

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

PART II.

"Apart from moral conduct, all that man thinks himself able to do, in order to become acceptable to God, is mere superstition and religious folly."—KANT.

Several months ago, THE NORTH AMERICAN Review asked me to write an article, saying that it would be published if some one would furnish a reply. I wrote the article that appeared in the August number, and by me it was entitled "Is All of the Bible Inspired?" Not until the article was written did I know who was expected to answer. I make this explanation for the purpose of dissipating the impression that Mr. Black had been challenged by me. To have struck his shield with my lance might have given birth to the impression that I was somewhat doubtful as to the correctness of my position. I naturally expected an answer from some professional theologian, and was surprised to find that a reply had been written by a "policeman," who imagined that he had answered my arguments by simply telling me that my statements were false. It is somewhat unfortunate that in a discussion like this any one should resort to the slightest personal detraction. The theme is great enough to engage the highest faculties of the human mind, and in the investigation of such a subject vituperation is singularly and vulgarly out of place. Arguments cannot be answered with insults. It is unfortunate that the intellectual arena should be entered by a "policeman," who has more confidence in concussion than discussion. Kindness is strength. Good-nature is often mistaken for virtue, and good health sometimes passes for genius. Anger blows out the lamp of the mind. In the examination of a great and important question, every one should be serene, slow-pulsed, and calm. Intelligence is not the foundation of arrogance. Insolence is not logic. Epithets are the arguments of malice. Candor is the courage of the soul. Leaving the objectionable portions of Mr. Black's reply, feeling that so grand a subject should not be blown and tainted with malicious words, I proceed to answer as best I may the arguments he has urged.

I am made to say that "the universe is natural"; that "it came into being of its own accord"; that "it made its own laws at the start, and afterward improved itself considerably by spontaneous evolution."

I did say that "the universe is natural" but I did not say that "it came into being of its own accord"; neither did I say that "it made its own laws and after-

ward improved itself." The universe, according to my idea, is, always was, and forever will be. It did not "come into being," it is the one eternal being.—the only thing that ever did, does, or can exist. It did not "make its own laws." We know nothing of what we call the laws of nature except as we gather the idea of law from the uniformity of phenomena springing from like conditions. To make myself clear: Water always runs down hill. The theist says this happens because there is behind the phenomenon an active law. As a matter of fact, law is this side of the phenomenon. Law does not cause the phenomenon, but the phenomenon causes the idea of law in our minds; and this idea is produced from the fact that under like circumstances the same phenomenon always happens. Mr. Black probably thinks that the difference in the weight of rocks and clouds was created by law; that parallel lines fall to unite only because it is illegal; that diameter and circumference could have been so made that it would be a greater distance across than around a circle; that a straight line could enclose a triangle if not prevented by law, and that a little legislation could make it possible for two bodies to occupy the same space at the same time. It seems to me that law cannot be the cause of phenomena, but is an effect produced in our minds by their succession and resemblances. To put a God back of the universe, compels us to admit that there was a time when nothing existed but this God; that this God had lived from eternity in an infinite vacuum, and in absolute idleness. The mind of every thoughtful man is forced to one of these two conclusions: either that the universe is self-existent, or that it was created by a self-existent being. To my mind, there are far more difficulties in the second hypothesis than in the first.

Of course, upon a question like this, nothing can be absolutely known. We live on an atom called Earth, and what we know of the infinite is almost infinitely limited; but, little as we know, all have an equal right to give their honest thought. Life is a shadowy, strange, and winding road on which we travel for a little way—a few short steps—from the cradle, with its lullaby of love, to the low and quiet way-side inn, where all at last must sleep, and where the only salu-