

A CREED, OR NO CREED?—IF A CREED,
WHAT CREED?

OR A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF THE

EVANGELICAL CREED.

ALSO

A Defence of Prayer.

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A CREED, OR NO CREED?

ROBABLY no time has witnessed a more perplexing presentation of the subject of religion than the present. Its doctrinal aspect is almost lost in the eager anxiety to emphasize its practical importance. The fine old theology of the Puritans has given way to the philanthropy of the present age, or a new theology is invented in the interests of modern speculation. A rivalry has commenced between religious and secular sects, to vindicate their claims by their practical value. The inevitable result has followed. Truth and principles have frequently been divorced from their natural allies. We are sometimes told, even by gifted religious guides, that we want neither doctrines nor theological dogmas, but conduct. The world is tired of theories, and now addresses itself to a genuine philanthropy. This attempt to separate truth from practice is fatal to all success. They are no rivals, they go together; they co-exist in mutual dependence, and in no department more than in Christian conduct and character. It is difficult to understand this attempt to detach practice from doctrine. The argument is in defiance of the spirit and purpose of inspiration. The Bible is filled with incident subservient to the great design of revealing truth, and this truth not mechanical, but forceful, and pregnant with a moral and spiritual influence that re-moulds the characters of both persons and nations. In every department of human enquiry the strict definition of truth and principles is sought, and in many cases the result of error is fatal. Nature offers no apology for her exactions. She severely punishes the erring as well as the reckless, but reserves her highest rewards for the truth finder. This discipline improves the character of her disciples, and with an autocratic voice she demands obedience from her students. We may expect the same rule to obtain in the search after religious truth. In this case a Divine revelation has been given to aid enquiry, and the probability of success increased. Revelation takes for granted that its great principles and designs may be easily appre-

hended, so that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. Evangelicals and the Puritans may have erred in the impedimenta of their creed, but substantially they only follow the example of all successful enquirers after truth. Accepting a supernatural revelation as complete and final, they seek its cardinal principles and embody them in a creed. In this attitude they stand side by side of every scientist who believes in his acquired principles. Why science should have its creed, and religion none, has not been suggested, but an indiscriminate attack has been made upon religious belief because it attempts to express its truths in a definite form. It is obvious that either a creedless religion or a creedless Christianity is an absurdity. The contention is, that the Evangelical Creed transcends all others by its intellectual, moral, and spiritual value. It covers the whole region of the Divine dominion ; it concerns itself with its supreme power and purpose. It also takes up the intermitting links of scientific enquiry and binds them to a higher subject and to an object of paramount importance. The *Divine personality and supremacy* may be regarded as the central attraction and force of this creed. It reigns throughout the whole of revelation. It is the master thought and impulse of its historians, prophets, and kings. It dominates in religious worship. "*Glory to God in the highest*" is its supreme purpose. The Divine personality is the crowning glory and living force of all revealed truth. Its supremacy is vindicated, no rival authority is tolerated. The choicest human relationships are subject to its control. These principles are written as by a sunbeam through the whole of the inspired scriptures, which are filled with vindications and illustrations of the sole dominion of the Christian's God. This patent fact lies at the basis of Puritanism and the Evangelical Creed. It has mastered some of our best modern thinkers. Carlyle was its disciple. He caught its inspiration in the presence of Cromwell and his compeers. And Froude has yielded to its influence. Neither Mill, Buckle, nor Clifford, gifted as they were, succeeded in detaching a personal God of sovereign sway from the universe, which is His servant. It is this imperial grandeur that invests the Evangelical Creed with its surpassing attractions. It honours the Divine that it may best serve the interests of the human. Man's welfare finds its best aid and only security in this dominant fact of the revealing record. It is this great doctrine that throws a flood of light upon the atonement of Christ. It removes it from the region of paternal impulse to the awful dignity of an

imperial sacrifice. It imparts a Divine splendour to the mysterious offering on Calvary. Not one jot or tittle of the law is either broken or evaded, and yet the Divine impulse of benevolence is triumphant and satisfied.

