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ARTICLE II.

THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE RELIGION OF
THE BIBLE ;

OR,

HOW A LAYMAN THOUGHT OUT HIS EVIDENCES.¹

BY THE HON. JAMES MONROE, LL. D.

III.

I NOW come to my third general proposition, which is that it is a law of the productions of the human intellect that they are at length outgrown by the thinking portion of mankind, and are superseded by something better. Such productions often contain much truth ; but the deficiency in them which after a time makes it necessary to lay them aside is either that they do not contain enough truth, lacking especially perhaps the truth which is wanted, or that they do not present truth in a symmetrical way, nor in its proper relations; or that they contain too much error with the truth, not discriminating between them, or that their views of truth are limited, partial, one-sided, the writers insisting that one facet, which they have discovered, is all there is of a great gem. The human intellect has been more successful in giving to the world single truths or facts, than in trying to arrange these in systems. It is safe to say that every system produced by the human mind whose object is conviction and enlightenment—whether such system be scientific, ethical, or religious—must, in time, fail to meet the wants of men, and be superseded. I say every system whose object is conviction and enlightenment, because some emi-

¹ Concluded from the April number.

ment men are of the opinion that productions in the fine arts follow a different law, and it is not necessary for me, in this place, to lay claim to any disputed territory outside of the proper field of our inquiries. No system originating in the human intellect, as distinguished from the imagination, can be such as to secure the full approval of succeeding ages. This proposition is a legitimate inference from one already established. If it be admitted that every effort of the human intellect is a natural result of its own age, and that the human intellect, both in the individual and in the race, is progressive, it follows that what is a source of improvement in one age will be inadequate to meet the wants of another. The most original man is finite, and no finite being can supply the wants of an endlessly progressing soul—still less the wants of an endlessly progressing race. Nobody but God can give us a system, especially a religious system, which the human mind can never outgrow. This statement might be illustrated by many facts.

We have already seen that one of the greatest minds which the world has produced is Lord Bacon. Too much credit cannot well be given him for calling back the attention of mankind to the Christian law that no philosophy is of any worth which does not take as its end the general welfare—the good of humanity—that all else is “science falsely so called”;—that “philosophy and vain deceit” through which we are said to be “spoiled.” This truth has been of unspeakable value, and is imperishable. But the claim of some of Bacon’s friends that he was the discoverer of the inductive mode of reasoning, is no longer urged, and never had any solid foundation; and his works, in many parts, are now seen to abound in puerilities which no public school teacher could attempt to impart to his pupils as truth, without promptly receiving his discharge. Perhaps the most original uninspired man that ever appeared upon our earth was Sir Isaac Newton. Whewell, in his “History

of the Inductive Sciences," says of Newton's discovery of the Law of Gravitation, "It is indisputably and incomparably the greatest scientific discovery ever made." And yet Newton's own estimate of this achievement well illustrates what I have said of the incomplete character of the grandest human production. I quote Dr. Whewell once more: "It is no doubt conceivable that future discoveries may both extend and further explain Newton's doctrines; may make gravitation a case of some wider law, and may disclose something of the manner in which it operates; questions with which Newton himself struggled." Some day, the man will come who will give us the larger generalization, of which Newton felt his discovery to be only one phenomenon. Later still, some genius will arise who will, in some measure, explain the manner in which these laws operate. And as these further additions are made to our knowledge, the work of Newton will be more and more superseded. Already we have reached a point where no text-book in Astronomy would be accepted in school or college which should give us no more complete account of facts and principles than those which were known to the great discoverer of the Law of Gravitation. In the field of metaphysics, Locke was the pride and glory of his age. But I apprehend that his views are now generally discredited by our most thoughtful writers and teachers. It is a good thing to know much about him, but not to believe much in him. In my youth, I was directed to Paley's "Natural Theology," as a perfectly satisfactory demonstration of the being and attributes of God. Now, if I mistake not, our teachers would advise us to seek for a deeper response from the needs and intuitions of our moral nature. I half regret to see that, even my old friend Bishop Butler is falling into disesteem. I fear that Butler's "Analogy" is less and less used as a text-book. They contend that instead of merely proving that you are "the same living agent" when your leg has

