

which we still call Revelation contain indeed the germs of the most precious truths upon which the heart and intellect of man can feed ; but in so far as the words of Revelation are dogmatic assertions put forward for you to believe, whether you can understand and appropriate them or not, in so far as they represent merely dogmatic as opposed to living truth, our age seems to have grown somewhat impatient with them, because man, constantly striving to make his religion, such as it is, bear upon his life, when he finds religious truth stated in such a manner as to obscure its connection with life and ordinary experience, then I say a man is tempted to become either a shallow formularist or an infidel.

There are, I have no doubt, numbers here present who are very much dissatisfied with many old forms of religious truth ; but I believe there are few here present who would not be willing to believe in God, and willing, even eager, to believe in a certain communion with Him, if they could only discover any rational grounds for such a belief. People sometimes accuse me of sowing doubt broadcast ; on the contrary, I sow belief broadcast. I acknowledge doubt ; if I did not acknowledge it I could not root it up. It is of no use to go up and down the world and pretend not to see the weeds, yet this is what some religious people want us to do. "Thoughts for the Times" are not for them.

When the mind has once been thoroughly shaken in its simple reliance on traditional assertion, I see no way out of the difficulty but one ; and that is, to take the facts of the world, to take the history of the world, to take the knowledge we have acquired about the world and human nature, and then to reason from these obvious standpoints to the Author of the world, and the relations which may subsist between that invisible and mysterious Author, Framers, Architect, Co-ordinator — call Him what you will—and the intelligent beings by whom we are surrounded. St. Paul guides us to such a method when he says, "the invisible things of Him, from the creation are clearly seen,"—that is, seen by the lowliest as well as by the most advanced intelligence—"the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." Thus we have an appeal from

the visible universe to the mysterious invisible world, in order that we may get back again from the unseen to the seen, and grasp the hidden connection between this world and another.

Now I intend to speak to-day on "The Law of Progress," because it is in grasping this fact, that all things progress and develop, that we infer the beneficent nature of God, regarded as the intelligent source of order and progress.

If I could believe that, although God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, nevertheless they are only dissimilar because they are so much more vast—not different in relations of thought and feeling, only immensely superior—then I should have no great difficulty in believing in a sympathy between God and man ; or, in other words, in bringing intelligent and sympathetic man into contact with some boundless source of intelligence and sympathy. Supposing that I see around me principles of most profound intelligence, an intelligence not different in kind, but immensely superior in degree to my intelligence,—then I say God is the seat of that intelligence ; and supposing I perceive that intelligence, unfolding itself in a certain order of progress, tends towards the improvement of the human race ; that such development tends also towards the multiplication of the objects of this progress, that it increases the well-being and elevates the felicity of those who are the subjects of it ;—may I not say I have got one step nearer to a Beneficent Principle, and may I not, by observing this sublime law of progress, come to some conclusion as to the intelligence, the beneficence, and the love of God? I think it will be seen before the conclusion of this discourse that no great stretch of imagination is required, in connection with the constitution of our nature, and with the impulses of man's heart and the aspirations of his whole being, to believe that God sympathizes with man, and watches over his development, and guides his progress towards the land of everlasting life.

I will ask you then to fix your minds upon the Law of Progress. What do you mean by progress? What is the Law of Progress? Lend me your close attention. It is *this* principle, that from one simple cause come many changes, and that from each one of those many changes