# ТОМАС ДЕ КВИНСИ

## NARRATIVE AND MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS — VOLUME 2

Томас Де Квинси

# Narrative and Miscellaneous Papers — Volume 2

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# Содержание

# Thomas De Quincey
# Narrative and Miscellaneous Papers — Volume 2

## SYSTEM OF THE HEAVENS AS REVEALED BY LORD ROSSE'S TELESCOPES MODERN SUPERSTITION COLERIDGE AND OPIUM-EATING TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT ON WAR THE LAST DAYS OF IMMANUEL KANT

SYSTEM OF THE HEAVENS AS REVEALED BY LORD ROSSE'S TELESCOPES.

[Footnote: Thoughts on Some Important Points relating to the System of the World. By J. P. Nichol, LL.D., Professor of Astronomy in the University of Glasgow. William Tait, Edinburgh. 1846.]

Some years ago, some person or other, [in fact I believe it was myself,] published a paper from the German of Kant, on a very interesting question, viz., the age of our own little Earth. Those who have never seen that paper, a class of unfortunate people whom I suspect to form *rather* the majority in our present perverse generation, will be likely to misconceive its object. Kant's purpose was, not to ascertain how many years the Earth had lived: a million of years, more or less, made very little difference to *him*. What he wished to settle was no such barren conundrum. For, had there even been any means of coercing the Earth into an honest answer, on such a delicate point, which the Sicilian canon, Recupero, fancied that there was; [Footnote: *Recupero*. See Brydone's Travels, some sixty or seventy years ago. The canon, being a beneficed clergyman in the Papal church, was naturally an infidel. He wished exceedingly to refute Moses: and he fancied that he really had done so by means of some collusive assistance from the layers of lava on Mount Etna. But there survives, at this day, very little to remind us of the canon, except an unpleasant guffaw that rises, at times, in solitary valleys of Etna.] but which, in my own opinion, there neither is, nor ought to be,— (since a man deserves to be cudgelled who could put such improper questions to a *lady* planet,)—still what would it amount to? What good would it do us to have a certificate of our dear little mother's birth and baptism? Other people—people in Jupiter, or the Uranians—may amuse themselves with her pretended foibles or infirmities: it is quite safe to do so at *their* distance; and, in a female planet like Venus, it might be natural, (though, strictly speaking, not quite correct,) to scatter abroad malicious insinuations, as though our excellent little mamma had begun to wear false hair, or had lost some of her front teeth. But all this, we men of sense know to be gammon. Our mother Tellus, beyond all doubt, is a lovely little thing. I am satisfied that she is very much admired throughout the Solar System: and, in clear seasons, when she is seen to advantage, with her bonny wee pet of a Moon tripping round her like a lamb, I should be thankful to any gentleman who will mention where he has happened to observe—either he or his telescope—will he only have the goodness to say, in what part of the heavens he has discovered a more elegant turn-out. I wish to make no personal reflections. I name no names. Only this I say, that, though some people have the gift of seeing things that other people never could see, and though some other people, or other some people are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, so that, generally, their geese count for swans, yet, after all, swans or geese, it would be a pleasure to me, and really a curiosity, to see the planet that could fancy herself entitled to sneeze at our Earth. And then, if she (viz., our Earth,) keeps but one Moon, even *that* (you know) is an advantage as

regards some people that keep none. There are people, pretty well known to you and me, that can't make it convenient to keep even one Moon. And so I come to my moral; which is this, that, to all appearance, it is mere justice; but, supposing it were not, still it is *our* duty, (as children of the Earth,) right or wrong, to stand up for our bonny young mamma, if she *is* young; or for our dear old mother, if she *is* old; whether young or old, to take her part against all comers; and to argue through thick and thin, which (sober or not) I always attempt to do, that she is the most respectable member of the Copernican System.

Meantime, what Kant understood by being old, is something that still remains to be explained. If one stumbled, in the steppes of Tartary, on the grave of a Megalonyx, and, after long study, had deciphered from some pre-Adamite heiro-pothooks, the following epitaph:—'*Hic jacet* a Megalonyx, or *Hic jacet* a Mammoth, (as the case might be,) who departed this life, to the grief of his numerous acquaintance in the seventeen thousandth year of his age,'—of course, one would be sorry for him; because it must be disagreeable at *any* age to be torn away from life, and from all one's little megalonychal comforts; that's not pleasant, you know, even if one *is* seventeen thousand years old. But it would make all the difference possible in your grief, whether the record indicated a premature death, that he had been cut off, in fact, whilst just stepping into life, or had kicked the bucket when full of honors, and been followed to the grave by a train of weeping grandchildren. He had died 'in his teens,' that's past denying. But still we must know to what stage of life in a man, had corresponded seventeen thousand years in a Mammoth. Now exactly this was what Kant desired to know about our planet. Let her have lived any number of years that you suggest, (shall we say if you please, that she is in her billionth year?) still that tells us nothing about the *period* of life, the *stage*, which she may be supposed to have reached. Is she a child, in fact, or is she an adult? And, *if* an adult, and that you gave a ball to the Solar System, is she that kind of person, that you would introduce to a waltzing partner, some fiery young gentlemen like Mars, or would you rather suggest to her the sort of partnership which takes place at a whist-table? On this, as on so many other questions, Kant was perfectly sensible that people, of the finest understandings, may and do take the most opposite views. Some think that our planet is in that stage of her life, which corresponds to the playful period of twelve or thirteen in a spirited girl. Such a girl, were it not that she is checked by a sweet natural sense of feminine grace, you might call a romp; but not a hoyden, observe; no horse-play; oh, no, nothing of that sort. And these people fancy that earthquakes, volcanoes, and all such little *escapades* will be over, they will, in lawyer's phrase, 'cease and determine,' as soon as our Earth reaches the age of maidenly bashfulness. Poor thing! It's quite natural, you know, in a healthy growing girl. A little overflow of vivacity, a *pirouette* more or less, what harm should *that* do to any of us? Nobody takes more delight than I in the fawn-like sportiveness of an innocent girl, at this period of life: even a shade of *espièglerie* does not annoy me. But still my own impressions incline me rather to represent the Earth as a fine noble young woman, full of the pride which is so becoming to her sex, and well able to take her own part, in case that, at any solitary point of the heavens, she should come across one of those vulgar fussy Comets, disposed to be rude and take improper liberties. These Comets, by the way, are public nuisances, very much like the mounted messengers of butchers in great cities, who are always at full gallop, and moving upon such an infinity of angles to human shinbones, that the final purpose of such boys (one of whom lately had the audacity nearly to ride down the Duke of Wellington) seems to be— not the translation of mutton, which would certainly find its way into human mouths even if riding boys were not,—but the improved geometry of transcendental curves. They ought to be numbered, ought these boys, and to wear badges—X 10, &c. And exactly the same evil, asking therefore by implication for exactly the same remedy, affects the Comets. A respectable planet is known everywhere, and responsible for any mischief that he does. But if a cry should arise, 'Stop that wretch, who was rude to the Earth: who is he?' twenty voices will answer, perhaps, 'It's Encke's Comet; he is always doing mischief;' well, what can you say? it *may* be Encke's, it may be some other man's Comet; there are so many abroad and on so many roads, that you might as well

ask upon a night of fog, such fog as may be opened with an oyster knife, whose cab that was (whose, viz., out of 27,000 in London) that floored you into the kennel.

These are constructive ideas upon the Earth's stage of evolution, which Kant was aware of, and which will always find toleration, even where they do not find patronage. But others there are, a class whom I perfectly abominate, that place our Earth in the category of decaying women, nay of decayed women, going, going, and all but gone. 'Hair like arctic snows, failure of vital heat, palsy that shakes the head as in the porcelain toys on our mantel-pieces, asthma that shakes the whole fabric—these they absolutely fancy themselves to *see*. They absolutely *hear* the tellurian lungs wheezing, panting, crying, 'Bellows to mend!' periodically as the Earth approaches her aphelion.

But suddenly at this point a demur arises upon the total question. Kant's very problem explodes, bursts, as poison in Venetian wine-glass of old shivered the glass into fragments. For is there, after all, any stationary meaning in the question? Perhaps in reality the Earth is both young and old. Young? If she is not young at present, perhaps she *will* be so in future. Old? if she is not old at this moment, perhaps she *has* been old, and has a fair chance of becoming so again. In fact, she is a Phoenix that is known to have secret processes for rebuilding herself out of her own ashes. Little doubt there is but she has seen many a birthday, many a funeral night, and many a morning of resurrection. Where now the mightiest of oceans rolls in pacific beauty, once were anchored continents and boundless forests. Where the south pole now shuts her frozen gates inhospitably against the intrusions of flesh, once were probably accumulated the ribs of empires; man's imperial forehead, woman's roseate lips, gleamed upon ten thousand hills; and there were innumerable contributions to antarctic journals almost as good (but not quite) as our own. Even within our domestic limits, even where little England, in her south- eastern quarter now devolves so quietly to the sea her sweet pastoral rivulets, once came roaring down, in pomp of waters, a regal Ganges [Footnote: *'Ganges:'*—Dr. Nichol calls it by this name for the purpose of expressing its grandeur; and certainly in breadth, in diffusion at all times, but especially in the rainy season, the Ganges is the cock of the walk in our British orient. Else, as regards the body of water discharged, the absolute payments made into the sea's exchequer, and the majesty of column riding downwards from the Himalaya, I believe that, since Sir Alexander Burnes's measurements, the Indus ranks foremost by a long chalk.], that drained some hyperbolical continent, some Quinbus Flestrin of Asiatic proportions, long since gone to the dogs. All things pass away. Generations wax old as does a garment: but eternally God says:—'Come again, ye children of men.' Wildernesses of fruit, and worlds of flowers, are annually gathered in solitary South America to ancestral graves: yet still the Pomona of Earth, yet still the Flora of Earth, does not become superannuated, but blossoms in everlasting youth. Not otherwise by secular periods, known to us geologically as facts, though obscure as durations, *Tellus* herself, the planet, as a whole, is for ever working by golden balances of change and compensation, of ruin and restoration. She recasts her glorious habitations in decomposing them; she lies down for death, which perhaps a thousand times she has suffered; she rises for a new birth, which perhaps for the thousandth time has glorified her disc. Hers is the wedding garment, hers is the shroud, that eternally is being woven in the loom. And God imposes upon her the awful necessity of working for ever at her own grave, yet of listening for ever to his far-off trumpet of *palingenesis*.

If this account of the matter be just, and were it not treasonable to insinuate the possibility of an error against so great a swell as Immanuel Kant, one would be inclined to fancy that Mr. Kant had really been dozing a little on this occasion; or, agreeably to his own illustration elsewhere, that he had realized the pleasant picture of one learned doctor trying to milk a he-goat, whilst another doctor, equally learned, holds the milk-pail below. [Footnote: Kant applied this illustration to the case where one worshipful scholar proposes some impossible problem, (as the squaring of the circle, or the perpetual motion,) which another worshipful scholar sits down to solve. The reference was of course to Virgil's line,—'Atque idem jungat vulpes, et *mulgeat hircos*.'] And there is apparently this two- edged embarrassment pressing upon the case—that, if our dear excellent mother the Earth could be persuaded to tell us her exact age in Julian years, still *that* would leave us all as much in the

dark as ever: since, if the answer were, 'Why, children, at my next birth-day I shall count a matter of some million centuries,' we should still be at a loss to *value* her age: would it mean that she was a mere chicken, or that she was 'getting up in years?' On the other hand, if (declining to state any odious circumstantialities,) she were to reply,—'No matter, children, for my precise years, which are disagreeable remembrances; I confess generally to being a lady of a certain age,'—here, in the inverse order, given the *valuation* of the age, we should yet be at a loss for the *absolute* years numerically: would a 'certain age,' mean that 'mamma' was a million, be the same more or less, or perhaps not much above seventy thousand?

