enactments which they did not like, and doctrines which reproved and abased, instead of flattering and exalting, the glory of man's intellect, the pride of humanity. In short, he declines to admit the more probable, and embraces the less probable. He refuses to attribute the phenomena he beholds, and the real facts which he cannot help admitting, respecting the books of the Bible, to a cause which will easily explain them; and does explain them in a manner at once inadequate and improbable.

But I have been speaking of the Bible generally, and as a whole. Nothing can be more certain, says the sceptic, than that it has no right to be considered or treated as a whole. It has no coherence. It consists of a number of books, fortuitously bound up together, because erroneously supposed to treat of the same subject, in the same manner, and upon the same principles. Even in the individual books themselves, traces may be recognized of one or two, or many, independent and incongruous sources, from which they are compiled. I regret that I cannot enter upon an answer to these propositions. It would give me sincere pleasure to endeavour to point out to you how the Jehovistic and Elohist theory of Astruc was the theory, not of a sceptic, but of a good Christian, and how all good Christians are quite prepared to allow that Moses was directed by the Supreme Intelligence to make use of certain early records preserved in the

Aramaic tongue, in some of which he retained the Aramaic Aloh, and in some substituted the great name which he had been taught (יהוה) Jehovah, the self-existent, for the mere (בעל) Ba'al, the lord of existence, a name already desecrated by its use in what Dr. Williams would term "the fierce ritual of Syria." But I forbear. We are not a theological society, and such a discussion would be theological. I repeat the words which I uttered as your Chairman (I am glad to be able to say with applause) at the beginning of this session, that we are a scientific, not a theological society. I refrain, therefore, from a theologico-critical examination of this form of secpis. But scientifically speaking, I may ask the sceptic, How do you account, philosophically, for the fact of the remarkable coincidences between these non-coherent books? On my principles, I can explain a seeming discrepancy. Indeed I think I can prove that no real discrepancy exists. But a coherence is a more difficult fact to deal with than a difference. If Nathan (or some one of that time, for I will not discuss authorship) tells us that David promised an inheritance to Chimham, and Jeremiah writes of the inheritance of Chimham, how can we explain the agreement, except on the hypothesis of truth? Can we believe that a forger, or a set of forgers, would be possessed of such superhuman acuteness as to concoct statements agreeing with one another in this minute manner, and of such astounding self-denial as not to draw attention to these agreements, as being proofs of the veracity of the concoctions? If there is credulity anywhere, it must be, not with one who believes that these statements agree because they are both true, but with one who maintains that so preternaturally clever a set of forgers could exist, and could exert themselves to maintain—what? not an easy-going, man-flattering system, but a system against which its enemies have ever alleged that it is too man-depressing, too God-exalting, too superhuman. Are the Scriptures not to be considered as a whole? Why, the separation of them actually weakens the sceptical argument. If they are a whole, they might (hypothetically) have proceeded from an intelligence lower than the highest; but if not a whole, there is a unity and a coherence in them, which can only be explained, without resort to the grossest credulity, on the view of their authors having been guided by one and the same Supreme Intelligence. "It is easier," says Bacon, "to accept the Talmud, the Koran, and the legends, than to allow that the universe exists without God": and so we may say, It is less credulous to believe that the so-called Scriptures are what they pretend to be, than to hold that they are other than the Revelation of the Most High.

A few words more. On what grounds does the sceptic base his theory of the formation of the Scriptures? Ours is definite, clear, intelligible. Right or wrong, we have something to say for it. But what is the sceptical theory? Can the supposed originals be produced? Have they been preserved, to show where the compiler exceeded, where he fell short of, his limits? If Plutarch misrepresent Herodotus, if Andronicus misunderstand Aristotle, if Theophylact misapprehend St. Chrysostom, or if the Targums distort or add to the Scripture, we can at once compare the later with the earlier, and show the error: but where are the originals of the Scriptures? Have they perished? On our view, they have been allowed to disappear, the Divine sanction being bestowed on those parts only which are incorporated in what we hold to be the Divine narrative; but on the sceptical ground, we may fairly ask, where are they? If they have had the same chance in the struggle for existence (one involuntarily uses Darwinian phrases) as the alleged Scriptures, how is it that they are not forthcoming; that all of them have given way to a set of compilations based upon them, and misrepresenting them? It is surely more credulous to believe in the existence of originals now not forthcoming, than to maintain that the books we have are Divinely-protected originals.

