

# FOOTE GEORGE WILLIAM

THE BOOK OF GOD : IN  
THE LIGHT OF THE  
HIGHER CRITICISM

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# **G. W. Foote**

## **The Book of God : In the Light of the Higher Criticism / With Special Reference to Dean Farrar's New Apology**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

During the fierce controversy between the divines of the Protestant Reformation and those of the Roman Catholic Church, the latter asserted that the former treated the Bible – and treated it quite naturally – as a wax nose, which could be twisted into any shape and direction. Those who championed the living voice of God in the Church, against the dead letter of the written Bible, were always prone to deride the consequences of private judgment when applied to such a large and heterogeneous volume as the Christian Scriptures. They contended that the Bible is a misleading book when read by itself in the mere light of human reason; that any doctrine may be proved from it by a judicious selection of texts; and that Christianity would break up into innumerable sects unless the Church acted as the inspired interpreter of the inspired revelation. They argued, further, that the Bible was really not what the Protestants supposed it to be; and what they said on this point was a curious anticipation of a good deal of the so-called Higher Criticism.

Both sides were right, and both sides were wrong, in this dispute. The Protestants were right against the Church; the Catholics were right against the Bible. It was reserved for Rationalism to accept and harmonise the double truth, and to wage war against both infallibilities.

The Bible is said to be inspired, but the man who reads it is not. The consequence is that he deduces from it a creed in harmony with his own taste, temper, fancy, and intelligence. He lays emphasis on what fits in with this creed, and slurs over all that is opposed to it. Every one of the various and conflicting Protestant sects is founded upon one and the same infallible book. "The Bible teaches this," says one; "The Bible teaches that," says another. And they are both right. The Bible does teach the doctrines of all the sects. But do they not contradict each other? They do. What is the explanation, then? Why this – the Bible contradicts itself.

The self-contradictions of the Bible have occasioned the writing of many "Harmonies," in which it is sought to be proved that all the apparent discrepancies are most admirable agreements when they are properly understood. All that is requisite is to add a word here, and subtract a word there; to regard one and the same word as having several different meanings, and several different words as having one and the same meaning; and, above all things, to apply this method with a strong and earnest desire to find harmony everywhere, and a pious intention of giving the Bible the benefit of the doubt in every case of perplexity.

This sort of jugglery, which would be derided and despised in the case of any other book, is now falling into discredit. Most of the clergy are ashamed of it. They frankly own, since it can no longer be denied, that a more honest art of criticism is necessary to save the Bible from general contempt.

But the "Harmony" game is not the only one that is played out. All the "Reconciliations" of the Bible with science, history, morality, and common sense, are sharing the same fate. The higher clergy leave such exhibitions of perverted ingenuity to laymen like the late Mr. Gladstone. Divines like Canon Driver see that this mental tight-rope dancing may cause astonishment, but will never produce conviction. They therefore recognise the difficulties, and seek for a more subtle and plausible method of removing them. They admit that Moses and Darwin are at variance with each other; that a great deal of Bible "history" is legendary, and some of it distinctly false; that such stories as those

of Lot's wife and Jonah's whale are decidedly incredible; that some passages of Scripture are vulgar and brutal, and others detestably inhuman; and that it is positively useless to disguise the fact. Yet they are naturally anxious to keep the Bible on its old pedestal; and this can only be done by means of a new theory of inspiration. Accordingly, these gentlemen tell us that the Bible is not the Word of God, but it contains the Word of God. Its writers were inspired, but their own natural faculties were not entirely suppressed by the divine spirit. Sometimes the writer's spirit was predominant in the combination, and the composition was mainly that of an unregenerate son of Adam. At other times the divine spirit was predominant, and the result was lofty religion and pure ethics. Moreover, the sacred writers were only inspired in one direction. God gave them a lift, as it were, in spiritual matters; but in science and sociology he let them blunder along as they could.

The old wax nose is now receiving a decided new twist, and a considerable number of accomplished and clever divines are engaged in manipulating it. One of them is Dean Farrar, who has recently published a bulky volume on *The Bible: its Meaning and Supremacy*, which we shall subject to a very careful criticism.