Every way, you see, reader, there are difficulties. But two things used to strike me, as unaccountably overlooked by Kant; who, to say the truth, was profound—yet at no time very agile—in the character of his understanding. First, what age now might we take our brother and sister planets to be? For *that* determination as to a point in *their* constitution, will do something to illustrate our own. We are as good as they, I hope, any day: perhaps in a growl, one might modestly insinuate—*better*. It's not at all likely that there can be any great disproportion of age amongst children of the same household: and therefore, since Kant always countenanced the idea that Jupiter had not quite finished the upholstery of his extensive premises, as a comfortable residence for a man, Jupiter having, in fact, a fine family of mammoths, but no family at all of 'humans,' (as brother Jonathan calls them,) Kant was bound, *ex analogo*, to hold that any little precedency in the trade of living, on the part of our own mother Earth, could not count for much in the long run. At Newmarket, or Doncaster, the start is seldom mathematically true: trifling advantages will survive all human trials after abstract equity; and the logic of this case argues, that any few thousands of years by which Tellus may have got ahead of Jupiter, such as the having finished her Roman Empire, finished her Crusades, and finished her French Revolution, virtually amounts to little or nothing; indicates no higher proportion to the total scale upon which she has to run, than the few tickings of a watch by which one horse at the start for the Leger is in advance of another. When checked in our chronology by each other, it transpires that, in effect, we are but executing the nice manoeuvre of a start; and that the small matter of six thousand years, by which we may have advanced our own position beyond some of our planetary rivals, is but the outstretched neck of an uneasy horse at Doncaster. This is *one* of the data overlooked by Kant; and the less excusably overlooked, because it was his own peculiar doctrine,— that uncle Jupiter ought to be considered a greenhorn. Jupiter may be a younger brother of our mamma; but, if he is a brother at all, he cannot be so very wide of our own chronology; and therefore the first *datum* overlooked by Kant was—the analogy of our whole planetary system. A second datum, as it always occurred to myself, might reasonably enough be derived from the intellectual vigor of us men. If our mother could, with any show of reason, be considered an old decayed lady, snoring stentorously in her arm-chair, there would naturally be some *aroma* of phthisis, or apoplexy, beginning to form about *us*, that are her children. But *is* there? If ever Dr. Johnson said a true word, it was when he replied to the Scottish judge Burnett, so well known to the world as Lord Monboddo. The judge, a learned man, but obstinate as a mule in certain prejudices, had said plaintively, querulously, piteously,—'Ah, Doctor, we are poor creatures, we men of the eighteenth century, by comparison with our forefathers!' 'Oh, no, my Lord,' said Johnson, 'we are quite as strong as our ancestors, and a great deal wiser.' Yes; our kick is, at least, as dangerous, and our logic does three times as much execution. This would be a complex topic to treat effectively; and I wish merely to indicate the opening which it offers for a most decisive order of arguments in such a controversy. If the Earth were on her last legs, we her children could not be very strong or healthy. Whereas, if there were less pedantry amongst us, less malice, less falsehood, and less darkness of prejudice, easy it would be to show, that in almost every mode of intellectual power, we are more than a match for the most conceited of elder generations, and that in some modes we have energies or arts absolutely and exclusively our own. Amongst a thousand indications of strength and budding youth, I will mention two:—Is it likely, is it plausible, that our Earth should just begin to find out effective methods of traversing land and sea, when she

had a summons to leave both? Is it not, on the contrary, a clear presumption that the great career of earthly nations is but on the point of opening, that life is but just beginning to kindle, when the great obstacles to effectual locomotion, and therefore to extensive human intercourse, are first of all beginning to give way? Secondly, I ask peremptorily,—Does it stand with good sense, is it reasonable that Earth is waning, science drooping, man looking downward, precisely in that epoch when, first of all, man's eye is arming itself for looking effectively into the mighty depths of space? A new era for the human intellect, upon a path that lies amongst its most aspiring, is promised, is inaugurated, by Lord Rosse's almost awful telescope.

What is it then that Lord Rosse has accomplished? If a man were aiming at dazzling by effects of rhetoric, he might reply: He has accomplished that which once the condition of the telescope not only refused its permission to hope for, but expressly bade man to despair of. What is it that Lord Rosse has revealed? Answer: he has revealed more by far than he found. The theatre to which he has introduced us, is *immeasurably* beyond the old one which he found. To say that he found, in the visible universe, a little wooden theatre of Thespis, a *tréteau* or shed of vagrants, and that he presented us, at a price of toil and of *anxiety* that cannot be measured, with a Roman colosseum, —*that* is to say nothing. It is to undertake the measurement of the tropics with the pocket-tape of an upholsterer. Columbus, when he introduced the Old World to the New, after all that can be said in his praise, did in fact only introduce the majority to the minority; but Lord Rosse has introduced the minority to the majority. There are two worlds, one called Ante-Rosse, and the other Post-Rosse; and, if it should come to voting, the latter would shockingly outvote the other. Augustus Cæsar made it his boast when dying, that he had found the city of Rome built of brick, and that he left it built of marble: *lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit*. Lord Rosse may say, even if to-day he should die, 'I found God's universe represented for human convenience, even after all the sublime discoveries of Herschel, upon a globe or spherical chart having a radius of one hundred and fifty feet; and I left it sketched upon a similar chart, keeping exactly the same scale of proportions, but now elongating its radius into one thousand feet.' The reader of course understands that this expression, founded on absolute calculations of Dr. Nichol, is simply meant to exhibit the *relative* dimensions of the *mundus Ante-Rosseanus* and the *mundus Post-Rosseanus;* for as to the *absolute* dimensions, when stated in miles, leagues or any units familiar to the human experience, they are too stunning and confounding. If, again, they are stated in larger units, as for instance diameters of the earth's orbit, the unit itself that should facilitate the grasping of the result, and which really *is* more manageable numerically, becomes itself elusive of the mental grasp: it comes in as an interpreter; and (as in some other cases) the interpreter is hardest to be understood of the two. If, finally, TIME be assumed as the exponent of the dreadful magnitudes, time combining itself with motion, as in the flight of cannon-balls or the flight of swallows, the sublimity becomes greater; but horror seizes upon the reflecting intellect, and incredulity upon the irreflective. Even a railroad generation, that *should* have faith in the miracles of velocity, lifts up its hands with an '*Incredulus odi*!' we know that Dr. Nichol speaks the truth; but he *seems* to speak falsehood. And the ignorant by-stander prays that the doctor may have grace given him and time for repentance; whilst his more liberal companion reproves his want of charity, observing that travellers into far countries have always had a license for lying, as a sort of tax or fine levied for remunerating their own risks; and that great astronomers, as necessarily far travellers into space, are entitled to a double per centage of the same Munchausen privilege.

Great is the mystery of Space, greater is the mystery of Time; either mystery grows upon man, as man himself grows; and either seems to be a function of the godlike which is in man. In reality the depths and the heights which are in man, the depths by which he searches, the heights by which he aspires, are but projected and made objective externally in the three dimensions of space which are outside of him. He trembles at the abyss into which his bodily eyes look down, or look up; not knowing that abyss to be, not always consciously suspecting it to be, but by an instinct written in his prophetic heart feeling it to be, boding it to be, fearing it to be, and sometimes hoping it to be, the mirror to a

mightier abyss that will one day be expanded in himself. Even as to the sense of space, which is the lesser mystery than time, I know not whether the reader has remarked that it is one which swells upon man with the expansion of his mind, and that it is probably peculiar to the mind of man. An infant of a year old, or oftentimes even older, takes no notice of a sound, however loud, which is a quarter of a mile removed, or even in a distant chamber. And brutes, even of the most enlarged capacities, seem not to have any commerce with distance: distance is probably not revealed to them except by a *presence*, viz., by some shadow of their own animality, which, if perceived at all, is perceived as a thing *present* to their organs. An animal desire, or a deep animal hostility, may render sensible a distance which else would not be sensible; but not render it sensible *as* a distance. Hence perhaps is explained, and not out of any self- oblivion from higher enthusiasm, a fact that often has occurred, of deer, or hares, or foxes, and the pack of hounds in pursuit, chaser and chased, all going headlong over a precipice together. Depth or height does not readily manifest itself to *them*; so that any *strong* motive is sufficient to overpower the sense of it. Man only has a natural function for expanding on an illimitable sensorium, the illimitable growths of space. Man, coming to the precipice, reads his danger; the brute perishes: man is saved; and the horse is saved by his rider.

But, if this sounds in the ear of some a doubtful refinement, the doubt applies only to the lowest degrees of space. For the highest, it is certain that brutes have no perception. To man is as much reserved the prerogative of perceiving space in its higher extensions, as of geometrically constructing the relations of space. And the brute is no more capable of apprehending abysses through his eye, than he can build upwards or can analyze downwards the ærial synthesis of Geometry. Such, therefore, as is space for the grandeur of man's perceptions, such as is space for the benefit of man's towering mathematic speculations, such is the nature of our debt to Lord Rosse—as being the philosopher who has most pushed back the frontiers of our conquests upon this *exclusive* inheritance of man. We have all heard of a king that, sitting on the sea-shore, bade the waves, as they began to lave his feet, upon their allegiance to retire. *That* was said not vainly or presumptuously, but in reproof of sycophantic courtiers. Now, however, we see in good earnest another man, wielding another kind of sceptre, and sitting upon the shores of infinity, that says to the ice which had frozen up our progress, —'Melt thou before my breath!' that says to the rebellious *nebulæ*,—'Submit, and burst into blazing worlds!' that says to the gates of darkness,—'Roll back, ye barriers, and no longer hide from us the infinities of God!'

'Come, and I will show you what is beautiful.'

From the days of infancy still lingers in my ears this opening of a prose hymn by a lady, then very celebrated, viz., the late Mrs. Barbauld. The hymn began by enticing some solitary infant into some silent garden, I believe, or some forest lawn; and the opening words were, 'Come, and I will show you what is beautiful!' Well, and what beside? There is nothing beside; oh, disappointed and therefore enraged reader; positively this is the sum-total of what I can recall from the wreck of years; and certainly it is not much. Even of Sappho, though time has made mere ducks and drakes of her lyrics, we have rather more spared to us than this. And yet this trifle, simple as you think it, this shred of a fragment, if the reader will believe me, still echoes with luxurious sweetness in my ears, from some unaccountable hide-and- seek of fugitive childish memories; just as a marine shell, if applied steadily to the ear, awakens (according to the fine image of Landor [Footnote: 'Of Landor,' viz., in his 'Gebir;' but also of Wordsworth in 'The Excursion.' And I must tell the reader, that a contest raged at one time as to the *original property* in this image, not much less keen than that between Neptune and Minerva, for the chancellorship of Athens.]) the great vision of the sea; places the listener

'In the sun's palace-porch,
And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there.'

