An Atheist

Contribution to the reform of a certain idea of God[1]

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[The text from the original booklet was scanned and put through an online French/English translation programme. The translation is somewhat clumsy and that relating to Monod's direct quotes from *The Story of My Heart* was replaced with the original text from the book.]

We are here in a place of retreat and recollection, and all your moments, it seems, should be reserved for the fervent and pious search for the inner life. On the contrary, the subject I am going to talk to you about is likely to plunge you, abruptly, in the middle of a human melée. Go on, if I came to speak of misery and social Christianity! But we are going to meditate on contemporary atheism ... Is it not a current of cold air that will chill us?

I will quickly dispel these legitimate fears. And, besides, how could "our heart not burn" at the sight of the multitudes who "wander without God and without hope in the world"? We are here for them; it is in their favour that we accumulate here spiritual forces.

This thought moves me deeply. And if I dare to approach with you, in this consecrated place, the problem of God, it is to obey an irresistible impulse of conscience. It is hours of intimate intuition where the most unworthy have the right to exclaim, with the Reformer: "I can not otherwise!"

Some of you will say, in spite of everything: "The task he imposes on himself is too heavy for his shoulders. Is he capable of renewing the theodicy?" That is not my claim; and the affirmations that I will bring are only simple propositions submitted to your examination. But in these grave matters, every Christian who has thought and prayed for himself becomes, for a small part, a witness; he is not despicable, insofar as he faithfully expresses what he has observed or experienced.

It is about eighteen years that I meditate, pen in hand, on religious subjects, for my personal instruction and edification. Before beginning my studies of theology, I wondered about God and his activity in this world, problems that remained unresolved. It is true that the life of the soul seemed to suffice for everything: enthusiasm for Jesus Christ, the faithful practice of prayer, the diligent meditation of the Evangile, the joyous and blessed labours of the holy ministry, the fight for the noble causes, soothe the heart and nourish the conscience. Meanwhile, the intelligence rests.

But the moment came when the Rouen Volkshochschule instituted contradictory talks on the existence of God. Atheists came looking for me to support the point of view opposite to theirs. The discussion lasted for many months; there were neither winners nor vanquished. How many times, returning from these dialectical tournaments, in the evening, I meditated before the silent firmament, studded with mute stars! . . . But at that time, a volcano of Martinique, gigantic howitzer pointed at the city of Saint-Pierre, destroyed 30,000 human creatures at once; it was the very day that Christendom celebrated the feast of Ascension.

In 1883, during the Krakatoa disaster, which claimed 40,000 lives, I was too young to suffer, intellectually, the counter-blow of the tremendous eruption. But, in 1902, I was able to think.

[1] Study presented at the St. Croix Student Conference. September 1904.

The events of Martinique defended for a few days the atheistic polemics of our political journals, for a few weeks the apologetic articles of our religious papers, for a few months the Astronomy Bulletins, and then we forgot. In any case, we seemed to forget. And yet many spirits continued to meditate secretly on the mystery of Providence and on the enigma of the world.

I admit that I rank among these researchers. I obtained all the documents that were within my reach, to try to reconstruct the physical and moral drama of Martinique. At the same time, I took a closer look at the arguments of atheists. Leaving aside the savors, the gross blasphemers, the boasters of unbelief, I wanted to know whether, beside the superficial atheism, there was not a deep, respectable atheism. If there is an atheism that is a manifestation of God, would there not be an atheism which is a reasoned protest against the traditional notion of God, a protest that is based both on science and on the conscience?

I have come to the certainty that this serious atheism exists, and that it has a role to play in the development of beliefs of the future; it has a mission to fulfill towards us Christians, to the extent that it imposes upon us the task.

It is difficult and solemn to revise, on this or that point, our notion of divinity. In truth, when we see serious people, open to all the progress, to the noble aspirations towards a more just society, towards a morality more delicate and more severe, when we see them spread, without their knowledge, the fundamental principles of the Gospel. How can we defend ourselves from a secret malaise by noting that our God leaves them cold or repels them? Are not they of those religious souls who, from age to age, raise an altar "to the unknown god"? And do not we have the sacred duty of announcing to them the heavenly Father?

Here is the clear impression that I would like to give you today, in speaking of a book too little known, written by a great meditative.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit, and stand in the presence of Jehovah!

After seventeen years of intense reflection, in 1883, the Englishman Richard Jefferies published an autobiography.[2]

In this small volume, we discover nothing, or almost nothing, about the circumstances of the author; on the other hand, we are learning to know a soul. This autobiography is less a story than a collection of elevations. You will judge by the first chapter of the book. In translating these pages to your intention, my aim is not to provide you with a simple quotation, a specimen of the material of which the work is woven; no, it is not a digression, I am at the very heart of my subject. For, in order to appreciate the arguments of the author at the heart of the notion of a God, one must first have entered the sanctuary of one's most solemn feelings. Or I am very mistaken, or you will be seized, as I was seized myself, by an austere and powerful emotion. It will unfortunately be impossible for me to restore the vigor of the original style, admirable of plenitude and brevity.

Here is then the beginning and the end of the first chapter, which begins abruptly and without title.

> In the glow of youth there were times every now and then when I felt the necessity of a strong inspiration of soul thought. My heart was dusty, parched for want of the rain of deep feeling; my mind arid and dry, for there is a dust which settles on the heart as well as that which falls on a ledge. It is injurious to the mind as well as to the body to be always in one place and always surrounded by the same circumstances. A species of

[2] *The Story of My Heart* (London: Longman, 1891).

thick clothing slowly grows about the mind, the pores are choked, little habits become a part of existence, and by degrees the mind is enclosed in a husk.

When this began to form I felt eager to escape from it, to throw off the heavy clothing, to drink deeply once more at the fresh fountains of life. An inspiration—a long deep breath of the pure air of thought—could alone give health to the heart.

There is a hill to which I used to resort at such periods. The labour of walking three miles to it, all the while gradually ascending, seemed to clear my blood of the heaviness accumulated at home. On a warm summer day the slow continued rise required continual effort, which carried away the sense of oppression. The familiar everyday scene was soon out of sight; I came to other trees, meadows, and fields; I began to breathe a new air and to have a fresher aspiration. I restrained my soul till I reached the sward of the hill; psyche, the soul that longed to be loose. I would write psyche always instead of soul to avoid meanings which have become attached to the word soul, but it is awkward to do so. Clumsy indeed are all words the moment the wooden stage of commonplace life is left. I restrained psyche, my soul, till I reached and put my foot on the grass at the beginning of the green hill itself.

Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire. The very light of the sun was whiter and more brilliant here. By the time I had reached the summit I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and the annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself. There was an intrenchment on the summit, and going down into the fosse I walked round it slowly to recover breath. On the south-western side there was a spot where the outer bank had partially slipped, leaving a gap. There the view was over a broad plain, beautiful with wheat, and inclosed by a perfect amphitheatre of green hills. Through these hills there was one narrow groove, or pass, southwards, where the white clouds seemed to close in the horizon. Woods hid the scattered hamlets and farmhouses, so that I was quite alone.

I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth. Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. I thought of the earth's firmness—I felt it bear me up: through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—its pureness, which is its beauty; the air touched me and gave me something of itself. I spoke to the sea: though so far, in my mind I saw it, green at the rim of the earth and blue in deeper ocean; I desired to have its strength, its mystery and glory. Then I addressed the sun, desiring the soul equivalent of his light and brilliance, his endurance and unwearied race. I turned to the blue heaven over, gazing into its depth, inhaling its exquisite colour and sweetness. The rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky drew my soul towards it, and there it rested, I for pure colour is rest of heart. By all these I prayed; I felt an emotion of the soul beyond all definition; prayer is a puny thing to it, and the word is a rude sign to the feeling, but I know no other.