Dean Farrar's book contains nothing that is new to fairly well-read sceptics. It presents the commonplaces of modern Biblical criticism, with a due regard to the interests of "the grand old book" and of "true" and "fundamental" Christianity, which is probably no more than the particular form of Christianity that is likely to weather the present storm of controversy. But although this book contains no startling novelties, it is of importance as the work of a dignitary of the Church of England. It is also of value, inasmuch as it will be read by many persons who would shrink from Strauss and Thomas Paine. It is well that someone should tell Christians the truth, if not the *whole* truth, about the Bible, and tell it them from within the fold of faith. His motive in doing so may be less a regard for truth itself than for the immediate interests of his own Church; but the main thing is that he does it, and Freethinkers may be glad even if they are not grateful.

Dr. Farrar's book has an Introduction, and we propose to examine it first. He opens by telling the clergy that they ought not to pursue an "ostrich policy" in regard to religious difficulties; that they should not indulge in "vituperative phrases," nor assume a "disdainful infallibility"; that they do wrong in denouncing as "wicked," "blasphemous," or "dangerous" every conviction which differs from their own form of orthodoxy; and that they must not expect all that they choose to assert to be "accepted with humble acquiescence." No doubt this advice is quite necessary; and the fact that it is so shows the value of Christianity, after eighteen centuries of trial, as a training-school in the virtues of modesty and humility, to say nothing of justice and temperance.

The clergy are also invited by Dr. Farrar to recognise the general diffusion of scepticism: —

"In recent years much has been written under the assumption that Christianity no longer deserves the dignity of a refutation; or that, at any rate, the bases on which it rests have been seriously undermined. The writings of freethinkers are widely disseminated among the working classes. The Church of Christ has lost its hold on multitudes of men in our great cities. Those of the clergy who are working in the crowded centres of English life can hardly be unaware of the extent to which scepticism exists among our artizans. Many of them have been persuaded to believe that the Church is a hostile and organised hypocrisy."

This is a sad state of things, and how is it to be met?

Not by denouncing reason as a wild beast, nor yet by relying on emotion and ceremonial, for "no religious system will be permanent which is not based on the convictions of the intellect." Dr. Farrar recommends a different policy. He has "frequently observed that the objections urged against Christianity are aimed at dogmas which are no part of Christian faith, or are in no wise essential to its integrity." Even men of science have been led astray by objections "based on travesties of its real tenets." One of these false opinions is that "which maintains the supposed inerrancy and supernatural infallibility of every book, sentence, and word of the Holy Bible." This is the principal point to be dealt with; it is here that we must make an adjustment. Nine-tenths of the case of sceptics "is made

up of attacks on the Bible," and the only way to answer them is to show that they misunderstand it, and that what they demolish is not Christianity, but "a mummy elaborately painted in its semblance," or "a scarecrow set up in its guise."

"It is no part of the Christian faith," Dr. Farrar says, "to maintain that every word of the Bible was dictated supernaturally, or is equally valuable, or free from all error, or on the loftiest levels of morality, as finally revealed." Such a view of the Bible has been popularly expressed by divines, but they really did not mean it, and it "never formed any part of the Catholic creed of Christendom." The doctrine of everlasting punishment is another of these delusions. There is such a thing as future punishment, but it is not everlasting – it is only eternal. In the same way, the Bible is the Word of God, but it is not infallible – it is only inspired. And what *that* means we shall see as we proceed.