Now, on some moonless night, in some fitting condition of the atmosphere, if Lord Rosse would permit the reader and myself to walk into the front drawing-room of his telescope, then, in Mrs. Barbauld's words, slightly varied, I might say to him,—Come, and I will show you what is sublime! In fact, what I am going to lay before him, from Dr. Nichol's work, is, or at least *would* be, (when translated into Hebrew grandeur by the mighty telescope,) a step above even that object which some four-and-twenty years ago in the British Museum struck me as simply the sublimest sight which in this sight-seeing world I had seen. It was the Memnon's head, then recently brought from Egypt. I looked at it, as the reader must suppose, in order to understand the depth which I have here ascribed to the impression, not as a human but as a symbolic head; and what it symbolized to me were: 1. The peace which passeth all understanding. 2. The eternity which baffles and confounds all faculty of computation; the eternity which *had* been, the eternity which *was* to be. 3. The diffusive love, not such as rises and falls upon waves of life and mortality, not such as sinks and swells by undulations of time, but a procession—an emanation from some mystery of endless dawn. You durst not call it a smile that radiated from the lips; the radiation was too awful to clothe itself in adumbrations or memorials of flesh.

In *that mode* of sublimity, perhaps, I still adhere to my first opinion, that nothing so great was ever beheld. The atmosphere for *this*, for the Memnon, was the breathlessness which belongs to a saintly trance; the holy thing seemed to live by silence. But there *is* a picture, the pendant of the Memnon, there *is* a dreadful cartoon, from the gallery which has begun to open upon Lord Rosse's telescope, where the appropriate atmosphere for investing it must be drawn from another silence, from the frost and from the eternities of death. It is the famous *nebula* in the constellation of Orion; famous for the unexampled defiance with which it resisted all approaches from the most potent of former telescopes; famous for its frightful magnitude and for the frightful depth to which it is sunk in the abysses of the heavenly wilderness; famous just now for the submission with which it has begun to render up its secrets to the all-conquering telescope; and famous in all time coming for the horror of the regal phantasma which it has perfected to eyes of flesh. Had Milton's 'incestuous mother,' with her fleshless son, and with the warrior angel, his father, that led the rebellions of heaven, been suddenly unmasked by Lord Rosse's instrument, in these dreadful distances before which, simply as expressions of resistance, the mind of man shudders and recoils, there would have been nothing more appalling in the exposure; in fact, it would have been essentially the same exposure: the same expression of power in the detestable phantom, the same rebellion in the attitude, the same pomp of malice in the features to a universe seasoned for its assaults.

The reader must look to Dr. Nichol's book, at page 51, for the picture of this abominable apparition. But then, in order to see what *I* see, the obedient reader must do what I tell him to do. Let him therefore view the wretch upside down. If he neglects that simple direction, of course I don't answer for anything that follows: without any fault of mine, my description will be unintelligible. This inversion being made, the following is the dreadful creature that will then reveal itself.

*Description of the Nebula in Orion, as forced to show out by Lord Rosse.*—You see a head thrown back, and raising its face, (or eyes, if eyes it had,) in the very anguish of hatred, to some unknown heavens. What *should* be its skull wears what *might* be an Assyrian tiara, only ending behind in a floating train. This head rests upon a beautifully developed neck and throat. All power being given to the awful enemy, he is beautiful where he pleases, in order to point and envenom his ghostly ugliness. The mouth, in that stage of the apocalypse which Sir John Herschel was able to arrest in his eighteen- inch mirror, is amply developed. Brutalities unspeakable sit upon the upper lip, which is confluent with a snout; for separate nostrils there are none. Were it not for this one defect of nostrils; and, even in spite of this defect, (since, in so mysterious a mixture of the angelic and the brutal, we may suppose the sense of odor to work by some compensatory organ,) one is reminded by the phantom's attitude of a passage, ever memorable, in Milton: that passage, I mean, where Death first becomes aware, soon after the original trespass, of his own future empire over man. The 'meagre

shadow' even smiles (for the first time and the last) on apprehending his own abominable bliss, by apprehending from afar the savor 'of mortal change on earth.'

——'Such a scent,' (he says,) 'I draw
Of carnage, prey innumerable.'

As illustrating the attitude of the phantom in Orion, let the reader allow me to quote the tremendous passage:—

'So saying, with delight he snuff'd the smell
Of mortal change on earth. As when a flock
Of ravenous fowl, though many a league remote,
Against the day of battle, to a field,
Where armies lie encamp'd, come flying, lured
With scent of living carcasses design'd
For death, the following day, in bloody fight;
So scented the grim feature, [Footnote: 'So scented the grim feature,' [*feature* is the old word for *form or outline that is shadowy*; and also for form (shadowy or not) which abstracts from the *matter*.] By the way, I have never seen it noticed, that Milton was indebted for the hint of this immortal passage to a superb line-and-a-half, in Lucan's Pharsalia.] and upturn'd
His nostril wide into the murky air,
Sagacious of his quarry from so far.'

But the lower lip, which is drawn inwards with the curve of a conch shell,—oh what a convolute of cruelty and revenge is *there*! Cruelty!—to whom? Revenge!—for what? Ask not, whisper not. Look upwards to other mysteries. In the very region of his temples, driving itself downwards into his cruel brain, and breaking the continuity of his diadem, is a horrid chasm, a ravine, a shaft, that many centuries would not traverse; and it is serrated on its posterior wall with a harrow that perhaps is partly hidden. From the anterior wall of this chasm rise, in vertical directions, two processes; one perpendicular, and rigid as a horn, the other streaming forward before some portentous breath. What these could be, seemed doubtful; but now, when further examinations by Sir John Herschel, at the Cape of Good Hope, have filled up the scattered outline with a rich umbrageous growth, one is inclined to regard them as the plumes of a sultan. Dressed he is, therefore, as well as armed. And finally comes Lord Rosse, that glorifies him with the jewellery [Footnote: *The jewellery of Stars*. And one thing is very remarkable, viz., that not only the stars justify this name of jewellery, as usual, by the life of their splendor, but also, in this case, by their arrangement. No jeweller could have set, or disposed with more art, the magnificent quadrille of stars which is placed immediately below the upright plume. There is also another, a truncated quadrille, wanting only the left hand star (or you might call it a bisected lozenge) placed on the diadem, but obliquely placed as regards the curve of that diadem. Two or three other arrangements are striking, though not equally so, both from their regularity and from their repeating each other, as the forms in a kaleidoscope.] of stars: he is now a vision 'to dream of, not to tell:' he is ready for the worship of those that are tormented in sleep: and the stages of his solemn uncovering by astronomy, first by Sir W. Herschel, secondly, by his son, and finally by Lord Rosse, is like the reversing of some heavenly doom, like the raising of the seals that had been sealed by the angel, in the Revelations. But the reader naturally asks, How does all this concern Lord Rosse's telescope on the one side, or general astronomy on the other? This *nebula*, he will say, seems a bad kind of fellow by your account; and of course it will not break my heart to hear,

that he has had the conceit taken out of him. But in what way can *that* affect the pretensions of this new instrument; or, if it did, how can the character of the instrument affect the general condition of a science? Besides, is not the science a growth from very ancient times? With great respect for the Earl of Rosse, is it conceivable that he, or any man, by one hour's working the tackle of his new instrument, can have carried any stunning revolutionary effect into the heart of a section so ancient in our mathematical physics? But the reader is to consider, that the ruins made by Lord Rosse, are in *sidereal* astronomy, which is almost wholly a growth of modern times; and the particular part of it demolished by the new telescope, is almost exclusively the creation of the two Herschels, father and son. Laplace, it is true, adopted their views; and he transferred them to the particular service of our own planetary system. But he gave to them no new sanction, except what arises from showing that they would account for the appearances, as they present themselves to our experience at this day. That was a *negative* confirmation; by which I mean, that, had their views failed in the hands of Laplace, then they were proved to be false; but, *not* failing, they were not therefore proved to be true. It was like proving a gun; if the charge is insufficient, or if, in trying the strength of cast iron, timber, ropes, &c., the strain is not up to the rigor of the demand, you go away with perhaps a favorable impression as to the promises of the article; it has stood a moderate trial; it has stood all the trial that offered, which is always something; but you are still obliged to feel that, when the ultimate test is applied, smash may go the whole concern. Lord Rosse applied an ultimate test; and smash went the whole concern. Really I must have laughed, though all the world had been angry, when the shrieks and yells of expiring systems began to reverberate all the way from the belt of Orion; and positively at the very first broadside delivered from this huge four- decker of a telescope.

But what was it then that went to wreck? That is a thing more easy to ask than to answer. At least, for my own part, I complain that some vagueness hangs over all the accounts of the nebular hypothesis. However, in this place a brief sketch will suffice.

Herschel the elder, having greatly improved the telescope, began to observe with special attention a class of remarkable phenomena in the starry world hitherto unstudied, viz.: milky spots in various stages of diffusion. The nature of these appearances soon cleared itself up thus far, that generally they were found to be starry worlds, separated from ours by inconceivable distances, and in that way concealing at first their real nature. The whitish gleam was the mask conferred by the enormity of their remotion. This being so, it might have been supposed that, as was the faintness of these cloudy spots or *nebulæ*, such was the distance. But *that* did not follow: for in the treasury of nature it turned out that there were other resources for modifying the powers of distance, for muffling and unmuffling the voice of stars. Suppose a world at the distance *x*, which distance is so great as to make the manifestation of that world weak, milky, nebular. Now let the secret power that wields these awful orbs, push this world back to a double distance! *that* should naturally make it paler and more dilute than ever: and yet by *compression*, by deeper centralization, this effect shall be defeated; by forcing into far closer neighborhood the stars which compose this world, again it shall gleam out brighter when at 2_x_ than when at *x*. At this point of compression, let the great moulding power a second time push it back; and a second time it will grow faint. But once more let this world be tortured into closer compression, again let the screw be put upon it, and once again it shall shake off the oppression of distance as the dew-drops are shaken from a lion's mane. And thus in fact the mysterious architect plays at hide-and-seek with his worlds. 'I will hide it,' he says, 'and it shall be found again by man; I will withdraw it into distances that shall seem fabulous, and again it shall apparel itself in glorious light; a third time I will plunge it into aboriginal darkness, and upon the vision of man a third time it shall rise with a new epiphany.'

But, says the objector, there is no such world; there is no world that has thus been driven back, and depressed from one deep to a lower deep. Granted: but the same effect, an illustration of the same law, is produced equally, whether you take four worlds, all of the same magnitude, and plunge them *simultaneously* into four different abysses, sinking by graduated distances one below another,

or take one world and plunge it to the same distances *successively*. So in Geology, when men talk of substances in different stages, or of transitional states, they do not mean that they have watched the same individual *stratum* or *phenomenon*, exhibiting states removed from each other by depths of many thousand years; how could they? but they have seen one stage in the case A, another stage in the case B. They take, for instance, three objects, the same (to use the technical language of logic) generically, though numerically different, under separate circumstances, or in different stages of advance. They are one object for logic, they are three for human convenience. So again it might seem impossible to give the history of a rose tree from infancy to age: how could the same rose tree, at the same time, be young and old? Yet by taking the different developments of its flowers, even as they hang on the same tree, from the earliest bud to the full- blown rose, you may in effect pursue this vegetable growth through all its stages: you have before you the bony blushing little rose-bud, and the respectable 'mediæval' full-blown rose.

