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BELIEFS AND OPINIONS

OF

A UNITARIAN.

BY THE REV.

S. FLETCHER WILLIAMS,

Joint Editor of the "Unitarian Herald."

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The form in which the Papers originally appeared, at considerable intervals of time, will account for the repetition, here and there, of phrases which it has not been deemed necessary to alter.

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S. FLETCHER WILLIAMS.

BIRMINGHAM,

April, 1885.

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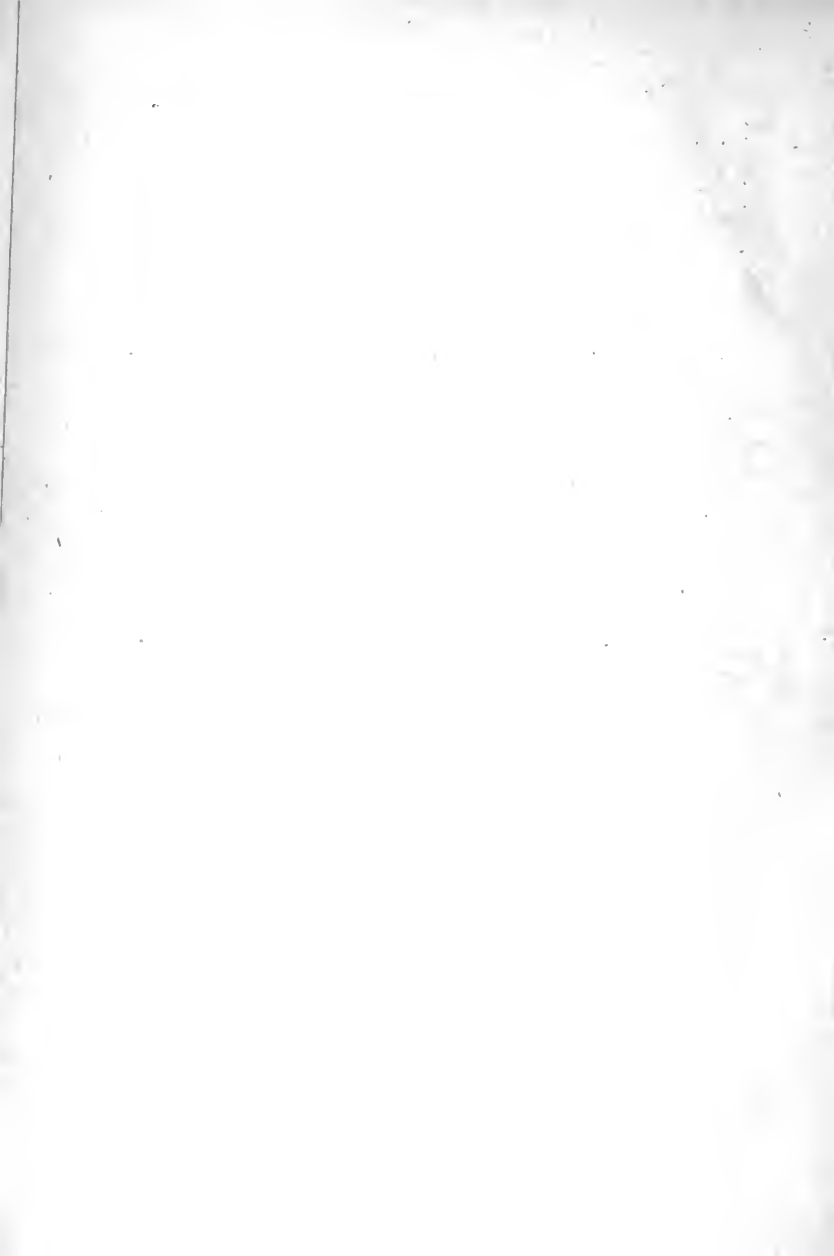
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Beliefs and Opinions of a Unitarian.

SCEPTICISM IN RELATION TO RELIGION.*

MODERN scepticism is fascinated with the methods of science. It glories in the fact that all things in nature can be subjected to material tests. It is proud of those triumphs which have brought the most ethereal of things within the range of physical experiment. It says: The earth, with its wondrous story; the sea, with its priceless treasures; the air, with its delicate secrets; the heavens, with their great array of worlds—all these science can bring before you in visible form, and prove them by the evidence of sight, touch, and taste. But in all the phenomena of nature no form of God is ever to be seen by the most intense gaze; within all the convolutions of the brain no Soul ever presents itself to the most earnest seeker for that entity; beyond all worlds, in the depths of infinite space, no heaven ever opens on the most rapt vision. You may search in flower's gentle blossom or in planet's overwhelming splendour, in the quiet, tender beauty of the glen or in the grand sweep of earth and sky that spreads before you on mountain's summit, but God does not appear, and your cry for Him dies away in the vast void. You may dissect the human brain with microscopic minuteness, but you will find no light radiating from any of its cells into the penetralia of soul, for a veil covers them at which the most piercing inspection of the keenest-sighted physiologist, with a microscope of the highest power, becomes helpless. You may turn your telescope to world after world, in endless succession, and fail to discover not only where heaven is, but where the last orb glimmers on the skirts of space. God, the Soul, the Future—where are they, that we may see and believe?

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, September 19th, 1879.

There cannot be any hope of meeting this kind of scepticism until both Sceptics and Theists come to a clear understanding as to the nature of the evidence which alone is available in regard to things spiritual. There are Sceptics who demand that the existence of God, of a spiritual essence in man, of a future life, shall be brought within the sphere of external observation. They will be content with nothing less than such certainty as is found in mathematics and in experiments of physical science which have been verified in the laboratory over and over again. But such a demonstration of the fundamental realities of religion cannot be given. Unless, then, we first of all agree what reasoning can do, and what it cannot do, respecting the verities of God, a soul in man, and a life beyond the grave, all subsequent inquiry will be perfectly unavailing.

Reasoning is divided into two kinds—mathematical or demonstrative, and moral or probable. Mathematical reasoning demonstrates its conclusions. By the constitution of the human mind we are unable to resist them. To doubt or to deny them would be an absurdity. We should do violence to the laws of the mind if we contradicted, say, the proposition that twice two are four, or if we disputed the statement that any two things which are like a third thing must be like each other. But it is an essential characteristic of moral reasoning that it is in the field of probability: and in the field of probability there is always room for doubt. Here there are questions on which we cannot, be the barrier we rear never so strong, prevent the entrance of scepticism. Was there ever such a person as Oliver Cromwell or Napoleon Bonaparte? Was there ever such a person as the Apostle Paul? Do we exist? Does God exist? Are we bodies and souls, or only bodies with thought and love, conscience and reason, that are but vibrations of a little grey pulp of the brain? When we go to the grave does all that constitutes the personality I call *I*, *myself*, all that makes the conscious, thinking subject dissolve into carbon and hydrogen; or do the capacities of knowledge and love, and all that makes the soul, pass into a life-

that shall remain as a self-conscious individuality when the heavens depart as a scroll that is rolled together? These are all questions utterly and for ever incapable of demonstration. They must be settled by moral reasoning. So far as our capacity for comprehending them is concerned, they belong to an entirely different order of truths to the ultimate demonstrations of physics. Neither the belief nor the disbelief of them, in other words, neither Theism nor Atheism, is capable of that demonstrative evidence which it is absolutely impossible to question. It is always just possible that they may be otherwise than we conceive them to be. They belong to a class of truths which Aristotle called contingent truths—things which it is possible to conceive existing in another form from that in which we think them now. We can only conclude them to be true or false as the larger amount of probability can be shown for them or urged against them. Theist and Sceptic must here bow to the same condition: neither can repose upon demonstration: each is left to base the one his affirmation, the other his negation, upon probability.

But let us guard against a plausible and mischievous inference from this. It may be alleged, it is frequently alleged, that moral reasoning is untrustworthy because it cannot demonstrate its conclusions beyond all possibility of doubt or disputation. We reply that a thing for which twenty solid reasons can be given, and against which only ten weak and dubious objections can be raised, rests upon an amount and a quality of evidence which gives to it the highest moral certainty that the subject admits. It is as assuredly true as that twice three are not seven but six, and that all angles of an equal-sided triangle are not unequal but equal. Moral reasoning is as rationally conclusive as mathematical. The moral demonstration that Napoleon Bonaparte lived and ruled, fought, was defeated and imprisoned, is so sufficient that it is as conclusive, practically, for the purposes of history and for the formation of an opinion on the history of modern Europe, as the mathematical demonstration of any of the problems of Euclid. Is there a Supreme Spiritual Being? Is there in man a

spiritual essence to which belong conscience, will, reason, love, which chemical analysis cannot detect and is known only to consciousness, which does not fade when the body returns to the dust but passes into fuller life? Is it a law of the inner world that man should constantly be rising higher in the accumulation of knowledge, in the ennoblement of his moral powers, in the breadth and beauty of his spiritual character? And is it religion alone which can elevate to the highest the powers that are in him, which alone can provide for the fullest energy and ensure the wealthiest development of his faculties? Those are truths which, though they cannot be scientifically demonstrated, are established by moral evidence which gives the assurance of certainty.

If then you come to me and affirm that you cannot believe anything unless it can be subjected to scientific tests, I reply: You are asking for what you cannot receive, and for what also you cannot give, in proof of your negations. You cannot have mathematical certainty for moral truths, and to insist upon it is illogical; nor can you supply it to establish your denials, and to pretend to do so is to discredit your honesty, discernment, and intelligence. You must take it that moral realities are incapable of the same sort of proof as the realities of physical science. But do not, therefore, rush to the rash conclusion that they are incapable of any proof. No: they are sustained by evidence of the very strongest moral character—evidence that inheres in the heart of the whole course of the history of mankind, and evidence, therefore, that you are not entitled to reject as worthless unless you are prepared boldly to subvert that history, or to condemn the grand primal forces of its development as delusions and snares. It is in human nature, that man has always been compelled, and will be compelled to the end, to reach his highest conclusions by the evidence of probability; and as well in the realms of politics, commerce, and social life as in the realms of religion, to act on the grounds of probability.

BELIEFS OF A UNITARIAN.*



I BELIEVE that it is the God-given right and duty of every human being to form his own creed,—a right which no person can take away,—a duty which cannot be delegated to any other. I believe that it is the duty of all to respect and guard him in the exercise of that right.

I believe that the voice of God in the soul of man is for the individual the supreme law, the highest authority, the final arbiter ; and that Church, Book, Person are authoritative only so far as they “show God in me” ; only so far as they command the moral sentiment ; only so far as they are charged with the conviction of truth to that faculty wherewith we judge of ourselves what is right.

I believe that not creed but character, not profession but life, determines standing as a Christian or as a child of God. Christ did not see fit to prescribe a creed, or to insist upon any theological dogmas as the essentials of religion. He taught theology, if at all, only incidentally. But he earnestly inculcated divine principles of conduct, speech, temper, thought, insisting upon obedience to them as the essentials of religion. Unitarians, therefore, deem it the wisest and truest course for all who would guide and help men in the way of salvation to do as the Great Teacher did, that is, to urge upon men the strictest obedience to all the laws of righteousness, purity, and benevolence ; leaving theological dogmas, which have ever been, and may ever be, matters of disputation, to be studied by such persons as have time and inclination to study them, according to them individually

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, July 13th, 1883.

the right to believe whatever they may be fully persuaded is true. Unitarians have always maintained that not what a man professes to believe, but the principles upon which he habitually acts, will show whether he is, or is not, a true child of our Heavenly Father. The man who habitually "reveres God and acts righteously," who "does justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with God," who, "denies all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and lives soberly, righteously, and godly in the world," who translates into his daily life and conduct the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, who embodies the principles of the divine judgment as expressed by Christ in Matthew xxv., 34-40,—that man, whatever may be his opinions, has attained to a real Christian life. He is accepted with God, and should be accepted by all his brethren on earth.

I believe that God is the Universal Father, absolutely wise, just, and good, immanent in His universe, and open always to the access of all His children. I believe in God, not as an out-dwelling God, separated from the universe, leaving it like a machine worked by acts of incoming will, but as an indwelling spirit, the Life of all that is, present in every atom of matter and in every throb of spirit, even as to Christ it was God who was in the sparrow's fall, and the lily's beauty, in the little child's heavenly face, in the mother's tenderness, in the father's care and providence: God above all, beneath all, within us all.

I believe that God has been manifest in the flesh in holy men and saintly women, saviours and redeemers of the race, since the world began, but most richly and clearly in Jesus Christ, who is the "chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely," who is, with us, one of God's children—the holiest and the best; whose life, character, and teachings are a revelation of and from God; but I am wholly unable to conceive of him as identical with that Being who fills immensity. "The more I think of Jesus *as a man*, the more commanding seems his stature, the more rapt his vision, the more unique and glorious his out-look on the

spiritual life of our humanity. But his highest glory pales before my faintest thought of God. . . . And nothing is so dishonourable to him, so prejudicial to his fame, as to claim for him a glory infinitely greater than the glory which he actually wore. For he is made to seem less than he was by claiming for him such stupendous attributes. The finest human panoply is but a meagre outfit for a God. If Jesus was God, he must be measured as God. And from my heart I pity that man or woman whose ideal standards of the Infinite are so undeveloped that they are met and satisfied by the person of the historical Jesus, although he was so grand in his enthusiasm, so wonderful in his tenderness, so mighty in his inspiration."* I believe that this vital realization of Christ *as a man* makes upon us the largest demand for the religion of daily life, as it calls upon us to reproduce Christ's character, instead of placing that character out of the range of imitableness by regarding it as an extra-human, or as a superhuman phenomenon.

I believe that the Old and New Testaments are inestimably precious, as the grandest chapters in the religious history of the human race; but I cannot persuade myself that they are infallible, and I fail to find in them any claim to such a character. Believing in the law of universal inspiration, I dare not confine the word of God to any book or any time, and I dare believe that for those who listen there are still oracular replies.

I believe that man is by nature and purpose God's child, and in training by the discipline of life for holiness, blessedness, heaven on earth, and heaven beyond the grave. With Christ, Unitarianism reverences the human soul,—sees in it, beneath all taint and sin, something sacred,—sees in it, even if weak and corrupted, amazing significance and preciousness,—sees in it the possibility of the glory of a perfected humanity.

I believe that punishment is corrective, not vindictive,—

* Rev. J. W. Chadwick.

inseparable, therefore, from sin, and to be borne by no substitute: no more eternal, therefore, than sin is eternal. I believe that moral law operates infallibly for the punishment of sin; that it operates, however, not for purposes of retribution only, but for purposes of reformation also; that, therefore, in its chastisements God has in view the restoration to obedience of the chastised; and that, at last, He will banish sin and misery from the hearts of all His children and from every region of the universe.

While holding my own convictions and the right of every man to interpret Christianity according to his own conscience, I gladly acknowledge and welcome the Christian spirit of life under all the forms of Christian confession; yea, and even non-Christian, for I hold, with Peter, that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him." I believe it is a grand truth that men of all churches, sects, and faiths, within and outside of Christendom, among all races, nations, and times, may and do love God in loving the Highest they see, and will find their way to heaven at last with the help of pure hearts and lives.

I am a Unitarian because, of all other forms of religious faith and of all other Christian churches, Unitarianism is the only form and the only church which implicitly and explicitly, fully and unequivocally, embrace these beliefs; and because, also, the aim of Unitarianism is (1) to maintain, deepen, and extend the unity of the spirit in diversity of form, and (2) to establish the kingdom of God on earth by promoting righteousness—personal, social, political, universal,—as the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, of true religion, essential to real salvation, real progress, real happiness.

BELIEFS ABOUT THE BIBLE.*



I.

TWO ERRONEOUS VIEWS.

THE word Bible comes to us from a Greek term, which is nearly equivalent to our Saxon word "book." Before the fifth century of the Christian era the collection of works now called the Bible was referred to as "The Writings" or "The Scriptures," these terms being often prefaced by the adjectives "holy" or "sacred" to indicate the religious nature of the subjects, and the religious uses and purposes for which the works were employed. But in the fifth century Chrysostom, for the first time, called these writings *Ta Biblia*, the books. It is a decided disadvantage to a true estimate of them that this plural form has been replaced by the singular *To Biblion*, the book, for this singular form makes us think of the Bible as one book, whereas the plural used by St. Chrysostom expresses the fact that it is not one book, but many,—a collection of books, a library, a vast literature.

But let us not suppose that ours is the only Bible. All the great ethnic religions are alike in this, that they have these sacred writings, or scriptures. They belong to the earlier stages of the religion; they give some account of its origin; and they are imbued with its leading ethical ideas. They were written for the present more than for posterity. But the great religious movements which they record came of new and deeper inspirations, and posterity always recognises this; and so gathers up the scattered words of the

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, July 27th, Aug. 3rd, 10th, 17th, 1883.

prophet, poet and seer. These writings not only report the advance thus made, but also tend to secure and establish it. They familiarize the many with the thought of the few; they become endeared to the popular heart; and they give shape to the later religious thought and life of the people. And so the Parsee has his Zend Avesta,—the Hindoo his Vedas,—the Chinaman his Kings,—the follower of Mohammed his Koran,—while we of Christendom have inherited our Bible. What is it, and how are we to regard it?

Two opposite views of the Bible are current to-day, and both are equally blind to its beauty and worth. According to the first the Bible is infallible. In all respects it is unadulterated truth. It is *absolute* and *final* authority *on all subjects* of which it treats. Men held the pen, but God moved the fingers. They were simply blind instruments, at most amanuenses, writing from the dictation of the Holy Spirit,—as pipes for water, or trumpets for sound, to carry the divine thought into the human mind. From beginning to end it is one, and from one infallible source. There can be no mistake in the record, no error in the teaching. Private judgment may interpret its teachings, but it must abide by that interpretation, and it is forestalled when it reaches a certain point, because all else—reason, science, experience, investigation—must yield to the prior assumption, that no error can be found in it. When you read Herodotus or Livy, you may separate the probable from the improbable; but if the historian be a Hebrew instead of a Greek or Roman, you have no longer this liberty. When you study the world's great moralists, ancient or modern, outside of Palestine, you may accept or reject with a free conscience. But when you turn to the Bible, it is sacred from touch or challenge. You may reject Seneca, but you must accept Solomon. You may differ from Plato, but you must agree with Paul. You may discredit the myths of Livy, but it is an act of proud reason or dangerous doubt to suspect those of Luke. In short, the Bible, historically, ethically, scientifically, doctrinally, is infallibly inspired.

The second view is a reaction from this. If you tell me that the sky is clear, and I see a single cloud upon it, I naturally point to the cloud, though all the rest be heavenly blue. If you insist that the flower is perfect, and I discover one petal lacking, my attention is rivetted to that imperfection. Just so with this reactionary view of the Bible. When one side insisted on its infallibility, the other fastened on its faults. When one claimed perfect agreement, the other dwelt upon its discrepancies. When one asserted the absolute purity of its moral teaching, as proof of a super-human origin, the other quoted Jehovah's direction to departing Israel to rob the Egyptians—or Joshua's God-commanded slaughter of the innocents—or the cruel curses of David upon his enemies. When one side affirmed the *universal character* of the *whole Bible*, as a fixed standard for all time, the other pointed to its many manifest limitations both to place and to time.

And so it is that this reaction strongly leads to a depreciation of the Bible, as unjust and as far from the truth as is the belief in its infallibility. Nothing has done its influence more harm than the imputation of an equal and direct divine authorship to its every chapter and verse. Its worst foes have been among its most zealous defenders, and have driven many into doubt and scepticism by claiming undue authority for every part of it. In the last century it was common for Christian apologists to vindicate their extravagant claims for the Jewish and Christian writings by comparing *the best* teachings from *these* with the *worst* teachings from other ethnic Scriptures. To-day the tables are turned by a class of men who adopt the same method in order to reduce the Bible of Christendom below the Bibles of the non-Christian races. Not long ago I met with a debater of this kind, who wished to convince me of the superiority of the Koran to the Bible. How did he try to prove it? By quoting some of the *finest* sentences of the Koran side by side with the most objectionable things of the Old Testament. I asked him whether he thought it fair to argue from

data so narrow and limited? Had he compared the Koran *as a whole* with the Bible *as a whole*? No. Had he ever read the Koran through? No. Not only had he passed a sweeping and an indiscriminating condemnation on the Bible—compared with a book he had never once carefully studied, but he had never seen a copy of the Koran! Upon what basis, then, had he formed so decided a judgment upon such an important matter? Simply on contrasts he had read of in the organs of Secularism. There are men of this type, with the merest smattering of knowledge of Moham-medan, Chinese, and Persian Scriptures, men primed with a few choice passages of this sacred lore which they have cribbed from a chance lecture or some newspaper corner, who go off at the slightest provocation into disparagement of the Bible, and bespatter the hearers with the froth of their shallow attainment. As Infallibilists see *no beauty* in the Scriptures of other religions, so those at the opposite pole depreciate the Bible, are blind to its beauties, do not recognise its immense value even as an embodied literature, and ignore its power for good in the past and to-day. They see the one imperfect petal, not the beautiful flower—they see the single cloud, not the blue sky. They catch at the faults, and lose sight of the splendid faith of those steadfast men of old whose work and words the Bible has recorded.

These are two views of the Bible widely prevalent to-day. Both are false and artificial; both are the product of mere partisan spirit. The true view is far from either, and comes from no compromise of the two, but from a better understanding of the origin of our Bible, and of its intrinsic worth and purpose.

II.

THE BIBLE NOT A UNIT.

There is no more prolific source of error and misconception than the common habit of looking at the Bible as a unit—as one complete and perfect whole, from Genesis to Revelation. As long as men view the volume in this light, they will put legend and history, local opinions and universal principles, miracle and moral teaching, all on one level. If you doubt *one*, you endanger *all*. This is the natural effect of regarding the Bible as a unit—to discredit one part seems to invalidate the whole.

Now the Bible is *not* a unit, and is not so to be regarded.

