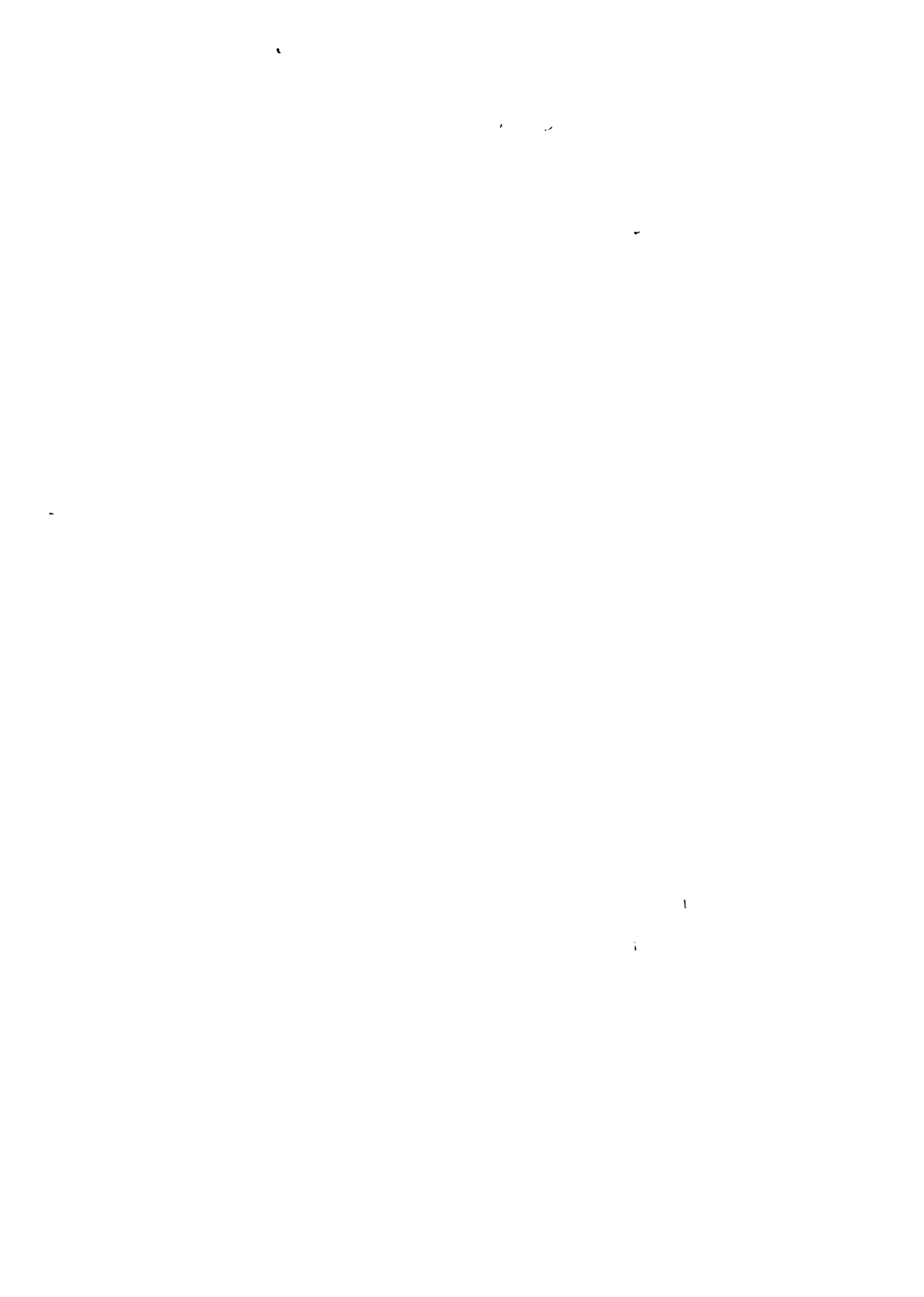


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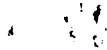


A SCIENTIST
WHO BELIEVES IN GOD

by

H. N. V. TEMPERLEY
Sc.D. (*Cantab*)

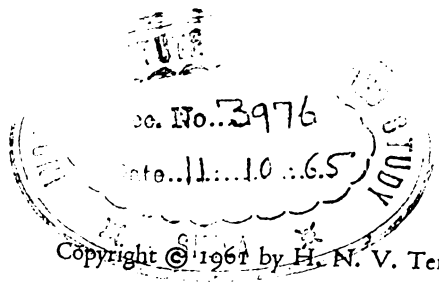
Smith's Prizeman, sometime Fellow
of King's College, Cambridge, and
Smithson Research Fellow of the
Royal Society



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TO
MY WIFE
AND
CHILDREN

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H. N. V. TEMPERLEY

RIVERSDALE,
GRANTCHESTER,
CAMBS.



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INTRODUCTION

It is the way of God, who does all things gently, to put religion into the mind by reason and into the heart by grace — *Pascal*.

This penetrating remark emphasizes that there is more than one source of religious belief. I am trying, in this book, to examine the purely intellectual approach and to show that it is useful to adopt the scientific method, that of examining the facts, then making a theory about them, which theory is continually modified so that its consequences agree with the facts even better. The central problem is whether the whole body of evidence before us justifies the inference that the universe is directed by a Mind, or whether we must conclude that the existence of the human race is the accidental result of certain forces acting in a particular environment. The relevant evidence is of very many different kinds, and the great difficulty is that a really balanced analysis of it all would require the collaboration of a panel of scholars of many types, theologians, archaeologists, scientists and historians of many periods. On the other hand, it is the painful experience of scientists and other scholars that neglect of any appreciable part of the available evidence about a problem is apt to lead to a wrong solution, or to one that is grossly out of perspective. I am, therefore, trying to set out exactly what the relevant evidence is, and to show how an impartial consideration of it as a whole very gradually led me back from the agnostic position of my undergraduate days to what is, for me, a satisfying philosophy of life. It is my hope that I shall help others in the same quest, but it is not likely that a reader will agree entirely with me. We are likely to give different weights to many of the facts before us, and the most likely end-result is that the reader will come to agree with some of

my conclusions and will object violently to others. There is no escaping the fact that much effort is needed from the individual himself in shaping a personal philosophy of life, but it is the most worth-while of all intellectual activities.

I should be the very last to deny the reality of religious inspiration or conversion, or the undoubted fact that many fine minds find it helpful to rely, in various degrees, on authority for the shape of their religious beliefs. On the contrary, I hold that these facts about religion constitute an extremely important part of the evidence that one has to consider when using the intellectual approach. It just happens that I myself, brought up as a Christian, was quite willing to trust to authority in my school days, but became unwilling to do so any longer a little later on, nor did I ever experience anything in the nature of a conversion. I hold that no belief is so sacred that it can be exempted from respectful, but absolutely fearless, scrutiny. I can assure my readers that I am neither out to 'needle' them, nor am I trying to score debating points. If some of my ideas seem offensive, unorthodox or even slightly blasphemous, I can do no more than ask for pardon in advance. In mitigation, I can plead that nearly every new investigation of old problems is liable to lead to some canon of orthodoxy being questioned, even if it is not ultimately overthrown.

The book is therefore not to be regarded as an exposition of orthodox theology which I should, in any case, not be qualified to undertake. I am trying to show that it is possible to arrive at a view of the universe that is reasonably consistent with the known facts about it and that is close to the spirit and letter of the Bible and of Christ's teaching. This has led me to comment on quite a number of aspects of the Bible as we have it and of some of the circumstances in which it was written. The historical and political backgrounds, at various times, are also relevant, and it is almost useless to attempt some of the books without some knowledge of Jewish literary conventions, and of the ways in which Jewish

thought and religion developed during their long history, including the period between the Testaments. Some of these vast topics have been dealt with in books suitable for the layman, but I have ventured to suggest that there is ample room for more, particularly for those that show the relationship of the Biblical account with historical and archaeological studies.

I have ventured to suggest a number of ways in which I feel that the Church could help the laity with these difficult problems, and also to suggest how the presentation of her Message could be brought a little more into line with twentieth-century attitudes. If I have seemed critical at times, I can only say that I am trying to be constructive and not offensive. It is a hard fact of life that the presence at a rostrum of a well-informed and devoted speaker about any subject is not, by itself, any guarantee that his audience will benefit at all. I believe that the Message is as relevant as ever, and I have no wish to see it watered down or altered, but some of the intensive study that, during the present century, has gone into the problem of presentation of information can surely be here adapted to good purpose.

To sum up, the book is intended to be a survey of, and a guide to, the available evidence rather than an attempt to sell any particular brand of philosophy, theology or churchmanship, or any special scientific theory. If I have seemed to devote considerable attention to materialistic theories of the universe, it is because my scientific training tells me to examine a theory, and to find out just how much it can explain, before deciding to reject it. I feel that Christian apologists often seem to weaken their case by altogether ignoring the successes of the rival theories. This fact certainly antagonized me and delayed my own journey back to belief.

CHAPTER

I

FINDING ONE'S WAY ABOUT

Truth is not revealed as a whole . . . it has to be progressively discovered — *Julian Huxley*.

I HOPE to help young people to make up their minds about fundamental religious questions. Everyone has some philosophy of life, even though he may never have consciously queried what he was taught at home and at school. Others, of whom I was one, found the religion they were taught as children quite acceptable for a time, but were assailed by torturing doubts as they grew up. Such doubts can end in complete agnosticism; this stage lasted for quite a number of years in my own case. My journey back to belief did not, as sometimes happens, result from a sudden conversion, but was the very gradual result of constantly thinking about possible philosophies of life. The philosophies of life of any two people will surely differ in many respects, but there are some central problems that everyone must face and wrestle with because they are so important.

Let us face straight away the fact that our relationship with the rest of the universe is such that we can never hope for absolutely irrefutable proof of anything about it at all. Our only direct contact with the outside world is through the messages that constantly come in from our senses, and our problem is to try to decide what sort of external world could have given rise to such messages: in other words we need a picture of the external world that is consistent with them. We build up the picture in various ways, by checking our senses against one another, by reasoning and by comparing our conclusions with those of others. It is as if we were trying to

solve a cipher in the absence of the code and without any other contact with the sender. This problem has been tackled many times, so often that it would be the work of many years to get even a superficial acquaintance with all the attempts that have been made and their respective impacts on human thought.

One of the most peculiar of the suggested pictures of the universe that emerged during the development of philosophy is known as solipsism. It amounts to a denial that the external universe exists at all, and claims that the stream of sense-impressions that appear to be flowing into the mind is, in fact, entirely created by that mind. In its extreme form, solipsism denies the objective reality of communications between two persons, holding that all such messages are created by the mind that receives them. Thus the one mind resembles someone listening to records of his own voice being played back. This philosophical system cannot be disproved by any logical process of reasoning whatever, and yet no one seriously accepts it. A person pressed to say precisely why not would say, "It doesn't make sense", or might quote from Father Brown, "Ten false philosophies will fit the universe."

We shall use very freely these concepts of making sense and fitting the facts, though they are difficult to analyse closely. We shall place ourselves in the position of jurymen trying to decide between rival pictures of the universe. Going back to the metaphor of trying to solve a code, we can see fairly clearly the principles on which we are to work, though they would be extremely hard to define precisely. We should be inclined to accept a suggested solution of a cipher if clear rules for decipherment were laid down, if the decoded message were in a recognizable language and if the various parts of the message added up to a consistent whole. We should be inclined to reject a suggested solution if the rules of decipherment were stated only vaguely, if parts of the deciphered message were still a jumble of letters, or if the ideas contained in various parts of it contradicted one another. Finally,

anyone not in a position to examine all the evidence personally would tend to accept the solution found by an experienced cipher-reader in preference to that of a beginner.

The inductive method of advancing slowly by means of reasonable guesses, checked and cross-checked wherever possible, is usually called the 'scientific' approach, but is really of far wider application, being also used, for example, in the analysis of historical evidence and in artistic and literary criticism. We can already see two things about it: first, that conclusions reached by it are always provisional — there is always the possibility of new evidence emerging which has a bearing on the question; second, that the conclusions will be coloured to a greater or lesser extent by the personality of the investigator, because of the fact that guesses of some kind are a necessary part of any theory. (A purely mathematical problem, which has one solution by whatever method it is worked out, is an exception to this last statement, and there are many such problems for which guessing is not required. Even here, the method of solution bears an imprint of the solver, and, in every other type of problem, the answer will do so as well.) We must now direct attention to the fact that problems certainly exist to which the scientific method can only be applied to a limited extent, and problems may exist which cannot be tackled by a scientific approach at all.

Examples of problems for which the scientific approach is only of limited use abound in such subjects as history and archaeology. Some conclusions are supported by so much evidence that they are practical certainties, such as the general belief that England once had a queen named Anne who is now dead. In other cases, the evidence may be scanty, confused and conflicting, and equally competent investigators may arrive at utterly different conclusions from the same set of data — for example, we shall probably never know with any degree of certainty what measure of truth may lie behind the extravagant stories about a king named Arthur,

simply because many of the chief actors in whatever drama took place were unable to read or write. A rather different type of problem which is difficult to study scientifically is exemplified by a haunted house. If one is honestly trying to decide whether the happenings in such places do or do not represent something new to science, one is faced by a dilemma. Either one tries to appraise the evidence of people whose testimony may be distorted or biased by shame, fright or a dozen other emotions, or one attempts an impartial investigation — tries to prevent deliberate fraud, self-deception and the mistaking of perfectly natural events for supernatural ones. If, as often happens, such an investigation yields negative results this can never be conclusive. It is always possible that the absence of a suitable medium, or the presence of unbelievers, is, by itself, sufficient to prevent the appearance of the supernatural phenomenon. We certainly do not know enough about the universe at the present day to be in a position to reject such possibilities out of hand — indeed the structure of several branches of science has recently had to be completely revised to take account of the undoubted fact that any observation must to some extent disturb the system observed (this being the celebrated ‘uncertainty principle’).

The ideal type of phenomenon for scientific study is one that can be produced at will under carefully controlled conditions. The great advances of science in the last hundred years stem partly from the fact that very many of the happenings in the universe can be made to conform more or less closely to this ideal, but this is no proof, nor does it even justify the presumption, that everything that happens in the universe can be made to conform in this way. Possible analogies with what we shall suggest to be the situation in the universe as a whole, are furnished by fields of study such as sociology, psychology, and economics. In such fields it is often possible to predict, with considerable accuracy, that certain situations will result in certain consequences, but even the most orderly of minds is capable of sudden and profound changes which

may spring from a cause so minute and insignificant as to defy identification. In such a situation, even a very slight intervention by the observer might completely change the result.

As another example of a field where the scientific approach is of limited value we may mention the many attempts that are made to classify aesthetic sensations. The artistic or literary critic can really do little more than marshal facts in a systematic way and thus exhibit the relationships of an artist with contemporary workers, with his own past work, with the culture of his time. He can tell us almost nothing about the central mystery, that is, why certain artistic compositions are almost universally admired while others may at the same time thrill some people to ecstasy yet leave other people indifferent or provoke them to bitter hostility. The critic may try to show that a really great work of art is so judged whatever criterion may be used, whereas the more controversial one is rated as great by some criteria and as indifferent or poor by others. This may be so, but it still does not explain the differing reactions of two equally instructed and equally sensitive people to the same piece of work. The reaction, whatever it is, may occur before the critic begins his systematic study of the masterpiece in relation to its circumstances and surroundings, and may not be greatly changed by prior knowledge of a critic's verdict. Here, therefore, we have a set of problems that can hardly be touched at all by the scientific methods available today, yet no one would seriously think of denying the reality of aesthetic experiences for this reason. Indeed, it is probably true to say that such experiences form a very large part of the relationship of a person with the universe and with his fellow men.

Such considerations show that we may be leaving altogether out of account certain aspects of the universe by attempting to study it by this detached or scientific method. Some aspects may be missed altogether, and the appreciation of others may be seriously interfered with. We have mentioned just a few instances of both these situations. Nevertheless, we shall

pursue the attempt to find whether there is a rational basis for the Christian faith, although the final picture may be a partial and incomplete one. Besides the difficulties just mentioned we are confronted with the fact that such inquiries often provoke passionate resentment of a most unchristian kind, and were, for many centuries, regarded as impious actions worthy of death. Such passionate reactions may be difficult to explain, but we must recognize that they are liable to occur, and they certainly provide a very serious obstacle to the earnest seeker after truth, just because they tend to hide from him the true state of mind of a sincere believer whose answers might otherwise be of the greatest value and interest. It is true that ministers of religion are trained to deal with such difficulties, and to answer patiently the most irreverent and, to them, provocative questions. However, the layman who is also a sincere believer usually lacks such training. His views are, or should be, of very great interest to a rationalist inquirer, yet all too often a conversation between two such people develops into a mere attempt to score debating points. Such a discussion, if it could only be carried on without constant chasing of hares, would be of great value to many people.

A child from a Christian home usually needs no such support for his religion. He may consult grown-ups on details, but hardly ever doubts the central facts. A change often takes place shortly after confirmation. Soon after the realization that not everything that is found in printed books is necessarily true, comes the further realization that, at school, he is taught many things dogmatically that are really debatable or only partially true. This leads to a doubting attitude and then follow the first efforts to analyse evidence, for example by comparing different sources. Since the tendency today is to doubt and question authority of all kinds, it almost inevitably happens that the foundations of religious belief are examined also. At about this time some science is being learnt and the adolescent is also studying English literature both in school

and by himself. Gradually he becomes aware of the great science versus religion controversy of the late nineteenth century, and comes to realize that some at least of the things that he was accustomed to regard as indubitable evidence of divine creation can almost equally well be considered to be the results of blind driving forces such as the purely automatic process of natural selection. Perhaps later still he becomes acquainted with works such as Frazer's *Golden Bough* and studies mythology and folk-lore. He now learns that many of the features of his Christianity are reproduced in other religions and mythologies all over the world, and finds, sometimes with a considerable shock, that this applies even to those beliefs that he has been taught to regard as the most central and sacred in his own religion. This is true, for example, of the idea that the deity can become manifest as a number of distinct persons, the idea of the supernatural birth of the deity, the story of an earthly life of the deity, accompanied by various exploits and followed by death and translation into heaven.

Further shocks may follow. He comes to realize that practically every organized tribe or nation subscribes to some religion, and may become acquainted with the idea of the psychologists that an organized religion of some sort is probably almost a necessity in any community — the elders need some sort of oracle to back up their prestige; everyone has an inward need for believing in a heavenly father to supply the place of the earthly father who fails us as he grows old; a strong religious sense in the community can be, and has been, exploited to preserve order in times of crisis ("the opium of the people") or to facilitate wars of aggression ("fight the infidels"). Such may be the impact of a normal education on the religion of a young person and, at this very same time it is becoming progressively more difficult for him to reconcile the teachings of Christianity with the appalling waste, injustice, cruelty and evil of every kind that exist in the world.

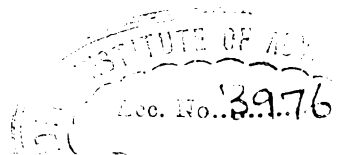
Many people have faith strong enough to survive all these

assaults, but there are very many others who are thrown into serious doubt and perplexity. Those who have had a very intense spiritual or mystical experience of any kind will probably find that their faith is enhanced by all trials, but such experiences are not vouchsafed to everyone. To help other people it will not do merely to exhort them to have more faith, nor are they inclined to accept the sort of answer that Job got, namely, that certain mysteries are too abstruse for their understanding and that it is impious to question them. Answers like this may be adequate to convince a sincere believer who is perplexed about certain points, but they will emphatically not satisfy someone for whom the foundations of belief have one by one been shaken by the normal progress of his education; something far more direct and positive is needed.

We must examine the evolutionary-materialistic case, and it is as well to begin by recognizing that it is, in many respects, extremely strong. It is quite surprising how far a materialistic theory of the universe can be pushed without seeming to become forced or artificial. Stated as briefly as possible, it seems to amount to something like this:

(a) Paley's famous teleological argument, in which the marvellously intricate structure of, for example, a living organism is held to be decisive evidence of an intelligent design and creation is rejected. Paley argued that the study of the working of a watch would convince one that it had been designed by a person of intelligence and made by a skilled craftsman. The materialist admits this, but says that the universe, as we know it, contains far too many features that seem contradictory, redundant or fantastic to enable a clear inference of divine purpose to be made.

(b) The materialist argues that the laws of nature, as they are now known, can give a very good account of many of the features of the universe that formerly seemed to be explicable only on the basis of heavenly design. He further argues that there is every reason to expect this process to go further as our knowledge advances.



(c) He argues that the problem of evil is insoluble if we assume a beneficent creator, but becomes completely intelligible if man is regarded as having evolved from "Nature, red in tooth and claw".

(d) The widespread existence of religious feeling and moral sense is explained as the response of the individual and the community to practical and psychological needs. For example, no community can survive without some measure of mutual support and fair play. Individuals often work better if they are struggling towards supreme ideals than if they merely have to provide for the needs of the current week or year.

On such grounds the materialist not only questions the theistic interpretation of the universe, but counter-attacks by claiming to be able to account for the very existence of religions. It is argued that some religion would be likely to appear in any community, even if there were nothing that could be interpreted as divine revelation. We shall begin by examining the materialistic criticism of the teleological hypothesis, *as it is usually put*, and it cannot be denied that some of it, such as that by J. B. S. Haldane, has been extremely damaging. We shall then try to show that a natural and unforced modification of Paley's original position takes nearly all of the sting out of these criticisms. The change of front that we make is to compare the universe with something that is still in the process of being fashioned, rather than making Paley's comparison with a finished article such as a watch.

We shall try to examine the materialist arguments without fear or prejudice, in the earnest belief that any Christian apologia which ignores them, or brands them as impious, or tries to smother them by appealing to the authority of the great names of the past, such as Thomas Aquinas, is doing Christianity an extremely poor service. Such evasions only tend to alienate a generation already seriously perplexed by the numerous strange happenings of the times in which we live. A young person is nearly always interested in one or

more causes, such as the plight of refugees or the maldistribution of food and other resources. At a time when he is acutely conscious of things that are wrong in the world, and is inclined to look askance at former generations who let them happen and at the apparent tardiness with which steps are taken to set them right, it is doubly unfortunate that he should be met by faulty arguments of the kinds that we have just mentioned. Over-emphasis of the alleged authority and wisdom of the past and claims that the present world looks perfect can only be described as insults to his intelligence. He may even interpret this presentation of imperfect arguments as a tacit admission that no better ones exist.

We do take the point of view that it is entirely right and proper to apply scientific methods of thought in the religious field, on the ground that the interplay of two quite distinct methods of thought usually enriches both. No system of philosophy is free from objection, but the practical attempt to find something good enough to form a guide to life is the most worthwhile of all activities; this need is felt by human beings at every level of development. Since no two persons have precisely the same needs or capabilities, the help that one can obtain from others can serve as a guide to one's efforts but is no substitute for them. No one would expect to acquire culture merely by reading the work of literary or art critics, and no one can expect to find an acceptable philosophy of life set out in a book. Even if the system described is acceptable to the author, the reader is bound to take time to find out how far it fits in with his own thoughts and experiences.

Most people agree that the educational effect of a good book begins when the actual reading is finished, and one tries to think out how far it is true to life, what gave one pleasure, and what could be improved. The intellectual approach to matters of faith usually leads to a gradual building up of convictions rather than to a sudden conversion. Even if the final result is similar to the system one accepted as a child, the critical examination of it can still be an exciting adventure.

CHAPTER

II

THE TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Disinterested intellectual curiosity is the lifeblood of real civilization — *G. M. Trevelyan.*

BEFORE going further, we must review briefly the logical processes that we are going to use. We are going to rely mainly on the scientific principle that an assumption is plausible if it can be shown to lead to reasonable consequences in agreement with our experience. Many difficulties stand in the way of our inquiry, and we shall enumerate a few of them. First, it is often forgotten that the rules of logic are not, as was once thought, fixed and immutable. Present-day mathematicians are inclined to deny the possibility of ever setting up a completely faultless system of logical thought. Whether this be possible or not, there can be no doubt that, whether we like it or not, the rules of logical thought do differ considerably in different departments of learning. This fact is often forgotten, probably because of the increasing tendency towards specialization.

As a simple example of the fact that different disciplines call for different logical rules, nearly everyone who has learnt geometry or algebra will recall having been warned against 'assuming what you are trying to prove'. Indeed, the scientific or inductive type of argument, from the particular to the more general, which is the central pillar of most of the exact sciences, can only be used in mathematics to a very limited extent; the process of reasoning known technically as 'mathematical induction' can only be carried out under fairly elaborate safeguards. Again, the process of argument by analogy is almost completely inadmissible in mathematics, has to be

used extremely cautiously in the exact sciences, yet may often be the only weapon at hand to tackle a historical or economic problem, or a sociological question. Again, the rules of evidence may be different in different contexts. A scientist tends to regard all his facts as relevant to an inquiry, whereas there are many circumstances in which a law court can rule that certain evidence is not admissible even if it is true. A historian may decide that certain sources are tainted. It is, therefore, not surprising that in philosophical discussions, certain methods of argument are frequently used in inappropriate contexts or in completely unsound ways.

As an example of such an error may be mentioned the very common attempt to copy the mathematician's process of *reductio ad absurdum* in inappropriate parts of the philosophical field. For example, the attempt has been made to show that the behaviourist theory of mental processes (the idea that the processes of the mind are merely part of the individual's response to the changes in his environment) is self-contradictory, because, so it is alleged, "it does not tell us how error is possible, how error can be detected, or even what error is" (Trueblood, *The Logic of Belief*, p. 110). (The short answer to this point is that no machine is exempt from failures, and the fact that these sometimes occur is no evidence at all whether or not the machine was built by a skilled craftsman or assembled completely automatically on a line.) Such methods of argument are on a par with the hardly serious remark of Whitehead: "Scientists actuated by the purpose of proving that they are purposeless constitute an interesting subject for study", or the famous paradox "Epimenides says that the Cretans are liars, but is himself a Cretan, so . . .". Very few inquiries progress far without meeting paradoxes of this sort, but what *is* surprising is that they can ever be regarded, as they clearly often are, as absolutely conclusive arguments. Usually, they merely indicate that the chosen approach to the problem is in some way faulty.

Another type of argument that is extremely prevalent, but,

for our present purposes, has to be used extremely cautiously, though we can never do without it, is that based on 'inverse probability'. The sort of loose statement that such and such an occurrence 'couldn't just happen by accident' must be familiar to everyone. Properly used, such a method or reasoning may be perfectly valid, but it so easily leads to fallacies that extreme care has to be taken with it. Imagine the effect that would be produced by the following conversation in a law court: *Witness*: "The number of the car was EF 2222." *Counsel*: "I put it to you that you are lying; the odds against this are over five million to one."

Counsel is absolutely right in his figure but would not be taken seriously, yet many people are deceived by arguments that have no more solid basis. For example, pollster Gallup claims to be able to "prove God statistically", by stating that "the assertion that the intricacies of a human body could just happen is a statistical monstrosity". No materialist has ever made the assertion that human bodies "just happen", but he holds that they are the end result of evolutionary processes that have been in operation for millions of years and which have included *countless instances of failure as well as of success* (see p. 53). Statistics are often reliable indicators of what may happen in the immediate future, or of what probably happened in the recent past. It is almost valueless to try to use them to decide what may have happened in the very remote past, or to try to predict trends in the future.

Another difficulty that besets all attempts at logical thought is the existence, in philosophy itself and in nearly all of the sciences, of enormous numbers of technical terms, all too many of which turn out, on critical examination, to stand for concepts that cannot be formulated precisely. (In fact, this is a very usual reason for introducing a technical term into a science, to stand for a concept which, although it may not have been, and perhaps cannot be, formulated precisely, has nevertheless become familiar enough to be discussed and reasoned about.) For example, the concepts of cause and effect

are so valuable that they are never likely to be abandoned by scientists and philosophers, and yet Hume long ago pointed out that difficulties arose whether one regarded cause and effect as completely separate or whether one acknowledged that they could not be completely distinct. This criticism was never met, and the famous uncertainty principle of modern physics has shown Hume's criticisms to be completely justified. Similar difficulties beset many of our elementary concepts. Consider, for example, the ideas of 'length', 'force', 'colour' or 'policy'. Attempts to define such concepts usually end in circularity or inexactitude, but these are often the very features that make a technical concept valuable — at the expense of a little vagueness much time and space may often be saved by using a technical term instead of constantly repeating a whole paragraph. This vagueness, and the fact that the precise meaning of the same technical term may differ in different contexts, does open up possibilities of apparent contradictions and certainly does also mean that the *reductio ad absurdum* type of argument, although it can be extremely valuable in mathematics, is not necessarily conclusive in other disciplines.

In these circumstances it is very difficult to take seriously the antics of certain ancient and modern philosophers who take a statement like "the world exists", assign to it in turn about half a dozen possible meanings (whatever these may be) and then knock each one down in turn like skittles, leaving no one any the wiser at the end of the process. Probably no statement that can be put into words at all is completely exempt from criticisms like this, but meanwhile we must make the best use we can of the languages and processes of reasoning that we do possess. Otherwise, we should be reduced to the condition of the philosophers of Laputa, who tried to avoid using words at all.