been cut off, he ought to prove that you are "the same living agent" when your head has been cut off. Is he, too, to be overwhelmed by the wave of progress? It looks very much like it. The history of the different departments of human thought has been, as a rule, the history of a succession of systems which human ingenuity has devised, each of which has been generally accepted in its day, and has then fallen into disrepute and given place to another, which in its turn has flourished, declined, and been superseded. Taking Astronomy as an example, we find the system of Hipparchus superseded by that of Ptolemy—that of Ptolemy by that of the Arabians—that of the Arabians by that of Copernicus—that of Copernicus by that of Newton—and that of Newton lingering, as he himself anticipated, to be superseded by some wider law. Why is it that we have thus outgrown the past? Is it because we have greater souls than those of Bacon and Newton and Locke and Paley and Butler? Certainly not; but because we began building upon the edifice of science and philosophy at the place where their labors terminated, and it would be strange if, by this time, we had not a higher point of observation than theirs.

This law applies, in its full force, to all human systems of religion. Every such system, together with its votaries, is, at length, left behind in the progress of civilization. We have an example of this in the Mohammedan faith. I have already given that faith the credit of having, for a time, served a useful purpose in the world. When it was first promulged, it was fully equal to the average civilization of mankind. For some centuries its leaders and thinkers ranked among the most intelligent portion of the race. But what place do that faith and its votaries occupy now? One has but to glance at the Ottoman Empire and its dependencies, at Northern Africa, Arabia, and other parts of the Mohammedan world, to discover that Mohammedanism long ago finished whatever of useful work it could do, and is now

outgrown and rejected by intelligent humanity. The Saracen kingdoms attained a distinct nationality about the same time with several of the modern European states. Together with them, and possessing in some respects superior advantages, especially in certain departments of science, they started in the race of improvement. Why is it that, long ago, they were left far in the rear? Why is it that while the civilization of England, France, Germany, and Austria is in the very prime of expanding manhood, that of Turkey and other countries of like faith is falling into a repulsive decay? After making all suitable allowance for differences of race, it must be admitted that the fact is owing mainly to difference in religion. There is not room in the Mohammedan faith for the human soul or the nation to grow. As a whole, it is a worn-out system. If the disciples of the prophet would now advance in civilization, they must renounce their religion. If they would cling to their religion, they must be content to remain barbarians. Within a century, several Sultans, having caught something of the spirit of European progress, have made attempts to elevate their people. But they have been constantly embarrassed by the tenacity with which the Turks have clung to the established usages of their religion. The Koran is the fountain of law as well as of religion. The Sultan cannot introduce any reforms which conflict with the Koran, or, what is practically the same thing, which the superstitions of the people regard as conflicting with it. The Grand Seignior is further embarrassed by the fact that the Chief of the Ulemas, who appears to be a kind of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on all religious questions and the guardian of the Koran, has a veto upon all the acts of the imperial ruler. A writer in Chambers' Encyclopedia says: "The power of the Sultan is much limited by the Sheik ul Islam, the Chief of the Ulemas, who has the power of objecting to any of the Sultan's decrees, and frequently possesses more authority over

the people than his sovereign." In the face of these difficulties, most of the Grand Seigniors have been too indifferent, too indolent, or too timid to make an effort for the promotion of the civilization of their subjects, especially when it must be done at the expense of breaking the force of religious superstitions which are the ally of their despotic power. The present situation of Turkey is pitiful enough. With agriculture fallen into decay; with industries discouraged; with property, liberty, and life among her people insecure; with a system of taxation dishonest and oppressive; with a prevalent lack of patriotism; with only a nominal dependence in some of her provinces; with just enough religion left to hate and to assassinate those of different faith; with the great powers lying in wait about her, expectant of their prey; there would seem to be nothing left for her but a speedy and disgraceful end. The contempt which is felt by all thinking men for the character of the Sublime Porte, was shown, some time ago, in a speech delivered, at Chester, by the most highly revered statesman in England, and published to the whole world, in which he declared that any pledge made by the Turkish government to make reparation for wrongs done to the Armenians, and to reform the brutal manners of murderous officials, would be worthless. "The Porte," said Mr. Gladstone, "will listen to the word *must*, but the word *ought* will have no weight with it." Mohammed rejected the only teacher who ever came into this world that, whether mistaken or not, offered not only to teach men the right way, but to give them his personal aid, by a divine indwelling Spirit, in walking in it. And now it has come to this: that the most enlightened statesman of his age tells us that if we would have that nation, which is the greatest surviving representative of Mohammed's faith, work righteousness, and do justice, we must threaten it, and not reason with it—we must appeal to cowardice, and not to conscience—to a quality which exists, and not to one which is dead.