There is, however, another form which the objections of the sceptic take. He professes to compare the conclusions of science with the propositions and statements of Scripture, and to find them so entirely at variance, that no one whose mind is logically constituted, can accept the latter, but must surrender them to the former. The Biblical cosmogony, he urges, is opposed to facts. The Biblical ethnology is inconsistent with what we see to be the present condition of the world. Geology teaches us what we cannot reconcile with the Scriptural records. The Hebrew tradition is opposed to what we find by experience to be true. The sceptic, then, believes something. As I said at the beginning, his mind is not a vacuum, even on such high matter as the Being of God, the universe, and man. He believes the testimony of science. He acquiesces in the propositions of geologists, ethnologists, and his own experience, but rejects what others receive as coming from God. But whence came these propositions which he is willing to accept? Does he not receive the most startling statements from his supposed science? He accepts a cosmogony, as difficult as and more incredible than that of the Bible. On what testimony? He accepts a popular or a scientific ethnology; but on what grounds? He appeals to his own and others' experience; but why is he at liberty to assume that this experience is true? May he not err as well

as others? He invokes the aid of geological science; is there anything *fixed* as yet in that branch of philosophy? Is it not true that for years those who were sceptics on geological grounds opposed to the Biblical cosmogony a scientific system, three-fourths of which at least has been repudiated? They assented to propositions proved by imperfect testimony, resting on insufficient experience, arrived at by incomplete induction. The probability of these propositions was nothing near so high as that of the correctness of the Bible account. Both cosmogonies, we will grant (for argument's sake) were equally probable, or equally improbable *à priori*; but either the one or the other had to be adopted; and the sceptical school did adopt the one which had the smallest amount of testimony and probable argument in its favour. This is credulity. But now that geologists are relinquishing their old position, and taking up a new one, the sceptical school will still believe; for, as I have said, men must believe something; they will believe still what comes to them on the testimony of science already proved fallible, and reject still what comes to them with the witness, the "prestige," if you choose to use the word, of ages, and without any more intrinsic improbability—indeed, with less—than their new scheme. I am not endeavouring now to prove that geology is worthless: I am far from thinking, and much farther from wishing to make out, that all the careful, patient investigations of its votaries, all the magnificent analysis which has been brought to bear upon the facts brought out by those investigations, are utterly useless. A humble student and admirer of physical science, I should be one of the last to utter such an absurdity. I know that sceptics have this accusation always in their mouths ready to utter against the believer. But we do not reject science as they reject revelation. We do not carry that scepticism into science which they do into religion. Nature is true, and grace is true; the truth of God is in all that He, the Truth, has made. No science is worthless—nay, rather, all are precious; but sceptics are credulous, more credulous than believers, because they accept the less probable, on weaker testimony, and reject the more probable, which has a stronger testimony in its favour. They would rather acquiesce in the amazing miracle of nine-tenths of the thinking world for ten centuries being deceived by a transparent forgery than allow, what is by no means miraculous, that they and theirs may be in error. And as with science, so it is with other things. The sceptic will believe in the authenticity of an Egyptian hieroglyph, and in the correctness of the translation of it with which he is furnished; he will believe the *Ægyptologist* and the Egyptian

chronicler, but he will not accept the Bible. Does he find here and there in other works quotations from Sanchoniathon, Berosus, and Maretho, he will put his trust in them, and also in those who quoted them; but he will not give the same trust to the Bible, and those who quote it,—nay, he actually shuts his eyes to the testimony borne to the truth of the Scripture narrative by the Assyrian inscriptions as interpreted. Or if a writer of his own days composes a Hebraistic romance, and substitutes it for the simple narratives of the Messiah's ministry, he will accept it; he will give a credence to Strauss and Rénan which he refuses to John and Paul, to Clement and Justin. Ever credulous where man is concerned, and man alone, he declines to believe where the work of the Deity is made to appear.