By the blue heaven, by the rolling sun bursting through untrodden space, a new ocean of ether every day unveiled. By the fresh and wandering air encompassing the world; by the sea sounding on the shore—the green sea white-flecked at the margin and the deep ocean; by the strong earth under me. Then, returning, I prayed by the sweet thyme, whose little flowers I touched with my hand; by the slender grass; by the crumble of dry chalky earth I took up and let fall through my fingers. Touching the crumble of earth, the blade of grass, the thyme flower, breathing the earth-encircling air, thinking of the sea and the sky, holding out my hand for the sunbeams to touch it, prone on the sward in token of deep reverence, thus I prayed that I might touch to the unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity.

With all the intensity of feeling which exalted me, all the intense communion I held with the earth, the sun and sky, the stars hidden by the light, with the ocean—in no manner can the thrilling depth of these feelings be written--with these I prayed, as if they were the keys of an instrument, of an organ, with which I swelled forth the note of my soul, redoubling my own voice by their power. The great sun burning with light; the strong earth, dear earth; the warm sky; the pure air; the thought of ocean; the inexpressible beauty of all filled me with a rapture, an ecstasy, and inflatus. With this inflatus, too, I prayed. Next to myself I came and recalled myself, my bodily existence. I held out my hand, the sunlight gleamed on the skin and the iridescent nails; I recalled the mystery and beauty of the flesh. I thought of the mind with which I could see the ocean sixty miles distant, and gather to myself its glory. I thought of my inner existence, that consciousness which is called the soul. These, that is, myself— I threw into the balance to weight the prayer the heavier. My strength of body, mind and soul, I flung into it; I but forth my strength; I wrestled and laboured, and toiled in might of prayer. The prayer, this soul-emotion was in itself-not for an object-it was a passion. I hid my face in the grass, I was wholly prostrated, I lost myself in the wrestle, I was rapt and carried away.

Becoming calmer, I returned to myself and thought, reclining in rapt thought, full of aspiration, steeped to the lips of my soul in desire. I did not then define, or analyses, or understand this. I see now that what I

laboured for was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be exalted, to be full of soul-learning. Finally I rose, walked half a mile or so along the summit of the hill eastwards, to soothe myself and come to the common ways of life again. Had any shepherd accidentally seen me lying on the turf, he would only have thought that I was resting a few minutes; I made no outward show. Who could have imagined the whirlwind of passion that was going on within me as I reclined there! I was greatly exhausted when I reached home.

Occasionally I went upon the hill deliberately, deeming it good to do so; then, again, this craving carried me away up there of itself. Though the principal feeling was the same, there were variations in the mode in which it affected me...

I prayed with the glowing clouds of sun-set and the soft light of the first star coming through the violet sky. At night with the stars, according to the season: now with the Pleiades, now with the Swan or burning Sirius, and broad Orion's whole constellation, red Aldebaran, Arcturus, and the Northern Crown; with the morning star, the light-bringer, once now and then when I saw it, a white-gold ball in the violet-purple sky, or framed about with pale summer vapour floating away as red streaks shot horizontally in the east. A diffused saffron ascended into the luminous upper azure. The disk of the sun rose over the hill, fluctuating with throbs of light; his chest heaved in fervour of brilliance. All the glory of the sunrise filled me with broader and furnace-like vehemence of prayer. That I might have the deepest of soul-life, the deepest of all, deeper far than all this greatness of the visible universe and even of the invisible; that I might have a fullness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond my own conception.

In the deepest darkness of the night the same thought rose in my mind as in the bright light of noontide. What is there which I have not used to strengthen the same emotion?

Thus ends the first chapter of the book; if we can still speak of a book, when we have just plunged, thus, into the mystery of existence. Placed in the presence of the most ordinary nature, Jefferies displays a capacity for enjoyment, stupor, aspiration, prayer, which gives you vertigo. One feels blind beside this seer, impious beside this worshiper. To perceive the unfathomable poetry and the glory of the world, at this point, it is almost to be endowed with a complementary sense, it borders on the genius.

And the work is full of such passages, where the most ineffable ecstasy expresses itself in a precise and delicately nuanced vocabulary, without literary blistering, without sentimental sentimentality. He who saw, knew how to see; one is seized with respect for the probity of his look, for the intensity of his disinterested admiration, for the fervour of his holy melancholy. With him we are on earth, which is usually called religious ground; he exalts the role of intimate intuition, he is thirsty to enlarge his soul, he prays. He is not one of those pantheists without consistency who are relaxing in the ocean of things. He may feel, with an often disturbing acuteness, the silent majesty, the magnificent splendor, the immeasurable power and the durability of nature, he never agrees to lose the proud feeling of his personality. His hymn to the universe is completed by a hymn to the soul. "Without the soul," he writes, "all these are dead. Except when I walk by the sea, and my soul is by it, the sea is dead. Those seas by which no man has stood—which no soul has been—whether on earth or the planets, are dead. No matter how majestic the planet rolls in space, unless a soul be there it is dead."

And again: "Things that have been miscalled supernatural appear to me simple, more natural than nature, than earth, than sea, or sun. It is beyond telling more natural that I should have a soul than not, that there should be immortality; I think there is much more than immortality. It is matter which is the supernatural, and difficult of under-standing. Why this clod of earth I hold in my hand? Why this water which drops sparkling from my fingers dipped in the brook? Why are they at all? When? How? What for? Matter is beyond understanding, mysterious, impenetrable; I touch it easily, comprehend it, no. Soul, mind—the thought, the idea—is easily understood, it understands itself and is conscious."

And again: "Look at another person while living; the soul is not visible, only the body which it animates. Therefore, merely because after death the soul is not visible is no

demonstration that it does not still live. The condition of being unseen is the same condition which occurs while the body is living, so that intrinsically there is nothing exceptionable, or supernatural, in the life of the soul after death. Resting by the tumulus, the spirit of the man who had been interred there was to me really alive, and very close. This was quite natural, as natural and simple as the grass waving in the wind, the bees humming, and the larks' songs. Only by the strongest effort of the mind could I understand the idea of extinction; that was supernatural, requiring a miracle; the immortality of the soul natural, like earth. Listening to the sighing of the grass I felt immortality as I felt the beauty of the summer morning."

You see, our author is a convinced spiritualist; his apotheosis of the soul reassures those whom his apotheosis of nature would disturb. We are in the presence of a man who has the sense of worship.

That's not all. His moral character is so rich that he unites the opposites. Jefferies is a mystic, but he will not fail on the ordinary pitfall of mysticism, that is, dormant meditation, lazy introspection, disinterestedness of action. Our thinker is thirsty to act; our worshipper has the ambition to become a redeemer. And, by that, he must be especially sympathetic to modern Christians. Listen instead to his accents when he addresses the social problem.