## II. THE BIBLE CANON

The first chapter of Dean Farrar's book deals with the Bible Canon. After another slap at the poor benighted Christians who still hold that every word of Scripture is "supernaturally dictated and infallibly true," Dr. Farrar remarks that the Bible is "not a single nor even a homogeneous book." Strictly speaking, it is not a book, but a library; and, as is pointed out later on, it is the remains of a much larger collection which has mostly perished. The Canon of the Old Testament was "arrived at by slow and uncertain degrees." The common assertion, that it was fixed by Ezra and the so-called Great Synagogue in the fifth century before Christ, is in direct opposition to the facts. It was not really *settled* until seventy years after the birth of Christ, when the Rabbis met at Jamnia, and decided in favor of our present thirty-nine books. According to Dr. Farrar, there was no special influence from heaven in the determination of the Canon. It was a work which God left to "the *ordinary* influences of the Holy Ghost." Let us see then how these influences operated on the last and most critical occasion. "The gathering at Jamnia," says Dr. Farrar, "was a tumultuous assemblage, and in the faction fights of the Rabbinic parties blood was shed by their scholars. Hence the decision was regarded as irrevocable and sealed by blood." Such are the *ordinary* influences of the Holy Ghost. Its *extraordinary* influences may be easily imagined. Their history is written in blood and fire in every country in Christendom.

Dr. Farrar allows that the Canon of the New Testament was formed "in the same gradual and tentative way." Many Gospels, Epistles, and Apocalypses were "current" in the "first two centuries." Some of them were "quoted as sacred books" and read aloud in Christian churches. Seven, at least, of the books which are now canonical were then "disputed" – namely, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, the Second and Third Epistles of St. John, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude, and the Book of Revelation. The Canon was "formally and officially settled" by the Council of Laodicea (a.d. 363), and the two Councils of Carthage (a.d. 397 and 419), the decrees of which were sanctioned by the Trullian Council (a.d. 692), nearly seven hundred years after Christ. Dr. Farrar holds, however, that these Councils merely registered the general agreement of the Christian Church. The real test of canonicity is not the decision of Councils, which may and do err, but "the verifying faculty of the Christian consciousness." Dr. Farrar's argument, if it means anything at all, implies that while Councils may err, consisting as they do of fallible men, this "Christian consciousness" is really infallible. But as this Christian consciousness only exists, after all, in individual Christians, however numerous they may be, or through however many centuries they may be continued, it is difficult to see how the greatest multitude of fallibilities can make up one infallibility. And unless it can, it is also difficult to see how Dr. Farrar can have an infallible Canon. He disclaims the authority of the Church, on which Catholics rely; indeed, he says it can hardly be said that the "whole Church" has pronounced any opinion on the Canon at all. What really happened is perhaps unconsciously admitted by Dr. Farrar in a rather simple footnote. "Books were judged," he says, "by the congruity of their contents with the general Christian conviction." Precisely so; the books did not decide the doctrine, but the doctrine decided the fate of the books. And how was the doctrine decided? By fierce controversy, by forgery and sophistication, by partisan struggles, and finally, after the adhesion of Constantine, by faction fights that involved the loss of myriads (some say millions) of lives.

Not the slightest attempt is made by Dr. Farrar to meet the difficulty of his position; indeed, he seems unaware that the difficulty exists. All he sees is the difficulty of the positions taken up by the Catholics and the early Protestants. It never occurs to him that he has only shifted from one difficulty to another. The Catholics rely upon the living voice of God in the Church. That covers everything, like the sky; and is perfectly satisfactory, if you can only accept it. The early Protestants repudiated the authority of the Church, at least as represented by the Pope and Councils; but they acknowledged the authority of the *primitive* Church. They were shrewd enough to see that what cannot possibly rest on mere reason must rest somewhere on authority; so they admitted as much as was sufficient to cover

the Scriptures and the Creeds, and refused to go a step farther. Dr. Farrar breaks away from both parties, and what is the result? He talks about the Canon of the New Testament being formed "by the exercise of enlightened reason," but he lays down no criterion by which reason can decide whether a book is inspired or not, or so specially inspired as to require a place in the Canon. The "verifying faculty of the Christian consciousness" is one of those comfortable phrases, like the blessed word Mesopotamia, which are designed to save the pains of accuracy and the trouble of definite thought. What light does it really shed upon the following questions? Why is the Protestant Canon different from the Catholic Canon? Is it owing to some inexplicable difference in the "verifying faculty of the Christian consciousness" in the two cases; and by what test shall we decide when the Christian consciousness delivers two contradictory verdicts? Why is the book of Ecclesiastes in the Canon, while the book of Ecclesiasticus is (by the Protestants) relegated to the Apocrypha? Why is the book of Esther in the Canon, and the book of Judith in the Apocrypha? Why is the book of Jonah in the Canon, and the book of Tobit in the Apocrypha? Why is the book of Proverbs in the Canon, and the book of the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha? These are questions which the early Protestants answered in their way, but we defy Dr. Farrar to answer them at all.