It would be impossible for me even to attempt to go into the minutiae of sceptical criticism of the Bible and the Christian faith, and to show that in nearly every case the sceptic attaches credence to something, which something is at least not more credible, and very often actually less credible, than the Sacred records. Such a work would fill volumes. I cannot, however, forbear directing your attention to one matter of detail. I must bear humble witness to the masterly manner in which a well-known writer has shown this credulity of the incredulous to be displayed in their treatment of the Book of Daniel. This book (Dr. Pusey's *Daniel*) has already become a standard work amongst us. It has not been answered, for it is unanswerable. The book of Daniel is confessedly, if the expression can be allowed, the least probable book in the Bible. Its being written in two different dialects, its definite historical narrative, and its equally definite prophecy, the miracles it records, and the foreign expressions which it of necessity contains, make it the mark at which the first arrows of doubt would naturally be levelled. If Daniel be proved genuine and authentic, the same proof as regards the rest of the Scripture will be easy; there is no other so assailable. And assailed it accordingly is. It is a romance, it is a forgery; it is a history, and an incorrect one, pretending to be prophecy. It is a late production, later than the times of the Maccabees. Its language is late, its theology Rabbinical. The learned writer examines each one of these points carefully and dispassionately, and clearly shows that to hold any one of them, far more to hold them all, involves a greater amount of readiness to assent to mere probabilities and hypotheses than the rational believer ever requires or indeed possesses. He shows that it cannot be later than the period to which it is referred, and is exactly what it would have been if

written at that period ; that its theology is that of the earlier Scriptures ; that the supposed late language is not really such, and that this whole objection arises out of misapprehension, if not ignorance ; that the book contains, put it where you will in point of date, undeniable prophecy ; that the supposed historical inaccuracies are really indications of extreme accuracy ; and that many touches are found in it, involving a knowledge of national customs and the like, which could have been possessed by none but a contemporary. To dispute all this requires more credulity than to believe.

Sceptics are of two schools. There are those who examine in order to pull down, and will believe anything, so they can, by believing it, and inducing others to believe, undermine the general faith in the scheme and the records of Christianity. But there are those whose *scepsis* is really intended to lead to truth ; and though it may, according to our notions, fail to attain that end, we cannot help respecting those whose object is really the same as our own. To them we would say, "See how much you must believe in order not to believe as we do ! See what violence you must do to your own minds in order to expel from thence, or guide at your own will therein, those thoughts of the Infinite which we maintain are directed by a celestial rule and a superhuman Guide !" You must have such thoughts : if there is a Deity at all, you must think of Him. "When the Scripture," says Lord Bacon, "tells us, *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God*, it does not say, *he hath thought it in his heart* ; nemo enim Deos non esse credit, nisi cui Deos non esse expedit." Take care, then, that you do not run to the extreme of credulity, by believing in a God of your own construction without any testimony to His existence, save your own imaginings. Such a belief may lead to outward expressions, and inward feelings too, which may be mistaken for the comforts of the Christian. Spinoza was termed "a God-intoxicated man," but the god which inebriated him was but the elaboration of his own mind and heart—not a benevolent Being, the object of his adoration, and the source of his hopes for the present and for the future. To such a Divine Person we must turn, the Author of Nature and the Giver of Revelation, Who alone can satisfy the longings of the soaring intellect, or fill the void in the mourning heart. To believe in Him and His is the truest reason—to disbelieve involves the merest credulity or the blindest self-reliance. And so those will find who seek in order to learn. There was one who wandered of old, and was guided, through many a maze of error and blind acquiescence in human theories, to the Truth. Augustin the rhetorician, Augustin the self-indulgent, Augustin

the Manichee, became at last Augustin the Christian Father, and he leaves us the sum of his varied experience in that one short, pregnant Confession to his Heavenly Father, "Inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in Te"—"Our heart is restless till it rest in Thee."

CHARLES BROOKE, Esq., F.R.S., V.P.—After the able and eloquent Paper we have just heard, I am sure I shall have the hearty concurrence of all present in moving "that the thanks of the meeting are hereby presented to the Rev. Dr. Thornton for his valuable address, and that it be printed in the *Journal of our Transactions*, and also published separately."

Admiral HALSTED.—I beg to second that motion. I am quite sure that all who have heard Dr. Thornton's address will feel with me that this Society, in sending forth such papers to the civilized Christian world, is doing a work which will redound to its honour and credit; and at the same time that there will be few of those papers which will excite more universal interest and be more acceptable and better regarded than the one we have just heard read. I only wish our Institute was better known and more widely appreciated than it is; and I wish also that more members of my own profession belonged to it; for there are times and seasons, in the intervals between the exciting work of our immediate duties, which would be well occupied by a consideration of the serious subjects, on which this Institute not only puts forth papers and discussions, but on which it clears the way for the discovery of truth, and combats those who are so anxious to cloud God's word with scepticism of every sort and description. There is no Institute which has yet been founded which has so deeply, so clearly, so distinctly, and yet with the utmost moderation and with the utmost amount of Christian forbearance, done its work towards clearing away those clouds, and giving men's minds the fullest and clearest information upon the subjects it is intended to illustrate, and for the purpose of meeting and removing false views and false science.

