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A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

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The following Paper, the fourth of a series, was then read by the Author:—

*THE SORROWS OF SCEPTICISM.* By the Rev.  
ROBINSON THORNTON, D.D., V.P.\*

IN three papers, which I have had the honour of reading at different times before this Institute, I have endeavoured to discuss, or raise a discussion on, the Scepticism of the present day in various aspects. In touching on the Logic of Scepticism, I have called attention to the illogical character of the reasoning process by which most, if not all, sceptical conclusions are deduced from their premises. Those who employ these arguments have generally proceeded as if it were their object to produce action rather than to attain to truth. Far be it from me to say that those great men of science who have unhappily identified themselves with the cause of Scepticism have knowingly ignored truth, or even permitted themselves for a moment wittingly to deflect from the course that they have adopted to lead to its attainment. But the sceptic, in general, I maintain, has, intentionally or unintentionally, so shaped his arguments as to appear to aim rather at inducing men to quit their profession of Christianity than at demonstrating the truth of his own principles; he has been content with the rhetorical enthymeme or example, where the subject-matter demanded the syllogism or the induction. In short, I have urged that the processes of sceptical thinking appear to violate the *formal* laws of thought. In treating of the Credulity of Scepticism I have endeavoured to point out that in the assumption of premises the sceptic has generally made a far greater demand upon faith than rational believers in Christianity have done. He has demanded absolute assent to propositions of very low probability, and has deduced conclusions which are, either directly or by implication, more startling than those which they were intended to contravene: while blaming those who accept

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\* Being the Fourth and concluding portion of the arguments brought forward in the Author's Papers on "The Logic of Scepticism," "The Credulity of Scepticism," "The Varying Tactics of Scepticism," read in 1866, 1869, and 1874.

statements on authority, he has himself been a blind worshipper of authority, taking on trust as much at least as Christians do; but with this difference, that the authority to which he defers is, by his own admission, merely human; theirs, on the other hand, they maintain to be Divine. In a word, I demurred to the *material* part of sceptical logic.

The historical view of Scepticism I have endeavoured briefly to unfold in writing of its Varying Tactics. I have tried to show how it has shifted ground: becoming, it may be, from time to time more astute, but not necessarily more truly scientific; availing itself of, and seeking to direct or divert, the currents of popular thought, but never taking up any definite and intelligible position which should vindicate for it the reputation of being something more than a pertinacious denial of truths which wise and good men have prized, and struggled for, even to the very death. To these logical and historical discussions of Scepticism, I venture to add a few words on its metaphysical aspect: I propose to look at it psychologically. Having suggested that its history is not ennobling, nor even respectable, and that its logic is materially and formally fallacious, I now proceed to inquire whether it responds to the requirements of man's higher being, and satisfies its needs and its laws any better than it does the needs and laws of the ratiocinative intellect.

I entitle my paper the "Sorrows of Scepticism." There is no sorrow produced directly by an historical shortcoming or a logical failure. We may be disappointed in a character of brilliant promise, we may feel dissatisfied if detected in a fallacy or unable to establish a projected conclusion; but these vexations are, in logical language, accidental, and not of the essence of history or logic; whereas a metaphysical failure, a coming short of the attainment of that which the very nature of the man yearned after, is in itself a pain to that higher nature which experiences it.

I have been led to employ this term, Sorrows of Scepticism, from an observation of the physiognomies of sceptics. I have never, or scarcely ever, looked at the faces or photographs of those who cherished doubts about revealed religion, without being struck with the expression of pain which they exhibit. It would be invidious and undesirable to particularize in this matter; but I may say without hesitation that this appearance of pain, disquiet, disappointment, unrest, is to be seen in nine-tenths of confessed unbelievers. No doubt it may be said that they, like Heraclitus, are weeping over the folly of mankind, though one would wonder why a Democritus did not now and

then appear, with an amiable or sarcastic smile on his face; no doubt it may be said that a lugubrious expression is not confined to those who cherish honest or dishonest doubt, but is seen in those whose orthodoxy is unimpeachable. Still I give you the fact, as it appears to me: most sceptics look unhappy, most believers look happy; and so, as a counterpoise to the Nemesis of Faith, I claim a right to speak of the Sorrows of Scepticism.

Whence then is the sorrow, and what is its nature?

“Dolor,” says the old Scholastic, “est solutio continui.” The definition is intended for physical pain, which was supposed in every case to be essentially connected with some interruption of that which is normally uninterrupted. That the definition is not adequate I presume our modern physiology would tell us; but we may accept it as containing within it a condition of many kinds of corporal suffering. And we may, *mutatis mutandis*, apply it to the higher nature with even greater correctness. If physical pain be caused by the severing of that which should be continuous, mental pain or sorrow is caused by the sundering of the soul or the mind from that which it yearns after, or with which it imagines itself to be, in some way or other, united. The great poet of the world to come was right when he pictured, plunged in unfathomable woe within the impassable portals of the city of despairing grief,

“le genti dolorose  
Ch’ hanno perduto il ben dell’ intelletto.”