Let us follow Dr. Farrar into his second chapter. He states, truly enough, that both the Old and the New Testaments represent "the selected and fragmentary remains of an extensive literature." Many books referred to in the Old Testament are lost. Some of the canonical books are anonymous; we do not know who wrote them. Others bear the names of men "by whom they could not have been composed." The Pentateuch is "a work of composite structure," which has been "edited and re-edited several times." The Psalms are a collection of sacred poems in "five separate books of very various antiquity." The Proverbs consist of "four or five different collections." The New Testament is a selection from the voluminous Christian literature of the earliest centuries. Many Gospels were already in existence when St. Luke prepared his own. "It is all but certain," Dr. Farrar says, "that St. Paul, and probable that the other Apostles, must have written many letters which are no longer preserved." That is to say, some letters actually written by St. Paul were allowed to perish, while others not written by him were allowed to bear his name, and were placed as his in the New Testament Canon! There are passages in the Gospels that are known to be interpolations; for instance, the story of the Woman taken in Adultery. This story is "exquisite and supremely valuable," but it is bracketed in the Revised Version as of "doubtful genuineness." Such passages are eliminated because they do not "meet the standard of modern critical requirements." *O sancta simplicitas!* Is there any reason, in the natural sense of that word, for believing that John the Apostle wrote the rest of the Fourth Gospel, any more than he wrote this rejected story? Dr. Farrar strains at gnats and swallows camels, and prides himself on his discrimination.

His references to Justin Martyr and Papias seem less than ingenuous. It is not true that Justin Martyr "freely uses the Gospels." Dr. Farrar admits that he "does not name them." Saying that he "used" them is quietly assuming that they existed. All that Justin Martyr does, as a matter of fact, is to cite sayings ascribed to Jesus, but not in one single case does he cite a saying of Jesus in exactly the form in which it appears in the Four Gospels. Supposing that he wrote freely, and had ever so bad a memory, and never took the trouble to refer to the originals, it is simply inconceivable that he should never be right. Now and then he must have deviated into accuracy. And the fact that he never does is plain proof that he had not our Gospels before him. Nor does Papias mention "the Gospels." He mentions only two, Matthew and Mark, and he says that Matthew was written in *Hebrew*. Now, the earliest date at which Papias can be fixed is a.d. 140. This is chosen by Dr. Farrar, and we will let it pass unchallenged. And what follows? Why this, that no Christian writer before a.d. 140 betrays that he has so much as heard of *any* Gospel, and even then but *two* are known instead of *four*, and one of these is most certainly *not* the Gospel which opens the New Testament.

All this was proved a quarter of a century ago by the author of *Supernatural Religion*— a work which is systematically ignored by the so-called Higher Critics because its author was a pronounced

Rationalist. An excellent summary of this writer's demonstrations appears in the late Matthew Arnold's *God and the Bible*: —

"He seems to have looked out and brought together, to the best of his powers, every extant *passage* in which, between the year 70 and the year 170 of our era, a writer might be supposed to be quoting one of our Four Gospels.

"And it turns out that there is constantly the same sort of variation from our Gospels, a variation inexplicable in men quoting from a real Canon, and quite unlike what is found in men quoting from our Four Gospels later on. It may be said that the Old Testament, too, is often quoted loosely. True; but it is also quoted exactly; and long passages of it are thus quoted. It would be nothing that our canonical Gospels were often quoted loosely, if long passages from them, or if passages, say, of even two or three verses, were sometimes quoted exactly. But from writers before Irenæus not one such passage can be produced so quoted. And the author of *Supernatural Religion* by bringing all the alleged quotations forward, has proved it."<sup>1</sup>

Now what is the exact value of these demonstrations? We will give it in Mr. Arnold's words: "There is no evidence of the establishment of our Four Gospels as a Gospel-Canon, or even of their existence as they now finally stand at all, before the last quarter of the second century." Not only is there no evidence of the orthodox theory, but, as Mr. Arnold says, the "great weight of evidence is against it."

