

**ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE
THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION
ASSEMBLED AT BELFAST;
WITH ADDITIONS**

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Address Delivered Before the British Association Assembled at Belfast; With Additions by John Tyndall

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JOHN TYNDALL

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ADDRESS

*R. M. H. H. H. H.
Sept 1874*

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION

ASSEMBLED AT

BELFAST

WITH ADDITIONS

BY

JOHN TYNDALL, F.R.S.

PRESIDENT

Un

LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1874

'There is one God supreme over all gods, diviner than mortals,
Whose form is not like unto man's, and as unlike his nature;
But vain mortals imagine that gods like themselves are begotten,
With human sensations and voice and corporeal members;
So, if oxen or lions had hands and could work in man's fashion,
And trace out with chisel or brush their conception of Godhead,
Then would horses depict gods like horses, and oxen like oxen,
Each kind the divine with its own form and nature endowing.'

XENOPHANES of Colophon (six centuries B.C.), 'Supernatural Religion,' Vol. I. p. 76.

'It were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such
an opinion as is unworthy of Him; for the one is unbelief, the
other is contumely.'

BACON.

Phy. Soc. Lit
gt. weekly
6-14-39

P R E F A C E.

At the request of my Publishers, strengthened by the expressed desire of many Correspondents, I reprint, with a few slight alterations, this Address.

It was written under some disadvantages this year in the Alps, and sent by instalments to the printer. When read subsequently it proved too long for its purpose, and several of its passages were accordingly struck out. Some of them are here restored.

It has provoked an unexpected amount of criticism. This, in due time, will subside; and I confidently look forward to a calmer future for a verdict, founded not on imaginary sins, but on the real facts of the case.

Of the numberless strictures and accusations, some of them exceeding fierce, of which I have been, and continue to be, the object, I refrain from speaking at any length. To one or two of them, however, out of respect for their sources, I would ask permission briefly to refer.

An evening paper of the first rank, after the ascription of various more or less questionable aims and motives, proceeds to the imputation, that I permitted the cheers of my audience to 'stimulate' me to the utterance

66-15-39 5:19

of words which no right-minded man, without a sense of the gravest responsibility, could employ. I trust the author of this charge will allow me in all courtesy to assure him that the words ascribed by him to the spur of the moment were written in Switzerland; that they stood in the printed copy of the Address from which I read; that they evoked no 'cheers,' but a silence far more impressive than cheers; and that, finally, as regards both approbation and the reverse, my course had been thought over and decided long before I ventured to address a Belfast audience.

A writer in a most able theological journal represents me as 'patting religion on the back.' The thought of doing so is certainly his, not mine. The facts of religious feeling are to me as certain as the facts of physics. But the world, I hold, will have to distinguish between the feeling and its forms, and to vary the latter in accordance with the intellectual condition of the age.

I am unwilling to dwell upon statements ascribed to eminent men, which may be imperfectly reported in the newspapers, and I therefore pass over a recent sermon attributed to the Bishop of Manchester with the remark, that one engaged so much as he is in busy and, I doubt not on the whole, beneficent outward life, is not likely to be among the earliest to discern the more inward and spiritual signs of the times, or to prepare for the condition which they foreshadow.

In a recent speech at Dewsbury, the Dean of Manchester is reported to have expressed himself thus:— 'The Professor (myself) ended a most remarkable and eloquent speech by terming himself a material Atheist.' My attention was drawn to Dean Cowie's statement

by a correspondent, who described it as standing 'conspicuous among the strange calumnies' with which my words have been assailed. For myself I use no language which could imply that I am hurt by such attacks. They have lost their power to wound or injure. So likewise as regards a resolution recently passed by the Presbytery of Belfast, in which Professor Huxley and myself are spoken of as 'ignoring the existence of God, and advocating pure and simple materialism;' had the possessive pronoun 'our' preceded 'God,' and had the words 'what we consider' preceded 'pure,' this statement would have been objectively true; but to make it so this qualification is required.

Cardinal Cullen, I am told, is also actively engaged in erecting spiritual barriers against the intrusion of 'Infidelity' into Ireland. His Eminence, I believe, has reason to suspect that the Catholic youth around him are not proof to the seductions of science. Strong as he is, I believe him to be impotent here. The youth of Ireland will imbibe science, however slowly; they will be leavened by it, however gradually. And to its inward modifying power among Catholics themselves, rather than to any Protestant propagandism, or other external influence, I look for the abatement of various incongruities; among them, of those mediæval proceedings which, to the scandal and amazement of our nineteenth century intelligence, have been revived among us during the last two years.

In connexion with the charge of Atheism, I would make one remark. Christian men are proved by their writings to have their hours of weakness and of doubt, as well as their hours of strength and of conviction; and

men like myself share, in their own way, these variations of mood and tense. Were the religious views of many of my assailants the only alternative ones, I do not know how strong the claims of the doctrine of 'Material Atheism' upon my allegiance might be. Probably they would be very strong. But, as it is, I have noticed during years of self-observation that it is not in hours of clearness and vigour that this doctrine commends itself to my mind; that in the presence of stronger and healthier thought it ever dissolves and disappears, as offering no solution of the mystery in which we dwell, and of which we form a part.

To coarser attacks and denunciations I pay no attention; nor have I any real reason to complain of revilings addressed to me, which professing Christians, as could readily be proved, do not scruple to use towards each other. The more agreeable task remains to me of thanking those who have tried, however hopelessly, to keep accusation within the bounds of justice, and who, privately, and at some risk in public, have honoured me with the expression of their sympathy and approval.

JOHN TYNDALL.

ATHENÆUM CLUB.
September 16, 1874.