Their sorrow was that they were sundered from that ἀγαθόν which the intellectual, in all its varied forms, according to Aristotle, ἐπίσθαι δοκεῖ, that nearer view of the Self-existent which Plato would consider the necessary ultimate destiny of intellectual being.

I. *The Sorrow of mere Negation.*—The mind, from its very nature, seeks for the positive and affirmative, and cannot rest in the negative or destructive. We should hardly, perhaps, be ready to endorse the Hegelian doctrine, that negation and affirmation are two necessary parts of a truth, and that absolute truth consists in the relation between the two; but I think we may maintain it thus far, that negation without affirmation is indefinite and incomplete, and that the mind cannot rest in it. Now the whole of Scepticism is essentially negative. Its scientific propositions, certainly, so far as they are concerned with phenomena, are positive enough; but its conclusions are destructive. Each of its arguments tends not so much to establish a new truth, as to dethrone what has been recorded as one; and in too many instances one seems to feel that the

eager delight with which the sceptic enunciates some startling inference arises not so much from the value of that inference to true philosophy as from its presumed contrariety to something which believers hold to be the revelation of God. This delight, however, is no true pleasure. The mind refuses to be satisfied with the love of that which is not, while it longs for the knowledge of that which is.

In this we may see, I think, a reason for the shiftiness and disposition to vary the ground which we cannot fail to remark as we review the history and development of the various sceptical schools. They will tell us, of course, that new discoveries have widened the field of human inquiry and knowledge; that this shifting of ground is only the occupying of more commanding heights from whence to attack superstition, not the abandonment of the old posts as untenable, nor the restless relinquishment of them as unsatisfactory to those seekers after change to whom that which is is distasteful because it is. They will tell us this; but we shall reply that they are unquiet because they cannot be quiet; that the sorrow of negation clings to them like the tunic of Nessus to Hercules, as a torment which they may sigh under, but are powerless to cast away.

II. *The Sorrow of Doubt.*—As the intellect cannot be satisfied with negation alone, and seeks for affirmation, so does it also long for Assent, and refuse to be contented with Doubt. A pure Pyrrhonism is as inconsistent with mental satisfaction as the absence of a definite centre would be with mechanical revolution. There cannot possibly be any acquiescence, on the part of a rightly-ordered intellect, in a system of teaching which consists either of a number of contrariant propositions of equally low probability, or of a continual assertion of the imperfect probability of another system. Yet such is really the character of sceptical doctrine. Either we have it laid down for us that it is vain to try to determine which is the fact, A, B, or C, all being nearly equally improbable,—this I should term pure scepticism;—or we are told that whatever may be the real fact, one thing is certain, that our assent must be withheld from C (Christianity).

By Doubt I do not here mean that which Descartes considers as the primary position from which all true philosophy springs. The two are often confused together,—one cannot help thinking sometimes of set purpose,—by those who wish to allege the authority of a great name in favour of their own unhappy system. But Descartes was no sceptic. His doubt was never intended to be a part of his philosophical system. It cleared

the ground for Philosophy; but was no more to be rested in as an end than the extirpation of Virgil's "horrida silva" of weeds and brambles is to be held for the completion of agricultural operations. Nor probably would Descartes have urged the application of his "doubt" to that higher class of propositions which we speak of as eternal truths. If, according to him, we cannot doubt of thought, so we may not venture to introduce our doubt where the object-matter is cognate with thought; but be that as it may, the Cartesian dubitation was to be anterior to philosophy, and not an integral portion, still less the principal portion, of the system itself.

Scepticism, however, as such, offers us little but doubt. It does not offer us a definite set of propositions to which we may assent, but, as we have seen, points out a set to which we must not assent. Now, as I have said of negation, so I say of doubt, that the mind cannot possibly rest in it. There is a longing for the credible, as there is for the affirmative; and wherever assent is withheld without some definite assent, in another sense, being propounded, there the intellect is disappointed of its aim, and cut off from that fixed positive truth which it identifies with itself. This the earlier seekers after truth felt to their deep sorrow, when they missed of what they were seeking, though they felt sure it was to be found, and hoped even beyond hope of a Time and a Man who should bring it to them; and the sceptics find it, too, when they turn away from the unchanging Truth to wayward doubt, and its chill, like the prison fetters of Joseph, enters into their very soul. They may call this freedom, but it is bondage; they may exult in a pretended emancipation, but they are in the bondage of disquiet, the servitude of unrest.