The history of man's creation and fall proves the absolute necessity of a supernatural power to control human corruption. A few generations sufficed to expel God from all voluntary subjection to His authority. The whole race plunged into a degradation that could only be subdued by Divine compassion and beneficence, otherwise despair reigned. In the unmitigated gloom God interposes, and as supreme assumes His rights, chooses His instruments, and prepares for ultimate conflict and triumph. Side by side of the uproar of a blatant rebellion He places a humble servant, who catches His own spirit, and meekly bows to His authority. Abraham becomes a co-worker with the Divine, and unconsciously forms the moral instrument that is destined to conquer the world. By faith Abraham became the link between the human and Divine, that gave promise and pledge of ultimate triumph. The central truths on which the patriarch's faith rested formed a magnificent creed, separating him from all cotemporary professions. He knew God as a person, to whom he willingly surrendered himself. The strain on his obedience was severe, but exemplary, intended to indicate how ultimately man could return to God. His belief was well defied, not by words, but by actions. The Divine supremacy had secured one heart over which it had dominion; and blended in the patriarch's character and life were the great principles that found their maturity in Christ and Him crucified. The Divine claim—human redemption by sacrifice, the obedience of faith—were all practically triumphant in the career of the devout patriarch. Adam and Eve were overwhelmed with conscious guilt, little suspecting that they had sown the seeds of a harvest of human sin and suffering; and the redeeming element was found in the simple faith of the humble patriarch, unconscious that his acts, Divinely prompted and controlled, were the beginning of a successful resistance to the general apostasy.

The pilgrim father of the Jewish nation knew but little of the tribes and peoples that surrounded him, and his descendants only touched the fringe of other nations; yet the prophets, seers, and historians everywhere condemn the world as universally guilty, and as alienated from God. Facts have demonstrated the truth of these pre-

dictions. Modern ingenuity has attempted to extort from existing cults evidence of primeval fidelity to the Divine Being. If the exceptions be proved, the terrible reign of revolt is scarcely lessened. All nations, as if impelled by a reckless defiance of the Divine claim, either sullenly or ostentatiously have rebelled against God. Practically, indifference to His claims is rebellion against His authority, and from this guilt no nation is free. Facts, as well as scriptural authority, declare that this world is a rebellious province of the Divine Empire. No suitable estimate of the remedy can be secured unless these facts be *felt*. The whole scheme of human redemption rests upon the universal prevalence of sin and its fatal results. Almost every mode of expression and form of imagery is employed by the sacred writers to indicate the fearful condition of the race. The value of revelation is never more seen than in its fearless acknowledgment of the magnitude of the evil with which its remedial grace has to contend. There is no evading of the difficulties nor palliation of the crimes. The Divine claim has to be vindicated—the Divine honour sustained, rebellion quelled, sin pardoned and subdued, and the rebel made a faithful, devoted, and loving subject. The Gospel, as Evangelically defined, professes to meet the necessities of the case. It awakens grateful adoration of the Divine person, and "*Glory to God in the highest*" is its key note. All other themes are subject to this supreme purpose, and no explanation that appears to lessen the Divine claims to obedience and honour satisfies. The Evangelical Creed deprecates inferior remedies. It demands a mediator that masters the mischief, and it can find no adequate help but in a Divine Saviour, whose sovereign sway surpasses the dominant power of sin. The devout believer receives with loving trust the atonement by Christ as the befitting medium of pardon and reconciliation.

Puritanism made no pretension to the philosophy of religion, but it possessed it. Its creed embraced the vital principles that lie at the basis of both nature and society. Substitutionary service and vicarious suffering thread the whole fabric of society, and absolutely rule nature. Abstract these and both nature and the social structure collapse. This shadows the prevalence of vicarious suffering and substitutionary service among men. The highest and noblest human characters are among the classes that have suffered and done most for their fellows. The brave are heroic when their courage is not for their own sakes alone. The martyr gains the highest renown when his martyrdom secures a harvest