> The most extraordinary spectacle, as it seems to me, is the vast expenditure of labour and time wasted in obtaining mere subsistence. As a man, in his lifetime, works hard and saves money, that his children may be free from the cares of penury and may at least have sufficient to eat, drink, clothe, and roof them, so the generations that preceded us might, had they so chosen, have provided for our subsistence. The labour and time of ten generations, properly directed, would sustain a hundred generations succeeding to them, and that, too, with so little self-denial on the part of the providers as to be scarcely felt. So men now, in this generation, ought clearly to be laying up a store, or, what is still more powerful, arranging and organising that the generations which follow may enjoy comparative freedom from useless labour. Instead of which, with transcendent improvidence, the world works only for to-day, as the world worked twelve thousand years ago, and our children's children will still have to toil and slave for the bare necessities of life. This is, indeed an extraordinary spectacle.
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> That twelve thousand written years should have elapsed, and the human race—able to reason and to think, and easily capable of combination in immense armies for its own destruction—should still live from hand to mouth, like cattle and sheep, like the animals of the field and the birds of the woods; that there should not even be roofs to cover the children born, unless those children labour and expend their time to pay for them; that there should not be clothes, unless, again, time and labour are expended to procure them; that there should not be even food for the children of the human race, except they labour as their fathers did twelve thousand years ago; that even water should scarce be accessible to them, unless paid for by labour! In twelve thousand written years the world has not yet built itself a House, nor filled a Granary, nor organised itself for its own comfort. It is so marvellous I cannot express the wonder with which it fills me. And more wonderful still, if that could be, there are people so infatuated, or, rather, so limited of view, that they glory in this state of things, declaring that work is the main object of man's existence—work for subsistence— and glorying in their wasted time. To argue with such is impossible; to leave them is the only resource.
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> This our earth this day produces sufficient for our existence. This our earth produces not only a sufficiency, but a superabundance, and pours a cornucopia of good things down upon us. Further, it produces sufficient for stores and granaries to be filled to the rooftree for years ahead. I verily believe that the earth in one year produces enough food to last for thirty. Why, then, have we not enough? Why do people die of starvation, or lead a miserable existence on the verge of it? Why have millions upon millions to toil from morning to evening just to gain a mere crust of bread? Because of the absolute lack of Organisation by which such labour should produce its effect, the absolute lack of distribution, the absolute lack even of the very idea that such things are possible. Nay, even to mention such things, to say that they are possible, is criminal with many. Madness could hardly go farther.
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> ... That any human being should dare to apply to another the epithet "pauper" is, to me, the greatest, the vilest, the most unpardonable crime that could be committed. Each human being, by mere birth, has a birthright in this earth and all its productions; and if they do not receive it, then it is they who are injured, and it is not the "pauper"—oh, inexpressibly wicked word!—it is the well-to-do, who are the

> criminal classes. It matters not in the least if the poor be improvident, or drunken, or evil in any way. Food and drink, roof and clothes, are the inalienable right of every child born into the light. If the world does not provide it freely—not as a grudging gift but as a right, as a son of the house sits down to breakfast—then is the world mad. But the world is not mad, only in ignorance—an interested ignorance, kept up by strenuous exertions, from which infernal darkness it will, in course of time, emerge, marvelling at the past as a man wonders at and glories in the light who has escaped from blindness.

You will not be surprised, after that, that our author bears, day and night, on his heart the noble preoccupation of future generations. Serve the unborn! such is the dream of this sublime soul. He writes: "I would submit to a severe discipline, and to go without many things cheerfully, for the good and happiness of the human race in the future. ... How pleasant it would be each day to think, Today I have done something that will tend to render future generations more happy.... To reflect that another human being, if at a distance of ten thousand years from the year 1883, would enjoy one hour's more life, in the sense of fulness of life, in consequence of anything I had done in my little span, would be to me a peace of soul." (p, 129, 131, 159).

When a man is accessible to such grave and disinterested worries, he can only despise the glitz of our superficial civilization, the idolatry of erudition, the superstition of speed, and other solemn and childish prejudices of our world. time. If my present purpose were to present to you a complete study of Jefferies' thought, I should have some interesting observations to offer you on his calculated, haughty, paradoxical contempt for tradition in all fields. But I limit myself to the essential, to what is necessary to situate its atheism and to construct the framework of its irreligion.

Now, the fervent ambition to work for the good of his fellows, does not only bring him to the contempt of tradition, it leads him to a deeper, more original feeling, which constitutes the mysterious attraction of this strange personality. Let's hear it again. "I never had," he writes, "an idea that has satisfied my soul" (117). From standing face to face so long with the real earth, the real sun, and the real sea, I am firmly convinced that there is an immense range of thought quite unknown to us yet. (143). As we have a circle of ideas unknown to Augustus Caesar, so I argue there are whole circles of ideas unknown to us. (169). Just as a star, a whole world, can be veiled by a branch, so there is an infinite knowledge to conquer, but it is hidden from us, so to speak, by a leaf. If any one says to himself that the telescope, and the microscope, the prism, and other discoveries have made all plain, then he is in the attitude of those ancient priests who worshipped the scarab or beetle. (189). No, I will not remain a slave to the observation of physical phenomena (195). We know the matter and the force; but other conditions may exist. If the mind is a marvelous instrument of investigation, the soul is the spirit of the spirit, it is creator; through it we can continue to shape things, to see more deeply, to penetrate the mystery (190, 191, 195). There is an infinity of knowledge to acquire, and, beyond, an infinity of thought (187). "

You may say: We admit this, it is evident that the human race is enriched every day by knowledge and ideas!

If you admit it so easily, it is because you have not yet grasped the originality of the point of view that I am exposing you to. Consider that, for Jefferies, it is a question of discovering a new "mental tool" (187), "to invent a new process of reasoning" (188). Here are all his thoughts.

> Three things only have been discovered of that which concerns the inner consciousness since before written history began. Three things only in twelve thousand written, or sculptured, years, and in the dumb, dim time before then. Three ideas the Cavemen primeval wrested from the unknown, the night which is round us still in daylight—the existence of the soul, immortality, the deity. These things found,

> prayer followed as a sequential result. Since then nothing further has been found in all the twelve thousand years, as if men had been satisfied and had found these to suffice. They do not suffice me. I desire to advance further, and to wrest a fourth, and even still more than a fourth, from the darkness of thought. I want more ideas of soul-life. I am certain that there are more yet to be found. A great life—an entire civilisation—lies just outside the pale of common thought. Cities and countries, inhabitants, intelligences, culture—an entire civilisation. Except by illustrations drawn from familiar things, there is no way of indicating a new idea. I do not mean actual cities, actual civilisation. Such life is different from any yet imagined. A nexus of ideas exists of which nothing is known—a vast system of ideas—a cosmos of thought. There is an Entity, a Soul-Entity, as yet unrecognised. These, rudely expressed, constitute my Fourth Idea. It is beyond, or beside, the three discovered by the Cavemen; it is in addition to the existence of the soul; in addition to immortality; and beyond the idea of the deity. I think there is something more than existence... The mind of so many thousand years has worked round and round inside the circle of these three ideas as a boat on an inland lake. Let us haul it over the belt of land, launch on the ocean, and sail outwards.

If I could multiply the quotes, I would prove that this is not a joke. On the contrary, the characteristic tendencies of our author, his capacity for improvement, his ambitions of humanitarian service, culminate in this grandiose affirmation: "There is a fourth idea!" in other words: no system of philosophy, morality, religion, is adequate to realism. We must continue to search. To formulate duty, the right, even the mere possibility of such a search, is already to break the chains of humanity and open the way for it to progress indefinitely.

This is our author, he is not the first comer. If he is to appear as a fool to superficial thinking, those who are familiar with the Bible will welcome him as a great personality. He has, indeed, like the Hebrew poets of the Old Testament, the meaning of the nature and the spirit of worship; and he, on the other hand, like the writers of the New Testament, as the hero of the Gospel, the intense love of neighbour, the concern of the sovereign to serve humanity.