III. *The Sorrow of Insufficiency.*—I have said already that regret at a logical failure must not be considered as essential, but accidental, a supervening discomfort not connected with the logic itself. Yet I may without inconsistency append this to the two sorrows already discussed. They arise from the very essence of scepticism; this, like the Aristotelian pleasure (for contraries correspond) is ἐπιγιγνόμενόν τι τέλος τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ. It must, however, be very real at times. I mean by "sorrow of insufficiency" the regret that many, if not all, sceptics must feel at finding that, do what they will, they fail to clear away all the difficulties which attend the rejection of Revelation; and scarcely, indeed, are able to deal with all the arguments alleged in its favour. It is not those who tell us loudly that the game of Christianity is played out, and that it must now take its place among the effete superstitions of humanity, not with the worst, perhaps, but still by no means

with the harmless,—it is not these, I say, who are really content at heart with the position of their own system. There is a latent feeling that all is not right; or, at all events, one seems to see, amidst all these “grave ’ords,” traces of a lurking dissatisfaction with their own method and their own conclusions. The most decided and intolerant unbeliever must see that he himself, in contravention of his own principles, asserts something, assents to something, believes something, while he censures others for assertion, assent, belief. In short, it must be one of the sorrows of Scepticism to see her despised adversary still standing fast, assailed at all points, but consistent and undismayed, while she is herself not altogether free from the fear of seeming self-condemned.

IV. *Sorrow from the absence of God.*—There is a sorrow above sorrows for the sceptic; not merely the disappointment of his intellectual longings, but the blankness of severance from the ultimate end to which soul and spirit alike look upward, towards which the moral and intellectual alike desire to struggle.

It is a hackneyed question, whether the mind does or does not habitually entertain a true conception of the absolute, the infinite, the unconditioned, as distinct from, and elevated above, the contingent, the finite, the conditioned. That there is some such notion present in the educated mind, the personal consciousness of every one probably testifies. We *have* a notion of that which is endless, and self-existent, and unlimited, differing in that very self-sufficiency from all that we experience in ourselves, or are aware of in the phenomenal existence which surrounds us. But does this notion correspond to some exterior existence, or is it merely evolved by us by a mental removal of limit from that of which we have experience as limited? Is our conception that of the Infinite, or of the Indefinite? This is, as I have said, a hackneyed question; but I must be pardoned if I touch on it in pursuance of my purpose.

That every conception has some external object corresponding to it, so that it is not only true that “*cogito, ergo sum,*” but “*concipio, ergo est,*” is well known as a bald statement of the doctrine of the realists: not that the realists probably ever maintained the doctrine in exactly the same form as it has been imputed to them. Doctrines are too often caricatured in a ghastly manner by those who gainsay them: the lion painted by man is quite another creature from the lion as he would be painted by lions. We may take it, however, as a realistic form of argument, that if there

is really such a conception present in the mind, it necessarily involves the existence of an external antitype: as therefore we have the idea of the Infinite, the Infinite must needs exist; as we have the idea of the Perfect, there must be a Perfect Being to correspond to it; the notion could not have been generated in the mind itself by a process of tampering with notions already there, derived from experience, but must be traceable to some external and independently existent origin.

The opposite view I cannot set forth better than in the words of Locke. He repudiates the view that there can be any notion of the Infinite as such; and therefore, of course, would deride as a mere fancy the belief that there was any existence corresponding to a mere negative notion. He accounts for the origin of such notions thus:—

“Every one,” he says (ii. 17, § 3) “that has any idea of any stated length of space, as a foot, finds that he can repeat that idea; and joining it to the former, make the idea of two feet; and by the addition of a third, three feet; and so on, without ever coming to an end of his addition, whether of the same idea of a foot, or, if he pleases, of doubling it, or any other idea he has of any length, as a mile, or diameter of the earth, or of the orbis magnus; for, whichsoever of these he takes, and how often soever he doubles or any otherwise multiplies it, he finds that after he has continued his doubling in his thoughts, and enlarged his idea as much as he pleases, he has no more reason to stop, or is one jot nearer the end of such addition, than he was at first setting out. The power of enlarging his idea of space by farther additions remaining still the same, he hence takes the idea of infinite space. . . . As by the power we find in ourselves of repeating as often as we will any idea of space we get the idea of immensity, so by being able to repeat the idea of any length of duration we have in our minds, with all the endless addition of number, we come by the idea of eternity.”

It would be over-refinement to point out here the confusion between linear extension and space, the more so as the confusion does not affect the argument. The answer to Locke, it seems to me, would be this, that he is describing not the formation of a notion of the Infinite from the perceptions of the Finite, but the struggle in the mind to bring down its transcendental notion of the unlimited to its experience of the concrete and limited; he does not prove that there is no idea of the absolute, but shows that, there being such an idea, we are always endeavouring to realize it.