The history of Islamism is, in the feature now presented, the history of Brahminism and Buddhism and of all other religious institutions of human origin. The authors of these systems were doubtless among the ablest and most active minds of the darker ages when they flourished. But what man whose mind had been disciplined by an acquaintance with the philosophy, science, and literature of modern civilization, could be persuaded to adopt such a religion as one of these? Their vitality is exhausted. Their votaries have advanced as far as possible, while remaining subject to their influence, and, if they would make further progress, must renounce the institutions of their fathers.

Recent events in the Orient have furnished an interesting commentary upon this opinion. The world was taken by surprise to see how speedily Japan, which had in a measure broken off from old traditions, and received some fresh vitality from the nations of the West, gained victory after victory over China, a country immensely her superior in population and resources, but two-thirds of whose people are Buddhists, and which adheres tenaciously to old usages. Further, the inability of China to make any real progress while in bondage to her present superstitions, has been shown in that cruel massacre of Christian missionaries by one of her secret orders, which she seemed unable to arrest and which may involve her in serious troubles with several great powers.

Thus much I have said by way of illustrating the proposition that every human system is eventually outgrown by the thinking portion of mankind—eventually comes to sustain such a relation to them that an adherence to it and further intellectual progress are incompatible.

IV.

My fourth proposition is that, when we turn from the examination of other productions to the great truths, the

great messages, the great offers of the religion of the Bible, we search in vain for any such indications of an earthly origin.

Of course there are large portions of the Bible, mostly in the Old Testament, which are either local, and plainly limited in their application, or temporary, and have already ceased to be obligatory, or ritual and symbolic, pointing to better things to come, and have now been fulfilled. These are not properly the great doctrines of religion, but rather the means by which, in different ages, those doctrines were introduced, expressed, and kept alive among men. It was necessary that they should be adapted to the kind and degree of intellectual development belonging to their time, and that they should pass away when the reason for their adoption no longer existed. This view of these institutions is revealed on their face, and is often expressed, directly or indirectly, in the Bible itself. Hence, while it may be true that these portions of the Bible, so wisely are they adapted to their end, were not, and could not have been, of human authorship, yet they were intended to be, and have been, or will be, outgrown by the human mind. Historically they are of the greatest interest, but they are not a part of the proposition which I am to defend.

That proposition is, that what properly constitutes the religion of the Bible—its great doctrines, its great features—affords no evidence of being outgrown, but the clearest evidence of being adapted to man in all his generations. The religion of the Bible has now been, in part, before the world for more than three thousand years. If, during that long period, many errors and defects have not been discovered in it, it is not because it has not been subjected to the severest scrutiny. During its progress it has come in contact with every form of civilization. It has been confronted with the mysterious wisdom of Egypt, the astrologers of Babylon, the philosophies of Greece and Rome, the strong-

ly intrenched paganism of the Roman Empire and of Northern Europe, the occult science of the Saracens, the revival of learning in all its different departments, the genius and wit of French infidels, and the restless spirit of inquiry which is the soul of modern improvement. It is itself, beyond any other system, peculiarly adapted to awaken thought. It frankly challenges a full and free investigation of its claims to attention. It exhorts its own adherents to examine into the grounds of their belief, and to be able to give an answer to every man inquiring for the reasons of their hope. Its great doctrines, whether true or not, are of such a nature and are so stated that, when the mind apprehends them, the faculties are stimulated and provoked to inquiry. It has been the occasion, directly and indirectly, of the writing of more books than all other causes together. On another account the religion of the Bible would not be very likely to escape scrutiny in such a world as this. It denounces vice and crime, selfishness and oppression, wherever they may be found, and warns men that unless these are repented of and put away, they are forever lost. It attacks the sins of governments as well as those of individuals, and threatens the judgments of God upon those nations that do not repent. It enjoins the virtues of humility, self-denial, and love upon all men, as essential to the divine favor. We need not turn to history to feel assured that such doctrines as these have awakened opposition. Owing then to the several causes I have named, wherever the Bible has been introduced, it has been the signal for a general controversy. All that the genius, the wit, and the learning of its opponents could do to find assailable points in its system of religion has been done. How has that system withstood this fiery ordeal? If it was merely the production of short-sighted men, it is surely not unreasonable, after the hot contests of thirty-three centuries, to begin to look for some indications of its perishable nature. Human thought has, for many ages, been taking

