

Chapter 10. Inference and Assent in the Matter of Religion

{384} AND now I have completed my review of the second subject to which I have given my attention in this Essay, the connexion existing between the intellectual acts of Assent and Inference, my first being the connexion of Assent with Apprehension; and as I closed my remarks upon Assent and Apprehension by applying the conclusions at which I had arrived to our belief in the Truths of Religion, so now I ought to speak of its Evidences, before quitting the consideration of the dependence of Assent upon Inference. I shall attempt to do so in this Chapter, not without much anxiety, lest I should injure so large, momentous, and sacred a subject by a necessarily cursory treatment.

I begin with expressing a sentiment, which is habitually in my thoughts, whenever they are turned to the subject of mental or moral science, and which I am as willing to apply here to the Evidences of Religion as it properly applies to Metaphysics or Ethics, viz. that in these provinces of inquiry egotism is true modesty. In {385} religious inquiry each of us can speak only for himself, and for himself he has a right to speak. His own experiences are enough for himself, but he cannot speak for others: he cannot lay down the law; he can only bring his own experiences to the common stock of psychological facts. He knows what has satisfied and satisfies himself; if it satisfies him, it is likely to satisfy others; if, as he believes and is sure, it is true, it will approve itself to others also, for there is but one truth. And doubtless he does find in fact, that, allowing for the difference of minds and of modes of speech, what convinces him, does convince others also. There will be very many exceptions, but these will admit of explanation. Great numbers of men refuse to inquire at all; they put the subject of religion aside altogether; others are not serious enough to care about questions of truth and duty and to entertain them; and to numbers, from their temper of mind, or the absence of doubt, or a dormant intellect, it does not occur to inquire why or what they believe; many, though they tried, would not be able to do so in any satisfactory way. This being the case, it causes no uneasiness to any one who honestly attempts to set down his own view of the Evidences of Religion, that at first sight he seems to be but one among many who are all in opposition to each other. But, however that may be, he brings together his reasons, and relies on them, because they are his own, and this is his primary evidence; and he has a second ground of evidence, in the testimony of those who agree with him. But his best evidence is the former, which is derived from his {386} own thoughts; and it is that which the world has a right to demand of him; and therefore his true sobriety and modesty consists, not in claiming for his conclusions an acceptance or a scientific approval which is not to be found anywhere, but in stating what are personally his own grounds for his belief in Natural and Revealed Religion,—grounds which he holds to be so sufficient, that he thinks that others do hold them implicitly or in substance, or would hold them, if they inquired fairly, or will hold if they listen to him, or do not hold from impediments, invincible or not as it may be, into which he has no call to inquire. However, his own business is to speak for himself. He uses the words of the Samaritans to their country-woman, when our Lord had remained with them for two days, "Now we believe, not for thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."

43 In these words it is declared both that the Gospel Revelation is divine, and that it carries
44 with it the evidence of its divinity; and this is of course the matter of fact. However, these
45 two attributes need not have been united; a revelation might have been really given, yet
46 given without credentials. Our supreme Master might have imparted to us truths which
47 nature cannot teach us, without telling us that He had imparted them,—as is actually the
48 case now as regards heathen countries, into which portions of revealed truth overflow
49 and penetrate, without their populations knowing whence those truths came. But the
50 very idea of Christianity in its profession and {387} history, is something more than this;
51 it is a "Revelatio revelata;" it is a definite message from God to man distinctly conveyed
52 by His chosen instruments, and to be received as such a message; and therefore to be
53 positively acknowledged, embraced, and maintained as true, on the ground of its being
54 divine, not as true on intrinsic grounds, not as probably true, or partially true, but as
55 absolutely certain knowledge, certain in a sense in which nothing else can be certain,
56 because it comes from Him who neither can deceive nor be deceived.