I. It is not *one* in *authorship*. It is not the work of one mind, but of many minds. These men did not write with reference to each other, nor for the purpose of making a book. In our time, when publishers put forth an encyclopædia, they secure different scholars to contribute on special departments of knowledge with which they are most conversant. But the Bible writers wrote what they did, whether hymns or histories, poems or prophecies, maxims or moral appeals, independently and alone; and posterity gradually gathered them up and made a collection of them. Of many books of the Bible we do not know who were the authors. There is no tradition of them even. This fact shows that the writings were not at once received into the popular regard, but long after, when authorship was a matter of doubt. Thus the Pentateuch is no longer regarded by scholars as the work of Moses, but as a later compilation by different hands. We do not know who wrote the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Judges, that wonderful book of Job, the last third of Isaiah, many of the Psalms, and other parts of our Bible. Turning to the New Testament, opinion is divided upon the authorship of the Fourth Gospel; and the other three, *as they now stand*, are probably not the work of the men whose names they bear, but compilations

from writings left by Matthew, Mark, and Luke ; while Luke himself tells us in his first chapter, in words full of meaning, that he founded his narrative on a three-fold basis : (1) in part, on the general faith of the church ; (2) in part, on written documents ; (3) in part, also, on oral testimony. Who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews is a matter of conjecture ; and the origin of several of the catholic epistles is to-day uncertain.

Thus we have not one mind but many minds represented in the Bible — with a variety of belief and sentiment ; chronicler and historian, prophet and preacher, psalmist and poet all together.

2. The Bible is not *one* in respect of *time*. What has been said of authorship has shown this. At least a thousand years passed while these writings were being formed and collected ; and if Moses wrote the Psalm attributed to him (90th), or any fragment of the Pentateuch, we may extend the period, from the earliest composition to the latest, to 1500 years ! But say only a thousand years. What an abundant scope for change of ideas ! Not a thousand years have passed since Alfred the Great founded modern England. The American Republic has seen but a century. It is only two centuries and a half since the “ Mayflower ” sailed from Plymouth Bay. It is less than four since Columbus sailed the unknown seas to open a new route to India, and found America on his way. Not a century has gone by since the first British settlement was made in Australia, midst the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. A hundred and fifty years ago where was the British Empire in India ? England’s *political* power there was then but beginning. A thousand years is a long time ! There is ample room, in so long a period, for modifications of thought, for growth, for change, for putting off old things and putting on new things. Is the human mind likely to stand still while ten hundred years roll by ? Impossible ! And this consideration, together with the diversity of authorship already mentioned, leads to another point.

3. The Bible is not *one* in respect of *ideas*. I hold, with a faith that grows stronger the more I read it, with a reverence that deepens as the permanent in it becomes detached from the temporary, that it is a guide in the formation of dispositions, in the regulation of conduct and character, in the founding of hope for this life and for the life which is to come. In all these ways, about which all honest men do in the main agree, it is an instructor, an enlightener, an inspirer. It sets forth the nature of good and evil, of virtue and vice, of sin and holiness, of goodness and ungodliness. It points out the elements of character needful for the highest manhood. It teaches how man's hungering and thirsting after God have grown intenser age after age; and how Jesus Christ presents Him, in so far as men can comprehend Him by manifestations in human experience. It reveals the method of recuperation in moral disorders. It opens to us the spiritual relations which subsist between the human soul and the divine spirit. It is a book of enlightenment in respect to human life and destiny. It concerns itself not much with speculation, but a great deal with character and conduct. No man need err who honestly searches it for truths which will renew his life. If he would express remorse, gratitude, aspiration, there are the Psalms. If he wish to know the noblest qualities of soul, there are the Beatitudes. If he desire the loftiest ideal of life, there is the Sermon on the Mount. If he would know what is the Divine disposition, there is Jesus Christ. And if he would overcome the fear of death, he may hear the Apostle at the grave's mouth chanting with an unquivering, a jubilant voice, a sublime psalm of victory for himself, and for all who have learned the royal law of love.

But while we draw from it this strength and comfort, this light and hope, I see that there is no such unity in it as is generally attributed to it. There are *historical* disagreements. There are *different shadings* of moral beliefs. There is diversity in the representations of God. There is *variety* of doctrine as to *man's destiny*. There is difference of

opinion upon the obligation of religious observances, and their application to life. Why should I dwell upon these points? Are they not familiar to every candid student of the Bible? No one denies them, except in defence of a theory of infallibility: no one dwells upon them, except in denial of that theory. It is painful to enumerate the differences and difficulties to be found in the Scripture narratives. But perplexities and misgivings are such *only* and *entirely* in view of the notion of the infallibility and unity of all the miscellaneous contents of the Bible. In view of what I regard as a more just and more healthy theory of the Bible, they are trivial and harmless.

In the earlier writings of the Old Testament we find representations of God as a God of fear, and as a jealous tyrant. He himself instigates to the crimes he condemns. He hardens men's hearts in order to signalize his glory by punishing them. He puts a lying spirit into the mouth of his own prophets, and so lays a trap for his people which they could not escape. He gives quails to destroy men, and appoints statutes that were "not good," in order to induce them "to pass their sons through the fire," and for the express purpose of making them desolate. God commands, "Thou shalt not kill," but elsewhere he is represented as killing all the first-born of Egypt. He is described as sanctioning the sacrificial murders of Jephthah. He is pourtrayed as commending Samuel when he hews Agag in pieces "before Him." He is delineated as approving the murders committed by Elijah when he slaughters the priests of Baal in the deep clefts of the Kishon. He is pictured as supporting the killing of the sons of Saul by the Gibeonites. He is set forth as encouraging that strange and wholesale carnage commanded by Moses, in which three thousand people fell in one day. "Thou shalt not steal," God says to Moses, yet he bids the Israelites to steal from the Egyptians whatever they could obtain before leaving the land. The Levitical law is very precise as to religious rites and observances; the prophets make light of them. God appears to

Moses and the patriarchs "face to face," yet he is invisible and "past finding out," and later it is said, "No man hath seen God at any time." In the earlier records God is represented as the national divinity, and is compared with the gods of other nations. But later he is made the one universal Father, and comparison is no longer possible. It was not the brotherhood and equal felicity of all nations that the Old Testament announced, it was their subjugation to the Jews. What virtue known and recognised among men, except the virtue of killing multitudes of Gentiles for the honour and safety of the children of Israel, can we find in the book of Esther—that strange book of which Professor Robertson Smith has written that it is a fiction, and must sink to the rank of an apochryphal production? Is there a hint in the Old Testament that David was cruel and culpable in torturing the patriotic defenders of Rabbah? Does not even Isaiah tell us that the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is to be signalized by the flying of the ransomed people upon Moab and Ammon to avenge old wrongs? There was no religion of universal brotherhood until Jesus came. David curses his enemies in prolonged and fearful imprecations which make the blood run cold. Jesus prays for his enemies, and tells us to bless them that curse us, and do good to them that hate us. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes is a perfect sceptic upon immortality; Paul is sure of life to come. The Pentateuch teaches simply a temporal and material reward and a temporal and material retribution; the book of Job is written with the *one* aim of disproving this.

Now, shall we deny our own perceptions, and say there is no discrepancy, no difference, no development in all this? Or, shall we not say that there *is* diversity, there are different outlooks, there are change, variety, and development underlying all? Shall we not adopt the only way there is of putting any intelligible construction on these incongruities, by supposing that our present Bible presents to us, in one simultaneous view, the conceptions of different ages; that

among the Hebrews as among other nations, there was a progressive development of ideas about God and the mode of worshipping Him ?

And this is just what we might expect. It finds an easy explanation in the fact already pointed out, namely, that these writings are not a unit ; they are not one complete and perfect book, but a collection of books, extending over centuries of a nation's history, and showing, therefore, the religious phases through which the nation passed. They are the outlook, not of one mind, but of many minds, and so present a great variety of feelings and of thoughts. They belong, not to one age, but to many ages, and each is a mirror of the time in which it had its birth.

Until people realize this fact, they cannot rightly understand the Bible. They will be perplexed in reading it. They will be disturbed by discrepancies, and wonder what they mean. But these things once understood, all is made plain. You are not obliged to reconcile differences. You are not compelled to accept as absolute (but only as historical) truth, ideas of God and of life that fall short of your own reason and conscience. To doubt one part is not to disparage all the rest. To reject David's bitter curses upon his enemies is not to be disloyal but rather to be faithful to the spirit of Jesus. You welcome all that to you seems good and true,—all that raises you above your ordinary level. You receive, as coming from God, the words which at the same time humble and uplift you. You cleave with warm heart to the narratives, to the exhortations, to the parables which disclose to you your own heart with its wants, its aspirations, its realities ; which clothe with winsomeness the character of Christ with his inviting sanctity and conquering pity, and which kindle in you a yearning and a resolve to reproduce his character in your own life. In this way you make the Bible suggestive, helpful, real, practical to you ; and in this way you learn that the divine and permanent elements in it always have exceeded, now exceed, and will always be felt as exceeding its human and transient elements.

III.

THE BIBLE INFALLIBILITY DOGMA.

The infallibility of the Bible is a comparatively modern doctrine. It belongs to the Reformation, and was adopted by early Protestantism when the latter dropped the infallibility of the Church as represented by her Councils. Even the old Talmudists never applied it to more than the Pentateuch. The early Christian Fathers were much more free in this respect than the stricter sects of to-day. The doctrine is nowhere taught in the Bible. Jesus said, "Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?" He appealed to his hearers to judge of *moral truth* just as they judged of the practical affairs of every day life. Paul, whose letters make a third of the New Testament, submitted what he said to the judgment of those to whom he wrote. He spoke "as to wise men," and left them to judge of his words.

But when we say that the contents of the Bible do not set up any claims to infallibility for themselves, but submit themselves to our conscience and reason, we are reminded of the passage in the New Testament, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and of the frequent use in the Old Testament of the solemn, emphatic phrases, "Thus saith the Lord," "And God said," "God spake these words and said."

I turn first to the verse in the New Testament. It is in II. Tim. iii. 16. Opening the Revised Version the passage reads thus: "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." Thus read, the passage almost interprets itself. What does the writer of it mean? He means that those Scriptures or writings which had been Timothy's guide and instructor in the religious life in his youth, would now be his most profitable or useful help in his public teaching. Those Scriptures or writings which Timothy's adviser had in view did not mean the *whole of our Bible*, for the

New Testament was *not then* in existence. The Scriptures in his mind were the older or Hebrew writings. The term "Scripture," employed by an Israelite when speaking to Israelites signified, and could signify, nothing else than the collection referred to as the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

How, then, can it be pretended that the words of the passage refer to our present Bible? To one-third of that Bible the words cannot refer; for the New Testament as a collection did not then exist. It follows, necessarily, that the writer in no way alludes to what we call the New Testament. Most, if not all, of its books were beyond the range of his vision, for they had not then seen the light. I submit that it is neither respectful to Timothy's pastoral counsellor, nor to the Bible in general, nor to the Church of Christ, nor to the cause of truth, to stretch out the line of the reference and application of these words so far beyond what was originally seen and intended. If such a liberty may be taken on literary subjects, we must bid farewell to accuracy; and when accuracy is gone, certainty must not be looked for.

I turn to the phrases in the Old Testament, "Thus saith the Lord," "God spake these words." Do these expressions mean that God spoke audibly in the air the words that have been written down? Do they not refer to the burning conviction within, which was to the prophets the divine voice? Are they not common Eastern modes of speech to express the fervent feeling and deep persuasion of the Eastern mind? On this point some most interesting facts are given by Sir Samuel Baker in his book on the "Nile Tributaries." "He says the conversation of the Arabs is in the exact style of the Old Testament. The name of God is coupled with every trifling incident in life. Should famine afflict the country, it is expressed in the stern language of the Old Testament: 'The Lord has sent a grievous famine upon the land,' or 'The Lord called for a famine, and it came upon the land.' Should the cattle fall sick, it is considered to be an affliction by divine command; or should the flocks

prosper and multiply, the prosperity is attributed to divine interference. . . . This striking likeness to the descriptions of the Old Testament is most interesting to a traveller living among these people. With the Bible in one hand, and these unchanged tribes before the eyes, there is a thrilling illustration of the sacred records; the past becomes the present; the veil of 3000 years is raised, and the living picture is a witness to the exactness of the historical description. At the same time there is a light thrown upon many obscure passages in the Old Testament by the experience of the present customs and figures of speech of the Arabs; which are exactly like those that were in common use at the periods described. . . . Should the present history of the country be written by an Arab scribe, the style of the description would be purely that of the Old Testament, and the various calamities or the good fortunes that have, in the course of nature, befallen both the tribes and individuals, would be recounted either as special visitations of divine wrath, or as blessings for good deeds performed. If in a dream a particular course of action is suggested, the Arab believes that God has *spoken* and directed him. The Arab scribe or historian would describe the event as the 'voice of the Lord' having spoken to the person; or that God appeared in a dream to him, and 'said,' etc. Thus much allowance would be necessary on the part of a European reader for the figurative ideas and expressions of the people."

Thus we see that, while the Bible records the experience of the wisest and best of men of the past in their search after truth, it is hard in these Oriental idioms and metaphors to discover proof of the infallibility which is claimed for it, but which it does not claim for itself.

Indeed, I must go on to observe this: a fact too commonly lost sight of in this modern exaltation of the Scriptures above our power to question their record or dissent from their doctrines: as a matter of *fact* men *have judged* the Bible all along. How did the collection come together?

Who said what books should be received and what should not? Who compiled the Bible?

All this was done by men—by the judgment of individual scholars, and by the decision of church councils. They judged the Bible when they said what should form a part of it and what should not. Moreover on several books, both of the Old and of the New Testament, opinion has never been unanimous, and it is still divided to-day. Were I to enter into detail as to how the early Fathers differed in their judgment of several books; how the three great leaders, Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, disagreed in receiving and rejecting certain of the Epistles; how Origen put on one side New Testament writings now venerated as inspired, and accepted as inspired others which are now pronounced worthless; how Eusebius disputed the genuineness of some, and condemned others as spurious: were all this gone into, it would, perhaps, be a matter of some surprise to all but scholars and specialists. But, leaving out for a moment the judgment of *individuals*, look at that of Councils. These Councils professed to winnow the vast multitudes of writings. They assumed the right of reception or rejection, and they exercised it unsparingly. But mark what followed. The Councils were composed of men whose opinions varied, and the decisions of one were often reversed by those of another, and so books that are now regarded as of vital importance oscillated for centuries between the divine source and the human fountain. The Council of Laodicea accepted Baruch, but rejected other books of the Old Testament Apochrypha. A later Council at Carthage rejected Baruch, and also Lamentations, which is found in our Bible to-day, but accepted nearly all the Apochrypha.

Turning to the New Testament, we find two different canons in the Eastern and Western churches at the close of the second century. The *Western* churches rejected the Epistle of James, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and II. Peter, but accepted the "Revelation of Peter," now regarded as

spurious. The *Eastern* churches accepted Hebrews, but omitted Jude, II. of Peter, II. and III. of John, and the Revelation of John. The Catholic Church left the Canon of Scripture open down to the Council of Trent (1545-63). At that Council the so-called Apochryphal books of the Old Testament were admitted, and the canon was closed. But these are not accepted as canonical by the Protestant Churches. Yet had some of our theologians written in the 16th instead of the 19th century, they would have proved the fourteen books of the Apochrypha, now tacitly all but disowned in England, to have been the Word of God as much as the sixty-six writings which are at present believed to be the only divinely-inspired books.

Then, again, our present Bible has sixty-six books in all; the Douay or Roman Catholic version, seventy-three books: which is the Word of God? Either English Protestants have too little, or Irish Romanists have too much. And if quantity in such an issue is of any value, all Protestants are condemned by the Roman Catholic Church for lamentably "taking from the words of the Book."

IV.

THE REAL BIBLE.

Scholars and critics have always varied in their estimate of the value of different books of the Bible. Luther himself manifested a bold independence which strongly contrasts with the prevalent subjection of reason to tradition. According to him it is not tradition which has the right to determine the value of sacred books, but the greater or less emphasis with which they testify to Christ. "That which does not teach Christ," he says, "is not apostolic, even though said by Peter or Paul. On the contrary, that which preaches Christ is apostolic, though it proceed from Judas, Herod, or Pilate." Acting on this criterion he set the Fourth Gospel, I. John,

the Epistles of Paul, and I. Peter, above all the other books. On the other hand, he rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews; he called the Epistle of James, "an epistle of straw," because it is written in the defence of the doctrine of justification by works; he especially detested the book of Esther, and spoke of tossing it into the Elbe; and Revelation aroused in him a bad temper; he became vexed with the writer who, he said, "promises and threatens while uttering things so obscure that no one can tell what he means." Erasmus, the greatest scholar of his time, rejected Hebrews, Luke, and the Revelation of John.

There is much diversity among Biblical scholars now as in the past. Coleridge could not believe that the Book of Job throughout was dictated by an infallible intelligence. Dr. John Pye Smith, one of the most powerful opponents of Unitarianism, says that the three friends of Job, and sometimes Job himself, advance many positions which are not true in principle nor right in practice, still less inspired; and he admits that in Jeremiah, Jonah, and Habbakuk, there are utterances of sinful infirmity. Schleiermacher, Neander, Tholuck, Jowett, Thomas Arnold, Dean Stanley, with a large number of other divines, believe, as we do, that the Bible is rich in the most enlightening writings ever penned, that it is invaluable as a record of the religious progress of a marvellous people, and as enshrining the most radiant life ever seen on the earth; but they also, with us, feel unable to close their eyes to the fact that there are errors of fact and errors of opinion which, though not affecting the *real* value, exclude altogether the conception of infallibility on the part of the writers, or of pure, absolute truth in every part of their productions.

In view of these facts, how arbitrary and irrational it is to affirm infallibility of the Bible, and to forge from it fetters for the free mind of man in its search for truth!

Moreover: our Scriptures have not escaped the vicissitudes to which all treasures of literature have been exposed. As fragments have been lost from classic lore, so parts have

perished from these sacred books. In the Old Testament are quotations from earlier documents: scraps of history or fragments of song. In the book of Joshua and also in II. Samuel are references to the lost book of Jasher. We have two of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, but the one he wrote before these, and to which he alludes in the fifth chapter in the I. Epistle, has perished. Luke's Gospel begins with a reference to the many histories then current, few of which survived, though their substance was probably gathered into the Gospels. And then, too, even if the original manuscripts had been free from error, I must urge that, unless we are prepared to claim that all transcribers, copyists, and translators of the Bible, as well as the collectors who first pronounced on the canonical documents, were, each and all of them, divinely watched over, restrained, and helped, there must have been risk of error. We know that the risk has been realized. We know that the oldest manuscripts differ in details. We know that our own English translators made many mistakes, the correction of which a body of learned men of to-day has recently completed. What is the inference from these facts? It is that our Scriptures in their preservation have fared like other books. They have not been unerringly collected, nor supernaturally handed down.

In all this I have said nothing which any one may not find in any competent work on the Bible to-day. These are facts known to every Biblical student. But in the face of the facts people are taught on the one hand to worship the letter; to believe in it all as the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation; while, on the other hand, people who have felt and found the falsity of this belief are thrown into an attitude of antagonism, and lose all interest in, and care for, the literature which a nation has left to the world!

Is it not time that men should come to some sensible ideas on these matters? Is it not time that ministers should cease to make religion play a losing game against science, historical criticism, reason, and the common sense of men? Is it not time that Protestantism should base itself fearlessly

on the grand faith of the Apostle, that *we* are the temple of God, that the Spirit of God dwelleth in us, and, realizing that, should address itself directly to the soul, aided by the Bible, by all the wisdom of the past, and not less by the revealings of to-day?

But when we speak thus, timid persons ask, "How can I accept *this* and not *that*, a *part* and not *all*?" It is a question that presents no difficulty. You are answering it every day. By the sure instincts of your religious life, unconsciously, perhaps, but really, you make distinctions between the different writings and between different portions of these writings. If all are inspired, *each* and *every* part is of equal value, and any preference is a sin. But your heart is opened by the music of the greater number of the Psalms, because it feels the Spirit of God breathing in them, while you do not catch the divine melody in the Law and in the Proverbs, and have a difficulty in believing that there is a single note of it in Solomon's song. You read the lofty and ennobling utterances of Isaiah, because they touch and kindle you with their glow, but it is impossible to say as much of the genealogy of the twelve tribes in the Book of Chronicles, or of that of Jesus in Matthew and in Luke. You leave the allegories of Daniel that only bewilder, and the mysteries of Revelation that do not open out into light, for the parables of Jesus, which are always fresh and renewing as the morning dew, and which call forth the thoughts that unite the merciful heavens and the penitent earth. You feel that in Paul's description of charity there is the divine air, but you do not feel it in the nautical details of his voyage and shipwreck. You, in a word, prefer those portions which respond to the aspirations, the hopes, the fears in your own hearts, and which have a deeper power over you because they express what you know and feel. Thus, by a judgment founded on the nature of things, you decide for yourselves the distinction between what is divine and what is human, between what is the word of God, and what the word of man, between the pure religious character of the

one, and the necessary mixture in the other, based upon the human conditions of every written work.

If you turn to your Bible for statements of scientific fact you will make a mistake. Very little of science was known when it was written, and it puts its *real value* in peril if you insist upon its statements in relation to the methods of nature. But if in some hour when you are in sorrow—when God has touched you very close—you turn to some of its psalms of trust, they will come nearer to you than your sorrow, and stand between you and it; for they are the natural outpouring of the human heart. If you would kindle anew your own moral desires, the burning words of the old prophets may bring the fire.

Our Bible has become inwoven with the common life and thought. The *real* hold it has grows out of its appeal to the human heart. Its stories are familiar as household words. Its plain moralities are on children's lips. Its language has entered into the devout and common expression of religion. Its tales and traditions are reflected in our literature. Its psalms and hymns have around them the halo of age, and yet are bright with the beauty of youth, for they radiate the universal heart of man. We, to-day, with Moses of old, pause between the two mysteries of birth and death, and cry to Him who hath "been man's dwelling-place in all generations." With David we stand in reverence before the Presence from which there is no fleeing; with Jesus we walk through the shadow, and learn how the highest humanity escapes not the sorrow that makes it more divine.

This natural hold which our Bible has upon us it will always have; simply *because it is natural*. And when present false and artificial ideas about the book have been outgrown—when men come to believe that God is the light of *their* minds, and that the Inspiration of the Almighty *is now giving them* understanding—when they take hold of the promise of Jesus that *to them* has been sent the Spirit of Truth, to teach them all things, to lead them into *all* truth,

to abide with them for ever, aiding them to separate the true from the false, the permanent from the temporary, the universal from the local—then this *natural* hold of the Bible will be intensified; its true light will shine more brightly; its living inspiration will become more richly and powerfully felt.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE.—PROFESSOR MAX MULLER,
PROFESSOR MONIER WILLIAMS, AND DR. MARTINEAU
ON THE SACRED BOOKS OF THE EAST.