This point settled, let it now be remarked, that Herschel's resources enabled him to unmask many of these *nebulæ*: stars they were, and stars he forced them to own themselves. Why should any decent world wear an *alias*? There was nothing, you know, to be ashamed of in being an honest cluster of stars. Indeed, they seemed to be sensible of this themselves, and they now yielded to the force of Herschel's arguments so far as to show themselves in the new character of *nebulæ* spangled with stars; these are the *stellar nebulæ*; quite as much as you could expect in so short a time: Rome was not built in a day: and one must have some respect to stellar feelings. It was noticed, however, that where a bright haze, and not a weak milk- and-water haze, had revealed itself to the telescope, this, arising from a case of *compression*, (as previously explained,) required very little increase of telescopic power to force him into a fuller confession. He made a clean breast of it. But at length came a dreadful anomaly. A 'nebula' in the constellation *Andromeda* turned restive: another in *Orion*, I grieve to say it, still more so. I confine myself to the latter. A very low power sufficed to bring him to a slight confession, which in fact amounted to nothing; the very highest would not persuade him to show a star. 'Just one,' said some coaxing person; 'we'll be satisfied with only one.' But no: he would *not*. He was hardened, 'he wouldn't *split*.' And Herschel was thus led, after waiting as long as flesh and blood *could* wait, to infer two classes of *nebulæ*; one that were stars; and another that were *not* stars, nor ever were meant to be stars. Yet *that* was premature: he found at last, that, though not raised to the peerage of stars, finally they would be so: they were the matter of stars; and by gradual condensation would become suns, whose atmosphere, by a similar process of condensing, would become planets, capable of brilliant literati and philosophers, in several volumes octavo. So stood the case for a long time; it was settled to the satisfaction of Europe that there were two classes of *nebulæ*, one that *were* worlds, one that were *not*, but only the pabulum of future worlds. Silence arose. A voice was heard, 'Let there be Lord Rosse!' and immediately his telescope walked into Orion; destroyed the supposed matter of stars; but, in return, created immeasurable worlds.

As a hint for apprehending the delicacy and difficulty of the process in sidereal astronomy, let the inexperienced reader figure to himself these separate cases of perplexity: 1st, A perplexity where the dilemma arises from the collision between magnitude and distance:—is the size less, or the distance greater? 2dly, Where the dilemma arises between motions, a motion in ourselves doubtfully confounded with a motion in some external body; or, 3dly, Where it arises between possible positions of an object: is it a real proximity that we see between two stars, or simply an apparent proximity from lying in the same visual line, though in far other depths of space? As regards the first dilemma, we may suppose two laws, A and B, absolutely in contradiction, laid down at starting: A, that all fixed stars are precisely at the same *distance*; in this case every difference in the apparent magnitude will indicate a corresponding difference in the real magnitude, and will measure that difference. B, that all the fixed stars are precisely of the same *magnitude*; in which case, every variety in the size will indicate a corresponding difference in the distance, and will measure that difference. Nor could we imagine any exception to these inferences from A or from B, whichever of the two were assumed, unless through

optical laws that might not equally affect objects under different circumstances; I mean, for instance, that might suffer a disturbance as applied under hypoth. B, to different depths in space, or under hypoth. A, to different arrangements of structure in the star. But thirdly, it is certain, that neither A nor B is the abiding law: and next it becomes an object by science and by instruments to distinguish more readily and more certainly between the cases where the distance has degraded the size, and the cases where the size being *really* less, has caused an exaggeration of the distance: or again, where the size being really less, yet co-operating with a distance really greater, may degrade the estimate, (though travelling in a right direction,) below the truth; or again where the size being really less, yet counteracted by a distance also less, may equally disturb the truth of human measurements, and so on.

A second large order of equivocating appearances will arise,—not as to magnitude, but as to motion. If it could be a safe assumption, that the system to which our planet is attached were absolutely fixed and motionless, except as regards its own *internal* relations of movement, then every change outside of us, every motion that the registers of astronomy had established, would be objective and not subjective. It would be safe to pronounce at once that it was a motion in the object contemplated, *not* in the subject contemplating. Or, reversely, if it were safe to assume as a universal law, that no motion was possible in the starry heavens, then every change of relations in space, between ourselves and them, would indicate and would measure a progress, or regress, on the part of our solar system, in certain known directions. But now, because it is not safe to rest in either assumption, the range of possibilities for which science has to provide, is enlarged; the immediate difficulties are multiplied; but with the result (as in the former case) of reversionally expanding the powers, and consequently the facilities, lodged both in the science and in the arts ministerial to the science. Thus, in the constellation *Cygnus*, there is a star gradually changing its relation to our system, whose distance from ourselves (as Dr. Nichol tells us) is ascertained to be about six hundred and seventy thousand times our own distance from the sun: that is, neglecting minute accuracy, about six hundred and seventy thousand stages of one hundred million miles each. This point being known, it falls within the *arts* of astronomy to translate this apparent angular motion into miles; and presuming this change of relation to be not in the star, but really in ourselves, we may deduce the velocity of our course, we may enter into our *log* daily the rate at which our whole solar system is running. Bessel, it seems, the eminent astronomer who died lately, computed this velocity to be such (viz., three times that of our own earth in its proper orbit) as would carry us to the star in forty-one thousand years. But, in the mean time, the astronomer is to hold in reserve some small share of his attention, some trifle of a side-glance, now and then, to the possibility of an error, after all, in the main assumption: he must watch the indications, if any such should arise, that not ourselves, but the star in *Cygnus*, is the real party concerned, in drifting at this shocking rate, with no prospect of coming to an anchorage. [Footnote: It is worth adding at this point, whilst the reader remembers without effort the numbers, viz., forty-one thousand years, for the time, (the space being our own distance from the sun repeated six hundred and seventy thousand times,) what would be the time required for reaching, in the *body*, that distance to which Lord Rosse's six feet mirror has so recently extended our *vision*. The time would be, as Dr. Nichol computes, about two hundred and fifty millions of years, supposing that our rate of travelling was about three times that of our earth in its orbit. Now, as the velocity is assumed to be the same in both cases, the ratio between the distance (already so tremendous) of Bessel's 61 *Cygni*, and that of Lord Rosse's farthest frontier, is as forty- one thousand to two hundred and fifty millions. This is a simple rule- of-three problem for a child. And the answer to it will, perhaps, convey the simplest expression of the superhuman power lodged in the new telescope:—as is the ratio of forty-one thousand to two hundred and fifty million, so is the ratio of our own distance from the sun multiplied by six hundred and seventy thousand, to the outermost limit of Lord Rosse's sidereal vision.]

Another class, and a frequent one, of equivocal phenomena, phenomena that are reconcilable indifferently with either of two assumptions, though less plausibly reconciled with the one than with the other, concerns the position of stars that seem connected with each other by systematic relations,

and which yet *may* lie in very different depths of space, being brought into seeming connection only by the human eye. There have been, and there are, cases where two stars dissemble an interconnection which they really *have*, and other cases where they simulate an interconnection which they have not. All these cases of simulation and dissimulation torment the astronomer by multiplying his perplexities, and deepening the difficulty of escaping them. He cannot get at the truth: in many cases, magnitude and distance are in collusion with each other to deceive him: motion subjective is in collusion with motion objective; duplex systems are in collusion with fraudulent stars, having no real partnership whatever, but mimicking such a partnership by means of the limitations or errors affecting the human eye, where it can apply no other sense to aid or to correct itself. So that the business of astronomy, in these days, is no sinecure, as the reader perceives. And by another evidence, it is continually becoming less of a sinecure. Formerly, one or two men,— Tycho, suppose, or, in a later age, Cassini and Horrox, and Bradley, had observatories: one man, suppose, observed the stars for all Christendom; and the rest of Europe observed *him*. But now, up and down Europe, from the deep blue of Italian skies to the cold frosty atmospheres of St. Petersburg and Glasgow, the stars are conscious of being watched everywhere; and if all astronomers do not publish their observations, all use them in their speculations. New and brilliantly appointed observatories are rising in every latitude, or risen; and none, by the way, of these new-born observatories, is more interesting from the circumstances of its position, or more *picturesque* to a higher organ than the eye—viz., to the human heart—than the New Observatory raised by the university of Glasgow.[Footnote: It has been reported, ever since the autumn of 1845, and the report is now, (August, 1846,) gathering strength, that some railway potentate, having taken a fancy for the ancient college of Glasgow, as a bauble to hang about his wife's neck, (no accounting for tastes,) has offered, (or *will* offer,) such a price, that the good old academic lady in this her moss-grown antiquity, seriously thinks of taking him at his word, packing up her traps, and being off. When a spirit of galavanting comes across an aged lady, it is always difficult to know where it will stop: so, in fact, you know, she may choose to steam for Texas. But the present impression is, that she will settle down by the side of what you may call her married or settled daughter—the Observatory; which one would be glad to have confirmed, as indicating that no purpose of pleasure-seeking had been working in elderly minds, but the instinct of religious rest and aspiration. The Observatory would thus remind one of those early Christian anchorites, and self-exiled visionaries, that being led by almost a necessity of nature to take up their residence in deserts, sometimes drew after themselves the whole of their own neighborhood.]

The New Observatory of Glasgow is now, I believe, finished; and the only fact connected with its history that was painful, as embodying and recording that Vandal alienation from science, literature, and all their interests, which has ever marked our too haughty and Caliph-Omar- like British government, lay in the circumstance that the glasses of the apparatus, the whole mounting of the establishment, in so far as it was a scientific establishment, and even the workmen for putting up the machinery, were imported from Bavaria. We, that once bade the world stand aside when the question arose about glasses, or the graduation of instruments, were now literally obliged to stand cap in hand, bowing to Mr. Somebody, successor of Frauenhofer or Frauendevil, in Munich! Who caused *that*, we should all be glad to know, if not the wicked Treasury, that killed the hen that laid the golden eggs by taxing her until her spine broke? It is to be hoped that, at this moment, and specifically for this offence, some scores of Exchequer men, chancellors and other rubbish, are in purgatory, and perhaps working, with shirt-sleeves tucked up, in purgatorial glass-houses, with very small allowances of beer, to defray the cost of perspiration. But why trouble a festal remembrance with commemorations of crimes or criminals? What makes the Glasgow Observatory so peculiarly interesting, is its position, connected with and overlooking so vast a city, having more than three hundred thousand inhabitants, (in spite of an American sceptic,) nearly all children of toil; and a city, too, which, from the necessities of its circumstances, draws so deeply upon that fountain of misery and guilt which some ordinance, as ancient as 'our father Jacob,' with his patriarchal well for Samaria,

has bequeathed to manufacturing towns,—to Ninevehs, to Babylons, to Tyres. How tarnished with eternal canopies of smoke, and of sorrow; how dark with agitations of many orders, is the mighty town below! How serene, how quiet, how lifted above the confusion and the roar, how liberated from the strifes of earth, is the solemn Observatory that crowns the grounds above! And duly, at night, just when the toil of over-wrought Glasgow is mercifully relaxing, then comes the summons to the laboring astronomer. *He* speaks not of the night, but of the day and the flaunting day-light, as the hours 'in which no man can work.' And the least reflecting of men must be impressed by the idea, that at wide intervals, but intervals scattered over Europe, whilst 'all that mighty heart' is, by sleep, resting from its labors, secret eyes are lifted up to heaven in astronomical watch-towers; eyes that keep watch and ward over spaces that make us dizzy to remember, eyes that register the promises of comets, and disentangle the labyrinths of worlds.