57 And the whole tenor of Scripture from beginning to end is to this effect: the matter of
58 revelation is not a mere collection of truths, not a philosophical view, not a religious
59 sentiment or spirit, not a special morality,—poured out upon mankind as a stream might
60 pour itself into the sea, mixing with the world's thought, modifying, purifying, invigorating
61 it;—but an authoritative teaching, which bears witness to itself and keeps itself together
62 as one, in contrast to the assemblage of opinions on all sides of it, and speaks to all
63 men, as being ever and everywhere one and the same, and claiming to be received
64 intelligently, by all whom it addresses, as one doctrine, discipline, and devotion directly
65 given from above. In consequence, the exhibition of credentials, that is, of evidence,
66 that it is what it professes to be, is essential to Christianity, as it comes to us; for we are
67 not left at liberty to pick and choose out of its contents according to our judgment, but
68 must receive it all, as we find it, if we accept it at all. It is a religion in addition to the
69 {388} religion of nature; and as nature has an intrinsic claim upon us to be obeyed and
70 used, so what is over and above nature, or supernatural, must also bring with it valid
71 testimonials of its right to demand our homage.

72 Next, as to its relation to nature. As I have said, Christianity is simply an addition to it; it
73 does not supersede or contradict it; it recognizes and depends on it, and that of
74 necessity: for how possibly can it prove its claims except by an appeal to what men
75 have already? be it ever so miraculous, it cannot dispense with nature; this would be to
76 cut the ground from under it; for what would be the worth of evidences in favour of a
77 revelation which denied the authority of that system of thought, and those courses of
78 reasoning, out of which those evidences necessarily grew?

79 And in agreement with this obvious conclusion we find in Scripture our Lord and His
80 Apostles always treating Christianity as the completion and supplement of Natural
81 Religion, and of previous revelations; as when He says that the Father testified of Him;
82 that not to know Him was not to know the Father; and as St. Paul at Athens appeals to
83 the "Unknown God," and says that "He that made the world" "now declareth to all men
84 to do penance, because He hath appointed a day to judge the world by the man whom
85 He hath appointed." As then our Lord and His Apostles appeal to the God of nature, we

must follow them in that appeal; and, to do this with the better effect, we must first inquire into the chief doctrines and the grounds of Natural Religion. {389}

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§ 1. Natural Religion

BY Religion I mean the knowledge of God, of His Will, and of our duties towards Him; and there are three main channels which Nature furnishes for our acquiring this knowledge, viz. our own minds, the voice of mankind, and the course of the world, that is, of human life and human affairs. The informations which these three convey to us teach us the Being and Attributes of God, our responsibility to Him, our dependence on Him, our prospect of reward or punishment, to be somehow brought about, according as we obey or disobey Him. And the most authoritative of these three means of knowledge, as being specially our own, is our own mind, whose informations give us the rule by which we test, interpret, and correct what is presented to us for belief, whether by the universal testimony of mankind, or by the history of society and of the world.

Our great internal teacher of religion is, as I have said in an earlier part of this Essay, our Conscience [Note 1]. Conscience is a personal guide, and I use it because I must use myself; I am as little able to think by {390} any mind but my own as to breathe with another's lungs. Conscience is nearer to me than any other means of knowledge. And as it is given to me, so also is it given to others; and being carried about by every individual in his own breast, and requiring nothing besides itself, it is thus adapted for the communication to each separately of that knowledge which is most momentous to him individually,—adapted for the use of all classes and conditions of men, for high and low, young and old, men and women, independently of books, of educated reasoning, of physical knowledge, or of philosophy. Conscience, too, teaches us, not only that God is, but what He is; it provides for the mind a real image of Him, as a medium of worship; it gives us a rule of right and wrong, as being His rule, and a code of moral duties. Moreover, it is so constituted that, if obeyed, it becomes clearer in its injunctions, and wider in their range, and corrects and completes the accidental feebleness of its initial teachings. Conscience, then, considered as our guide, is fully furnished for its office. I say all this without entering into the question how far external assistances are in all cases necessary to the action of the mind, because in fact man does not live in isolation, but is everywhere found as a member of society; I am not concerned here with abstract questions.