The exploitation of analogy is another instance of a process that must be used with great care. It also is so valuable that we cannot afford to do without it. It is almost impossible to

explain a new concept without a model or an analogy — for example, a teacher would be hard put to it to expound the wave theory of light without either referring to sound, ripples on a pond, or the waves on a seashore, or else setting up in the class-room some cunning arrangement of weights and springs. For such purposes the analogy is of great value and its main limitation, that any analogy breaks down if pushed too far, does not greatly matter. The difficulty comes in when one attempts to use an analogy as a means of proving rather than describing or explaining something. Everyone must be painfully familiar with the bitter, heated, argument that begins, "Absurd! You might just as well say that"

The person who uses this approach does not seem to realize how very much more difficult his task at once becomes. What is he trying to do? To establish that "A is probably false" as a consequence of these two statements: "B is almost certainly false", "A and B are good analogues". The task is almost hopeless, as anyone who has ever listened to such an argument will agree. Even if "B is false", can be accepted without prolonged discussion, such an argument can always be countered by the simple: "Oh, but that's different". There is room for far more difference of opinion about analogies than one sometimes realizes. An analogy that seems to one person apt and almost conclusive may seem to another absurd and far-fetched. Let me give an example of this. The argument that any body like the United Nations must, if necessary, be in a position to apply force to restrain an aggressor, on the analogy that even the most law-abiding peoples find it necessary to maintain police forces, seems, to the author, almost completely conclusive. Yet he has often discussed this matter with people who, although completely sincere and well-balanced, can quite genuinely see no valid analogy at all between individuals and nations in this particular context. Again, Spengler claimed to be able to foresee the probable development of our present culture by tracing its history up to the present day and then comparing this with the history

of other cultures. His opponents merely had to reply that it is the differences, rather than the resemblances, between our culture and others that are its most characteristic features and will play the major part in deciding future trends. An argument reaching such a stage stops dead or revolves in endless circles or becomes cluttered up by side issues. Every teacher knows that an analogy which may help one pupil may confuse or antagonize another, who may, however, be helped by a quite different one.

Another avoidable error is that of thinking that everything that we learn about the universe can be put into the form of propositions or statements, and that anything that cannot be is meaningless. When we contemplate a work of art or listen to music our experience is meaningful, but the number of statements that we can make about it may be quite small. The *Mona Lisa* would be just as great a work of art whether a woman of such appearance really lived or not. What statement does Henry Moore's *King and Queen* make? It may matter hardly at all whether the propositions contained in a poem are verifiable or not; the poet may be trying to convey some deep emotion, such as awe or love, that can be conveyed by images but not by statements. We must therefore be on the look-out for the possibility that some religious experiences may be difficult to describe in words, but this is not, by itself, any argument against their relevance.

We are going to rely mainly on the method of making a hypothesis and comparing its consequences with experience, and we shall make free use of models and allegories to clarify difficult and unfamiliar ideas. If the story, as it unfolds, seems to be making sense, we shall not be unduly deterred by logic-choppers who prove that our basic concepts are ill-defined, self-contradictory or meaningless. We have compared our programme with the attempt to decode a cryptogram, and there is an implied appeal to inverse probability as our solution takes shape.

CHAPTER

III

THE FACTS BEFORE US

My picture of the world is drawn in perspective and not like a model to scale. The foreground is occupied by human beings, and the stars are as small as threepenny bits. The stars may be large, but they cannot think or love, and these are qualities that impress me far more than size does — *F. P. Ramsey*.

WE have seen that logical processes do differ slightly in different intellectual disciplines. Another point that needs stressing is that the facts that we have to work with are of all kinds and some of them are much harder to reason about than others. Many of the facts that are used by scientists, philosophers, theologians and economists are (a) reproducible or (b) verifiable or (c) measurable, and, in philosophical inquiries, there is often a tendency to concentrate on facts that have one or more of these characteristics. However, there are many other facts about the world that can serve as the raw material for a philosophical argument, yet possess none of these three characteristics, or possess them only to a very limited extent. It would be wrong to exclude such facts altogether from consideration, as some of them have, or seem to have, extremely far-reaching implications about the universe. Since they are very much harder to study in a scientific manner (the expression being used in a wide sense) there has been a definite tendency on the part of some thinkers to ignore their implications, or to regard them as inferior, in evidential value, to facts that possess one or more of the above three characteristics. Many of the nineteenth-century arguments about science and religion seem to have originated

from this tendency to regard different types of fact as of different evidential value. Indeed, we do not really know today how to deal with a situation in which the implications of two sets of facts of different types seem to be in conflict, or partially so.

One frequent reaction is to accept the conclusions drawn from the verifiable facts and then to use these conclusions as weapons of attack to prove that the less easily verifiable facts are incorrect or are being used in a wrong context, or should be ignored for some other reason. This attitude of trying to explain away can be short-sighted and foolish but is not easy to avoid. We have compared the philosophical studies of the universe with the attempt to decipher a colossal cryptogram. Now anyone who has ever attempted a task of this kind would never rely on the text alone if he had access to clues from other sources, such as an overheard conversation in which the originator of the message took part. He knows very well that this might give him hints that would save him hours of work. This might be true even if the conversation overheard had been imperfectly recorded, parts of it lost, or if the only record of it was a garbled version existing in someone's memory. Even if the decoder had no means at hand of checking such a hint, he would certainly not ignore it.

As examples of reproducible facts we may mention scientific experiments. These are usually written up in a published journal in such a way that it would be possible to reproduce the experimental conditions almost exactly, and also to follow, step by step, the processes by which the experimenter arrived at the conclusions he drew from them. Almost the whole history of such an investigation thus lies open to checks and criticisms by anyone in the world. If another investigator makes a check and obtains similar results, there is every reason to believe that the original facts are correct. (Very often, but by no means always, the results are presented in numerical form, i.e. are measurable, but many scientific experiments lead only to a 'yes or no' type of answer.) As an example of a

verifiable fact we may mention the existence of certain historical or Biblical manuscripts. It is open to anyone to verify for himself the physical existence of documents, and to trace for himself the reasoning by which scholars have established their possible authors and dates. Every schoolboy knows that Henry VIII had six wives, and their respective fates, but he would actually need several years of intensive study to familiarize himself with the evidence that leads historians to make the assertions that appear in the books. Few people actually do this, the remainder being content with the knowledge that the evidence on such matters is being constantly scrutinized by distinguished scholars, and it is presumed from this that any serious flaws would long ago have been detected. In other words, most people are content, and quite rightly so, to accept such facts on authority. (The authority of a scholar is based very largely on the esteem in which he is held by other scholars. This is not a logically perfect test but it is the best that a layman can devise. Very occasionally, as in the famous example of Piltdown Man, an authoritative opinion does lead to the perpetuation of errors, but progress in any branch of learning would scarcely be possible unless each generation were content to rely very largely on the labours of its predecessors, coupled with the knowledge that nearly all the evidence can be checked by anyone who is prepared to acquire the necessary skills.)

As an example of a fact that might be difficult to verify we may mention the existence of folk-lore and other oral traditions in certain communities. It by no means follows that anyone who investigated a community today would be able to obtain independent verification of studies that were made at the beginning of this century. For one thing, he would be interviewing a different set of people; for another, the way of life of the community may have changed considerably in the meantime; for a third, the very facts that investigations of this kind have taken place and that the results have been published may easily modify the attitude of the community towards future investigators. The fact that a present-day

investigator rediscovers the same songs and stories is not real proof that they existed before (someone in the community may have read the published versions), nor is the apparent absence of a given tradition proof that it did not exist a few years back. Yet the very survival of folk-lore down to modern times, and the fact that very many of the stories appear in many different communities in practically the same form, may be data of very great significance in social science. Another type of fact that is very difficult to verify is the claim of certain individuals to be able to find water or to determine the sex of an egg. Some scientists are inclined to pooh-pooh such claims because they detect no such powers in themselves and those whom they know well, or because they seem to conflict with the accepted facts of physiology and physics, or because dowsers often fail when investigated under controlled conditions. Besides all this, there is always quite a reasonable chance that water will be found at some depth below almost any spot. Such difficulties do detract from the evidential value of such alleged facts, but they emphatically do not prove them to be false.

There are many other types of fact that are, or may be, of great philosophical significance, but are extremely difficult to study or evaluate scientifically because they lack the vital quality of reproducibility. The fact that certain attributes of the universe cannot be produced to order, in the way that a scientific experiment can be repeated, does not mean that they are less significant than scientifically ascertained facts. As an example, consider the many instances that have been reported of direct communication between minds. Many of these are well corroborated (for example, someone becomes aware of the illness or death of a loved one, and the times and details are afterwards found to agree perfectly). Conditions of great emotional stress do seem occasionally to open up some channel of communication that is ordinarily closed. Again, consider the instances collected by J. W. Dunne in *An Experiment with Time* which point very clearly to the possibility of

an occasional dream corresponding closely with a future event. The philosophical implications of even one such authentic dream of this kind would be of the utmost importance, even if we reject J. W. Dunne's theories altogether. The same is true of events that are claimed to occur at séances or in haunted houses. It is most unfortunate that such events often cannot be produced to order, that they often occur under conditions extremely unfavourable for correct observation, and that independent corroboration is often weak.

Equally startling philosophically in their implications but extremely difficult to appraise in a balanced way are the experiments by Rhine and others on extra-sensory perception and on the alleged ability of the mind to influence such events as the fall of dice. The difficulties here are that the percentage of successes is, usually, only a little above what would be expected on the basis of pure chance, and that especially promising subjects tend to deteriorate as time goes on, rather than improving as might be expected of someone who is acquiring a skill. These difficulties certainly do not disprove the existence of the effects in question but they do most emphatically make it very much more difficult to arrive at a balanced judgment about them.

Lastly, we come to facts that may be of great significance but which cannot be reproduced or verified at all (in the scientific senses of these words). Among such facts are religious conversions and the calls of the prophets, and the various types of mystical experience that can befall quite ordinary people. (For a collection and discussion of the latter by a scientist see R. C. Johnson's *Watcher on the Hills*.) These experiences show a remarkably uniform pattern, in that they produce a strong conviction that the ultimate purpose of the universe is good beyond all telling. Are we to accept this at its face value, or are we to regard all such people as mentally unhinged, exhibitionistic or self-deluded? I have personally known only one individual who has had a religious conversion. From the complete changes in his personality and attitudes,

unaccompanied by any sign whatever of mental unbalance or putting on an act, I did conclude that he had had a very convincing experience. It is most interesting to read what happened to Jeremiah. In spite of the violently unpopular contents of his message and in spite of the fact that tempers must have run very high in Jerusalem in the last stages of its siege, it is clear that some tribunal recognized that he was not mad and decided that he was completely sincere.

Some of these data are so startling in their implications that we simply cannot leave them without examination. It is always possible to bring forward explanations like religious genius or mania, or to point to the fact that experiences resembling the mystical are obtainable under drugs like mescaline, which, one can argue, temporarily knock out part of the brain leaving the remainder free to indulge in wishful fantasies. Various other stock arguments can be invoked which could enable one to write off a great deal of such evidence, yet may we not thus be neglecting an important source of knowledge about the universe?

There is a type of scientific mind that almost automatically rejects almost all odd occurrences or tries to account for them as coincidences. It holds that the laws of nature are immutable, and that events once thought to be supernatural have eventually received scientific explanations. It is not unduly perturbed by the discoveries of the present century that all is not well with such fundamental concepts as cause and effect or before and after. (In fact these concepts only break down in rather special circumstances, of interest mainly to experts in relativity, quantum theory and thermodynamics, and are still perfectly safe to use in nearly all studies of the everyday world.) It greets a story like that of Jesus walking on the sea with derision or polite disbelief, holding that the law of gravity is universal and that it is impossible that it could have failed even once.

The basis of this belief, that odd events never actually occur, seems to be the astonishing success of the scientific

picture of the universe. Events such as eclipses can be predicted for years ahead, and there is every prospect that, as knowledge advances, similar certainty will be attained in more and more fields. A person holding such views will deny the possibility of precognition of future events because the principle that effect follows cause works out so extremely well. Although acknowledging the objective existence of electrical effects in the brain, he will nevertheless deny the possibility of telepathy between two widely separated persons, because even the most refined measurements can only detect these electrical effects at very short distances. For many years I held views similar to these, but I now consider that the evidence for them is insufficient. If the materialist wishes to hold them, it must be by an *act of faith*. To some scientists this assertion will seem outrageous, but is it really so?

Let us suppose for a moment that the structure of the universe does permit the occasional odd event but that it is in other respects reducible to law and order in the ways that Laplace and others have claimed. Provided only that the odd events cannot be produced and repeated to order, the nature of scientific investigation is often such that these events would be either overlooked or not recorded even by the most able and honest investigator. If, for example, he gets an anomalous result from one observation in a series, he is likely to repeat that particular measurement and he is likely to accept the new value if it looks right. Again, if his apparatus is set up to record a certain event, the occurrence of something rather different might well be overlooked, or mistaken for the event actually expected. Finally, we cannot rule out *a priori* the possibility that odd events may often occur in circumstances when no trained observer is present at all.

For such reasons we can be certain that, if unreproducible events really did occur occasionally, they would have practically no influence on the structure of scientific equations, which deal mainly with reproducible events under controlled conditions. From this it follows that the success of the

scientific picture of the universe is not, in itself, proof that odd events never occur. The materialist is quite entitled to believe this, but, in doing so, he is going beyond what he can prove. It follows further that, when there is evidence of an odd event having occurred, this evidence is worthy of careful investigation. For example, some of the miracles of Lourdes seem to have occurred in the presence of highly qualified men like Alexis Carrel. Unfortunately, many scientists are afraid or unwilling to examine such evidence.

My own personal view is that there is a large body of evidence for the actual occurrence of odd events, but that much of this evidence is poor, and that there is probably no such single event which cannot be explained away, given enough ingenuity and determination (see p. 89 for a further discussion). I have laboured this point because of its extreme importance in determining our approach to religious matters. If, for example, we approach the New Testament with a fixed disbelief in the possibility of the occasional miracle, we find ourselves having to write off episode after episode as legendary, healing by suggestion, natural causes and so on. We then have to discard long passages (sometimes whole chapters) as deliberate fabrications, and, at the end of this long process of emendation and explaining away, we find that we now have some more explaining to do. We finish up with a rationalized picture of Christ that is so jejune and unconvincing that the fact that He founded a lasting and world-wide movement becomes inexplicable.

The question is important from another point of view. If we believe that our minds were divinely created, many of the odd occurrences fit into place quite naturally. For example, on this basis we must think of our minds as separated parts of one original single entity. (The notion of separation is essential. If we had means of peering at will into other minds, life would be something completely different from what it is.) This separation may be practically complete under ordinary conditions, yet there may be communication under conditions of great

stress. (As an analogy, think of two rivers, ordinarily quite separate, connected by a channel that fills when one of them is very high.) Again, if we could foretell the future at will, life as we know it becomes impossible. Yet, if we suppose that God's mind has a partial knowledge of the future, it becomes quite reasonable that, in certain circumstances, scraps of such knowledge could trickle through to some of us. (Jung has in fact suggested the concept of a 'shared unconscious' on other grounds.) It may well be that the very scantiness and non-reproducibility of powers such as these constitute the necessary safeguard that enables us to live our own lives. We should then expect to find that systematic investigation of them leads only to marginal results, but this is not the same thing as saying that they never occur at all. There probably are very good reasons why they cannot be produced at will.

Our proposed view that scientific laws are nearly immutable but admit of the occasional uncontrolled exception is, admittedly, less tidy than the materialist view. (Tidiness and beauty are often used as criteria for assessing scientific theories, but they can never override the check of experience. Maxwell's electromagnetic equations are of great beauty, but it now seems clear that the correct description of electrical effects is much more complicated.) The holding of this view will have hardly any effect on one's reactions as a scientist. A doctor will deal with cancer in the same way whether or not he believes that there have been a few instances of spontaneous cure. His belief, or otherwise, that Christ had special powers over epilepsy will not affect the treatment he gives to a patient today.

We end this chapter by examining one more point of the utmost importance: the question of free will and what it may mean. Nearly every individual has the settled conviction that in certain situations he is free to choose between two or more courses of action. The behaviourist psychologists may argue that a man is a mere machine which, like any other, responds to its environment, but that its possible responses

are so complex, and depend on so many factors, that we get this illusion of freedom of choice. The conviction that we have a freedom of choice within certain limits is, however, so deeply rooted in nearly all of us that one takes leave to doubt whether even the behaviourists really act the part of an automaton throughout their lives, whatever they may say in the class-room.

The strange thing about this conviction is that neither the physicists nor the psychologists or the physiologists have ever been able to suggest *how* freedom of choice can come about. (The suggestion that the brain is a machine a little loose at the joints, so that its reactions to its environment are partly governed by chance, is as unacceptable to most people as is an absolutely rigid behaviourism.) Theologians accept freedom of choice as a fact, but can tell us nothing about how it comes about; their concern is with its consequences. We can, if we like, introduce the standard conception of a ceaseless struggle between good and evil tendencies in the same brain, victory going now to one side, now to the other, but it is, at the present time, impossible even to guess at the relationships between such decisions and the corresponding physico-chemical occurrences in the brain. Of one thing we can be fairly confident: these relationships will be of extreme complexity. Something is now known about the simpler vital processes like muscular contraction and nerve conduction, and it is already clear that mechanisms complicated almost beyond belief underlie even these elementary processes of life.

For the present, we accept the existence of free will as a fact, leaving aside such difficult questions as how it comes about, and at what degree of evolution it becomes a really important factor. (Some biologists say that even single-celled organisms can make acts of choice.) The really significant point is that it is present in man. Granted this, it is not difficult to see its fundamental philosophical importance. Looking at the survival problems that necessarily confront a race endowed with any freedom of choice, it is obvious that they are vastly

different from those facing one whose reactions to environment are virtually automatic. As a simple example, if a man with freedom of choice acquires some food, he has to consider whether to gorge himself to repletion or to keep some for another time. If he is guided by memories of the past instead of by purely automatic instincts, he can, as we say, acquire skills, and this opens up a whole new field for the operation of the principle of natural selection, and therefore evolution in quite new directions becomes possible.

This may seem obvious enough, but we shall try, in this book, to take a further step. If we try to look at the world from the point of view of a possible Creator, it becomes clear that the introduction, on any significant scale, of freedom of choice into a living community vastly complicates many of the problems and introduces many entirely new ones. Since such functions as eating and sexual activity have to be made pleasant if a race is to survive at all, the introduction of freedom of choice almost automatically implies that almost every form of excessive and unnatural use of them will be tried out at some time or other, even if some taboo or other restraint is implanted at the same time as the freedom of choice.

We have thus reached a conclusion very similar to that set out for us in the book of Genesis in symbolic terms, namely, that the introduction of free will into the world necessarily brought us straight up against the problem of evil. In other words, the known fact that evil exists in the world cannot, by itself, be used as an argument against the goodness of God, for He may have decided to endow man with a certain freedom of choice in the full knowledge that some of the consequences would be extremely unpleasant. Apart from this new problem of evil, and the related one of devising means of keeping it within bounds, we shall find that some older problems become immensely more complicated in this new setting, and that solutions of them, if they exist at all, very often have to be compromises.

Our answer to those who say that the world is too evil to

have been created by a good God will run on roughly these lines: "Look at the immense new possibilities of development opened up by the gift of freedom of choice." We then ask: "Accepting this freedom of choice as inviolable, exactly what other feature or features of the world do you think could be changed in order to make it a more pleasant and moral place to live in?" Some of the obvious suggestions can be examined, with the general conclusion that it is well nigh impossible to foresee the consequences of even one fundamental change, the various forces that govern the world being so interrelated that any single change could have all kinds of totally unexpected consequences.

Therefore, we shall be constantly referring directly or indirectly back to this concept of freedom of choice which we regard as of fundamental importance. As things are at present, we can neither define it logically, nor have we the remotest idea of how it actually happens; we appeal to "the proper study of mankind" to convince us that it does happen.

CHAPTER

IV

THE 'MATERIALIST EVOLUTIONARY'
THEORY OF THE UNIVERSE

Roll on, thou ball, roll on
Through pathless realms of space.

W. S. Gilbert.

IT is not unfair to sum up the advice given by many religious books roughly as follows: "If you have faith, doubts and difficulties about the world do not worry you unduly; if you have not enough faith, pray diligently until you get it, and do not be discouraged if the answer seems long in coming." Such advice is of value for someone who has deep-seated convictions of the existence of God, and is constantly worried by issues such as the shocking amount of evil that seems to exist in the world. This is substantially the answer that Job got, and it would probably satisfy a devout person. It is of little or no help to someone who is honestly trying to make up his mind about fundamentals, and whose philosophy of life has been through some of the stages described in the first chapter. To him, advice of this kind looks suspiciously like assuming what you are trying to prove. Certain religious and philosophical books seem to the author to be doing the cause of religion a very grave disservice by completely ignoring the materialistic case.

The author was left to discover for himself how extremely strong this case is, and the quite surprising lengths to which materialistic explanations can be pushed, even of attributes of the universe that seem to some to be decisive evidence of divine creation or personal control. The attempt to examine four or five different religions and then to try to decide

between them would probably represent a lifetime of work by a scholar of the highest class, but it does seem essential for anyone who is assailed with serious doubts to try at least to examine the question of whether he believes in a theistic or in a materialistic universe.

The Lord Buddha advised people to accept nothing on authority without backing it up by independent investigations whenever possible, and even the authoritarian Roman Catholic Church gives very similar advice to possible converts. They know that the conversion of an adult is not likely to be lasting unless a real effort is made, and is seen to be made, to answer at least some of the doubts and objections beforehand. Let us therefore heed such wise advice, and try to examine the materialistic case as fairly and objectively as we possibly can.

Very briefly, the materialists ascribe to blind and impersonal 'laws of nature' the changes in the universe that are at present beyond man's control, and which the theistic viewpoint ascribes to divine creation or direction. For example, they argue that although the Greeks and Romans attributed thunder to the anger of the gods, we are now almost certain that it is due to friction of ice crystals in a thundercloud. Furthermore, the ancients believed that lightning conveyed divine warnings, or was a means of punishing a guilty mortal. Today, most people believe that the spot at which the lightning strikes is determined by the laws of physics rather than by the guilt or innocence of nearby people. Materialists argue further that many of the attributes of the universe which we find at present inexplicable on the basis of our present knowledge, will, in due course, be understood as rational explanations are found for more and more of today's mysteries. It is possible to point to quite a number of such instances which have occurred in the fairly recent past, and to others that may well happen before very long. It is indeed surprising how closely the workings of a purely impersonal law can sometimes produce results closely resembling those that one would expect from personal control. As a very

elementary example consider the economic law of supply and demand. The workings of a free market are believed, and with a great deal of truth, to ensure, in the long run, first that the number of producers of goods stays near the optimum, secondly, that those who give short weight or are inefficient or too greedy are, in the long run, forced out of business. How very closely this resembles the ideas of dividing the sheep from the goats, rewarding the virtuous and punishing the guilty, that form part of the make-up of almost any religion, with the difference that they are now supposed to be the acts and choices of a personal deity!

By far the most famous example of a natural law that is capable of producing results closely resembling the acts of a personal, intelligent and discriminating creator is Darwin's principle of natural selection. This principle, in essence, states that under natural conditions ("life in the jungle") those individuals in each generation that are best adapted to their environment tend to survive and have offspring, while those that are born with disadvantageous characteristics tend to be killed off early, either by other animals that prey on them, or because they are less well equipped to find food, less resistant to disease and so on. Since many characteristics are passed on from parents to children according to the fairly well understood Mendelian laws of heredity, desirable characteristics tend to be widely distributed among individuals and then are perpetuated in the race. In many cases it is possible to trace the history of a race from the fossil records (quick-breeding animals can be studied alive) and to watch this adaptation of a race to its environment, that is, to see what changes are taking place in the race if, for example, the climate becomes warmer or cooler. It is not difficult to see how the workings of a principle of this kind can mimic in very many ways the activities of a beneficent creator, for ever trying out new ideas and rejecting them as and when they prove unworkable. What is surprising is the quite extraordinary lengths to which reasoning of this kind can be pushed.

Let us consider an organ such as the eye. As an optical instrument it is not perfect, but it is in many ways extremely well designed for its job. Moreover it contains features, such as a lens of variable focal length incorporating ingenious corrections against some forms of aberration, the wonderfully fine structure of the sensitive elements of the retina and the very high sensitivity to light of each of them, that compare very favourably with any laboratory instruments ever made, or ever likely to be made. Surely, one would think, the existence of such a structure is, like Paley's watch, an overwhelming argument for an intelligent creator? Yet the situation is not nearly so simple. In other animals one can trace many steps in the evolution of the eye, beginning with a very simple organ that is simply capable of distinguishing light from darkness. For primitive forms of life, the possession of something even as crude as this may well be a help in finding food or in escaping from enemies or from unsuitable surroundings. The Darwinian principle would then ensure that most of the race would possess such an eye after the lapse of comparatively few generations (and we always have to remember that life has existed on the earth for millions of years). It is not difficult to fill in further evolutionary steps, such as the multiplication of light-sensitive elements, enabling the animal to form crude pictures of its surroundings and to discriminate between different forms, and the appearance of a lens, which would make the pictures much clearer and easier to interpret. Here again, sexual reproduction secures the rapid spread of these modifications in later generations, and the evolutionary principle all the time ensures that worth-while changes are perpetuated, while misfits and retrograde developments disappear in a few generations.

So one might go on. We are not yet certain whether the Darwinian principle is, by itself, capable of accounting for the whole process of evolution from one-celled organisms up to the highest forms of life, with all their delicate co-ordinations of bodily functions. What is clear is that the perpetuation

of favourable variations, as and when they occur, is capable, by itself, of leading to vast changes in a species if sufficient time is allowed. Some scientists argue that there are bodily functions which involve co-ordinated action of more than one organ which can hardly be explained as the result of natural selection alone. If the co-ordination has to be nearly perfect before it is of any real advantage to its owner (for example, the co-ordination between eyes and forepaws in a beast of prey), then it is indeed hard to see how it can have come about in the Darwinian manner as the end-result of a multitude of small changes. We shall not attempt to argue this difficult technical point, but, even if it were granted, the materialist would answer somewhat as follows: "Maybe natural selection doesn't, by itself, explain the whole thing. But look at what it *can* explain. There *are* gaps in my theory, just as there are in any other, but, in due course, fresh principles will be discovered that will enable these gaps to be bridged."

Another argument that evolution is the result of impersonal laws rather than of intelligent direction comes from the fact that we constantly meet apparent misfits in Nature, such as organs that are obviously ill-suited for the tasks they are asked to perform, or organs that may have been of value at some stage in the history of the species but are now almost useless vestiges. Elementary physiology reminds us of the existence of vestiges, such as the appendix, the little toe and the external ear, which can be dispensed with without any real effect on the individual's efficiency. Anatomists tell us that some of the present arrangements for supporting the baby in the womb are probably survivals from the days when our ancestors went about on all fours. It is easy to point also to instances of almost incredible wastefulness in Nature, for example, the fantastically large number of eggs and sperms produced by some species. All of this may seem to be very strong evidence for some form of evolution directed by impersonal laws.

However, we shall soon put up the counter-suggestion that

an intelligent creator might well be content to act mainly through natural laws in this sort of way. If we may anticipate one of our analogies, an engineer who has designed a new machine may, once his design has been proved to work as intended, freeze it, even though he may know very well that certain details could be improved or that labour could be saved on some of the items. This may happen for a variety of reasons: the finished articles may be wanted quickly, it may be desirable to use up an old stock of parts, it may be difficult to improve one detail without upsetting something else, a proposed improvement might necessitate a whole series of fresh trials, and so on.

The materialist argument exploits this idea of natural selection very much further. It urges that many of the human emotions and activities conventionally described as high and fine, and which some philosophers and theologians try to ascribe to divine origin, are to be expected in almost any community which has been exposed to the operation of natural selection, that is, has had to put up any sort of struggle to survive. We can give just a few examples, but these could be multiplied almost indefinitely.

(a) Parental love and family loyalty. An animal that is prepared to stand and fight for its brood obviously has a better chance of rearing some of them to maturity than if it habitually abandons them. A tribe or family that did not make proper arrangements for the care of its children would very soon die out. A united family would have a better chance in a competitive world than one that was constantly quarrelling.

(b) Patriotism. A tribe is prepared to accept organization and discipline, even to the point of sacrificing the individual, would nearly always fare better than one endowed with no such spirit.

(c) Hospitality and care of the old. A tribe that habitually treats strangers kindly will automatically gain much more knowledge of the neighbouring territories than one that murders travellers at sight. A tribe that has the accumulated

wisdom and experience of its elders available will almost certainly do better in the long run than one that turns the old folk out to die when they become too old to work or fight for themselves.

(d) Enterprise and initiative. It seems obvious that these qualities have a survival-value for their possessors at almost every level of culture. The same is probably true of other desirable qualities such as the spirit of fair play, and the sentiments of "do as you would be done by", and loyalty to friends.

In this sort of way very many attempts have been made to set up codes of ethical conduct independent of any divine inspiration, prophetic revelation or the existence of the individual's conscience. In a word, the materialist, while recognizing the necessity of moral standards in any workable community, argues that their existence is no real evidence of divine creation, since they might have been expected to develop anyway on evolutionary grounds.

The controversy over science and religion filled the second half of the nineteenth century, the scientific case following roughly the lines sketched briefly above. The twentieth century has seen a considerable abatement of the controversy itself and a growing belief that the conflict may, after all, not be irreconcilable. And there have been fresh developments of some interest. Concurrently with the development of psychology as a science, and the modern tendency to use the media of literature and the arts as means of portraying the unconscious, there have grown up a whole series of attempts to explain the existence of religion itself on a scientific basis. These range from crude attempts to dismiss religious observances and practices as repressed sex, tribal mumbo-jumbo, manifestation of the father-complex and so on, in which, for example, it is argued that the unconscious needs a heavenly father as compensation for all the wickedness in the real world, and as a substitute for the earthly father who fails us as we grow older, to very elaborate theories which attempt to

reconstruct a typical history of religious development as a tribe gradually evolves from the primitive.