Do the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures stand on the same moral and religious level as the Veda of the Hindu, the Avesta of the Parsi, or the Tripitaka of the Buddhist? We have been told that these sacred books of Eastern lands are full of primæval wisdom; that their authors were men of devout spirit, who had penetrated the *arcana* of religious thought, and who taught the nations a pure and lofty Theism; that they were rich in beautiful poetry, and gemmed with maxims of the most exalted morality. It was said that the early histories of Divine manifestation recorded in the Bible were worthy of no stronger belief than the myths and legends which form so great a part of the early faiths of mankind. It was said that gross as may be the polytheism of Eastern lands, and frightful as may be the orgies of idolatrous worship, these sacred Bibles of Eastern nations were, nevertheless, as worthy of profound respect as the Bible of Christendom.

While these books remained in their original manuscripts, or hidden in languages some of which awaited the discoveries

of modern philologists or decipherment by men skilled in Oriental learning, it was difficult to say how far these lofty claims were justified by the facts. It is true that in the early years of this century such eminent Orientalists as Sir William Jones, Professor Wilson, Mr. Hodgson, Mr. Colebrooke, Anquetil Duperron, and others had given to the world translations of portions of these books which scarcely bore out the modern ideas respecting them. Indeed, in some instances, the researches of these scholars led them to an open expression of contempt for their assumed Divine origin, and to the rejection of some of them as monstrous forgeries or incredible tales.

Since, however, the revival of Oriental learning in the last fifty years, these writings have been again brought forward as demonstrating that all the religions of the world, past and present, stand on a common platform, and are alike penetrated with the same Divine ideas. And it is intimated, if not clearly said, that the religion of Christ is indebted to these ancient faiths for everything pure, elevated, and spiritual that it may contain.

The announcement, therefore, that Professor Max Muller was about to publish the most important of the Sacred Books of the East, translated by various Oriental scholars, was received with interest and raised great expectations. The progress of scholarship and discovery has not only rendered such a task possible, but it may confidently be affirmed that an English reader will now have in his hands as true a transcript of these ancient documents as the most thoroughly accomplished scholars can give. Several volumes have already appeared, embracing books concerning the Hindu system, the religions of Buddha and Zoroaster, and the sacred works of China.

It is not my intention to enter into any detail respecting these works, or to compare them with the documents of the Christian faith. I shall content myself with quoting from the somewhat remarkable Preface contributed to the series by Professor Max Muller.

The Professor writes with reference to the Buddhistic books :—

“Scholars who have devoted their lives either to the editing of some of the original texts, or to the careful interpretation of some of the sacred Buddhistic books, are more inclined, after they have disinterred from a heap of rubbish some solitary fragments of pure gold, to exhibit these treasures only, than to display all the rubbish from which they had extracted them. I do not blame them for this ; perhaps I should feel that I was open to the same blame myself ; for it is but natural that scholars in their joy at finding one or two fragments, fruits, and flowers, should gladly forget the brambles and thorns that had to be thrown aside in the course of their search. How happens this? We must face the problem in its completeness ; and I confess it has been many years a problem to me, ay, and to a great extent is so still, how the great books of the East should, by the side of so much that is fresh, natural, simple, beautiful, and true, contain so much that is not only unmeaning, artificial, and silly, but even hideous and repellent. This is a fact, and must be accounted for in some way or other.”

Valuable, then, as these volumes may be and are as historical records of the faiths to which they refer, it is now certain that they do not possess a moral and religious equality with the Bible of Christendom. The best that can be said of them is well expressed in the following extract from an article on Zoroaster in the *Nineteenth Century*, for January, 1880, by Professor Monier Williams, and which is equally applicable to all the other religious writings of the East :—

“The fact is that the Zoroastrian Bible is a simple reflection of the natural workings, counter-workings, and inter-workings of the human mind in its earnest strivings after truth, in its eager gropings after more light, in its strange hallucinations, childish vagaries, foolish conceits, and unaccountable inconsistencies. Here and there lofty conceptions of Deity, deep philosophical thoughts, and a pure morality are discoverable in the Avesta, like green spots in a desert ; but they are more than neutralized by the silly puerilities and degrading superstitious ideas, which crop up as plentifully in its prayers as thorns and thistles in a wilderness of sand. Even the most tolerant and impartial student of Zoroastrianism must admit that the religious cravings of humanity can no more be satisfied

with such food than a starving man be kept alive on a few grains of good wheat in a cartload of husks. Happily we are not obliged to resort to the Avesta any more than to the Veda to be spiritually fed, nor yet to be mentally feasted."

Dr. Martineau likewise repeats the story in language not less plain and uncompromising as follows :—

"The importance of these studies is wholly anthropological. They tell the grotesque and pathetic story of our struggling race—the dreams of its darkness, the guesses of its wonder, the surmises of its sin ; but supply no selective rule for saving the true while pitying the false, and yield no Divine knowledge but what we bring to them. If, in pursuing them, we are already and independently furnished with our theology, they will reflect perhaps some rays of it here and there, and so adorn it with a fresh illustration ; but in themselves they will merely pass before us strange forms of thought, on which we gaze from an outside station, and which we treat only as phenomena of the world. They cannot, therefore, claim the place of the old Theology."

This valuable three-fold testimony conclusively proves that the Jewish and Christian sacred books are greatly superior to the ethnic scriptures, in literary, moral, and religious value ; and this because they flowed out of a higher conception of God and man and human duty, and out of a nearer converse with the Divine.

KNOWLEDGE AND RELIGION.*



THE Christian Churches for at least fifteen hundred years have rested their strongest appeals on the sentiment of fear—the fear of God as the final judge and avenger of sin. All the love they have had to offer has been bestowed upon the person of Jesus. God the Father has been the impersonation of severe, inflexible, vindictive retribution. Jesus has been the tender mother-heart in the bosom of the Trinity. He is the beloved one, the pitying, the compassionate, the sympathetic, the pleading intercessor, the sacrificing redeemer, the dear friend of humanity.

It is not humanly possible to love such a God as Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan divines, the Westminster theologians, portrayed. Fear him we might and must; but loving a God who could doom every infant to eternal perdition for Adam's sin, who could plunge into a lake of fire nine-tenths of the human race, who could pave the floor of the pit with infants unbaptized, is as impossible as loving a demon. Reading Mr. Lecky's "History of Rationalism in Europe," we see how the doctrine of future endless misery in a literal lake of fire was elaborated by the Mediæval Church, and stamped upon the minds of men as an undoubted fact. We see how art lent her brush to paint, in the most ghastly colours and the most lurid light, the torments of the lost, until they were realized with an intensity of conviction happily inconceivable in this age. We see how the flames of the infernal region leaped into heaven itself, and the smoke that curled upwards from "the bottomless pit" shadowed till it hid completely in darkness the features of the heavenly Father which were revealed in the face of

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, August 15, 1879.

Jesus Christ. Thus for centuries the only lovable person in the Godhead was Jesus ; and one strong objection to the theology still prevalent is, that it has set forth God as a merciless being, resolved on the destruction of the human race, and Jesus as the embodiment of tenderness, the compassionate deliverer of man, to whom, therefore, and not to God, the gratitude, the love, the confidence of mankind are due.

Through a variety of liberal and rational influences the idea of a God of fear is being removed from our minds. Even in orthodox churches ideas of God have materially changed within the last twenty years. Why do we not fear Him as our forefathers did? It cannot be that He has changed. It must be that man has changed. But how has man changed, and what has changed him? We must look for so general a result in a general cause. We find it in the fact that during the present century man has progressed wonderfully in a knowledge of law, in searching out the secrets of nature, and meeting God face to face in His universe. We have found that ignorance is the mother of fear: the moment that you begin to let in the light of knowledge fear, like the bats, flies away.

The savage has been for ages afraid of God because He was hid in darkness, just as the timid child in a dark room trembles at the faintest sound. The savage in this world is like a child in a dark room. He knows almost nothing of the laws and forces of nature. Everything is wrapped in a dense cloud of mystery which he dare not penetrate. He trembles at the sight of his shadow on the wall. He sees not and knows not the secret chain of causes and effects that links all phenomena together. Everything extraordinary seems to him produced by an arbitrary and capricious power. He looks up at the storm-cloud, where "leaps the live thunder," and in his fancy he sees in it the Great Spirit foaming with rage, and rattling and storming through the sky. When subterranean forces shake the ribs of the earth he imagines that the Almighty is uttering threats of vengeance and slaughter against the children of men ; and when pestilence

and famine desolate the land, the ignorant, knowing nothing of the causes of disease and drought, regard it with alarm as a judgment of the Creator for some neglect of sacrifice or ceremony; and straightway they slaughter their fattest sheep, or a bull without blemish, or a brace of turtle-doves, if they are poor, to appease the offended Powers.

Nor is such a conception as this confined to the ignorant. A few years ago the clergy offered prayers in the churches in order to arrest the cattle plague, which was described as a divine chastisement of the nation for its shortcomings. Similarly, during a summer of prolonged rains, when agricultural operations are suspended, when acres of fields are deluged, when the crops from end to end of the country are damaged and to some extent destroyed, when the nation thus suffers loss or inconvenience, or both, the downpour is looked upon by high authorities as a divine judgment; and it is determined by our spiritual teachers that the clergy should propitiate the Almighty, asking Him to stay what they tell Him is "Thy plague of immoderate rain and waters." I remember that a certain bishop stated that the rain which came down in California after a season of drought was, without doubt, "sent in answer to the prayers of Christians." Superstition in religion is by no means confined to black or copper-coloured races. It flows in Saxon blood; and the Kaffir juggler in South Africa who professes to bind or loose the rain by incantations has his representatives among Christian ministers in England. Each fancies himself a rain-maker or rain-suspender; each believes he can show God how to amend the operations and laws of nature.

But we are learning to master the forces of nature and control them to our service. We do not flee before the pestilence as if it were the scourge of an angry God; we study the laws of health, and try to fortify ourselves against it. We now say to the thunderbolts of Jupiter: "Come down out of the clouds; come here! run along this wire and carry this message?" And before we can think of it, electricity has obeyed our commands. Earthquakes, how

they terrified men when they thought that God in His wrath had seized the poles of the earth and was shaking man's impiety out of him! Now the North winds do not alarm us, when coals glow in the stove and furs wrap us in. We have caught the fickle winds and made them turn our mills. We have compelled fire, so fearful when unrestrained, yet so docile when confined in a boiler and well bitted, to pull trains of palaces from land to land. We have taken the wings of steam and crossed the chasms of mountains. We have bridged the sea with ships, made gardens of deserts, and drained the soil of pestilence and disease. So far from being the weak and cowering slaves of those multiform forces which once so terrified man with fears of God, we have learned our power and now rule them as a master. It is knowledge, and knowledge alone that has banished fear; and shall not that same knowledge bring love?

I believe it will. I believe that as fear in religion was begotten of man's ignorance and helplessness, so this knowledge and power which man is attaining, and which dispel fear, are to produce a religion of trust, of confidence, of hope, of enthusiastic devotion and love. If man has knelt and worshipped in blind faith when he did not *know*, but only dimly *felt* the great powers above him, shall he not worship all the more when he *sees* the Power in all the majesty and beneficence of its mighty action? The form of his worship may change, but its substance shall surely survive unchangeable. So far from knowledge weakening religion, it is to be religion's strengthener. To say that science is hostile to religion is to confess either that the truths of nature and the truths of human consciousness are not in harmony, or that our religion is a superstition that cannot endure. I look to see the religion of the future disconnected utterly from the sentiment of fear, and wedded more closely to the sentiment of love, which shall infuse its warmth and quickening spirit into all the channels of human life.

I do not and cannot believe that the more we learn of nature, the less we shall love nature's God. If the stars

are beautiful to the savage who fancies them nothing but bright specks stuck on the dome of this small earth-cathedral, how much more beautiful, how much more suggestive of an Infinite Power, how much more inspiring to adoration, reverence, gratitude, trust, and love are they, when we learn that those little specks of light are really mighty suns, millions of miles away, each of them, probably, with its brood of worlds circling round it, and each of those worlds, it may be, inhabited by countless millions of living creatures! Does this grand thought destroy your love of God? Does it not rather expand it, and kindle within you a deeper awe and adoration? Do you cease to love God because you have found that this earth was not made in six short days, but that God has been fashioning it millions of years, and the seventh day of rest has not yet come? Do you feel your love grow cold when you learn that man has not fallen from a state of perfection, and is not under sentence of condemnation for Adam's sin, but was created imperfect, and has been rising towards perfection ever since, with the law of eternal progress written on his forehead? Shall the child see God in the flowers, and shall not the botanist much more, who analyses and classifies them and gives them a habitation and a name? Shall we cease to think of Him in the sunshine because the philosopher has decomposed the ray of light and untwisted its triple skein? Shall we declare that God is not in the wind or the whirlwind, because the meteorologist predicts the storms, and signals the ship to furl her sails and keep to the harbour? No! The more we know of nature, the more we find to raise and ennoble our wonder, to develop our reverence and love. The more we search out the laws of God, the more we learn to love the Great Lawgiver—we find law everywhere, and everywhere love is woven in with it. It seems to me that every science is to man an usher introducing him to a more intimate acquaintance with the Deity. As we draw the worlds down to us through the telescope, or lift them up to us through the microscope, we are approaching step by step nearer the

Power and Presence that is "in all, through all, and over all." Every study that brings us into deeper sympathy with nature brings us into nearer communion with God. I rejoice, then, in all that science has done to open the Bible of nature to us. I am thankful that in botany we may walk in a present garden of Eden; that in astronomy we may wander with Job to a thousand brilliant worlds that the Arabian poet never dreamed of; and that in geology we may sing with the Psalmist, "He layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; he maketh the clouds his chariot; he walketh upon the wings of the wind; he laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains; the mountains rose; the valleys sank in the place which thou didst appoint for them." And those words of the Psalmist geology proves true—true, if not in form, yet in a grander sense than he meant. And it is from the study of geology that we learn of a greater exodus than that of Israel flying from Egypt. We see how God, through untold ages, has been leading men, through wanderings in deserts and forests and wildernesses, through Red Seas of trials and over mountainous obstacles, to the civilization of the present day. He has led them by pillars of cloud by day and of fire by night, out of a bondage worse than Egyptian, a bondage to ignorance, superstition, and fear, into lands where there are a free press, free government, free religion, free men. Our part is to build up, in our own hearts and in our communities, a religion as free as our country is free; a religion of love that casts out fear; a religion of reason that banishes superstition; a religion of life that measures men by their character, not by their creed; a religion of faith and good works hand in hand. Such a religion will come in time, and produce a nobler type of manhood and womanhood—

One royal brotherhood, one church made free
By love, which is the law of liberty.

THE CRISIS OF BELIEF.*



I.

EVERY form of religious faith is now openly challenged, and required to show whether it is worthy of acceptance by rational and thoughtful men. Except among the credulous—still, it must be owned, a large number—the days of simple acquiescence in what our spiritual teachers declare, are past. The Churches have been too long content to rest in an easy belief, and have yielded themselves too readily to unreasoning credulity. Their pretensions are now questioned and denied. Free thought is undermining in every direction the old assumptions upon which popular theology has been so long satisfied to rely. Its advance is no mere temporary oscillation of religious opinion. It is a steady progress which is cutting away the basis of orthodox Christianity, and alienating from the Churches which still build on that insecure foundation, a large number of the cultivated and reflecting portion of the community. Authority in matters of belief is being found to be but a very slender thread on which to hang everlasting things. The Bishop of Rome himself is no longer believed. Though he is clothed with infallibility, the world sees that beneath the investiture, as beneath the ribbons and spangles of “the first gentleman in Europe,” there is—nothing. He waves his pastoral staff, but it has lost its magic power. It is not the charmer’s wand it used to be in other ages. The assumed infallibility of Protestant orthodoxy is also melting away. The dogmatic creeds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are no longer

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, Feb. 27th, March 12th, 1880.

believed to be vessels of heavenly material, fashioned by the hand of an almighty potter ; and their contents are found to be not all precious, eternal treasure : they are mixtures of alloy and gold. To change the figure—they are interesting monuments of the past—records of the systematizing processes in which theologians have been wont to indulge. But they are now relegated to history as having exhausted in the past the strength that was in them. As landmarks of thought they are invaluable ; as authorities they are intolerable. The age of dogmatic theology in which they were formed, and in the spirit of which they are necessarily steeped, is departed. The age when the pope of any sect could lay an interdict on any realm of thought, and prevent the human mind from travelling to it, and seeing all around it, and gathering of whatever wealth it has to yield, is gone by. Look where we may, everywhere there is seen the spirit of change and dissolution. We have entered on a new era, and men are musing in their hearts what the end will be. The older generation, and some among the younger, look around with dismay. The religious world appears to them a picture hidden in solemn gloom, with fitful dashes of light, as if sketched on the canvas of Rembrandt. But it is only the timid who sit down and sigh over a spirit which they cannot quell—a movement they are powerless to arrest. An incapacity to distinguish between the spirit and the form conjures up the fear, that if the form be changed the spirit must of necessity decay. But we may be confident that truth will come with a new life out of this travail. We are taught by history that the dissolution of both social and religious elements in the past has been followed by their reunion in a deeper vitality and their reconstruction in a higher form. And so taught, trusting in the power of truth to embody itself in ever new external shapes adapted to the circumstances of the time, it is the duty of faithful men, not to cry out in alarm that the age is infidel, not to cherish or countenance the fear that the citadel of religion will at last be beaten down, not to deprecate discussion on the ground

that if men loosen from their old moorings they go adrift and find no anchorage for their souls, not to be deterred from the attempt to meet difficulties lest difficulties should multiply ; but to come to the discussion of the deepest religious problems with a reverence for truth for its own sake, regardless of the consequences to our little systems—to come with the confidence, inspired by the experience of the most single-eyed and purest-hearted searchers after the eternal realities, that if Truth is ardently, reverently, patiently and with utter loyalty to it, sought for, the foundation of God that standeth sure will at last be discovered.

It may be said that there is no room for progress of thought on religious questions, since the fundamental principles of religion are unchangeable. The latter of these propositions is true, but the former is the reverse of true, for man's knowledge and apprehension of religious principles change, and ought to change. It is the same sun which shines to-day which shone a thousand years ago ; but men know much more about the sun, and about the way in which its light and heat act upon our world, than men knew when it was imagined that it really, as well as apparently, rose in the east and journeyed towards the west, and that the earth was the centre of the universe. The planet on which we stand is the same now as it was two hundred years ago ; but the knowledge possessed by men regarding the planet in these days, when its strata from the Laurentian to the Boulder Clay have been scrutinized, and when there have arisen, in long procession from their stony tombs, the forms of its once living things, from the trilobites that were imbedded in Silurian mud to the colossal elephants and gigantic stags that roamed in the forest which now lies deep beneath the cliffs at Cromer—such knowledge is something very different from that possessed by our ancestors two centuries ago. The truth as to the universe changes not ; but every step in astronomy or geology has been a change in man's knowledge of that truth. And at this moment both the astronomer and the geologist unite in declaring that the

magnificent advance in knowledge which has taken place in their sciences in recent times, is but the preparation, the foretaste, the prophecy of higher progress and more glorious change. The astronomer knows more of the stars than his predecessors, but he knows also, and better, at the same time, what infinite depths and what numberless secrets remain to be explored. The geologist is acquainted with animals and conditions of life undreamed of in former times; but it is not on the completeness of his knowledge, it is upon the number of the gaps still to be filled up in the annals both of inorganic and organic nature, that he emphatically dwells.

Is it credible that man's knowledge in every other department should be extending year by year, but that in religion his knowledge should be fixed and unalterable? The Almighty changes not; but man's knowledge of Him ought to change into higher ideas of purity and glory with each successive year that reflects in its face a brighter illumination. It is unchangeably true that God is Love; but man's conception of the way and manner in which Divine Love is manifested ought ever to be changing and widening. It is everlastingly true that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein; but it is only in these last times that man has had a glimpse of the laws and processes in accordance with which the work of creation has been, and is, carried on.

Some may object that the whole truth as to God, and as to man's relation to God, was once for all perfectly and infallibly revealed in the Bible, and that, therefore, there can be no change in sound theology. I reply, that the whole truth as to God and man and their relations is not found within the covers which bind the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures; that it must be sought for also in the facts and revelations of nature, in the historical development of the human race, in the teachings of the Holy Spirit incarnated in each man to lead him into all truth; and that, therefore, the view of the Bible as a book which is the only and the final disclosure of God must not stand in the way of enrich-

ing religion by the vast accessions which have recently been made to our knowledge of nature and of man.

We see now that theology as well as other sciences is liable to change and capable of improvement. The subject-matter with which it deals, the truth of God, cannot change; but the degree in which man truly conceives it must change with every extension of his acquaintance with nature, with himself, and with his race.

II.

The most powerful agency in improving and ennobling theology is modern science. Under its influence the old is passing away—the new is taking form. In what way is it giving to religion a deeper meaning and a wider interpretation?

From it men are learning to see the ever-present God in the order of nature. They cease to look for Him in extraordinary and miraculous phenomena. An astronomer said he had searched the whole heavens and had not found God. That is, he had not found God according to the popular and in some respects heathen idea; God working by interruptions of the established order of nature; God operating by interferences with the processes by which the world moves. But science destroys that idea only to erect in its place the conception of God as One who works by unbending laws, by methods that know no variableness or shadow of turning, and who, by these laws and methods, everywhere manifests Himself to the mind of man. There we see Him as a pervading and sustaining Energy, as an omnipresent Intelligence. It is said that for God science has substituted matter, and left us without a Divine Being. But it is not against the idea of God himself that science is directed. It is against a form of thought in which men in general have clothed the Supreme, and have insisted that only in that form could He be believed in at all. What science does not

tolerate is the doctrine of an Almighty Being separate from matter, outside of it, apart from it, operating upon it only intermittently. The destruction of this form of thought, instead of removing God from us, brings Him nearer as an indwelling Power incessantly at work. It gives us another and far worthier thought of Him as the all-upholding Spirit of the Universe, never absent from it, abiding in it always, never announcing Himself by signs and wonders of fitful intervention, but in the steady march of the great life of the world disclosing Himself as the Infinite Life of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, who besets us behind and before, and in whom we live and move and have our being.