Now Conscience suggests to us many things about that Master, whom by means of it we perceive, but its most prominent teaching, and its cardinal and distinguishing truth, is that he is our Judge. In consequence, the special Attribute under which it brings Him before us, {391} to which it subordinates all other Attributes, is that of justice—retributive justice. We learn from its informations to conceive of the Almighty, primarily, not as a God of Wisdom, of Knowledge, of Power, of Benevolence, but as a God of Judgment

and Justice; as One, who, not simply for the good of the offender, but as an end good in itself, and as a principle of government, ordains that the offender should suffer for his offence. If it tells us anything at all of the characteristics of the Divine Mind, it certainly tells us this; and, considering that our shortcomings are far more frequent and important than our fulfilment of the duties enjoined upon us, and that of this point we are fully aware ourselves, it follows that the aspect under which Almighty God is presented to us by Nature, is (to use a figure) of One who is angry with us, and threatens evil. Hence its effect is to burden and sadden the religious mind, and is in contrast with the enjoyment derivable from the exercise of the affections, and from the perception of beauty, whether in the material universe or in the creations of the intellect. This is that fearful antagonism brought out with such soul-piercing reality by Lucretius, when he speaks so dishonourably of what he considers the heavy yoke of religion, and the "æternas pœnas in morte timendum;" and, on the other hand, rejoices in his "Alma Venus," "quæ rerum naturam sola gubernas." And we may appeal to him for the fact, while we repudiate his view of it.

Such being the *primâ facie* aspect of religion which the teachings of Conscience bring before us individually, {392} in the next place let us consider what are the doctrines, and what the influences of religion, as we find it embodied in those various rites and devotions which have taken root in the many races of mankind, since the beginning of history, and before history, all over the earth. Of these also Lucretius gives us a specimen; and they accord in form and complexion with that doctrine about duty and responsibility, which he so bitterly hates and loathes. It is scarcely necessary to insist, that wherever Religion exists in a popular shape, it has almost invariably worn its dark side outwards. It is founded in one way or other on the sense of sin; and without that vivid sense it would hardly have any precepts or any observances. Its many varieties all proclaim or imply that man is in a degraded, servile condition, and requires expiation, reconciliation, and some great change of nature. This is suggested to us in the many ways in which we are told of a realm of light and a realm of darkness, of an elect fold and a regenerate state. It is suggested in the almost ubiquitous and ever-recurring institution of a Priesthood; for wherever there is a priest, there is the notion of sin, pollution, and retribution, as, on the other hand, of intercession and mediation. Also, still more directly, is the notion of our guilt impressed upon us by the doctrine of future punishment, and that eternal, which is found in mythologies and creeds of such various parentage.

Of these distinct rites and doctrines embodying the severe side of Natural Religion, the most remarkable is that of atonement, that is, "a substitution of something {393} offered, or some personal suffering, for a penalty which would otherwise be exacted;" most remarkable, I say, both from its close connexion with the notion of vicarious satisfaction, and, on the other hand, from its universality. "The practice of atonement," says the author, whose definition of the word I have just given, "is remarkable for its antiquity and universality, proved by the earliest records that have come down to us of all nations, and by the testimony of ancient and modern travellers. In the oldest books of the Hebrew Scriptures, we have numerous instances of expiatory rites, where atonement is the prominent feature. At the earliest date, to which we can carry our inquiries by means

of the heathen records, we meet with the same notion of atonement. If we pursue our inquiries through the accounts left us by the Greek and Roman writers of the barbarous nations with which they were acquainted, from India to Britain, we shall find the same notions and similar practices of atonement. From the most popular portion of our own literature, our narratives of voyages and travels, every one, probably, who reads at all will be able to find for himself abundant proof that the notion has been as permanent as it is universal. It shows itself among the various tribes of Africa, the islanders of the South Seas, and even that most peculiar race, the natives of Australia, either in the shape of some offering, or some mutilation of the person." [Note 2]