The typical rationalist account seems to run something like this: a clever man (or family), or a mighty man of war, convinces others that his extraordinary powers depend on the careful preservation of some totem, and that failure to preserve it properly and to carry out appropriate ceremonies will bring bad luck to the tribe. A few carefully staged incidents soon convince any doubters of the truth of these claims, and, in the course of time, a family of priest-chieftains is established, who are guardians of the tribal lore and traditions about the great heroes of the past. As things develop, the functions of priest and chieftain may or may not become separated, but the priest, if unscrupulous, often acquires power over life and death, hence horrible manifestations such as human sacrifices to appease the gods. As the community develops still further, religion is used as a means of maintaining cohesion in the tribe; for example, it may be used as a means of calling the men together and inspiring them for war, as a cloak for witch trials, secret police and so on, or as a means of levying taxes, or of distracting the people's attention from misgovernment and other abuses ('the opium of the people'). A really enlightened society, so it is argued, will recognize all these manifestations for what they are, and will dispense with them in due course though it may preserve the sacred relics as historical curiosities. Society, on this view, recognizes that some sort of religion was an almost inevitable accompaniment of its early evolution, but should see that it is now no longer needed, just as the child puts away his toys as he grows up.

Now it cannot be denied that it is possible to interpret a great many religious manifestations along such lines. We do not need to be reminded of human sacrifices by the Druids and Aztecs, nor of the fact that religious differences have given rise to an enormous number of futile wars, nor of the loathsome manifestations, such as the cult of the master-race,

that accompanied the recent aggressions by Germany and Japan. Indeed, the historical books of the Old Testament abound in incidents, such as the stories of Samuel and Agag, and of the loss and recovery of the Ark, which, if one so wished, could be used as very apt illustrations of various stages in the typical development of a tribal religion on the lines we have just summarized, the times of Moses and the judges representing the stage when gifted leaders claim to be in direct communication with the deity, while the period of the monarchy represents the rather later stage when Church and State often fail to co-operate. According to the Biblical account, when this happened to the Jews it nearly always resulted in some fresh disasters. According to the rationalists, many of the prophetic warnings fit naturally into the same picture; for example, the words of Samuel when he foresaw only too well what the effects of appointing a king would be, and the writings of the prophets, who could see no hope for Israel and Judah, wedged as they were between several powerful empires, if Church and State could not agree. Failing this, there was nothing to be expected but repeated ruin, ending in the destruction of the existing order of things, followed by some complete new deal in the distant future. All of this can be fitted into the rationalist picture of a typical tribal religion, purporting to trace its origin, growth, development and decay. Furthermore, it would be difficult to deny that the histories of Christian countries do show countless instances in which priests have become corrupt, religious ideas have been exploited and twisted for filthy political purposes and so on. It is also not difficult to find examples of traditions and dogmas of Christianity that have had their origin at all sorts of periods down to quite recent times, and that have very little backing from the Bible itself. Here again, one thinks, there is ample scope for the materialist to trace the various stages of growth and decline of a typical culture and its accompanying religion.

As another example of the way in which fresh developments

in the science and religion controversy can occur in a comparatively short time, let us look briefly at our present ideas about the origin of life. At the end of the nineteenth century, it had been practically conceded by religion that natural selection can and must be a potent factor in producing all sorts of changes in living forms, and in regulating the nature and speed of such changes in such ways as to avoid the complete extinction of life, that is, that, although impersonal, the principle did have many of the attributes of a creative agency. At the same time science was quite unable to explain the origin of life, and the religious position ranged from regarding the existence of life as its trump card to an almost passionate belief that scientists had no business even to speculate on the possibility of anything other than divine creation. In recent years both positions have changed in some very interesting ways. Probably no serious scientist expects to see life created in the laboratory in his lifetime; indeed, some of the recent developments make it likely that enormously long periods would be required for the carrying out of anything even faintly resembling the creation of a living cell.

We now realize that conditions on the earth before life started must have been very different from what they now are. The appearance of life has probably changed the composition of the earth's atmosphere very materially. For example, the ultra-violet light from the sun is now largely cut off by a layer of ozone in the upper atmosphere. If this layer could be removed many of the existing higher forms of life would be killed, although, strangely enough, these very same rays may well have been the agency that helped life to start. It has been suggested that, when the earth cooled down, there was little oxygen or ozone in the atmosphere though there were probably large quantities of familiar chemical compounds like carbon dioxide, ammonia, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur compounds, which would have originated from volcanoes while the earth was cooling down. Some of these gases would dissolve in the sea and, under the influence of ultra-violet light, there would

be plenty of opportunity for chemical reactions to form carbohydrates, alcohols, fats, amino-acids, perhaps even simple protein molecules. That is, enclosed waters, and even some of the shallower parts of the sea, might well have become a medium not at all unlike the broths that are used for the cultivation of bacteria.

Only one thing is now needed for life to start—the appearance of a single living cell. We know very well that such a cell is enormously complex, and it may still seem far-fetched to say that it happened by chance that the right molecules came together. While we are perfectly free to believe, if we so wish, that the first sparks of life were divinely created, we do, as we have seen, now know about forces capable of taking over the rôle of producing, from that starting point, the infinite variety of life that we know today. One of the facts about the growth of a cell that has proved extremely baffling is to explain how it can divide thousands of times into exact copies of its original self, mistakes being extremely rare. We should go a long way towards understanding this if we could find out why it is that certain types of long-chain molecules, when immersed in a suitable mixture of raw materials, can use them as building blocks to build up in their neighbourhood other molecules that are exact replicas of the original, down to the last atom, the original molecule and its replicas being related to one another somewhat in the manner of a mould and castings made from it. This process is now being intensively studied. While various reasons are known why molecules might attract others that are replicas of themselves and repel everything else, the origin of these so-called specific forces is still unknown. They are no longer regarded as the ‘life-force’ — something outside physics, and there is now every reason to believe that they are a consequence of the ordinary laws of nature.

When this problem is solved, as it certainly will be, several startling developments are likely to follow. Not only shall we be a long step forward in understanding how and why cells

divide, but we shall also be able to give an idea of how a *simple life-cycle could have started up on the earth without any divine intervention at all*. For, if a molecule with this property were inserted into the dilute 'broth' that, as we have seen, probably existed at the beginning of things, it would go on reproducing copies of itself until some of the raw material in the neighbourhood was used up. It would then stop until fresh supplies were brought up in some way by diffusion or by ocean currents, or until they were created by fresh chemical reactions, whereupon the process of self-duplication could begin over again. Thus we already have something that looks very like a life-cycle, as we know it today in the simplest forms of life. Another very important fact is this: suppose that some such process got going for a time but failed to be completely workable because it made too much use of some scarce chemical element. The self-copying would cease and in the course of time the special molecules that had formed would break up, *leaving the stage all set for a fresh start*. Before life fairly started, there may well have been countless millions of these dress rehearsals, until a sequence of events that gave really workable results was finally arrived at by trial and error on the grand scale. This is something very different from the idea of the first living cell just happening through the right molecules coming together by some fantastic accident.

The above brief summary is not extracted from the latest science fiction, but does represent an outline of the thoughts of sober scientists working at the present time. One more thought before we leave this fascinating field. If small plant-like organisms had evolved by the sort of processes we have tried to sketch out, they would during their life-cycle, release oxygen. This could build up in the atmosphere, giving rise to the layer of ozone which exists today and now cuts off most of the ultra-violet light. Thus the way could be cleared for the evolution of higher forms of life that breathe by means of gills or lungs, the sunlight would be gradually toned down to an intensity at which such higher forms of life were viable

and, at the same time, the spontaneous appearance of life would probably stop. Thus once again we have the possibility of a set of happenings that, at first sight, seem so significantly interrelated that they positively call for some intelligent mind behind them. Yet, as we have seen, they may have been the result of quite impersonal laws of nature.

Such are the lines on which the materialist argument runs, though the same sort of theme has been developed in numerous other ways, for example in the writings of Herbert Spencer. It is folly to ignore the strength of the case that can be made out on these lines, and the fact that it can be extended, as Herbert Spencer showed, to cover very many departments of human thought and activity. How is a theist to meet this challenge, and has Christianity, as distinct from other theistic religions, anything special to say? One of the most convincing demonstrations of the strength of the materialistic case is that it wins converts in spite of the fact that (apart from avowed Communists) there are very few militant atheist writers in the Western world today who actively seek to win recruits. Yet recruits there undoubtedly are, many of them from thoroughly Christian homes, who, like me, were utterly perplexed by the problem of evil and, at almost the same time, became aware of the impressive strength of the materialistic case and its explanations of the existence of religious beliefs themselves.

The field of apparent conflict is so vast that it would need a whole library of books to do justice to it. There are certainly weak points in the materialistic case; for example it is probably unsound philosophy to try to base a complete, workable, ethical code solely on the principle of enlightened self-interest. This point alone can be argued endlessly, as could many other weaknesses in both the materialist and the theistic cases. The end-result, for many people, is to create more confusion than ever. For a time, I was thoroughly bewildered by all the detail and the numerous currents and cross-currents of thought. I saw the universe as something resembling a modern painting,

which might have been created as a result of conscious design, but might equally have been the result of throwing a loaded brush at the canvas.

I now believe that the proper reply to the materialist is to *concede him almost his entire case*, weak points and all, rather than attempting to attack them. One simply says, "Yes, I do agree that natural laws sometimes can and do have consequences very closely resembling those to be expected from conscious direction. Yes, I agree that the countless misfits and inefficiencies that are apparent everywhere in the universe, mixed in fantastic ways with what seems to be evidence of brilliant planning and careful thought, could be the consequences of blind laws of nature acting on their own. Yet, even if I admit all this, I can still believe in a God who, whenever He possibly can, works through the laws of Nature instead of interfering with them." Of course, this answer is not, by itself, any reason for believing in a God, unless it is supplemented by something on the positive side, as we shall try to do in other chapters. In the meantime, we take the position that one can concede almost the entire materialistic case based on the natural selection part of the argument and yet still maintain a rational belief in God.

The Christian has, I think, a little more to say about the materialistic counter-attack on religion itself. He might say: "Yes, I agree with your points that every primitive tribe probably develops its own religion, which often has most unpleasant features. The history of the Jews in the Old Testament indeed gives us a very good idea of how a tribal religion might develop, if left to evolve by itself. The result shows very clearly many of the bad features you have mentioned. The account shows further that the attempts attributed to the prophets to direct this development along better lines were on the whole, a failure. They got a hearing, indeed they had plenty to say that is of interest to this day, but, on the whole, they were not believed and were maltreated. What follows? Surely this: *Something else had to be tried*. Christ tells

us all this very clearly in the parable of the vineyard ('they beat one [prophet] and killed another and stoned another'). The Christian endorses all this and believes that, faced with this unsatisfactory situation among His chosen people, God decided to become Man and to live amongst them. In criticizing Christianity what we must look at is the religion that Christ expounded, not at what it became at various bad periods in its history. Granted that at times there has been ground lost, and the Church has certainly not been infallible, what with endless meddling in politics, which I am sure Christ did not intend, ceaseless accretions of legend and dogma and disputes about ceremonies, an attitude explicitly condemned by Christ, and persecutions actually within the Church. Granted also that attempts at reform have sometimes misfired. I find myself able to concede very nearly all the materialist arguments without any real weakening of my own position. I now ask you to listen to my positive arguments, and also put it to you that the history of the Church looks much more like the consequence of a deliberate decision by God than it resembles the growth of a typical tribal religion."

CHAPTER

V

THE THEISTIC CASE IS COMPATIBLE WITH SCIENCE

. . . some mocked, and others said "We will hear thee again of this matter." — *Acts 17, 32.*

WE shall try to show that a reconciliation of the materialistic and the Christian points of view is possible on the basis of one assumption, namely, that *once the universe was created, God has interfered with it as little as possible, but that He can and does intervene from time to time.* This is a threefold assumption and we shall examine each of the points in turn.

"There was some initial act of creation." Whatever theory of the universe the materialist may hold, he is confronted by the fact that the further back he pushes his speculations, to the origin of the earth, of the sun, of our galaxy, of the whole universe, the more scanty the relevant evidence becomes and the smaller grows the prospect of our being able to decide between rival cosmologies. Many seem to reach ideas of 'the beginning' of such a nature that it is clearly fruitless to surmise what might have gone before. For example, we may hold that the universe, as we now know it, was the result of some cataclysmic explosion, or that it evolved by condensation from an almost uniform distribution of matter throughout space. Such assertions differ hardly at all from the description in Genesis of the initial state of affairs as being "without form and void".* A point that is more debatable is the question

* Another view is that some process of creation of matter is going on all the time in the universe as it is today, so that there was no definite beginning; but the creation has still to be explained, whether it is spread out in time or not.

whether there were further acts of creation, for example of the sun and the earth, of life and of man, or whether these were allowed to evolve as a result of the inter-play of natural forces. In the last chapter we have seen that it is quite possible that life arose spontaneously on the earth in the state in which it must have been when it was cool enough for the seas to form. Although some religious groups may disagree, the Christian can quite safely concede the position that life evolved from non-living matter in response to natural forces. The difference between the two statements "Life was created on the earth" and "The earth was originally in such a state that life could evolve from non-living matter" seems, again, to be little more than a difference in the form of words.

The further question, whether life, once started, was permitted to evolve as it would, need not cause serious dissension between the two positions. We have seen that the laws of natural selection, acting by themselves, are capable of bringing about many changes in living forms, ever striving to adapt them more perfectly to an environment that may be itself in the process of change. The effects of such laws acting over enormously long times are, in the end, extremely hard to distinguish from the effects that would have been produced by deliberate acts of creation. Indeed, as we have seen, it is quite surprising how far we can push materialistic explanations of many qualities that used to be held to be decisive evidence of divine creation at all levels. Such qualities are likely to contribute to the survival of a family or race and are therefore likely to be encouraged and fostered by the blind process of natural selection acting over long periods. Here again, it does not seem to matter very much whether we say "These virtues are divine gifts to animals and men", or "The universe, as originally created, was such as to permit the appearance of life, which gradually acquired these qualities as the result of evolutionary changes."

We reject altogether faulty attempts to undermine this position, usually based on inverse probability. Religion tried

to say "Even a single-celled organism is such a marvellously made structure that it could not possibly be the result of mere chance. How much more is this so for an animal?" What is forgotten is that, according to the materialist picture, countless millions of protein-like molecules probably were formed before the self-duplicating property appeared. Then there were probably millions of millions of further failures before anything evolved even remotely resembling the dividing cell as scientists know it today, and, this is the important point, *until a viable cell had evolved and divided frequently enough to endanger the food supply, the environment would remain favourable for further evolutionary attempts*; the debris from previous efforts would simply break down, leaving the environment substantially as it was. No one would seriously maintain that a living cell would evolve out of a mass of miscellaneous protein molecules and amino-acids at the first attempt, but one must realize that such an environment would not have changed very much until at least one attempt had succeeded. Such a situation is wholly unsuitable for discussion on an inverse probability basis simply because the governing factors are so completely unknown. If a carefully controlled series of experiments gives anomalous results, it is possible to estimate the probability that these results happened by accident, and, if this probability is small enough, one is then justified in asserting that some unsuspected factor must be in operation. In such a situation the inverse probability argument can be of great value, but there is always a decided tendency to employ it in vague contexts, when the method can be both useless and misleading. Since we can only make rough guesses about conditions on the earth in the archaean era, we are simply not in a position to rule out theories of the spontaneous origin of life.

"After the creation, God intervenes as little as possible." There are, no doubt, grounds for criticizing this assumption, but it does go a long way towards reconciling the apparently opposed ideas of a loving Father, and of a universe governed to a very large extent by unemotional laws of which the

impact on individuals is often extremely harsh and arbitrary; this leads on to the famous problem of evil that many young people find an almost insuperable obstacle to any theistic philosophy at all. Let us use the analogy of a model-maker, in whose eyes a model is judged very much on the extent to which it is capable of acting like the real thing without outside interference. Everyone prefers a clockwork train to one that has to be pushed by hand, and an electric train, that never needs winding up, to both of these. So with other models, their merit is judged largely on the performance that they give without outside control. Any organization of people is rated good or bad very largely on its capability of functioning efficiently without a constant stream of orders and directions from above.

We have all heard, and laughed at, the phrase 'a system of checks and balances', yet we find something of the kind in many different parts of the universe. Current affairs show us how difficult it can be to get something done when a large number of committees have to be consulted, or some public inquiry has to be held. Yet we know also that attempts at streamlining often lead to fresh confusion, and that it can be quite disastrous to give great power to one individual. We also know that a reasonably stable market is the result of the interplay of a large number of different and conflicting interests and that efforts to control it often fail completely. If we look at an animal or plant community, we again see an apparent stability brought about by fierce struggles, and we often find that interference with the balance of nature, by killing off some species of animal or plant, leads to utterly unexpected and sometimes drastic results. If we look at our bodies, we find that much of their routine working is regulated by our glands and by the influences of the various secretions on the whole mechanism. The output of any one gland is not constant but is regulated by that of others, yet a state of apparent equilibrium is quickly reached and is maintained unless one gland is grossly injured. It is an undoubted fact that

the glands and nerve centres of a healthy body interact in countless ways. The result is much more than a viable organism; we have one that is capable of responding to big changes in the environment and of adapting itself to disasters.

Many more examples of such tendencies could easily be given. It may seem to lead to a great deal of waste to allow much of the universe to run itself on this sort of hit or miss basis, yet the principle has been tried and is found to work. It is entirely possible, in fact it seems probable, that other principles have been tried out in the past and have been found wanting in those situations in which we find checks and balances in use. It is a well-known principle, due to le Chatelier, that systems of this kind react to outside interference in the direction that tends to weaken its effect, in other words that they possess powers of adaptation and compromise which, in very many contexts, can be extremely valuable. The principle is, therefore, something valuable rather than something to be mocked at, though there are certainly cases in which a policy of *laissez-faire* does not work.

Some materialists have argued that, since the human sex drive is far more intense than seems to be rationally required to maintain the race, it cannot be of divine origin. This sort of argument entirely overlooks various important points. First, that it may have been discovered that the checks and balances régime may be the only sound basis on which a community can survive. Indeed, there are some populations which can barely keep pace with natural wastage. If so, it clearly implies that certain tendencies are being held partly in check. Secondly, that no viable community ever gives complete sexual freedom; there are always some rules (some of them strange enough in our eyes) which have the object of diverting some of this drive towards other objects. Thirdly, that in any assembly that works on a system of checks and balances, the dividing line between stability and instability can be very fine; it is almost impossible to say what the effect of strengthening or weakening some of the checks would

actually be, because even a small change can have startling results. (We are familiar with the miserable failures of efforts to predict things like population trends. In technical terms, the equations governing them are unstable, and a small change in the coefficients can have a large ultimate effect.)

The wastage and misfits that confront us everywhere in the universe are, therefore, not the trump card that the materialist thinks them to be. It is *possible* that the system of checks and balances is the most efficient means of maintaining real stability in a large community, and that it has been made use of so often by God for that very reason. It certainly occurs again and again in man-made institutions, the waste inherent in it being counterbalanced by its advantages. The question in Parliament is an extremely expensive thing, involving a great deal of work in finding answers to actual questions, together with much more apparently useless work in collecting answers to questions that might be asked, but are not. Yet there can be little doubt that the community reaps an enormous net benefit from this inherently wasteful check.

Paley's famous comparison of the universe with a watch, and the consequent argument for an intelligent Creator, contained a large element of truth; his fundamental mistake was to compare a completely finished article with something that is, quite obviously, changing rapidly. He would have done better to compare the universe with a factory which continually has to regulate the pace of its output, to introduce new processes and to abandon old ones. Even a factory belonging to a very thriving business would inevitably exhibit some apparent inefficiency and waste to any visitor who made a point of going all through it on one particular day. He might find a new process being tried out and see the first batch go straight to the scrap heap. He might witness a praiseworthy, but futile, attempt to use up an old stock of parts, leading to mysterious difficulties in some quite different part of the plant. He might observe the repercussions of a wrong decision by a line-foreman and yet realize that that decision was the only possible one in the

light of the information available to him. If Paley, on examining his watch, had found a number of parts with no apparent function, others looking unnecessarily clumsy and heavy, the hands fouling one another and some odd chips of metal lying about, he might have been very much less definite in his deduction of an intelligent designer. It would, however, be a valid deduction from such a confused impression that the watch was unfinished. An unbiased study of, say, the human body does leave us with just such confused and conflicting impressions, as do studies of many other aspects of the universe. A firm that was go-ahead would try out new processes more frequently than one that was conservative. This very fact might lead a casual visitor to think that the production lines of the former firm were less integrated and worse organized than those of the latter.

Another extremely apt simile can be suggested. Stanley Jones in his book *Christ and Human Suffering*, likens our view of the universe to the impression that would be gained by someone who was watching the weaving of a carpet, or the working of a tapestry, from the wrong side. What he saw might look like a jumble of threads of many colours, an abundance of knots, with here and there some semblance of a pattern, but with large areas of apparent confusion in between the definitely recognizable features. As a Christian he claims that, if we could but see the right side, the whole splendour of the pattern would become apparent to us at once. The atheist replies: "That is all very well, but how do we know that there is a pattern there at all?" This simile might have been carried further. To test the theory that there is a pattern, it would be possible to examine small bits of it from the wrong side, and it would be reasonable to choose those bits that showed most evidence of order, in order to try to find out something about the pattern and stitch that the weaver was using. Armed with this provisional knowledge, one might then try to find some interpretation of those parts of the pattern that seemed to show more confusion, using the rules already found both to

try to infer what the hidden right side was like, and to try to see the manner in which neighbouring parts of the pattern were fitting together.

This sort of approach closely parallels the study of the universe, in all its aspects, using the scientific method. Pieces of information are examined one by one, possible interpretations are proposed and continually checked, and, from time to time, attempts are made to fit smaller pieces together in the manner of a jig-saw puzzle. It is abundantly clear that this sort of approach can never finally prove or disprove the existence of a hidden plan. It is possible to produce ordered patterns out of complete randomness, such as pebbles on a beach, if one works at it long enough; equally a complete failure to find a pattern in something that is not a finished article, but is still in the process of being made is no real proof that it is not there; it may be that the searcher is working on completely wrong lines; he may be trying to decode a cipher by a wrong method.

It is imperative that we should make some effort to understand these problems, particularly the problem of evil, because it is such a stumbling-block to so many young people, as they gradually hear more and more about the world. Indeed, the Old Testament itself contains countless instances of extremely severe punishments for small offences. Not only David, but all his people were severely punished because he insisted on taking a census. The children who were rude to Elisha were torn by she-bears. The good and successful king Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for the irregularity of burning incense in the temple instead of leaving it to the priest. The two captains and their fifties who addressed Elijah disrespectfully were burnt up. Jeroboam was punished for setting up shrines at a time when it must have been politically impossible for him to go to Jerusalem to worship. Equally, we hear of wicked kings like Manasseh being let off very lightly. Jesus was well aware of the difficulties and perplexities that the apparent suffering of the righteous and prosperity of the wicked must

have caused to simple-minded folk in His audiences. Above all, the whole Jewish nation were smarting under the recent Roman conquest, and their learned men must have been looking back over their national history of repeated ruin with amazement and perplexity that such things could befall God's chosen people. What could it all mean?

Some shrewd utterances of Jesus on this matter are actually on record; for example, that the people on whom the tower of Siloam fell were not necessarily extra wicked, that rain falls equally on the just and the unjust without discrimination. These clearly show that He was well aware that such difficulties have always existed in the minds of devout people. One very clear lesson seems to emerge from His recorded sayings, namely, the utter impracticability of ordering an actual world in such a way that each individual act is promptly followed by the appropriate rewards and punishments.* Indeed, He expressly warns the world that strife and injustice are likely to continue for a very long time, perhaps right up till the last trump. At the same time, He warns the evil-doer that retribution may easily come "on a day that he looketh not for Him and at an hour that he is not aware of", perhaps, that is, at his moment of apparent triumph. We also have the well-known instructions on how the Christian is to react to unjust treatment, together with shrewd warnings about what anyone may expect if he has an unpopular point of view to put forward.

The really interesting point is that Jesus spoke of all these things as a matter of course, and never suggested that the spreading of the Gospel all over the world would be followed by Utopia. There also seem to have been some very deep ideas about the proper relationships between Christians and people with influence, money and power. Fragments such as those

* In any large organization of people, clan, factory, family or nation, some acts are promptly followed by appropriate consequences, but there is always some elasticity, and occasions arise when a good administrator will flout the rules, or introduce makeshift arrangements, to tide over some difficulty.

about mammon and the use to be made of it and the famous answer to the question about tribute to Caesar evidently dealt with this most important point, but, in the form in which we have them, they are extremely difficult to interpret. The same is true of the difficult parable of the unjust steward, which has been interpreted in countless ways, but it quite obviously was mainly concerned with the proper relationships between Christians and the worldly-wise.

Such passages, obscure, fragmentary, and perhaps garbled or out of context, are actually extremely strong evidence for the substantial genuineness of the whole record. Again and again we hear of even the Apostles missing the whole point of a saying or action of Jesus. What is more natural than that the disciples should later on endeavour to preserve some partly understood sayings of the Master, realizing that some very profound idea was involved and trying to remember the exact words and context in the hope that posterity could interpret them better? And what seems more unlikely than that a forger would invent obscure, ambiguous passages or strange fragments and apparent paradoxes for insertion into what was claimed to be a divinely inspired record? We heartily wish that we had these passages in a clearer form, but at least they help us to believe in the substantial accuracy of the whole, even if they do nothing else. (There are other passages, like the Sermon on the Mount, that serve both purposes, both authenticating the record and giving clear teaching on how to live. The ideas here are so simple, yet so profound, so apparently daring yet, as listeners must have realized on reflection, so fundamentally true, that they could hardly have been invented except by someone of very great genius indeed.)

Let us try to carry on this idea, put before us so plainly by Jesus, that it is simply not possible, even if it were desirable, to run a world on slot-machine lines, in which prayers and good deeds are automatically followed by gifts and rewards. Let us make a tremendous effort of the imagination, and try to realize some of the problems that must confront any divine

Being in possession of great power. To get the remotest conception of such problems we must use analogies like the model-maker and the factory which are probably poor and imperfect in the extreme, and we have to use the analogy since it is the only instrument of thought we have that is capable of dealing with such matters at all. Before attempting to do this we have to try to straighten out our ideas about omnipotence. Apart altogether from the ridiculous logical quibbles on the lines of "Mummie, can God make a stone so heavy that He can't lift it?", it is, I think, admitted by nearly all theologians and philosophers that some limitations on divine power must exist. For example, few serious thinkers would claim for God power to alter the past. (This comes out very clearly in the story of the Fall. Man had acquired certain knowledge, and there was nothing for it but to leave him to suffer the consequences. Blotting out that knowledge or creating an entirely fresh race of men would merely have postponed the fundamental problem.) Again, I do not imagine that modern thinkers would claim that God knows the future down to the last detail, though it seems certain that He has very detailed knowledge of the probable ways in which various kinds of situation develop. This He could have without actually knowing how, for example, a certain individual was going to react to a certain temptation. In a word, to make the universe intelligible at all we have to accept some limitations of divine power. The assumption of complete omnipotence poses many more problems than it solves.

This idea of great divine power with some limitations fits in very well with what we know about the life and miracles of Jesus. Those rationalists who would have it that Jesus was nothing more than a rather successful faith-healer are faced with a record of miracles of many kinds, far outweighing anything that is ever claimed for any earthly saint or shrine (except perhaps the Apostles). Even if we reject the supernatural miracles like the feeding of the five thousand as pure inventions (though one wonders what possible motive there

could be for inventing such stories) and restrict ourselves to the healings, and make every imaginable concession to the rationalist point of view (for example, that what the Bible calls leprosy might well not have been true leprosy at all or that skin diseases are particularly suited to treatment by psychological means), we are still confronted with something quite stupendous. The possibility that the Gospel record has been significantly exaggerated or otherwise tampered with has often been put forward, but can be quickly dismissed. In the first place, it is clear that a large number of converts were made as a direct result of the miracles. In the second place, if there had been any significant misreporting of the facts, such as the systematic suppression of failures, this circumstance would certainly have been seized upon by the opponents of Christianity and used as a political weapon of attack during some of the bitter persecutions of the Church. If there had ever been any justification for the cry that the Nazarene sect worked with falsified documents, it is incredible that some record of it would not be preserved by contemporary writers, many of them bitter opponents of Christianity themselves. There remains only the possibility that, down the centuries, the record may have been gradually tampered with by copyists. This possibility has been thoroughly examined by scholars, and it is clear that we are in possession of the Epistles and Gospels substantially as they were originally written, the documentary evidence being far better than that for the text of Caesar or Livy. (See Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?*)

We never actually hear of any failure to make a cure, but there are some interesting sidelights which do suggest that there were some definite limitations on the power to heal together with some reluctance to use it. For example, either the patient, or someone acting on his behalf, apparently had to be in a proper state of mind (see Mark vi. 5, 6, "He could do no mighty works . . . because of their unbelief"). Sometimes we hear of a gradual cure, taking place in stages. The

epileptic boy baffled the disciples and had two fits in Jesus' own presence. It looks as if there was a severe struggle here. Probably the Gadarene demoniac also entailed some conflict, though it is hard to know what we can make of the story of a pact with the legion of devils, who were permitted to enter the herd of swine. Again, we hear of seven devils having been cast out of Mary Magdalene, which probably means that several separate acts of healing took place. All this compares very favourably with modern medicine; the successful treatment of epilepsy still requires many years of constant medical care. Even a mild skin disease usually requires at least a week of treatment. Again, the healing of the blind and deaf shows powers that far exceed anything that a modern faith-healer can claim. It is true that we do occasionally hear of most extraordinary cures of cases given up by doctors, at Lourdes, the facts about some of which are attested by competent medical men; but there are also an enormous number of failures. What stands out in the Gospel record is that we never hear of anyone who specifically asked for such help failing to get it (though we do hear of a Gentile woman having to plead very eloquently). The rationalist attempt to water down the record and then to explain what is left as faith-healing and folk-medicine simply will not do. The only reasonably consistent positions that are open to him are to admit the substantial accuracy of the record, or else to deny its authenticity altogether.