II

Well! despite everything, Jefferies is an atheist. This perhaps hampers current ideas about the intellectual and moral causes of atheism; however, we are obliged to note the fact. In reality, he is an atheist for religious reasons. He is an atheist, first because the observation of nature prevents him from going to the end of his admiring ecstasy; and then, because the experience of human destiny shows him too often the vanity of redemptive pity. Here below, impossible to admire nature without limit, impossible to love with a full effective humanity. This problem of evil weighs, like a dead weight, on thought and on the heart.

Now, according to Christian tradition, there is an omnipresent and omnipotent God. But if it is omnipresent in nature, it is not intelligent, because the spirit immanent produces monsters. And, on the other hand, if God is omnipotent in history, he is not good, for Providence gives free reign to the worst sufferings, the worst scandals. As a result, something greater than the traditional notion of divinity can be conceived. The vulgar notion is not religious; it satisfies neither reason nor the soul.

This is a double affirmation that is worth weighing. Let's look at Jefferies's arguments. At first, you will be amazed at their simplicity; you will be tempted to exclaim: The author is not even a dialectician! It's vulgar common sense that speaks through his mouth. "That's true, but that's his strength." Intuition can sometimes replace, with advantage, metaphysics, look at the world, and candidly say what we see, with the naive and terrible frankness of children,

here is a very elementary but very wise process of investigation, and, in the end, more philosophical than certain syllogistic deductions.

The first observation of our author is this: "There is nothing human in nature. The earth, though loved so dearly, would let me perish on the ground, and neither bring forth food nor water. Burning in the sky the great sun, of whose company I have been so fond, would merely burn on and make no motion to assist me. Those who have been in an open boat at sea without water have proved the mercies of the sun, and of the deity who did not give them one drop of rain, dying in misery under the same rays that smile so beautifully on the flowers. In the south the sun is the enemy; night and coolness and rain are the friends of man. As for the sea, it offers us salt water which we cannot drink. The trees care nothing for us; the hill I visited so often in days gone by has not missed me. The sun scorches man, and willing his naked state roast him alive. The sea and the fresh water alike make no effort to uphold him if his vessel founders; he casts up his arms in vain, they come to their level over his head, filling the spot his body occupied. If he falls from a cliff the air parts; the earth beneath dashes him to pieces.

Some fruits are produced which he can eat, but they do not produce themselves for him; merely for the purpose of continuing their species. In wild, tropical countries, at the first glance there appears to be some consideration for him, but it is on the surface only. The lion pounces on him, the rhinoceros crushes him, the serpent bites, insects torture, diseases rack him. Disease worked its dreary will even among the flower-crowned Polynesians. Returning to our own country, this very thyme which scents my fingers did not grow for that purpose, but for its own. So does the wheat beneath; we utilise it, but its original and native purpose was for itself. By night it is the same as by day; the stars care not, they pursue their courses revolving, and we are nothing to them. There is nothing human in the whole round of nature. All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass. If the entire human race perished at this hour, what difference would it make to the earth? What would the earth care? As much as for the extinct dodo, or for the fate of the elephant now going.

On the contrary, a great part, perhaps the whole, of nature and of the universe is distinctly anti-human. The term inhuman does not express my meaning, anti-human is better; outre-human, in the sense of beyond, outside, almost grotesque in its attitude towards, would nearly convey it. Everything is anti-human. How extraordinary, strange, and incomprehensible are the creatures captured out of the depths of the sea! The distorted fishes; the ghastly cuttles; the hideous eel-like shapes; the crawling shell-encrusted things; the centipede-like beings; monstrous forms, to see which gives a shock to the brain. They shock the mind because they exhibit an absence of design. There is no idea in them.

They have no shape, form, grace, or purpose; they call up a vague sense of chaos, chaos which the mind revolts from. It would be a relief to the thought if they ceased to be, and utterly disappeared from the sea. They are not inimical of intent towards man, not even the shark; but there the shark is, and that is enough. These miserably hideous things of the sea are not anti-human in the sense of persecution, they are outside, they are ultra and beyond. It is like looking into chaos, and it is vivid because these creatures, interred alive a hundred fathoms deep, are seldom seen; so that the mind sees them as if only that moment they had come into existence. Use has not habituated it to them, so that their anti-human character is at once apparent, and stares at us with glassy eye.

But it is the same in reality with the creatures on the earth. There are some of these even now to which use has not accustomed the mind. Such, for instance, as the toad. At its shapeless shape appearing in an unexpected corner many people start and exclaim. They are aware that they shall receive no injury from it, yet it affrights them, it sends a shock to the mind. The reason lies in its obviously anti-human character. All the designless, formless chaos of chance-directed matter, without idea or human plan, squats there embodied in the pathway. By watching the creature, and convincing the mind from observation that it is harmless, and even has uses, the horror wears away. But still remains the form to which the mind can never reconcile itself. Carved in wood it is still repellent.

The shape of the horse to the eye has become conventional: it is accepted. Yet the horse is not in any sense human. Could we look at it suddenly, without previous acquaintance, as at strange fishes in a tank, the ultra-human character of the horse would be apparent. It is the curves of the neck and body that carry the horse past without adverse comment. Examine the hind legs in detail, and the curious backward motion, the shape and anti-human curves become apparent. Dogs take us by their intelligence, but they have no hand;

pass the hand over the dog's head, and the shape of the skull to the sense of feeling is almost as repellent as the form of the toad to the sense of sight. We have gradually gathered around us all the creatures that are less markedly anti-human, horses and dogs and birds, but they are still themselves. They originally existed like the wheat, for themselves; we utilise them, but they are not of us.

There being nothing human in nature or the universe, and all things being ultra-human and without design, shape, or purpose, I conclude that, no deity has anything to do with nature. There is no god in nature, nor in any matter anywhere, either in the clods on the earth or in the composition of the stars. For what we understand by the deity is the purest form of Idea, of Mind, and no mind is exhibited in these. That which controls them is distinct altogether from deity. It is not force in the sense of electricity, nor a deity as god, nor a spirit, not even an intelligence, but a power quite different to anything yet imagined. I cease, therefore, to look for deity in nature or the cosmos at large, or to trace any marks of divine handiwork. I search for traces of this force which is not god, and is certainly not the higher than deity of whom I have written. It is a force without a mind. I wish to indicate something more subtle than electricity, but absolutely devoid of consciousness, and with no more feeling than the force which lifts the tides. (p.61-71)

These are the reflections suggested to Jefferies by the spectacle of nature. The observation of society does not awaken in him most consoling ideas.

Next, in human affairs, in the relations of man with man, in the conduct of life, in the events that occur, in human affairs generally everything happens by chance. No prudence in conduct, no wisdom or foresight can effect anything, for the most trivial circumstance will upset the deepest plan of the wisest mind... In human affairs everything happens by chance—that is, in defiance of human ideas, and without any direction of an intelligence. A man bathes in a pool, a crocodile seizes and lacerates his flesh. If any one maintains that an intelligence directed that cruelty, I can only reply that his mind is under an illusion. A man is caught by a revolving shaft and torn to pieces, limb from limb. There is no directing intelligence in human affairs, no protection, and no assistance. Those who act uprightly are not rewarded, but they and their children often wander in the utmost indigence. Those who do evil are not always punished, but frequently flourish and have happy children. Rewards and punishments are purely human institutions, and if government be relaxed they entirely disappear. No intelligence whatever interferes in human affairs. There is a most senseless belief now prevalent that effort, and work, and cleverness, perseverance and industry, are invariably successful. Were this the case, every man would enjoy a competence, at least, and be free from the cares of money. This is an illusion almost equal to the superstition of a directing intelligence, which every fact and every consideration disproves.