of blessings for others. These striking and instructive illustrations of a Divinely-appointed order the Evangelical Creed regards as but emblems and imperfect symbols of the vicarious sufferings and work of its Divine Lord. The foundation of human redemption was laid in the consecration of suffering and service as the means of restoration. The Cross creates no mystery. The same obscurity lies about the path of providence and physical science. God moves in a mysterious way outside redemption, and physical law proffers no explanation of its perplexing rule. If objection be taken to the innocent suffering for the guilty on the Cross, let nature explain her habit of punishing guiltless ignorance, and involving the lives of the innocent in the criminal neglect of her laws. It would seem that every department of human knowledge is designedly intended to anticipate the nature and sublime issue of the redeeming work of Christ. A calm dignity becomes the old theology when confronted with the attenuated theories of the modern school. The Mauricean attempt to substitute the Divine Fatherhood for the Divine sufferer, and to create filial affection by parental love, is but a poor substitute for the imperial remedy. If only the human heart had to be won, it would fail; but other difficulties have to be overcome ere such an appeal could be made, and greater interests are involved than even the changed character of man. If, as it is possible, the conquest at Calvary means the final triumph over sin and its abettors, the universe must be the servant for its purpose. The glad tidings of salvation may be heard far beyond the hearing of human ears, and responded to by a joy and ecstasy that no human spirit can ever know; but, if so, the supreme delight will come, not simply from the glorious fact that sinners are saved, but from the surpassing and supreme result that *sin is conquered*. Can it be possible that this majestic issue is to be the result of the character, sufferings, and death of a perfect man—of one who, dismantled of his Divinity, battles as ineffectually as any of us with life's stormy seas? He was wounded for our transgression, and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. But in His lonely suffering and humiliation He disclosed a Divine spirit and a Divine power in perfect harmony with His Divine pretensions, rebuking the reproach that He was only human and not Divine. This view of the Divine atonement despoils it of its power, and appears to mock the very calamities it professes to remedy. It offers a paltry recompense to insulted beneficence, and reduces the

Divine government to a fitful capricious rule, assuming that sin and suffering are but the passing incidents of paternal authority.

The besetting infirmity of the modern theology is its inadequate estimate of the disruption caused by disobedience, and its inevitable results. The theory creates a world unlike the present, and disregards the facts that even science discloses, confirmatory of the shock to nature itself that this moral disruption may have occasioned. The whole creation seems burdened by this inexplicable sorrow. The rocky entombment of life that geology discloses may link itself to the violation of law. No human limit can be prescribed to responsibility, and, as Scriptures indicate, the first fall was not in Paradise. "*Fallen angels*" has an awful significance, and speaks of disobedience before our time began. The day of human history is but one beat in the progress of time. The past has its secrets of terror as well as of rapture, all probably prophecies of the surpassing interest of the perfected redemption. When Milton sang

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restores us, and regain the blissful seat,

he sang of no Hebrew legend that had imaged a fancy piece of prehistoric superstition, but he felt he was in a world that told a more solemn and imposing tale than his imagination could depict. The splendid scenery of his sublime epic is charged with the thunder-clouds of punishment for sin. His "*Paradise Lost*" is no unnatural exaggeration of the real facts that lie behind his terrible images and awful detail of Divine anger and human guilt. His Puritanism and keen sense of the Divine sovereignty charged his imagination with images that may startle the placid theology of some, but aptly reveals the terrors that a Divine remedy removes.

The moral force of these transcendent truths, applied by the Divine Spirit, has no limit. They change the character, not as by a piece of mechanism, but as the appropriate means of transformation.

The relation of Evangelical truth to the formation of Christian character is a prolific subject. It illumines incidentally the whole realm of sacred truth. The change has been aptly called regeneration. "*Ye must be born again*" is the philosophy of Christian experience, and