But it would be an unwarrantable departure from my subject to fight the battle of Aquinas against Abelard, Locke against

Cudworth, and Berkeley against both, or to uphold with Schelling the intellectual intuition (*intellectuelle Anschauung*) of the Absolute. I should simply venture to lay down thus much: we have a notion of the Infinite, no matter whence or how derived, as truly as we have of the Finite; not an image, of course, but a conception; and this Infinite is to us a necessary correlative of the Finite: so that—even as the distinct knowledge of good implies in it the knowledge of evil, its correlative—we cannot conceive of the Finite without the Infinite, of the Limited without the Unlimited.

But has this conception of the Infinite, the Absolute, the Unlimited, necessarily any personal existence corresponding to it? One would say that as the finite man has personality, so the Infinite, too, may be expected to be personal; and, as we have a conception of the one finite nature in many finite persons, we infer that there is an Infinite Nature personally existent corresponding to our idea of it. Thus we come to the well-known arguments of Descartes (*Med. iii. and v.*):—“The idea of an All-perfect, Infinite Being, is, without controversy, in my mind—how did it get there? Not from the outer world; not from education; not from any finite source, because the finite and imperfect could never give me a conception of the Perfect and Infinite; the effect could not transcend the cause. Hence, if I have the idea of God, a God must necessarily exist.” And again: “As the existence of a triangle is implied in the very nature or essence of the conception we have of it, so the existence of God is implied in the essence of our idea of Him.” This may be flat realism, but, if it is, so much the better for realism. The conception of the superhuman is neither, as Locke would tell us, a mere abstract notion of humanity with human conditions removed, nor, as Fichte might say, a projection of our own self-consciousness into the region of the unknowable, but a real representation of a real existence. A representation, but, as I said above, not an image; or else that argument might hold good which presses the impossibility of there being an idea of the Infinite at all. Can that which is finite, it is urged, take in the Infinite, the measured comprehend that which is immeasurable? We know the old tale of St. Augustin of Hippo; that when designing to write an exhaustive treatise on the Triune mystery of the Divine Being, he saw in vision by the seashore a child who had scooped a hollow in the sand with a shell, and smilingly told the Saint that he was going to pour the ocean into it with the same instrument. “Nay,” said St. Augustin, “surely it were foolish to think of taking up the wide sea with a little shell, and

inclosing it within a tiny receptacle." Suddenly the child disappeared, and in his stead an angel form was there, while a solemn voice replied, "Not more foolish than to hope with a finite mind to understand the infinity of God." In fact, we may well echo the poet's words,—

"In this wild maze their vain endeavours end ;  
How can the less the greater comprehend,  
Or finite reason reach Infinity ?  
For what could fathom God were more than He."

True: but the human may conceive of, though it cannot fully fathom, or take in, or image, the Divine. Man's intellect, we must remember, is in the likeness of God's; it is immortal, and though limited *in esse*, is intended for an unlimited and eternal growth; so it may possess, if it cannot itself form, a conception, though an inadequate one, of the Immortal and Perfect; and, having a potentiality of infinite advancement, may formulate the Infinite within itself: just as a finite formula in mathematics is capable of representing an infinite extension.

To this Personal Being, All-good, All-wise, Self-existent, the longings and yearnings of humanity, frail, weak, and ignorant, yet ever conscious of a possibility of better things, are eagerly directed. The sceptic himself knows that in the midst of the impure and false he involuntarily longs for, and by that very longing admits the existence of, the pure and the true, and that not as an abstraction, but as a Person. The affections seek Him as their rest; for rest they must have, and they cannot rest in the restlessness of the finite. The intellect seeks Him because it must have, and rest in, truth, and it cannot rest in the half-truths of the finite. Affections and intellect, heart and mind, soul and spirit, alike stretch forward to Him whose very Being is so wondrously impressed upon them.

And this is the great Sorrow of Scepticism, that it cuts man off from his highest good. There must be, it tells us, no Personal Deity; no "golden chain" which binds each soul to "the feet of God"; no Providence, though the inmost recesses of the heart seem to testify that there cannot but be one.

"Mother! some Hand, through sky, o'er sea,  
Leads wandering birds protectingly;  
'Mid floating piles, and ocean dark,  
That Hand will guide thy homeless bark."

A rigid "self-denying ordinance" bears all these away, and

weeps over fair children whom it has, like Brutus, doomed to death by a mistaken fanaticism.