The same picture of enormously great, but not unlimited, powers also fits in well with many other features of the life of Jesus, for example the temptations and the agony in Gethsemane. He told us quite clearly that He had certain powers that He did not intend to use, such as summoning angels to disperse the crowd trying to arrest Him. It is not really a very long step from this to the idea that God does not use all the powers that He may have. For example, He may deliberately refrain from knowing the future if He wishes to carry out some great test of an individual or group of people,

or to avoid the undoubted difficulties that would face a world in which nearly everything was predestined.

Let us now look a little more closely at some of the analogies we have already mentioned, such as the watch, the model-maker, the factory, and to these one might add some typical group of people such as a family or tribe which has to manage some or all of its own affairs. If we consider them a little, it is possible to see some reasons why even a very powerful God would be reluctant to intervene in human affairs. First, the excellence of something like a watch is very largely judged by the extent to which it will continue to work satisfactorily without attention, and a watch that needed continual adjustment would be considered very unsatisfactory. Furthermore, if it ever proves possible to make a watch that cleans itself automatically, this will probably be thought to be better than watches are now. We have already mentioned a working model such as a toy train. This is, as we have seen, judged very much by the extent to which it will go through its paces, stopping and starting like the real thing, without obvious control from outside. A model that continually had to be replaced on the rails would be thought to be very bad. A factory belonging to a thriving firm might be expected to be continually trying out new processes, but this very fact would give the outward appearance of some waste, redundancy and inefficiency.

We can push this analogy further. The efficiency of a manager would be judged by many criteria apart from the profits he made for his firm. A manager would be considered bad if he were continually wandering round the shops fussing about minor details, and would be considered good if he were capable of keeping his departments running smoothly without constant interference from above. On the other hand, he would also be considered bad if he relied blindly on his assistants and had no first-hand knowledge at all of what was going on. Very much the same thing could be said about an Army officer or the head of a tribe or clan. He would be considered

bad if he became remote and unknown to those under him and had no proper personal contact, but he would also be considered a poor head if he were unable to keep things running smoothly without constantly inflicting penalties. The head of a clan who refused ever to help his poor relations would be regarded with contempt, but so also would one who listened to every sob story. It is, quite simply, *not possible* to run any large organization in such a way that grievances are immediately dealt with and equitable rewards and punishments are promptly handed out, and the reasons for everything are explained in detail to all.

These analogies are extremely rough, but they do help us to visualize in a very dim and imperfect way the sort of problems that would confront any God of great power when men ask for help. Those who pray and seem to get no answer are disappointed and may even become disbelievers, but they very often fail to stop and think of possible reasons for their apparent failures to get help. One of our prayers may be a completely reasonable request, but also it may be quite impossible to grant it without messing up someone else's life. We shall not labour the oft-made point that character often benefits from suffering, which may be a blessing in disguise or a means of doing good, because any reader of Victorian literature will be thoroughly weary of it. The book of Job and the Gospels tell us quite clearly that tests and temptations must often be our lot. Here again some of our analogies help a little. A person about to be offered a new and better job may first be subjected, without his knowledge, to a probationary period, or may be deliberately given a number of difficult problems to handle. Someone contemplating becoming a missionary or nurse may, at the start, be deliberately subjected to the unpleasant parts of the job to make sure that he or she is in earnest. In such cases, mitigating the unpleasantnesses might well have a bad result. Indeed, there are so many reasons why it may not be possible, or expedient, to answer a prayer at once, that it is really not so surprising that

we often seem to fail to get an answer, or that a prayer often seems to be answered in a way quite different from what we might expect.

The materialist is likely to reply to this: "Just why does God let things get into such complicated messes?" If he reads history, he might add further: "Why are near-maniacs like Tamerlane, Ivan the Terrible, Marat and Hitler permitted to prosper and sacrifice lives by the thousand if there is a God who has power to strike such people down? Why were such frightful wickednesses as the Inquisition and the Thirty Years War ever allowed in the name of Christianity? What about the Lord's chosen people? Why did they always suffer such terrible retribution for their sins?" These questions are extremely hard to answer, but they are so terribly important that we must try. Again, by using some analogies, we can get some dim ideas on what the answer may be. At the risk of seeming to be blasphemous we must try to visualize what courses might be open to God, should He decide to intervene in world affairs. The Bible gives us some very broad hints that, even if such a decision has been made, it may be extremely difficult to carry out. In the story of the temptation, we hear that Jesus rejected the idea of doing a spectacular miracle before all Jerusalem, such as leaping down from the temple. Any converts so gained would have been won by fear rather than by love and the desire to serve their fellow men. As another example, in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the suggestion that Lazarus be allowed to rise from the dead as a warning to Dives' brothers, is rejected. It is implied that such an event would be explained away, and it is all too easily seen how this might be done. "Poor fellow, he must have fallen into a trance and have been buried prematurely. As a result, his mind became unhinged, and he has been ranting about hell-fire ever since. . . ." We are also reminded of the comparative failure of the prophets. Even though they were often provided with very convincing credentials, and their sincerity and the divine origin of their messages seem to have been largely

accepted, we still hear of the melancholy sequence of relapses into idolatry, punishment and temporary reform. We see nations making the most elementary mistakes today, yet it is far from obvious how outside influences could stop them.

This does suggest one answer to the very puzzling question: Why does not God speak to His peoples in ways that they cannot ignore? Later on, we shall suggest some evidence that He sometimes does just this to individuals, but that it is something that happens very seldom. Moreover, there certainly were situations in history in which no messages to individuals would have been of any avail. Consider, for example, events like the French and Russian revolutions, themselves the horrible aftermaths of the too long neglect of undoubted injustices. Or again, what is to be done about a nation that has been goaded into war fever as the result of the constant fanning of petty grievances? When things have gone beyond a certain point, the striking down of the original rabble-rousers might only make matters worse (for example, the death of Nero did not result in any immediate improvement in the situation of the Roman Empire). In such situations no messages to individuals are likely to have the slightest restraining effect and the removal of demented but popular leaders might easily make matters worse. What possibilities remain? God might stage a demonstration on such a scale, and to so large a number of people, that it could not be ignored or explained away. He might permit the frenzied nation to find out by bitter experience that Valhalla or Utopia is not going to be the result of their efforts. There are grave objections to both of these courses, but they both have their advantages, and the writer believes that they have both been tried.

The analogies that we brought out a little while ago do help us to see that a community continually subjected to large-scale divine demonstrations would be completely overawed, and the tendency would be for it to have no will of its own at all, so that it would hardly differ from a machine, or would be ruled by fear. Therefore the analogies of the model, the

factory and the tribe seem to show that no healthy development would be possible if such demonstrations were used often. There is evidence that they do sometimes occur. Even if we reject all the Biblical stories of large-scale demonstrations (for example, the plagues of Egypt or Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal) as complete folk-lore, there are episodes from more recent history, such as the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine, or the Reformation, the effects of which were so startling that it is extremely tempting to attribute them to divine inspiration.

Still more convincing is the episode of Joan of Arc. Many of the facts can be whittled away by the sceptics. It is possible to argue that her sudden appearance on the scene gave French morale just the boost it needed at that time. It is also extremely likely that she had good military advisers. What does seem almost impossible to explain away is that before she was allowed to see the Dauphin at all, she was examined by a panel of learned doctors. These men would have been anything but favourably disposed to the idea that she was divinely inspired. Although they believed in God, on this occasion they would have been inclined to look for the very explanations of her actions that the atheist would like to put forward today, such as religious mania or her use as a political pawn. Any explanations on the basis of her being a religious prodigy or of her perhaps having been coached to give the proper answers seem completely impossible, as the panel, being trained in all the subtleties of philosophy and rhetoric, would have instantly detected any evidence of fraud or delusions. This would be a valid, and extremely powerful argument even if we did not possess the record of these proceedings. Actually we do have a record of some of her answers, always simple and to the point. How can we explain her success in convincing shrewd and hard-headed clerics of her genuineness otherwise than by crediting her with some divine inspiration? It is completely inappropriate to try to explain these facts by invoking some of the stock materialist arguments about

the possibility of the effects of personal magnetism, mass hypnotism, telepathy or deliberate fraud which make it so difficult to come to definite conclusions about the genuineness of spiritualistic séances. (However damaging these arguments may be to the spiritualistic position, they are simply not relevant at all in our present context.) It is perhaps possible to invoke telepathy as an explanation of the fact that Joan apparently received personal messages that enabled her to convince the Dauphin himself of her genuineness, but her success with the doctors cannot be explained in such ways.

It is hard to imagine any way in which God could have staged a more convincing mass demonstration of His power. If we once admit this, all the other facts fall into line — Joan's almost miraculous exploits, her constant revelations that she was doing it all against her will and would much rather go home, and the final undoubted fact that her capture and burning were quickly followed by the utter defeat of the English in France.* We read in the Old Testament of other mass demonstrations of great power, such as some of the episodes in the book of Judges and Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal. Equally we have several instances in the New Testament of such occurrences, such as the feeding of the five thousand. It is easy to argue that the accounts are exaggerated, and some of them probably are, but what are we to make of the fact that at least one such episode occurred in historical times and is thoroughly well authenticated? It is a most sobering thought that, if such an episode had occurred in classical or Biblical times, it would almost certainly have been described as legend, the details being so incredible.

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question: Why are certain wicked and oppressive forms of government sometimes permitted to go on for so long? And, if they are overthrown, why is the result often an even nastier mess? We may reply to this sort of question on two lines. First, for reasons that we have tried to indicate by our analogies, God may be really reluctant to interfere with a nation too often. Secondly, even if He is willing, what practical steps are open to Him? A form of government that survives for any length of time must be in some ways suited to its community and it may not be appropriate to change it (unless it collapses, in which case its unsuitability becomes obvious to everyone) unless and until the community has been brought to see that something better or more efficient may be possible. Changes may come about in various ways, such as the influence of writers and reformers like Dickens, General Booth or Lloyd George, who gradually got nineteenth-century England to see that everything was not wonderful and perfect, and that certain bad features, such as homeless, starving men, sleeping in the streets, were not necessary evils.

We might even say that a type of government stands or falls according to its workability and its power to incorporate reforms and to adapt itself to changing conditions. As an illustration of this we have an extremely illuminating episode in the Bible. The people of Israel were advised not to have a king, and the disadvantages were pointed out in detail by their beloved leader Samuel. Nevertheless, they persisted in their request and were granted their king, but he soon proved unsatisfactory and had to be replaced. After the very successful and glorious reign of David, fresh troubles began in the next reign, and Israel and Judah suffered from almost every type of bad ruler, exactly as Samuel had warned.

Here again there is a lesson for us. The only practical way in which a nation can learn about the merits and demerits of various forms of government is to try some of them out in practice, and much of recorded history describes various nations doing just this. It has often been a long and painful

process for a nation to find a form of government that suits it moderately well, and it is sometimes extremely hard to see any fairness or justice in the fact that some nations such as the Greek city states or the Roman and British empires have been in a position to carry out such experiments under relatively sheltered conditions for centuries at a time, while others, such as Bohemia, have had very few such opportunities because of the constant menace of foreign domination. (Much of the later history of Israel and Judah shows that they too became mere pawns in the hands of larger nations.) Nevertheless, we can make a valid point by saying that there is really no way in which a Deity could teach a nation what is the best form of government for it, other than by permitting it to experiment. (No form of government has ever been abandoned simply because of a theoretical proof of its unworkability.) On the other hand, probably no new nation is left to work out its own salvation without any help at all. The guidance from recorded history has nearly always been available and all the great religious leaders, such as Moses, Buddha, Lao-tze, Confucius, Jesus and Mahomet have had plenty to say about the principles of government, and their direct and indirect influence on their various civilizations has been profound and lasting in this respect. Much history can be interpreted in this sort of way, in which we think of God as arriving at some compromise between intervening too much, and thus overawing His peoples, and intervening only occasionally, leaving every nation to lie on the bed that it has made. As another analogy, very rough but perhaps helpful, we may cite the recalcitrant child, who disobeys its parents and falls out of a tree and hurts itself severely. This is a far better way of learning that tree climbing requires care than having to listen to parental exhortations on the theme.

Another intrinsic difficulty that would face any God who was trying to influence a community is the very fact that it is a community, so that anything that is done to influence just one member, family or class inevitably affects a large number

of others. For example, the sending of a thief to prison may easily result in an entirely innocent family suffering great hardships, and the repercussions of these may produce fresh criminals. On the other hand, an ill-judged display of clemency may have equally unpleasant results. Here, again, the analogy of the watch is helpful. The mechanism may contain a piece of dirt that it is desirable to remove, but it may not be possible to do this without taking the entire watch to pieces. In these circumstances, it may well be expedient to leave the dirt in, or to content ourselves with removing only a portion of it. Administrators often use the phrase 'doing rough justice', by which they mean bringing about some reform in a community in a way that is practicable but is acknowledged to lead to some anomalies which are, they hope, not too extreme or too numerous. Attempts to remove all of these might well result in something too cumbersome to be workable.

We have seen the difficulties that would arise if a community were governed by frequent divine demonstrations, although this method does seem to be resorted to occasionally, and we can also see that compromises have to be made in governing a closely knit community. What other possibilities remain open? God has still the resource of speaking to a community through individuals. There is nothing strange or peculiar in the idea that only certain individuals are ever so chosen. No one is surprised at the undoubted fact that gifts like leadership and artistic and intellectual abilities differ greatly. There do seem to be several of very definite characteristics of divine inspiration of individuals, as far as one can judge this by comparing accounts that various people have given of their experiences. Such evidence is of a kind that is extremely difficult to analyse in a scientific manner, since it is not reproducible, and the only verification we have consists of the comparison of the accounts people give, and a study of their lives. We may divide people up into several groups according to the types of experience that they have had.

First, we have people like the Biblical prophets, the Apostles, particularly St. Paul, some at least of the early leaders of the Church, for example St. Ambrose and, in more modern times, Joan of Arc, Luther and John Bunyan. Similar experiences have also come to non-Christians, for example Buddha and Mahomet. The type of experiences that befell all these people seem to have had several characteristics in common. In the first place, it is always so intense and so convincing that it produces absolutely burning conviction in the individual, and, besides bringing about a complete change in his mode of life, also gives him the power of convincing others of the divine origin of his message. This may happen in all sorts of ways, e.g. from the nature of the message itself or from the way in which it is transmitted. In John Bunyan's case one is led to ask: By what solely human means could he have collected his material, his former life having been what it was? Perhaps the best-known instance of this was the conversion of St. Paul, which occurred when he was actually on his way to Damascus to try to wipe out the Church there. His behaviour afterwards was such that it carried complete conviction to people who knew him. We have already mentioned that Joan of Arc managed to convince a religious tribunal (besides many others) of the divine origin of her message, though its members would have been thoroughly opposed to such an idea. Another striking instance is that of Jeremiah. During the final stages of the siege of Jerusalem, he seems to have convinced some kind of tribunal of the genuineness of his message, even though it was not believed and feelings against him must have run exceedingly high.

Another rather interesting fact about these revelations is that they have often come to quite ordinary people. The Apostles were unlearned and ignorant men, and similar descriptions could have been applied to Bunyan and Joan of Arc. One has only to read some of the available accounts of some of these happenings, for example the calls of Isaiah and Ezekiel, to realize how intense, and yet how strange and

fantastic, these experiences must have been, and how impossible it would be for anyone to disobey such a message. Again, it is not at all surprising to find, as indeed we seem to, that this drastic approach to the individual has not been used very often in the history of the world. The objections to a freer use of it are much the same as apply to the giving of a sign. Repeated too often, such an approach would completely overawe the community in which it was used.

A less intense kind of experience seems to befall a much larger number of people who are often described as dedicated. Such people carry out their job, whatever it may be, the Church, medicine or nursing, teaching, research, social work, pacifism, missionary work, or the Salvation Army, with little or no regard for the material rewards that it brings them. Some will endure very great hardships and risks rather than give up their chosen work; others are willing to endure opprobrium and misunderstanding from their fellow men as a result of the work they do. By no means all of such people believe in God, for example many research scientists and social workers do not, and many of those who do are tortured by grave doubts, and find Christian teaching, with its constant exhortations to resort to prayer and to lead a better life, rather unhelpful. When prayers constantly seem to be unanswered and to lead them to no deeper understanding of philosophical matters nor to any sense of closer communication with God, they become discouraged. They say, "We are capable of faith, we believe in our jobs, but how can we be expected to have a real, live, religious faith when we get no real revelation?" Or again, "I agree with you that if you only have faith in God, difficulties about the universe disappear — if you are happy this way well and good, but why should I have the faith in the first place?"

It is strange, but true, that dedicated people seldom discuss amongst themselves the nature of the forces that drive them on; between one another the existence of these forces

is taken for granted. You hardly ever hear researchers or missionaries discussing *why* they work; nearly always it is *how* they work. It seems to be an extremely difficult matter to convey this inspiration to an outsider, or even to give him the remotest conception of it. A scientist thoroughly in love with his subject often makes a sad hash of a talk to a lay audience. The efforts of missionaries or Salvation Army or temperance workers to inspire enthusiasm are often unbearably dull to an outsider, and can even border on the ludicrous or pathetic. One can say that enthusiasm for a cause, and the ability to pass this enthusiasm on to others very often do not go together. It is quite possible that such people are divinely inspired, even though they do not realize it consciously.

The most numerous class in any society probably consists of people who are not dedicated in the sense that they love their work for its own sake, but merely regard it as a means to some end such as gaining a livelihood, with some leisure and amusements, and with all the other possible objectives such as gaining power and influence. Naturally, it is almost impossible to draw any sharp distinction between the daily-breader and the dedicated person, and one gets borderline cases, such as a person who works at a routine job, but who runs the local boys' club in a spirit of dedication to the ideal of improving society. It is probably to this very numerous group of people who are good citizens, but who are not fortunate enough to see a vocation in their job that the Christian message is mainly addressed. The Apostles seem to have been a typical cross-section of society. One of the central themes is that there is almost no work, no matter how lowly or humble, which cannot be done better and with more satisfaction if it is lifted to the level of a vocation.

A servant with this clause,
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine. (*George Herbert*)

May not the urge to do good be of divine origin, even though the person does not consciously realize the fact?

Lastly, we have the class of social misfits, ranging from people who consciously exploit their fellow men in various ways from outright violence to subtle swindling. Of these it can only be said that the Christian message cannot begin to work without repentance. It is probably one of the most satisfying things in the world to be endowed with qualities that enable one to bring about such repentance, and such a one can realize what Jesus meant when He spoke of the "joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth". In a rather different class we have people who imagine themselves to be dedicated, but are too much out of tune with society. We all know the harmless cranks, such as the person who has devised the perfect system of taxation, the hot gosseller, the inveterate writer of letters to the papers. Society can well afford to maintain such people with amused tolerance, resorting to the mental home only in extreme cases, even though the real crank uses up most of his energy on his pet obsession and is of very little actual help to society. Given certain circumstances, cranks have developed from harmless lunatics into deadly menaces, and one of the most difficult things for a Christian to understand is why, for example, Hitler was allowed so much freedom to push to their logical conclusions his insane beliefs about the Jewish menace and the superiority of the German race. Why does not God quietly remove such people before they can do serious damage? If circumstances had been slightly different, Hitler might never have become more than a comparatively harmless tub-thumper, in which case he would have been tolerated, but why was he not removed (or converted like St. Paul) before he became such a dreadful scourge?

In this chapter we have tried out the scientific method. The initial hypothesis (Paley's watch) is examined and found wanting. A slight modification of it leads to very much improved agreement with experience and some very interesting consequences of it are traced. Finally, we find that there are

still some facts hard to interpret on the modified hypothesis, and it is only right to record this. It is hard to explain why devoted servants of God are sometimes allowed to die slowly of incurable diseases. A scientist nearly always finds some difficulties about his theories, but he thinks that they are worth promulgating if they represent some advance on previous knowledge. It would never do to wait until all possible objections had been disposed of.

In developing our theory, we have tacitly assumed that God is, in some senses, 'subject to time' in the sort of ways that we are, in particular that the past cannot be altered and that the speeds of certain natural processes, e.g. growth, evolution and progress, cannot be greatly changed. This assumption by no means excludes possibilities that God's mind may be related to time in ways quite incomprehensible to us, as some theologians suggest. We have not discussed such suggestions, as it is not easy to deduce observable or verifiable consequences from them. Hence we cannot 'decide' for or against them.

It does seem quite likely that concepts like 'before' and 'after' and 'action at a distance' will eventually have to be re-examined. The evidence for precognition, telepathy and other odd processes is steadily piling up. Such happenings just do not fit in with some of our fundamental concepts in their present state. This accounts for the sceptical attitude of many scientists. Their actor friends tell them that 'audience reaction' is a very real thing, but it is very hard to describe in words, so the scientist tends to ignore it.

CHAPTER

VI

WHERE DOES THE CONFLICT OCCUR?

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. — *Matthew 5, 10.*

SO far we have looked mainly at aspects of the universe that seem to be explicable almost equally well on either a theistic or a materialistic basis. This body of equivocal evidence has been found to be far larger than is often realized, and this is one of the reasons why so many people are impressed with the strength of the materialist case. In order to decide between the two we must concentrate on those areas where there seems to be definite disagreement between the two standpoints. The experience of science tells us that this approach is likely to be much more fruitful than continually mulling over facts that seem to be explicable almost equally well on the basis of either approach.

One of the most important differences seems to lie between the two conceptions of progress. The struggle for survival does imply constant adaptations of a race to its environment, and, amongst other things, this does lead to the emergence and perpetuation of certain moral principles. However, one lesson that the evolution of animals teaches us is that there are quite definite limits to its potentialities. When a species has exhausted its evolutionary potential, in the sense that its height, weight and other characteristics have been optimised as much as possible, it usually happens that evolutionary changes practically cease. The species may, by this time, have established itself as successful, or it may prove incapable of adjusting itself to further changes in environment and die out. The giant

reptiles are the classic example of the latter occurrence, while the former is exemplified by the famous fish coelocanth, which completed its evolution aeons ago, yet has survived practically unchanged to this day. So with human beings. The struggle for existence has certainly improved our morals and behaviour up to a certain point, but there is no particular reason for expecting any further spectacular improvement once the survival of mankind is assured. Humanists like Julian Huxley can thus offer only a rather jejune doctrine of progress; something like swimming with, rather than against, the evolutionary stream. This seems to mean that the individual must do his best to conform with, rather than to obstruct, the further evolutionary changes in society that may occur as the result of our continual advances in knowledge. By doing his best to help the progress of the trends he discerns, it is held that the individual is led to a fuller and more satisfying life than if he tries to oppose them. In short, "Be a yes-man!"

The Christian outlook is almost diametrically opposed to such teaching, which seems, to the Christian, to be akin to complacency and drift. Jesus was preaching to a nation that had attained a relatively high standard of culture and morals, partly as a direct result of a long struggle against adversity, partly as a result of guidance from the prophets and under the influence of traditions built up by those who had followed and interpreted them. Jesus, and afterwards St. Paul, declared quite plainly that all this was no more than a good beginning, and that the time had come for a further step forwards. The best life, which would hardly ever be an easy one, would be devoted to strenuous efforts to improve behaviour and morals still further. On no account were the disciples to muddle along relying on old traditions, but were to strive continually to break new ground. Traditions and evolutionary influences were, by themselves, much too weak to bring about the required improvement, and it would lead straight to disaster to rely on them alone. It was also quite clearly recognized that the good Christian life would impose stresses beyond the

capacity of human beings to bear alone, so the disciples, besides helping one another, were to rely on grace or divine inspiration when it came, and to seek diligently for it when it did not. In fact the New Testament is full of accounts of the methods that we have looked at in an earlier chapter (p. 73), by which God might reasonably influence people without destroying their freedom of choice. We are told of divine demonstrations, conscious inspiration of certain individuals, and also, very probably, of cases of individuals being influenced without their being directly aware of it.

Looking at society today, can we decide between these two viewpoints? Can we detect any evidence of inspiration of certain individuals that cannot be explained on a purely evolutionary basis? I think it is clear that we can. Society contains, and has always contained, altruistic people who will struggle for an ideal or principle, even though it represents a considerable departure from the norm, is out of tune with the times, and even though it may result in much loss or suffering for the individuals concerned. We can all name people who are prepared to give up glittering careers for the sake of a principle, or who will not invest in profitable trades that they consider wrong. There can be little doubt that the presence of such people improves the general moral level of society very considerably; they are nearly always respected even by people who disagree completely with their cherished beliefs. On the other hand, the yes-man very often has a successful career, but it seldom fails to earn him contempt. If we think that the structure of society is conditioned solely by tradition and by forces resembling natural selection, we should expect altruistic people to damage their chances of survival appreciably, and to incur the contempt or pity of their fellow men. In a very few generations, families showing such tendencies would be expected to die out, or to drop to positions of little influence, whereas nothing of the kind seems to have occurred. If we think that such people are divinely inspired, possibly without being consciously aware of it, their continual presence

in and influence upon society becomes much more intelligible.

This suggestion that people can be divinely influenced via their unconscious may seem strange, but it is, in fact, quite consistent with various psychological studies that have been made of the creative activities of scientists, writers and artists, which prove beyond all doubt the great part played by the unconscious mind. Some even speak of being in a trance-like state while actually working, while others report long hours of conscious effort that apparently leads nowhere at all, but is later followed by a key idea. Such ideas well up from the unconscious, but would not have come without the preliminary conscious effort. This picture is strikingly analogous to the Christian concept of struggle and prayer, followed, at a lesser or greater interval, by the solution of the difficulty.

Another very important difference between the two pictures concerns the attitude to the miraculous. Most materialists hold that scientific laws admit of no important exceptions; that such concepts as cause and effect, before and after, can be validly used in nearly all situations of practical interest. (They admit the theoretical limitations imposed on these simple concepts by the requirements of thermodynamics, relativity, and quantum mechanics, but they hold, in the author's opinion rightly, that such limitations are mainly for experts, and that the use of such concepts is fully justified in the everyday world.) Confronted with the New Testament record, and with the fact that theories such as that Jesus was a purely legendary figure have been carefully examined and found wanting, they have to resort to various naturalistic explanations for the presence of so many miracle stories in the narrative. Now it is quite true that the presence of *some* of the stories can perhaps be accounted for by such factors as the Jewish attitude to old prophecies and the far-fetched interpretations of them which they sometimes made, or the long interval that elapsed before the Gospels were written down, or the universal love of a tall story. In short, the view is that the miracle stories are exaggerated or garbled accounts of events

capable of naturalistic explanations such as faith-healing.

There are two very serious objections to this view. In the first place, even if one can succeed in explaining away all the miracles, one then arrives at the conclusion that a poor village carpenter, much of whose teaching must have been unintelligible to the simple country folk He talked to, succeeded nevertheless in convincing them that He was the Messiah by exhibiting some faith-healing. It is indeed true that the Messiah was expected for quite a variety of reasons. Anyone claiming to be the Messiah would, no doubt, have got a hearing; in fact there certainly were other claimants at various times. What does seem quite incredible is that any such claimant could have founded a world-wide movement on so slender a basis without producing some extremely convincing credentials. The second objection is that there is a hard core of miracle stories that are extremely difficult to write off in any of the above ways. A good example is the healing of the man blind from birth (John ix). If we grant the central fact, the whole of the rest of the narrative has a really authentic ring, the utter consternation of the Jews, their repeated interrogation of witnesses, the man himself and his parents, the man's growing exasperation at their attitude, and Jesus' final humorous yet stinging rebuke, showing what fools the Jews had made of themselves. If we deny the central fact, the entire chapter must be fabrication from start to finish.

If one takes such a view, this chapter appears to be a remarkably fine piece of dramatic writing for an old man, probably in his nineties! The process of watering down the narrative until we can arrive at a naturalistic explanation just does not seem to be possible in this case. The minimum fact that is required to give point to the rest of the narrative is that a man was healed who had been blind for some years, and that this blindness had been definitely known both to his priest and his neighbours. None of the possibly available naturalistic explanations, such as folk medicine, faith-healing, or the known fact that blindness caused by conjunctivitis sometimes

clears up by itself after a long interval, seem to be applicable here at all. The only alternative open to the thorough-going materialist seems to be to reject the whole chapter. Other miracle stories in the same category are the raising of Lazarus and the healing of the Gadarene demoniac, both of which are stated to have caused tremendous sensations, on account of the fact that they took place before many witnesses. Here again, naturalistic explanations, such as the suggestion that Jesus would have risked His entire reputation on the desperate gamble that Lazarus was in a trance, hardly bear examination. If we reject all these stories, large blocks of the Gospel narrative have to be cut out also, with all the historical difficulties that this entails (see, for example, Schonfield, *The Bible was Right*; Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?*). The historical accuracy of the narrative can be checked in all kinds of ways, so that, on the materialist view, the Gospels as we have them must indeed be a most curious blend of truth and falsehood. How could it have happened that St. Luke can have taken such immense pains to verify so many details of his narrative and yet include large blocks of fiction?

Christianity asserts that such miracles as these quite definitely happened, and, further, that miracles are possible at any time. There are, as we have seen, good reasons why they are infrequent and do not happen on demand (pp. 71, 73). Thus, the Christian denies the materialist claim that there is no room in Nature for the supernatural. This claim seems to rest entirely on the stock argument that a scheme of almost completely rigid scientific laws has been found to work so well that it is only a matter of time before it is extended to cover everything now thought to be supernatural. (See *Miracles* by C. S. Lewis, for a fuller discussion.) One can indeed point to many such instances in the past, such as the finding of natural explanations of thunder and earthquakes. Actually, it is, as we have already seen (pp. 36, 38), quite possible for a scientist to believe in the possibility of miracles without abandoning any of his scientific principles. Indeed, it is the scientist who

takes the opposite view who is performing the act of faith. If he asserts that the scheme of laws (now understood partially, but to be continuously improved in the future) admits of no really significant exceptions, he is claiming more than he can ever hope to prove by theory or experiment — the assertion embodies an article of faith.