this renewal reveals the fascinating influence and adaptation of Gospel truths. They appeal to the conscience, the imagination, and the heart. The atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is the great central fact. It tends directly and powerfully to alter the character. All the vindictive passions of our nature are taught a solemn lesson. Surely Calvary is the place to learn the wickedness of revenge! The malign emotions get confronted by the bleeding, dying Son of God. The pride of the human heart is mocked by the meekness of Him who gave His life a ransom for the sinner; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Familiarity with the Divine dignity of Christ, the august nature of His humiliation and sufferings, the mental and spiritual conflict that shook His spirit, the tenderness that hallowed every hour of agony and every scene of conflict, must capture the human heart as no other themes can. Calvary, the Cross, Gethsemane's garden are names engraven on the imagination and memory of every disciple of the Saviour; and the exhaustless goodness of this Divine redeeming sacrifice must produce kindred virtues in the penitent and believing spirit. The expansive illimitable resources of the mysterious Sufferer meet every necessity and aspiration of the troubled conscience and broken heart. Not one solitary spirit complains of the costliness of his redemption. Contrition and penitence do not exaggerate its value. They are but the creature's sympathy with the Creator's resistance of evil, and become the soil whence come a triumphant faith and a restored fidelity. Christian experience becomes disjointed and detached if a less firm hold of these great principles obtain. The faith that accepts the Divine help holds the germ, quickened by godly sorrow, of a noble Christian character. The human penitence and contrition shielded and nurtured by a vital faith ultimately ripens into a character conformed to the Divine image.

The imagination finds at the Cross the welcome means of surrounding the Sufferer with attractions that its boldest creations cannot exaggerate. The highest and its best can only shadow the real dignity of the regal Sufferer. Its Divine pathos tends to captivate the human heart, its beneficence secures ceaseless gratitude, and its example

becomes the exemplar for humanity itself. These splendid themes never despair. The Cross knows nothing of ultimate failure. Its ministrations are laden with prophecies of triumph, and its influence often pervades the character when least discerned. It is the pledge of the ultimate reign of beneficence and love. This buoyed the faith of the early suffering church, and no mediæval darkness could extinguish the hope of the universal reign of the Divine Redeemer. It has exacted the homage of its theoretic doubters. It so awakens the conscience, subdues the will, and charms the imagination, that thousands are *unconscious* captives of its grace. Charity hopes that often its peace and sanctifying influence are felt when the mind suspects not the cause. It may stumble at the theory of a Divine offering and expiatory sacrifice, but the conscience and heart break through the logic to cling to the Cross. Of such the eminent linguist, diplomatist, and politician, Sir J. Bowring, may be regarded as an example. It is perfectly inexplicable that his noble hymn of praise, dedicated to a suffering Redeemer, could only express reverence for human perfection and suffering.

“ In the Cross of Christ I glory,
 Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time ;
 All the light of sacred story
 Gathers round its head sublime.

“ When the woes of life o'ertake me,
 Hopes decline and fears annoy,
 Never shall the Cross forsake me ;
 Lo ! it glows with peace and joy.

“ Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
 By the Cross are sanctified ;
 Peace is there that knows no measure,
 Joys that through all time abide.”

The kingdom of grace, as that of nature, has often its peerless dominion where least known, and may dwell in the solitudes of devout meditation and solitary quest. The ostensible church may be but the fringe of that great multitude that no man can number who are, though unobserved, in the pilgrim way to the heavenly home. The impassioned earnestness of Calvary, though so strong and glorious, neither breaks the bruised reed nor quenches the smoking flax, but meets the alarmed conscience wherever it finds it, and turns its penitence and sorrow into tranquil trust. It seems an absolute necessity for keen

contrition to find in the Cross the union of the Divine and human, the one for conquest, and the other to attemper its greatness to the weakness and danger of man. The heart stricken by a sense of guilt has no peace until a Divine voice has said "*Fear not, thy sins are forgiven thee.*"

An Evangelical faith forbids the selfishness that appropriates redeeming love to its own interests without regard to the honour and Divine claims of its author. When both justice and love are satisfied the instructed believer indulges in the spirit of adoption, and cries with adoring gratitude "*Abba, Father,*" thanking the Divine for the beautiful but imperfect symbol that the human fatherhood presents.

