

1. *The interests at stake are most vital.*

The main topics of controversy now-a-days are not whether a particular text of Scripture means this or that, nor whether one doctrinal system is more logically and exegetically constructed than another, nor even whether one theory of inspiration is more clearly taught in Scripture than another. These are matters of deep interest, but they rest upon a foundation of supposed fact, and it is this foundation itself which has to bear the brunt of our modern conflict. If it be true that man knows—and can know—only what is phenomenal, and must, therefore, of necessity, be ignorant of the existence of final cause, real cause, and all unseen realities, as the eager followers of M. Comte affirm; if it be true that thought is only the evolution of the organized and consolidated experiences of the nervous brain tissue of ourselves and ancestors, and that, therefore, what we call “mind” is only an elaborated mechanism of delicate matter—as Herbert Spencer and his powerful School of Biologists teach;—if our thoughts and all vital action are *only* the expression of the molecular action of the protoplasm which is the formal basis of life—as the admirers of Huxley maintain—though he himself has guarded off this *excluding* conclusion; if all life is the result only of a slow and never-ceasing evolution of the powers of matter from an ancient and never created “star-dust,”—which the extreme section of Evolutionists seem disposed to regard as the true solution of existence,—if, also, the widest and deepest investigations in the regions proper to physical science lead to the conclusion, that the laws of matter are so constituted, that, in the very nature of things, a supernatural intervention, in the form of miracle, is a physical impossibility; if the records which relate to us the occurrence of such miracles are framed as they are, in consequence of the untutored, unscientific spirit of the age in which they originated,—as *they* must maintain who try to reconcile history with supposed scientific views of miracles; and, finally, if what of good contained in the Bible, like scattered gems in the midst of rough unreliable material, is only the early form of a general Divine illumination, destined in the course of centuries to be obscured by the “clearer light” of a more developed state of the human intellect and of the “moral sense”—the egotistical creed of Emerson and Parker—then, I say, our very life as immortal, spiritual, God-worshipping men, is assailed. And these, let it be observed, are the leading questions agitating the leading minds on both sides of this tremendous controversy. Must our ministry be in the dark as to what is being done? Shall we see all that is most sacred and vital undermined without quitting ourselves as men?

2. *The form in which these views are presented is likely to fascinate enterprising and aspiring minds.*

In one of his books on Ethics, Aristotle lays great stress on the disposition of those who approach the study of moral subjects. This sagacious observer of human nature thus reminds us how we, in preparing for the conflict of the age, should consider the predispositions of the rising generation. It is an undoubted fact, that there does dwell in the minds of men, when not subject to Christ, a