How can I adequately express my contempt for the assertion that all things occur for the best, for a wise and beneficent end, and are ordered by a humane intelligence! It is the most utter falsehood and a crime against the human race. Even in my brief time I have been contemporary with events of the most horrible character... Consider only the fates which overtake the little children. Human suffering is so great, so endless, so awful that I can hardly write of it. I could not go into hospitals and face it, as some do, lest my mind should be temporarily overcome. The whole and the worst the worst pessimist can say is far beneath the least particle of the truth, so immense is the misery of man. It is the duty of all rational beings to acknowledge the truth. There is not the least trace of directing intelligence in human affairs. This is a foundation of hope, because, if the present condition of things were ordered by a superior power, there would be no possibility of improving it for the better in the spite of that power. Acknowledging that no such direction exists, all things become at once plastic to our will. (pp. 145-147, 73).

In short, the indifference of nature to man, the sufferings and injustices of history, suffice to overthrow the traditional notoriety of divinity.

Jefferies is so opposed to any assumption of finality, that he goes so far as to reject, with astonishing ease, the reality of an organic evolution. For example, he does not admit that he does not like to exist a trait of biological union between the vegetable kingdom and the animal kingdom.

He writes: "There is no evolution any more than there is any design in nature. By standing face to face with nature, and not from books, I have convinced myself that there is no design and no evolution. What there is, what was the cause, how and why, is not yet known; certainly it was neither of these." (p.137)

One might object that if nature is thinkable, it must have been thought. But our author goes to the end of his intrepid paradoxes, and he does not admit that the world is intelligible. The reasoning is symmetrical, the reality is asymmetrical; that one thinks instead of the viscera in the human body, and the indescribable form of the bones, which is neither round nor square. Logic is not superimposed on being. This is why Jefferies rejects the famous argument of deism, which relies on the necessity of a primary cause.

> But it may be argued the world must have been created, or it must have been made of existing things, or it must have been evolved, or it must have existed for ever, through all eternity. I think not. I do not think that either of these are "musts," nor that any "must" has yet been discovered; not even that there "must" be a first cause. There may be other things—other physical forces even—of which we know nothing. I strongly suspect there are. There may be other ideas altogether from any we have hitherto had the use of. For many ages our ideas have been confined to two or three. We have conceived the idea of creation, which is the highest and grandest of all, if not historically true; we have conceived the idea of design, that is of an intelligence making order and revolution of chaos; and we have conceived the idea of evolution by physical laws of matter, which, though now so much insisted on, is as ancient as the Greek philosophers. But there may be another alternative; I think there are other alternatives.(p.138)

Here is the verdict, carefully weighed, of a beautiful intelligence and a great soul: the world is sad, humanity is left to itself, faith in Providence is despicably optimistic.

But here is reappearing originality troubling and sympathique of the author. After writing this decisive sentence: "There is not the least trace of directing intelligence in human affairs," he proudly adds: "This is a foundation of hope, because, if the present condition of things were ordered by a superior power, there would be no possibility of improving it for the better in the spite of that power. Acknowledging that no such direction exists, all things become at once plastic to our will. (p.147).

Do not reply that one can conceive of a benevolent deity, morally incapable of counteracting the progress of humanity. Jefferies dismisses the objection by this simple remark: If your divinity is good, it is, in any case, impotent; practically, its influence is therefore zero. Here are his own words: The world would be happier:

> But that which is thoughtlessly credited to a non-existent intelligence should really be claimed and exercised by the human race. It is ourselves who should direct our affairs, protecting ourselves from pain, assisting ourselves, succouring and rendering our lives happy. We must do for ourselves what superstition has hitherto supposed an intelligence to do for us. Nothing whatsoever is done for us. We are born naked, and not even protected by a shaggy covering. ... The sea does not make boats for us, nor the earth of her own will build us hospitals. The injured lie bleeding, and no invisible power lifts them up. ... For how long, for how many thousand years, must the earth and the sea, and the fire and the air, utter these things and force them upon us before they are admitted in their full significance? (p.150)
>
> Left to itself it will not be satisfied with an invisible idol any more than with a wooden one. An idol whose attributes are omnipresence, omnipotence, and so on, is no greater than light or electricity, which are present everywhere and all-powerful, and from which perhaps the thought arose. Prayer which receives no reply must be pronounced in vain. The mind goes on and requires more than these, something higher than prayer, something higher than a god.(p.198)
>
> I know that there is something infinitely higher than deity. The great sun burning in the sky, the sea, the firm earth, all the stars of night are feeble—all, all the cosmos is feeble; it is not strong enough to utter my prayer-desire. My soul cannot reach to its full desire of prayer. I need no earth, or sea, or sun to think my thought. If my thought-part—the psyche—were entirely separated from the body, and from the earth, I should of myself desire the same. In itself my soul desires; my existence, my soul-existence is in itself my prayer, and so long as it exists so long will it pray that I may have the fullest soul-life. (p.206)

These are the last words of the book.

III

I admit that all this gives food for thought. Suppose Jefferies were one of your friends, and if you had the ambition to awaken faith in God, what method would you follow? With atheists of such a caliber, it is superfluous to cry scandal, for their impiety is religious, their incredulity arises from their most disinterested aspirations, the most sublime, the most divine. It is necessary to descend, rather, in the preoccupations of these noble seekers, to share their doubts, to commune with their indignations, to marry their anguish.

Personally, if I were talking to a disciple of Jefferies, I think I would concede to him the three main points of his argument, even in the paradoxical form of these aphorisms. To be honest, I would provisionally admit — even if I want to complete my thought — first, that God is not omni-present, then that God is not omnipotent, and finally that we can conceive of an idea superior to the traditional notion of divinity.

Let's review these three statements; we will observe that they derive, very simply, from the three fundamental notions of Christian doctrine, from the three axioms which have found their formulas, respectively, in the three dogmas of creation, redemption and consumption.

Here, first, the dogma of creation. If we take it seriously, we will not be pantheists, the world will not appear to us as an emanation of God, as an organism of which it would be the soul by all diffuse; in short, we will not hesitate to confess that God is not all that is, and that he is not better in all that is. Absolutely speaking, divine immanence is inadmissible; the observation of the landscape does not allow us to recognize everywhere the activity of an omniscient being.

The truth is that our world precisely because it was created; lives a life of his own, independent, he is endowed with spontaneity. He is like a seed, detached from the generator, and unrolling its potentialities.

Hence the contradictory characters presented by nature. On the one hand, indeed, and despite Jefferies' declarations, the universe is the reflection of an intelligence since it is intelligible; on the other hand, it reveals a strange absence of thought. The formation of a body in the maternal flanks is a marvel that passes the other wonders; however, monsters are born; there are two-headed calves. It takes intelligence to make an eye! But to fashion four where two would suffice is unintelligent. Thus, on the basis of underlying reason, the fantasy of a spontaneity which disconcerts and takes on the appearance of chance is detached from the picture of the universe.