The cementing power of this estimate of the redemption by Christ is a striking evidence of its correctness. It has proved its adaptation to all conditions of men. Other interpretations may capture the few, but this has subdued all classes. Some of its greatest triumphs are secured when contrasting characters find in it an irresistible bond of union. It melts all diversities into the golden chain of rapturous devotion to one Lord. The songs of Zion have a melody in which every regenerate heart can join. The outward circumstance and show may differ, but the sources of the inward life are the same. Among ourselves the examples are abundant. Roman Catholicism seems to muffle the Gospel by its meretricious symbols and ornate ritual; but the *Cross* asserts its power in the character and lives of many of the worshippers, who rest on the Divine Sufferer, though removed so far by the unhappy intrusion of priestly mediation. In the other extreme the placid and apparently indolent worship of the Friends is subject to the same sovereign influence. The silence leaves the heart at liberty to commune without hindrance with the crucified but risen Saviour. Everywhere and among all classes the regenerating influence begins at the Cross. This marvellous symbol, so pregnant with meaning, keeps the heart and mind near to Calvary while waiting for that magnificent future for which both faith and hope reverently wait. These sublime themes have in the past ministered to the joys of the millions that have fought the fight of faith and finished their course. They are now sustaining the confidence, stimulating the zeal, and soothing the sorrows of multitudes on their way to the eternal home, and they are destined to be the Divine companions of the whole host of weary pilgrims who at last shall form the redeemed family of God. The splendid future, the

solemn past, and the present conflicts cast a halo of glory around the Divine Sufferer, and admonish the believer never to lessen his hold of this glorious Gospel.

It does not limit its success to its special purpose, but reveals or modifies principles that lie in obscurity in every department of human enquiry. The Gospel dignifies man and discloses the secrets of a mysterious providence, solving many of the riddles of human history. But above all, it justifies the Divine government, and unveils the benignant smile of a loving God. No other system cares to attempt this beneficent purpose. The result is that there is a creed, and one of surpassing interest, finding its home in the Puritan heart and its defence in the Evangelical school. Ridicule has attempted to reduce this exposition to a low forensic view of the Gospel, but no burlesque can rob it of the noble purpose of vindicating the claims of justice before pardon can be secured. An impulsive forgiveness may suit a creature's weakness, but degrades the conception of the Divine Ruler of the Universe. The judicial aspect of the Divine government is of primary importance, and Christ and Him crucified vindicates and honours it in its majestic course of pardon and restoration. Perhaps no better alternative can be secured than reading the latest fancy pieces of Renan, with their scholarly puerilities, and then mingling among the sturdy disciples and believers of the Puritan school. The Frenchman takes us up in a balloon to see the beauties below. The Evangelical treads on solid earth, and *feels* the glory around him. To follow Renan is to travel a decorated path to despair; to track the path of the old theology is to rough the way to a Paradise regained. The German interpreters of the Divine Word leave the student buried in the confusing mass of scholastic lore, and from each the simple enquirer finds relief in the happy success of a repentant faith. The brokenness of spirit induced by a sense of guilt instinctively accepts this simple remedy. It may be feared that the rejection of these truths reveals a character incapable of indefinite *moral* improvement, and inevitably exposed to the Divine anger. The terrible necessities that have successfully appealed to the *Divine love* are practically mocked by unbelief, and perhaps the most degrading in the Divine esteem is the absolute indifference of the mind and heart most needing the proffered aid. Practically it designates God's great work as "*Much ado about nothing.*" To tolerate such a disposition would be the surrender of the Divine sovereignty, and leave

the seeds of rebellion to reproduce the mischief but partially subdued. Belief or unbelief are vital questions. They reveal character both Divine and human, and include truths that affect the destiny of man and the government of God, and rescue from destruction every interest, both human and Divine. If so, how unseemly the paltry exaggerations that are indulged in, especially the vulgar cry of heresy hunters as applied to the men who guard the outposts of this citadel. A nervous apprehension of danger may tempt to narrowness and bigotry, but the infirmity is less dangerous than the possible mutiny among the professed defenders of the faith. Let the Pulpit and the Press remember that tolerance of ignorance may be a virtue and not a crime.

There is no obligation laid upon the Evangelical believer to explain the mysteries either of nature, providence, or grace. His interest and his duty alike prompt to a definite use of the truths he knows to be true. He finds these sufficient to subdue fear, awaken gratitude, create hope, and secure obedience. The lesser themes he keeps in strict subordination to these cardinal principles of his faith. The nature of inspiration, the larger hope, and kindred topics, pale in his esteem before the mercy and splendour of the Saviour's sufferings and work. Life is too short, and duty too imperative, to yield leisure for speculative theories; and to know the knowable of Evangelical truth demands more time and devotion than the most ardent student can give. Even in this solitary search Divine help is sought and found.