such gigantic strides that we must, by this time, be rapidly approaching the point where the religion of the Bible will be found incompatible with further progress. Doubtless some signs of such a result are beginning to appear. If we are mistaken in supposing that this religion has led us forth into a boundless field of thought, when it has only shut us up in a large enclosure, no doubt those inquirers who, for more than three thousand years, have been running toward all the thirty-two points of the compass in search of truth, have somewhere come in sight of their prison walls. It is to be presumed that some scientific truths have been found to antagonize the fundamental doctrines of our religion, and that those who can see farthest into the future are those who feel most doubtful about its permanency. I affirm, without fear of contradiction from any intelligent reader of history, that no human system, in any department of thought, was ever given to mankind which did not afford some indications of decay such as I have mentioned, before it had been in the world a sixth part as long as the religion of the Bible has been. How has that religion borne the strain of the ages?

One of the profoundest needs of the soul is a just idea of the being and attributes of God. Moses professed to give us such an idea as a revelation from Jehovah himself. Some passages embodying his conception have already been quoted. In the very beginnings of human speculation he poured that wholesome salt into the fountains of thought. Has that salt lost its savor? Has anybody produced anything better than his outlines of that awful theme? Does any one seem likely to give us anything better? Is his statement outgrown? Are there any indications that it ever will be outgrown? When our crude and froward thoughts need to be chastened and made humble and sweet, is there even now any better thing for us to do than to sit at the foot of that mount which "quaked greatly," and upon the

top of which, amid "thunders and lightnings," God spake unto Moses? Glance a moment at some further portions of the Old Testament which are an outgrowth of the doctrines established by Moses. The human soul needs decorous and reverent and fitting words in which it can pour forth confession and prayer and thanksgiving and acclamations of praise. Have you heard that any one had found anything better for this purpose than the book of Psalms—those Psalms which, ever since the days of Constantine, have furnished the inspiration for all the worship of the civilized world? Are they outgrown? Do not all sore and penitent and trustful and jubilant hearts still turn to them for suitable expressions of feeling? Are the prophets outgrown? Has any unbeliever written a book which imparts a finer tonic to the moral nature, or a wholesomer fear of God, or a grander conception of the Infinite Majesty, or a truer regard for righteousness, justice, mercy, and truth, than the book of Isaiah? Are there any writings that make you think more humbly of yourself at first, and more nobly of yourself in the end than these?—more humbly when you reflect upon what you are when aloof from God; more nobly when you consider what you may become when in sympathy with him?

Is the teaching of Jesus outgrown? Has any unbeliever so much as suggested the name of any human being who could take his place in the needs and the conscience of man? I have already referred to some examples of the teaching of Jesus, which I need not repeat here. Are there any indications that these teachings are about to be laid aside? Who is giving us anything better? There is a wide-spread feeling among men that they have wandered away from God, their Creator and Father, and that they need to be restored to the divine favor, and to be established in the paths of righteousness and peace. Many often resolve to attain this, but such are their weaknesses and temptations that they

constantly fail. The good which they would, they do not; but the evil which they would not, that they do. Hence Jesus announces that he came not only to teach men the truth, but to help them to obey it. Now this is a question of unspeakable importance. No one can afford to trifle with it. Jesus tells the truth or he does not. If he tells the truth, no one can afford to defer, for a moment, to accept his friendly offer. If he does not, the whole civilized world should, by this time, have been sick with disappointment. Millions upon millions of needy souls would have come to him for help and failed to receive it. Has this been the experience of the millions of honest inquirers? And, as a result, has the age outgrown him, and is it now ready to repudiate him? Let the twenty thousand children of the church who assembled in Boston, the other day, that, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, they might pour forth their thanksgivings to the Redeemer of their souls, answer the question. There certainly never was a time when so many thousands took such deep hold of the promises of Christ as to-day. Is the number of these comforting experiences to be diminished in the future? Is the time to come when man will cease to feel his need of help, and cease to find in Jesus the friend who can bestow it? Will men ever cease to say, "Lord, save us; we perish"? Will those who feel that Christ has saved them ever cease to shout praises to the Lamb who was slain and has redeemed them to God by his blood "out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation"?