Science has changed the conception of the doctrine of Incarnation. The old idea was not without a foundation so long as the earth was believed to be the centre, or the chief mansion, the upper room, of the universe. But think now of the earth as it is, a speck in the universe, its size a millionth part of the size of the sun. Then judge of the idea that God selected this world as the one in which He would be content to be born, to suffer unheard-of humiliation, and finally to die for the salvation from eternal misery of a portion of the few men it contained. God elected to suffer and die, and where? Not in some grand central orb, but in this obscure nook of creation, distinguished by its smallness among other worlds? This stupendous difficulty cannot be surmounted except by an arbitrary supposition such as Dr. Chalmers was driven to adopt. It is historically undeniable that the popular ideas of the Incarnation and Atonement were born at a time when the universe was regarded as infinitely smaller than the endless series of worlds astronomy has since revealed; and it will always remain a mystery impossible of being unravelled, a contradiction almost defying faith, that this planet, considering its position in the universe, could have been the arena for such a supernatural effort and exhibition as that which is believed to have taken place in it. Science has enriched us with the

nobler idea that God is in and over all worlds ; and that in this world he manifests Himself afresh in every living thing, is incarnated in every human being, and effects the atonement in every heart in which love rejoices to obey law.

The revelations of the glories of the heavens above and of the wonders of the earth beneath have also exploded the idea that heaven is a place of bliss beyond the skies, and hell a place of torment under the ground ; while experience has taught us that our soul makes its own heaven and hell :

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

The scientific question of the present day with which theology is most concerned, is that of development. Evolution may not be proved beyond doubt. The origin of life and of man may still be regarded as involved in mystery. But it is impossible now to receive the accounts in Genesis as more than the attempts of early unscientific thought to explain the beginning of things. They are as contrary to the ascertained facts of nature, as the Mosaic astronomy is to the Copernican system ; and the thousands of books written to "reconcile" the facts with the record represent a superfluous and wasteful expenditure of thought and time to accomplish the impossible—an expenditure due to a complete misconception of the province, and hence of the limits, alike of the Bible and of science. Genesis represents creation as produced in six days ; but we know that it is the result of the play of mighty forces through cycles of time that overwhelm the imagination. Genesis represents that everything was perfect as soon as it appeared—it instantaneously came forth in maturity. All was "good" ; it had no trace of imperfection ; it was free from suffering ; it was innocent of pain. The world was a state of unalloyed enjoyment and of perfection—a Paradise. Science, on the contrary, demonstrates that nothing was absolutely perfect at its first creation ; and that from the very beginning all living organisms have been subject to disease and death.

Perfection lies in the future, not in the past. Paradise is before us, not behind. The ideal of the creation was perfect from the first, but the realization of the ideal is a glory to come.

So, too, of the doctrinal theology deduced from Genesis. The general interpretation of the accounts of the creation of Adam and Eve, their innocency and their fall, cannot stand in the light of known facts. The doctrine of original sin—the doctrine that the breaking of one command by the primitively simple and ignorant Adam and Eve, is imputed as damnable guilt to all and every one of the untold millions of their posterity—is absolutely baseless. Paul speaks of sin entering by one man; but he never charges mankind with the guilt of the one man's sin. Original sin and redemption by a price are speculative doctrines. What essential truths are in them are the human consciousness of guilt, and the sense of Divine forgiveness. The book of Job has for its problem the mystery of the existence of evil; but it does not refer to the record in Genesis. The writer, preceding in time the author or authors of Genesis, and therefore betraying no trace of the influence of the Persian philosophy and theology apparent in the early chapters of the latter, says not a word of birth-sin: the whole argument is resolved into the power and wisdom of God.

Here, then, are some of the changes wrought in theology by science. It gives us a conception of God as the Indwelling Spirit of the Universe, instead of a God sitting on a throne above it, and operating on it as a machinist. It gives us a conception of His Will and Wisdom as manifested in the ceaseless and orderly circle of unvarying laws, instead of being displayed at intervals in miracles. It gives us a measureless and endless sweep of worlds, with a Progress, a Purpose, a Cosmic Life—that is to say, with the Lord God Omnipotent—reigning in every one, and reducing to its proper dimensions the idea that He once came as an infant and a man for a few years to this speck of a globe, but also establishing in its place the idea that as a Spirit He is within

them all. It gives us a creation the result of ages of evolution, nature ever marching with slow, measured steps, upwards to her goal. It gives us man, not fallen from a paradise to hell, from light to darkness, from the glory-crowned hill of purity to the black-enveloped abyss of vice, but man rising ever from the state of barbarism to the spiritual condition of a Son of God.

But, I am asked, in the midst of all this flux and flow, where is certainty about religion to be had? There are those prepared with a ready answer. There is an infallible Church; or there is an infallible Book; or there is a miracle; or some immediate and signal interference of Deity, which gives a certainty beyond what is afforded in the order of nature. The answer is, that no such certainty exists for us. Like every thing around us, we are being developed. God is teaching us, but in His own way. Shall we go on elaborating schemes of revelation? Shall we not rather be content to learn of God as He chooses to reveal Himself? Giving up the Bible as an infallible book, giving up the Church as a Divine institution, giving up the Creed as an authoritative document, giving up the Priest as the only qualified interpreter of the Divine Will—where shall we go to find God and to know His Word of Life? To the witness He bears to Himself in our own soul. God speaks to me; why, then, should I not listen to Him when He speaks? And where is there an audience-chamber so fitting as my own soul? And where can His voice come to me with such directness, with such distinct and penetrating, enlightening and subduing power?

Is it said that He speaks diversely there? Does one declare that He speaks thus, and another assert that, to him, the Divine Voice utters a word contradictory to the whisper that falls on the ear of his brother? We doubt it, really. The Bible differs; the creeds differ; but not the instincts and declarations of the soul. Creeds are not the pure products of spiritual yearnings after God. For the most part they are the products of contention, pride, and power; and

they echo, not the personal trusts and the holy aspirations of the individual heart, but the disputes and the successful tyrannizing ambition of ecclesiastics. If men would let God speak to them, and would take His word in the soul as indeed *His word*, good, wise, and holy souls in all churches would be at one. They differ because they have persuaded themselves into adopting a creed, and enforced upon themselves the duty of defending it; and thus they do violence to their own minds, stifle the instincts of their hearts, and suffer many earthly tyrants to usurp the place of one heavenly spirit.

But a blessed change is coming. The first duty of man is becoming plainer—the duty of respecting the intuitions, the instincts, the revelations of God in his own soul. Reason, conscience, and affection are coming to rule the world; and, as they ascend the throne, dogmas that shock the moral sense, injure man, and dishonour God, abdicate. The creeds remain; but belief in them is fading away. By-and-by they themselves will be entombed; and then the messages of God flashed forth in the heavens, and borne on the sea, and engraved on the rocks, together with the messages He sends by the mouth of His prophets, each open-eyed, large-minded, and holy-hearted man, will be heard, welcomed, and obeyed. Amidst the confusion, the perplexity, the disorder of our time, this is our confidence—the witness borne by God in the unswerving laws by which He enwraps us from the cradle to the grave, and the witness clear, silver-toned, wise, and merciful, in the soul of every earnest, reverent, humble, and loving man.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY ?



I.

FOR nineteen centuries men have had before them varied externalisms of Christianity, but still unsettled is the question : What is the *essence* of Christianity ? Its principles are said to be distinguished above those of all other religions by their simplicity and plainness. It is declared to be pre-eminent for being intelligible to the human mind in all its stages of development. It is justly attributed to the Founder of Christianity—to the purest representative of it—that he was the clearest of expounders of spiritual truth. His teachings are adapted for all mankind. Their peculiar quality is that they may be universally understood and applied. They are not for men, but for man : not for a race, but for humanity. They appeal to the common realities, the common wants, the common aspirations of human nature. Like the fundamental principles of religion, they lie close to the reason and feelings of mankind. If Christianity, then, as expounded by him who taught it to the poor and unlearned, be a religion of simplicity and perspicacity, intelligible to the unlettered, it might naturally be expected that, like the common beauties of nature, its great qualities would be so placed that the eye might readily see, and the mind might easily apprehend them.

But now, instead of this natural expectation being realized, I find that there are a hundred contradictory definitions of Christianity, creating sad confusion in numbers of honest minds. A mere glance at the varied representations of it is a fruitful source of mental embarrassment. *Now* it has

been held to be a total abstinence from all the activities of life—a withdrawal into entire seclusion from the world: although that Christianity is of no value which does not make our commercial life more honest, our social life more generous and wholesome, our political life just, our religious life more real. *Now* it has been considered to consist in fastings, penances, the exercises of ascetic devotion: although, as history clearly shows, where this form has prevailed, the miseries of the world have been left untouched, and virtue has descended to the lowest point. *Now* it has been appraised as a state of ecstasy, wherein the enraptured soul, disdaining to find its life in the shop, or in the smithy, in the quarry, in the colliery, or the exchange, has soared upward to see visions and dream dreams: though Christianity is not a luxury of imagination, but a religion to be wrought out in daily business and duty. *Now* it has been esteemed to be a longing to be in heaven, as a happy release from the continuous labour of earth: although it teaches us that we make our heaven only by doing the duties of earth in the spirit of purity and righteousness. And *now*—and perhaps this has been the most prevalent form of Christianity—it has been regarded as identical with the belief of certain dogmas; theologians have made this the beginning and the end of it; and they have shorn it of much of its strength by projecting and fortifying doctrinal definitions of it, rather than by breathing its spirit, and infusing it, as an element of living power, into the commerce and politics, the literature and society of life. Is it any wonder that Christianity has become a riddle? Is it any surprise that its history has been a history of strife? Is it not almost a thing of course that there are men who condemn it as able neither to satisfy the reason nor move the heart?

At the present time this question is pressing eagerly for solution. In restlessness and pain many minds are seeking for the full assurance of faith. The scepticism of which we hear so much is a natural re-action against the churches that have decried real and true free inquiry. There is, we see,

scornful scepticism, the offspring of vanity, presuming in its pride to have gathered into *its* eye the *infinite* of truth. There is *frivolous* scepticism, born of the spirit of levity, stepping lightly and jauntily into whatsoever new paths are opened up, simply because the old roads had been travelled by past generations. But there is *intense* and *reverent* scepticism, the child of conflict, springing from a profound feeling that there is no beauty in Christianity that it should desire it. There are noble spirits in all churches, and outside of all churches, earnest, faithful hearts who want something to believe. Their questions were never so universal, so long, so loud, so deep. They cannot, they will not give body and soul to cold and dead formalities. They have travelled hither and thither, but have not arrived anywhere. They have coasted round continents, and found no rest for the sole of their feet. They have walked *this* land and *that*, and have become lost in their labyrinths and swamps. In agony and bitterness they exclaim, "Who will show us any good?"

I will ask you to follow with me for a little while, the course of such an Inquirer. Honesty, earnestness, sincerity are his characteristics—sincerity, veracity, a love of truth, without which there can be no religion whatever, although there may be any quantity of theology. He has thought, heard, read about Christianity, delved into subtle speculations, and attempted to see clearly into misty creeds, until the religion of Jesus has become involved in perplexity. The light that should be bright and shining is enveloped in darkness. The fine gold is dimmed. From what seemed an open road he has got entangled in a thicket. Having sought for explanations, he has discovered *two* things at least. First, that the interpreters demand that in theology, reason, that crowning faculty of man, must be sacrificed. In *all* other things human beings need it; in *theology* they do not need it. *Every where else* it is of supreme value; *there*, it is of supreme danger. In *every other* investigation it is a necessity; in *this* it is a superfluity. God has given

it to us for the purpose of testing things; but in *theology*, we must act as if the Almighty had made a grievous mistake,—as if He intended us, in the most tremendous of questions, to have no confidence in the faculties that come from Him,—as if they were fit to be used simply for the lower things, but renounced with suspicion—yea, with contempt, and these God's grandest gift,—in the highest things. And yet, perhaps, those who invite us to dismiss our reason do well to traduce it; for as Hobbes well said, "when reason is against a man, a man will be against reason." Reason, they feel, will not square with their doctrines, and blinded, indeed, it must be before it will admit them. "My Lord Understanding's house," says John Bunyan, "was too light for the Prince of Darkness, and he therefore built a high wall to darken all the windows."

The next thing he has discovered is, that these interpreters—who while advising *us*, on peril of our soul's welfare, to cast off our reason, have used it themselves to reach their own conclusions—have arrived at interpretations as innumerable as the sands on the sea shore. In his embarrassment he determines to call in four counsellors. He declares to them that he wants to believe in Christianity, if only he can find solid footing for his belief; and to love it, if only its comeliness can be unveiled to him. But, that he may embrace it, he must first have solved the problem that has harrassed him—"What is Christianity?"

II.

THE HISTORICAL ANSWER.

It is, seemingly, a simple question, but these four advisers will not reply to it alike. The first gives what may be called the *historical* answer. According to this, Christianity hangs upon a series of historical statements in the Gospels. It is

a common conception that it consists in accepting as absolutely accurate the reports of incidents and events in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You are an Israelite indeed, if you are persuaded that every sentence in the Evangelists is the *exact* expression of what was actually said, and the *faultless* narrative of what was actually done ; and that every verse in the Epistles is not the opinion of Paul, Peter, James, and John, but the unchangeable truth of God. Assent to *all* and *everything* within the covers of the New Testament, and you have become a believer in Christianity.

But, rejoins the Inquirer, I cannot build upon that foundation. It must first of all be settled, beyond *all possibility* of doubt, that there is *no* error, *no* mistake, *no* opinion that can, by any possibility, be other than the truth of God. Leave only one point weak, and the structure is insecure. Establish one inaccuracy, and Christianity is in peril. Now, he goes on to say, there are errors of *fact* and errors of *opinion*. These do not affect the history *in the main* : on the contrary, the differences, discrepancies, inaccuracies, confirm the substantial truth of the history ; for, if each of the writers narrated everything, down to the smallest circumstance, in perfect agreement, a suspicion of collusion would naturally arise against them. But while these errors leave the history in the New Testament in the main true, they leave Christianity baseless if you affirm that it hangs upon the absolute immunity of the New Testament from error. Look, says our Inquirer, I see that the genealogy in Matthew is one generation short ; but does Christianity perish because that is defective ? I see that Paul led the Corinthians and Thessalonians to expect the end of the world in the generation then existing ; but because Paul thought wrongly, and the world still stands, does Christianity become enfeebled, lifeless, shrink into a withered fruit ? I see that the Apostles, in common with all Jews at the time, believed and taught that nearly all physical diseases were simply the workings of Satan in actual possession of

the human body ; but because they were mistaken, does Christianity sink into the abysses of the deep? Is Christianity loosened from its moorings, and sent forth without rudder, without compass, without guidance, where it will be in peril of being engulfed? No, my friend, you place Christianity in jeopardy, you present additional temptations to the scoffer, when you affirm that Christianity means believing that all and every sentence in the Gospels and Epistles is written with God's own hand. You expose it to scorn and confutation ; and still worse, you make God the author of defects and imperfections.

I go a step further, pursues our Inquirer. It is a possibility for a man to accept all the statements that he reads in the Scriptures ; and yet to be impressed with the feeling that Christianity is too deep, too vital, too personal a thing ; that it comes home too immediately to his heart ; that it entwines itself too inseparably round about the familiar business of the day, and inweaves itself too deeply into the fibres of our common conduct, to depend upon the accuracy of a reporter's narrative. The tree planted in the depths of the soil, striking its running roots here and there, does not obtain its pith and marrow from the treatises of botanists : these merely describe the tree. And the principles of Christianity do not consist of exact documents : these simply describe and record them. They fathom the deepest thoughts ; they branch out widely into all the relations of life ; they are woven ineradicably into the essential and imperishable elements of man's highest nature ; and, therefore, are too vital and practical to be dependent upon the correctness of chronicles.

Yea more : it is possible for a man to give an unreserved credence to all he reads in the Scriptures, and yet be destitute of that inward power inspiring and purifying the affections, controlling the thoughts, regulating the conduct, which, alone, makes a man a Christian man. He may believe all that books on botany tell him of the structure of the tree, but share none of the nutrifying fruit of it. He

may read in the history of his country of those who have curbed the power of the despot, and broken the neck of the tyrant, and through their dauntless valour and quenchless fidelity to God and man won the freedom he enjoys. And he may assent to every word of it, without a thrill of patriotism exulting his breast, or a response of sympathy going forth from his heart. In like manner, he may accept all that is contained in the historical documents which record the founding of Christianity; and, at the same time, while declaring his belief that everything in the New Testament is the truth and the expression of God, he makes in his daily work window-blinds with slits that cannot stand the wind, and paint that cannot stand the sun, and fastenings that may be looked at but are on no account to be touched. I mean that a man may (and hundreds of men do) accept every word of the New Testament as of divine origin, and yet be far removed in his affections, thoughts, and actions from the righteousness which alone makes a Christian. He may believe that Martin Luther lived, and wrought a great work in Europe. But Luther is only a name as dead as a fossil, and not a power in his life. Jesus Christ is nothing more. Luther stands for certain *bare and blank* facts, devoid of moral force. Jesus represents certain events, and his name is synonymous with certain beautiful virtues of character and admirable moral teaching; but both the character and the teaching have no more real influence than that two and two make four. Belief in the occurrence of events, acquiescence in the accuracy of statements, concurrence in the report that a teacher has propounded such and such views, is not Christianity; for the whole Bible may be accepted as a historical document, as the history of England may be accepted, while the spiritual teaching of the former, and the moral lessons of the latter, remain ineffectual and inoperative.

III.

THE DOCTRINAL ANSWER.

The second counsellor proffers his opinion. He declares that there has been deduced out of the Scriptures a well-compacted system of doctrines; and Christianity is to believe what able minds have wrought out of the Bible. But here is hopeless confusion. There is a crowd of answers in complete antagonism. What is it that the churches generally affirm? They affirm that man is born in a condition of rebellion and hostility towards God, because two frail creatures yielded to temptation in the morning of human life,—in other words, to put the matter plainly, that every infant on its mother's knee hides under its innocent eyes and happy face a heart which is a mass of corruption, and has come into the world under the wrath of God for sin committed by some person ages ago. They affirm that to rescue man from this lost condition, to make up the arrears of his defied and neglected duty, and to save him from the awful penalty of his rebellion, God visited the doom upon the head of an innocent being whom he tenderly loved, and at the same time, by punishing the guiltless, fulfilled the required righteousness, meted out the merited sentence of guilt, reconciled the claims of justice and mercy in the divine nature, so as to let man, the real criminal, go free. They then go on to affirm that, notwithstanding all this, God will ultimately, as the grand result of this arrangement, banish into endless suffering, in hell, the vast majority who, from some cause or other—frequently through no fault of their own—fail to make their escape by this one open door! And they add that if this "scheme of salvation" be surrendered, Christianity is renounced. If it be so, Christianity is a rapidly vanishing quantity; for when we look into the churches which are supposed to hold these views, we find

completely contradictory opinions on the doctrines of the transfer of Adam's guilt, original sin, and an expiatory, substitutionary sacrifice, while the doctrine of endless torment is boldly denied by leading ministers as a libel on God.

I am advised, again, that Christianity is absolutely dependent on miracles ; and, therefore, if a man, having looked at that question from top to bottom, says, "I reject the miracles of the New Testament as facts ; they are allegories ; they are the growth of legend ; they came of the spirit that surrounds heroes with signs and wonders " ; or, if he stops short, and simply says, "I can say nothing one way or the other ; it is an open question ; I lean sometimes this way, and sometimes that, but have no decisive opinion " ; then we are told that his Christianity is worthless, although it is obvious that the principles of Christianity are imperishable truths, based on a foundation independent of miracles.

Archbishop Manning lays down that the worship of the Virgin Mary is an integral part of Christianity. The Rev. Orby Shipley, formerly one of the leaders of the Ritualist school and now a Romanist, solemnly announces that a belief in the Seven Sacraments is an essential feature of Christianity ; while the Evangelical asseverates that this is a deadly heresy. Indeed, so far-reaching and fundamental are the differences in the Church of England that the late Dean M'Neile made the stupendous assertion that he and Dr. Pusey did not worship the same God. It would seem that our only safety consists in the omnivorous appetite that can digest each and all of the 999 interpretations of which Lord Amberley said the 39 Articles are capable ; and then we shall assuredly be in possession of the heavenly manna, with whatever adulterated bread it may be mixed up. It is related of an illustrious Englishman that, in a court of justice, he heard a case stated by counsel, and resolved upon his judgment. But when the counsel for the other side had spoken, he found himself so unsettled and perplexed, that he exclaimed, "So help me God, I will never

listen to evidence again!" Similar confusion, resulting in a like not unnatural decision, has been created in hundreds of earnest minds by the contradictory definitions of Christianity—definitions so contradictory that we do not wonder at the fact that many men turn away from religion as something too mystical, too unsubstantial, too far removed from common life, for them to trouble themselves about.

Now, surely, this indisputable fact—this serious, not to say diversity alone, but opposition of opinion and statement—affords the strongest reason for considering it an error of the first magnitude to regard Christianity as essentially consisting in a definite scheme of theological dogmas. Is it possible to believe that a divine revelation, such as Christianity is commonly supposed to be, would have been left to be a matter of doubt and debate to its recipients? Admitting, for a moment, the idea that God had designed to offer to men a scheme of doctrines, the right belief of which should, in some way, be necessary to the Christian life, must we not also hold that this would have been clearly made known to them? So clearly, plainly stated as to preclude the differences just alluded to, as to what it *is* that has been revealed? It is impossible, in short, on such an assumption, to conceive of Christianity as having been left in so doubtful a position that its disciples should have found occasion, age after age, in councils, in assemblies, in conferences, in books and in magazines, to dispute among themselves, often amidst anger and bitterness of spirit, upon the question of the nature and the number of its most essential doctrines. Of all possible suppositions, surely this is the least admissible, the most extravagantly inconsistent with the nature of the case.*

For another consideration, of even greater weight, and weary of these contradictions, I turn to the New Testament to learn how Christ taught Christianity, and how he

* Rev. Dr. Vance Smith on "Christianity," in *Christianity and Modern Thought*, p. 237.

lived it. He formulated no articles, compiled no catechism, constructed no system of divinity, offered to the acceptance of the future ages of the world no peculiar creed, such as the speculative theologians of ancient and modern times have vexed the world with. He issued no demand for subscription to a series of puzzles in metaphysics ; made no cage of creeds, with the inscription written over it, "Whoso would be a Christian must enter here." He summed up Christianity in a principle which contains, embraces, exhausts the law and the prophets : "Love God thy Father—love man thy Brother." As he teaches he lives. He goes not among the people as a dialectic, devoting his energies to the discussion of intricate questions in theology ; but, addressing our common humanity in tones of love and righteousness that still touch the heart, tells the erring and abandoned equally with the pious and gentle-hearted, of an all-bountiful Father who cares for them, and of solemn duties to God and to each other ; speaks words of comfort and hope to the penitent, but of warning and woe to the self-righteous ; imparts health, energy, life to the spiritually feeble, the sick, the dying, the dead ; pronounces benedictions on little children, on the humble-minded, on the mourner, on the meek, on the hungerer and thirster after righteousness, on the merciful, on the pure in heart, on those who suffer for the name of Christ. This is Christianity. I know it is often called infidelity to think Christ meant only just what he said, and was understood to say, in his discourses ; but I care nothing at all for the names men give it : it is Christianity daring to be as simple as Christ was in his own faith ; and what was enough for him is enough for me.