The CHAIRMAN.—I think I need scarcely call upon you to pass this motion by acclamation. The paper of our learned and excellent vice-president has indeed shown that there is a unity in our proceedings. It is a very valuable paper, coming in on our third anniversary, because it gives admirable ideas of the kind of work we are endeavouring to do. The greater part of our papers will be found to bear out most fully the thesis of Dr. Thornton—namely, that those who oppose the Holy Scriptures show the greatest amount of credulity, while those who maintain the unity and truth of Revelation are those who have the greatest amount of reason and of reasoning on their side. We have been banded together, some have said, only to maintain a foregone conclusion; but, in fact, we have come together to defend the Bible, believing that Bible to be true, and we have no wish to deny this. But, while we have our own feelings with regard to the antiquity and authenticity of that book upon other grounds than mere external evidence, for we most of us believe in that book not only upon external evidence; not only from philosophy; but from the teaching of the Spirit within our hearts, and

from something bearing witness to us that there is something in that book which alone will fill the void that man feels, and which alone will soothe man's sorrows and point out to him the means by which his sins and sorrows may be healed. I believe there is no greater philosophical truth, or one which can be maintained by such a tremendous amount of testimony, as the existence of sin in the world and the stain which sin produces in man's innermost being. The fallen man, who feels that he is a fallen creature, and who feels that the Bible is the only book which gives him a true account of that fall, feels also that it is the only book which gives him a remedy or anything which will supply all the wants of his soul, and it supplies this with a fulness which may be appreciated and felt by the highest philosopher, by the most profound and truest student of all that is revealed in the external works of God; while yet at the same time it is comprehensible by a child, and it enables the Christian child to meet death without fear or apprehension. It carries comfort and consolation into the peasant's cottage as well as into the palace, and it appeals to the peasant man and to the peasant woman with the highest and noblest philosophy which the world has ever seen. We know something of the philosophy which was acquired by patient seekers after truth—by men who sought for it without the full aid of divine inspiration—but, let me ask, can we find anything anywhere in the pages of Plato, or in the pages of Cicero, which is at all comparable with the majesty of that philosophy which we may have here in a peasant's cottage from a man who has had nothing more than the teaching of that marvellous book, the Bible? When we see such power as this, we may well claim it for ourselves that we are not credulous in believing in the divine nature of the book which has not only civilized Europe but which is carrying its civilizing influence throughout all the nations of the world, and which gives the lie to all that pseudo science which says that men are of many races and have not come from one common source and centre. That book shows us that the soul of man is the same whether his skin be white or black. The comfort and consolation and philosophy of that book are adapted to the wants of the whole human race, wherever they are found or however deeply they are sunk in barbarism. And this is not all: when we meet a sceptic face to face and analyze his science, we are always led to this conclusion, that the receiver of revelation is not credulous. He is a man who acts on the soundest and strongest probabilities, and who would go even further than Dr. Thornton and say, that in none of the mixed sciences received by man as demonstrative, can you find such an amount of demonstrative proof as you have, if you will only patiently and earnestly enter into it, to prove that the book which we believe to be divine really is divine. In adducing all this we are not credulous, but we are acting the part of men who can use scepticism in its right sense—in the sense in which thinking men may rightly use it to determine whether that to which he gives his assent be true or false. But there is another remarkable thing which fully bears out Dr. Thornton's thesis, and it is this: Only watch the scientific sceptics, and see how very credulous they are upon those subjects which seem to be most monstrous to

the apprehensions of common-sense men. Not only do their various theories require a greater amount of credulity for their acceptance, but I think it may be accepted as an axiom, that all those men who have furthest advanced their scepticism have shown the necessity of believing something by professing their belief in absurdities utterly contrary to common sense ; thus manifesting credulity of the highest character that it is possible for us to conceive.

The vote of thanks to Dr. Thornton was carried with acclamation ; and the Meeting then adjourned for business purposes to a future day to be hereafter announced.