If we inquire into the metaphysical conditions of this sad engenderer of sorrow, we shall find, I think, that it is an intellectual malady; a mental imperfection somewhat similar to colour-blindness, only not, like that singular defect, unattended with pain. The imperfection consists in an inability to admit, at the same time, the existence of the contingent and the absolute, and to appreciate the province or district, so to speak, which belongs to each. That form of the imperfection which refuses the contingent leads to mere transcendental idealism, but not necessarily to religious scepticism. Though Schelling was not a fervent Christian, Malebranche was. The other form, however, the rejection of the absolute, must inevitably end in a logical and a metaphysical deception. The logical fallacy I will not enlarge on now. It would take the form, usually, of that called in our logical treatises the fallacy "*a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*," or its converse; and would lead us to an utter confusion between will and mechanical power, between the fitfulness of the imperfect and the steady consistent energy of the perfect. The metaphysical error would rather resemble the incorrect perceptions of a sight which, in other respects of normal power, will not bear focussing to the usual extent, and therefore deprives its possessor of the advantage of seeing what is within, or beyond, a certain distance, while at the same time its goodness disposes him to doubt or deny the existence of what he is unable to perceive. The absolute being withdrawn from view, and the contingent alone remaining, the sceptic is left to the contemplation of force in the place of Divine Will; and to the ultimate choice (an unhappy one) between Atheism, Pantheism, or Fatalism. The outcome of these is as injurious to the community as they are in themselves full of sorrows to the individual. No one can doubt this who watches the course of modern unbelief. From the rejection of a written revelation, and a Personal Deity, it advances to the denial of moral responsibility, and the repudiation of social relations, social duties, social morality; eliminating sin by the simple process of asserting the non-existence of moral evil. It professes by this course to cure the griefs to which humanity is liable; the medicine, however, is no true balm, but rather like that narcotic which for a short time induces oblivion of troubles only to intensify them tenfold when the patient wakes to consciousness again. Even the Greek poet could see that the Supreme Being alone was the giver of peace to the troubled mind:—

οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι,  
 πάντ' ἐπισταθμώμενος,  
 πλὴν Διὸς, εἰ τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος  
 χρῆ βαλεῖν ἐτηγύμως.

It has remained for a later age to enunciate the doctrine that the surest expedient against care is to banish Him. But where this expedient is tried, the witness of Him still remains, to increase the care by the feeling of severance from Him: scepticism enhances sorrow by the addition of its own. A true philosophy, a true estimate of the needs of humanity, its tendencies, its latent powers, its patent frailties, points, equally with religion, to a very different course, and a very different result. "Ita ergo," says St. Bernard, "sursum cor, sursum clamor, sursum desideria, sursum conversatio, sursum intentio, et omnis expectatio tua desursum sit: clama in cœlum ut exaudiaris, et Qui in cœlis est Pater mittat auxilium de tribulatione, eripiat a tribulatione, et glorificet in resurrectione."

The CHAIRMAN.—I am sure you will allow me to return thanks to Dr. Thornton for his interesting paper. I may, perhaps, be allowed to make one remark to give you an opinion having reference to the argument bearing upon physiognomy. Some years since I was visiting the studio of the celebrated American sculptor, Hiram Power, whom I found to be as good a talker as a sculptor. I asked him "if he knew that anthropologists say that it is impossible to study the subject of anthropology perfectly without considering the effect of religion; that the physical effect which religion has upon the countenance is a prime factor in the estimate?" He replied, "Well, I have had a good deal of experience among the revivalists of America, and I found this uniformly, that though individuals had been only five or six weeks under the influence of religious enthusiasm, following the movement as mere camp-followers, their countenances were perfectly changed in the time by the fact that they had been under such an influence." Now that, coming from a man like Power, whose profession involved the study of the features, is not without interest to us, and I can quite understand Dr. Thornton's statement that unhappiness is to be found in the physiognomy of the sceptic, just as an expression of happiness will be found, as a rule, in the face of the true Christian, for who can be happy if he is not? (Cheers.)

Mr. H. COLEMAN, LL.D.—I think that the paper which we have heard read to-night contains much that is admirable, but it also contains some weak points. The question which we ought to discuss is not whether scepticism may not be attended by certain sorrows, but whether the mere fact that scepticism may be so attended is an argument against it from a Christian point of view. The Christian dispensation leads us to expect sorrow, and

therefore the mere fact that scepticism is attended by sorrow would in itself not be an argument against it. Scepticism is a disease, and you must go to the cause of it. It is of no use telling a man under these unfavourable conditions that he would be better out of them. He cannot help them. He is involved in sceptical conditions. I should have preferred to see in this paper a bolder and more enlightened treatment of the question. We all know that scepticism exists, and that it is very prevalent, but what can be the practical result or use of saying, "If you accept scepticism, you must accept a system of sorrow." I desire, however, to express a general approbation of the paper, and of the excellent manner in which it has been placed before us, but I really would urge Dr. Thornton to tell us in his reply the cause of scepticism and the best mode of treating it.