Another feature of interest, connected with the Glasgow Observatory, is personal, and founded on the intellectual characteristics of the present professor, Dr. Nichol; in the deep meditative style of his mind seeking for rest, yet placed in conflict for ever with the tumultuous necessity in *him* for travelling along the line of revolutionary thought, and following it loyally, wearied or not, to its natural home.

In a sonnet of Milton, one of three connected with his own blindness, he distinguishes between two classes of servants that minister to the purposes of God. '*His* state,' says he, meaning God's state, the arrangement of his regular service, 'is kingly;' that is to say, it resembles the mode of service established in the courts of kings; and, in this, it resembles that service, that there are two classes of ministers attending on his pleasure. For, as in the trains of kings are some that run without resting, night or day, to carry the royal messages, and also others—great lords in waiting—that move not from the royal gates; so of the divine retinues, some are for action only, some for contemplation. 'Thousands' there are that

——'at his bidding speed, And post o'er land and ocean without rest.'

Others, on the contrary, motionless as statues, that share not in the agitations of their times, that tremble not in sympathy with the storms around them, but that listen—that watch—that wait —for secret indications to be fulfilled, or secret signs to be deciphered. And, of this latter class, he adds-that they, not less than the others, are accepted by God; or, as it is so exquisitely expressed in the closing line,

'*They* also serve, that only stand and wait.'

Something analogous to this one may see in the distributions of literature and science. Many popularize and diffuse: some reap and gather on their own account. Many translate, into languages fit for the multitude, messages which they receive from human voices: some listen, like Kubla Khan, far down in caverns or hanging over subterranean rivers, for secret whispers that mingle and confuse themselves with the general uproar of torrents, but which can be detected and kept apart by the obstinate prophetic ear, which spells into words and ominous sentences the distracted syllables of ærial voices. Dr. Nichol is one of those who pass to and fro between these classes; and has the rare function of keeping open their vital communications. As a popularizing astronomer, he has done more for the benefit of his great science than all the rest of Europe combined: and now, when he notices, without murmur, the fact that his office of popular teacher is almost taken out of his hands, (so many are they who have trained of late for the duty,) that change has, in fact, been accomplished through knowledge, through explanations, through suggestions, dispersed and prompted by himself.

For my own part, as one belonging to the laity, and not to the *clerus*, in the science of astronomy, I could scarcely have presumed to report minutely, or to sit in the character of dissector upon the separate details of Dr. Nichol's works, either this, or those which have preceded it, had there even been room left disposable for such a task. But in this view it is sufficient to have made the general acknowledgment which already *has* been made, that Dr. Nichol's works, and his oral lectures upon astronomy, are to be considered as the *fundus* of the knowledge on that science now working in this

generation. More important it is, and more in reconciliation with the tenor of my own ordinary studies, to notice the philosophic spirit in which Dr. Nichol's works are framed; the breadth of his views, the eternal tendency of his steps in advance, or (if advance on that quarter, or at that point, happens to be absolutely walled out for the present,) the vigor of the *reconnoissances* by which he examines the hostile intrenchments. Another feature challenges notice. In reading astronomical works, there arises (from old experience of what is usually most faulty) a wish either for the naked severities of science, with a total abstinence from all display of enthusiasm; or else, if the cravings of human sensibility are to be met and gratified, that it shall be by an enthusiasm unaffected and grand as its subject. Of that kind is the enthusiasm of Dr. Nichol. The grandeurs of astronomy are such to him who has a capacity for being grandly moved. They are none at all to him who has not. To the mean they become meannesses. Space, for example, has no grandeur to him who has no space in the theatre of his own brain. I know writers who report the marvels of velocity, &c., in such a way that they become insults to yourself. It is obvious that in *their* way of insisting on our earth's speed in her annual orbit, they do not seek to exalt *her*, but to mortify *you*. And, besides, these fellows are answerable for provoking people into fibs:—for I remember one day, that reading a statement of this nature, about how many things the Earth had done that we could never hope to do, and about the number of cannon balls, harnessed as a *tandem*, which the Earth would fly past, without leaving time to say, *How are you off for soap?* in vexation of heart I could not help exclaiming—'That's nothing: I've done a great deal more myself;' though, when one turns it in one's mind, you know there must be some inaccuracy *there*. How different is Dr. Nichol's enthusiasm from this hypocritical and vulgar wonderment! It shows itself not merely in reflecting the grandeurs of his theme, and by the sure test of detecting and allying itself with all the indirect grandeurs that arrange themselves from any distance, upon or about that centre, but by the manifest promptness with which Dr. Nichol's enthusiasm awakens itself upon *every* road that leads to things elevating for man; or to things promising for knowledge; or to things which, like dubious theories or imperfect attempts at systematizing, though neutral as regards knowledge, minister to what is greater than knowledge, viz., to intellectual *power*, to the augmented power of handling your materials, though with no more materials than before. In his geological and cosmological inquiries, in his casual speculations, the same quality of intellect betrays itself; the intellect that labors in sympathy with the laboring *nisus* of these gladiatorial times; that works (and sees the necessity of working) the apparatus of many sciences towards a composite result; the intellect that retires in one direction only to make head in another; and that already is prefiguring the route beyond the barriers, whilst yet the gates are locked.

There was a man in the last century, and an eminent man too, who used to say, that whereas people in general pretended to admire astronomy as being essentially sublime, he for *his* part looked upon all that sort of thing as a swindle; and, on the contrary, he regarded the solar system as decidedly vulgar; because the planets were all of them so infernally punctual, they kept time with such horrible precision, that they forced him, whether he would or no, to think of nothing but post- office clocks, mail-coaches, and book-keepers. Regularity may be beautiful, but it excludes the sublime. What he wished for was something like Lloyd's list.

*Comets*—due 3; arrived 1. *Mercury*, when last seen, appeared to be distressed; but made no signals. *Pallas* and *Vesta*, not heard of for some time; supposed to have foundered. *Moon*, spoken last night through a heavy bank of clouds; out sixteen days: all right.

Now this poor man's misfortune was, to have lived in the days of mere planetary astronomy. At present, when our own little system, with all its grandeurs, has dwindled by comparison to a subordinate province, if any man is bold enough to say so, a poor shivering unit amongst myriads that are brighter, we ought no longer to talk of astronomy, but of *the astronomies*. There is the planetary, the cometary, the sidereal, perhaps also others; as, for instance, even yet the nebular; because, though Lord Rosse has smitten it with the son of Amram's rod, has made it open, and cloven a path through it, yet other and more fearful *nebulæ* may loom in sight, (if further improvements should be effected

in the telescope,) that may puzzle even Lord Rosse. And when he tells his *famulus*—'Fire a shot at that strange fellow, and make him show his colors,' possibly the mighty stranger may disdain the summons. That would be vexatious: we should all be incensed at *that*. But no matter. What's a *nebula*, what's a world, more or less? In the spiritual heavens are many mansions: in the starry heavens, that are now unfolding and preparing to unfold before us, are many vacant areas upon which the astronomer may pitch his secret pavilion. He may dedicate himself to the service of the *Double Suns*; he has my license to devote his whole time to the quadruple system of suns in *Lyra*. Swammerdam spent his life in a ditch watching frogs and tadpoles; why may not an astronomer give nine lives, if he had them, to the watching of that awful appearance in *Hercules*, which pretends to some rights over our own unoffending system? Why may he not mount guard with public approbation, for the next fifty years, upon the zodiacal light, the interplanetary ether, and other rarities, which the professional body of astronomers would naturally keep (if they could) for their own private enjoyment? There is no want of variety now, nor in fact of irregularity: for the most exquisite clock-work, which from enormous distance *seems* to go wrong, virtually for us *does* go wrong; so that our friend of the last century, who complained of the solar system, would not need to do so any longer. There are anomalies enough to keep him cheerful. There are now even things to alarm us; for anything in the starry worlds that look suspicious, anything that ought *not* to be there, is, for all purposes of frightening us, as good as a ghost.

But of all the novelties that excite my own interest in the expanding astronomy of recent times, the most delightful and promising are those charming little pyrotechnic planetoids,[Footnote: *'Pyrotechnic Planetoids:'*—The reader will understand me as alluding to the periodic shooting stars. It is now well known, that as, upon our own poor little earthly ocean, we fall in with certain phenomena as we approach certain latitudes; so also upon the great ocean navigated by our Earth, we fall in with prodigious showers of these meteors at periods no longer uncertain, but fixed as jail-deliveries. 'These remarkable showers of meteors,' says Dr. Nichol, 'observed at different periods in August and November, seem to demonstrate the fact, that, at these periods, we have come in contact with two streams of such planetoids then intersecting the earth's orbit.' If they intermit, it is only because they are shifting their nodes, or points of intersection.] that variegate our annual course. It always struck me as most disgusting, that, in going round the sun, we must be passing continually over old roads, and yet we had no means of establishing an acquaintance with them: they might as well be new for every trip. Those chambers of ether, through which we are tearing along night and day, (for *our* train stops at no stations,) doubtless, if we could put some mark upon them, must be old fellows perfectly liable to recognition. I suppose, *they* never have notice to quit. And yet, for want of such a mark, though all our lives flying past them and through them, we can never challenge them as known. The same thing happens in the desert: one monotonous iteration of sand, sand, sand, unless where some miserable fountain stagnates, forbids all approach to familiarity: nothing is circumstantiated or differenced: travel it for three generations, and you are no nearer to identification of its parts: so that it amounts to travelling through an abstract idea. For the desert, really I suspect the thing is hopeless: but, as regards our planetary orbit, matters are mending: for the last six or seven years I have heard of these fiery showers, but indeed I cannot say how much earlier they were first noticed,[Footnote: Somewhere I have seen it remarked, that if, on a public road, you meet a party of four women, it is at least fifty to one that they are all laughing; whereas, if you meet an equal party of my own unhappy sex, you may wager safely that they are talking gravely, and that one of them is uttering the word *money*. Hence it must be, viz, because our sisters are too much occupied with the playful things of this earth, and our brothers with its gravities, that neither party sufficiently watches the skies. And *that* accounts for a fact which often has struck myself, viz., that, in cities, on bright moonless nights, when some brilliant skirmishings of the Aurora are exhibiting, or even a luminous arch, which is a broad ribbon of snowy light that spans the skies, positively unless I myself say to people—'Eyes upwards!' not one in a hundred, male or female, but fails to see the show, though it may be seen *gratis*, simply because their eyes are too uniformly reading the earth. This downward direction of the eyes,

however, must have been worse in former ages: because else it never *could* have happened that, until Queen Anne's days, nobody ever hinted in a book that there *was* such a thing, or *could* be such a thing, as the Aurora Borealis; and in fact Halley had the credit of discovering it.] as celebrating two annual festivals—one in August, one in November. You are a little too late, reader, for seeing this year's summer festival; but that's no reason why you should not engage a good seat for the November meeting; which, if I recollect, is about the 9th, or the Lord Mayor's day, and on the whole better worth seeing. For anything *we* know, this may be a great day in the earth's earlier history; she may have put forth her original rose on this day, or tried her hand at a primitive specimen of wheat; or she may, in fact, have survived some gunpowder plot about this time; so that the meteoric appearance may be a kind congratulating *feu-de-joye*, on the anniversary of the happy event. What it is that the 'cosmogony man' in the 'Vicar of Wakefield' would have thought of such novelties, whether he would have favored us with his usual opinion upon such topics, viz., that *anarchon ara kai ateleutaion to pan*, or have sported a new one exclusively for this occasion, may be doubtful. What it is that astronomers think, who are a kind of 'cosmogony men,' the reader may learn from Dr. Nichol, Note B, (p. 139, 140.)

