

A REASONABLE CHRISTIANITY

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A reasonable Christianity by Laurentine Hamilton

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LAURENTINE HAMILTON

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CHRISTIANITY**

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BY LAURENTINE HAMILTON

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

"Ever the words of God resound;
But the porches of man's ear
Seldom, in this low life's round,
Are unsealed, that he may hear."
—EMERSON.

SAN FRANCISCO

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Introduction.

"Pele's hair," says the Kanaka, as he sees the smoke and flame streaming from the great chimney of Kilauea. "An eruption of lava," says the scientific materialist; and curls the lip at the poor superstition which imagines a God in the wonder. "As if we did not know how it all comes to pass—chemical forces generated in the subterranean laboratory of the earth belch forth these rock-flames; 'Pele's hair,' indeed!" Which is the nearer right? Is there no God in the case? If the atom originated the forces that lift and shake that feathery plume of rock, then the materialist has the question. If those forces came forth from a personal Will, immediate or remote, then the Kanaka is nearer the right in both fact and feeling. This raises at once the vital question of religion: Is there a Personal God? The materialist says no. Jesus of Nazareth *assumes* the affirmative, nowhere attempting its demonstration. The agnostic (whose philosophy is just now the fashion) says we can know nothing positive of an infinite Personality. Confused with this Babel of voices, distressed with conscious vagueness in the idea of God, not yet wise enough to see that our limited powers must be content with sufficient evidence *that* God is, while they can know but in part, and very limited part, *what* He is, many a thoughtful mind wavers between conflict-

ing opinions, and gets neither comfort nor strength for right living, from any faith. The need is of some idea of God that puts the mind in the right practical attitude toward Him. The Kanaka *feels* his relation to a personal God, and reasons no further. The materialist speculates himself out of all sense of such relation, and feels only the properties of matter in the cold touch of nature. His only *felt* relation to Heaven is gravitation and starlight. The Kanaka asks help of God. The materialist seeks to adjust himself to impersonal law and inexorable force. But the Kanaka looks for special interventions of the Deity which never come. He imagines that God will turn aside from the course of nature to smite him with a thunderbolt if he sins, or send supernatural *poe* in answer to his prayer, or wait on his material wants in like ways. This is a false expectation. Its influence is bad. It makes him a slave to fear, or leads to disappointment, discontent, instability, and quarrel with nature and God. Growing reason corrects the superstition. On the other hand, the materialist, looking upon nature as *Spiritless* and impersonal, feels no appeal from it, as the voice of God, to conscience, aspiration, hope or love; he misses the highest influences that have made history heroic, and souls grand. A sense of dependence and heart-relations teaches the world better.

We want a faith that corrects the errors of each and combines the good of both—a faith that purifies by a sense of personal responsibility to God, and warms with personal trust and love, and still holds solidly to the order of nature. Until we get such a faith, the alternative will be Kanaka piety, or materialistic indifference and pessimism. There is a good deal of the former in

the Christian Church of to-day; perhaps an equal amount of the latter in the circles of science.

The discussions of this book* aim to aid, as far as they may, the bringing in of the needed faith. They interpret Jesus and his Word, not as a miracle or afterthought of God, thrust into the order of the world, but as the summit and crown of evolution, an integral and inseparable part of the whole, the fullness of the divine manifestation, which was unfolding, progressively, from the first globing of the star-mist, or whatever element it was, that formed our earth. It is my conviction that the course of moral and spiritual evolution that places Jesus at the head of the human race, can be inductively traced, and with as much clearness, for minds capable of discerning that kind of evidence, as that course of physical evolution which places man at the head of the animal kingdom. In this may we not yet find a truly scientific basis for the Christian faith—one that will not only command the respect, but compel the assent of the scientific and philosophic mind?† It may be a shock to some deep-rooted prejudices; it may call for the reconstruction of dogmatic conceptions which have been sup-

* These discussions, save the Appendix and last two articles, were revised carefully from sermons delivered in the pulpit of the Independent Church, Oakland, and first printed in a local paper, issued only for the society of that Church. Some local references are left to stand in them because I have believed that they illustrate conditions of society that are nearly universal. The subjects follow each other in an order that aims at natural succession and something more of unity and completeness than would be possible in a volume of miscellaneous discourses.

I owe grateful acknowledgments to Mr. A. T. Dewey, senior member of the firm that publishes the book, for the generous liberality which offered to stereotype and preserve the weekly discussions in this more permanent form.

† The last two articles of this book are added in the hope that they will serve to make more clear the rational and scientific basis of my interpretation of Christianity. I am aware that they are insufficient, and hope, with larger opportunity of time and study, to give a fuller statement of the facts and laws that form that basis.

posed to involve the very essence of Christianity ; but, as has often happened before, it will soon be seen that it destroys only that which was becoming an obstacle to the progress of faith.

Science has set aside the idea of specific acts of the Creator in shaping the forms of vegetable and animal life. The mind takes a new bent from this fact. The corollary is not yet accepted, but it is easy to see whither the course of thought tends. It will not rest until it has set aside the idea of special "Divine Interpositions," "Governmental Expedients," "Schemes of Salvation," and all solemn fictions of that sort, in God's ruling of the world. Nature knows nothing of such *ex post facto* laws. Her methods are God's methods. Faith must learn to see God where Science sees him, if at all, in nature, not in eccentric power breaking now and then across her laws, as a disturber of her order. "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father," says Jesus. Gravitation is his act. He is in every force of nature. The movement of these forces is the energy of his will. One question here comprehends all particular questions: Are we to think of God as putting forth special volitions? (See pp. 205-210). If he does not in creating, does he in ruling? The conception of special Divine acts will not bear examination. It will be found an absurdity to reason, and practically mischievous. Can we think of the Infinite as putting forth more energy or action at one moment than at another? And whence spring the darkest doubts of God's goodness, and the worst tempers of rebellion against his providence? Is it not from these Kanaka expectations of his special interpositions, awakened only to be disappointed? If that be his way, why does he not come

at our cry? We cannot help but ask. He does not come. We doubt his existence, or we charge him with heartlessness and cruelty.

But, I am asked, "If God answers not by special act, why pray?" Strange question! Is God's action to be counted for naught because it is uniform? The atmosphere does not press into the lungs by special volition; why breathe? Because *your act* is necessary. God is the atmosphere of spiritual life in which you live, and move, and have your being; prayer inhales that life. Your field puts forth no special volition to give you a harvest; why till the soil? Because, though the field, in its richness, is the perpetual offer of a harvest, you must accept. Plowing and sowing is your act of acceptance. God, the ever-present Spirit, is the perpetual offer of Himself to the soul. Prayer accepts. And, to the praying soul God gives Himself forever and ever. This is all that any special act could do.

"Yes, in spiritual influence and fellowship," it will be said; "but does he never bestow, are we never to ask, special temporal favors?" At two crises in the life of Jesus, it is recorded that angels came and ministered unto him; and Jesus himself asked on one occasion, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" We at once ask here, if it be God's way to come Himself in special assistance, why send the angels? Could they do better than the Omnipotent? Yet, in these very examples, it grows plain how answers to prayer, even in special gifts, may come, without supposing that the Infinite Will has first been moved to some new act. They affirm the truth of *Mediatorial Ministration*. (See pp.