Understand me well; I am far from denying the moving, admirable general finality that radiates on all the planes of the cosmos, and whose reality is even imposed on materialists. The scholar Charles Kichet, director of the Paris Scientific Review, wrote these significant lines: "Is it possible to deny that the eye is affected by vision?" It would fall into a fantastic excess of absurdity, to suppose that there is no cause and effect relationship. between the eye and the vision It is not by chance that the eye sees ... The adaptation of the eye to a goal, which is the vision, imposes itself to us with such force that the most subtle sophismes can not shake the opinion of anyone, even of the Sophists themselves. "(*Le problème des causes finales* [*The Problem of Final Causes*], p.6)

And the positivist philosopher Bourdeau, who wrote a large volume against the immortality of the soul, wrote this remarkable page: "Does the nature, prodigious artist, create her most important masterpieces? accomplished without knowing what it does? ... Everything in it seeks the good, aspires at the best, aims at an increase of life ... Seen from above, the order of its whole attests a superior reason of which ours, with its shortcomings and failures, is only a pale reflection. In the presence of so much agreement, harmony and

unity, reflection refuses to believe that such a series of effects can be the work of blind chance. (*Le problème de la vie* [The problem of life], p.200.)

This is the testimony that nature takes from atheists. But we must hear the other bell, we must listen to Christians confess that it is reckless or blasphemous to attribute all the events of this world to divine causality. A naturalist philosopher, M. Armand Sabatier, of Montpellier, has written: "In the evils of which nature is the theatre, it is necessary to see the relative imperfection and powerlessness of nature, struggling against the obstacles which affect its nature, walk towards the ideal. It is not the creator God, distinct from nature, that we could blame for the faults and errors of nature ... Like every being called to evolve, the world is neither perfect nor infallible. He wants, but he fumbles, he hesitates, he deceives himself, he tries himself and he stops, he moves forward, he recoils, and his progress is acquired only through hesitant attempts, errors, deviations and rectifications, twists and straightenings. From there, incessant oscillations. (*La, philosophie de l'effort,* [The Philosophy of the Effort], pp. 15, 11, 10.) Is this not the eloquent picture of an autonomous nature, of a universe delivered to itself?

Examine the Protestant literature after the catastrophe of Martinique. There you will find confessions that would scandalize Calvin, and all the defenders of "the honour of God". For example, in a small leaf of edification, the *Sunday Messenger*, we read the following statements: We are told, "It is the will of God, it is only to bow. But to make all accidents the expression of the will of God, seems to us terribly false; for it must be logical, and if it is God who has rained fire and sulphur, it is also he who lights the spark that will produce the explosion of firedamp; it is he who will put in the gear the hand of the workman; it is he who, misdirecting the ships, will cause these collisions and shipwrecks. And if you do not want to go that far, and even further, why enter this path? Is it not wiser and simpler to look for human or natural causes? (Maurice Bas, July 20th, 1902.)

Take another evangelical publication, even Orthodox, the *Faith and Life Review*. Under the pen of a pious teacher of dogmas at the Faculty of Theology of Montauban, one can discover the following assertions:

> God did not want, of a precise will, a determined event, such as the annihilation of thirty thousand victims of Mount Pelé ... Masses of events occur, which were never decided nor wanted as such by the good God ... God built this world in large, instituted certain laws involving a blind distribution of goods and physical ills ... General Providence shines the sun indifferently on the good and the bad; it is, by its nature, foreign to justice; and it must be, for freedom and human trial. (July, 1902).

Here are some more significant statements borrowed from an English Theological Review, *The Hibbert Journal*:

> Traditional theism creates the problem of evil, since we regard God as the author of nature. For the materialists, the atheists, there is no enigma of evil, the evil is only a brutal fact, whose responsibility does not go back to an all-powerful intelligence. But for the idealist, theist, the problem is this: how to reconcile evil with the supreme control of a being endowed with moral perfection? Let us leave aside the revolting hypothesis that God, all justice and love, produces every detail of the whole; let us only admit that he literally formed the general system of nature, which involves death, destruction through the agony of mind and body, for innumerable creatures endowed with the most exquisite capacity for suffering; well! the supposition that a God expressly produces such a system, and maintains it inexorably, is something which, in advance, seems inadmissible. Moreover, the fruits of human thought are now ripe enough for us to formulate the following conclusion: we have never managed to reconcile these two contradictory propositions. First, nature is the direct product of divine activity; then, God is the sum of all perfections. Jesus proclaimed the religion of love. The fatal error of our theodicy is therefore the effort to juxtapose the notion of the universal causality of God with the notion of his essential love. (October 1902. Howison.)

Thus, in the name of facts, in the name of the brutalities of nature, Christian thought comes to reject a certain idea of divine transcendence, the activity of which would be posed in the face of the world like that of a watchmaker with regard to a clock. But this does not mean that a certain doctrine of immanence can satisfy our minds better. If, indeed, it is the very spectacle of nature that has destroyed a given conception of transcendence, it is obvious that this, collapsing, engulfs immanence under its ruins. This one, *a fortiori*, is compromised.

But between these two hypotheses, whose formula is unfortunately borrowed from the spatial vocabulary, we can insert another conception of the relations between God and the world, a conception borrowed from the moral domain and the evangelical phraseology. While the transcendent God is to the world what the mechanic is to the mother, while the immanent God is to the world what the soul is to the body, the living God would reconcile the two points of view in a superior synthesis, and he would be in the world what the father is to the child.

Jefferies did not see that. Its merit is to have clearly brought to light the following truth: God is not all that is, God is not even in all that is.

But his weakness is to have concluded from there atheism. It would have been enough for him to take seriously the doctrine of creation to arrive at conclusions that leave no aspect of reality in the shadows, and which provide us with a notion of God full of life, poetry, and tragedy, stimulant and hope.

The universe is an X, a curtain behind which appears and disappears a thought. It appears, that is for deism; it disappears, that is for atheism. Neither absolute deism nor absolute atheism are radically right against each other; we must climb higher; and Jefferies, no doubt, had a presentiment when he sighed after a "fourth idea" to discover.

In any case, you have just seen how we could concede that God is not omnipresent. And you are prepared to understand how we do not refuse to follow our author further, how we would not recoil before the assertion that God is not all-powerful, at least in the world that is subject to our observation.

Indeed, it is difficult to escape this conclusion when one takes seriously the doctrine of redemption, or, more simply, the evangelical history. Everything shouts to us that human freedom, that evil, are real obstacles to the will of God.

Every Sunday, in the Reformed churches of France, thousands of faithful say the following prayer: "God very good, Father of mercy, we pray for all men. Enlighten with your Spirit those who are plunged into the darkness of ignorance and error." You will admit that if such a request were granted, the mission companies would have the joy of dissolving. Yet, despite this prayer, there are even today millions of little children, poor innocents aged five and below, who will inevitably fall into the abyss of paganism, if Christians do not hold them at the edge of the precipice . There are, at this very moment, millions of men, our kind, our brothers, to whom God does not reveal Himself, and whom He does not help, and who will give up the last breath without having heard the Gospel.

That's a fact. If God is love, what explanation to provide? You know the famous dilemma: or he can, and does not want, or wants and can not. Faith in divine paternity gives us the choice of the second term of the alternative: He wills, and can not.

Set the problem clearly. How did the heavenly Father manifest in prehistoric times? Where was the God of the Gospel in the so-called Quaternary period? Did not a mammoth fall to the ground without the providential will? Were all the hairs of primitive man counted? Did God love, yes or no, his creature without fire, without roof, without clothes, without tools, without bread? If he did not love it, it is difficult to maintain faith in the personal and compassionate

God. And if he loved it, then we might doubt the divine omnipotence, and we should no longer be astonished if the present world is such that the unbelievers blaspheme, and the believers murmur: "The ways of God are mysterious."