In taking leave of a book and a subject so well fitted to draw out the highest mode of that grandeur, which *can* connect itself with the external, (a grandeur capable of drawing down a spiritual being to earth, but not of raising an earthly being to heaven,) I would wish to contribute my own brief word of homage to this grandeur by recalling from a fading remembrance of twenty-five years back a short *bravura* of John Paul Richter. I call it a *bravura*, as being intentionally a passage of display and elaborate execution; and in this sense I may call it partly 'my own,' that at twenty-five years' distance, (after one single reading,) it would not have been possible for any man to report a passage of this length without greatly disturbing [Footnote: *'Disturbing;'*—neither perhaps should I much have sought to avoid alterations if the original had been lying before me: for it takes the shape of a dream; and this most brilliant of all German writers wanted in that field the severe simplicity, that horror of the *too much*, belonging to Grecian architecture, which is essential to the perfection of a dream considered as a work of art. He was too elaborate, to realize the grandeur of the shadowy.] the texture of the composition: by altering, one makes it partly one's own; but it is right to mention, that the sublime turn at the end belongs entirely to John Paul.

'God called up from dreams a man into the vestibule of heaven, saying, —"Come thou hither, and see the glory of my house." And to the servants that stood around his throne he said,—"Take him, and undress him from his robes of flesh: cleanse his vision, and put a new breath into his nostrils: only touch not with any change his human heart—the heart that weeps and trembles." It was done; and, with a mighty angel for his guide, the man stood ready for his infinite voyage; and from the terraces of heaven, without sound or farewell, at once they wheeled away into endless space. Sometimes with the solemn flight of angel wing they fled through Zaarrahs of darkness, through wildernesses of death, that divided the worlds of life: sometimes they swept over frontiers, that were quickening under prophetic motions from God. Then, from a distance that is counted only in heaven, light dawned for a time through a sleepy film: by unutterable pace the light swept to *them*, they by unutterable pace to the light: in a moment the rushing of planets was upon them: in a moment the blazing of suns was around them. Then came eternities of twilight, that revealed, but were not revealed. To the right hand and to the left towered mighty constellations, that by self-repetitions and answers from afar, that by counter-positions, built up triumphal gates, whose architraves, whose archways—horizontal, upright —rested, rose—at altitudes, by spans— that seemed ghostly from infinitude. Without measure were the architraves, past number were the archways, beyond memory the gates. Within were stairs that scaled the eternities above, that descended to the eternities below: above was below, below was above, to the man stripped of gravitating body: depth was swallowed up in height insurmountable, height was swallowed up in depth unfathomable. Suddenly as thus they rode from infinite to infinite, suddenly as thus they tilted over abysmal worlds, a mighty cry arose—that systems more mysterious, that worlds more billowy,—other heights, and other depths,—were coming, were nearing, were at hand. Then

the man sighed, and stopped, shuddered and wept. His over-laden heart uttered itself in tears; and he said,—"Angel, I will go no farther. For the spirit of man aches with this infinity. Insufferable is the glory of God. Let me lie down in the grave from the persecutions of the infinite; for end, I see, there is none." And from all the listening stars that shone around issued a choral voice, "The man speaks truly: end there is none, that ever yet we heard of." "End is there none?" the angel solemnly demanded: "Is there indeed no end? And is this the sorrow that kills you?" But no voice answered, that he might answer himself. Then the angel threw up his glorious hands to the heaven of heavens; saying, "End is there none to the universe of God? Lo! also there is no Beginning."'

NOTE.—On throwing his eyes hastily over the preceding paper, the writer becomes afraid that some readers may give such an interpretation to a few playful expressions upon the age of our earth, &c., as to class him with those who use geology, cosmology, &c., for purposes of attack, or insinuation against the Scriptures. Upon this point, therefore, he wishes to make a firm explanation of his own opinions, which, (whether right or wrong,) will liberate him, once and for all, from any such jealousy.

It is sometimes said, that the revealer of a true religion, does not come amongst men for the sake of teaching truths in science, or correcting errors in science. Most justly is this said: but often in terms far too feeble. For generally these terms are such as to imply, that, although no function of his mission, it was yet open to him— although not pressing with the force of an obligation upon the revealer, it was yet at his discretion—if not to correct other men's errors, yet at least in his own person to speak with scientific precision. I contend that it was *not*. I contend, that to have uttered the truths of astronomy, of geology, &c., at the era of new- born Christianity, was not only *below* the purposes of a religion, but would have been *against* them. Even upon errors of a far more important class than any errors in science can ever be,— superstitions, for instance, that degraded the very idea of God; prejudices and false usages, that laid waste human happiness, (such as slavery and many hundreds of other abuses that might be mentioned,) the rule evidently acted upon by the Founder of Christianity was this—Given the purification of the fountain, once assumed that the fountains of truth are cleansed, all these derivative currents of evil will cleanse themselves. And the only exceptions, which I remember, to this rule, are two cases in which, from the personal appeal made to his decision, Christ would have made himself a party to wretched delusions, if he had not condescended to expose their folly. But, as a general rule, the branches of error were disregarded, and the roots only attacked. If, then, so lofty a station was taken with regard even to such errors as had moral and spiritual relations, how much more with regard to the comparative trifles, (as in the ultimate relations of human nature they are,) of merely human science! But, for my part, I go further, and assert, that upon three reasons it was impossible for any messenger from God, (or offering himself in that character,) for a moment to have descended into the communication of truth merely scientific, or economic, or worldly. And the reasons are these: *First*, Because it would have degraded his mission, by lowering it to the base level of a collision with human curiosity, or with petty and transitory interests. *Secondly*, Because it would have ruined his mission; would utterly have prostrated the free agency and the proper agency of that mission. He that, in those days, should have proclaimed the true theory of the Solar System and the heavenly forces, would have been shut up at once—as a lunatic likely to become dangerous. But suppose him to have escaped *that*; still, as a divine teacher, he has no liberty of caprice. He must stand to the promises of his own acts. Uttering the first truth of a science, he is pledged to the second: taking the main step, he is committed to all which follow. He is thrown at once upon the endless controversies which science in every stage provokes, and in none more than in the earliest. Or, if he retires as from a scene of contest that he had not anticipated, he retires as one confessing a human precipitance and a human oversight, weaknesses, venial in others, but fatal to the pretensions of a divine teacher. Starting besides from such pretensions, he could not (as others might) have the privilege of selecting arbitrarily or partially. If upon one science, then upon all,—if upon science, then upon, art,—if upon art and science, then upon *every* branch of social economy, upon *every* organ of

civilization, his reformations and advances are equally due; due as to all, if due as to any. To move in one direction, is constructively to undertake for all. Without power to retreat, he has thus thrown the intellectual interests of his followers into a channel utterly alien to the purposes of a spiritual mission.

Thus far he has simply failed: but next comes a worse result; an evil, not negative but positive. Because, *thirdly*, to apply the light of a revelation for the benefit of a merely human science, which is virtually done by so applying the illumination of an *inspired* teacher, is—to assault capitally the scheme of God's discipline and training for man. To improve by *heavenly* means, if but in one solitary science—to lighten, if but in one solitary section, the condition of difficulty which had been designed for the strengthening and training of human faculties, is *pro tanto* to disturb—to cancel—to contradict a previous purpose of God, made known by silent indications from the beginning of the world. Wherefore did God give to man the powers for contending with scientific difficulties? Wherefore did he lay a secret train of continual occasions, that should rise, by intervals, through thousands of generations, for provoking and developing those activities in man's intellect, if, after all, he is to send a messenger of his own, more than human, to intercept and strangle all these great purposes? When, therefore, the persecutors of Galileo, alleged that Jupiter, for instance, could not move in the way alleged, because then the Bible would have proclaimed it,—as they thus threw back upon God the burthen of discovery, which he had thrown upon Galileo, why did they not, by following out their own logic, throw upon the Bible the duty of discovering the telescope, or discovering the satellites of Jupiter? And, as no such discoveries were there, why did they not, by parity of logic, and for mere consistency, deny the telescope as a fact, deny the Jovian planets as facts? But this it is to mistake the very meaning and purposes of a revelation. A revelation is not made for the purpose of showing to idle men that which they may show to themselves, by faculties already given to them, if only they will exert those faculties, but for the purpose of showing *that* which the moral darkness of man will not, without supernatural light, allow him to perceive. With disdain, therefore, must every considerate person regard the notion,—that God could wilfully interfere with his own plans, by accrediting ambassadors to reveal astronomy, or any other science, which he has commanded men to cultivate *without* revelation, by endowing them with all the natural powers for doing so.

Even as regards astronomy, a science so nearly allying itself to religion by the loftiness and by the purity of its contemplations, Scripture is nowhere the *parent* of any doctrine, nor so much as the silent sanctioner of any doctrine. Scripture cannot become the author of falsehood,—though it were as to a trifle, cannot become a party to falsehood. And it is made impossible for Scripture to teach falsely, by the simple fact that Scripture, on such subjects, will not condescend to teach at all. The Bible adopts the erroneous language of men, (which at any rate it must do, in order to make itself understood,) not by way of sanctioning a theory, but by way of using a fact. The Bible *uses* (postulates) the phenomena of day and night, of summer and winter, and expresses them, in relation to their causes, as *men* express them, men, even, that are scientific astronomers. But the results, which are all that concern Scripture, are equally true, whether accounted for by one hypothesis which is philosophically just, or by another which is popular and erring.

Now, on the other hand, in geology and cosmology, the case is still stronger. *Here* there is no opening for a compliance even with popular language. *Here*, where there is no such stream of apparent phenomena running counter (as in astronomy) to the real phenomena, neither is there any popular language opposed to the scientific. The whole are abstruse speculations, even as regards their objects, not dreamed of as possibilities, either in their true aspects or their false aspects, till modern times. The Scriptures, therefore, nowhere allude to such sciences, either under the shape of histories, applied to processes current and in movement, or under the shape of theories applied to processes past and accomplished. The Mosaic cosmogony, indeed, gives the succession of natural births; and that succession will doubtless be more and more confirmed and illustrated as geology advances. But as to the time, the duration, of this cosmogony, it is the idlest of notions that the Scriptures either have or could have condescended to human curiosity upon so awful a prologue to the drama of this world.

Genesis would no more have indulged so mean a passion with respect to the mysterious inauguration of the world, than the Apocalypse with respect to its mysterious close. 'Yet the six *days* of Moses!' Days! But is any man so little versed in biblical language as not to know that (except in the merely historical parts of the Jewish records) every section of time has a secret and separate acceptation in the Scriptures? Does an *æon*, though a Grecian word, bear scripturally [either in Daniel or in Saint John] any sense known to Grecian ears? Do the seventy *weeks* of the prophet mean weeks in the sense of human calendars? Already the Psalms, (xc) already St. Peter, (2d Epist.) warn us of a peculiar sense attached to the word *day* in divine ears? And who of the innumerable interpreters understands the twelve hundred and odd days in Daniel, or his two thousand and odd days, to mean, by possibility, periods of twenty-four hours? Surely the theme of Moses was as mystical, and as much entitled to the benefit of mystical language, as that of the prophets.