Mr. J. RENDALL.—The last speaker seems to have forgotten that the paper which has been read to-night only deals with one-third part of the question.\* My exception to it is of a very different character. I was sorry to find some expressions in the paper which are not worthy of so able a man as Dr. Thornton; he does not quite do justice to the position nor to the views of sceptics. On the very first page I find him saying: "The sceptic, in general, has, intentionally or unintentionally, so shaped his arguments as to appear to aim rather at inducing men to quit their profession of Christianity, than at demonstrating the truth of his own principles." On the second page he says of scepticism: "Its history is not ennobling nor even respectable," and so on through several other pages, speaking of "its shiftiness," its being "confused together," et cetera. I was much struck with the contrast afforded to this style of writing by that of Farrar's "Life of Christ," where I find this passage, in reference to scepticism,—Dr. Farrar writing distinctly, be it remembered, as a believer to believers:—"Let me here say at once that I hope to use no single word of anger or denunciation against a scepticism which I know to be in many cases perfectly honest and self-sacrificingly noble." Dr. Thornton, I think, does injustice to his own position, when he will not allow to the sceptic, motives, quite as good as his own, and a sacrifice quite as great, though the sceptic arrives at different conclusions. But the purpose for which I rose was to bring forward a strong illustration of the soundness of the general view contained in the paper. In reading the life and letters of Niebuhr I came across a passage which well illustrates the sorrows of scepticism. Niebuhr was an unbeliever, and one of the most eminent; but, writing to a lady, afterwards his wife, about the education of his son, he says:—"He shall believe in the letter of the Old and New Testaments; and I shall nurture in him from his infancy a firm faith in all that I have lost, or feel uncertain about."—*Life and Letters*,

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\* The paper is the fourth or concluding portion of the arguments brought forward in the Author's Papers on "The Logic of Scepticism," "The Credulity of Scepticism," and "The Varying Tactics of Scepticism"; read in 1866, 1869, and 1874. (See note, p. 234.)—ED.

vol. ii. p. 101. (Cheers). That is a very strong utterance to proceed from Niebuhr. The father, though he could not himself believe in the Old and New Testaments, still felt such an amount of discomfort about his own position that in educating his child he determined to bring it up in the belief which he himself had ceased to possess. With reference to the question of physiognomy, we must remember that (with most of us) lines will deepen and wrinkles will come with age, also that Froissart charges the English with being serious even in their pleasures, and certainly Dr. Thornton's friends must be exceptions, if nine-tenths of them have happy expressions. I agree that unbelievers, as a rule, carry a painful expression, but my experience leads me to deny that nine-tenths of Christians are happy-looking, at least among Englishmen.

REV. F. N. OXENHAM.—The observation which I specially wish to make arises partly from what fell from the first speaker. The industrious author of the paper has not done one thing which we should have wished: he has not pointed out to us the very essential difference between two sorts of scepticism. It seems to me that if we are really to meet the growing difficulties of scepticism, we must be most careful to distinguish between the doubt which arises from a desire not to believe what is put before a man as truth, and the doubt which arises from a real genuine difficulty, in being convinced that a certain statement does rest on sufficient grounds. One I should call moral, the other intellectual. It seems to me that the scepticism with which we have to deal ought to be regarded as simply intellectual, and Dr. Thornton has told us that he regards it as an intellectual disease. If it really is an honest incapacity in any mind to see that a particular statement rests on a sufficient basis of truth, then all these arguments as to "attempts to make us give up Christianity" are beside the mark. I cannot help thinking, and I say it regretfully, as a clergyman, that we have failed to do much that we might have done in the way of winning over sceptics by assuming, to begin with, that they were morally wrong. If we began by sympathizing with their doubts, and agreeing with them that truth is so precious that we cannot allow an imposture to usurp its place; if we gave them more credit, not for wishing to undermine Christianity, but for feeling genuine difficulties in ascertaining the grounds on which certain statements were originally made, we might do a great deal more for them than we have done. When we impute to them bad motives, and tell them they are not respectable,\* the sceptic naturally says, "A person who speaks in that way does not understand my state of mind, and has no sympathy with me." I cannot help thinking that the scepticism which Dr. Thornton has called intellectual is entirely different from that which he described in the earlier pages of his paper. If we had been told at the beginning of this paper that the author regards scepticism as a moral disease, which desires not to believe God's word, and which wishes to explain God's word

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\* Dr. Thornton said this of the history of scepticism, not of sceptics.—ED.

away, because it checks the sceptic's evil desires, then the paper might be true; but if we are told that scepticism is intellectual, then it seems to me that the paper is irrelevant. It really is of no use to go to a man who is deeply sorry because of his doubts and say, "Give them up, because they make you sorry." He answers: "I would give worlds to know on what I may rest my faith. I am sorry you cannot get rid of my doubts, which want positive truth to upset them. I do not want to be told I am sorry because I rest on shifting ground, for I feel that already." I cannot help thinking that if a paper of this kind goes abroad, it will tend much to confirm the view which I have often met with in my small experience. Men who are really searching for truth say, "You clergymen have no sympathy with us, you throw us overboard at once if we do not agree exactly with all you say, and therefore it is of no use to come to you." I do not mean to say that Dr. Thornton has had this idea in his own mind.