Dr. Giles – another ignored writer, although a clergyman of the Church of England – had said and proved the very same thing in his *Christian Records*; and had appended the following significant declaration: —

"There is positive proof, in the writings of the first ages of Christianity, that the same question as to the age and authorship of the books of the New Testament was even then agitated, and if it was then set at rest, this was done, not by a deliberate sentence of the judge, but by burning all the evidence on which one side of the controversy was supported,"<sup>2</sup>

It is probable that Dr. Farrar is well aware that our Four Gospels cannot be traced beyond the second half of the second century – that is, considerably more than a century after the alleged date of the death of Christ. But he shrinks from a frank admission of the fact, and leaves the reader to find it out for himself.

Instead of making this important and, as some think, damning admission, Dr. Farrar continues his remarks on the Bible Canon. That thirty-six books are accepted "on the authority of the Church" simply means, he tells us, that they are accepted "by the general consensus of Christians." The whole Church, as such, has hardly pronounced an opinion on the subject. The Churchmen who voted at Laodicea and Carthage "exercised no independent judgment," and their critical knowledge was "elementary." Nor was the decision of the Council of Trent any real improvement. Dr. Farrar approves the reply of the Reformed Churches, that "any man may reject books claiming to be Holy Scripture if he do not feel the evidence of their contents." But this is to make every man a judge, not only of what the Bible means, but also of what it should contain. Each unfettered Christian may therefore make up a Bible for himself; which is simply chaos come again. What then is the way of escape from this grotesque confusion? Dr. Farrar indicates it with a crooked finger: —

"The decision as to what books are or are not to be regarded as true Scripture, though we believe it to be wise and right, depends on no infallible decision. It must satisfy the scientific and critical as well as the spiritual requirements of each age."

This reduces the Bible Canon to a perpetual transformation scene. It is a tacit confession that the Protestant Bible is an arbitrary collection of questionable documents; that it has nothing to plead for itself but common usage; that its very contents, as well as their interpretation, are liable to change;

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold, *God and the Bible*, pp. 222-3.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Giles, *Christian Records*, p. 10.

in short, that if the Catholic stands upon the rock of implicit faith, and defies all dangers by closing his eyes and clutching the reassuring hand of his Holy Mother Church, the Protestant flounders about with the poor little dark-lantern of private judgment in a frightful mud-ocean – his old rock of faith in an infallible Bible having been reduced to dust by the engines of criticism, and finally to slush by a downflow from the lofty reservoir of pure reason.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It would be a pity to omit an amusing instance of the contemptuous dogmatism of Christian divines when they had the field to themselves. Dr. William Whitaker, a famous learned writer on the side of the Reformation in England, in his Disputation with two of the foremost Jesuits, Bellarmine and Stapleton, wrote as follows: – "Jerome, in the Proem of his Commentaries on Daniel, relates that Porphyry the philosopher wrote a volume against the book of our prophet Daniel, and affirmed that what is now extant under the name of Daniel was not published by the ancient prophet, but by some later Daniel, who lived in the times of Antiochus Epiphanes. But we need not regard what the impious Porphyry may have written, who mocked at all the scriptures and religion itself." Well, this opinion of the blasphemous Porphyry, whose writings were burnt by the Christian Church, is now accepted by the Higher Critics. Canon Driver, for instance, admits that the Book of Daniel is not the work of Daniel, that it could not have been written earlier than 300 B.C., and that "it is at least *probable* that it was composed under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, B.C. 168 or 167" (Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, p. 467). This involves that the fulfilled prophecies of Daniel were written after the events.