Oh! what relief takes the cross of the Messiah. He came to save man, and he came to save God. The cross is the ineffable revelation of divine love bound by divine impotence, and the divine impotence liberated by divine love.

Unable to do anything, love gives itself, it calls, it waits, it hopes, it suffers ... it triumphs in defeat.

Yes, the Golgotha cross, an unheard-of monument of the tragic and necessary conflict between good and evil, demonstrates the impotence of God. Besides, this impotence breaks out everywhere, according to Christian doctrine. At the origin of things, we pose an omnipotent Creator, who did not want suffering, sin, death; and yet the evil is there, in spite of himself, unleashed by human spontaneity. In holy history, we are shown a providential wisdom that prepares, for centuries, the appearance of a prophesied Messiah within a predestined people, and this people crucifies his Messiah! And since then, nearly two thousand years have passed, and the Holy Spirit, who founded the Church, did not want the perpetuity of paganism in Africa or Asia; he did not want the advent of papal Romanism, he did not want schisms, persecutions, wars of religion, authoritarian dogmatism, and yet the power of God did not spare traditional Christianity so many mistakes and so many crimes.

It is always the drama of Calvary that begins again. Well! this vanquished God is the one who speaks to my heart. I could not worship a deity who would be responsible for the continuation of the present world. We object: God does not expressly want all this evil, he limits himself to allowing it. Yes, he allows it expressly, and it comes down to the same thing. So will anyone say that if he does not allow, he tries to prevent? This is precisely the hypothesis that I formulate. God strives and does not always succeed. What a relief to believe it! Decreased metaphysically, the deity is morally magnified.

After all, present reality is a mystery whose origin escapes; and I call God the effort, everywhere manifested, to transform reality. It is an intelligent, moral, painful effort, constantly thwarted, but whose progress is becoming more and more affirmed.

Evil is that which can not be explained; and that is why the consoling God is possible. For if it were the unique and permanent cause, if the state of the world at each moment of the duration was his work, either directly by the divine activity, or indirectly by the passivity of a "laissez-faire! Pass!"God, then, in congrating us with suffering, God would console us with God. This is not the case. God comforts us with that which also desolates him. And then, before the spectacles of iniquity, or inexplicable pain, our faith could express itself in this way, in a sublime conversation with the Father: "Do not be afraid! I do not suspect you. I know you have not steeped in it. If I thought so, I would be desperate! "

To pray to God anyway, to pray to him in the darkness, to the inevitable, is an admirable tribute to the thought of love which wrestles in the depths of things against obscure fatality, it is to refuse to attribute to God, the paternity of evil, is to associate his own impotence with the divine impotence, it is to say to the Father: "If we are vaincus, we will be together! Nothing is lost, I remain your child. That is to say, with the hero of Gethsemane and Golgotha: "Father, all things are possible to you ... Father, if it is possible." And again: "My God, why have you forsaken me? ... Father, I put my spirit in your hands. This is the Christian doctrine of God, with its fertile contradictions, with its equal respect for the observable realities and religious needs of the soul, with its unshakeable attachment to the revelation of the heavenly Father in the only-begotten Son.

Without doubt, we do not cease to believe in God's power, nor in his ultimate victory. Do not a hundred thousand millions of worlds, gravitating majestically in infinite space, proclaim the glory of the Creator? Does it not reveal itself, still more radiant, in the invincible and unconquered soul of Christ? Let us trust in such power; but do not raise the conscience against God, affirming the present and absolute omnipotence.

In boarding schools, girls are offered compositions on this subject: If I was fairy! One of them, one day, declared that, if she possessed a magical power, she would arrange for the girls to be educated within the family, and not having the pain of being shut up in children's boarding.

If I were fairy! ... The imagination can give itself a free career. And if I were God! If I were God, if I were the merciful and misunderstood Force working on our planet to save it, despite sin, if I were God, I would be reduced to sighing: If I was fairy !

The fairy belongs to the unreal realm of possibilities, God acts in the concrete realm of reality, he operates a work of rescue. And this is how we can accept certain affirmations of the English thinker on the impotence of God; it is enough to read them in the light of the cross, it is enough to take seriously the Christian doctrine of Redemption.

In the end, if I dared to say so, I would say that we are mistaken in placing the omnipotence of God at the beginning of things, instead of placing it at the end. There is a God who will be, and who is not yet manifested; there is a God "who comes", according to the formula of the Apocalypse. And this leads us to justify, to some extent, the third paradox of Jefferies, the affirmation that we can conceive of an idea superior to the notion of divinity. He speaks, of course, of the traditional notion, that which implies omnipresence and omnipotence. Well! it seems to me that the dogma of consumption, when it is pushed to its last consequences, helps to understand the thought of our author.

Indeed, unless we admit that God is already "all in all", it must be admitted, according to St. Paul himself, that the supreme manifestation of God is yet to come. Today, the revelation of the Lord in history is not complete; The present stage of cosmic evolution does not permit us to elaborate an adequate concept of divinity. The present world is an embryonic organism that aspires to the complete state; this perfect state is the Kingdom of God, or the City of Justice, or Humanity. It can also be called God; because God is the ultimate cause of the world. Therefore, to admit that God exists is only a first step. We must go further, we must want God to be. This affirmation and this united attitude constitute faith in God.

Weigh these statements well. They correspond, in you, to secret discomfort, to intellectual and moral concerns that one does not always dare to confess to oneself. As you know, insoluble questions weigh heavily on our hearts: Why nature with death? Why the story with sin? Why? if there is a God. Well! adopt a frank and courageous attitude to the enigma, and acknowledge that Jesus Himself did not answer these questions. Or rather, he indirectly responded by giving himself to the world, for the answer will come with his triumph; the answer will come with the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth; Only then will the work of creation and the work of redemption be consummated, only then will humanity be able to judge of a picture of which it still only sees the outline.

To have faith in God is therefore to welcome the full revelation of God in the future. God is not yet fully manifested. And that is why it is not strange that one can doubt its existence, that is why a modern thinker could write: "God is the supreme decision of the soul. That is to say, we must want God to be, it must be affirmed by all the moral powers of our being, all our faculties must become the accomplices of his advent, the allies of his cause. To have faith in God is not a mere intellectual belief, it is a heroic act, it is a personal enlistment in the service of truth, justice, beauty, love; it is a free subordination of the present to the future; it is a

consecration of our body, of our soul and our mind to the ideal that God pursues in humanity, through the Son of man. As a challenge, faith in God truly engages our faith in the mystical and sublime sense of the term; she. demands all that is in us of attention, seriousness, perseverance, aspirations to individual holiness and social justice; it is not acquired in a day, and it is developing in loving and sacrificed hearts, not only until the hour of death, but through eternity.

Prayer is the activity par excellence when it comes to developing in us faith in the God who comes, because it is, precisely, a condition of his coming. " Hallowed be thy name! Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven! "

Hallowed be thy name! that is to say: O Father! may your Fatherhood be revealed! That we can believe, that we have the right and the joy to believe that the Reality is good, that the ultimate Truth is not sad, that the World has a goal, that Life has a meaning, that X = Love.

Thy kingdom come! that is to say: May the Messiah triumph! May the Spirit of Jesus win the victory! Let economic enfranchisement, intellectual liberation, and the religious redemption of mankind become an accomplished fact, and prove divine paternity! O God! complete the incarnation: after the man-God, and through him, give us humanity-God!