In practice, scientists who profess Christian principles seem to be at no professional disadvantage compared with those who do not. The truth is that the rather abstract question whether or not odd events sometimes occur has very little bearing on the nature of the theory or the equations that the practical scientist builds up, concerned as they are with systematic or reproducible events. Newton's and Einstein's work on gravity is not affected at all by the view we take about the story that Christ and St. Peter once walked on the sea any more than are their equations affected by the historical accuracy or otherwise of the claim that an apple once hit Newton on the head. A Christian doctor sees no conflict between present-day medical facts about epilepsy and skin diseases, which take a long time to cure, and the claim that Christ had some startling successes in treating them. To take a parallel example: the claim is sometimes made that there have been cases of spontaneous recovery from cancer, but a doctor's views on the accuracy of this claim would in no way affect his emphatic advice to a patient with early cancer. The existence of scientific laws that seem to work well today is not, by itself, a valid reason for excluding *all* possibility of occasional departures from them. Still less can it be a basis for denying such possibilities in the past.

I once held, as an article of faith, a view very similar to the one that I am now criticizing. One of my reasons for abandoning it was that, apart altogether from assertions about the past which are hard to explain away, there does seem to be a very considerable body of evidence for the occurrence of odd (non-systematic) events even in the world as we know it today. It lies in the very nature of the case that the evidence for any

one such alleged event must be in some way suspect, but the cumulative value of all such evidence is very great. Are we to think, for example, that all the reported instances of telepathic communication between loved ones are coincidences? When J. W. Dunne collects, in *An Experiment with Time*, extensive data on precognition through dreams by himself and others, are we to think of him as a confirmed liar? And, even if we do, what would be the point of founding an elaborate theory on faked data? His own explanation of how he was led to develop the theory has a thoroughly authentic ring, and describes just the way in which a trained scientist might be expected to react to something rather unusual. The theory may be wrong, but the data are significant. Are we to think of Nobel Laureate Alexis Carrel's claim to have been present at the cure of a medically hopeless case at Lourdes as the result of defective medical observation? For balanced surveys by scientists of some of the evidence for odd events, the reader is referred to Raynor Johnson's *The Imprisoned Splendour*, or to Oliver Lodge's article in *Outline of Science*.

I hasten to add that much of the alleged evidence is, for me, highly suspect. If, for example, we once admit the possibility of telepathy, for which the evidence seems to me to be extremely strong, we at once reduce almost to vanishing point evidence for communication with the dead resting on episodes that 'only he could have known about'. There are alleged borderline sciences such as astrology* and numerology with little or no solid basis in ascertained fact. I shall not attempt the task of assessing the quality of these varied lines of evidence. I now only wish to make the point that if the materialist holds the article of faith mentioned above, it requires him to reject, or explain away, this vast body of evidence *in toto*, without being able to bring up any counter-vailing evidence.

* The thousands of people born during any one hour have completely different lives and prospects. Yet they all have the same horoscope. Does this make sense?

Such seem to be two main points of conflict between the Christian and the evolutionary materialist outlook, the wholly different attitudes to the supernatural and the wholly opposed conceptions of the good life. We do not expect God to reveal Himself through telepathy, but the evidence for it is indirect evidence for the existence of the supernatural, and also fits in naturally with Christian ideas (see p. 37) but is inconvenient for the materialist. The fact that dedicated altruists keep on turning up in generation after generation is wholly in keeping with Christian principles, whereas a society governed by evolutionary forces would strongly favour the yes-man. At the end, St. Paul was perfectly happy that he had done his best; even though his life-work seemed to have crashed in ruins and most of his friends had deserted him, the results have been permanent. He could not have known this at the time, yet he was quite content — a typical dedicated man.

In the light of all this, we can see how relevant Christianity really is to the situation of today, so complex' and so fascinating. The duty of a Christian today is very clear. Apart altogether from advances in technology, we are now beginning to get some real understanding of the workings of society itself, and of the factors that make for such evils as depressions, slums, crime and corruption. One task before us at present is to apply this knowledge, as and when it becomes available. Not only do we want to improve society still further, but it is also necessary to hold ground that has been gained in the recent past, and both of these objects require strenuous effort, much of it thankless and unpleasant, which can only come from dedicated people. To the cynic who denies the evolutionary theory of history, sneers at the welfare state, and compares the present century unfavourably with the past, we can reply simply that we now take as matters of course items such as the inspection of factories and enforcement of proper conditions of work, and the organization of proper measures for the care of the sick and destitute, which remained so woefully lacking down to the comparatively recent past,

and which require enormous effort, and an unbelievably complex structure of committees and boards, just to keep them running. And yet the effort is so very well worth while, and even a few dedicated people can make their influence felt over a wide area.

Besides trying to correct the conditions that tend to produce criminals, we are grappling with the even more baffling problem of what is to be done with them. We have found that it is futile to hang or transport them all, others take their places as long as the basic causes of crime remain untreated. We have found that vicious punishment merely leads to fresh crime, but that an excessive leniency may be equally bad. At present, we are at the stage of trying out various theories in the treatment and rehabilitation of criminals and of experimenting with practicable ways of steering young people away from crime before it occurs. Undoubtedly some of these experiments will turn out to be mistaken; the really heartening thing is that they are being tried.

This is just one aspect of the fantastic yet fascinating world in which we live today. For everyone there are opportunities, to improve society still further, to help lighten someone else's burdens, to make one's own particular job more useful to others, to do just that extra kind action — the list is endless. The Christian message is so plain, to be ever on the look-out for such opportunities which present themselves to us all, no matter how humble our walk in life, and to use them to the utmost when they come, and, above all, never, never to be satisfied that one has done enough. Anyone who faces life in this way cannot fail to have lasting influence on the world, although many of his most cherished schemes may fail. We have earlier tried to examine some of the possible reasons for this: many of his efforts may not bear real fruit for many years, and their full effects may never be known to the person himself or to his friends, for example, if he is a teacher of small children or works in an inquiry office. Certainly there are many possible reasons why results do not come more quickly.

Anyone who is really doing his best with the problems that he can actually reach need not reproach himself about others that he cannot touch, such as the immense amount of oppression in the world, or the fantastic situation of food surpluses in some countries and near-starvation in others. He is right to be shocked and grieved about them, to exert what influence he can or to ask himself and others how they come about. The one thing he must never do is to say: "These things are so big and so dreadful, of what use are my poor efforts?" Such is the Christian interpretation of the world, something ever in process of creation and at each place and at each second of time presenting an infinity of challenges and opportunities to us all to influence something for the better, in other words, *to take a small part in this wonderful process of creation.* How does the materialist interpret the world? He may simply work all the time for his own satisfactions and pleasures, and accept that many others are doing likewise. He may, like the Christian, consider it the right thing to strive his utmost to control Nature, and to use the knowledge so gained to ease the lot of humanity. Indeed, it cannot be denied that there are a great many good and kind people in the world today who do not believe in God. They, too, may strive their utmost to improve things but all the time there is the haunting fear that in the long run their efforts count for absolutely nothing, that the 'blind' forces of Nature can only be interfered with just so much without producing violent reactions, for example, attempts to improve agricultural yields — soil erosion; introduction of medicines to a primitive people — population problem; conquest of the air — bombs; new drugs and insecticides — undesirable side-effects, and one could extend the list endlessly.

Even if there is no such violent reaction one must conclude that the effect of some improvements is wiped out gradually by the impersonal tendencies of evolution. (Some historians interpret history as an endless re-learning and forgetting of the same old lessons.) The materialist is almost forced to

conclude that all the results of his efforts to do good will be swept away by the river of time, and therefore he is much more liable to lose heart than is the Christian. Also he is prone to point to such happenings as conclusive evidence against divine creation. In the foregoing pages we have tried to show that the existence of a situation which seems to be drifting from bad to worse is not always evidence against divine direction. There may be very good reasons why divine intervention at that particular time and place would be inappropriate or harmful. Armed with such knowledge, the Christian can accept setbacks with a good grace — “They say these things are sent to try us” — but the materialist has no such sheet-anchor. When he sees his efforts come to nothing, he must often wonder whether he is altogether on the wrong tack, whereas the Christian feels perfectly happy even in the face of apparent failure as long as he is really doing his best.

This is, perhaps, the whole crux of the matter. Do we think that we are sent into this world to do some definite piece of work, the ultimate consequences of which will be permanent and lasting (although we may never see them in this life or appreciate their significance if we do see them), or do we think of ourselves as like birds of the air, now fighting with the wind, now being blown along by it, all the time thinking that the air will close up behind us as if we had never been?

CHAPTER

VII

EVIDENCE FROM WITHIN

Let a man examine himself — *St. Paul*.

THE attempts to look at the external universe, together with the Biblical record, and to see whether or not they can be interpreted on the basis of a divine plan, constitute a task of the utmost difficulty. We are trying to show that such an interpretation is possible, but we can never hope to prove that it is the only possibility.

For this reason it is profitable to look within ourselves and to compare the evidence that we find there with that from outside. There are usually held to be three main lines of argument for the existence of God based on these intangibles. These arguments are:

(a) *Moral*. The existence of the individual conscience, and the alleged existence of absolute moral standards. 'The Moral Law.'

(b) *Aesthetic*. The existence of the individual's appreciation of beauty, and the alleged existence of absolute aesthetic standards.

(c) *Epistemological*. The power of the individual to gain knowledge about the universe, and the absolute existence of such knowledge.

These arguments have very different weights for different individuals. All that one can do is to try to weave the various strands into a rope that shall be stronger than any of them separately, but different individuals will assess the various strengths very differently. The moral argument splits itself into two parts. About the actual existence of individual consciences very little can be said. It is for each person to

examine his own deeper feelings, and to try his best to decide whether they are there as a result of divine creation, or whether they can be satisfyingly labelled 'guilt-complex', 'herd instinct', 'childhood fixations' and whether they might have appeared in any race of animals that reached a certain stage of development or whether, as some psychologists claim, it is possible to produce such manifestations by some 'conditioning' process in childhood, analogous to the well-known experiments of Pavlov. Apart from this earnest self-examination, it is not easy to gather direct evidence about the existence of other people's consciences. We do know that this driving force can be immensely strong in some people, who are willing to accept set-backs and hardships because it is right or as a matter of principle. Equally, we know of hardened criminals being reclaimed by the right kind of appeal to their better natures. Needless to say, the Christian view is that every man possesses a divine spark, however weak or obscured, but there is little that we can do to help one another to decide between the truth and falsity of this.

We now come to the possible existence of absolute moral standards in the world, independent of any particular conscience or of the scale of values of any one culture. If the existence of such standards could be established, the argument that they were of divine origin would be immensely strong, as they would not be likely both to appear spontaneously and to evolve in the same way in a number of different cultures. Anthropologists have done a great deal of examination of cultures in search of such evidence, with rather confusing results. One can give an endless list of important differences between the moral outlooks of different cultures, and even of the same culture at different stages in its development. To take just a few examples, the attitude towards treaties and their sanctity obviously differs very much from country to country and from age to age. An individual may be thoroughly dependable in his dealings with others, yet he may allow his country to break a treaty or to indulge in dubious financial manœuvres. The

payment of interest is today almost a matter of course, yet, in Biblical times, it seems to have been regarded as a 'poor show' if not actually immoral. Attitudes to taxation differ enormously. In this country we should greet with extreme horror any attempt to farm out the right to collect taxes, yet this was an accepted thing in New Testament times, and, in some countries today it is regarded as the only efficient way of collecting taxes, so that the absence of such a system would arouse horror. People who would take the utmost care of a friend's money will often squander public funds. Other examples are furnished by the widely different views that have existed about the sexual relationship. The contemporary attitude is that, provided that they are married, it is the finest possible relation between two human beings, yet, a generation or so ago sex was thought to be impure and unmentionable. Some Christian fathers thought that original sin was transmitted by sexual intercourse. In some cultures, the highest planes of existence are supposed to be unattainable unless all sexual desires are suppressed. Again, on such matters as temperance, capital punishment, conscription, gambling, racial problems and war, one can find every conceivable viewpoint held quite sincerely by huge numbers of the well-informed people of almost any country.

The existence of long lists of such differences is universally admitted. On the other side, a great deal of common ground has been found to exist among widely different cultures. Among such common features are loyalty to the family and the home, care of children and the sick, care of and veneration for the old, hospitality to strangers and loyalty to one's neighbours and the tribe. This is roughly the ground covered by the last six of the Ten Commandments, and, for many people, it is a very striking fact that so many diverse cultures have arrived at practically the same code governing the basic relationships between human beings. From there, it is but a short step to infer the absolute existence of moral standards in the world, independently of any particular culture, and then

to argue that this is evidence of the existence of God, apart altogether from the evidence available to each individual who finds that he has a conscience. However, it seems to the author that the argument in this form has a great weakness.

Even if we agree that the moral codes of different cultures do have a great deal in common, and ignore the very great and often, as it seems, fundamental differences, it still seems possible to account for this fact without invoking a divine origin for the resemblances. As we indicated briefly in an earlier chapter, it is also possible to account for the existence of these common standards on the evolutionary theory of the universe, simply on the basis that any tribe that failed to regulate its community life properly would soon cease to exist — for example, a tribe that failed to take proper care of its children would obviously not last long. Thus, we are faced by the fact that this argument is inconclusive, or at least that a great many thoughtful people find it so.

This objection, that those moral principles which command a universal enough acceptance to be regarded as part of the Moral Law are just those which would be expected to emerge in almost any community as the result of evolution, would certainly be a weighty one if it could be sustained. Many philosophers have, however, pointed out the difficulty of basing a satisfactory code of behaviour entirely on the restraining influences of tradition and public opinion. The difficulty is twofold: first, that the restraints imposed by public opinion can deteriorate alarmingly and with surprising speed; secondly, that the scheme is incomplete, that there exist in fact important moral principles that command wide acceptance yet are outside the evolutionary framework. A truly frightening example of the rapid deterioration of morality through the successive acceptance of half-truths was the Nazi persecution of Jews. The process seems to have been somewhat as follows: the Jews use unfair business methods — therefore it is legitimate to boycott their businesses — this

often leads to breaches of the peace, so they must be taken into protective custody — if they are released the trouble starts again, if they are imprisoned indefinitely they are a burden on the community — hence extermination. This is an extreme example, but it is as well to recall that the sterilization of the unfit was a perennial topic of conversation in England in the late nineteen-twenties, and advocates of euthanasia for lunatics also obtained sympathetic audiences for their views. One of the really frightening things about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that public opinion seems to have been so ready to condone or to be apathetic about the evils of the times.

Jesus was not slow to point out the dangers of trying to regulate one's behaviour solely on the basis of enlightened tradition. He recognized that it was a great deal better than nothing, but claimed that the time had come for a further step forward. Much of the denunciation of the well-meaning Pharisees was provoked by the fact that they contested this vital point. By the famous example of "It is Corban", He showed how reliance on tradition had allowed things to deteriorate to a stage at which a son could evade his filial obligations merely by reciting a formula. Other religious leaders have taught very similar lessons; Buddha taught that a soul that is complacent about things as they are had nothing to hope for but endless suffering.

On the positive side one can pick out quite a number of principles from the teaching of Jesus and other religious leaders that command a very wide degree of assent and seem to be essential to prevent the deterioration that comes from relying entirely on tradition. On both counts, such principles can claim to be part of the Moral Law, but it seems difficult or impossible to deduce them from an evolutionary type of argument; indeed some of them seem diametrically opposed to the evolutionary principle in that they are highly disadvantageous to those who practise them. As an example of such a principle, we may recall that Jesus repeatedly told

His disciples that they must be prepared, in certain circumstances, to accept violent unpopularity and persecution, and that they were not to evade these consequences but to welcome them. History does indeed provide countless instances of the immense good that can be wrought by a determined reformer, even though his proposals may seem to be absurdly out of step with the trend of public opinion at the time. If there had not been people like Shaftesbury, Elizabeth Fry, Howard, Dickens and Booth to jerk some of the complacency out of public opinion the social history of the nineteenth century would have been very much the worse. Moreover, it is surprising how much assent and respect can be won by a person, who, for example, is prepared to give up a glittering career for the sake of his principles. Respect often comes from people who disagree totally with what he is advocating, or with the way in which he is trying to bring his schemes to fruition. On a purely evolutionary basis one would expect such a person to be at a considerable disadvantage in comparison with a yes-man. The latter may have a more successful career, but ends by being loathed and scorned.

We can detect evidence of the same kind of situation if we look at the precept of being prepared to submit to a wrong in certain situations, without trying to hit back. This also seems anti-evolutionary in the sense that such a person would seem to be at a hopeless disadvantage in competition with the ruthless go-getter, yet again we find that such apparently foolish conduct commands a wide measure of respect and approval. The comment: "He took it very well" usually implies admiration for this kind of conduct, when a more emphatic reaction to the situation might have seemed quite excusable. One could multiply examples of this kind; indeed, it seems very difficult to resist the conclusion that there are valid ethical principles that are difficult to deduce purely from the evolutionary argument. If ethics really does contain principles that cannot be accounted for in this way, yet seem to command fairly wide acceptance, one must at once look for a

possible origin for them, and it becomes very difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are divinely inspired. (These principles do occur in other religions besides Christianity, and the moral argument must be regarded as one for theism rather than one for any particular religion.)

We now turn to the aesthetic argument. It runs on very much the same lines as the moral one. It is argued that each individual is endowed with the power to appreciate beauty and that, in spite of all sorts of differences, it is possible to infer the absolute existence of beauty, certain values being common to the histories of different cultures. If this argument can be substantiated, it is then reasonable to think of a divine origin for aesthetic standards. Let us admit straight away that the issue is, in some respects, almost as confused as is the moral one, since standards in different cultures and at different times seem to differ so widely. In one way this argument is more clear-cut than the moral one, for the simple reason that the rival or evolutionary explanation of the apparent existence of aesthetic standards just cannot be invoked at all. With minor and relatively trivial exceptions, the presence or absence of an aesthetic sense in an individual or tribe would have nothing, or very little, to do with the chances of survival, and therefore its fairly general existence in the human race cannot be accounted for on an evolutionary basis. In a few cases, the aesthetic sense may be of evolutionary importance, for example, a person who spends long periods contemplating the scenery is more likely to starve than one who is not interested; a woman with a pretty face is more likely to have children than is a plain one, and so on, but, and this is most important, such instances only prove that the aesthetic sense may be capable of influencing the development of the race; they do not show that the presence or absence of a sense of beauty makes any real difference to the chance of survival. The evolutionary argument therefore does not explain why the sense of beauty is spread so widely among the human race, nor why it survives from generation to generation.

Thus, the argument turns on the question whether or not we believe in the existence of absolute standards of beauty. There is a large number of confusing factors, such as the fact that certain sorts of beauty cannot be appreciated without training, the very rapid changes sometimes brought about by the rise of a new school, the existence at all times of a certain amount of charlatanism, and the immense differences between different cultures (for example, a Westerner is usually quite unable to appreciate Oriental music and drama). These confusing factors have always existed, and a quite new one has emerged in the twentieth century, namely, that the media of a great many of the arts — sculpture, painting, poetry, literature, drama — have been used for the purpose of portraying the unconscious mind, that is, are being used more for psychological than for aesthetic purposes. Such items as a Picasso portrait, a sculpture consisting of bits of wire or of a stone with a hole in it, a book such as *Ulysses*, may possibly be art and may well have entailed a great deal of hard work and research, but they have little or nothing to do with aesthetics, though they do teach something about the unconscious.

If we try to look beyond all these confusing issues, it is possible to see how much permanent beauty there is in the world, and how much the nations really have in common. A Westerner, although he cannot appreciate Oriental music and drama, has no difficulty at all in appreciating a Japanese vase, a Chinese picture, an Indian ivory carving or a Persian carpet. The plays of Shakespeare have been successfully translated into all sorts of languages. The beauty of some cave-wall drawings, of the Parthenon, or of a Constable painting, is something that has survived and will continue to survive such occurrences as Gothic revivals and impressionistic movements; indeed it is independent of all the rises and falls of later schools of art, and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that these works do embody some permanent and lasting values. The same is true of such works as the *Iliad* and many of the other fine stories of folk-lore, which give

pleasure to generation after generation, not only in their own countries, but all over the world, again quite independently of trends in later literature.

Some of the confusion that we have just mentioned is accounted for by the fact that nearly all artists make some attempt to conform to their own times and cultures; indeed, it is one of the pastimes of critics to try to assess the extent to which artists have influenced one another, and to try to see an artistic work, not in isolation, but against the background of the culture and social problems of the times, and the real or imagined influence of their contemporaries in other fields of art and learning. An artist who completely ignores these factors runs the risk of being rejected or misunderstood, and, apart altogether from his natural desire for recognition, the artist who is out of tune with his age fails, at least in part, in his primary task of sharing with others the beauty that he has captured or created. It is therefore absolutely right and natural that artists should try to adapt themselves to their contemporaries but the fact that they do so tends to accentuate the swings in artistic fashions, and so to obscure some of the similarities in aesthetic standards that have existed down the ages, and which point to the existence of absolute beauty.

The so-called epistemological argument is much more difficult to expound and, even when they have seen what it really is, many people find it difficult to decide its relevance and weight. To some it seems almost completely conclusive, while others hold that it has no relevance at all. To take a concrete illustration, let us suppose that an antiquary is examining a recently discovered ruin. When he has collected all the evidence he can, he will come to a set of conclusions about it. Some of them he will believe in so strongly that his attitude amounts to practical certainty, for example, he may believe that he has seen a Roman villa of such and such an approximate date. Some of them he will be less certain about, for example, the dates and purposes of various additions or alterations. Still others, he will regard as plausible guesses or

mere flights of fancy. But what he does know is that, if another competent investigator visited the spot independently, he would come to very much the same set of conclusions. He would almost certainly agree with those that the first man held with conviction, but the chance of possible disagreement increases as the conclusions become less certain, while the flights of fancy might travel in diametrically opposite directions and might lead to violent arguments if the two investigators ever met!

What we do know is that there would be this broad agreement *even if the methods of work of the two investigators were very different*, even if they actually uncovered different parts of the villa, even if one investigator had access to methods such as carbon-dating that were not available to the other. Thus, one is led to infer the existence of a body of knowledge about the villa. What is this knowledge? It is clearly not the same as the original facts, because some of these are irrecoverably lost while others can be established with near certainty. It is more than the written records of the experts, findings and measurements on the site. These are part of the body of knowledge about it, but a layman studying the records alone would be unable to piece together the evidence and reach conclusions in the way that the expert can. It is not even identical with the paper that the expert might publish about the villa, because, as we have seen, another expert might work on the problem in an entirely different way and yet reach similar conclusions without ever writing down anything at all.

One is thus led to think of knowledge (the word all the time being used in a sense that admits that there is no absolute certainty about anything) as being something distinct both from the original set of facts that give rise to it, and also from the observer who acquires it. Anyone who has ever tackled a mathematical problem will agree that the answer is something distinct from the question, and that it has nothing to do with the choice of method used for working it out. (If a proposed method gives a different answer from others, we

react by questioning its soundness; if an investigator continually reaches conclusions at variance with others we are apt to question his competence.) Let us therefore agree that a large body of knowledge about the universe does exist in its own right, and that this existence is guaranteed by the fact that any particular item can be rediscovered and verified by a competent enough person. We have, as part of this knowledge, the further facts that, since the beginning of time, men have continually tried to increase this body of knowledge, and that attempts to put it, or the facts that give rise to it, on permanent record, are also of very great antiquity.

We are thus presented with two quite distinct facts, that knowledge can, apparently, have objective existence, and the basic human urge to acquire and record it. Can we infer divine direction of the universe from either of these facts? The absolute existence of knowledge does seem to enable one to rule out some hypotheses about the universe, for example, it makes it very unlikely that the universe was created by a completely irrational being, and also makes unlikely such hypotheses as the one that the Creator put fossils into the rocks in order to confound men's curiosity. On the positive side it does tell us that the universe can, at least in part, be interpreted on a rational basis. (We could not have deduced this *a priori*; we might easily have found, on examination, that our powers of reasoning did not enable us to predict anything at all about the universe.)

The fact that nearly everyone has the urge to gather knowledge of some kind can be only partly interpreted on an evolutionary theory. No doubt a tribe that is continually exploring its surroundings and studying the stars does better than one that only moves on when the pastures are exhausted, and one that experiments systematically with new foods and medicines does better than one that does not. On the other hand, it is well-nigh impossible to explain on this sort of basis such urges as those which lead people to visit the North Pole or the top of a mountain, or to study deep-sea fishes or

Babylonian inscriptions. It is pushing the evolutionary explanation altogether too far to apply it to such activities. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that such activities command such a very wide circle of admiration, approval and desire to emulate quite irrespective of their utilitarian value. The existence of these urges in the comparatively few individuals who actually carry them through to completion might, no doubt, be explained as some genetic aberration, but, in fact, they seem to be felt to some extent by much of the human race.

The argument then is that the existence of knowledge apart from the facts that give rise to it, the fact that many people devote their lives to acquiring it, and the real respect that is felt for the wise man by much of the human race, are all evidence for the existence of some central reservoir of knowledge in the universe. Some psychologists, e.g. Jung, have reached a very similar conclusion on quite other grounds. Furthermore, the fact that this desire for knowledge, so widely spread throughout the human race, cannot be explained in all its aspects (though it clearly can in some) as having survival value, leads one to look for some further explanation, the usual one being that this craving is, like the conscience and the craving for beauty, something of divine origin.

This argument has, just like the moral and aesthetic arguments, immensely different appeals to different people. We may, if we like, argue that the really dedicated scholar has been entrusted with a little of the divine fire in the same way as has the artist or the saint, but if so, it seems strange that a scholar can be an atheist. The question is all the harder to evaluate, because the scholar seldom tries to convert or educate the lay public, though he will lavish care and attention on a promising pupil. Indeed, although he usually has a burning conviction that it is his duty to use his gifts as much as possible, he seldom discusses this conviction or the implications of the fact that it exists. Among his fellow scholars its existence is taken as a matter of course and little or no

progress is made by discussing this basic fact, while the task of explaining it to one of the lay public is almost as hard as that of the poet or missionary in trying to explain to the public what makes him tick.

We leave these arguments here. Do we regard these feelings, that are probably present in all of us, and can become ruling passions in the lives of some of us, as of divine origin; do we think that they are of evolutionary significance and can be explained on these lines; or are we content to ignore them altogether, in the sense of saying that, from the philosophical point of view, they are not real evidence of anything, and that no explanation of their existence is called for?

CHAPTER

VIII

WHAT OF OTHER SECTS AND FAITHS?

No particular body, from the Roman Church to the Quaker meeting, has ever expressed all the riches of Christianity, and the disintegration of Protestantism in the post-Reformation period was an honest attempt, which had to be made, to explore these riches more fully — *John Kent.*

THE final question that every Christian has to face sooner or later is that of his attitude to other religions. How does he explain the fact that other religions exist? What significance is to be given to the fact that their adherents are often indifferent or hostile to Christianity? What is the right attitude to devout exponents of other creeds (as opposed to agnostics or heathens)? An enormous number of answers have been given to such questions. Perhaps the most important question concerns the evidence about the universe that is supplied by the existence and survival of other religions. Does this undoubted fact in any way weaken the Christian case? Two taunts come from the materialists. First they can, if they wish, see Christianity as a mere offshoot of Judaism, "a typical tribal religion, one of whose sects has expanded rather more than such splinter-groups usually do". We have already outlined the argument which tries to interpret the rise of the tribal religion as a typical stage in the development of all cultures. Secondly, it is easy to say: "Christ Himself told you to spread the gospel all over the world. If it is really so very much superior to all other religions, how is it that it has not ousted them all in two thousand years?"

It is very hard to reach a considered judgment on these

questions. For one thing, there is considerable disagreement about them in the Christian community itself. Almost every view can be found, ranging from the doctrine held by some sects that only with them lies salvation (which cannot, according to them, be obtained even by another type of Christian), to an almost complete tolerance of almost all religions. Christian views about missionary work also vary enormously, some communities attaching most importance to revivals and missions intended to maintain Christianity as a living thing among people who are already nominally Christians, others throwing great emphasis on converting the poor heathen, while a few direct their main efforts to converting people from other established religions. In this situation, the mere layman may well feel mystified, and it is easy for the agnostic to say: "Well, if they get into such muddles themselves about these fundamental points, how can they expect an outsider to believe?"

This type of remark does emphasize the fact that every Christian must try to reach some kind of balanced judgment on these points, though a proper study of them would call for scholarship of a very high order indeed. It is perfectly true that many of the religions that have existed in the past can be interpreted on the familiar pattern of tribal folk-lore and totems, worship of the king or the ancestors, attempts to derive magic formulae for the production of rain and the prediction of the future, and so on. Amongst religions that probably developed on these lines we may mention those of the Greeks and Romans and of the Norsemen and Druids. We know that such tribal religions are capable of lasting for centuries. Hinduism is certainly of very great antiquity, and some at least of it is readily interpreted as a gradual development from folk-lore. Furthermore, we must not make the mistake of thinking that such religions always develop very slowly over the centuries, dogmas being accumulated gradually. The absolutely horrible recent manifestations of Japanese Shinto remind one that a tribal religion can develop surprisingly

rapidly, and can inspire fanatical devotion quite comparable with that of the Christian martyrs. Yet all this seems to have developed from the relatively harmless pattern of ceremonial purification and ancestor worship. It certainly cannot be denied that anyone who is looking for tribal religions has plenty of material, past and present, for several lifetimes of study.