These ceremonial acknowledgments, in so many distinct forms of worship, of the existing degradation of the human race, of course imply a brighter, as well {394} as a threatening aspect of Natural Religion; for why should men adopt any rites of deprecation or of purification at all, unless they had some hope of attaining to a better condition than their present? Of this happier side of religion I will speak presently; here, however, a question of another kind occurs, viz. whether the notion of atonement can be admitted among the doctrines of Natural Religion,—I mean on the ground that it is inconsistent with those teachings of Conscience, which I have recognized above, as the rule and corrective of every other information on the subject. If there is any truth brought home to us by conscience, it is this, that we are personally responsible for what we do, that we have no means of shifting our responsibility, and that dereliction of duty involves punishment; how, it may be asked, can acts of ours of any kind—how can even amendment of life—undo the past? And if even our own subsequent acts of obedience bring with them no promise of reversing what has once been committed, how can external rites, or the actions of another (as of a priest), be substitutes for that punishment which is the connatural fruit and intrinsic development of violation of the sense of duty? I think this objection avails as far as this, that amendment is no reparation, and that no ceremonies or penances can in themselves exercise any vicarious virtue in our behalf; and that, if they avail, they only avail in the intermediate season of probation; that in some way we must make them our own; and that, when the time comes, which conscience forebodes, of our being called to judgment, then, at least, we shall have to stand in and by ourselves, whatever {395} we shall have by that time become, and must bear our own burden. But it is plain that in this final account, as it lies between us and our Master, He alone can decide how the past and the present will stand together who is our Creator and our Judge.

In thus making it a necessary point to adjust the religions of the world with the intimations of our conscience, I am suggesting the reason why I confine myself to such religions as have had their rise in barbarous times, and do not recognize the religion of what is called civilization, as having legitimately a part in the delineation of Natural Religion. It may at first sight seem strange, that, considering I have laid such stress upon the progressive nature of man, I should take my ideas of his religion from his initial, and not his final testimony about its doctrines; and it may be urged that the religion of civilized times is quite opposite in character to the rites and traditions of barbarians, and has nothing of that gloom and sternness, on which I have insisted as their characteristic. Thus the Greek Mythology was for the most part cheerful and

214 graceful, and its new gods certainly more genial and indulgent than the old ones. And,
215 in like manner, the religion of philosophy is more noble and more humane than those
216 primitive conceptions which were sufficient for early kings and warriors. But my answer
217 to this objection is obvious: the progress of which man's nature is capable is a
218 development, not a destruction of its original state; it must subserve the elements from
219 which it proceeds, in order to be a true development and not a perversion [Note 3].
220 {396} And those popular rituals do in fact subserve and complete that nature with which
221 man is born. It is otherwise with the religion of so-called civilization; such religion does
222 but contradict the religion of barbarism; and since this civilization itself is not a
223 development of man's whole nature, but mainly of the intellect, recognizing indeed the
224 moral sense, but ignoring the conscience, no wonder that the religion in which it issues
225 has no sympathy either with the hopes and fears of the awakened soul, or with those
226 frightful presentiments which are expressed in the worship and traditions of the heathen.
227 This artificial religion, then, has no place in the inquiry; first, because it comes of a one-
228 sided progress of mind, and next, for the very reason that it contradicts informants
229 which speak with greater authority than itself.