### III. THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE

Having examined Dean Farrar's observations on the Bible Canon, and seen that it is a more or less arbitrary selection from Hebrew and early Christian literature, many of the books being anonymous, while others bear the names of authors who did not write them, and most of them being much later compositions than orthodoxy supposes; we now take a leap forward to his twelfth chapter to see what he has to say on the subject of the Bible and Science. His first object is to drive home to his co-religionists the mischief of adhering to the old doctrine of Bible infallibility. Consequently he does not mince matters in dealing with the difficulties of the literal theory of inspiration. Writers like Gausson contend that the Bible is a perfect authority in matters of science. Mr. Gladstone argues that Moses supernaturally anticipated the teachings of modern evolution, and that the inspired fishermen of Galilee, notably St. Peter, no less supernaturally anticipated all that modern astronomy teaches as to the final destiny of our planet. Dr. Farrar declines to follow them in this perilous path. He does not walk in the opposite direction, for that would lead him among the "infidels." He strikes off at right angles, and takes the line that the Bible was never intended to teach science, or anything else but religion. He quotes with approval the saying of Archbishop Sumner, that "the Scriptures have never revealed a scientific truth." He maintains that the writers of Scripture had only a natural knowledge of exact science; and that was precious little, and was indeed rather ignorance than knowledge, as they belonged to "the most unscientific of all nations in the most unscientific of all ages." "It is now understood by competent inquirers," he says, "that geology is God's revelation to us of one set of truths, and Genesis of quite another." "Nature," he says, "is a book which contains a revelation of God in one sphere, and Scripture a book which contains a revelation of him in another. Both books have often been misread, but no *truth* revealed in the one can be irreconcilable with any truth revealed in the other." This, however, is a mere truism; for one truth cannot be irreconcilable with another truth. Dr. Farrar's statement sounds imposing and consolatory, but when you look into its meaning you see it is only a pulpit platitude.

But before we proceed to criticise Dr. Farrar's position, let us glance at his attack upon the literalists. He charges them with having opposed and persecuted every modern science, and with having manufactured the most absurd scientific theories from the text of the Bible; the said theories being not only ludicrous, but irreconcilably opposed to each other. Lactantius, with the Bible in his hand, ridiculed the rotundity of the earth. Roger Bacon and Galileo were imprisoned and tortured for teaching true science instead of the false science of the Church. John Wesley declared the Copernican astronomy to be in opposition to Scripture. Thomas Burnet's "Sacred Theory of the Earth," founded upon the Bible, was assailed by William Whiston, who based a different "Sacred Theory" upon the very same book. Buffon, the great French scientist, was compelled by the Sorbonne to recant, and to abandon everything in his writings that was "contrary to the narrative of Moses." Even when God (that is to say Dr. Simpson) gave to the world the priceless boon of anaesthetics, there were many Biblicists who declared that the use of chloroform in cases of painful confinement was flying in the face of God's curse upon the daughters of Eve. Catholic and Protestant have alike pitted the Bible against Science, and both have been ignominiously beaten.

But this is not all. The theologians have been disgraced as well as defeated. With respect to the Buffon case, for instance, Dr. Farrar writes as follows: —

"The line now taken by apologists is very different from that of previous centuries, and less honest. It declares that Genesis and geology are in exact accord. It no longer refuses to believe the facts of nature, but instead of this it boldly sophisticates the facts of Scripture."

John Stuart Mill said that every new truth passes through three phases of reception. At first, it is declared to be false and dangerous; secondly, it is discovered that there is something to be said for it; lastly, its opponents turn round and declare "we said so all along." Dr. Farrar dots all the

"i's" in Mill's statement. He asserts that "religious teachers" first say of every scientific discovery, "It is blasphemous and contrary to Scripture." Next they say, "There is nothing in Scripture which absolutely contradicts it." Finally they say, "It is distinctly revealed in Scripture itself."

Dr. Farrar puts the historic case against "orthodoxy" – which, of course, is not Christianity! – in the following fashion: —

"The history of most modern sciences has been as follows. Its discoverers have been proscribed, anathematised, and, in every possible instance, silenced or persecuted; yet before a generation has passed the champions of a spurious orthodoxy have had to confess that their interpretations were erroneous; and – for the most part without an apology and without a blush – have complacently invented some new line of exposition by which the phrases of Scripture can be squared into semblable accordance with the now acknowledged facts."