In spite of this, it is a very great mistake to try to explain all religion in this way. Most of the religions that are living forces in the world today fall into quite another pattern. Each is based on the teaching of one great founder, and further developments have been guided mainly by the writings and commentaries of lesser men. Apart from Christianity, obvious examples of such religions are Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Taoism. The teaching of the leader and his immediate entourage are usually considered to be sacred and the result of divine inspiration, so that they are seldom tampered with, but attempts are made to interpret them in spirit rather than in letter in cases where they have manifestly become garbled or out of date. But these efforts never go further than attempts to interpret the words of the master or to deal with points that he did not cover, and scholars are interested mainly in trying to find out what the master did say or mean, rather than in attempting to find flaws in his positions. (Although people sometimes claim to be the new Messiah, or new incarnations of Buddha or Mahomet, they seldom succeed in founding a lasting movement, and, indeed, the scales are very heavily weighted against such attempts.) Thus we have the pattern that the founders of the great religions of the world are genuinely believed by their contemporaries and followers either to have been in direct personal communication with God, like Moses or Mahomet or Elijah, or else, like Buddha or Lao-tze, to have received inspiration from divine sources. (Christianity seems to be unique in its claim that the leader is identical with God.)

Now, how on earth can we explain such manifestations on a

materialistic basis? The real thing that seems to defy such explanation is not so much the miracles or marvellous exploits often attributed to the master, but the fact that his contemporaries have always been completely convinced of the reality of the master's divine inspiration and that they, in turn, succeed in transmitting these convictions to others and to future generations, so that, hundreds of years later, his words and writings are still sacrosanct. We can hardly do better than turn to Gamaliel's advice to the Jews, when they were uncertain what to do about the Apostles. He told them that false prophecy was very common, but that it was best not to try to suppress it. A false prophet, he said, perhaps collects a few followers and then the whole movement fizzles out, but a divinely inspired movement grows and flourishes, do what you will. This wise advice holds good today. It is possible to explain the temporary success of a revivalist or of a false prophet because he happens to meet some psychological needs of the moment, but it is very much harder to explain survival of the great religions in this way. Another point that is hard for the materialist to explain is that the founding of the great religions has resulted in a great deal of philosophical writing. For example, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian philosophy has been much studied by Western scholars, and, although we Westerners find some of the ideas difficult to accept, others very good but impractical and yet others hard to grasp at all, there is evidence of genius of a high order. If we do not accept the idea of divine inspiration it becomes extremely hard to explain these outbursts of genius that accompanied, or followed soon after, the founding of most of the great religions. In this context, it becomes almost trifling to try to juggle with highly technical terms like *Weltgeist*, 'herd-complex', 'release of libido' and the like, in order to try to explain away these awkward facts. Where did the leaders get their material, and why did their disciples follow them?

It is probably right to accept, for the reason Gamaliel gave

us, that the other great religions are divinely inspired. Although we can never know for certain, it is quite likely that a Hindu mystic and a Buddhist lama are, in their own special ways, as close to God as is a good Christian. Rudyard Kipling made a most penetrating study of this sort of question in the wonderful book *Kim*. Very interesting, too, are his subtle accounts of the impact of the same worldly events on people of different religions. What does the Christian do about this situation when he is faced with Christ's very last command that the gospel is to be spread all over the world? Is he to concentrate his own missionary effort on the heathen, on other established religions, or on the agnostics a few doors away?

At least part of the answer to this very difficult question can be obtained by reading Jesus' last words, by looking at the efforts that have been made to obey them, and at some of the results that these efforts have had. Jesus never really held out any hope that all the world would be converted, and He told His followers quite plainly about the strife and discord that would be produced by their efforts to spread the gospel, apart altogether from their own martyrdoms. What He seems to have hoped for was that the world should be covered by a chain of missionary stations, so that everyone should at least know of the existence of the Message, and could find out about it if he were so moved.

In the Acts we hear of such a chain being established in Asia Minor and of its being extended through Greece to Rome but it is very hard to tell whether most of Asia Minor was actually converted or whether the churches were mere islands in a hostile sea. We are also told little or nothing of what was done about people of other established religions, except that, generally speaking, the Jews were to be taught before the Gentiles were approached. The Greeks and Romans were beginning to lose faith in their own gods and so were all of them possible material for conversion, but otherwise the question of the conversion of other religions hardly arose at first. It helps us a little if we look at what has actually been the

result of the missionary effort of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While it is never right to be complacent, it does seem that these efforts have had quite astonishing success with heathens or with those who had only tribal religions. At home, missionary efforts and movements do at least seem to have jolted the Church out of the deplorable state that it was in during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Milton could write "The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed", with much more of the same, and when it was possible for a bishop to be appointed to a see that he never visited. Although there are still far too many people who are only nominal Christians, perhaps for social or political reasons, at least the clergy of today are nearly all devout and dedicated men.

Some people have tried to make a selection of the best ideas from all the established religions, and to use them as a means of evolving a satisfying philosophy of life, the idea being that certain facets of the universe are revealed most clearly in one particular region. Now it is certainly true that nearly all religions contain some extremely valuable ideas. To take just one example, the Taoist emphasis on gentleness and patience, illustrated by the extremely apt simile of water trickling through cracks in a hard rock, never wasting energy by useless pushing, but always seeking ways round, would be an ornament to almost any philosophy of life. The most casual study will reveal equally attractive ideas in other revealed religions, yet the attempt at a sort of patchwork seems pretty hopeless, and, to take another analogy, resembles an attempt to belong to a number of different clubs, but to obey only a few rules of each one, or an effort to piece together chapters from several good books into a coherent and better story. Even if anyone succeeded in compiling what he thought to be the best ideas from a number of religions and was prepared to defend each one in detail, he would be unlikely to be able to convince others of the rightness of his choices, and we should soon have a large number of such composite religions in competition with one another.

What may be helpful to some people is to turn to other religions to see how they handle difficult problems that arise also in the Christian faith. As an example of this, let us look at the controversy about the relative importance of faith and works which seems to have raged since very early times in the Church. It does not need any profound philosophy to tell us that someone who is always trying to do something can, in certain circumstances, be an infernal nuisance, and may not only make mistakes himself, but may cause them in others. What is less obvious is the result of going to the other extreme of believing that God will do it all if we have faith enough. A glance at Hinduism and some forms of Buddhism shows us the results of abandoning works altogether, because any act has so many unpredictable consequences, or because the things of this world shall pass away. This leads to the idea that the highest form of existence is that of a hermit or contemplative beggar. While a Westerner is not likely actually to carry things to such extremes, it is helpful to him to see what may happen if he does.

Another way in which a comparative study of religion may be helpful is to see how other revealed religions face the problem of keeping themselves up to date. The lesson here is clear too. Attempts to reform usually result in splitting a religion, however necessary or praiseworthy they may seem to be. In some circumstances this may not be too big a price to pay — Luther probably thought that it was better to have the Church divided than to have all of it corrupt and overlaid with superstitions about the saints. Again, the net result of the Oxford Movement has probably been to make Church services more inspiring, and this probably compensates for the disunion that it also caused. Moderation is necessary. It cannot be sinful to subject the teachings of one's church to close and continuous scrutiny for the benefit of one's own peace of mind and soul, but it is quite another matter to decide how far one should go in trying to undermine the faith of others in doctrines that one considers false, irrelevant or

silly. Here again, we come to vast problems — when does a difference of opinion become a heresy and what is to be done about the heretics? — that have confronted the Church since the earliest times.

Yet it is only right to report some progress. We have at least abandoned the attempt to get rid of heresies by burning the heretics and it is no longer fatal to question dogma, so that one can at least look dispassionately at what one is arguing about. With this new freedom has come a situation in which the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches are themselves subdivided into numerous smaller sects: the price we pay for individual freedom. Many devout Christians regard this as deplorable, and work with all their might towards re-unification. Yet the present situation has its compensations. Contrast it with the older one in which people were kept in one Church by fear of punishment, or, a little later, that in which petty persecution and political pressure served to enforce outward uniformity, or, later still, with a situation in which people are for social reasons nominal, but quite apathetic, members of the Church. If one hears a Roman Catholic and a Protestant, or an Anglo-Catholic and a Modernist, arguing with great violence about some dogma for which there is no clear warrant in the scriptures, or which is based on passages whose authenticity, accuracy or significance is doubtful, one often feels extremely sad, and even more so when the argument is about some minor point of ritual, which a third person might not consider to matter at all. But there is also cause for rejoicing. First, it is possible to argue today about such things without fear of the consequences, something that has by no means always been true. Secondly, the fact that such arguments take place at all is *prima facie* evidence that people care about their beliefs, and feel that they matter, and, when they hear opposing beliefs, feel an absolute compulsion to make sure that the case against them does not go by default, even if they know perfectly well that there is little prospect of destroying the opponent's belief by an afternoon's

argument. While it may be true that few of us would be prepared to go to the stake for our convictions, how comforting it is that we are not all completely apathetic, but really care!

Whether we believe in a revealed religion or not, one thing about the universe does seem clear; that over very wide fields we are left to reach our own conclusions about it, and experience has shown us that one of the very best ways of reaching valid conclusions about any subject is to compare notes, to argue with others and to subject our ideas to their criticisms. The danger about this is that such arguments rapidly become heated, even amongst professional philosophers or those of a similar turn of mind, and it is often extremely difficult to decide whether one's own arguments are based on mere prejudice, or on points that have been carefully thought out. Many people's religious ideas are a mixture of these two kinds — what seems to happen is that a person reaches the best conclusion he can, then files it away in his mind but may not fully remember the reasoning that led him to it in the first place. It is probably this that produces a sense of exasperation, and makes the person angry when asked to justify the point in detail, and another irritant is the uneasy feeling that the half-forgotten argument might, after all, have been unsound. Nevertheless, it does seem to be the duty of the Christian to take part in such arguments. Although the points he makes may have no apparent effect at the time, it is always possible that they will bear more fruit later, perhaps in quite unexpected ways; as the psychologists tell us, they may have a kind of delayed action through the unconscious mind.

It may be true that a debate in Parliament is carried out on party lines, and, if the topic is of real importance, the main points made by the speakers on each side, and the result of the final vote, can almost be predicted in advance. Yet very few people would, on these grounds, argue that such debates were useless and not worth staging. At least one can expect an exposure of the weaknesses of any proposed policy,

or of the arguments on which it is based, and one also knows that, although the validity of such criticisms will not be admitted at the time, the party will later on try to meet them, and perhaps even change the policy, if for no other reason than to avoid the same telling criticisms on another occasion. So it is with individuals. There may be a dozen different reasons, such as pride, obstinacy or convenience, why someone cannot, or will not, act immediately on a suggestion from outside, yet this capacity of the mind to store away outside suggestions like an accumulator, at the same time processing them like a vast machine, is of the very stuff of which human relationships are made. Why then should we neglect to use it, and to use it to the utmost of our power, in helping ourselves to make up our minds about the hardest things in the world which, at the same time, are those which matter most of all?

We have reached an idea about religion similar to the ideas about the universe that we have been looking at in earlier chapters. Not all of the beliefs of a revealed religion are sacrosanct or divinely preordained; there is always a very considerable area over which we can let our minds roam and try to reach our own conclusions. The number of beliefs which are, so to speak, official hand-outs that may not be queried by anyone professing the religion, varies greatly, being very small indeed in the Church of England, rather larger in some other forms of Protestantism, and larger still in Roman Catholicism. Even in Roman Catholicism, one knows that there is plenty of debatable ground over which Catholic scholars can and do range (and have done for centuries) without any fear at all of excommunication or other sanctions. In the Church of England, this debatable area is very wide indeed, and, perhaps the most heartening sign, a great deal of the debating is carried on by the clergy themselves. Once we admit that there is any debatable ground at all, it is hard to see how one can expect to avoid divisions of opinion, and the gradual formation of groups and sects of all sorts. On the genuinely doubtful points, it is surely better that the clergy should be

represented on both sides of the fence, rather than that they should all be committed to one side in advance, leaving only laity on the other side. To compel acceptance of a belief as a condition of membership is something that must not be done lightly. A religion that was based entirely on divine revelation would be a dead one. A human family dragooned into obedience by threats of fearful punishments, or awed into goodness by constant demonstrations of divine power would, as we showed earlier in the book, be a pitiful spectacle.

A much more difficult question is how to deal with someone who claims to be a member of the Church and yet attacks beliefs that one holds to be sacrosanct. Nearly every religion and country has met this problem, and has tried to deal with it by measures like the Inquisition, Acts of Uniformity or the Test Act. The same sort of problems face the Church today. For example, the Modernist movement attempts to play down the importance to a Christian of what are usually considered to be such vitally important beliefs as the Resurrection and the Last Supper. It may be true that historians differ on the historical value of the evidence for the Resurrection. The Modernists may well be right in their claim that there is doubt about the authenticity of some of the words in St. Luke's account of the Last Supper, which, as we have it, is confusing because two cups are mentioned. It may be possible to read this passage, and the famous "bread of life" passage of St. John, in senses that show that Jesus did not really intend to institute a permanent Sacrament. What cannot be denied is that a Sacrament *was* instituted, whether Jesus actually intended it to be or not, and that it forms a central pillar of Christian worship today and that, as such, it has been of help to millions of individuals in ordering their lives. Whether the historical accounts of the Resurrection are accurate is arguable, but there is, as we have seen in earlier chapters, indirect evidence that the early Church believed in it thoroughly, and that they contrived to pass this conviction on to others without first-hand knowledge of the facts.

For one who believes, as I do, that our religion is to be based only in part on divine revelation and inspiration, and that we are left to find out more for ourselves, it becomes, as we have seen, very difficult indeed to avoid divisions and subdivisions of opinion. It also becomes difficult completely to deny the validity of some at least of the other great revealed religions. To begin with, we share with the Jews the belief that the books of the Old Testament are sacred, and that they describe the first strivings of a people towards a revealed religion, and also the gradual replacement of threats of punishment by the ideal of love. Some of these books are very confusing and hard to interpret, and it would indeed be presumptuous to claim that the Christian interpretation of them was completely right and the Jewish, where it differs, completely wrong. It is true that we have had the powerful help of Jesus in interpreting parts of the Old Testament, and that He helped us to see what parts were out of date, but, although He often quoted the scriptures, there are many points of doubt about which no words of His are preserved for us at all. Although we do not share sacred writings with other religions, we do find that they often put great emphasis on the very same virtues that we regard as cardinal, such as love, service, patience, gentleness and charity, and it again becomes difficult to argue that we are completely right and that they are completely wrong, bearing in mind the fact that much of our present-day Christianity has been worked out by human minds, as Jesus seems to have clearly intended should be the case.

Such is one scientist's view of the universe, and such is the Church to which he belongs. The essence of both is to listen patiently to evidence and opinions of all kinds and then to try to evolve an acceptable philosophy of life. By various analogies we have tried to show that it is quite possible to believe in a universe that was divinely created and yet seems to show, in its cruelty and waste, much evidence to the contrary. Indeed, one can go further and argue that there would

be little point in creating a universe that was too rigidly controlled, just as a machine or model is judged very largely by the extent to which it can be relied upon to work on its own. Our universe seems to be such that it repays careful investigation from all angles, but everyone has to do something of this for himself, and the precepts of others are only of limited help in this task. At its best, our Church seems well attuned to this conception of the universe. Genuine, as opposed to deliberately provocative, inquiries are welcomed, even if they seem to threaten the whole structure. The price of this freedom seems to be a division into sects which, considered by itself, is regrettable, but it is difficult indeed to see how it could have been avoided without an altogether excessive control of the Church from above or from within.

We have rejected the materialist position that the revealed religions are based on illusions. Our main ground for such rejection is the advice of Gamaliel — how can one account for the persistent belief in the divine inspiration of the founder enduring for generation after generation? If we recognize that all revealed religions contain something of permanent value, if we assert that each one incorporates something of ultimate reality, why do we prefer one to all others? It is true that Hinduism has gradually incorporated ideas from all kinds of different sources, and that there are many instances in which one can trace the influence of one revealed religion on another, but, generally speaking, each revealed religion tends to assert its superiority over all others. Christianity quite definitely takes this position: we assert our superiority in some sense, though few Christians would describe other revealed religions as completely false. *A priori*, two entirely different creeds may both contain some truths about reality, just as two perspective drawings of the same building, made from different angles and distances, may resemble one another hardly at all. Can Christians give any rational justification for their parochial attitude, or must they

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admit that they prefer the religion that they happen to know most about?

I suggest that we can justify our attitude, because there is one absolutely crucial way in which our religion differs from all others that have proved lasting: Jesus is the only founder who made the definite claim to be God. Other founders have been described as sages or prophets; inspiration of divine origin has been attributed to them in greater or less degree, but the lesson of history is that anyone else who has claimed to be God has utterly failed to found any lasting movement. One can see very easily what a handicap any such claim would be; almost any audience in any age would tend to regard it as a symptom of megalomania or something worse. This claim was something even greater than that of being the Messiah. Jewish ideas about the Messiah differed greatly: some expected a new king, others a great High Priest; in second Isaiah's prophecies one even reads of a Servant, while other prophets foresaw a world-conqueror of the calibre of Alexander. The claim to be the Messiah was, therefore, not fully equivalent to that of divinity.

It is clear that the full claim was made. Jesus' reply to the High Priest at His trial seems to admit of no other interpretation, and, in addition, there are various other passages like John viii, 58; x, 30; xiv, 9, which are also quite explicit. The difficult "bread of life" passage (John vi, 27-end) seems to be an account of another occasion on which this claim was made. This time, Jesus was well aware of the effect that it would have of offending many of the disciples, and prepared them very carefully for it. To do this, He used the familiar notion of sacrificial communion, according to which the drinking of the blood of an animal enables one to acquire some of its qualities, or, if the animal was held to represent God, it could imply acquiring some of His qualities. In spite of all this careful preparation of the ground, it is clear that many of the disciples were grievously offended and left. The facts are therefore quite clear — the claim of divinity was

made, it had the expected effects of offending some of the disciples and of infuriating the Jews, yet it did *not* lead to the complete break-up of the movement.

Two quite distinct points follow from these facts: first, that a rationalist explanation of the survival of Christianity is made even more difficult; secondly, that this stupendous claim is one that no Christian or possible convert can ignore, he must either accept or reject this claim of divinity outright. There is absolutely no possibility of steering a middle course, sitting on the fence or reconciling these two opposites by some dialectical exercise. Whichever alternative he chooses, it becomes impossible to treat Christianity on the same level as other revealed religions; it must either be reckoned superior to them, or else be held to be based on completely false foundations.

Once again we are led back to the one central fact: by some means, His personality, miracles and teaching, or through a combination of all three, Jesus was able to convince the apostles of His divine origin, and to endow them with the capacity to convince others who never saw Him at all.

CHAPTER

IX

THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH

No one is more aware, and I say this as one whose training has included the discipline of science, that there is much that needs to be interpreted afresh as to the terms in which Christian truth needs to be presented, but the manner by which alone it can come to be accepted remains essentially the same — *Enthronement sermon of the Bishop of Norwich.*

IT is not enough to show that the universe as we see it today is compatible with the theory of intelligent creation. We must do much more than present to the agnostics various facts that are awkward for them to explain. We must put forward a positive message, and, above all, we must do all that we can to ensure that what we offer is credible at the present day. It is not surprising that we find the Bible difficult and obscure — some of our own early literature is barely intelligible to the modern reader without special study. It has always been the business of the Church to perform the task of interpretation. One of the very first tasks was to interpret a message of Jewish and Asiatic origin to Asiatic Gentiles and then to Europeans, and much of the Acts and the Epistles is taken up with accounts of this process, and of the many accompanying problems and stresses. From the first we hear of rejections, resulting from various factors.* For

* In *The Bible was Right*, Schonfield has given a most interesting discussion of one factor (that was probably completely unknown to Paul and his helpers). Christians were probably confused with Zealot agitators who would cause trouble with the Roman authorities. This explains why the Jews were prepared to go to such extreme lengths, hunting them like outlaws from city to city, which was rather hard to understand. Without this explanation one might even suspect the insertion of sensations to improve the story.

example, St. Paul's carefully thought out intellectual sermon to the Athenians seems to have been a flop; open internecine quarrels about the right method of approach, for example, over the status of non-Jews in the Church; agonized re-appraisals, for example, the many passages in the Epistles concerned with the Law; perplexities because the second coming of Christ was delayed, and so on. It will not be surprising therefore if mistakes are being made today when the intellectual climate is developing so rapidly.

Whether we like it or not, the twentieth-century mind is inclined to ask: "Just what is it that you ask me to believe?" Anything in the nature of a mystery automatically excites suspicion. This has not always been so for at many periods mysteries have commanded respect: "What a learned man he must be to preach a sermon like that!": "Even the village schoolmaster can't understand this book, so it can't be for the likes of me to try", and so on. In such climates the rather obscure and indirect statement could be accepted without serious question, but how different is the climate today! Probably some element of mystery is inseparable from any religion, but today it is a grievous hindrance to its acceptance, whereas in former times it may even have been a help. To take a few mundane examples. A doctor who uses medical jargon when questioned by a patient is promptly suspected of not knowing what is wrong, whereas a Victorian patient might have gone away deeply impressed. The old-fashioned family solicitor who makes a mystery about his fees may be, quite unjustly, suspected of being a swindler. The artist or poet whose work is hard to understand is promptly suspected of obscurantism, technical incompetence, charlatanism or a combination of the three. The writer who breaks too many of the rules incurs the suspicion of having nothing worth saying.

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The Church must try its best to adapt its message to suit the cynical moods of today. (Although some of the clever Athenians mocked St. Paul, others said, "We will hear thee

again of this matter".) Approached properly, even the most hardened cynic will respond. Pascal's famous remark, that, even if the probability of eternal life was small, the value of it was so great that it was worth being religious just in case, would have appealed very strongly to a certain type of twentieth-century audience, though, at some periods, this same remark has incurred biting criticisms.

The uninstructed reader of the Bible soon realizes that some of the books (for example, Isaiah and Jeremiah) are thoroughly mixed up, and he also finds that several versions of the same story are often very skilfully combined into one, in ways quite foreign to our own literary conventions. There are other things, that he should undoubtedly know, that he would be unlikely to find out for himself. In the first place, even the most respectable Jewish writers have, at certain periods, considered it quite legitimate to publish their work under famous names, or to adapt, amend, or add to, older texts. We should regard such actions today as thoroughly immoral, and some historians would say that it detracted seriously from the value of the Biblical record as evidence of history. It becomes understandable when we know that there was a long period when the Law and the Prophets were regarded as a closed canon, to which nothing new could be added, so that anything that was not attributed to someone mentioned in this record, had little chance of getting a hearing at all. For a description of this very rigid situation and of how it arose, the reader is referred to books on the period between the Testaments.

A more serious fact is that it was also considered quite legitimate to tamper with historical facts in order to point this or that moral. The attitude seems to have been something like that of the writer of the historical novels, "Well, if things didn't happen in this way, they ought to have done." A careful reading of the historical books of the Old Testament shows that the writers are, besides telling a story, also defending the thesis that the Jews' troubles were due to their serving

other gods, and that they ceased each time they turned back to Jehovah. Facts that fit in with this are emphasized; those which do not are often omitted or glossed over, for example, that the idolatrous king Manasseh reigned for over fifty years. Again, the discrepancies between Kings and Chronicles are probably due to the fact that the latter books were written from a much more priestly angle. The reader who desires to pursue these matters in detail must be referred to theological works, but, contemporary attitudes being what they are, it seems a great pity that the Church does not take more steps to warn its members of these difficulties. (The injunction, in the Thirty-nine Articles, that the Church "may not expound one part of scripture so that it be repugnant to another" seems to be aiming altogether too high.)

Unfortunately, the New Testament also contains some evidence of the same kinds of tampering. For example, St. Matthew seems to have been obsessed with the idea that Jesus was predestined to fulfil to the letter every prophecy that could possibly be held to refer to the Messiah. For example, after describing the Virgin Birth, he proceeds to tear the famous prophecy of Isaiah (chapter 7) right out of its context. Whether or not we think the facts to be authentic, this prophecy cannot refer to them. Some scholars hold that the Hebrew of Isaiah means young woman rather than virgin, but, apart even from this, it is abundantly clear from the context that the prophecy refers to a sign that was to be shown to King Ahaz. He was offered a sign (ver. 11) but declined to ask for it (ver. 12), he was told that he would be given it all the same (ver. 14), and that the kings of Israel and Syria (who were threatening Ahaz) would be out of the way before the child was grown up (ver. 16). We do not know whether Ahaz did get his sign but the prophecy, as we have it, cannot possibly refer to Christ. If a prophecy did not come true, the tendency was to wait, perhaps for centuries, until a suitable event did come along to which it could be fitted reasonably well, and St. Matthew tried to do just this. Another curious

example is the famous quotation of Rachel weeping for her children. This is applied in the New Testament to a situation almost exactly the reverse of that which gave rise to it originally (see Jeremiah xxxi, 15, 16). The Church has nothing to be ashamed of here, but it would do well to explain to modern readers of the Bible exactly how such misinterpretations came about.

Perhaps the most difficult problem of all is that some parts of the Bible are clearly intended to be allegories. Sometimes we are definitely told this, for example Jesus tells us that He intends to preach in parables, and the prophets frequently say that they are using a type, that is to say that an object or an experience is to be given a symbolical meaning which is sometimes, but not always, explained, or we may be told that each day of some period represents a year of actual time. Now there are many excellent reasons why this was done; Jesus wanted to discourage mere sightseers among His audience, besides which He lived in times that were extremely dangerous politically. Many of His audiences would have contained spies and *agents-provocateurs* acting on behalf of the Romans, and members of the various bitterly opposed sects of the Jews, and His premature arrest before He had had time to train the Apostles would have been a disaster. Equally, many Jewish writers worked in times when the nation was being persecuted, and direct statements would have been unsafe. It has often been suggested that the book of the Revelation is really some kind of coded message to oppressed Christians. The ordinary chapter headings of the Bible contain a singularly unconvincing attempt to interpret the Song of Solomon as an expression of the mutual love of Christ and the Church, but the very existence of this attempt is further evidence that symbolism of the most extreme kind was not thought to be at all extraordinary.

The unfortunate thing is that many of the keys seem to be irrevocably lost and we are left in the far from easy situation which enables us, if we wish, to write off whole books as

allegorical. We cannot doubt that the Jews took it as a matter of course that some of their literature was of this kind, but the difficulty for us is to know which. One has only to look at that strange writing, the apocryphal Epistle of Barnabas, to see to what lengths such processes of re-interpretation can be carried. This writer proposes to demolish the whole Mosaic Law, by regarding its distinctive instructions as symbolic rather than literal, but the proposed interpretations seem utterly fantastic to a modern reader. What, for example, can one make of his assertion that the number 318 (servants of Abraham) is really a sort of letter puzzle representation of Jesus and the Cross? Yet this and other strange interpretations of certain passages in the Old Testament came so near to being accepted by the early Church as genuine scripture, that this epistle is bound up with the famous Codex Sinaiticus. Such a method of reading sacred literature must, therefore, have been fairly widely acceptable. Another example is the Dead Sea commentary on Habakkuk, some of it seeming very forced. Many attempts have been made to interpret the numbers in the Bible in fanciful ways, but no means of checking the conclusions is in sight today.

There is thus room for a great deal of doubt whether to struggle with a difficult book like Ezekiel, only to end up by deciding that it is nearly all allegorical. The possibilities for complications, wild speculations, and the emergence of heresies seem very great. Here again it seems that the Church could help the laity much more than it does, in such matters as explaining which passages are read publicly and why, which chapters are suitable for private reading and meditation and which are best avoided or studied only under the guidance of a priest or theologian. The reasons for the choice of the Epistle and Gospel of the day are sometimes obvious, but are very often extremely subtle, and, here again, many of the laity would welcome much more guidance and explanation than they usually get. (After all, the Bible is a library, and even the most learned of scholars using a library has frequently to turn

to the librarian for help in finding what he wants.) The Church's task, then, is to interpret the Bible and Prayer Book, both of them centuries old, in ways that are understood of the people of today, and yet to avoid degradation or distortion. A mistake that is often made is that one is not told why certain lessons are read on certain days, and, when the obscure passages come along, very often nothing is said about them. It is far from obvious to the lay mind, to take just one example, why Septuagesima Sunday is the appropriate day for reading both Genesis i and a passage very near the end of Revelation. Whether we like it or not, the clergyman who does not tell his congregation about the meaning of what he reads and the significance of the ceremonies may soon lose most of his congregation or be suspected of Popery. Even the instructed reader of the Bible can be greatly helped if he is told, for example, a little about the historical and social background in which a particular prophet worked or a particular Epistle was written. The Bible is far from easy; some of the books are very difficult indeed and a few of them, such as Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, seem completely out of place.

Such difficulties are to be expected; after all, nearly every literary work of any value needs to be read and re-read before it is fully appreciated, and the apt and beautiful passages are winnowed from the precious or irrelevant ones. The pleasure we get tends to increase with the effort we make. In addition, we have the further facts that the Bible is about the most important topics in the world (even the cynics and agnostics grant this much), and that it was written at many different places and times by people whose outlook, and, still more important, whose standards of reporting, editorial accuracy and historical authenticity, differed in so many ways from ours. We know how rapidly literary standards change, for example, how quickly the flowery pomposity of some Victorian writing has become laughable and offensive to us. It is therefore not surprising that the constant repetition of the Psalms, the essence of Hebrew poetry, should be, for us, rather irritating,

that we find the legalistic attitude of the writer of the 119th Psalm unhelpful, and that the flights of imagination characteristic of Jewish apocalyptic writing should seem to us rather absurd. (We may well wonder what a future age will make of some of our modern books, for example, the gross distortions of the Gospel narrative introduced into *Salome* to justify the introduction of sexual perversion. Future readers will wonder why *Ulysses* should have been written in a dozen different styles, why the immense learning and research that it represents was poured out on such trivial themes, or why so many twentieth-century writers used unpunctuated sentences, or why one of them may be discussing the legends of the Holy Grail and, a few words later, linking them with the sexual and excretory functions.) Clearly every age has its literary peculiarities, and the canonical books of the Bible certainly span many centuries. Anyone who reads it today needs help, and one feels that the Church does not give enough.