230 Now we come to the third natural informant on the subject of Religion; I mean the
231 system and the course of the world. This established order of things, in which we find
232 ourselves, if it has a Creator, must surely speak of His will in its broad outlines and its
233 main issues. This principle being laid down as certain, when we come to apply it to
234 things as they are, our first feeling is one of surprise and (I may say) of dismay, that His
235 control of this living world is so indirect, and His action so obscure. This is the first
236 lesson that we gain from the course of human affairs. What strikes the mind so {397}
237 forcibly and so painfully is, His absence (if I may so speak) from His own world [Note 4].
238 It is a silence that speaks. It is as if others had got possession of His work. Why does
239 not He, our Maker and Ruler, give us some immediate knowledge of Himself? Why
240 does He not write His Moral Nature in large letters upon the face of history, and bring
241 the blind, tumultuous rush of its events into a celestial, hierarchical order? Why does He
242 not grant us in the structure of society at least so much of a revelation of Himself as the
243 religions of the heathen attempt to supply? Why from the beginning of time has no one
244 uniform steady light guided all families of the earth, and all individual men, how to
245 please Him? Why is it possible without absurdity to deny His will, His attributes, His
246 existence? Why does He not walk with us one by one, as He is said to have walked with
247 His chosen men of old time? We both see and know each other; why, if we cannot have
248 the sight of Him, have we not at least the knowledge? On the contrary, He is specially "a
249 Hidden God;" and with our best efforts we can only glean from the surface of the world
250 some faint and fragmentary views of Him. I see only a choice of alternatives in
251 explanation of so critical a fact:—either there is no Creator, or He has disowned His
252 creatures. Are then the dim shadows of His Presence in the affairs of men but a fancy of
253 our own, or, on the other hand, has He hid His face and the light of His countenance,
254 because we have in some special way dishonoured Him? My true informant, my
255 burdened conscience, gives me {398} at once the true answer to each of these
256 antagonist questions:—it pronounces without any misgiving that God exists:—and it
257 pronounces quite as surely that I am alienated from Him; that "His hand is not
258 shortened, but that our iniquities have divided between us and our God." Thus it solves

259 the world's mystery, and sees in that mystery only a confirmation of its own original
260 teaching.

261 Let us pass on to another great fact of experience, bearing on Religion, which confirms
262 this testimony both of conscience and of the forms of worship which prevail among
263 mankind;—I mean, the amount of suffering, bodily and mental, which is our portion in
264 this life. Not only is the Creator far off, but some being of malignant nature seems, as I
265 have said, to have got hold of us, and to be making us his sport. Let us say there are a
266 thousand millions of men on the earth at this time; who can weigh and measure the
267 aggregate of pain which this one generation has endured and will endure from birth to
268 death? Then add to this all the pain which has fallen and will fall upon our race through
269 centuries past and to come. Is there not then some great gulf fixed between us and the
270 good God? Here again the testimony of the system of nature is more than corroborated
271 by those popular traditions about the unseen state, which are found in mythologies and
272 superstitions, ancient and modern; for those traditions speak, not only of present
273 misery, but of pain and evil hereafter, and even without end. But this dreadful addition is
274 not necessary for the conclusion which I am here wishing to draw. The real mystery
275 {399} is, not that evil should never have an end, but that it should ever have had a
276 beginning. Even a universal restitution could not undo what had been, or account for
277 evil being the necessary condition of good. How are we to explain it, the existence of
278 God being taken for granted, except by saying that another will, besides His, has had a
279 part in the disposition of His work, that there is a quarrel without remedy, a chronic
280 alienation, between God and man?

281 I have implied that the laws on which this world is governed do not go so far as to prove
282 that evil will never die out of the creation; nevertheless, they look in that direction. No
283 experience indeed of life can assure us about the future, but it can and does give us
284 means of conjecturing what is likely to be; and those conjectures coincide with our
285 natural forebodings. Experience enables us to ascertain the moral constitution of man,
286 and thereby to presage his future from his present. It teaches us, first, that he is not
287 sufficient for his own happiness, but is dependent upon the sensible objects which
288 surround him, and that these he cannot take with him when he leaves the world;
289 secondly, that disobedience to his sense of right is even by itself misery, and that he
290 carries that misery about him, wherever he is, though no divine retribution followed upon
291 it; and thirdly, that he cannot change his nature and his habits by wishing, but is simply
292 himself, and will ever be himself and what he now is, wherever he is, as long as he
293 continues to be,—or at least that pain has no natural tendency to make him other than
294 he is, and that the longer he lives, the more difficult he is to {400} change. How can we
295 meet these not irrational anticipations, except by shutting our eyes, turning away from
296 them, and saying that we have no call, no right, to think of them at present, or to make
297 ourselves miserable about what is not certain, and may be not true?" [Note 5]

298 Such is the severe aspect of Natural Religion: also it is the most prominent aspect,
299 because the multitude of men follow their own likings and wills, and not the decisions of
300 their sense of right and wrong. To them Religion is a mere yoke, as Lucretius describes
301 it; not a satisfaction or refuge, but a terror and a superstition. However, I must not for an