I rejoice, indeed, that this element is independent of creeds ; and that this it is which has made men Christians who have belonged to various folds. In *doctrines* they have been far apart : Xavier far from Melancthon—Wesley far from Channing—Chalmers far from Vincent de Paul—Henry Ware far from Chalmers—in *doctrines* separated from

each other, far off, aloof, in different sectarian folds; but in *something* they were all one. What is that *something* that united them? It cannot be anything in which each differs from the rest. It cannot be anything that is peculiar to the Roman Catholic alone, for then the Protestant would not have it; nor anything that is peculiar to the Protestant alone, for then the Roman Catholic would not have it; nor anything that is peculiar to the Trinitarian, for then the Unitarian would not have it. It must be something apart from the distinctive creed of each. It is something which all possess, or they would not be Christian; which they must have, in addition to their several distinguishing doctrines—in company with which the latter may indeed be held, but which is not the exclusive property of any single church, or sect, or individual whatever. It is simply this—the spirit that was in Jesus—the love of God, the love of man, the love of goodness.*

IV.

THE SACERDOTAL ANSWER AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ANSWER.

Now the third counsellor proffers his opinion. He gives what may be termed the *sacerdotal* answer. His conception is that Christianity can be secured only by the intervention of a priest. What kind of creature is a priest? It is a man who, to all outward appearance, is but a human being among human beings, yet who alleges, and finds people to believe, that he can forgive their sins, that he alone can procure God's grace for them, that he can open and shut the

* Rev. Dr. Vance Smith, *Ibid.*, pp. 257—8.

gates of heaven to his fellow men. It is needless to say how large a part of Christendom is still under the influence of this kind of superstition : or how this form of religion, so enervating to all vigour of thought, is, at this moment, establishing itself in the midst of a Church which, as if in irony, calls itself the "bulwark of Protestantism."

It is almost superfluous for me to say that, probably, no one who cares to read these words would seriously maintain that the Gospel of Christ consists, in any essential way, in submission to a priesthood, fallible or infallible ; in the observance of rites and ceremonies, of times and seasons ; or in a particular mode or form of church government, whatever doctrines these may be supposed to embody or to symbolise. Such things have, indeed, variously prevailed among Christian communities from the beginning. Generation after generation has seen priests, popes, patriarchs, and presbyters, without number, and without much profit from them. These personages deck themselves out in sacred garments—assume ecclesiastical dignities and powers—and seek to heighten the charm and the efficacy of their worship by the aid of altars and sacrifices, so called, of prostrations, incense, lamps, and candles, and many other imposing accessories. But are such things to be reckoned among the essentials of Christian righteousness? Does the *presence* or the *blessing* of the spirit of God, to the penitent, reverent, waiting soul of man, depend upon anything which anyone calling himself a priest can do or say for us? Will anyone whose opinion is worth listening to, say that it does?

I turn from this to the fourth counsellor,—to the *final* and *scriptural* answer to the question, "What is Christianity?" The words of Paul are the reply, "It is having the same mind that was in Jesus Christ." Doctrines, organisations, ritual may be and are useful in their way, but they are outside wrapperings, husks, shells. Christianity is what Christ was, in his devout and holy spirit, in his life. We see in him what Christianity is. It is an inward, vital, regenerating power, influencing the affections, purifying the motives,

exalting the desires, renewing the thoughts, governing the conduct. Not an external form to be observed, but an internal life. Not a dead letter to be obeyed, but an inward and divine force, propagating itself in beneficent action. Not a system of opinions to be held, but a spiritual power to permeate the whole being of man and develop in him the moral qualities of Jesus. Christianity is to be inspired by the motives, to be animated by the principles, to live for the exalted ends that actuated him. In relation to *man*, it is to do our duty to our wives and children, to our neighbours and fellowmen, to the ignorant that they may be enlightened, to the poor that they may be comforted, to the oppressed that they may be made free, and to all whom we can help with hand and heart. In relation to *God*, it is to be pervaded by a continual sense of dependence upon a Being of vast love, higher than ourselves; to be thankful to Him for life, and the joys, the glories, the temptations, the crosses that attend it; to love Him with the devoutest affection; to place in Him a confidence so firm that pleasure cannot charm it away, nor pain remove it, nor adversity shake it, nor death destroy it; never to be weary of doing whatever we believe to be His will; to be daily striving to transcribe into ourselves and our life more of the justice, the goodness, the truth, with which we clothe our God; and in universal love, embracing the evil as well as the good, in tenderness, sweetness, unselfishness, to come nearer to Him who sends His rain on the just and the unjust. It is to live the chaste and noble, the tender and brave, the truthful and merciful life of Jesus Christ; and there is not a man or woman who may not reproduce it. It is to seek by all the force that is in us, to mend the world with a little human love; to live, in our measure, the same life of personal purity and of devotedness to the welfare of others that Christ did in his career. This is Christianity; nothing *more*, nothing *less*, nothing *else*.

Now, from this way of looking at Christianity, three things follow which I will touch upon. The first and second

apply to the common view of Christianity ; the third applies to the Secularist argument against Christianity.

First, I remark that a man may be a Christian in the only true and vital sense, and yet have a good deal of speculative error. A man may go a great way wrong in his intellectual views of God and of spiritual realities ; he may err much in reasoning on them ; he may fall into innumerable mistakes in fashioning a system of theology, as we all do, and yet be a Christian. If the principles of Jesus permeate your being ; if the motives that inspired him and the objects he lived for, are the motives and objects that constrain you ; if you are willing to reproduce his life—not in particular and specific copies of his acts, but—in the spirit of reverence and obedience towards God, and affection towards humanity, you cannot be more Christian than that, whatever your theological and technical views may be. It is with what his affections love, with what he cleaves to with all his soul, that a man lives a Christian life. And if he gives himself to the love of truth, pure and unfeigned, to sincerity, to genuine disinterestedness,—if he seeks, with all the energy and ardour that are in him, to spread knowledge, nobleness, righteousness, to those around him ; then, although his intellect has gone wrong about doctrine, although his reason has gone wrong, he is a living embodiment of what Christianity is.

If this be the true view, it follows, again, that the Christian spirit is not confined to those who have the knowledge of Christianity. While we cannot set our own ideal too high, and while we cannot be too strenuous in carrying to all the world the clearer and fuller light we have, we must rejoice in whatever is excellent in character, wherever it appears. We may say that wherever any man—be he Christian, Mohammedan, Brahmin, or Pagan,—is moved to do right rather than wrong, to tell the truth rather than to lie, to sacrifice his own happiness to another's, to conquer temptation, to love duty rather than pleasure, that man is a Christian indeed, though not in name. There have been some, like Socrates and Marcus Aurelius, who knew not the

name of Christ, who have possessed the divine temper, who have been the servants of God, and with whom it would be an honour for any of us to be reckoned as fellow-servants. With gladness and with a great feeling of brotherhood it stirs within me, I believe, with Peter, that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him.

There are such men everywhere, of every nation, of every religion in the world, whose lives are full of goodness, of helpfulness to their kind, and of all nobleness. Show me such a man, and though he be a heathen, or a so-called heretic or sceptic, I can join heart and hand with him. I respect him. I esteem and love him. I cannot help it: I do not want to help it. He may *say* that he is no Christian; nay, he may say that he is Anti-Christian; he may say what he will; what I wish he would not say; what I think it is contrary to the usages of speech to say; but whatever the language of his *lips*, the language of his *heart* and *life* wins me to him, and I cannot help it. He may call himself a Theist; he may call himself, or be called, an Infidel; and yet if he is, as he may be, one of the best men I know, the consequence must follow. I judge of him just as I should judge of the Roman Catholic, the Calvinist, the Presbyterian, the Episcopalian, the Methodist, under the same conditions. I have dear friends among them all, and I will not suffer this holy bond to be torn asunder by the meshes of speculation which surround it.

V.

THE SECULARIST OBJECTIONS—CHRISTIANITY A
PERMANENT RELIGION.

Regarding Christianity in this light, my third remark is that it nullifies the argument of the Secularist against Christianity. It is astonishing how much is written by both parties in this controversy which is completely beside the mark ; how much has been laboriously proved or disproved which mattered nothing, whether true or false, to the great question at issue. That question is, Is it a divine thing to have the mind that was in Jesus in our daily lives, in the principles on which we act, in the feelings we manifest in our intercourse with our fellowmen, in the spirit we evince towards God and man under the various circumstances of life, prosperity and adversity, joy and sorrow, health and sickness? Is it a divine thing to have a character resembling Christ's? He who disproves that fact destroys Christianity ; and he who has proved that fact has proved Christianity. When men object to the narrow, contracted, and cruel ideas of God held by the ancient Hebrews ; when they revolt against the way in which Jewish warriors used their victories ; when they assail the apostleship of Judas, or the authority of Paul on matters of social life, or on questions of civil polity ; when they detect an exploded science in Genesis, or in the Epistles a piece of advice about giving up property, or obeying in all circumstances civil rulers, which was merely local and temporary, and arose out of the exigences of the early Christians ; when they labour to show a proverb not wise, or a precept not practicable ; when they argue that Joshua was not merciful, and David not altogether a man after God's own heart, because he was guilty of a great crime, that the Jews were not refined, and that the insane were not possessed ; and when they call this

disproving Christianity,—they are as trifling as the divines who, with infinite zest and toil, meet them on all these points and call that establishing Christianity. Assume that the objections are completely triumphant on every one of those points, still Christianity is not demolished; it is not shaken, it is not touched. It stands like a castle on a rock; and all that the combatants have ascertained is that certain plants at its base are weeds and not flowers. What can be more irrelevant than such arguments as these: Moses did not understand Sir Isaac Newton's theory of the planetary system, therefore, it is worthless to nurture the graces and virtues of Jesus in our hearts and translate them into our lives: or, Jewish doctors and the Apostles were wrong as to the cause of insanity, therefore, worship, duty, devotion to God, Christ, humanity, to justice, freedom, truth, are a grand mistake: or the social and political opinions of Paul were not of *universal*, only of *local* and *temporary* application, expedient at the time, therefore, it is folly to study the life of Jesus, to inform our minds and hearts, and to shape our wills into his likeness, which is the ideal of humanity? How far away from the mark is such reasoning as this! And yet to this may very much be reduced which is continually put forth as destructive of Christianity. But if it does not prove that love to God and man—that walking in the life and light of the enlightened conscience—that surrender to God's laws, written on man's heart, and for ever urged by God's spirit—if it does not prove that these are false and pernicious principles, it does not disprove Christianity.

Christianity cannot be destroyed. It is true, because it is the transcript of self-evident and self-proving principles; true, because it is guaranteed by our nature; true, because of universal application, unimpeached by time or experience. It affirms the being and authority of a righteous, holy, and all-loving God, whom man can serve and love and worship because he is made in His image; whom he can know by studying what is best in himself; to whom he is directly

related by reason, conscience, and affection. It affirms divine science and worship to consist in walking by the light of conscience, and surrendering to the Voice of God as it speaks within. It affirms the present and persistent penalty, the inevitable consequences, of all moral and spiritual wrongdoing and disobedience ; the present and future blessedness of well-doing and holiness. It sets forth Jesus Christ as Son of God and Son of Man—appellations which, deeply considered, really mean the same thing,—the messenger, the representative, the moral image of God. It insists upon men honouring, loving, and following him. Its clear object is to dignify and ennoble man by presenting God as his father ; to show him to what a height of divine goodness and glory he may reach by exhibiting Christ in the loveliness, sanctity, and power of his winsome yet awful beauty ; to make him ashamed of his own sins, and afraid of sin, by arousing moral sensibility in his heart, and revealing to him, in Jesus Christ, the grand possibilities of his soul.

If there be anything that disproves this plain, direct, earnest, simple Christianity, in nature or in man, in earth or in our dust, in chemistry, astronomy, anthropology ; in geology, the language of dead eras ; in language, the geology of buried races—by all means let us know it ! Why should we be afraid that assaults upon creeds, and books, and documents, can injure permanently faith and piety, or endanger Christianity ? “ Oh, not a thousandth part the power of Christian truth and righteousness has yet been shown in the world. The love of God, the love of man, have only just begun their glorious mission. Christ yet waits for his true throne. Humanity is just come of age, and, with some wild festivity, is claiming its heritage. But God is with it and over it ; and Jesus Christ is its inspirer and guide. He will not lose his headship. He will be more followed when he is less worshipped ; more truly loved when he is less idolised ; more triumphant when he is more clearly understood. Darkness, wrath, threats, enchantments, sacraments, prostrations, humiliations of reason, emotional

transports, affectations of belief, belief for its own sake,—none of these things are truly favourable to Christ's kingdom, or the glory of his gospel. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Christ is the Son of Righteousness. When reason, conscience, affection, rule the world; when love and justice, and mild and tender views of life and humanity, of God and Christ, displace the cruel terrors and superstitions that have survived the social and political meliorations of the age, we shall begin to see that love is the fulfilling of the law, and liberty of thought the greatest friend of worship, the final result of Christ's coming, and the throne from which he commands the whole human heart and history." *

* Rev. Dr. Henry N. Bellows on "Break between Modern Thought and Ancient Faith and Worship," in *Christianity and Modern Thought*, pp. 30-31.

THE BASIS OF CHRISTIANITY.*

IN our view the foundations of Christianity are solid, impregnable. They are based on the realities of human nature. To destroy them, the common facts of life must cease to be. Annihilate the wants of the soul, extinguish the light of conscience, kill the hopes that "wander through eternity," quench the ideal of perfect manhood, and then the pedestals upon which Christianity is reared are removed. For Christianity is erected upon—or, rather, we should say, is a development out of—the unassailable facts, the deepest necessities, the highest aspirations, the loftiest possibilities of human nature.

Of course the *meaning* of Christianity and the *basis* of Christianity are inseparably connected. Whatever Christianity is defined to be, there must be placed underneath it a support adequate to sustain the definition. Let it be said that it consists in the assent to the historical statements in the four gospels, then there arises the necessity of establishing the infallible accuracy of every item in those chronicles, for if it depends on their absolute correctness, and one of them can be demonstrated to be an error, the foundations are weakened. If it be maintained that it consists in the acceptance of a well-compacted system of doctrines, which everybody must believe, or be doomed to perdition, then there confronts us the obligation of proving, beyond the possibility of reasonable doubt, that the doctrines are the truth of God. We know in what insurmountable difficulties this representation fixes us. Say that the vitality of Christianity is inseparably joined with a belief in the

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, Dec. 24th, 1875, and the *Christian Register*, Boston (U.S.), July 28th, 1881.

reported supernatural birth, the miracles, and the physical resurrection of Jesus, and we are driven into corners from which there is no escape,—none, except by accomplished manœuvring, or skill in the theoretical art of dexterous movement. Discover a flaw in the traditions—decline to believe that the natural needs anything in the supernatural to augment its unceasing wonder and inexhaustible glory—feel the heart shuddering at doctrines which convert God's countenance of light into a face of frowning darkness—listen to reason condemning them as untrue to the best instincts and the noblest thoughts of the soul; and, if there be no Christianity apart from things which reason rejects, and the emotions revolt from, does it not result that Christianity is a mixture of truth and fable? What can be done, men ask, in such conditions, to save Christianity?—as if a religion based upon such weak foundations as these could be saved, or were worth saving, against the tide of modern knowledge. And the answer of the two prevailing schools of theologians is—“We can save it by appealing to the authority of an infallible Book, or to that of an infallible Church.” They tell us that it will fall with a mighty crash if it be not buttressed by a divine corporation, or borne up by an infallible text. But neither of these two claims of infallibility can be sustained by facts. That Church cannot be infallible which contradicts itself, as the Roman Church does. That Book cannot be infallible which comes to us in its present form simply by the unratified choice of men, or the decisions of unauthenticated tribunals; which gives us no handle by which we can even begin to deal with the plain question of its inspired authority; which affords no source of certainty or uniformity of belief even among those who hold most strenuously its perfect freedom from error; which is so insufficient even for them, that they cannot trust it alone, but must supplement it with catechisms and creeds.

But, now, as neither Church nor book affords a basis on which to place Christianity in a position of solidity, where

are the grounds on which it is founded with a strength and certainty that cannot be shaken? They are in human nature. Its spiritual truths correspond to human realities, and richly supply human wants. It appeals to, and is in harmony with, the best instincts and affections of the soul. The highest aspirations are drawn out and met by the presentation of a Living Person who fulfils them in the round of his daily life. The ideal of humanity is heightened, strengthened, and satisfied by a real human Life which reveals, by their actual realization, the spiritual possibilities of man. The yearning of the heart for a God who is not an all-pervading Intellect, impassive, insensible, incapable of sympathy, a great marble colossus, but a God vital with feeling and affection, with whom rich communion is possible, is answered in a Personal Life and Character, in which as the noblest of men, even men miscalled "unbelievers," have confessed, there shines forth the Image of God; in which the ages have seen, in fullest attained measure, an incarnation of divinity in humanity, and a translation of humanity into divinity. The aching void of the heart is filled, the mighty unrest that possesses it is calmed, by the winning faith and quiet of that Life which went through its sorrows and sufferings, still and noiseless, because it trusted utterly to the Love of a Living Being who was around its path, and encompassed it with a vital Presence. The longing and reaching up of the soul for immortality are confirmed by him who lived in the clear light of the unseen world, and who disclosed the reality of our undying personal being to our hungry heart, to our longing life, to our sense of human imperfection.

Here, then, is the test of Christianity. For spiritual purposes we do not care whether every statement in the New Testament is literally and entirely true; we do not inquire whether a certain set of dogmas is Scriptural or not; we do not ask for a sign from heaven; we do not trouble to get established beyond controversy whether the Gospels were written by the men whose names they bear. What

matters it if Plato did not write the wise thoughts that are in the books ascribed to him? *Are the thoughts true?* What matters it if the problems attributed to Euclid were constructed by some one else? *Are the problems sound?* What matters it if that name of wonder and power, the name of Shakspeare, be but a fable? *Does the poetry of Shakspeare tune forth for us in "warbles of native wood-notes wild," the thoughts, desires, passions, and working of our nature?* Does it disclose ourselves to ourselves? Is it full of the "touches which make the whole world kin"? What matters it if Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were not the authors of the four Gospels? *Does the Life therein portrayed read like a fiction?* Does it not lay hold on us and move us as only reality permanently can? Does it not come to us with the supply for the needs of the living soul in its richly laden hands? Does it not find a response in our purest emotions? Does it not fulfil our highest ideal of virtue and holiness? Does it not answer to the cry of the heart and the flesh for the living God? And for a reply to these questions we can refer to human experience, which, if it clearly testifies to anything at all, testifies triumphantly, in a thousand religious biographies, that *Jesus, whose spirit is the imperishable essence of Christianity,* has been to men strength in weakness, guidance in uncertainty, light in darkness, consolation in sorrow, and the light of an immortal morning in the night of death.

CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY.



I ASSUME that, however varied may be our views as to his person, nearly all will be agreed that the life, the central figure, the pivotal fact of Christianity is Christ. If we say that he is a superhuman being, we shall attribute the power of Christianity to his divine nature. If we say that he is one of us, we shall still appraise Christianity as the spirit of him who was the crown of the human race. Ascribe to him Godhead, and Christianity will be estimated as owing all its effect to that source. Ascribe to him manhood alone, and Christianity will be concentrated in that life which was the most royal of royal lives. From any point of view, Christ is the living genius of Christianity; even from the atheist's, for he thinks that if he can dethrone Christ he will abolish Christianity.

Christianity is something deeper than a system. A system is fluctuating, subject to modification, alteration, revolution, by the varying conditions and needs of life, and is incapable of universal application. Systems are local. There is the Episcopalian, the Independent, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Methodist system. Each of them is good in its way, but it is limited. Not one of them, not all of them together, exhaust Christianity. Nor do they make Christianity. It makes them and transcends them. It is above and beyond them. It enters into them all, more or less, but these ecclesiastical reservoirs do not empty the fountain.

Christianity is no more a philosophy than an ecclesiastical organisation. A philosophy is a scheme of thought in explanation of the laws and the reciprocal relation of physical and mental phenomena. But in Christianity there is nothing of this. Jesus is silent on the laws of nature,

matter and mind. What account can be given of the world's existence, and of the phenomena of matter presented to the senses? What is the human soul, and what the cause of the phenomena it exhibits? By what process do we acquire our mental furniture? Whence came our notions of time, space, substance, identity? Whence our notions of beauty, virtue, duty, right and wrong? Are they generalisations of experience and observation, begun from the earliest period of the childhood of mankind, and now the accumulated, inherited results of the intellectual and moral history of the race? Or, does the soul possess them innately on its entrance into the world? These questions, which from the earliest times have divided, and still divide, philosophers into two schools, are outside the thought of Christ. What is the standard of ethics? He enters into no discussion, whether it be the principle of Utility, or of Expediency, or of the Fitness of things, or of Sympathy. He speaks of purity, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love; of inward consecration—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart"—and of outward service—"And thy neighbour as thyself"; of God as a Heavenly Father, and of a life beyond this. But we do not find these ideas elaborated in a system of thought. We find them incarnated in a life, a life of spiritual richness, in the soul of Christ, full, inexhaustible; passing from him into the hearts of apostles and disciples; flowing from them in a continuous stream of Christian experience down to the present time. The vital and exhaustless element of Christianity is not an ecclesiastical system, not a philosophy, but a personality of perennial power.

I waive the discussion of special doctrinal definitions. I pass over the criticism which insists upon reducing the New Testament to a collection of borrowed moral precepts, because Christianity is not identical with the question of the originality of Christ's teaching; its essential is the life in which that teaching, whatever the origin of "these sayings of mine," was embodied. I leave out of sight the miracles of the Gospels. They are not of the essence of Christianity.