The sum of the matter is this:—God, by a Hebrew prophet, is sublimely described as *the Revealer*; and, in variation of his own expression, the same prophet describes him as the Being 'that knoweth the darkness.' Under no idea can the relations of God to man be more grandly expressed. But of what is he the revealer? Not surely of those things which he has enabled man to reveal for himself, and which he has commanded him so to reveal, but of those things which, were it not through special light from heaven, must eternally remain sealed up in the inaccessible darkness. On this principle we should all laugh at a revealed cookery. But essentially the same ridicule applies to a revealed astronomy, or a revealed geology. As a fact, there *is* no such astronomy or geology: as a possibility, by the *a priori* argument which I have used, (viz., that a revelation on such fields, would contradict *other* machineries of providence,) there *can* be no such astronomy or geology. Consequently there *can* be none such in the Bible. Consequently there *is* none. Consequently there can be no schism or feud upon *these* subjects between the Bible and the philosophies outside. Geology is a field left open, with the amplest permission from above, to the widest and wildest speculations of man.

# MODERN SUPERSTITION

It is said continually—that the age of miracles is past. We deny that it is so in any sense which implies this age to differ from all other generations of man except one. It is neither past, nor ought we to wish it past. Superstition is no vice in the constitution of man: it is not true that, in any philosophic view, *primus in orbe deos fecit timor* —meaning by *fecit* even so much as *raised into light*. As Burke remarked, the *timor* at least must be presumed to preexist, and must be accounted for, if not the gods. If the fear created the gods, what created the fear? Far more true, and more just to the grandeur of man, it would have been to say—*Primus in orbe deos fecit sensus infiniti*. Even in the lowest Caffre, more goes to the sense of a divine being than simply his wrath or his power. Superstition, indeed, or the sympathy with the invisible, is the great test of man's nature, as an earthly combining with a celestial. In superstition lies the possibility of religion. And though superstition is often injurious, degrading, demoralizing, it is so, not as a form of corruption or degradation, but as a form of non-development. The crab is harsh, and for itself worthless. But it is the germinal form of innumerable finer fruits: not apples only the most exquisite, and pears; the peach and the nectarine are said to have radiated from this austere stock when cultured, developed, and transferred to all varieties of climate. Superstition will finally pass into pure forms of religion as man advances. It would be matter of lamentation to hear that superstition had at all decayed until man had made corresponding steps in the purification and development of his intellect as applicable to religious faith. Let us hope that this is not so. And, by way of judging, let us throw a hasty eye over the modes of popular superstition. If these manifest their vitality, it will prove that the popular intellect does not go along with the bookish or the worldly (philosophic we cannot call it) in pronouncing the miraculous extinct. The popular feeling is all in all.

This function of miraculous power, which is most widely diffused through Pagan and Christian ages alike, but which has the least root in the solemnities of the imagination, we may call the *Ovidian*. By way of distinction, it may be so called; and with some justice, since Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* gave the first elaborate record of such a tendency in human superstition. It is a movement of superstition under the domination of human affections; a mode of spiritual awe which seeks to reconcile itself with human tenderness or admiration; and which represents supernatural power as expressing itself by a sympathy with human distress or passion concurrently with human sympathies, and as supporting that blended sympathy by a symbol incarnated with the fixed agencies of nature. For instance, a pair of youthful lovers perish by a double suicide originating in a fatal mistake, and a mistake operating in each case through a noble self-oblivion. The tree under which their meeting has been concerted, and which witnesses their tragedy, is supposed ever afterwards to express the divine sympathy with this catastrophe in the gloomy color of its fruit:—

'At tu, quæ ramis (arbor!) miserabile corpus
Nunc tegis unius, mox es tectura duorum,
Signa tene cædis:—pullosque et luctibus aptos
Semper habe fructus—gemini monumenta cruoris:'

Such is the dying adjuration of the lady to the tree. And the fruit becomes from that time a monument of a double sympathy—sympathy from man, sympathy from a dark power standing behind the agencies of nature, and speaking through them. Meantime the object of this sympathy is understood to be not the individual catastrophe, but the universal case of unfortunate love exemplified in this particular romance. The inimitable grace with which Ovid has delivered these early traditions of human tenderness, blending with human superstition, is notorious; the artfulness of the pervading connection, by which every tale in the long succession is made to arise spontaneously out of that which

precedes, is absolutely unrivalled; and this it was, with his luxuriant gayety, which procured for him a preference, even with Milton, a poet so opposite by intellectual constitution. It is but reasonable, therefore, that this function of the miraculous should bear the name of *Ovidian*. Pagan it was in its birth; and to paganism its titles ultimately ascend. Yet we know that in the transitional state through the centuries succeeding to Christ, during which paganism and Christianity were slowly descending and ascending, as if from two different strata of the atmosphere, the two powers interchanged whatsoever they could. (See Conyer's Middleton; and see Blount of our own days.) It marked the earthly nature of paganism, that it could borrow little or nothing by organization: it was fitted to no expansion. But the true faith, from its vast and comprehensive adaptation to the nature of man, lent itself to many corruptions—some deadly in their tendencies, some harmless. Amongst these last was the Ovidian form of connecting the unseen powers moving in nature with human sympathies of love or reverence. The legends of this kind are universal and endless. No land, the most austere in its Protestantism, but has adopted these superstitions: and everywhere by those even who reject them they are entertained with some degree of affectionate respect. That the ass, which in its very degradation still retains an under-power of sublimity, [Footnote: '*An under-power of sublimity*.'— Everybody knows that Homer compared the Telamonian Ajax, in a moment of heroic endurance, to an ass. This, however, was only under a momentary glance from a peculiar angle of the case. But the Mahometan, too solemn, and also perhaps too stupid to catch the fanciful colors of things, absolutely by choice, under the Bagdad Caliphate, decorated a most favorite hero with the title of the *Ass*—which title is repeated with veneration to this day. The wild ass is one of the few animals which has the reputation of never flying from an enemy.] or of sublime suggestion through its ancient connection with the wilderness, with the Orient, with Jerusalem, should have been honored amongst all animals, by the visible impression upon its back of Christian symbols —seems reasonable even to the infantine understanding when made acquainted with its meekness, its patience, its suffering life, and its association with the founder of Christianity in one great triumphal solemnity. The very man who brutally abuses it, and feels a hardhearted contempt for its misery and its submission, has a semi- conscious feeling that the same qualities were possibly those which recommended it to a distinction, [Footnote: '*Which recommended it to a distinction*.'—It might be objected that the Oriental ass was often a superb animal; that it is spoken of prophetically as such; and that historically the Syrian ass is made known to us as having been used in the prosperous ages of Judea for the riding of princes. But this is no objection. Those circumstances in the history of the ass were requisite to establish its symbolic propriety in a great symbolic pageant of triumph. Whilst, on the other hand, the individual animal, there is good reason to think, was marked by all the qualities of the general race as a suffering and unoffending tribe in the animal creation. The asses on which princes rode were of a separate color, of a peculiar breed, and improved, like the English racer, by continual care.] when all things were valued upon a scale inverse to that of the world. Certain it is, that in all Christian lands the legend about the ass is current amongst the rural population. The haddock, again, amongst marine animals, is supposed, throughout all maritime Europe, to be a privileged fish; even in austere Scotland, every child can point out the impression of St. Peter's thumb, by which from age to age it is distinguished from fishes having otherwise an external resemblance. All domesticated cattle, having the benefit of man's guardianship and care, are believed throughout England and Germany to go down upon their knees at one particular moment of Christmas eve, when the fields are covered with darkness, when no eye looks down but that of God, and when the exact anniversary hour revolves of the angelic song, once rolling over the fields and flocks of Palestine. [Footnote: Mahometanism, which everywhere pillages Christianity, cannot but have its own face at times glorified by its stolen jewels. This solemn hour of jubilation, gathering even the brutal natures into its fold, recalls accordingly the Mahometan legend (which the reader may remember is one of those incorporated into Southey's *Thalaba*) of a great hour revolving once in every year, during which the gates of Paradise were thrown open to their utmost extent, and gales of happiness issued forth upon the total family of man.] The Glastonbury Thorn is a more local

superstition; but at one time the legend was as widely diffused as that of Loretto, with the angelic translation of its sanctities: on Christmas morning, it was devoutly believed by all Christendom, that this holy thorn put forth its annual blossoms. And with respect to the aspen tree, which Mrs. Hemans very naturally mistook for a Welsh legend, having first heard it in Denbighshire, the popular faith is universal—that it shivers mystically in sympathy with the horror of that mother tree in Palestine which was compelled to furnish materials for the cross. Neither would it in this case be any objection, if a passage were produced from Solinus or Theophrastus, implying that the aspen tree had always shivered—for the tree might presumably be penetrated by remote presentiments, as well as by remote remembrances. In so vast a case the obscure sympathy should stretch, Janus-like, each way. And an objection of the same kind to the rainbow, considered as the sign or seal by which God attested his covenant in bar of all future deluges, may be parried in something of the same way. It was not then first created—true: but it was then first selected by preference, amongst a multitude of natural signs as yet unappropriated, and then first charged with the new function of a message and a ratification to man. Pretty much the same theory, that is, the same way of accounting for the natural existence without disturbing the supernatural functions, may be applied to the great constellation of the other hemisphere, called the Southern Cross. It is viewed popularly in South America, and the southern parts of our northern hemisphere, as the great banner, or gonfalon, held aloft by Heaven before the Spanish heralds of the true faith in 1492. To that superstitious and ignorant race it costs not an effort to suppose, that by some synchronizing miracle, the constellation had been then specially called into existence at the very moment when the first Christian procession, bearing a cross in their arms, solemnly stepped on shore from the vessels of Christendom. We Protestants know better: we understand the impossibility of supposing such a narrow and local reference in orbs, so transcendently vast as those composing the constellation—orbs removed from each other by such unvoyageable worlds of space, and having, in fact, no real reference to each other more than to any other heavenly bodies whatsoever. The unity of synthesis, by which they are composed into one figure of a cross, we know to be a mere accidental result from an arbitrary synthesis of human fancy. Take such and such stars, compose them into letters, and they will spell such a word. But still it was our own choice —a synthesis of our own fancy, originally to combine them in this way. They might be divided from each other, and otherwise combined. All this is true: and yet, as the combination does spontaneously offer itself [Footnote: '*Does spontaneously offer itself.*'—Heber (Bishop of Calcutta) complains that this constellation is not composed of stars answering his expectation in point of magnitude. But he admits that the dark barren space around it gives to this inferior magnitude a very advantageous relief.] to every eye, as the glorious cross does really glitter for ever through the silent hours of a vast hemisphere, even they who are not superstitious, may willingly yield to the belief—that, as the rainbow was laid in the very elements and necessities of nature, yet still bearing a pre- dedication to a service which would not be called for until many ages had passed, so also the mysterious cipher of man's imperishable hopes may have been entwined and enwreathed with the starry heavens from their earliest creation, as a prefiguration—as a silent heraldry of hope through one period, and as a heraldry of gratitude through the other.