302 instant be supposed to mean, that this is its only, its chief, or its legitimate aspect. All
303 Religion, so far as it is genuine, is a blessing, Natural as well as Revealed. I have
304 insisted on its severe aspect in the first place, because, from the circumstances of
305 human nature, though not by the fault of Religion, such is the shape in which we first
306 encounter it. Its large and deep foundation is the sense of sin and guilt, and without this
307 sense there is for man, as he is, no genuine religion. Otherwise, it is but counterfeit and
308 hollow; and that is the reason why this so-called religion of civilization and philosophy is
309 so great a mockery. However, true as this judgment is which I pass on philosophical
310 religion, and troubled as are the existing relations between God and man, as both the
311 voice of mankind and the facts of Divine Government testify, equally true are other
312 general laws which govern those relations, and they speak another language, and
313 compensate for what is {401} stern in the teaching of nature, without tending to deny
314 that sternness.

315 The first of these laws, relieving the aspect of Natural Religion, is the very fact that
316 religious beliefs and institutions, of some kind or other, are of such general acceptance
317 in all times and places. Why should men subject themselves to the tyranny which
318 Lucretius denounces, unless they had either experience or hope of benefits to
319 themselves by so doing? Though it be mere hope of benefits, that alone is a great
320 alleviation of the gloom and misery which their religious rites presuppose or occasion;
321 for thereby they have a prospect, more or less clear, of some happier state in reserve
322 for them, or at least the chances of it. If they simply despaired of their fortunes, they
323 would not care about religion. And hope of future good, as we know, sweetens all
324 suffering.

325 Moreover, they have an earnest of that future in the real and recurring blessings of life,
326 the enjoyment of the gifts of the earth, and of domestic affection and social intercourse,
327 which is sufficient to touch and to subdue even the most guilty of men in his better
328 moments, reminding him that he is not utterly cast off by Him whom nevertheless he is
329 not given to know. Or, in the Apostle's words, though the Creator once "suffered all
330 nations to walk in their own ways," still, "He left not Himself without testimony, doing
331 good from heaven, giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and
332 gladness."

333 Nor are these blessings of physical nature the only tokens in the Divine System, which
334 in that heathen {402} time, and indeed in every age, bring home to our experience the
335 fact of a Good God, in spite of the tumult and confusion of the world. It is possible to
336 give an interpretation to the course of things, by which every event or occurrence in its
337 order becomes providential: and though that interpretation does not hold good unless
338 the world is contemplated from a particular point of view, in one given aspect, and with
339 certain inward experiences, and personal first principles and judgments, yet these may
340 be fairly pronounced to be common conditions of human thought, that is, till they are
341 wilfully or accidentally lost; and they issue in fact, in leading the great majority of men to
342 recognize the Hand of unseen power, directing in mercy or in judgment the physical and
343 moral system. In the prominent events of the world, past and contemporary, the fate,
344 evil or happy, of great men, the rise and fall of states, popular revolutions, decisive

345 battles, the migration of races, the replenishing of the earth, earthquakes and
346 pestilences, critical discoveries and inventions, the history of philosophy, the
347 advancement of knowledge, in these the spontaneous piety of the human mind discerns
348 a Divine Supervision. Nay, there is a general feeling, originating directly in the workings
349 of conscience, that a similar governance is extended over the persons of individuals,
350 who thereby both fulfil the purposes and receive the just recompenses of an Omnipotent
351 Providence. Good to the good, and evil to the evil, is instinctively felt to be, even from
352 what we see, amid whatever obscurity and confusion, the universal rule of God's
353 dealings with us. {403} Hence come the great proverbs, indigenous in both Christian
354 and heathen nations, that punishment is sure, though slow, that murder will out, that
355 treason never prospers, that pride will have a fall, that honesty is the best policy, and
356 that curses fall on the heads of those who utter them. To the unsophisticated
357 apprehension of the many, the successive passages of life, social or political, are so
358 many miracles, if that is to be accounted miraculous which brings before them the
359 immediate Divine Presence; and should it be objected that this is an illogical exercise of
360 reason, I answer, that since it actually brings them to a right conclusion, and was
361 intended to bring them to it, if logic finds fault with it, so much the worse for logic.