Rev. Prebendary Row.—I feel some regret in criticising this paper, because I must endorse the opinion which has been expressed by the last speaker. I have had much experience of scepticism, and I have always treated sceptics with respect, as though they were searchers after truth. For the last nine months I have been reading a large amount of sceptical philosophy, and I own I cannot endorse the opinions at the opening of this paper, with respect to the works of the very eminent men that I have been reading. Would such comments be applicable to Herbert Spencer's works, or to the works of John Stuart Mill, or to the last production of Herbert Spencer's school, the *Cosmic Philosophy of Mr. Fisk*? Any one who has conversed with men who are not sceptics, but who feel doubts and difficulties, must have felt, as I have felt, the greatest sympathy for them. Now let us go to the first point in this paper; and I would ask, what does Dr. Thornton define scepticism to be? Unless we have a considerable amount of scepticism, we shall certainly fall into gross superstitions. When miracles were recently stated to have occurred in France, I certainly could not believe them, and that is a species of scepticism. The mere term itself is so absolutely vague that I do not see how you can lay hold of it to make any definite utterance on the subject. Take, for example, many of our great writers: you may charge nearly every one of them with a certain amount of scepticism, because a spirit of inquiry exists among them. I suppose Dr. Thornton meant the scepticism of unbelief; but let me have something like a definition. I did not really know what was the end and purport of the paper, and I am still very much in the dark. It may be said that it is to prove that scepticism or unbelief is a very bad thing; but there is much matter in it which has no bearing on that purpose at all. There is one thing on which Dr. Thornton has laid considerable stress, and that is, that, according to his own observation of the physiognomy of sceptics, they look a very sorrowful and wretched set of people. One day lately I was walking through London with more than my usual observation, and scrutinizing the faces of those I met. I subsequently observed to a gentleman I met, "It seems to me that people of our age" (we

were both of the same age) "get to have a great deal of care expressed in their faces." Dr. Thornton may be right, and many sceptics may look unhappy; but I do not think that proves much, for I am sure a large number of Christians do so also. Even if you prove that the sceptic looks sorrowful, it is not much to make a point of; for the Scriptures refer to much that is sorrowful, and, with all reverence be it spoken, they place before us a Person designated the Man of Sorrows. I have been much struck with the altered aspects assumed by scepticism for some years past. It has been in real earnest attacking Christianity, in a manner very different from that of the last century, when it consisted more of gibes. The present attack on Christianity is most determined. I do not know a time when a greater amount of intellect was attacking theism than at present. We have to meet it, not by taking any side-issues, but by trying to grapple with it heartily.

Mr. T. W. MASTERMAN.—I should like to say a few words in favour of the paper when I have heard so many hard words against it. (Mr. Row.—Not "hard" words.) I like the paper very much indeed. We cannot look at any form of scepticism—at any form of doubt—and not see that it must necessarily bring with it sorrow; and I believe the idea in Dr. Thornton's mind is just this; that scepticism of all kinds brings sorrow to those who hold it. (The CHAIRMAN.—Unrelieved sorrow.) Exactly so. There is a great difference between the sorrow of Christians and the sorrow of sceptics. The sceptic has the intense sorrow of finding that he has no outlet and no relief for his doubts; and here is the difference between him and a believer, who, when he has sorrow, as sorrow he must have, knows that there is always a refuge from it—always a relief. The reason why, in my opinion, the sceptic must naturally have sorrow, is that he sees, or fancies he sees, all around him going wrong; he is wrong himself, and he feels that he is without a future, without hope, either for himself or humanity around him. Look at the later examples of modern scepticism—John Stuart Mill, for instance—read his ablest works, and you will find impressed upon them an intense sorrow. It is a most melancholy exhibition to see that great intellect straying from the paths along which it might have walked, into the depths of an everlasting sorrow; and I agree with Dr. Thornton in acknowledging that scepticism must bring with it a deep and great sorrow. Mr. Row has alluded to the lines of thought which are traced in the features, and has told us that no thoughtful man has advanced to a certain period of life without deep lines in his face and an expression of care. Of course there is some truth in that, but the expression of sorrow which Dr. Thornton referred to is something very different from the expression of thoughtful care. A man engaged in deep thought will have the marks of thought in his face, but they need not of necessity be unhappy marks. They may show that a man thinks much and deeply; but talk to that man about something in which he is really interested and the face will alter at once, and brighten with pleasure. All who have a true faith will be able to show generally the marks of their faith even in their countenances.