They are not the holy power with Christian souls of Jesus the Master. It is the beauty and the wisdom and the wonder of his daily life that draw the hearts of men to him. All imaginable miracles surrounding an inferior teacher would have had no such heart-penetrating power, no such will-subduing might, no such saving efficacy. Excluding all these things from consideration, there is one conception, one feature, one fact of Christianity, which is imperishable. It is a fact of power; and the power is eternally fresh. Age does not weaken it. The advance of the years does not dim its brightness. Its voice does not falter with the passage of the centuries. It still calms the storm of our passions; draws from us the response of sympathy; rebukes us with tenderness; counsels us with wisdom and love; kindles afresh the fires of life; communicates power; adds to our resources; draws us ever upward to higher heights of being; mellows the day, and makes the night radiant with the light of an unquenchable hope. Social convulsions do not shake its foundations. Civilisation, destructive of so much, does not cause this to crumble. While the power of thrones and dynasties wanes as the ages go on, this power deepens and "widens with the process of the times." The human race as it rises into higher manhood and truer knowledge, throws off what is feeble, discovers what is imposture and renounces it, detects what is the growth of pious fraud and uproots it, discerns what is fanaticism, becomes weary of it, and pricks the bubble. But as the race ascends into manhood, this living soul of Christianity gently assumes a higher throne, and exercises a loftier, purer, and wider sovereignty. Ecclesiastical systems miscarry; schemes of philosophy vanish into history. Now Plato reigns; then Bacon takes his place; anon Hamilton is our ruler; and, once again, Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer are our guides. One after another our lights go out. But this light shines brighter and brighter into the perfect day. And what is it? It is the character of Christ. The power comes from a life. Does mankind, with its hunger and thirst after righteousness, ask to be fed

with a supply of propositions, a collection of syllogisms? When it wants to know the philosophy of Utility you will not say, "Look at Bentham's or Stuart Mill's life," but you will direct it to read Bentham's or Stuart Mill's books. When it questions you as to what Reason is, what the Will is, what the relation of Sensation to Knowledge is, you never think of responding, "Look to the example of Kant, the conduct of Jonathan Edwards, the life of Bacon or Hobbes, or Descartes and Hume"; but you answer, "Read the books of Kant, Edwards, Bacon and Hume." But when the soul is filled with its holiest aspirations and profoundest yearnings, with sighings for truth, with cries for love and light, with cravings for the lost, where does it find answer of inspiration, radiance and peace? In a series of speculations, or an argument of metaphysics? In dissertations of abstract reasoning? No; but in a real, noble, divine man,—in the loveliness, sanctity, tenderness, power, and winning beauty of Jesus.

Take it which way we please, the feature of Christianity will never become dim, which every age grows more luminous; which will for ever draw the wonder of our childhood, the reverence of our manhood, the unquenched curiosity and awe of age; is the life of love and truth, mercy and purity, obedience and self-sacrifice lived by Christ. A set of abstractions attracts no sympathy. Syllogisms are not things that you can love. Around a personal life alone affections twine. Nothing less than a real life is a spring of stimulus. Precepts are not vital souls charged with spiritual magnetism. Only a personality can fill the heart with strength and solace. It was no organisation, no philosophy, no creed, but an exalted life of sacrifice which armed with courage and fortitude "the noble army of martyrs"; and of all the agencies employed to-day to inspire humanity to live as befits sons of God, there is none more effectual than the story of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

II.

Every week we are assured, in some periodical or other, not in words of tender regret, but in those of unfeeling exultation, that Christianity is destined to die. If it were a system it would die, and it would not much matter. If it were a philosophy, it might live, but only among the few, not among the many: it would be a religion impossible for the poor. If it were a creed it would die, for creeds,—which are only provisional statements—grow old as knowledge enlarges and the soul expands. And if it were a creed of the old and not yet extinct theology, presenting God as a remorseless Judge and Destroyer, man's life as a curse, Christ's death as a bargain, man's righteousness as "filthy rags," and man's future either as a hell of hopeless torture or as a heaven of selfish joy,—if it were a creed beginning with God execrating the whole race at their entrance on earth for the sin of an ancestor in some incalculably remote period of time, proceeding to God dying on the cross, ending with God crowning His work with torturing most of mankind in an eternal hell, it would die out as utterly as the extinct monsters of pre-historic times. But if Christianity be the spirit of Christ, then it has a quality which distinguishes it from all other religions, and which also ensures its permanence. That quality is the universality of its application. The grand distinction between Christianity and other religions is that they are for races, for classes: this is for humanity. The other great religions have been, or are, limited to a single nation, or to a single race. Christianity, Mohammedanism, and Buddhism, are the only three religions which have overstepped the boundaries of race: and Mohammedanism began as a local and purified form of Christianity: while Buddhism, foreign in its genius to and unadaptable by the Western mind, is not absorbing Christianity in the East, but Christianity there is assimilating to itself all in Buddhism which is allied to it. Christ

alone is really Catholic. He invades our common humanity. He touches all estates and conditions, all phases of character and circumstance. There is something in him that awakens the chord, not in the Englishman, in the European, in the Asiatic, but in man : something that appeals, not to the Unitarian and Trinitarian, but to all of them, deeper and more embracing than any creed, more vital and inclusive than any dogma, more expansive than any sect, more cosmopolitan than any national genius. Is it doubted? Within the folds of what sect, or church, or nation, or century, are those who honour, and love, and follow him confined? They are of all peoples, of all confessions, and of all times. Their national peculiarities separate them ; their doctrinal differences keep them theologically apart ; but beneath all that tends to sunder there is something which unites them, which is not the exclusive property of any one of them, but the common inheritance of all. The Spirit of Christ is the key which has unlocked the mysterious and intricate wards in souls of every theological habit. By a life of spiritual beauty which enraptures the heart, by a life which is still the inspiration, the guide, and the ideal of men, he meets the varied spiritual moods of our universal humanity. Amidst the transition state in which the ecclesiastical institutions associated with Christianity now are, Jesus remains, the central fact of Christianity. Amidst the interminable controversies of philosophy, the unceasing battles of the Sensationalists and Intuitionists, men are still won to the study of that life, drawn to it by the quietness and confidence of its strength, and feeling in it an attraction of which they never grow weary, and a fulness which a life's study cannot exhaust. Amidst the decline of dogmas which have had only the power of ecclesiastical authority behind them, they find in Christ a Christianity that is always as fresh as the morning dew, as universal as the dawn, as life-giving as the sun ; and while mankind exists ; men will not cease to receive from him the highest and purest inspiration of which human

nature is capable. Christianity will live, because Christ will ever have a response in the holiest instincts of our spiritual nature.

III.

We are assured that science will displace Christianity. A distinguished leader of this school is reported to have said : " All the religion I know or need, all the religion the world knows or needs, is the religion of science." And another of the same school : " Science is the invincible power of the future, and the only true religion of humanity, based upon the teachings of nature." Deeply must we regret such utterances as these, for the scientific exclusiveness that banishes spiritual realities is as narrow and dogmatic as the theological exclusiveness that shuts out science from its field. We want no exclusion : we want the breadth that takes in the totality of man's being. We embrace science with open arms, because it shows us the methods by which the Infinite Power works in nature, and so enlarges our knowledge of Him. We embrace Christianity because it dignifies and ennobles man by presenting God as his father, because it shows us what our nature is capable of in the life of one who, made like unto his brethren and tempted in all points like as we are, rose out of temptation into the serene strength of an untemptable manhood ; because it teaches—what, I think, dawns upon our nature in its most luminous hours as a heavenly vision—that, on the throne of the universe love is the Supreme Power : love divine, absolute, infinite, able, therefore, to conquer all evil, all sin, to ultimately make man and God, earth and heaven, time and eternity, one harmonious whole of being. Neither of these faiths will supplant the other. Neither is complete without the other. They cohere, as two parts of a perfect whole. Science has blessed religion by ennobling its conceptions

and bettering its methods. Religion will bless science, when religious teachers cease to stand on the high places screaming in wrath at its advance, when they cease to retire in terror into sacred caves and refuse to look out upon the universe as it is, and when they devote themselves to bringing out from the truths of matter the celestial side which Emerson says is in every material fact. We, therefore, thank science for its grand facts, for their utility in the business of daily life, and for their fruitful suggestions on the ways of the Infinite Power and Wisdom. We accept the light, the help, the truth which have come, and are to come, from rock and soil, from air and sea and star. This globe is the book of the Infinite Mind, God's Bible, the only Bible which is God's, and we are eager to know the wondrous characters on its pages. We are eager to know how this planet has been brought into existence, how it has been fashioned and re-fashioned in its successive stages, how have worked the stable and unswerving laws by which it has been bound round through all its changes and its cycles. We rejoice that there are ten thousand workers and teachers abroad, interpreting the revelation that is in all things; and we say that every man who brings down facts from the sky, or hauls them up from the ocean's bed, or hammers them out from the rock's recesses,—every man who brings forth facts from any department of research whatever, and sets us thinking of their origin and uses, is hastening the great end to which all knowledge is tending; and that end, whatever it may do with theologies, will strengthen religion by basing it on laws that are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But when we are told that this knowledge of the outward world is all that is needed, and that, as it advances, religion will retreat, I reply:—You commit the very mistake of the theological dogmatists,—you put a part of truth for the whole of truth, and you narrow down our needs to one class of our needs. You are serving religion by clearing from it a mass of superstitions, but when you assume that science will displace

religion, you are ignoring elements of human nature which Strauss confesses constitute its illustrious pre-eminence, and which, say what you please, will assert their ascendancy. We have from Professor Tyndall the distinct avowal that science does not cover the whole of life, that human nature needs more and will have more, and that emotion, imagination, conscience are wanted for the full and ripe development of our being. There are imperishable instincts, emotions, and wants of man upon which science is dumb and philosophy opens not its mouth, and which experience demonstrates that religion alone can supply ; and, therefore, while we readily accept all the established verities and conclusions of science, we must have something more to meet man's hungering and thirsting after God,—something that answers to man's reaching upward for a strength that never fails, for a patience that is never tired, for a refuge that is always sure, for a love that is never exhausted. That something I find in the faith in God and in the realisation of God which Christ gives me—not which he alone gives me, but which he gives me most richly and abundantly. For this reason the world will turn to him, as to an everlasting fountain of living water, to satisfy its thirst after it has fed itself on the truths of science ; for somehow he gets hold of those things which lie deepest in the common heart of man,—those permanent and glorious emotions which cannot be exhausted, and in which the mysteries that never cease their awe and wonder clothe themselves from age to age.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE.—ESTIMATES OF JESUS, by Mr. MATTHEW ARNOLD, RENAN, JOHN STUART MILL, STRAUSS, W. R. GREG, the Author of *Ecce Homo*, W. H. LECKY, and the Author of *Supernatural Religion*.

Mr. Matthew Arnold affirms:—"Try all the ways to righteousness you can think of, and you will find that no way brings you to it except the way of Jesus, but that this way does bring you to it." *

The language of Renan is probably familiar to most of us. He says:—"Jesus is the man who has made his race take the greatest step towards the divine. . . . In him was condensed all that is good and elevated in our nature. . . . Whatever may be the unexpected phenomena of the future, Jesus will not be surpassed. His worship will constantly renew its youth; the tale of his life will cause ceaseless tears; his sufferings will soften the best hearts; all the ages will proclaim that among the sons of men, there is none born who is greater than Jesus." †

John Stuart Mill says:—"Whatever else is taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. . . . To the conception of the rational sceptic it remains a possibility that Christ actually was what he supposed himself to be—*not God*, for he never made the slightest pretensions to that character, and would probably have thought such a pretension as blasphemous as it seemed to the men who condemned him,—but a man charged with a special, express and unique commission from God to lead

* *Literature and Dogma*, 2nd edition, 1873, p. 332.

† *Vie de Jesus*, 11th edition, p. 457. English Trans., cheap edition, pp. 310-11.

mankind to truth and virtue It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the gospels is not historical, and that we know *not* how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. *The tradition of his followers suffices to insert any number of marvels, and may have inserted all the miracles which he is reputed to have wrought.* But who among his disciples or among their proselytes are capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus or of imagining the life and character revealed in the gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in which nothing is more evident than that the good which was in them was all derived, as they always professed that it was derived, from a higher source. *What could be added and interpolated by a disciple* we may see in the mystical parts of the gospel of St. John, matters imported from Philo and the Alexandrian Platonists and put into the mouth of the Saviour in long speeches about himself such as the other gospels contain not the slightest vestige of, though pretended to have been delivered on occasions of the deepest interest and when his principal followers were all present; most prominently at the last supper. The East was full of men who could have stolen any quantity of this poor stuff, as the multitudinous Oriental sects of the Gnostics afterwards did. But about the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality, combined with profundity of insight, which *if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at,* must place the prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon the earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of

humanity.”* This quotation is the more noteworthy because Mill had no Christian training as a child, but reached these conclusions solely by the independent investigations of his adult years.

Strauss, in the first edition of his *Leben Jesu*, describes Christ as one whose all but perfect life “stands alone and unapproached in the world’s history.”† In the second edition he places him above Socrates as a moralist and reformer; saying that he united Hebrew sanctity with Greek geniality, and that he realized with an original force the Fatherhood of God, and by taking it as the model for human morality, succeeded in giving to the virtues of mercy, tenderness, and self-sacrifice their long-neglected place and ascendancy.‡

Mr. William Rathbone Greg, writes:—“It is difficult, without exhausting superlatives, even to unexpressive and wearisome satiety, to do justice to our intense love, reverence, and admiration for the character and teaching of Jesus. We regard him not as the perfection of the intellectual or philosophic mind, but as the perfection of the spiritual character, as surpassing all men of all times in the closeness and depth of his communion with the Father. In reading the sayings of Jesus, we feel that we are holding converse with the wisest, purest, noblest being that ever clothed thought in the poor language of humanity. In studying his life, we feel that we are following the footsteps of the highest ideal yet presented to us upon earth. ‘Blessed be God that so much manliness has been lived out, and stands there yet, a lasting monument to mark how high the tides of divine life have risen in the world of man.’”§

The author of *Ecce Homo* says:—“The story of his life will always remain the one record in which the moral per-

* *Three Essays*, p. 253—254.

† II., 779.

‡ II., 624—627.

§ *Creed of Christendom*, 2nd edition, pp. 209—210.

fection of man stands revealed in its root and unity,—the hidden spring made palpably manifest, by which the whole machine is moved. And as, in the will of God, this unique man was elected to a unique sorrow, and holds as undisputed a sovereignty in suffering as in self-devotion, all lesser examples and lives will for ever hold a subordinate place, and serve chiefly to reflect light on the central and original example.”*

Mr. Lecky, the historian of Rationalism and of European Morals, thus writes of the power of Christ upon mankind :—“ If Christianity was remarkable for its appeals to the selfish or interested side of our nature, it was far more remarkable for the empire it attained over disinterested enthusiasm. The Platonist exhorted men to imitate God ; the Stoic to follow reason ; the Christian to the love of Christ. The later Stoics had often united their notions of excellence in an ideal sage, and Epictetus had even urged his disciples to set before them some man of surpassing excellence, and to imagine him continually near them ; but the utmost the Stoic ideal could become was a model for imitation, and the admiration it inspired could never deepen into affection. It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character, which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love ; has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions ; has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice ; and has exercised so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and all the exhortations of moralists. This has indeed been the well-spring of whatever is best and purest in the Christian life. Amid all the sins and failings, amid all the priestcraft and persecution and fanaticism that have defaced the church, it

* *Ecce Homo*, 5th edition, p. 302.

has preserved, in the character and example of its Founder, an enduring principle of regeneration." *

If we turn to *Supernatural Religion*, we find its author saying:—"The teaching of Jesus carried morality to the sublimest point attained or even attainable by humanity. The influence of his spiritual religion has been rendered doubly great by the unparalleled purity and elevation of his character. Surpassing in his sublime simplicity and earnestness the moral grandeur of Sakya Muni, and putting to the blush the sometimes sullied, though generally admirable teaching of Socrates and Plato, and the whole round of Greek philosophers, he presented the rare spectacle of a life, so far as we can estimate it, uniformly noble and consistent with his own lofty principles, so that the 'imitation of Christ' has become almost the final word in the preaching of his religion, and must continue to be one of the most powerful elements of its permanence." †

Finally, Dr. Theodore Keim, in his *Jesus of Nazara* (vol. vi, pp. 436-437) avers that—"The person of Jesus is not only one work among many works of God, it is the peculiar work, the specific revelation of God; yet not a work of pulling down, but of building up and completing the God-appointed order of the world. If Spinoza acknowledged him to be the temple of God in which God most fully revealed Himself, we may exclaim still more joyously that Christianity is the crown of all the creations of God, and Jesus is the chosen of God, God's image and best-beloved and master-workman and world-shaper in the history of mankind. He is at once the repose and the motive-power of history: the noblest ideals of which the dawn of human development dreamt, for which the halcyon days of the earth yearned and strove in inspiration and sadness, have found their realization in him, have become a credible existence in flesh and blood; and yet, again, he is a far-off, dimly-seen prize, which brethren

* *European Morals*, 4th edition, vol. 2, pp. 8-9.

† *Supernatural Religion*, 6th edition, II., 487.

and nations and generations are for ever striving after. To them has fallen the more modest lot of imitating the Great One, of portraying his nature, and of reproducing his ideas in the kingdom of the mind and in the world of existences. And under the banner of these ideals, under the standard of the man who, like God and unlike any other man, called a world of life from naught, there stand and fight even his short-sighted opponents, so far as they contend only for the honour and dignity of mankind, and for the victory of the mind over the tyrants of the earth, over nature and flesh, use and prescription, injustice and unreason. For in such a warfare, when it is honourable, He stands among them, because He and no other is and remains the appointed standard-bearer of the world's progress, who shall triumph over the quagmires and the spirits of darkness of the nether Kosmos."

On the testimony, then, of men who cannot be accused of sectarianism, or of the bias of theological dogmatism, it is acknowledged that, whether Christ and Christianity are or are not divine, they at least are superior to other known phenomena of human history. Yet how can we explain the admitted fact that an unlettered Galilean peasant thus surpassed all philosophers? What other explanation is there so satisfactory and adequate, or as satisfactory and adequate, as his own, that he was taught of God, and spake and did as the Father gave commandment?

WHAT CHRIST CAME FOR.*



I.

THE power of an individual soul : have we ever thought of that? The world has not been made by men in masses, but by a man here and there. An Arabian philosopher, writes Emerson, used to say of the Koran, "You may burn all the libraries, for their value is in this book." So you may shut out the crowd of men from the history of the world, and find the story of nations in the lives of a few persons of commanding mental or moral power. The tale of every empire is in some single biography. The current of every literature runs from the fountain of a few vital books. From one work proceeds the influence that cultures a whole people. Upon a solitary production rests the corner-stone of schools of learning. The features of art for generations are painted by the brush of one man. Every law and constitution, every reformation, civil war, revolution in politics, and era in philosophy, may be reduced to, and epitomized in, the thought or action of one fruitful soul. The forest with its thousand oaks clapping their hands : whence comes it but from the single acorn? The vast rivers with their living burdens : whence flow they but from narrow springs or measurable lakes? The field of corn : whence grow its multitudinous, palpitating ears but from single grains? The great works of the world are each the products of a single brain. Around Plato and Bacon converge the ancient and

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, Jan. 31st, Feb. 14th, 1879, and the *Christian Register*, Boston, U.S., Sept. 8th, 15th, 22nd, 1881.

modern schools of philosophy, whose latest words are framed from their alphabet. Lucretius represents modern science in accounting for all things—for sensations and thoughts, for pain and pleasure; for love and hate, for judgment and deduction, for ideas of good and evil, for noble aspirations and high purposes—by the unconscious commingling sport of atoms. The name of Julius Cæsar is but another title of the history of Rome. Charlemagne is the creator of the system of modern Europe. Dante embodies the aspiration of Italy for a united nationality. With Chaucer begins the uprise of English literature, and under his magic influence the English language ceases to be a dialect, and becomes a speech. Roger Bacon marks the birth of experimental science. Clive represents European conquest in the East. The life of Watt is a standpoint from which to observe man's progress in the utilization of steam. Out of Cromwell's unconquerable soul issue the civil and religious liberties of England. Out of the mighty heart of Luther, that "solitary monk who shook the world," comes the Reformation. Washington is the Father of his country. Wesley is the inspirer of the powerful Evangelical movement in England. Wordsworth creates an era in poetry, and Scott in fiction. And thus it comes to pass that the work of these individual men is the panorama of national movements in politics, science, literature and art. Thus it comes to pass that history is rarely more than the biography of the few creative men. History is a grand, momentous drama, and the scene shifts, and the actors come and go and vary; but the interest lies in certain central figures, whose words and deeds and characters create the chief situations, and make the grand points of the story. There are subordinate characters, but the moulding influence comes from other than they. All the fruit of history is the harvest of seed cast in by a few sowers. And thus history can be explained only by a reference to the lives of individuals.

In the moral history of the world Christ is the central figure. He does not stand alone, but he stands pre-eminent.

He is not simply one of many, but one above many. His character and influence mark a new manifestation of life. The face of the world begins to be changed when there passes over it the breath of his power. His words and acts, and still more, his spirit—that influence which in the realm of souls corresponds to the wind in the material world, and which, while subtle, untraceable, is everywhere felt, all-penetrating, all-powerful—this spirit of Christ affects the condition of the human race. Make what deductions we may from the early history of his life; a history exaggerated, perhaps, by credulous devotion, and even falsified by legendary traditions; it still remains true that the influence of Christ, when we survey its great results, has beneficently impressed itself on the annals of the world. The words which fell from those lips of gentleness and grace on the shores of the lake, on the slope of the mountain, or in his journeyings through Palestine, fermented in the human heart, stirred the deepest feelings, and kindled the aspirations of mankind. They did undoubtedly, to quote the Duke of Somerset, “convulse the world, shake the whole fabric of human society, supply a new basis for civilization, a new framework for human thought, a new motive for human actions.”* The history of all succeeding centuries testifies to the marvellous results thus described, for they have borne some impress of the truth that flowed from his lips, some image of the goodness that in him reached its highest human form and glory, some reflection of the influence that streamed forth from his character—an influence never to be arrested, varying but advancing in its career.