362 Again, prayer is essential to religion, and, where prayer is, there is a natural relief and
363 solace in all trouble, great or ordinary: now prayer is not less general in mankind at
364 large than is faith in Providence. It has ever been in use, both as a personal and as a
365 social practice. Here again, if, in order to determine what the Religion of Nature is, we
366 may justly have recourse to the spontaneous acts and proceedings of our race, as
367 viewed on a large field, we may safely say that prayer, as well as hope, is a constituent
368 of man's religion. Nor is it a fair objection to this argument, to say that such prayers and
369 rites as have obtained in various places and times, are in their character, object, and
370 scope inconsistent with each other; because their contrarieties do not come into the
371 idea of religion, as such, at all, and the very fact of their discordance destroys their right
372 to be taken into account, {404} so far as they are discordant; for what is not universal
373 has no claim to be considered natural, right, or of divine origin. Thus we may determine
374 prayer to be part of Natural Religion, from such instances of the usage as are supplied
375 by the priests of Baal and by dancing Dervishes, without therefore including in our
376 notions of prayer the frantic excesses of the one, or the artistic spinning of the other, or
377 sanctioning their respective objects of belief, Baal or Mahomet.

378 As prayer is the voice of man to God, so Revelation is the voice of God to man.
379 Accordingly, it is another alleviation of the darkness and distress which weigh upon the
380 religions of the world, that in one way or other such religions are founded on some idea
381 of express revelation, coming from the unseen agents whose anger they deprecate;
382 nay, that the very rites and observances, by which they hope to gain the favour of these
383 beings, are by these beings themselves communicated and appointed. The Religion of
384 Nature has not been a deduction of reason, or the joint, voluntary manifesto of a
385 multitude meeting together and pledging themselves to each other, as men move
386 resolutions now for some political or social purpose, but it has been a tradition or an
387 interposition vouchsafed to a people from above. To such an interposition men even
388 ascribed their civil polity or citizenship, which did not originate in any plebiscite, but in *dii*

389 *minores* or heroes, and was inaugurated with portents or palladia, and protected and
390 prospered by oracles and auguries. Here is an evidence, too, how congenial the notion
391 of a revelation is to the human mind, so that the expectation of {405} it may truly be
392 considered an integral part of Natural Religion.

393 Among the observances imposed by these professed revelations, none is more
394 remarkable, or more general, than the rite of sacrifice, in which guilt was removed or
395 blessing gained by an offering, which availed instead of the merits of the offerer. This,
396 too, as well as the notion of divine interpositions, may be considered almost an integral
397 part of the Religion of Nature, and an alleviation of its gloom. But it does not stand by
398 itself; I have already spoken of the doctrine of atonement, under which it falls, and
399 which, if what is universal is natural, enters into the idea of religious service. And what
400 the nature of man suggests, the providential system of the world sanctions by enforcing.
401 It is the law, or the permission, given to our whole race, to use the Apostle's words, to
402 "bear one another's burdens;" and this, as I said when on the subject of Atonement, is
403 quite consistent with his antithesis that "every one must bear his own burden." The final
404 burden of responsibility when we are called to judgment is our own; but among the
405 media by which we are prepared for that judgment are the exertions and pains taken in
406 our behalf by others. On this vicarious principle, by which we appropriate to ourselves
407 what others do for us, the whole structure of society is raised. Parents work and endure
408 pain, that their children may prosper; children suffer for the sin of their parents, who
409 have died before it bore fruit. "Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi." Sometimes it is a
410 compulsory, sometimes a willing mediation. The {406} punishment which is earned by
411 the husband falls upon the wife; the benefits in which all classes partake are wrought
412 out by the unhealthy or dangerous toil of the few. Soldiers endure wounds and death for
413 those who sit at home; and ministers of state fall victims to their zeal for their
414 countrymen, who do little else than criticize their actions. And so in some measure or
415 way this law embraces all of us. We all suffer for each other, and gain by each other's
416 sufferings; for man never stands alone here, though he will stand by himself one day
417 hereafter; but here he is a social being, and goes forward to his long home as one of a
418 large company.