No; the religion of the Bible affords no indications of decay. Other institutions, though springing from the combined wisdom of civilized man, have speedily passed away. This religion, though having its beginning, both in the time of Moses and in that of Christ, among humble and unlettered people, has still endured. How many forms of civilization have done their work and ceased to exist—how many

religions have ruled the human soul for a time, and then been banished with their votaries to the dark corners of the earth—how many vast political empires have burst into being, adolescence, manhood, and sunk into decline, old age, a grave—how many great cycles of time have been absorbed like flakes of snow in the ocean of eternity, since Moses led out his uncultivated people into the desert of Sinai, and there in the center of the human soul, laid the foundations of an empire, which, after a hundred generations have been gathered to their fathers, is still fresh in the vigor of an immortal youth! And this empire, as the “Kingdom of God,” Jesus has made eternal. Never were the race so generally fixing their eyes upon the cross of Christ as their hope of ultimate redemption as now; and this feeling is the strongest in those nations where the highest degree of intellectual culture is combined with the most intimate acquaintance with the Bible. So far is this book from being outgrown by the human intellect, that the most cultivated minds are those who least feel as if its wealth is exhausted. Many such are ready to testify that they are only beginning to comprehend its sublime character. The more the religion of the Bible is studied, the more the intellect is expanded; and the more the intellect is expanded, the more that religion is studied and approved. What *human* system could endure a test like this? As often as infidelity has rejoiced when some new discovery in science has seemed for a moment to conflict with the Bible, so often has a little further investigation put all their boasting to shame. Like the visible horizon, the religion of the Bible keeps retreating and expanding and stretching out before the advancing soul of man. So far as we can see, there is room in it for an eternity of progress. If the nineteenth century has been more remarkable than any which the world has ever seen for intellectual activity, the nineteenth century has also done more than any other to spread a knowledge of the Bible to every part of the

world. If in Great Britain and the United States have been exhibited the noblest results of modern civilization, in those countries also the *Bible* is most universally loved, and the most wealth and time have been expended in its circulation. As it is with ages and nations, so has it been with individuals. In modern times what comprehensive thinker have we had like Bacon—what metaphysician like Butler—what philosopher like Locke—what scientific mind like Newton—what poet like Milton—what universal genius like Shakespeare? Yet all these names are associated in our minds with a humble acknowledgment of the authority of the religion of the Bible. To it Bacon confesses himself indebted for the true method of philosophic inquiry. Butler devoted his noble and true life to its defense. Locke saw in it the prophecy of that freedom in whose cause he suffered poverty and banishment. Into Shakespeare's soul it was admitted with the simple and confiding reverence of a child. In its amazing conceptions, Newton saw a sublimer revelation of that Being whose footsteps he had heard in the Milky Way. It poured into the heart of Milton a stern but holy inspiration, and touched his lips with a coal of living fire. I know Hume did not love the gospel—nor Voltaire—nor Rousseau. But Rousseau was a crazed social reformer, and Voltaire was an embittered wit who mistook the religion of France for the religion of the Bible, and Hume, as to his religious feelings, was an iceberg. Neither of them had carefully studied the book which he condemned, but Rousseau, who sometimes rose from a perusal of its pages to confess his error with tears.

We have now arrived at the following results: Every human system is a natural result of tendencies existing in its own age. The religion of the Bible is a natural result of tendencies directly *opposed* to *all* the tendencies of its own age. Every *human* system is eventually outgrown by the thinking portion of mankind. The religion of the Bible

during three thousand years has constantly risen in estimation in a way that affords satisfactory evidence that it can *never* be outgrown. We have thus discovered two invariable marks of a human production, both of which are wanting in the religion of the Bible. What remains but the conclusion that that religion is not of human origin? Two other suppositions are possible. One of these, you will agree with me, is puerile; but it has been sometimes employed ever since the Pharisees ascribed the work of Jesus to Beelzebub. If the religion of the Bible did not come from man, it may have come from God or it may have come from the devil. If from the devil, either he must have supposed that it was adapted to promote the interests of his kingdom, or he must have desired that his kingdom should be overthrown. The former is forbidden by the testimony of all nations to his sagacity, the latter by what we all know of his character.

We have arrived then at the conclusion which it was my object to impress upon your minds—the conclusion that the religion of the Bible has a divine origin. It is not of man; it is not of Satan; it is of God. The light which is reflected from the pages of the Bible is “the light which never was on sea or land”—a light from “above the brightness of the sun.”