It is to be witnessed in our philanthropy, in our literature, in our politics, in our public institutions. It is to be seen in the fact that wherever the power of that life is felt, there civilization has reached a higher form than can be found where it is unknown. It is to be seen associated with the accumulation of knowledge, with the elevation of sentiments

* *Christian Theology and Modern Scepticism*, p. 47.

and manners. It is to be seen in the unquestionable verity that where culture has reached its highest style, and where morality is at its best, there the influence of that life is operative. The most powerful and enlightened nations acknowledge it. It is connected with the greatest results of intellectual research. For where is it that we learn the latest discoveries in chemistry, astronomy, geology? It is not from Hindoo mythologists, or Chinese moralists, or from Mohammedan philosophers, but from the scholars of Christendom. Where is it that we read the most fruitful books, the deepest philosophy, the noblest poetry? It is not in Arabia, but in Christendom. It is not to the stores of feeble Orientalism, but it is to the libraries, the maps, the globes of Christendom, that we go to learn the history and geography of the earth. It is Christendom which conducts the commerce of the globe. They are the ships of Christian nations which decorate the oceans with their sails. Yes, it is an established historical reality that the Christian spirit is domesticated among peoples predominant in political power, in science, in arts, and commerce; it is undeniable history that it has become identified with all the great elements of human progress in modern times, and that it cannot but go, as things are, wherever steam goes, wherever modern literature goes, wherever Anglo-Saxon enterprise and energy go, wherever civilization goes. The power of the world is concentrated in the colonizing races of Christendom. In all the spheres of life Christendom stands supreme over all other portions of mankind; and while Oriental nations, until they feel the onset of a more active mind and more commanding will, remain unchanged from generation to generation, stationary in their political institutions, inflexible in their customs, stereotyped in their social habits, stagnant in their intellectual life, Christendom goes on advancing.

What is the inevitable inference? Can you dissociate the influence of the life of Christ from the factors which have produced the civilization of Christendom? No theory

of race, of climate, of soil, of geographical position, is an adequate explanation of these phenomena. Admit all these influences, and then imagine, if that be possible, what our condition would have been if Christ had never lived. Says the Duke of Somerset :—"The character of the nation, the laws, the institutions, the whole mind of the people, would have been more changed than the wildest fancy can conceive."* Whatever the grand inspiring cause or causes of this civilization, that cause, if it be but one, those causes, if they be manifold, cannot be separated from the power which has run and spread, as from an exhaustless fountain, from the life of Christ.† May we not, then, fitly ask ourselves what was the purpose of that life which has obtained its most potent sway, not among theorists and dreamers, but among nations of action whose intellects have become sinewy from constant and healthful exercise, among races the most busy, the most practical, and most prying—that life around which range the most important interests of the generations?

* *Christian Theology and Modern Scepticism*, p. 48.

† Mr. Lecky writes :—"The great characteristic of Christianity, and the great moral proof of its divinity, is that it has been the main source of the moral development of Europe, and that it has discharged this office not so much by the inculcation of a system of ethics, however pure, as by the assimilating and attractive influence of a perfect ideal. The moral progress of mankind can never cease to be distinctly and intensely Christian as long as it consists of a gradual approximation to the character of the Christian Founder. There is, indeed, nothing more wonderful in the history of the human race, than the way in which that ideal has traversed the lapse of ages, acquiring a new strength and beauty with each advance of civilization, and infusing its beneficent influence into every sphere of thought and action."—*Rationalism in Europe*, 7th edit., vol. i., p. 307.

II.

It is affirmed by some that these phenomena are accounted for on the supposition that Christ revealed divine truths which were beyond the reach of the human mind. This conception has given rise to what I believe to be conclusive objections to Christianity. What are the ideas, the doctrines of Christ which had been hidden from the foundation of the world? The gospel which he preached was preached centuries before he was born. The sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer, the Golden Rule, can be found in Buddhist, Hindoo, and Chinese Scriptures; at least, they can be gleaned from the sacred literatures of these religions. What Christ did was to proclaim and emphasize those truths with more authority, clearness, richness, fulness. He gathered them together out of the shadows, and poured upon them a flood of light. He surrounded with brightness what before was only dim. He found divine, indefeasible truths, having undying roots in the heart of man; and he illumined them until they shine bright and radiant as the stars against the sky.

There is a marble quarry. It is within easy reach. The commonest labourer may hew out the blocks. A workman ignorant of art may form out of them some rude figure; but he cannot bring out from the marble the eye reposing in beauty, and almost sparkling with emotion; the cheek orbed and symmetrical, and almost wearing the mantling blush; the lips true to nature and almost speaking the thrills of the soul; the features of the human face almost instinct with life. Only an artist can shape the blocks of stone into the human form, and work them into fashions of exquisite beauty. What the artist does for the blocks of stone Christ does for the fundamental religious ideas. He puts them together in a new and living form. He exhibits them in a unity never before apprehended, and with a breadth and

loftiness of meaning never before associated with them.* And he uses them to appeal, not to our intellectual faculties, but to our spiritual sympathies, the deepest elements of our nature. The objection, then, that Christ teaches us no new thing vanishes altogether.

And, moreover, it unfairly keeps out of view the most potent fact—that Christ was inspired to *live* the truths he taught. Men said before him: “These doctrines are true, beautiful, divine; but who can translate them out of philosophy into life? Who can take them out of the region of abstract ideas, and practise them in a veritable human reality?” Christ felt the warmth, the beauty, and the illumination of them, and, kindled by these true fires of God, he opened his being to God in prayer, the divine inspiration filled his soul; and then he absorbed the truths into his being. He was an incarnation of the Golden Rule; he was an embodiment of the Lord’s Prayer; he was the Sermon on the Mount in an electric human life. For two thousand years God has drawn millions of the aspiring races of mankind to Christ, and said: “Behold, what man can be and do under the influence of divine inspiration!” A theory or a doctrine may have, as many have in the Mohammedan and Persian and Indian Scriptures, the

* “Nothing, I conceive, can be more erroneous or superficial than the reasonings of those who maintain that the moral element of Christianity has in it nothing distinctive or peculiar. The method of this school, of which Bolingbroke may be regarded as the type, is to collect from the writings of different heathen writers certain isolated passages embodying precepts that were inculcated by Christianity; and when the collection had become very large, the task was supposed to be accomplished. But the true originality of a system of moral teaching depends, not so much upon the elements of which it is composed, as upon the manner in which they are fused into a symmetrical whole, upon the proportionate value that is attached to different qualities, or, to state the same thing by a single word, upon the type of character that is formed. Now it is quite certain that the Christian type differs not only in degree, but in kind, from the Pagan one.”—Lecky, *Rationalism in Europe*, 7th edit., vol. i., pp. 308-9.

image of deity, and the superscription of eternal love ; but men are always ready to put to a precept the practical test : " Can it be clothed in the reality of daily life ? " And we are prepared to answer that every one who will obey the laws which govern his spirit can live the divinest gospel that heaven ever sent upon the earth. The inspiration by which Christ has touched, moulded, and revolutionized the ages, lies more in his life than in his words. That life is still the ideal ; it seems to me the highest attainable ideal ; and I see not how any advance of humanity can do more than reproduce it.*

III.

It is affirmed by others—and to-day with loud, persistent voices—that Christ aimed at founding an organized ecclesiastical society. But it is a profoundly mischievous misconception to declare that his mission was the erection of an association. It is the error upon which sacerdotalism in all its forms, whether Romanist or Anglican, is built ; and, therefore, sacerdotalists are glad to see it maintained in such books as *Ecce Homo* and Mr. Curteis's Bampton Lectures. *Ecce Homo* gave an unhealthy stimulus to the idea

* " To conceive the good, in fact, is not sufficient : it must be made to succeed among men. . . . Jesus, son of Sirach, and Hillel had uttered aphorisms almost as exalted as those of Jesus. Hillel, however, will never be accounted the true founder of Christianity. In morals, as in art, precept is nothing, practice is everything. The idea which is hidden in a picture of Raphael is of little moment ; it is the picture itself which is prized. So, too, in morals, truth is but little prized when it is a mere sentiment, and only attains its full value when realized in the world as fact. Men of indifferent morality have written very good maxims. Very virtuous men, on the other hand, have done nothing to perpetuate in the world the tradition of virtue. The palm is his who has been mighty both in words and in works, who has discerned the good, and at the price of his blood has caused its triumph. Jesus, from this double point of view, is without equal : his glory remains entire, and will ever be renewed."—Rénan, *Life of Jesus*, Eng. trans., cheap edit., pp. 91-92.

that the institution of a corporation called the Church was an essential part of the purpose of Christ ; and since then the plausible but false and extremely baneful theory has become more prevalent. John Henry Newman, the subtlest thinker among the Roman Catholics, in the world, saw at a glance that the book would do yeoman's service in the interests of the Church of Rome. Canon Curteis propounds the same view in his Bampton Lectures on Dissent. "What," he asks, "was the employment and purpose of our Lord's earthly ministry?" And the answer he returns is this : "It was to the training and preparation of an evangelizing society that the whole of his short ministry was devoted." But if the establishment of a society was the chief object of the ministry of Christ, it will be difficult in the last degree to silence the controversial artillery of Romanists when they maintain that the society he came to found was exhibited in the mediæval Church of Western Europe. The work of Christ was not that of rearing an organic Christianity. It was personal and spiritual. It was that of drawing and indissolubly binding hearts to himself. If it had any reference at all to the formation of a society, the reference was only secondary. This is no slight distinction. It is as wide as the division which has rent Christendom asunder into Protestant and Catholic. If the main aim of Christ was to establish a visible church, then the prime question must clearly be, what association, calling itself the Church, is the right one to join? If his main object was to set on foot a Church, then it is reasonable to infer that the Church would have the gift of salvation, and be the guardian of religious truth. Sacerdotalism, sacramentarianism, ecclesiastical infallibility follow, as a natural consequence, from the doctrine that Christ came to erect an institution in which men might be convoyed by the priesthood safely to heaven. If, on the other hand, his primary object was to create a new life in human souls by uniting them in motive, aim, sympathy with himself and with God—if it was to set going a mighty fermentation in the atmo-

sphere of the world by manifesting the beauty, the glory, the divinity of the soul when radiant with the image of God, then the organization of a Church, though it be a convenient, an expedient, and an important thing, will not be the essential and vital thing.

The modern predominant idea of a church as an integral part of Christianity finds no countenance in the teaching of Christ as to the work given him to do. Amidst all his clear declarations of the purpose for which he came into the world, he never once stated that he was sent to found a hierarchial corporation. He never passed through any of those forms which are supposed to be the qualifications of a hierarchy. He never was ordained. He never took upon himself any official relation to mankind any more than to his own people. There is not a single utterance in all his speech, as recorded in the Gospels, that looks like organizing men. His was not the systematizing mind. There is not in the history of religion any contrast so striking, so fundamental, so oppugnant, as that between the spirit and the example of his life and the enormous and pompous organization of Christian churches which pretend to derive their authority and their forms from him. No: the grand sacerdotal denominations, with their thousand errors, are not the creation of the spirit of Christ, but the offspring of the ambitious minds of ecclesiastics.

Let me add here that I do not undervalue the various instruments which the Christian life employs. I would not be understood as setting aside the church, nor the various associations which cluster around it. It cannot be set aside. Churches will be formed, because they spring out of the necessities of man. Those who are seeking a common end will seek it by common help through the social element. But what has come to pass? This: that instead of the grandeur of the kingdom of God in the individual, instead of the power of purity and beauty which comes from the disclosure of a Christ-like life in each particular person, there has been an artificial organic body. And when

Christianity is mentioned, people identify it with churches, and not with individuals; or with individuals solely as members of churches. Reverence for religious societies has almost destroyed the living force of individual piety. Individuals are grander than institutions. Institutions are only jewel cases; men are the jewels. But churches have been made largely to take the place of the power of personal goodness. Individuals have been absorbed to make corporations; and Christ's great idea of divine individuality in men has almost been lost sight of through many ages. When I contemplate what the church has been and done through whole centuries, I wonder that the divine personal life has not been extinguished. But it has been kept warm and glowing here and there in holy women and great-souled men; and the force of Christianity has not been in the cathedral, or in the temple, or in the synagogue, or in the organization, or in denominations, but in the sum of men's individual excellences.

IV.

It is affirmed, again, that Christ came to formulate a theology. But if this idea be true, it is singular, and it is inexplicable, that he constructed no system of divinity. No enunciation of what is called "the Catholic Faith, which if a man does not keep whole and undefiled, he shall perish everlastingly," ever came from those lips which spoke of oneness of heart with himself and of love to one another as the basis of discipleship; and if the Catholic Faith be the true bread from heaven, Christ dispensed not the heavenly manna. He made no demand for subscription to a series of puzzles in metaphysics; invented no cage of creeds, with the inscription written over it, "Whoso would be a Christian must enter here"; elaborated no Confession of Faith with the command, "If thou wouldst be saved, thou must swear by this." If these are essentials, it must be charged upon

him who spake as the Father gave commandment, that his teaching is an imperfect and inadequate expression of Christian truth.

Again : it is singular, it is inexplicable, if Christ came to teach theology, that no two schools of thought can agree as to what that theology is. The interpretations of it are so varied, so contradictory, as to constitute distinct and irreconcilable faiths.

I do not join in the growing condemnation of theology itself. Every man who thinks, and who arranges his thoughts by their logical relations, will have a theology. Not to have one, negative or positive, one of some form, is evidence of the want of intellectual activity. The uses of this inevitable systematization open up another question. While we throw off the despotism of creeds, used not to inspire and foster religious thoughtfulness but to limit and destroy it, we yet recognise the proper uses of statements of doctrine. They give logical shape to beliefs. They form a basis for instruction. But when theologies, or doctrines, or any other instruments are, either by superstition, or by carelessness, or by formalism, put above piety and praised more than goodness, then the servant has usurped the place of the master. "The end of the law is love out of a pure heart." All theology is to be tried by its power of producing life. And when, in any of those ways in which the Spirit of God works upon the human heart, there manifestly appears the genuine life of love, no man is to dispute it for want of doctrinal associations; nor is he, with worse folly, to arrogate to doctrinal beliefs, unaccompanied by holiness of life, a superiority over goodness of life which cannot affirm itself in any intellectual forms. All that theology is good for is to make piety. Piety is not to be judged by theology. Theology is, in a large way, to be judged by piety. We have no quarrel with creeds, systems, or theologies, except so far as they suppress or neglect holiness of heart and life; but alas! for this very reason our quarrel with some still popular creeds is a deep and vital one. Our whole burning desire and the aim of our

life are to awaken in men a real living religion ; and we will use gladly whatever will produce that fruit, and will cut down as cumberers of the ground whatever tends to hinder its growth. Hence, by the very highest considerations, we are committed against the popular theologies, because while the life of Jesus has been the inspiration of God to the world, theologies have reared rightness of thinking—that is, thinking after their fashion—above righteousness of life. But we rejoice that the time is now come when men are beginning to regard religion no longer as a scholastic, technical, and intellectual system, but as a personal life of doing justice and loving mercy, the spring of which is love to God and love to man.

V.

If, then, the aim of Christ was not to teach new truths, not to organize a priestly church, not to formulate a theology, what was it? And what was the secret of the power of this prophet who appeared nineteen centuries ago, who was not the master of a system, who did not organize a school, and who wrote not a line of theology or philosophy?

And the question may be answered in a word. It was to infuse into life a new spiritual power, it was to pour into it an element of sensibility and enjoyment in respect to divine things. It was to energize with divine influence a humanity that, through the length and breadth of the civilized world, had become morally paralysed—dim, uncertain, confused in apprehension—impotent in conscience, with scarcely so much pulsation at the heart as to give assurance that the spark of life had not gone out. It was to lift the soul, that had become degraded by sensualism, from its debasing indulgences, and to breathe into it the love of God. It was not to teach metaphysics or to elaborate a science, but to purify from baseness, and to develop, the

religious faculties which had been smothered by neglect and depraved by being the slaves of the flesh. It was to kindle into vitality, and to elevate into ascendancy, the higher powers of man: conscience, that it might exercise its high and sovereign authority; the moral faculties, that they might control all those lower elements which, if they be not guided, lead on to spiritual death; the sympathies, that man, united in the bonds of love to his fellow men, blending his will with the will of his Father in heaven, might walk the world arrayed in the beauty of doing good. And Christ sought to accomplish this object by unveiling to the spiritual sympathies a higher type of life than had ever been seen in the world before. He lived a divine manhood. He showed that there was more power in the simple living of a divine life than in any other source whatsoever. The manifestation of the might of meekness, gentleness, and sympathy; of the sublime force of patience and self-denial; of the persuasive, conquering power of such manliness as lifts the character of Christ above all that ever lived on the face of the earth; and the exhibition in his life and teachings of the truly divine disposition—these have been the secret of his spiritual mastery from that day to this. These have stimulated into life and activity the religious element of man's nature as no other power has done—as no other power of which we are cognisant is competent to do. They continue to operate in the same way; and could we conceive the energy that has been gained from them to be wholly withdrawn to-morrow, we should naturally expect a great collapse of the religious sentiment, and that in regard to spiritual culture and development, society would experience a speedy and marked backward step.

Aiming at a new spiritual creation, Christ, as Mr. Matthew Arnold justly observes, went direct to the inner man. The Jew had placed life in outward and measured precepts. Christ places it in inward and living principles, in allegiance to God, and in the loyalty of a true and pure heart. The Jew said, and the priesthood of to-day repeat it, "Conform

to an outward standard." But Christ comes and proclaims, "Nay, the heart must be regenerated—the understanding must be influenced, the affections must be cleansed from all impurities." It is, perhaps, the profoundest revelation of Christ that sin and holiness, life and death, are in an inward and spiritual state. He saw, as we see to-day, numberless inventions in the place of inward reform. The priests preached, as they do now, that the healing balm and the cleansing power were in their imposing authority and mystical influence. Ceremonies, with their graceful gestures, charmed the senses. Sacrifices of fruits and flowers, turtle-doves, sheep and kine, were offered without number. Christ sees the complete failure of these external appliances. He pierces beyond the veil of these deceitful substitutes. He goes at once to the heart and the conscience, where moral evil has its seat. While some baptize with water, he baptizes with fire and the holy spirit, going swift and sure to the innermost thoughts. He listens to some teachers telling the people to wash their hands; but he enjoins upon them to go rather and cleanse their hearts. The scribes pointed to the commandments written on tables of stone; but he speaks of what God has written on the fleshly tables of the heart. They taught that whatever entered into a man defiled him; but he teaches that man is defiled by what he has within him; for in the human mind itself there is a power for good or ill superior to all external influences. They were contented with beautifying the outside of sepulchres; but he proclaims that, though adorned in the exterior, they may inside be full of rottenness and corruption. In these times of revived ritual and elaborate observances, to which a moral efficacy is attached, we need to be increasingly impressed with the truth Christ preached to the world, that reformation, higher life, must begin from within, that the springs of life must be purified, that there must be the culture of a right spirit, and the prayerful nourishment of a holy will. For there can be no remedy for moral disorder which does not begin at the inward elements of life, which

does not reach down to, and put into a healthy condition, the native and independent powers of the soul.

In harmony with the appeals of Christ to the inward man for the reformation of human life after the image of God, he begins his work with individuals. It is true that he did not neglect the mass. Indeed, it is one of the remarkable features of his character that he conceived the sublime idea of a universal regeneration, and that, having behind this idea a divine power, he wielded an influence which is becoming co-extensive with humanity. But society cannot be morally mended until individuals have been reformed. Society is what the individual members of it are. A nation is what the men and women of it make it. The ennoblement of society must begin with the individuals who compose it. We may deal with men in masses when we use them as mere machines for labour or for war; but if we would bring about a new moral life, we must make the start by going right home to individuals. Christ began in that, the only effectual, way. And it is in that way alone man's nature must be renewed. There is no genuine ennoblement, no cleansing of the spirit, no enlightenment of conscience, no eradication of moral disease, except by individual reformation. The Confession of the church cannot give life. Union with societies cannot give life. Association with the multitudes who fill the temple of God cannot give life. Attachment to a religious community cannot give life. In each individual heart it must begin; and to those, who, in earnestness of heart, are calling out "Life! Life! Eternal life!" Christ proclaims that every one must begin it *in* and *for* himself by battling with his own sins, by softening each irritable feeling, by humbling each proud thought, by reclaiming each wandering propensity, by casting off every unworthy attachment, and by surrendering the being to the love of God.

THE AIMS AND MEANS OF CHRIST.*



I.

By admission of Renan, Strauss, and Stuart Mill, equally as by the reverent homage of Christians of all varieties of theological confession, the life of Christ fills the central position in the moral history of the world. The question, then, naturally arises—What was the purpose of it? Its aim was not of an intellectual but of a spiritual character, and therefore it is irrelevant to compare it, as is sometimes done, with that of ancient and modern philosophers. It was to awaken and nourish love by that kind of knowledge which appeals to the sympathies, and enkindles the heart to the pursuit of personal holiness. Inspired by this object, Christ pierced beyond the spiritually inefficient externalisms which the Jew had substituted for inward principles, and went straight to the heart and conscience in order to impel men to the culture of a right spirit. And he began with individuals because society can be spiritually regenerated only through the reformation of the individual members of it.