Another fact that we must remember is that the Jewish conception of God was changing all the time that the Bible was taking shape. It seems to have begun as that of a tribal champion or war god, somewhat resembling the classical ideas about the gods. The extraordinary story of Abraham bargaining with Jehovah over the impending fate of Sodom might have come straight out of Homer, and other early stories remind us of Jove and his thunderbolts. The distinctive ideas of modern Judaism and Christianity such as infinite love, life after death and the coming of a Messiah seem to have appeared only very gradually. Unfortunately, one of the most important periods in which these developments took place seems to have been that between the Testaments. The Old Testament contains only the vaguest references to a future life, yet the Pharisees believed in it fully in New Testament times. A proper appreciation of the religious and intellectual climate at the time of our Lord's ministry seems to call for a study, not only of the Apocrypha, but also of some of the near-apocrypha, which is an enormous task for a layman, but this

very real need for a popular summary presents great opportunities to modern religious writers.

Many other opportunities of filling in the background for the benefit of the layman also exist. It is extremely difficult for a layman to read the Epistles with profit, but they do spring to life in a surprising fashion if one fills in just a few of the details about the peculiarities of each local church and the circumstances in which each letter was probably written. For an admirable collection of such material the reader is referred to Schonfield's *The Jew of Tarsus*. Similar background knowledge about many other parts of the Bible can be extremely helpful. Schonfield, in *The Bible was Right*, gives us many helpful details, and, besides, clarifying the actual meaning of the text, immensely enhances its credibility. Most people probably realize that, because of the explosive nature of the subject and the critical political situation, Jesus would have had to speak about John the Baptist in extremely guarded terms. Nevertheless, the average reader is left completely baffled by the famous phrase "a reed shaken in the wind"; yet it takes on an altogether new interest when one learns that the words for 'reed' and 'zealot' are practically identical in Aramaic.

We have before us the attempts of many people, who lived at many different times, to tell us about their conceptions of God, using for the purpose nearly all the recognized literary devices: poetry, drama, story-telling, imagery, allegory and so on. There is something to suit nearly every taste, and one can find passages of almost every degree of literary merit and of every degree of profundity to suit almost every situation. One person may find no help from passages that are of supreme value to another. Some passages repay reading over and over again because they can be interpreted at several different levels of understanding. (We can take *Gulliver's Travels* at its face value as a story for children; the grown-up reader can enjoy the satire with only an elementary knowledge of the political situation of the times; while some of the obscure allusions have puzzled even experts on the period.) Such writings as

St. John's Gospel and the Epistle to the Hebrews are in this sort of category. They can be read with profit by almost anyone, but, like Shakespeare's works, they are full of fine points that only become apparent if they are read under expert guidance. The Bible is a library which no two people will use in exactly the same way. The ideal rôle of the expert resembles that of the librarian out to help the non-technical reader, whereas a great deal of religious writing is that of the commentator trying to elucidate technical points of detail. Many other types of guidance are possible. The prophetic books are full of political pamphlets containing denunciations of this or that nation. Some of the mysterious allusions can still be understood, while the keys to others are irrevocably lost, and the non-expert would like guidance here too. (Today, we could hardly understand a political pamphlet about Napoleon without expert help.)

However firm our faith, we can hardly afford to rely on the Bible alone. As has happened very often, the Jews considered certain very important matters too sacred, or too obscure, to write about at all, a situation which required that some sort of oral tradition should be preserved through each generation. We too may expect to have to lean heavily on such traditions in our Church, if for no other reason than that much of Christ's teaching has not come down to us. (His recorded sayings leave many gaps and are thought to be equivalent to only about forty days of actual teaching, whereas His mission must have lasted at least one year, possibly two or three years.) The layman who tries to make contact with these traditions is confronted by a vast mass of material, commentaries, writings of the saints, lives of the saints, commentaries on their lives, and so on. Much of this would profit us nothing, being out of tune with the times in which we live. The modern mind looks with astonishment, for example, at the seemingly trivial points that led to the very serious split between the Roman and Orthodox Churches. It thinks, for example, that as the question whether the Holy Ghost

proceeds from the Father or from the Father and Son jointly is something that we cannot hope to settle in this world, it would be very much better not to argue about it at all. Still less can we understand why such relatively subtle points can ever have been regarded as legitimate reasons for persecutions or wars.

How can we make contact with some of the living traditions of the Church? Properly used, they should take us back through the ages and enable us to make contact with the disciples themselves in a way that the written record can never do. One way is to go to church and to talk matters over with one's vicar. One may know someone, not necessarily a clergyman, whose moral standards one respects and admires and one may try to trace their origin. One may take a fairly simple writing, such as *The Imitation of Christ* and compare it with the Bible. Any of these approaches can lead further — for example, we can try to see how à Kempis and other religious writers were influenced by their times. Many possible avenues lie open, and the scientific approach tells us to follow any idea without fear or favour wherever it may lead. It does not follow that this will lead to one's conversion but any such study, whether of the life and work of one saint, the history of some monastic order, or the history of the whole Church, cannot fail to be a rewarding experience. For example, ecclesiastical historians like Milman or Coulton must have derived great satisfaction from their work, which has permanently enriched our culture, even though they were opposed to many of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, whose history they record.

Is it possible to say what the end-result of such a study is likely to be? Straight away one can say that it will certainly provide plenty of ammunition for anyone who wishes to attack any sect of the Church; Roman Catholic, Church of England, Lutheran, Wesleyan — what you will. One recoils with horror from many things that have been done in the name of Jesus Christ, persecution, corruption, simony, provoking of wars, political chicanery, claims of infallibility —

the list is endless. One looks with absolute loathing at the attitude of the Inquisition. If it had merely put heretics to death it might not have been so bad, but the fiction that all that the Church was really doing was to expel the heretic ("abandoning him to the secular power", knowing full well what would follow) seems to be one of the most cynical pieces of hypocrisy ever recorded. Again, one finds it almost incredible that respectable people could, at any period, have accepted a plurality of high ecclesiastical offices, or could have solemnly undertaken cures of souls without even visiting their dioceses. Errors are still being made today. As a child, I was taught the absurd doctrine that a child begins to sin as soon as it is born (before it is even old enough to think, let alone to know the difference between right and wrong). The person who taught me this rubbish has attained high preferment. So we could go on filling volume after volume with error upon error, and it does not take more than a superficial reading of the Gospels to decide what Jesus would have said about them.

Let us, whatever denomination we may belong to, admit this unpleasant fact that the Church always has contained misguided, bigoted and cruel men, and that some of the otherwise good men have often exaggerated small points, such as the meanings of vestments or whether this or that small ceremony conforms with ancient usage, far beyond their real importance. Judging by the Gospel story, Judaism had run into similar difficulties — the Pharisees were often good men but were obsessed with the importance of ceremonial. We admit these unpleasant facts without trying to condone them. But there is another that also cannot be ignored — in fact it seems to be strongly reinforced by what we have just said. Whatever may have gone wrong, the Church has always contained people willing and able to hand on the great Message in the face of all difficulties. We may exclaim as much as we like at the times of corruption, of apparent indifference to crying wrongs, but the more we do this, the more do we see that there is something that we can turn into a source of inspiration —

— namely, that there always have been people willing, if necessary, to die for the Faith, and what is more, that they were always able to inspire others with the same Message. What the materialistic critic often does not seem to realize is that, the more he criticizes the clergy of this or that period, the more wonderful becomes the fact that in spite of all these difficulties, the Message has survived for so many centuries and that the Church has always gone a great deal of the way towards making itself suitable to the needs of each one. If we look through our hymn-books, we can find that some hymns are of permanent value down the ages, while others seem ludicrous or offensive to us today, but were doubtless helpful to congregations of other periods.

The main task of the Church today is to present a Message, in which faith and grace loom large, to a generation in which everything is doubted and questioned, and authority and tradition tend to be belittled. The task is an enormous one, but how worth while! The modern mind is not entirely composed of doubts and obstinacies. If it quibbles endlessly about minor points, it will nevertheless give a fair hearing to a patient person who seems to have something worth saying and who knows his stuff. If it mocks at traditions, the mockery often gives place to genuine interest if the origins of these traditions are explained. It may laugh at apparent inconsistencies, yet display enormous zeal in trying to find out how they originated. Some of the clergy have found it possible to put certain aspects of the Christian Message into modern dress and others will undoubtedly follow.

We are not suggesting that every parish priest should install cinemas or try to jazz-up the hymn tunes or resort to other cheap stunts; what we are asking is that he should interpret the Bible and Prayer Book in ways that are in tune with the needs and doubts of modern man, and that take at least some account of archaeological discoveries and modern studies of Biblical manuscripts. To take just one example, all kinds of sensational statements have been made about the Dead Sea

Scrolls, but the prevailing belief now seems to be that, although we now have fresh evidence of the substantial accuracy of our present Old Testament texts and new information about the times in which our Lord lived, the Christian Message is hardly affected. It would give much comfort to many laymen to be told just this. In the few years that these manuscripts have been available, almost every conceivable theory about their dates and significance has been ventilated in the literature, and the layman just cannot be expected to reach a reasoned conclusion without some guidance. This guidance can come quite as well, if not better, from the parish priest as from a high-powered expert.

The priest should regard himself, and be regarded by the layman, as an expert in religious matters in much the same way that the family doctor is an expert in medical matters. Now and then a situation arises in which the patient has to be referred to a specialist, and the earnest inquirer may have to be advised on occasion to consult a learned divine, either in person, or through his books.

CHAPTER

X

WHAT I BELIEVE

To every man is given the key of the gates of heaven, the same key opens the gates of hell — *Buddhist Proverb.*

IN former chapters I have tried to show that the universe, as we perceive its various aspects, is not incompatible with the idea of an intelligent Creator and Guide, who, nevertheless, may have very good reasons for refraining as much as possible from direct intervention. Along such lines a solution of the problem of evil seems to be within our reach, and this is, perhaps, one of the greatest stumbling blocks to a young Christian, while the materialist often regards it as one of his trump cards. Other key questions may have equal importance to the young inquirer, for example, what exactly is he asked to believe about heaven, angels, hell and devils?; what exactly is the Church's teaching about redemption and the Trinity?; why does the Church so constantly exhort us to pray when God seems to give, to many people, so little real feeling of His presence and companionship? Coupled with this last question may come something like this: "All right, we see that there may be perfectly good reasons why God does not reveal Himself unequivocally to people today. But, in that case, why did He not leave more convincing proofs of His stay on earth?"

In present-day conditions it is of no use at all to try to dodge such questions as mysteries too complex for our gross minds. Nearly all modern minds hold that, since so many apparent mysteries have been and can be solved by a patient process of adding step to step, more and more will follow in the years to come. An obscurantist attitude here is likely to be

compared today with, for example, the old idea that pain is something that it is cowardly or wicked to evade, so that anaesthetics were a violation of divine law.

If we return to the picture of a universe allowed to evolve and develop with the minimum of interference, we can get at least some idea of what the Biblical writers may have meant by angels. Almost always we hear in the Bible of an angel being sent to perform a definite task, and doing it in a rather impersonal way. Surely, in any large organization, there is always the tendency for some of the rules to be administered in a mechanical and impartial fashion and with an apparent loss of the personal touch. Often, almost always, one has deliberately to make some of the rules difficult to alter or override, merely to guard against constant requests to make exceptions. Even a small club usually has to insist, for example, that a substantial alteration in the rules has to be passed at two different meetings before it comes into force. Such tendencies become more and more marked as the organization becomes larger. The value of many of our institutions rests on the very fact that their rules and customs are not easy to alter. This helps us to understand why, even if the universe is divinely ordered, there must be a certain rigidity about some of its workings. As an analogy, it may be found necessary to lay it down that riding a bicycle without lights results in a fine of one pound, even though no damage may have been done and the offender may be the most public spirited man in the district. It seems to be executive, rather than administrative, functions that are assigned to angels in the Bible itself; in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are almost taught to think of them as the servants of mankind, rather than as superior beings. This picture seems most reasonable in any large organization; certain actions lead to certain consequences and arrangements have to be made to see that this state of affairs is permanent. (The absurdly detailed and extravagantly imaginative speculations about angels that were made by the schoolmen seem, to the author, to have no warrant in Scripture at all. Equally

elaborate ideas about recording angels have also grown up from time to time.)

This conception of the automatic consequences of certain types of action may also be what is behind most of the doctrines about heaven and hell, that we meet in the Bible. When Jesus, in His celebrated parable of the sheep and the goats, talked about everlasting rewards and punishments, He was uttering some very profound truths. (We first have to realize that He was probably forced to take the extreme cases of thoroughly good and thoroughly selfish people as an illustration for the benefit of an unsophisticated audience. In practice, no one is wholly good or bad, and such a simple division could never be made, but it would have complicated the discussion absurdly if such reservations had been made and the vividness of the parable would have been quite lost.) What He seems to have been trying to convey is that, in after-life, the consequences of our mistakes will be shown to us and it will, by then, be too late for us to retract them, and our eternal punishment and eternal rewards will consist in such knowledge of the results of our good and evil deeds. Now something like this is certainly true in this life. We all know how regrets for certain ill-advised, mean or thoughtless actions can pursue us in this life, that they will be with us as long as memory and consciousness last, and that, if our personalities do survive death in any form at all, these regrets, having become parts of our personalities, must survive too. This view of the matter is caught very well in the story of Scrooge. He and his friends were not criticized for making money, nor were they expected to give it all to the poor. The mistake they did make was to let the making of money become an obsession which blinded them to the good that they might have done in alleviating misery very near to them by spending a little of it in a sensible way. Once they were dead, these chances were lost for ever, and not even God could alter this unpleasant fact, though there remained for Marley the chance to help his friend. Even in this life, the memory of lost chances of doing good can

be a grievous torment. This seems to be the sort of idea that Jesus was trying to convey. "He is comforted, thou art tormented." The spirit of Lazarus could have done nothing to wipe out the regrets that Dives must have felt for his neglect. When we think of the fire, and the even more unpleasant devices that we read about in such documents as the Apocalypse of St. Peter, developed with such gusto by Dante and others, we have to remember that Jesus' audiences would have taken the existence of hell-fire almost for granted. Jesus may well have been mainly trying to drive home the lesson of the permanent consequences of evil-doing. God can forgive, but He cannot restore lost chances of doing good, and everlasting punishment is not too strong a term to describe the regrets for such lost chances.

If, as a matter of policy, an evil is often left to work itself out until man becomes enlightened enough to find the particular remedy, a price has to be paid. When the slave trade started, its evil consequences did, in the end, lead to its being suppressed without direct divine intervention. But it would have been an utter impossibility to undo all these consequences, for example, by returning all the negroes in the New World to Africa. Even the step of freeing the slaves led to many new problems, some unsolved to this day, but it is not possible to argue from this that there is no God.

Apart from the direct testimony of Jesus Christ, we can have very little direct evidence about the future life and what it is like. The fact of His own resurrection was convincing enough to the early Church. If we accept this testimony, rather than attempting a direct analysis of the fragmentary evidence that has survived until now, we can accept the future life as a fact, but we are told very little about what it is really like. Arguments based on what happens in this world are of very little help. The testimony of people who have 'died' and have afterwards been revived are not very illuminating, the accounts resembling very vivid dreams. Even if we believe in spiritualism, the accounts that have reached us seem to be

too detailed to be convincing, resembling a long succession of distorted mirror-images of life on this earth. A famous attempt to use earthly arguments was the rather stupid puzzle put forward by the Sadducees about the woman who married seven brothers in succession. All that this proved, if anything, was that human relationships in the next life are quite different from those on earth, a point that Jesus regarded as obvious in any case. We can only say this: we have had opportunities of testing for ourselves many other assertions of Jesus. Some of them seem strange and paradoxical, and must have seemed so to the disciples at the time, yet careful study of them has always shown that He knew what He was talking about. This experience seems the best of reasons for accepting His testimony in a case where it cannot be independently checked.

Much of the Old Testament is taken up with two problems: the search for means of putting across God's Message to the Jews, and the eternal question why the various devices tried, plus the unpleasantnesses that resulted from breaking the Law, did not lead to permanent reform. The New Testament is concerned with God's reaction when confronted with the world as it was during the reign of Augustus. Slowly and painfully humanity had learnt certain lessons, a reasonably just and efficient form of government had been evolved and the known world was at peace, though much evil was still in existence, and the two problems that had baffled the Old Testament prophets were still outstanding. It does not take a very great leap of the imagination to see that God decided upon some completely new approach to the problem of speaking to Man. The attempts of the prophets had been a failure in the sense that they had been rejected in their lifetimes, though their works were eventually accepted as holy.

From time immemorial, rulers of men have encountered these very problems of making their will known to their subjects and of appreciating their points of view, in short, of keeping in touch. The same problems occur in any large

organization. Sometimes the ruler has busied himself with every detail, so that the nation becomes one vast patriarchal family, as occurred during the period of Moses and Joshua. At other times, intermediaries have multiplied, and we may finish up with a bureaucracy, a police state, or with some fantastic form of benevolent despotism. Yet another device that rulers have used to keep themselves in touch with the attitudes of their peoples was the romantic one of travelling among them incognito, and Christians believe that something rather like this is what was finally tried. The analogy is, as usual, rough and incomplete, but may be of help to some. Many books have been written on different aspects of the atonement, to which the reader is referred for a fuller account, for example, H. A. Hodges, *The Pattern of Atonement*

Notice what would follow such a decision. In order to be able to speak to man with authority, the first requisite would have been for God to gain a thorough and complete understanding of the human point of view.* So we believe that God put His knowledge aside, came into the world as a child, and submitted to a normal education and upbringing as a working man's son. The little we are told of his childhood agrees exactly with this picture. Having been through this experience of living the life of an ordinary man, He was then in a condition to receive John's baptism, for knowledge to come to Him again, for it to be applied, in the light of His experience as a man, in the giving of a Message to mankind. The episode of Jesus among the doctors shows Him hard at work studying men's methods of teaching and their reactions to various situations. In

* Why did the Jews continually make the mistake of ignoring the prophets? A nation may act quite differently from an individual, and its motives can be hard to analyse. When an outsider sees a nation making a silly mistake and criticizes it, he is likely to be told: "If you only lived among us you would understand". God may have felt the need to understand the collective attitudes of the Jews before He could decide on the form of the Message that He had determined to give them.

St. Luke 4 we hear of an early sermon which began promisingly but ended in uproar as the result (let us face it) of some very tactless remarks. It seems that, like all other teachers, He had to learn His craft in the hard way. The Message was transmitted through the Apostles, a cross-section of society, representing various points of view. The text: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" is regarded by many as the key to the whole of the New Testament. Jesus Himself said that certain things were hidden even from Him (for example, the time of the last judgment). All this corresponds excellently with what the Gospels assert to have happened.

Apart from the problem of evil, the idea of an angry Father, who required the sacrifice of His Son before the sins of the world could be forgiven, has been a stumbling block to many. There are various stories in the Old Testament of God becoming more merciful as the result of prayer and intercession; such ideas turn up constantly in our own hymns and prayers. In its crudest form, this idea of atonement sounds thoroughly pagan and savage, akin almost to human sacrifice. Yet we find Jesus explicitly condemning primitive ideas like an eye for an eye and hitting back. The attitude He took to sin seems to have been something like this. Sin is inevitable if there is free will in the world, but the consequences of it are permanent, and will always be, in the end, unpleasant for the sinner. Even though God is always willing to forgive a true penitent who shares in His sorrow for the sins, He cannot wipe out their consequences. How to deal with the consequences of sin? Make restitution to whatever extent may be possible, but do not be lured into fresh sins by such misguided motives as revenge or by ill-conceived schemes to put matters right at the expense of causing fresh trouble. Finally, and this is the characteristically Christian part of the Message, try to live one's life in such a way as to be ready to turn to good account the evil consequences of sin as and when they impinge on that life.

Countless instances of this occur in Jesus' life — nearly all

the miracles were done in the context of utilizing the consequences of some misery, or some mistake, to drive home a lesson. Jesus used the clever questions not so much as opportunities to score crushing debating points, but as chances of teaching more lessons in a forcible and direct way. Think of the woman taken in adultery, brought to Him by a crowd of well-meaning but self-righteous people. As a teacher, He was asked to give a ruling on whether the Mosaic penalty of stoning was right. Any direct answer, in the sense of either condemnation or acquittal, would certainly have offended some of the crowd, and could have been used as a weapon to discredit Jesus. The Mosaic penalty had fallen into disuse, and was illegal under the Roman occupation. What was He to say? The course actually taken, instead of starting a riot, or, at best, furious arguments, seems to have taught them all some valuable lessons in self-criticism and charity that they would have remembered for a very long time. What a marvellous consequence of a thoroughly unpleasant original situation that must have seemed an ideal opportunity to divide Jesus' followers and discredit them! Many more instances of using awkward and unpleasant facts rather than fighting them could be given, and Christians can certainly copy the idea. Now why should Jesus have become convinced that His death was a necessary part of His mission? We must answer: because He foresaw that it could be used in many ways. First, it gave an opportunity to give proof of His divinity through the resurrection. Secondly, He felt that, in order to complete His experience of the world through the eyes of a man, He had to experience the worst that the world could do to Him, to make possible the new relationship between God and man that He was working for. Thirdly, to show, by His example, that He really believed in His great Message that the best way of fighting evil was to accept the permanent existence of its consequences and to seize every opportunity of turning them to good ends. What better method of demonstrating His belief in this principle could He have chosen? The lesson,

at all events, was thoroughly learnt and similar sentiments were felt by many of the martyrs. Perhaps we may sum it all up by saying that Jesus was prepared to go to any lengths to establish a better relationship between God and man. The former relationship symbolized by the Old Covenant, had been spoilt by the inevitable consequences of sin, not by the vindictiveness of the Father.

This is surely the lesson that St. Athanasius is trying to drive home in his creed, that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three different aspects of the same God, and that anything in the nature of conflict between them (as would be possible if there were three Gods) is unthinkable, and he was also fighting the Arian heresy that Jesus was merely a highly gifted man. The Son and the Holy Ghost represent God's direct approaches to man, by becoming a man and by inspiration of men. It is difficult for modern minds to understand certain philosophical niceties which the early Church thought to be of the first importance, such as the alleged differences between substance and accidents or between begotten and proceeding; indeed many modern philosophers would hold that most of such arguments arise from the impossibility of describing fundamental concepts in exact words. We can believe such a simple doctrine of the Trinity without confusing the issue by such irrelevancies. The Cross is to be thought of as a sacrifice freely made by one God, not as one deity sacrificing another. The latter item seems absurd to us, but in the time of St. Athanasius the influence of classical literature, with its endless stories of quarrels between the gods, must have been very great. (Traces of the idea of an angry Father requiring the sacrifice of the Son are evident even today in certain hymns.)

Do we think that Jesus left satisfactory credentials behind Him, or must we rely mainly on His Message as our evidence? For me, it is enough by itself, but others may wish to add the documentary evidence from the Bible and other sources, and the continued existence of the Church. Each will carry different weight with each individual and — and this seems important

— must certainly have changed in relative importance as the centuries have rolled by. In the early days, the evidence for the resurrection seems to have been completely convincing to the Church, and the Jews and the Romans seem to have been quite unable to disprove it publicly, though it would have been in both their interests to do this, for example, by producing the body. The historian of today is faced with an extremely difficult problem, greatly aggravated by the loss of the end of St. Mark's Gospel, in analysing the surviving evidence. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the continued existence of the Church during the lifetime of those who had actually seen Jesus, but her survival to this day is much more difficult to explain. As the direct evidence, from the resurrection itself, became weaker with the passing of the centuries, so the indirect testimony, based on the continued survival of the Church, has become much more cogent.

To this positive evidence, it is legitimate to add the negative arguments: How else can we explain the facts before us? and What sort of credentials could Jesus have left that would have been more convincing than those that we have? The story of the temptations makes it clear that Jesus considered the latter question most carefully, and rejected at least three alternatives: the military Messiah, the reliever of want and the spectacular wonder-worker. Any of these rôles would have had a big immediate impact on the world as it then was, but would this have lasted? In the light of the experiences of the prophets and of what He Himself had learned about the reactions of men and groups of men, He seems to have decided 'No'. We are hardly in a position to say that some other course of action would have been better than the one taken, there still being so many gaps in our knowledge of the situation in the Near East in Gospel times.

Many rationalist explanations of the existence of the Gospels and Epistles have been examined by the critics. Some of the more extreme ones, such as the theories that Jesus was a purely legendary figure, or that He was not really dead when taken

down from the Cross, can be said to have been finally disposed of, but it is necessary to pay more attention to some other suggestions. It is sometimes claimed that the account that we have corresponds to a substratum of real events considerably improved by the addition of legendary stories. The impressive agreement of the various independent writings, some written before, some after the national calamity of A.D. 70* and the upheaval which followed, could conceivably be accounted for on the basis of extensive editing and emendation when these writings were put together. Such an occurrence would be in line with the known propensities of Jewish sacred writers; it is, for example, not difficult to find in the Gospel story some forced attempts to see fulfilments of old prophecies, but what is a historian to make of the writings of St. Luke? He provides us with a enormous number of details, many of which have been independently checked (see, for example, Schonfield, *The Bible Was Right*) and which he must have taken great pains to verify. It seems inconceivable that such a careful writer would have included large blocks of purely mythical material about miracles. If we suppose this to have been added by later hands, the weaving of it into the original text was a very brilliant forgery indeed.

There are, moreover, other objections to this idea. In the first place there was hardly time for extensive accretion of legend before the first of the documents were written, and many eyewitnesses would still have been available. Secondly, even after much longer intervals than those that we are concerned with here, historical writers have had little difficulty in sorting out truth and legend about colourful figures such as Charlemagne and Alfred the Great. The Church has herself made genuine efforts in the past to sort out the legendary material, and began by throwing out quite a number of alleged Gospels. She has undoubtedly made mistakes, but has always been very much alive to this danger of the accretion of

* For example, we can compare the outline of Jesus' life obtained from the Epistles with the Gospel story.

irrelevant and misleading material with time. An impartial historian is bound to be extra cautious about the miracles of Jesus just because of their tremendous implications if accepted, and he would certainly call attention to all possible reasons for rejecting them. Thirdly, if the early Christians could have been shown to be in the habit of retailing grossly exaggerated accounts of miracles, their many enemies could hardly have failed to notice and exploit this fact. Certain of them are stated to have taken place before many witnesses and to have caused huge sensations. For example, the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate resulted in more than one meeting of the Sanhedrin. If this miracle did not in fact occur, how simple it would have been for counter-propagandists to disprove the account of it and its sequel. Why also did not the Roman authorities take some action on similar lines? Rome at first regarded Christianity as politically harmless (e.g. Pilate, Festus), but the attitude quickly changed when it became apparent that it was a threat to the cult of Emperor worship. The famous correspondence between Pliny the Younger and Trajan clearly shows the perplexity that they were in, and how eagerly they would have exploited any damning counter-evidence that they had been able to find.

Materialists often fail to notice the fact that if they deny the divinity of Christ and assert that He was no more than a carpenter in a small village in an obscure province of the Roman empire, who did no miracles incapable of naturalistic explanations, they are then faced with the problem of explaining how such a man could have started a movement that survived fierce persecution and became world-wide. Founders of other lasting faiths have had various advantages; Moses and Mahomet were successful military leaders, Buddha was a rich and accomplished nobleman, Confucius and Lao-tze had established reputations as scholars in a land where scholarship was respected, Gandhi had immense political abilities and found a favourable political situation combined with a Hinduism already in a process of rapid development. It has

been suggested, and with some truth, that the psychological atmosphere in Palestine was just right for the growth of a new religion. The Jews had never lost their belief in themselves as the chosen race, yet the bright hopes aroused by the Maccabean revolt had perished completely, and they were now being treated by the Romans as second-rate citizens. This was undoubtedly an appropriate moment for expecting the advent of the long-promised Messiah.

It undoubtedly seems to be true that the Messiah was expected, and also that there existed a multitude of traditions about his nature; some Jews expected a king, while others expected a scholar-prophet. (There was even the idea that it was an office, akin to a professorship or bishopric, to which a man might be called after many years of preparation and study.) This atmosphere of expectancy would have ensured that almost anyone who claimed to be the Messiah would have attracted a following; indeed we know of a number of such episodes. Gamaliel mentioned two, and a third led to the uprising of the Samaritans that brought about Pilate's recall to Rome. Here we can see how wise Gamaliel's famous advice really was. The times were indeed such that any imposter or religious maniac could have secured a hearing and a few followers, but this very fact would also have ensured that, within a very short time, his followers would have asked for some credentials, a sign, and would quickly have gone home if it had not been forthcoming. If we disbelieve most of the miracles, it becomes indeed hard to understand what can have induced hard-headed men like Matthew and Judas Iscariot to forsake everything to become His disciples. It is certain that He had an arresting personality, but this would hardly have convinced people other than at first-hand. It has been suggested that the moral quality of His teaching was so excellent as to be self-authenticating. This is true if one is prepared to reflect about it at leisure, but, to simple country folk, much of it must have seemed strange and paradoxical at first hearing. If, however, it had been accompanied by mighty works, as we are told was the

case, there would have been a very much greater inducement to think over the teaching at leisure.

If we particularly dislike any one incident in the Gospel story, it is often possible to show that there are important discrepancies between the different accounts and one can invoke possible later additions and mistakes in copying. (For example, the Modernists have attempted to minimize the importance of the Last Supper in this sort of way.) However, each such emendation does involve one or more purely *ad hoc* assumptions, and, the more of these we make, the more strain we put on the credulity of the reader. One crucial instance of this sort of uncertainty is, of course, the account of the resurrection. It is only right to admit that the surviving accounts are fragmentary, that there are genuine doubts about the authenticity of the important story of the guard on the tomb, and that the only recorded appearances were to the disciples themselves, who must, historically speaking, be regarded as interested parties, and that, on account of the very importance of what we are asked to believe, we do feel entitled to ask that the evidence should be particularly good.