419 Butler, it need scarcely be said, is the great master of this doctrine, as it is brought out
420 in the system of nature. In answer to the objection to the Christian doctrine of
421 satisfaction, that it "represents God as indifferent whether He punishes the innocent or
422 the guilty," he observes that "the world is a constitution or system, whose parts have a
423 mutual reference to each other; and that there is a scheme of things gradually carrying
424 on, called the course of nature, to the carrying on of which God has appointed us, in
425 various ways, to contribute. And in the daily course of natural providence, it is appointed
426 that innocent people should suffer for the faults of the guilty. Finally, indeed and upon
427 the whole, every one shall receive according to his personal deserts; but during the
428 progress, and, for ought we know, even in order to the completion of this moral scheme,
429 vicarious punishments may be fit, and absolutely necessary. {407} We see in what
430 variety of ways one person's sufferings contribute to the relief of another; and being
431 familiarized to it, men are not shocked with it. So the reason of their insisting on
432 objections against the [doctrine of] satisfaction is, either that they do not consider God's

settled and uniform appointments as His appointments at all; or else they forget that vicarious punishment is a providential appointment of every day's experience." [Note 6] I will but add, that, since all human suffering is in its last resolution the punishment of sin, and punishment implies a Judge and a rule of justice, he who undergoes the punishment of another in his stead may be said in a certain sense to satisfy the claims of justice towards that other in his own person.

One concluding remark has to be made here. In all sacrifices it was specially required that the thing offered should be something rare, and unblemished; and in like manner in all atonements and all satisfactions, not only was the innocent taken for the guilty, but it was a point of special importance that the victim should be spotless, and the more manifest that spotlessness, the more efficacious was the sacrifice. This leads me to a last principle which I shall notice as proper to Natural Religion, and as lightening the prophecies of evil in which it is founded; I mean the doctrine of meritorious intercession. The man in the Gospel did but speak for the human race everywhere, when he said, "God heareth not sinners; but if a man be a worshipper of God, and doth His will, him He heareth." Hence every religion has had its eminent devotees, exalted above {408} the body of the people, mortified men, brought nearer to the Source of good by austerities, self-inflictions, and prayer, who have influence with Him, and extend a shelter and gain blessings for those who become their clients. A belief like this has been, of course, attended by numberless superstitions; but those superstitions vary with times and places, and the belief itself in the mediatorial power of the good and holy has been one and the same everywhere. Nor is this belief an idea of past times only or of heathen countries. It is one of the most natural visions of the young and innocent. And all of us, the more keenly we feel our own distance from holy persons, the more are we drawn near to them, as if forgetting that distance, and proud of them because they are so unlike ourselves, as being specimens of what our nature may be, and with some vague hope that we, their relations by blood, may profit in our own persons by their holiness.

Such, then, in outline is that system of natural beliefs and sentiments, which, though true and divine, is still possible to us independently of Revelation, and is the preparation for it; though in Christians themselves it cannot really be separated from their Christianity, and never is possessed in its higher forms in any people without some portion of those inward aids which Christianity imparts to us, and those endemic traditions which have their first origin in a paradisiacal illumination.

Notes

1. *Supra* p. 105, &c. *Vide* also Univ. Serm. ii. 7-13.
2. *Penny Cyclopædia*, art. "Atonement" (abridged).
3. On these various subjects I have written in "University Sermons" (Oxford), No. vi. "Idea of the University," Disc. viii. "History of Turks," ch. iv. "Development of Doctrine," ch. i. sect. 3.
4. *Vide* "Apologia," p. 241.
5. *Vide* "Callista," ch. xix.
6. "Analogy," Pt. ii. ch. 5 (abridged).