Even in the comparatively recent case of Darwin this was perfectly true. Dr. Farrar, who preached Darwin's funeral sermon in Westminster Abbey, says that he "endured the fury of pulpits and Church Congresses." He did so with quiet dignity; not an angry word escaped him. Yet before Darwin's death not only was the scientific world converted, but leading theologians said that, if Darwinism were proved to be true, there was "nothing in it contrary to the creeds of the Catholic faith."

Darwin never answered the clergy. He had better work to do. All he did was to smile at them. In one of his letters he said that when the men of science are agreed about anything all the clergy have to do is to say ditto. He understood that when science is victorious it will always have clerical patronage. Had he been able to do it, he would have smiled, in that beautiful benevolent way of his, at Dr. Farrar's funeral sermon. The worthy Dean thought they had got Darwin at last; and the grand old philosopher might have said, "Why yes, my *corpse!*"

So much for Dr. Farrar's impeachment of "orthodoxy" and its doctrine of plenary inspiration. Let us now examine his own position, and see whether it is logical as well as convenient.

Take the first chapter of Genesis. It is not a scientific revelation, though it seems to be. Whoever wrote it had only the science of his time. Nevertheless, it is of "transcendent value," according to Dr. Farrar. "Its true and deep object," he says, "was to set right an erring world in the supremely important knowledge that there was one God and Father of us all, the Creator of heaven and earth, a God who saw all things which he has made, and pronounced them to be very good."

This is very pretty in its way; but how absurd it is in the light of the fact that the Hebrew creation story is all *borrowed!* While the Jews were desert nomads, long before the concoction of their sacred scriptures the doctrine of a Creator of heaven and earth was known in India and in Egypt, not to recite a list of other nations. If this is all the first chapter of Genesis teaches, we may well exclaim, "Thank you for nothing!" It is a curious "revelation" which only discloses what is familiar. Had the Bible never been written, had the Jews never existed, the "true and deep object" of the first chapter of Genesis would have been quite as well subserved. Wherever the Christian missionaries have gone they have found the creation story in front of them. Wherever they took it they were carrying coals to Newcastle.

We venture to suggest that if Dr. Farrar thinks that all things God has made are very good, there are many persons who do not share his opinion. It would be idle to read that text to a sailor pursued by a shark. We could multiply this instance a thousandfold; but why give a list of all the predatory and parasitical creatures on this planet, from human tyrants and despoilers down to cholera microbes? Dr. Farrar may reply that everything ends in mystery, that we must have faith, that it is our interest as well as our duty to believe. But that is exactly what the Catholic Church says, and Dr. Farrar laughs it to scorn. The truth is, that all theology is ultimately a matter of faith; and the quarrel about more or less is a domestic difference. The greater difference is between Faith and Reason. This was clearly seen by Cardinal Newman, who pointed out that every mystery of the Roman Catholic faith is matched by a mystery in Protestant theology.

Finally, we have to remark that Dr. Farrar overlooks a very important point in this controversy. Having argued that the Bible was not intended to teach science, and has not in fact helped the world to a single scientific discovery; having also admitted that the Bible has all along been used to hinder the progress of natural knowledge, and to justify the persecution of honest investigators; he seems to imagine that there is no more to be said. But there is *much* more to be said. We forbear to press the objection that Omniscience was very curiously employed in entangling a religious revelation with scientific blunders, which would necessarily retard the progress of scientific truth, and therefore of human civilisation. What we wish to emphasise is less open to the retort that Omniscience is beyond our finite judgment. We desire to urge that the Bible is not simply non-scientific. It is anti-scientific. Let us take, for instance, the story of the creation and fall of man. Even if it be not taken literally, but allegorically, it is thoroughly antagonistic to the teachings of Evolution. At the very least it implies that man is something special and unique, whereas he is included in the general scheme of biology, and is but "the paragon of animals." Get rid of the actual garden and the actual tree of knowledge, as Dr. Farrar does, and there still remains the fact that the fall of man is a falsehood, and the ascent of man a verity. The allegory does not correspond to the essential truth of man's history; and in spite of all the flattering rhetoric with which Dr. Farrar invests it – a rhetoric so inharmonious with its own consummate simplicity – there is something inexpressibly childish to the modern mind in the awful heinousness which is attributed to the mere eating of forbidden fruit. An act is really not vicious because it is prohibited, or virtuous because it conforms to the dictates of authority. When man attains to intellectual maturity he smiles at the ethical trick which was played upon his youthful ignorance. It is not sufficient to tell him that he must do this, and must not do that. He requires a reason. His intelligence must go hand in hand with his emotions. It is this union, indeed, which constitutes what we call conscience.