All these cases which we have been rehearsing, taking them in the fullest literality, agree in this general point of union—they are all silent incarnations of miraculous power—miracles, supposing them to have been such originally, locked up and embodied in the regular course of nature, just as we see lineaments of faces and of forms in petrifactions, in variegated marbles, in spars, or in rocky strata, which our fancy interprets as once having been real human existences; but which are now confounded with the substance of a mineral product. Even those who are most superstitious, therefore, look upon cases of this order as occupying a midway station between the physical and the hyperphysical, between the regular course of nature and the providential interruption of that course. The stream of the miraculous is here confluent with the stream of the natural. By such legends the credulous man finds his superstition but little nursed; the incredulous finds his philosophy but

little revolted. Both alike will be willing to admit, for instance, that the apparent act of reverential thanksgiving, in certain birds, when drinking, is caused and supported by a physiological arrangement; and yet, perhaps, both alike would bend so far to the legendary faith as to allow a child to believe, and would perceive a pure childlike beauty in believing, that the bird was thus rendering a homage of deep thankfulness to the universal Father, who watches for the safety of sparrows, and sends his rain upon the just and upon the unjust. In short, the faith in this order of the physico- miraculous is open alike to the sceptical and the non-sceptical: it is touched superficially with the coloring of superstition, with its tenderness, its humility, its thankfulness, its awe; but, on the other hand, it is not therefore tainted with the coarseness, with the silliness, with the credulity of superstition. Such a faith reposes upon the universal signs diffused through nature, and blends with the mysterious of natural grandeurs wherever found—with the mysterious of the starry heavens, with the mysterious of music, and with that infinite form of the mysterious for man's dimmest misgivings—

'Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.'

But, from this earliest note in the ascending scale of superstitious faith, let us pass to a more alarming key. This first, which we have styled (in equity as well as for distinction) the *Ovidian*, is too ærial, too allegoric, almost to be susceptible of much terror. It is the mere *fancy*, in a mood half-playful, half-tender, which submits to the belief. It is the feeling, the sentiment, which creates the faith; not the faith which creates the feeling. And thus far we see that modern feeling and Christian feeling has been to the full as operative as any that is peculiar to paganism; judging by the Romish *Legenda*, very much more so. The Ovidian illustrations, under a false superstition, are entitled to give the designation, as being the first, the earliest, but not at all as the richest. Besides that, Ovid's illustrations emanated often from himself individually, not from the popular mind of his country; ours of the same classification uniformly repose on large popular traditions from the whole of Christian antiquity. These again are agencies of the supernatural which can never have a private or personal application; they belong to all mankind and to all generations. But the next in order are more solemn; they become terrific by becoming personal. These comprehend all that vast body of the marvellous which is expressed by the word *Ominous*. On this head, as dividing itself into the ancient and modern, we will speak next.

Everybody is aware of the deep emphasis which the Pagans laid upon words and upon names, under this aspect of the ominous. The name of several places was formally changed by the Roman government, solely with a view to that contagion of evil which was thought to lurk in the syllables, if taken significantly. Thus, the town of Maleventum, (Ill- come, as one might render it,) had its name changed by the Romans to Beneventum, (or Welcome.) *Epidamnum* again, the Grecian Calais, corresponding to the Roman Dover of Brundusium, was a name that would have startled the stoutest-hearted Roman 'from his propriety.' Had he suffered this name to escape him inadvertently, his spirits would have forsaken him—he would have pined away under a certainty of misfortune, like a poor Negro of Koromantyn who is the victim of Obi.[Footnote: '*The victim of Obi.*'—It seems worthy of notice, that this magical fascination is generally called Obi, and the magicians Obeah men, throughout Guinea, Negroland, &c.; whilst the Hebrew or Syriac word for the rites of necromancy, was *Ob* or *Obh*, at least when ventriloquism was concerned.] As a Greek word, which it was, the name imported no ill; but for a Roman to say *Ibo Epidamnum*, was in effect saying, though in a hybrid dialect, half-Greek half-Roman, 'I will go to ruin.' The name was therefore changed to Dyrrachium; a substitution which quieted more anxieties in Roman hearts than the erection of a light-house or the deepening of the harbor mouth. A case equally strong, to take one out of many hundreds that have come down to us, is reported by Livy. There was an officer in a Roman legion, at some period of the Republic, who bore the name either of Atrius Umber or Umbrius Ater: and this man being ordered on some expedition, the soldiers refused to follow him. They did right. We remember that Mr. Coleridge used facetiously to call the well-known sister of Dr. Aikin, Mrs. Barbauld, 'that pleonasm of nakedness'—the idea of nakedness being reduplicated and reverberated in the *bare* and the *bald*. This Atrius Umber

might be called 'that pleonasm of darkness;' and one might say to him, in the words of Othello, 'What needs this iteration?' To serve under the Gloomy was enough to darken the spirit of hope; but to serve under the Black Gloomy was really rushing upon destruction. Yet it will be alleged that Captain Death was a most favorite and heroic leader in the English navy; and that in our own times, Admiral Coffin, though an American by birth, has not been unpopular in the same service. This is true: and all that can be said is, that these names were two-edged swords, which might be made to tell against the enemy as well as against friends. And possibly the Roman centurion might have turned his name to the same account, had he possessed the great Dictator's presence of mind; for he, when landing in Africa, having happened to stumble—an omen of the worst character, in Roman estimation—took out its sting by following up his own oversight, as if it had been intentional, falling to the ground, kissing it, and ejaculating that in this way he appropriated the soil.

Omens of every class were certainly regarded, in ancient Rome, with a reverence that can hardly be surpassed. But yet, with respect to these omens derived from names, it is certain that our modern times have more memorable examples on record. Out of a large number which occur to us, we will cite two:—The present King of the French bore in his boyish days a title which he would not have borne, but for an omen of bad augury attached to his proper title. He was called the Duc de Chartres before the Revolution, whereas his proper title was Duc de Valois. And the origin of the change was this:—The Regent's father had been the sole brother of Louis Quatorze. He married for his first wife our English princess Henrietta, the sister of Charles II., (and through her daughter, by the way, it is that the house of Savoy, *i.e.* of Sardinia, has pretensions to the English throne.) This unhappy lady, it is too well established, was poisoned. Voltaire, amongst many others, has affected to doubt the fact; for which in his time there might be some excuse. But since then better evidences have placed the matter beyond all question. We now know both the fact, and the how, and the why. The Duke, who probably was no party to the murder of his young wife, though otherwise on bad terms with her, married for his second wife a coarse German princess, homely in every sense, and a singular contrast to the elegant creature whom he had lost. She was a daughter of the Bavarian Elector; ill-tempered by her own confession, self- willed, and a plain speaker to excess; but otherwise a woman of honest German principles. Unhappy she was through a long life; unhappy through the monotony as well as the malicious intrigues of the French court; and so much so, that she did her best (though without effect) to prevent her Bavarian niece from becoming dauphiness. She acquits her husband, however, in the memoirs which she left behind, of any intentional share in her unhappiness; she describes him constantly as a well-disposed prince. But whether it were, that often walking in the dusk through the numerous apartments of that vast mansion which her husband had so much enlarged, naturally she turned her thoughts to the injured lady who had presided there before herself; or whether it arose from the inevitable gloom which broods continually over mighty palaces, so much is known for certain, that one evening, in the twilight, she met, at a remote quarter of the reception-rooms, something that she conceived to be a spectre. What she fancied to have passed on that occasion, was never known except to her nearest friends; and if she made any explanations in her memoirs, the editor has thought fit to suppress them. She mentions only, that in consequence of some ominous circumstances relating to the title of *Valois*, which was the proper second title of the Orleans family, her son, the Regent, had assumed in his boyhood that of Duc de Chartres. His elder brother was dead, so that the superior title was open to him; but, in consequence of those mysterious omens, whatever they might be, which occasioned much whispering at the time, the great title of Valois was laid aside for ever as of bad augury; nor has it ever been resumed through a century and a half that have followed that mysterious warning; nor will it be resumed unless the numerous children of the present Orleans branch should find themselves distressed for ancient titles; which is not likely, since they enjoy the honors of the elder house, and are now the *children of France* in a technical sense.

Here we have a great European case of state omens in the eldest of Christian houses. The next which we shall cite is equally a state case, and carries its public verification along with itself.

In the spring of 1799, when Napoleon was lying before Acre, he became anxious for news from Upper Egypt, whither he had despatched Dessaix in pursuit of a distinguished Mameluke leader. This was in the middle of May. Not many days after, a courier arrived with favorable despatches—favorable in the main, but reporting one tragical occurrence on a small scale that, to Napoleon, for a superstitious reason, outweighed the public prosperity. A *djerme*, or Nile boat of the largest class, having on board a large party of troops and of wounded men, together with most of a regimental band, had run ashore at the village of Benouth. No case could be more hopeless. The neighboring Arabs were of the Yambo tribe— of all Arabs the most ferocious. These Arabs and the Fellahs (whom, by the way, many of our countrymen are so ready to represent as friendly to the French and hostile to ourselves,) had taken the opportunity of attacking the vessel. The engagement was obstinate; but at length the inevitable catastrophe could be delayed no longer. The commander, an Italian named Morandi, was a brave man; any fate appeared better than that which awaited him from an enemy so malignant. He set fire to the powder magazine; the vessel blew up; Morandi perished in the Nile; and all of less nerve, who had previously reached the shore in safety, were put to death to the very last man, with cruelties the most detestable, by their inhuman enemies. For all this Napoleon cared little; but one solitary fact there was in the report which struck him with consternation. This ill-fated *djerme*—what was it called? It was called *L'Italie*; and in the name of the vessel Napoleon read an augury of the fate which had befallen the Italian territory. Considered as a dependency of France, he felt certain that Italy was lost; and Napoleon was inconsolable. But what possible connection, it was asked, can exist between this vessel on the Nile and a remote peninsula of Southern Europe? 'No matter,' replied Napoleon; 'my presentiments never deceive me. You will see that all is ruined. I am satisfied that my Italy, my conquest, is lost to France!' So, indeed, it was. All European news had long been intercepted by the English cruisers; but immediately after the battle with the Vizier in July 1799, an English admiral first informed the French army of Egypt that Massena and others had lost all that Bonaparte had won in 1796. But it is a strange illustration of human blindness, that this very subject of Napoleon's lamentation—this very campaign of 1799—it was, with its blunders and its long equipage of disasters, that paved the way for his own elevation to the Consulship, just seven calendar months from the receipt of that Egyptian despatch; since most certainly, in the struggle of Brumaire 1799, doubtful and critical through every stage, it was the pointed contrast between *his* Italian campaigns and those of his successors which gave effect to Napoleon's pretensions with the political combatants, and which procured them a ratification amongst the people. The loss of Italy was essential to the full effect of Napoleon's previous conquest. That and the imbecile characters of Napoleon's chief military opponents were the true keys to the great revolution of Brumaire. The stone which he rejected became the keystone of the arch. So that, after all, he valued the omen falsely; though the very next news from Europe, courteously communicated by his English enemies, showed that he had interpreted its meaning rightly.

These omens, derived from names, are therefore common to the ancient and the modern world. But perhaps, in strict logic, they ought to have been classed as one subdivision or variety under a much larger head, viz. words generally, no matter whether proper names or appellatives, as operative powers and agencies, having, that is to say, a charmed power against some party concerned from the moment that they leave the lips.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.