The CHAIRMAN.—It strikes me that in this, as in other things, the prime factor of the problem is often forgotten, and that is, that there is a power which comes with Christianity which determines all these things. An eminent London clergyman had been for four years unsuccessfully arguing with a person who was doing much harm in his parish, and was said to be an honest infidel—(though I think we may use that phrase too widely, and call them “honest,” when in truth there is something behind which prevents them from accepting the clearest demonstrations). At last, on bringing before his mind this prime and essential factor, a living and true faith in Jesus Christ, he accepted his views; subsequently saying, “You may tell your friends that there is not now a happier man in all England than I am.”

Dr. THORNTON.—I thank my critics very much for their kind tone, and also for their criticism. I know my paper is not as complete as it should be, but I think its intention has not been quite understood. I would reply to Dr. Coleman: “I quite agree with what you say, but I am not endeavouring, in a paper of eleven pages, to show why and how scepticism is opposed to Christian truth. I have already pointed out in previous papers the weakness of scepticism; I have now taken up a single point, which is, that scepticism does not satisfy the human intellect in the case of those who profess it. I am not writing a complete treatise against scepticism; still less do I write against sceptics. You will not find the word ‘sceptics’ above once or twice in my paper; it is scepticism, not sceptics, that I write against.” I can endorse all that has been said about attacks on sceptics, and I believe that many have been lost to Christianity merely because they have not been properly approached. I have had some intercourse with persons troubled with doubts; in every instance where I have endeavoured to make Christian views prevail, I have tried the effect of love, and the experiment has always been perfectly successful. I believe that is the way to deal with such persons; but we must treat scepticism in the abstract in a totally different manner. The fact is that there is a great deal of dishonest scepticism about. I do not mean to say dishonest sceptics, for a man who yields to a scepticism which we must term dishonest is not necessarily a dishonest man. This distinction between scepticism and sceptics may answer a great deal of the criticism of Mr. Row and Mr. Oxenham, for which I thank them all the more because I cordially agree with it. I think it is right, while showing all charity to individuals, to point out the really insidious undermining character of the doctrines which sceptics unhappily profess. I do not base my arguments against unbelief on the fact that it produces or appears to produce sorrow; it is part only of my argument that it does not seem to satisfy the aspirations of the intellect, and therefore there probably is something completely wrong about it. I must disagree with one or two remarks which have been made. I did not say that nine-tenths of Christians look happy. I said that nine-tenths of sceptics look unhappy, and I adhere to that. However, there is this very great difference between the

sorrow in the face of a Christian and that in the face of a sceptic. The sorrow in the face of a Christian seems to prepare him for something better, that in the face of a sceptic does not. Mr. Row mentioned "the Man of Sorrows," but I think he would scarcely have done so if he had remembered, as I have no doubt he has by this time, that the grief of the Man of Sorrows was not His own, but that of others. (Cheers.) We must always bear in mind that He had no reason of His own to be sorry. I have not pointed out how that incompleteness which causes sorrow may be remedied, because I do not think that this is the place in which it should be done. It is too distinctly religious a question for a scientific institution like ours. That is the reason why I did not give, as I should have liked to do, a longer quotation from St. Bernard, to show the true remedy for sorrow. But I want to be thoroughly understood. The object of my paper is not to abuse those who differ from me; nor is it to point out how the aspirations of men can be thoroughly satisfied. That is the office of the Christian preacher, and not of the writer of a semi-scientific paper; but I wanted to urge that there is an antecedent probability against scepticism, because it does not supply man with that which he hungers and thirsts after.

The meeting was then adjourned.

NOTE BY DR. THORNTON.—By the Editor's kindness I am permitted to add a note to complete my somewhat inadequate reply. I have, I hope, made it plain: (1) that there is a great difference—and one which Lavater would recognize—between the lines of thought, care, penitence, which a Christian's face may exhibit, and the peculiar restless, unsatisfied, unhappy expression of the unbeliever, that testifies to the aching void within; and (2) that Charity is of persons, not of doctrines or acts, so that one may abominate and denounce infidelity, and yet feel most tenderly for the Infidel, and give him credit for the best motives and the utmost honesty. But I omitted to point out clearly the distinction between Philosophical, Historical, and Religious Scepticism. The first declines to assent to a conclusion without knowing the premises, and weighing their correctness and cogency. It is praiseworthy and valuable; for philosophy is of knowledge, not of faith. Our Institute is in this sense extremely sceptical: we doubt all science that opposes revelation. Historical scepticism refuses to accept a statement of fact without examining the evidence and finding it adequate, and is an absolute necessity for those who have to deal with facts. Of this kind is the scepticism which led Mr. Row to reject the alleged French miracles. Religious scepticism is a refusal to believe what Christians do now receive, and have from the first put faith in, as belonging to a higher and Supreme Intellect. This is the scepticism against which we protest, since religion is not of knowledge, but of faith; and yet the Sceptic asks for such proofs as shall lead to knowledge. I have touched on the subject in my remarks on the Cartesian doubt (p. 237), and dealt with it more fully in my paper on the Credulity of Scepticism.