

**MR. BALFOUR'S
APOLOGETICS
CRITICALLY EXAMINED**

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Mr. Balfour's apologetics critically examined by W. B. Columbine

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BY
W. B. COLUMBINE

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CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY

ON the great battle-field of the human mind, where, from age to age, the strife is unceasing and the most brilliant victory of any particular school of thought means only that the conflict is transferred to other ground, and, perhaps, higher levels, two great and irreconcilable powers are engaged in a fierce struggle for mastery. One of these combatants is Supernaturalism, under which term we include all the supernatural religions of the world, with Christianity at their head; the other is Rationalism, by which we mean the free and fearless application of reason, regardless of consequences, to all questions of ethics, science, philosophy, and religion. Both alike are children of Evolution; but, while one is hoar with age, and looks back upon a long maturity which stretches far away into the dim abyss of prehistoric time, the other glows with the vigour and promise of youth, and its gaze and expectation are directed towards the present and the future, with all the glorious possibilities which they unfold.

To the present writer it seems that this struggle can have but one result. Rationalism or Naturalism (the terms are practically synonymous) is swiftly and surely beating back the forces of Supernaturalism at all points, and the day of its final victory—in the Western world at least—cannot be far distant. Armed with the sword of Science, clad in the coat of mail which has been slowly fashioned by human thought and effort during many painful centuries. Rationalism possesses inestimable advantages in the war with the myths and fables of the past, and against the futile longings for the magic and the mystery of a supernatural world. These things have been weighed in the balance of Reason and found wanting; in bold and indelible characters their fate is written on the wall in the sight of all mankind; by all the laws of nature and of human thought they are doomed to extinction.

It is clear that Mr. Balfour has realised with special vividness the overwhelming strength of the Rationalist case against Christianity, and that he does not indulge in any vain hope that the hostile verdicts of science, history, and Biblical criticism may be reversed by further investigations and discoveries. Apparently he accepts these verdicts. In his speech at

Glasgow, November 4th, 1901, he urged that the "great change in our views of the history of the world," to which "every science has contributed—astronomy, geology, physics, anthropology," carries with it "the need and necessity, not of any change in Christian doctrine, not of any change of religion, but of a change of statement of the thought and setting in which religion is from age to age presented to the people." But if words are to represent things, and to be something more than empty sounds, a change of statement which is necessitated by "the greatest revolutions in secular and scientific thought of which any record remains to us" must involve some change of doctrine. Mr. Balfour admits that this is the case when, in the same speech, he refers to "the great harm, in some cases the incalculable harm, and the immeasurable loss which has occurred through that being represented as integral and essential which was, after all, temporary and accidental." That is to say, features of the Christian religion which have been held by high authorities to be of the utmost importance, and, in fact, "integral and essential," may, under stress of criticism and advancing knowledge, be abandoned as "temporary and accidental." This is more than a "change of setting"; it is a change of doctrine, and,