The truth is that the Bible is steeped in superstition and supernaturalism. Its cosmogony, its conception of man's origin and position in the universe, its infantile legends, its miracles and magic, its theory of madness and disease, its doctrine of the external efficacy of prayer, its idea that man's words and wishes avail to change the sweep of universal forces and the operation of their immutable laws: all this is in direct opposition to the letter and spirit of Science. The special pleading of clergymen like Dr. Farrar may afford a temporary relief to trembling Christians, and keep them for a further term in the fold of faith; but it will never make the slightest impression upon sceptics, unless it fills them with contemptuous pity for a number of clever men who are obliged, for personal reasons, to practise the lowest arts of sophistry.

## IV. MIRACLES AND WITCHCRAFT

Dr. Farrar, as we have seen, holds that the Bible is not a revelation in science. The inspired writers were, in such matters, left to their natural knowledge. The Holy Spirit taught them that God made the world and all which it inhabits; but *how* it was made they only conjectured. The truth, in *this* respect, was left to the discovery of later ages.

This is a pretty and convenient theory, but it does not provide for every difficulty in the relationship between science and the Bible. There still remain the questions of miracles and witchcraft.

Dr. Farrar does not discuss these questions thoroughly. He only ventures a few observations. In his opinion, the two miracles of the Creation and the Incarnation "include the credibility of *all* other miracles." We agree with him. Admit creation out of nothing, and you need not be astonished at the transformation of water into wine. Admit the birth of a boy from a virgin mother, and you need not raise physiological objections to the story of a man being safely entertained for three days in a whale's intestines. It is absurd to strain at gnats after swallowing camels. For this reason we are unable to understand Dr. Farrar's fastidiousness. He is ready to believe that some miracles are mistaken metaphors, that some were due to the action of unnoticed or ill-understood natural causes, and that others were providential occurrences instead of supernatural events. All this, however, is but a concession to the sceptical spirit. It is throwing out the children to the wolves. It may stop their pursuit for a little while, but they will come on again, and flesh their jaws upon the parents.

A mixed criterion of true miracles is laid down by Dr. Farrar. They must be (1) adequately attested, and (2) wrought for adequate ends, and (3) in accordance with the revealed laws of God's immediate dealings with man. The second and third conditions are too fanciful for discussion. They are, in fact, entirely subjective. The first condition is the only one which can be applied with decisive accuracy. The miracles must be *adequately attested*. But was it not David Hume who declared that "in all history" there is not a single miracle attested in this manner? And did not Professor Huxley say that Hume's assertion was "least likely" to be challenged by those who are used to weighing evidence and giving their decision with a due sense of moral responsibility?

It is easy enough to sneer at Hume. It is just as easy to answer what he never said. What the apologists of Christianity have to do is to take a single miracle of their faith and show that it rests upon adequate evidence. Anything short of this is intellectual thimble-rigging.

Dr. Farrar does not face this dreadful task. He treats us, instead, to some personal observations on the Fall, the Tower of Babel, Balaam's ass, Joshua's arrest of the sun and moon, and Jonah's submarine excursion. Let us examine these observations.

No Christian, says Dr. Farrar, is called upon to believe in an actual Garden of Eden and an actual talking serpent. Christians have believed in these things by the million. But that was before the clergy invented "the Higher Criticism" to disarm "infidelity." They know better now. The story of the Fall is false as a narrative. It is true as a "vivid pictorial representation of the origin and growth of sin in the human heart." All the literature of the world has failed to set forth anything "comparable to it in insight." Therefore it is "inspired."

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