Thy will be done on earth! To win, you need us. "Here I am to do your will. Here I am to suffer, to love, to enjoy, to doubt, to seek, to succumb, to adore. Use me! Help me to help! Not what I want, but what you want ... Or rather, I want what you want, you want what I want, you want by me, you act, you love, you speak by me. You are the trunk, I am the branch; it is by the branch that the trunk fruits. Ecstasy!

In praying thus, I become an organ of the Holy Ghost, I give him the opportunity to manifest Himself here below, I enter his merciful views, I subscribe to his redeeming program, in other words, I hearken to God.

Yes, I dare say — although human words, on such a subject, are nothing more than stammerings — he who prays answers to God. What does it mean? Let's use an image. Just as atmospheric air presses the surface of our globe and insinuates itself, by its own weight, through the least fissure, into all the cells that it makes live, so is it possible to imagine to feel the divine Spirit as an influence which envelops us, and which seeks to penetrate us. He who prays offers him an opening, he collaborates with him, he lets him advance in the heart of the place. To grant God is to allow God to answer us.

Do you feel all that is touching in such a conception of prayer? There are bodies that are good or bad conductors of heat or electricity. The praying man is distinguished from men who do not pray, because he becomes an excellent conductor of the Holy Spirit. In a world that is partly blind, brutal, hostile, within a creation that sometimes resembles a disused ancestor, the one who prays attracts the Redeemer Spirit. He allows God to act.

Think of this mission that is yours, and strengthen yourself in the faith. Around us we are vociferating, we are proclaiming the death of Christianity, we are sounding the knell of religion, and a certain atheistic press roars: There is no God! What will be our answer? Without anger and without fear, we will kneel in secret; and through us the Holy Spirit will spring into the world in the precise place where we are, as we see in the desert a lively spring bubbling the sand into a green oasis.

We must therefore pray, not only to become ourselves, to form in ourselves a soul truly capable of immortality, to be in the full sense of the word, — we must pray, not only for others to be, and for all humanity to come to redemption — but we must pray for God to be.

In that sense, I do not fear the strange formula of Jefferies, and I admit with him that humanity as a whole sighs after the unknown God. To justify in part the audacious formulas of the English atheist, it was sufficient for us to dig the doctrines of creation, redemption, and

consumption. Our author was worthy of rising to the vast syntheses of Christian thought; but he does not seem to have foreseen them, as he deliberately ignores Christ. I say "voluntarily" because to write in England today a whole book on the problem of human destiny without referring to the Gospel is a tour de force that presupposes a bias of silence; To erase from history what happened in Jerusalem under Tiberius is to manifest a calculated disdain for Jesus. The term is not exaggerated, since the author speaks of Julius Caesar, at various times, in a dithyrambic tone, calling him "divine Julius" (149) and declaring that he is "the only generous man." and truly great who has ever lived "(94). He adds that one is tempted to "despair" when one thinks of the "brutes" who murdered this unique being. Obviously, the drama of Calvary does not seem worthy of mention. Proof of this is the passage in which he seeks to illustrate the affirmation that the just suffers here below. "Virtue," he writes, "is vain. In the past, there is no more moving example than that of Danae, two thousand years ago, when bad people threw her into a precipice, to punish her for denouncing their plot against Sophron (p. 72). Thus, in the eyes of our author, this forgotten epistle of Greek antiquity eclipses, rather annihilates, the cross of Golgotha.

It is to say that our author reasons as could reason a pagan of Athens; he stands resolutely outside the beam of light radiating from the Messiah. Is not this a mistake of tactics? First, he seems to dread his argument, the meeting of Jesus. Then, he deprives himself of all the strength he has drawn, in favor of his melancholy thesis, in an atheistic interpretation of the final abandonment of Christ, the great misunderstood, the great vanquished.

Jefferies, by his prodigious power of admiration for nature, has approached the doctrine of creation; by his unheard-of fervour of hope for future humanity, he turned to the doctrine of consummation. But how sad it must be that the doctrine of redemption, that is to say, simply the contemplation of Jesus Christ, is absent, radically, from his prestigious work!

When I see this gap, or rather this gaping hole, in the thought of our author, I am no longer surprised at his grave and poignant atheism. Jesus Christ alone leads to the Father. What did I say? the Savior is so necessary to the human being that a Christian woman could write: "If I did not believe in God, I would still believe in Jesus Christ. I do not see who else to follow. He answers everything by his very silence, sometimes. I have always loved him; and, of course, how to go to the Father, if not by him? When I look at these cold and glittering nights, with this moonlight that illuminates everything indifferently and without heat: the bones of the caravans at the Pamir, the tombs of the kings of the Zambezi surrounded by trees, the hunts of tigers in the jungle, torments polar explorers who eat their boots and die on the snow — and the working-class households where the man, if he does not drink, extends his members of the convict thinking of all the urgent expenses which will not be made, where the pale, angry woman stands up for the last screaming child — and the white crosses in the black cemeteries — and the giraffes who graze the mimosa — when I look at the night, the loneliness of our little globe of nothing, which circulates in the swarming of the stars, seems to me very bitter and irremediable. (Nov. 21, 1902.)

Which of us can escape, on a beautiful November night, to intuitions of this kind, icy, deadly? And what become, then, without Jesus Christ? In the name of observation, as we have seen, there are cases in which consciousness protests against Providence and omniscience in history, there are cases in which intelligence protests against immanence and omnipresence in nature; and then, not only do we see the transcendent and all-powerful God waver, but the personal God, the God of love, turns pale. In these cases, do not hesitate: salvation is in Jesus. In favor of God, let's put the cross in the balance, as Brennus threw his sword. The only-begotten Son breathed in the fellowship of the heavenly Father; let us rely on his experience,

it is valid for all ages; it is the doctrine of substitution in another form: beside the "vicarious satisfaction", there is also the vicarious affirmation. In Jesus, I believe in God.

Yes, to believe in God is to cry, "Abba! Father! By the Holy Spirit, in a close moral union with the Savior. It is to adopt, in the face of mystery, a filial attitude, that is to say, not blind submission, but of confidence. It is to deny that the hieroglyphics of nature and history are indecipherable; it is vaguely perceived in the general and reassuring sense: the primacy of practical Reason, personal holiness, fraternal love, hope; life is stronger than death; we walk towards deliverance; Progress is Redemption.

In the end, no hypothesis covers reality. There remains an unexplained surplus. The materialistic hypothesis does not explain the cosmos; the spiritualistic hypothesis does not explain chaos. The human body, human history, provides strong arguments for both atheism and deism.

But the Christian is the man who chooses, between the two hypotheses, the one that justifies the life and death of Jesus Christ, the one that legitimizes his moral and social triumph, and the conscience in us, and the Church outside of us, and the unswerving hope of the Kingdom of God.

After all, the Bible contains only a practical doctrine of redemption. The Christian does not explain the world, he triumphs over the world. He repeats with the apostle: "The victory that triumphed over the world is our faith."

Here is the sober and rich message, cautious on the metaphysical ground, enthusiastic in the spiritual field, which we must bring to our atheistic brothers. Be certain that they will welcome this message as good news, as a joyful gospel, insofar as their atheism was truly based on religious grounds.

I do not want to guarantee that for Jefferies himself. A painter who was with him, during the days preceding his untimely death, wrote these precocious lines in their brevity; you will know how to weigh the value. "His wife," writes the artist, "said that for a long time they had spent their time praying together and reading the story of St. Luke. Almost the last intelligible words he uttered were these: 'Yes, yes, it is so. Help me, Lord, for Jesus' sake!'[3] I have spoken.

imp. P. Attinger, Neuchàtel

[3] *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies,* by Walter Besant.