On the purely historical side, that remarkable book *Who moved the Stone* by Frank Morison contains a factual examination of the evidence by someone who originally did not believe in the Resurrection, but ended by being convinced of its truth. He faces up to the great difficulties caused by the loss of the original end of St. Mark's Gospel, and concludes that much turns on the mysterious story of the guard on the tomb. If this story can be accepted at all, it seems certain that precautions were taken to prevent the fraudulent stealing away of the body, and that something extremely drastic must have happened on this first Easter eve to cause the guards to swoon or run away (either of which might easily have earned them the death penalty). If enough evidence is left today to convince, or convert, an impartial investigator, it becomes possible for us to understand how it was that, in the light of the actual facts, the disciples gained the burning convictions

to which their subsequent actions, which were in such strange contrast with their previous ones, seem to testify. Due weight, too, must be given to the fact that they succeeded in instilling these same convictions into non-witnesses of the facts, and so on, generation after generation, down to the present day. For many people, these simple arguments are enough — they do not need the meticulous sifting of evidence according to historical standards — they will accept the work of others who are better equipped.

He who still doubts knows that the evidence is there awaiting study by anybody, that it has convinced at least one person who began looking at it with an unfavourable bias and that quite a number of alternative theories that try to account for the facts do not stand up to serious examination. Added to the written evidence we have the living testimony passed down through the Church from generation to generation and originating from the Apostles themselves. Added to this again we have the evidence that each person can gain for himself by introspection, and the evidence from the external universe. On so important a matter one is reluctant to rely on any one line of approach, but the sum total of all the evidence is very considerable indeed.

One last word on prayer to a very numerous class of people, the unfortunates. "Yes", they say, "there may be something in it, but, if so, why am I denied the beautiful spiritual experiences that some say they have? I have tried praying, I have many times asked sincerely for some enlightenment, yet nothing ever seems to happen." This kind of question is extremely hard to answer, because every individual is, in several senses of the words, a special case. The Christian teaching is plain: God can and will make use of anyone who is willing to co-operate, but that willingness may be valueless if it is forced on the individual by some wonderful manifestation or sudden visitation. Now if a person constantly reflects on certain problems from the Christian angle he can hardly fail to benefit himself. What Jesus taught is really so simple. He specially

warned us against ostentatious praying and church-going, and decried constant mechanical repetition of prayers. If a person who thinks that he has been badly treated, or has been extremely unlucky, tries to see new points of view about his problems, he can hardly fail to benefit. "Why did X behave in such a shocking way to me when he had no need to?" "Perhaps he didn't know any better; perhaps he really thought he was doing right; perhaps he was misinformed about the situation and decided to handle it in an unfortunate way; perhaps I managed to wound him deeply when he pointed out some fault of mine." "Why doesn't God give *me* a lucky break? I try so hard but nothing ever comes off, yet other people have all the luck." Here again is a chance for profitable reflections. "What effect would it have if I achieved this ambition now? Would I slack off and become lazy?" "Can I think of anything wrong with my present approach?" "Is it possible that I am aiming at the wrong thing, and that I might do better by shifting my sights?" "What might be the unpleasant results to others?" Questions like this could be multiplied indefinitely along perfectly sane and healthy lines. Jesus never advised us to indulge in morbid introspection. The same cannot be said of all Christian writings; some show too strong a tendency to emphasize the sinfulness of man, whereas the whole emphasis of Jesus' teaching was on the doing of good. Some writings, like the Communion Service, or the elaborate techniques of self-examination recommended by certain devotional manuals, do come dangerously close to the morbid.

The advice to love and pray for our enemies seems to some an unrealistic ideal. Surely, the attempt to penetrate the motives of one's enemy and to try to understand his point of view, be he a thief, a Communist, an intriguer or merely an unpopular relative, is one of the most worthwhile of activities, whether one is a believer or not. No evil can be remedied until its possible causes are understood. Again, the attempts to understand God's possible points of view (why He cannot grant us our requests at once and very often answers them in

quite unexpected ways), or to appreciate possible reasons why He does not reveal Himself unmistakably to each one of us, can only lead to our becoming more patient and tolerant. The process of gaining such understanding may be very gradual and extend over many years. Perhaps people are inclined to read more into the phrase 'communion with God' than is really intended. Two persons talking, even about quite superficial matters, can hardly escape revealing some facets of their personalities, but it may be years before they 'know' one another at all well, and the process of getting to know God can be very much slower. We should not grieve at this; we should merely realize that there may be very good reasons why it is so. Jesus Himself needed to pray constantly. He must have been constantly thinking over the complex relationship between man and God.

Some may say: "How can we expect to know God when so little of His teaching is preserved?" Indeed, it is true that we should very much like to know what Jesus said or thought about so many of the burning questions of the day. In some cases, we can fill the gaps without trouble; for example, it does not take very much imagination to know what He would have said about the colour bar. In other cases we cannot do this; for example, sincere Christians are hopelessly divided on whether it is ever right to go to war or to give instruction on birth-control. In yet others, we are told so little that it is hard to form a balanced opinion. Some of His sayings seem to advocate the doctrine of non-violence in nearly all circumstances, yet, when the soldiers asked John the Baptist what they should do, he did not tell them to refuse duty whatever the consequences, but to do their job in a humane way and not to abuse their power, nor did Jesus ask the centurion, whose servant He healed, to give up his post. Always we have to think hard, and to look out for possible misinterpretations or translations. Anyone who takes literally the famous injunction to "Take no thought [about food and clothes] . . ." is likely to end up in difficulties, yet, if we substitute the

equally good translation, "Be not over-anxious . . .", we find ourselves being given the shrewd advice that one who does not worry overmuch about material things is likely to have at least as full and happy a life as one who does. We have testimony from many who have tried.

The scientific approach to religious matters holds that nothing is too sacred, too difficult or too trivial for earnest and careful thought and meditation; that it is sometimes possible to reach satisfying and sensible conclusions, and that, even if we make mistakes, they will be freely forgiven us; that whether our faith is originally strong or weak, such inquiries are infinitely worth while, if for no other reason than that they help us towards a better understanding of the world and of our fellow men.

Besides all these individual efforts, why did Jesus encourage us to 'dress up' as children of God, to meet together to recite prayers and carry out prescribed ceremonies in company with other people, some of whom we may dislike or regard as humbugs? Of what possible benefit can it be to people who fall so far behind the ideal as we do to come asking for absolution and then go away to make more mistakes? The answer is twofold: even a formal confession is a great deal better than nothing and can hardly fail to increase one's resistance next time one is tempted; also a meeting with other people can be productive of good even if it is not apparent at the time. Anyone who has belonged to a committee knows that its decisions are sometimes foolish and petty, but that at other times a wise decision is made without anyone being quite aware of how it has happened. People will afterwards report that 'the sense of the meeting was . . .' and then go on to state a view that commands general assent, yet differs from anything any one member actually said. Church-going provides opportunities for experiences like this on the religious plane, even for people who do not feel the divine presence at all.

EPILOGUE

HAS THE WORLD EVOLVED OR REGRESSED AS KNOWLEDGE HAS ADVANCED?

Progress is real, if discontinuous. The upward drive resolves itself into a series of troughs or crests. But, in these domains which archaeology as well as history can survey, no trough ever declines to the low level of the preceding one; each crest out-tops its last precursor. Observation has convinced me that moral evolution is upward, despite massive evidence to the contrary — *Eden Phillpotts*.

IT is not difficult to find exponents of the view that we are vastly inferior today to what we were at great periods in our history, and some historians do indeed see nothing but the learning and forgetting of various lessons. If such a picture were the whole truth, it would indeed be difficult to maintain our view of a God who is making use of the evolutionary forces in the universe, and the gradual accumulation of human experience over the centuries, as means for creating a better world. The author has heard the present day compared unfavourably with almost every other period of modern history; the nineteen-twenties, the Victorian age, the eighteenth century, and so on right back to Elizabethan times. It is possible to find plenty of faults with the modern state of affairs, but we are so apt to forget some of the solid gains that the last century or so has brought us, which are unlikely ever to be wholly lost. To pick just a few — the self-governing dominion, the realization of practically everything asked for by the People's Charter, the introduction of proper inspection of factories and housing (and, even more important, the realization that such matters just cannot be left to look after themselves), and the rapid progress we have made in understanding

economic and social sciences. (In these very same nineteenth-century, no one seemed able to deal with unemployment, and, when the big crisis came, the shrewdest business brains in the country could propose nothing better than savage economies, a policy now known to have been completely unsound, which probably prolonged the slump quite unnecessarily.)

When we have quite finished decrying the Welfare State and its manifest disadvantages, let us ask ourselves seriously whether we would really want to go back to anything remotely resembling the conditions of Victorian times? Apart from Dickens' exposures, what sort of England must it have been of which General Booth could write that the standard of a working man was worse than that of the proverbial cab-horse (which could at least count on a job and adequate shelter and food)? No doubt our present sexual and political behaviour leaves much to be desired and there is much cynicism and frustration about, but do we really prefer the disgusting political and private lives of the eighteenth century and the utter cynicism of the usual motives for making wars in that period so well portrayed by Swift? In *Frederick the Great and Kaiser Joseph*, my father gives an account of an utterly useless and futile war, with the most sordid possible causes, and he found Swift's famous passage a most apt introduction to this book. Would we prefer the hypocritical morality and subjection of women of Victorian times? Erring daughters could be turned out into the snow; men could slowly starve to death in debtor's prisons. Meanwhile the smugly satisfied members of well-to-do families carried food, tracts and coals to the poor and gave a little to foreign missions as their share of alleviating the wants of their fellow men. Thus they salved their consciences and conveniently forgot the appalling misery and squalor that accompanied the Industrial Revolution to which many owed their prosperity. Are we proud of the Crimean War? Before we throw the United Nations overboard and sigh for the old diplomacy, let us reflect that the latter was unable to prevent World War I (that no one seems to have wanted) and let us

look back at the exploits of Metternich, Princess Lieven and the Cottage Côterié. Some would have us look on the first Elizabethan age as golden, but the slave trade is glossed over, and the fact that torture of *suspects* was taken as a matter of course is conveniently forgotten.

Mud-slinging is unprofitable, and the whole argument may seem pointless, since one cannot draw up a moral balance sheet at any time. But it does seem a travesty of the truth to argue that we are so very much *worse* than other ages have been. The items on the credit side are all too easily forgotten. The present-day idea that nations with a high standard of living have a real responsibility towards less fortunate peoples seems to be something completely new, even if it is slightly coloured by self-interest. We lament, and rightly, that so many nations of the world are under foreign domination and that others are near starvation or are under corrupt and incompetent governments, who probably could not initiate progress even if they wanted to. Yet is this pattern so very unfamiliar? In the nineteenth century Europe also had its Russian menace and the ruthless domination of small peoples that we have today, together with many more problems caused by the gradual decay of the Austrian and Turkish empires. It is a melancholy reflection that many nations in the world have never experienced anything remotely resembling freedom or democracy, and others, such as Poland, China and Bohemia, have been under foreign domination for long periods of their history. I am not trying to be complacent about the present situation of the world, far from it; what I am trying to show by these few instances is that things are in some respects very much better and, in at least some others, no worse than they had been at various periods in the past.

Perhaps one of the most characteristic features of the world today is that very few people are content with the present state of things. Too often in the past, people with influence have thought that things were too perfect to alter. The discontent certainly results in all kinds of bitterness, inefficiency,

and wasted efforts, and some of the newly independent nations are clearly repeating some of the mistakes of the past, but these are surely inspiring times for Christians to live in. A Christian will have many more opportunities of trying to influence the world, by application of his principles in the ways explained in former chapters, than he would have if he lived in a comparatively stable or complacent society. A time of change provides a wealth of opportunities. We know very well that Christians seized many of the opportunities to influence the world presented to them by the rises and falls in the fortunes of the Roman empire. This applies not only to the great leaders of history but to countless others whose names are not known. Similar opportunities exist for any Christian today at every level. Christ tells us to use them in a sensible way, never to despair if we do not get quick results, and never to give way to complacency, nor to attempt too much. What better advice could anyone give to a friend in present times? The Church can give us much help in following it and it is never wise to refuse help that is freely available.

Some people hold that the horrors such as Dachau and Belsen are conclusive evidence against a progressive view of history. Certainly, they do show that things can deteriorate with alarming speed if, for any reason, there is a shortage of people determined to fight such trends whatever the consequences. But it is possible to draw some comfort even here. At least they were promptly followed by genuine efforts on the part of the world to set right some of the fundamental causes of such horrible evils, rather than merely to take some senseless revenge for them. Let us remember that barbarities like flogging a man through the fleet are not so very long extinct; that, within living memory, respectable and well-meaning people loudly maintained that the British Army were the scum of the earth, who could only be appealed to through the lash. Let us also remember that the nineteen-twenties, which are alleged to be such a wonderful period, saw the liquidation of the kulaks in Russia (now admitted to have been done by deliberate

starvation) pass almost without a protest, certainly without any effective action, from the rest of the civilized world. To this same period belong the twitterings of various well-meaning people about the sterilization of the unfit (the method by which they were to be selected never being explained; the horrible example of Nazi Germany shows only too clearly where such muddle-headed ideas might so easily have led). The world does seem to be learning by its mistakes, but oh, so slowly. Compare the present fairly healthy state of international finance with the endless crooked deals that occurred between the wars, e.g. nations repudiating debts and then using the income that should have paid the interest to buy up and cancel their own depreciated bonds. Again, we have gradually learned that prosperity does not necessarily come if each nation is left to manipulate its own currency and tariffs at its own sweet will. Yet, before the last war, this situation was taken as a matter of course, and any attempt to alter it would have been bitterly opposed on all sides.

Any crusader of today can find plenty of causes, but this is not at all the same as saying that the world as a whole has slipped back. Doubtless we do strike bad patches and lose some ground from time to time, and a great deal of selfless effort is needed merely to enable the ground already gained to be held. What opportunities for anyone who wants to try applying Christian principles to his everyday life!

We abandon this attempt to draw up, *Robinson Crusoe* fashion, a list of the evil and good in the world, after having thrown out a few talking points in support of the idea that present times are by no means hopeless — in fact, that they can bear comparison with any other period. Where have all our arguments, which have tried to be fair to the materialistic case, finally led us? This seems to be the final position:

(a) The inductive, or scientific, method of argument can never prove anything, but it can make conclusions extremely probable. It can legitimately be used to arrive at conclusions about the universe, and to attack any problem, however difficult or sacred.

(b) The Christian case has suffered because it is not always presented in a manner suitable to the times. For example, a too rigid application of Paley's teleological arguments about intelligent design is felt, by many, to be almost insulting when one contemplates the world today (or the world of any other period).

(c) The evolutionary-materialistic thesis can explain a great many of the facts about the universe, and the number of such facts is constantly increasing. It is likely that this will ultimately apply to items like the origin of life and the workings of the mind, that were once thought to be utterly beyond its purview. In the author's view, the Christian can safely concede all this, and he makes a strategic blunder if he does not do so.

(d) Instead the Christian puts forward the alternative suggestion that God does intervene in the affairs of the world, but mostly prefers to work through the existing laws of nature. Arguing from various analogies it becomes possible to see many reasons why this might be so. From our own experience we know that no organization of any size can be made to run with absolute smoothness in all parts at all times. If we accept this modification of Paley's position, we can describe the universe as something that is being created (rather than as something that is finished) with as much success as can the evolutionary-materialist. We think of a God who makes things make themselves, like Kingsley's Mother Carey.

(e) There are other items that are not easily explained on an evolutionary-materialist basis, yet seem to fall naturally into place on our hypothesis. Amongst them may be mentioned the existence of moral and aesthetic values, the universal desire and respect for knowledge, the existence of the Bible and the Church and the survival of the Church down to the present day, despite all its tribulations and difficulties.

(f) One can safely concede that study of the Bible, and unbiased investigation of these other matters can be extremely difficult, but even the reading of a good book demands effort and reflection, and serious study of any kind can make very

exacting demands even on an expert. How can we expect the central problems in our lives to be solved easily? The leading of a Christian life is very difficult in present day conditions; one gathers that the same has been true at all times. The struggle is difficult but rewarding, and the opportunities for putting Christianity into practice are as abundant today as they have ever been.

(g) While it is not possible to give simple descriptions of such ideas as the Trinity, heaven and hell, angels, prayer and atonement, it is a tactical blunder to wrap them up as sacred mysteries. By the use of analogies one can gain considerable insight into their meanings and significance, and this effort to understand is one of the most rewarding that anyone can make. The efforts others have made down the ages are of a little help, but each individual must make much of the effort himself, in his own way, at his own pace. The process cannot be hurried, any more than can any kind of education.

We can conclude in the words of the kindly cleric, John N. Figgis in *Civilisation at the Cross Roads*. Although he spoke them well before World War I, he was profoundly distressed at the state of the world in Edwardian times, and did not hesitate to say so often. He was no cloistered hermit nor complacent humbug. He asks: "Do we know enough of reality to pronounce *a priori* as incredible such a narrative as that of the Gospels, supported as it is by the statements of the Epistles, actualized in the Church and the individual of today?" Half a century has passed since he spoke, during which time our knowledge has increased beyond anything he can have dreamed of, yet the really honest answer must still be "No". To quote Figgis again: "No bigotry is more intense and less amenable to evidence than that dogmatism which, while proclaiming man's ignorance of the secret of things, asserts also that he knows enough of that secret to declare that it could not communicate itself through Jesus Christ . . . to deny that it was possible is pure assumption. . . ."

With other writers, we have found that the materialist

case is itself not free from mysteries and articles of faith that its devotees must accept without proof. Figgis here lays his finger on one of the most indigestible of them, which we have already discussed (pp. 36, 89). Among materialist scientists one often finds a certain conceit, not about their personal achievements, but embodied in various assertions about the scientific method, equivalent indeed to a claim that they *do* know enough of that secret. One very recent fact is more than a little ironical. It has been said that one of the motives for developing the theory of the universe known as the continuous creation of matter was to avoid the philosophical difficulties associated with an initial act of creation (which are very real ones for an agnostic). If the universe has always been much the same as it is now, the need for initial creation seems to disappear. Yet mark the cost of this! We have now to suppose that hydrogen atoms are continually popping up into the observable universe from nowhere. In other words, the one single act of creation has now been replaced by a continuous creative effort. We have seen that the latter postulate is at least as acceptable to a theist and Christian as is the former, one of the main parts of the Message being that things cannot just be left to run themselves.

Even more arrogant is the claim that some aspects of the universe are so fantastic and inexplicable that they cannot be the result of intelligent design. One can only compare this with the attitude of a child who rummages among his father's papers, and concludes from a study and partial understanding of their contents that his father must be mad, or that business matters are square or all rot.

APPENDIX

I

SOME COMMON DIFFICULTIES ANSWERED

I venture to hope that I can help someone by these short answers to some queries that I know have caused difficulties.

Why did a good God create something like the polio virus?

It is indeed difficult to see that the world would not be improved by its removal. It can hardly be even an instrument of divine punishment, since it seems to strike a population at random, crippling one person and leaving his neighbour practically unscathed. A great deal has been found out in the last few years about the reproduction of viruses, and we can even make informed guesses about how they originate. One possibility is that they may appear spontaneously in certain living cells that contain the necessary chemical constituents. If this is so, the problem of creating living cells that shall be immune to virus may be rather like that of preparing a compost that will grow crops and not weeds. In other words, it may be intrinsically impossible to produce an environment that suits us and yet prevents the appearance and growth of our parasites. In the present state of knowledge this is only a speculation, but, in view of the great importance of the question, it seems well worth considering.

Why is the known universe so large compared with our home?

This argument, based on the relative insignificance of the world compared with the stars and galaxies, is by no means trivial; indeed it influenced a person so impartial and well-informed as Professor C. D. Broad. Ramsey's answer to it (p. 30) is incomplete. The short answer really seems to be that we do not know at all how many other planets really exist in the universe, since we do not really know how the solar system was formed. On any theory, there are likely to be a large number of stars with planetary systems of their own, and, on a small proportion of these planets, conditions are, or were, probably about right for the spontaneous appearance of life in

the manner outlined on p. 51. There seems to be no valid theological or philosophical objection to the existence of life and free will in more than one setting, in which case the above argument loses much of its cogency.

Is not the Christian ideal too remote to be attained?

In the modern world, it is a very good citizen indeed who does not ever break the law; the test of a good citizen is that he respects it. It is sometimes said that the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount are so inaccessible that it is not worth even trying to live up to them, and this leads to very dangerous ideas (like deliberate putting off of reform and repentance to the eleventh hour). But are these ideals so unattainable? The life of Joan of Arc seems to have been one of almost perfect obedience, King Henry VI seems to have carried out the injunction of submission quite literally, while in the long legal and political career of Abraham Lincoln, we hear of mistakes and possibly strange actions, but never of underhand or mean ones.

These are three examples of lives that have kept closely to the Christian ideal while being subjected to the full impact of the world. All three involved disappointments and suffering, yet all three resulted in achievements of permanent value.

How does one reconcile the injunctions to "fight evil" and "not to hit back"?

To the logical purist there is indeed a discrepancy here. Just because the evil affects him as well as others is, to the Christian, no reason why he should not resist it. If the remedy is worse than the disease, he should not resist.

Why is the second coming so long delayed?

There is indeed evidence, from the Epistles and elsewhere, that an early end of the world was expected by the primitive Church. It has even been claimed that some of Jesus' own prophecies failed, so that He was no greater than other prophets. I believe that such misunderstandings stem largely from confusion between three distinct events, any of which could quite legitimately be described as marking the end of an era. These are the coming of the Kingdom of God, which could be dated at the first Easter or Whitsun, the destruction of the temple and much of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which Jesus clearly foresaw as the almost inevitable consequence of the political situation that He faced, and the second coming, which

was to be delayed "until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled", and of which Jesus several times said that He did not know the date. We can only guess, but it does seem quite likely that some prerequisite for the second coming is still not fulfilled. We know for a fact that evolutionary processes and reforms just cannot be hurried. For the first time in history, we do seem to be within sight of a time when most of the inhabitants of the world will have enough to eat, and leisure to reflect on philosophical matters. It seems quite possible that the second coming will be delayed until well after this stage is reached.

Is the devil a real person?

Many passages in the Bible do seem to assert that he is a real person who exploits the failings of human beings to delay God's plan. I believe that it is better to take them in the same sort of sense that one speaks of the demon of drink. If man is given reason, free will and a conscience, it is inevitable that he will experiment with them even to the extent of rationalizing his sins, trying to convince himself and others that his conscience is wrong. The results, pride and temptation, are often very similar in effect to works of the devil, and they differ little in effect from the deliberate actions of an evil being.

Do I believe in "the God of the gaps"?

This phrase has become almost a slogan in the mouths of certain agnostics, the implied claim being that, as the sciences have advanced, fewer and fewer possibilities seem to remain available for the operation of divine influence on world affairs, and that some of the channels suggested in the past have already been closed off, for example, we no longer regard oracles or sibylline books as such. My answer to this is that some of the possible channels are never likely to be closed off in this way. We have already suggested that aesthetics are never likely to be reduced to an exact science. Thus, in the foreseeable future, we shall always have to consider the possibility that aesthetic experiences form a possible channel of communication between God and man. Again, in the light of present day knowledge it seems to me extremely likely that God uses the unconscious mind as a means of influencing our decisions. We are never likely to find out enough about the unconscious to be in a position to refute this. (Psychologists sometimes talk about a

'complete analysis', but this, if it means anything like what it says, is a contradiction in terms — the mind under analysis may have spent years in considering subtle matters beyond the analyst's purview; the experience of the analysis is itself something that may have far-reaching effects on the unconscious that have, in their turn, to be sorted out and evaluated and so on, *ad infinitum*.) On the positive side, it is abundantly clear that the unconscious is intimately concerned with intellectual, poetic and artistic inspiration. Why not with divine inspiration and guidance also?

Are there punishments and rewards in this life?

Christ warned us, quite explicitly, against the tendency, so popular in Victorian times, to see a stroke of divine judgment in operation whenever anyone has an inexplicable piece of bad luck. We seem to be forced to conclude that punishments for our mistakes in this life will consist mainly of our having to suffer their consequences which follow automatically. In particular, we gradually become aware of the opportunities for doing good that we have lost. Christ also promised us rewards for good deeds done secretly, or for that little bit of extra effort that may not become apparent to men, or which does not seem to have any immediate effect. We cannot doubt the truth of this. Apart altogether from the deep satisfaction associated with a good job well done, countless Christians have testified to the existence of some rather more subtle system of rewards. They claim that the consequences of some special effort are never wasted. They become manifest in such a way that it is always possible for the person himself to trace cause and effect, though it may be difficult for anyone else to do so. However, the reward does not always come at once, and it is very often not the one that the person hoped for or expected at the time; indeed the time lag can be very considerable. I can do no more than add my own testimony to that of others. In a research career, it is clearly one's duty to make the utmost possible use of any gifts that one may have, and any failure to do so recoils upon oneself. Like people in so many other walks of life, I have had setbacks that are not entirely my own fault, but I can make no complaint at all about the deep satisfaction that has always followed an exceptional piece of effort. The actual material rewards, though sometimes delayed in time and unexpected in form, have always been quite evident — and it

would be no exaggeration to describe them as pressed down and flowing over.

Does God ever alter His decisions?

From various stories in the Old Testament, we are clearly intended to understand that the answer is 'Yes', and this agrees with the Christian position. In human affairs, it very often happens that a decision has to be modified or reversed, even though it was the right one in the light of the information available at the time. Now, if we believe in free will, it must follow that the information available even to God will very often be incomplete. He does not actually know how a certain individual, or group of people, will react to a certain situation. When this information does become available, it clearly has to be taken into account — it would be mere stubbornness not to do so.

APPENDIX

2

A NOTE ON 'THE PALM SUNDAY CASE'

While this book was in press my attention was called to 'The Palm Sunday Case', *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 52, February 1960, pp. 79-267. It illustrates the immense difficulties that seem to face anyone who tries to analyse impartially evidence for the occurrence of 'odd' events in the world to-day. It is claimed that, over a period of about fifteen years, there was an attempt by a group of dead scholars to achieve two things: first, to convey to a person still living (the first Earl of Balfour) news of the survival of the personality of his long-dead sweetheart; secondly, to supply to the living world proof of their own survival by a new method that precluded 'explaining away' as being the result of telepathy between living people or the consequence of subliminal effects in the medium's minds. The method of communication was automatic writing, through five different sensitives, and the novel feature was that the sense of the messages could only be understood after careful comparison of a very large number of scripts and the bringing into play by the interpreters of vast literary knowledge, together with scholarly insight of great subtlety. Many of the scripts contained indications that the messages were being fragmented deliberately, phrases like: "I grasp a new thread to-day", "Look elsewhere for further information" being common.

Now it does seem to be quite clearly established that the automatic writers had no knowledge whatever of some of the events so cryptically referred to in their scripts, and, in some cases, the investigators themselves were also not aware of them at the time. Also, that some of the literary allusions would have been incomprehensible to the automatic writers themselves. Even a very hasty study of the evidence suggests that the attempt to invoke telepathy between living people as the explanation is unacceptable—such a process would have involved so many tortuous and repeated interchanges between the writers and the interpreters. In view of the

acknowledged uncertainty and capriciousness of telepathy even between highly sensitive people, such an explanation seems impossible.

What, then, are we to make of this piece of evidence? It seems to me that only two attitudes are possible. One can take the line of thorough and complete scepticism and regard the writings as the mere vapourings of the unconscious mind. The determined attempts of the investigators to find the hidden meanings *could* conceivably be written off as wishful thinking. (Indeed, the investigators had their own doubts about some of the interpretations and allusions, calling them far-fetched.) If one works hard and long enough at some modern poetry one can extract some sort of meaning from it. We have also heard of people 'decoding' Roger Bacon and obtaining accounts of microscopes and other modern devices and of people who read Shakespeare 'between the lines' and find the name of the real author. It is possible to point to things that make the evidence as a whole much less credible than it might have been; the interpretation of 'sigma' in about a dozen different ways, or the almost hopeless confusion that occurred between 'hair lying in a casket' and 'a sealed letter lying in a chest'. The former idea was a central theme in the messages, the latter has nothing whatever to do with it. (It must have come in because of the attempts that have been made by Myers and others to communicate the contents of sealed envelopes after the death of the sealer, but its intrusion here complicated the task of the interpreters enormously.)

On the other hand, what follows if we do accept this evidence at its face value? Only two things seem clearly established by it, first, that personalities survive after death; secondly, that they retain enough attributes to make some forms of mutual recognition possible. Now these are the two very things that Christ assured us were facts, and they are almost the *only* things He told us about the future life. To one who is both scientist and Christian, the fact that some sixty years of investigation of this matter has taken us just this far and no further, conveys an absolutely clear message. There must have been very good reasons why Christ told His people so little about this point, which we know to have been of such burning interest to the Jewish mind. The fact that we have here some independent evidence in confirmation of these two facts, but going no further at all, seems to me to mean that some of these

reasons must still operate—that this end-result is God's gentle way of telling us that, for the present anyway, we can still be told no more about the future life. This is quite acceptable to a Christian; the Church has sometimes described this particular branch of psychical study as unnecessary or has prohibited it outright. A scientist who was confronted with an investigation that after many years of hard work merely confirmed some known results, but led to no new ones, would be strongly tempted to drop it. He would conclude that the methods he had been using were unsuitable, or that some very formidable obstacle was preventing further progress.

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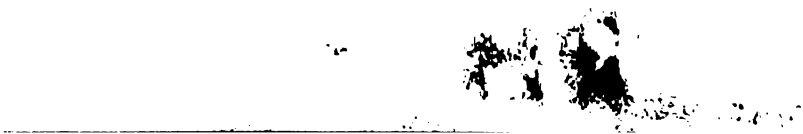
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