Starting with this principle, observe how far-reaching are the aims of Christ. They are not limited by the land of Judea, nor bounded by distinctions of sex, age, condition, or nation. Instead of being narrowed by Jewish notions, they extend to the human race. Beginning, as all spiritual ennoblement must begin, by redeeming individuals from lower conditions of life, and infusing into them “a new

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, September 20th, 27th, 1878.

heart" of faith, and hope, and love, he formed aims of the widest possible extent. It stands out as an unexampled fact that of all spiritual teachers and reformers, Christ alone formed the grand conception of benefiting humanity, without respect of country, age, or time. Philosophers necessarily addressed themselves only to the cultivated. Only the trained intellect could appreciate them. It was "wasting their sweetness on the desert air" to expound their subtle theories to the multitude. They had no message to give, and no arm to bring salvation to the common people. Christ is at the head of spiritual teachers in the breadth of his aims. It is a sublime idea. A workman's son—but he rises to the height of a vast conception of a universal spiritual regeneration. How shall it be explained, except it were taught him of God? No social, civil, or political influence is at his command to ensure dominion for him. The pride of his haughty countrymen, to whom other nations are barbarians, is an influence of exclusion. But, as if this prejudice were powerless to bias him, he nourishes the large intention of quickening into higher life the human race throughout the world. How shall it be accounted for, excepting as an inspiration of God? No section of men confines his affection. He loves not men, but man. His philanthropy bears the stamp of universality. And the principles he teaches are as wide and comprehensive as the love he displays. There is no example like it. In political history the Roman Empire is the grandest fact. It spread from the Thames to the Euphrates. It was a tree that grew and was strong, in height reaching to heaven, and branching to the ends of the earth. It attained sovereignty throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world. But the Roman Empire compassed only universal political sway. It ruled in civil polity: it dreamed not of moral conquest. It could not, at least it indisputably did not, achieve the rescue of the people from degradation. It proved itself powerless to touch the morals of mankind. It was left to a man born in a little country town of proverbial meanness—to a man unaided by the

intercourse of learned society, which broadens the mind—to a man unassisted by the favour of the rich and the support of the great—to present to the world the spectacle of aims of universal spiritual supremacy, and to enrich mankind with such pure ideas of God, with such lofty principles of human duty, with such glorious and permanent simplicities of religion, with such calm and quiet confidence in immortality, that there may be safely predicted for them a dominion that shall be completed only when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

In order to give effect to this great idea, which was the travail of his soul, what were the means Christ used, and what are the principles he taught? Look at the agencies employed. A candid consideration of them will compel the acknowledgment that they are unique. Christ springs out of the ranks of the poor. He receives no knowledge of science, and acquires no learning, art, or eloquence, in the usual sense. He studies in no school of rhetoric to gain the secret of arresting the attention and winning the admiration of the world by commanding speech. Universities, academies, and libraries are not within his reach. He is under no obligation to Egyptian wisdom and Essenic philosophy. Attempts have been made to prove otherwise; but those who have made them evidently admit the difficulty of proof, by their elaborate efforts to establish out of the very slenderest materials what was and still is only an assumption, and what ever will be an assumption, unless the Synoptics could be blotted out of existence, and the Fourth Gospel alone remain. When Christ enters public life his course is calculated to prevent him from attaining any influence, calculated to arrest his mission almost before it begins. No circumstances of position are his to endow him with control over his fellow men. He associates not with the social and religious leaders of the nation. They are looking for a political emancipator; but his teaching and his manner of life are the continual disappointment of such material expect-

tations as centre in him. They are characterized by national bigotry ; but instead of feeding it, as a hunter for popularity would have done, he sets himself to stem the current of prejudice. They are cherishing fond hopes of continuing in religious supremacy over all peoples ; but he proclaims that the crown shall be worn by others, and the inheritance pass into alien hands. They are wrapped up in purely Jewish interests ; but he preaches a gospel of unconfined human interests. They conceive it a degradation to acknowledge the co-equality with them of other peoples ; but he, instead of courting fame and status by fostering that notion, as a time-server would have done, proclaims the principle of human brotherhood and urges the duties involved therein. Are these the methods to result in triumph ? Are these the agencies calculated to eventuate in spiritual empire ? Presenting to the Jewish people no point to fascinate their intellectual or national pride ; crushing their dearest hopes of political deliverance and coming re-ascendency ; opposing, in his spirit of universal love, the antipathies of the nation ; exciting the animosity of the chief priests, elders, and rulers of the people ; rebuking with almost superhuman boldness the Scribe, the Pharisee, and the priest, for their shameful misuse of power and their still more shameful hypocrisy ; dispensing to his followers only a cup of suffering ; devoting his ministry chiefly to the poor and the ignorant, the outcast and the despised, and thus incurring contempt ; paying the penalty of his sublime and saintly unselfishness in hatred, persecution, and death—who would predict that such a teacher would win in all succeeding generations victories transcending all other moral conquests recorded in the pages of history ?

II.

From the means Christ employed let us pass on to refer to the principles he taught. The spiritual truths that fell from his lips may be comprehended in these three: the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Reality of a Future Life. That God is the Father of the human race is the basis and essence of Christianity. It is the sublimest of truths. It was known to the Aryan and Semitic races of old, who worshipped the Infinite under names that indicate some apprehension of His paternal relations to mankind. But it is only through its consecration in the teaching of Christ that it has become the conception which has superseded all others,* which has been deepening through the Christian ages, but the height and depth and length and breadth of which we yet only faintly comprehend. The earth rejoices in it and is glad. It is as the dawn of morning upon a darkened world. It is the pearl of great price, the unspeakable gift, the everlasting consolation. It harmonizes so well with the wants and aspirations of all ages and religions, it has so much to recommend it in the teaching of nature, it receives such re-inforcement from the course of divine

* "God, conceived simply as Father, was all the theology of Jesus. . . . He regarded his relationship with God as that of a son with his father. This was his great act of originality; in this he had nothing in common with his race. Neither the Jew nor the Mussulman has understood this delightful theology of love. The God of Jesus is not that tyrannical master who kills us, damns us, or saves us, according to His pleasure. The God of Jesus is our Father. We hear Him in listening to the gentle inspiration which cries within us, 'Abba, Father.' The God of Jesus is not the partial despot who has chosen Israel for His people, and specially protects them. He is the God of humanity. Jesus was not a patriot, like the Maccabees; or a theocrat, like Judas the Gaulonite. Boldly raising himself above the prejudices of his nation, he established the universal fatherhood of God,"—Rénan, *Life of Jesus*, cheap edit., pp. 82-83.

guidance over human life, it is such a source of peace and rest, joy and hope amid the shocks and convulsions of the world, and amid the changes of individual experience, that surpassingly wonderful as it is, men have clasped the doctrine to their bosoms, and lived and died in its persuasion and trust.

Out of it arises the second grand principle, that all men are brethren, their fraternal relationship resting not upon natural equality, which is a baseless dream, nor upon social equality, which is an impracticable vision, but upon the fact that God is the Father of all, who are therefore all alike His children, born with equal spiritual rights, born to promote each other's good in various ways of mutual service, born to attain through varied experience and discipline a destiny of good to themselves and of glory to Him. Here is a solid and satisfactory reason for cultivating a spirit of universal benevolence, and for doing good to all men within reach of our opportunity. That this truth of human brotherhood has exercised a genial and humanizing influence over modern civilization is testified by numberless public movements for obtaining justice to the oppressed, or ministering help to the helpless and the outcast. The civilization of Greece and Rome was marked by a certain hardness, and want of benevolent feeling. Its surface was highly polished, but its heart gave no quick response to the touch of the kindlier sympathies of our nature. Its features were those of a face exquisitely chiselled, but which has a lack of geniality. Its manners were graceful, but characterized by a sad want of moral warmth. In a word, ancient civilization lacked tenderness. But since the coming of Christ civilization has become more genial, more gentle, more prolific of benefits, more redolent of the heart. And with every century the exercise of benevolence becomes more general, movements and institutions multiply to raise the depressed, to succour the wretched, to shelter the unfortunate, to reclaim the erring, to instruct the ignorant. It is indisputable by any fair-minded man that we owe this fuller development of the

humane and kindly sympathies of our nature to the influence of Christ's teaching and life.*

Christ taught the reality of a future life. Immortality was not a new truth. He did not disclose it as a novelty. It had been in the mythologies, religions, and philosophies of the world before his time. But he took it out of the region of shadows and brought it into light. He did not argue it. Philosophizing was not his habit. There is nothing of the logical method in any of his teaching. His appeal was not to the intellect. With a quiet faith he affirmed the immortality of man. With him it needed no argumentation : nor do the deep things of God answer to that test. The light of immortality shone upon his inward eye with a serene brightness. And he lived in it with a quiet confidence, which, in its rest and stillness, is to him that hath it strength beyond all logic, and certainty beyond all demonstration. The wealth of satisfaction with which Jesus has met the yearning of our being for perpetual life is manifested in the historical circumstance, that the idea of immortality has prevailed in society not only more extensively, but in a form more operative than at any period anterior to the advent of Christ.

These are the three fountal truths with which Christ sought to attain his comprehensive aim. How they started a movement which rapidly extended itself throughout the civilized world ; how they kindled a fire amongst a people to whom

* "As a matter of fact, it [the Christian religion] has probably done more to quicken the affections of mankind, to promote pity, to create a pure and merciful ideal, than any other influence that has ever acted on the world."—Lecky, *Rationalism in Europe*, 7th edit., Vol. I., p. 326.

"The pre-eminent characteristic of modern Christianity is the boundless philanthropy it displays."—*Ibid.*, p. 345.

"That Christianity was designed to produce benevolence, affection, and sympathy, being a fact of universal admission, is indubitably more certain than that any particular dogma is essential to it ; and in the increase of these moral qualities we have therefore the strongest evidence of the triumph of the conceptions of its founder."—*Ibid.*, p. 351.

the idea of God's universal Fatherhood was obnoxious, and who elevated themselves into a sacred caste; how they exerted an influence over polished Greek and haughty Roman in spite of forces to obstruct it; how, notwithstanding the lowly origin of their expounder and representative, they compelled the educated to cast aside prejudices, and elicited the admiration of the intellectual; how they exerted a plastic power among the common people of the Gentile nations, sunk in animal indulgences and debasing superstitions; how, in the first three centuries of the Christian era, they tore up deeply-rooted habits, and brought into subjection appetites and desires, affections and ambitions by which men are wont to be governed; how, in that period, they grasped the very will of humanity, and controlled it as with the hand of God; how, after that period, they began to be over-loaded with follies, and corrupted with absurdities, and burdened with crimes; how, nevertheless, they have not passed away nor spent their strength, but still live as permanent and imperishable powers: all this is a thrice-told tale. But there is one significant fact, giving promise of their triumph, to which sufficient attention has perhaps not been paid, and to which I would advert. It is the fact that they have won their greatest success amongst those races whose intelligence has been most developed, and whose intellect has been most active. Where civilization has been most advanced, there they have made way. Where the mind of man has been most awakened, there they have reached their most potent sway. No race under heaven has exhibited the mental activity and the restless energy of the Anglo-Saxons; and it is a significant fact that, not amongst theorists and dreamers, but amongst the Anglo-Saxons, amongst practical men, men of action, amongst men whose intellects have become strong from constant and healthful exercise, the power of these truths and of Christ's life has reached its highest vitality, notwithstanding constant and severe investigation. And we look upon it as full of hope for the fulfilment of Christ's aim. Those who now most

firmly hold these truths are the Anglo-Saxons, with their active intellect, their strong will, their enterprising spirit. And when we observe that this restless family is multiplying itself in America, in Australasia, in India, in China, in Japan, in Africa, that it is opening up highways into the very heart of the Old World, that its moral influence is extending beyond calculation, that it is supreme in intellectual and commercial power among the several races of mankind—we see in these circumstances providential movements concurring to favour the grand conception of Christ of a universal conquest, when his spiritual kingdom shall be established, and when to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father.

THE TRUE INCARNATION.*

THERE is one tendency of the human mind which we trace throughout history. It is manifest no less in ages of intelligence than in ages of ignorance, although the forms it assumes under the influence of culture are finer and nobler than those in which barbarism shapes it. It is the tendency to bring God near, either by humanizing Deity or deifying humanity. The great impulse of humanity is to unite the divine and the human. God is at an infinite distance—hidden, now and for ever, behind a thick veil. His nature transcends our highest conceptions. The deep endeavour of the human mind is to withdraw the veil and behold the Unseen One, to be relieved of the sad and unsatisfying idea of God's remoteness, and to realize the nobler and more inspiring idea of His nearness.

This passion of humanity has manifested itself in various ways. One of these is known as God's incarnation. It is not a sentiment peculiar and exclusive to Christianity. It is older than Christianity. It is the common property of the human mind in all countries and in all times. In every nation and at every period there has been the longing of the heart to blend the divine spirit with the human spirit, that Deity, instead of being confined in a far-off region, in retirement from mankind, may be with men, and amongst them. Hence all religions have their incarnations. Thoroughly interwoven with the systems of Egypt and India was the notion of divine persons taking flesh. Nay, the tendency is not merely to be traced there. Personification and corpo-

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, January 2nd, 1880.

realization are notions so closely connected that they are ever prone to run the one into the other. In delineating Deity as a person, men have always made Him a human person. Hence the frequency with which we meet with the notion of a dying God. The Jewish conception of Jehovah was much superior to thoughts of this description ; and yet how much of the corporeal do we find connected with it in the Old Testament ! When sacrifice is offered, He smells a sweet savour. When the sultry summer day comes, He walks in the garden in the cool of the evening. When he is presented to the imagination it is as a venerable personage, "the Ancient of Days." Everywhere there is the tendency to humanize God—a tendency which at length took its strongest and most enduring form in the identification of the Infinite Spirit with the prophet of Nazareth. But the prevalent notion of Divine incarnation, that the Deity has come in a human fashion and bearing the name of Christ, is essentially the same notion which runs through the mythologies of all ages.

Has not the notion wrought mischief in the world? It has ; but it would be untrue to say that it has wrought unmixed mischief. Still, the mischief has been abundant.

It has put into the Gospel narratives perplexities and contradictions. Those narratives record the life of a man—of one touched with the feeling of our infirmities—a man of like passions with ourselves—a veritable human brother, in real, not apparent, oneness with the children of men. And the impossibility of making all portions of such a narrative, and every expression in it, bend to a theory which is essentially at variance with it—what equivocation has this induced ! what tampering with the fidelity of man's own mind and intellect ! what manipulation of words in order to extract from them a significance which is not their natural import !

Then, too, the idea has resulted in the isolation of Christianity from all other religions, and the placing of it in a position of hostility towards them. The impersonation of

the Deity in Christ, and the attempted identification of God with his recorded history, has disconnected Christianity from other systems, and barred the hope of their gradual approximation by the progress of knowledge and spiritual insight. It has led to a consequence even more unfortunate: it has represented Christianity as antagonistic to Judaism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, and to all other forms of faith, until the cross has blazed on the banners of armies—nay, until it has decked the hilt of the sword forged for the purpose of shedding the blood of a fellow-creature.

Nor has this doctrine been free from the evil of degrading the character of God. He, the Infinite, has been habitually spoken of as in human form. Human organs have been habitually ascribed to Him. From human organs has followed the imputing to Him of human passions, even of those passions which are least connected with the nobleness, and the progress of our nature. And further, it has tended to concentrate on Christ all the feelings of affection and gratitude, leaving to be associated with Him who is still called the Father, only the sterner attributes and functions of wrath and judgment.

These have been evils. But have they been unmixed evils? What fair-minded thinker can say this when he contemplates the millions who would scarcely have had, a god at all unless they had possessed such a man-God? They have felt confident in the sympathy of one who could be touched with a feeling of their infirmities. Their eyes have streamed with tears at the affecting and impressive record of his sufferings. They have magnified the love he evinced to man; and have regarded love to him as the seal and the proof of their own spirituality. Their trust, their hopes, their outward and inward best tendencies have thus been stimulated. Shall we not gladly make these confessions? We recognise the mischiefs, but we recognise also that, intermingling with them, there has been a great amount of good spreading from mind to mind and

heart to heart. We are eager to say with emphasis that the good has been working in a most mistaken way, and by a process on many grounds most objectionable; but shall we not be as eager to say with equal emphasis that it has still been working out something of that nearness of the human to the divine which is the craving of the human heart?

Nor has the good been confined to this. This is only the good of one section of Christianity, the Protestant section, the good of a minority of professing Christians. Humanizing the Deity, making the Infinite Spirit take flesh and be born, implied the relation of maternity. And hence that thought of the Mother of God, worshipped throughout the greater part of Christendom, and called upon by her gentleness and pity to secure relief for the distressed, to annihilate the distance between the poor, oppressed, trembling, down-trodden creature and the mighty Spirit, the Omnipotent God, whom that creature feared directly to approach. In some aspects of it, it is a strange thought—gross, corporeal, carnal, open to fatal objections, the source of a mass of sneering infidelity; in other aspects of it, it is touching and beautiful, the source of inspiration to many to whom, otherwise, heaven would seem silent and shut. How much of confidence and trust in danger has been felt by many of those who have peculiarly looked to the “Mother of God” for their defence, and in so doing have found a sympathy and a oneness with the Divine which they could not, with their education, have realized in any other mode!

But, as I said, this process of bringing God down upon earth in a human shape has been accompanied by the process of raising the human to the divine by apotheosis. But this is only another form of the same tendency—only another contrivance to bring nearer spirit and matter, heaven and earth, the divine and the human. Whether it bring down the one or raise the other, still this is the great impulse on which humanity has been working. Whatever shape it has assumed, the idea testifies to the imploring of the heart

to bridge over the measureless separation between God and man.

Wherein is the mistake of the process? In emphasizing the notion that God is generally absent from the world, and only now and then comes to dwell in it for a brief period, and for that brief period only with a favoured few. The Brahmin, the Buddhist, the Greek faiths implied that God was away, and that only at intervals did He deign to present Himself in one here and there. The Jew nearly excluded Him from the world, and held that He spoke only at times, by an angel, by a vision, by a calamity. The modern Christian excludes Him from humanity, and holds an idea not so broad as that of the Jew, namely, that only once, some centuries ago, did He condescend to dwell in an individual man for a few years, and that then He retired into eternal privacy. To us this is a most circumscribed, most cold and cheerless idea of divine incarnation. We do not want to look through ages of history for our God—we want Him in our own heart. We do not want to return to the remote past, and find Him among angels and prophets, or even in the streets of Jerusalem alone. We want to find and to know Him here amongst us, to sustain and strengthen us. We do not want to know that He occasionally visits the earth, entering it from somewhere outside, but that now and ever He is within it, the Life of its life; and not only within it but within us, the heart of us all, drawing us into the large liberty of obedience by the silken cords of His love, giving to us bright and radiant hopes by the illumination of His Spirit.

This we understand to be the true idea of incarnation. The Egyptian, the Indian, the Hebrew, the common Christian idea, that God has dwelt in the minds of a few men, in generations far back in history—we take that idea, elevate it, expand it, till it assumes this form—that now, always, and for ever God is not only above all, but through all, and in us all. Our heart and our flesh cry out for Him. Where shall He be found? “There,” answers one; “He

was in Christ, and you must look back through the vista of by-gone ages to see Him." True, O man, is thy answer : but it is not the whole truth—it is only part of the truth. He is near, not alone in Christ, but in all humanity ; and it is only because our brother Jesus has fully and intensely realized the nearness of the all-encompassing Presence that he has been accounted the Deity. He is near, not in any special, miraculous influence over prophet, apostle, and Messiah, but in the universal influence of His universal spirit, in all nations, in all ages. He is near, not alone in miracle, but in what, rightly considered, is far more impressive—in the unfailing operation of the laws of nature, and in the returning phenomena of the year which they so surely bring. He is near in His oneness with all things ; and He is near in the growing tendency in our own mind to be in harmony, physically, intellectually, and morally, with that system which He has originated, to which we belong, and in which we are one with Him and He is one with us.

WHAT IS THE USE OF PRAYING ? *



IN the Book of Job the question is asked, "What profit should we have if we pray unto Him?" I believe that prayer is the bringer of profit—not of physical, material profit, but of deep and helpful inward strength. I believe that prayer is not a wasting of words, not a cry into space with a return only of echo, but a power in life. On the strength of that conviction men of all religions and in all stages of civilization have prayed. It has been said that races of men have been found without raiment, without houses, without manufactures, but never without prayers, no more than without speech, human faculties, or human passions. The problem of life involves prayer. Fed by our wants, rooted in our souls, it has attended man's history from the beginning, in all climes, under all forms of religion, in all grades of civilization. There must be reality of some kind—a precious reality which humanity will not let go—in what has thus a universal and permanent hold on mankind.

What shall we do with this momentous fact of history? We meet with it in the pagan's idea of devotion. Grossly as he misunderstands it, with whatever superstitions he surrounds it, with whatever idolatrous accompaniments he practises it, whatever unnatural and impossible consequences he expects to flow from it, he steadfastly cleaves to his unwavering faith in prayer as a source of strength. Grovelling as his notion of it is, he means it, believes in it, and resorts to it as an instrument of power.

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, August 1st, 1879.

Equally with the pagan all the greatest men of the world, even when indifferent to forms of worship, have "lifted their eyes to the hills whence cometh our help." Prayer is breathed in the words of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Richter, and in those of all great souls. In the centre of human life prayer is lodged as a power. It does come to pass that the heart of man "cries out for the living God." It is a moral law as fixed as any physical law that man in his darkness will want to find the light; and in his weakness will want to lean upon an arm stronger than his own; and in his struggles out of pride and passion and sin will want to come into strengthening presence with a spirit purer than his own. As a fact man by structural necessity prays. It is as much the law of his nature to pray as is the beating of his pulse or the throbbing of his heart.

I admit the impossibility of solving the much-discussed problem of law and prayer. I will make no attempt to solve it. All argumentation leaves it unsettled. We land, at last, in insuperable difficulties of logic. But above and beyond all argumentation and logic is human nature, which, because it has other elements than the intellect, will never be confined within the most perfect and unassailable intellectual proposition; and this human nature, so refusing to be shut up by or within our faultless syllogisms, always has prayed, and will continue to do so until the end of time. We do not attempt to weigh tears, nor have we invented a thermometer by which we can gauge the fervour of that human love and friendship which "many waters cannot quench." We say—nay, we know that they are realities, and we do not wish to cast doubt on their moral value by insisting on a purely scientific explanation. We have no almanacs to tabulate the results of either human or divine compassion; but for all the interminglings of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man, as for those of the spirits of men with each other, we have sympathy and reverence, though in each case they include mysteries too high for any of us to scale, and too deep for any of us to look into without becoming dizzy.

Hence while it is honest to confess that the speculative and argumentative difficulties about prayer are not to be answered—at least, I have read no attempted answer but leaves them where they were—it is equally honest to confess that prayer is inwoven into the human soul. Its presence in human nature from the beginning is too serious a fact to be dismissed with the assertion that it exists there only for delusion. I believe that it is as vital a power in the realm of spirit as gravitation, light, and electricity are real powers in the realm of matter.

But here be it clearly noted that, in my conception of it, prayer is not a power which changes, or in any way influences, the laws of the material world. By fixed and unswerving methods of operation is the world carried on. Its processes are the same now as they have ever been, and to no entreaties of man will they bend. From age to age they go on unbrokenly, and know no “variableness or shadow of turning.” Whether men pray or not, whether men glorify God or blaspheme Him, *they* execute their course, come what may of apparent weal or woe to individual lives. Prayer cannot touch *them*. Place your hand in the fire, and no supplication that you can offer will save it from being burned. Fall into the devouring sea, and no petition you can present will deliver you out of its enwrapping whirl. Become entangled in revolving machinery, and no entreaty you can imploringly send forth will preserve your entrapped limbs from being crushed. Let the merciless pestilence grip you with its awful power, and no cry that may be wrung from you, though it be a cry of great agony that wrings the heart, will liberate you from its grasp. Scatter the corn seed in the furrows of the ground, but no beseeching request that you can put forth will control “the ordinances of heaven” to gather or disperse “abundance of waters,” to intensify or diminish over your little area of earth the quantity of the sun’s heat. Alterations, interferences, suspensions of the laws of nature no prayer of the most devout man can

accomplish. Who that realizes what the reverence of the Lord implies would wish such breaks and changes and irregularities to be within the compass of human asking? Who, too, that considers the absolute necessity of the uniformity of law to the ordinary operations of life, or that looks from the present inconvenience and loss to the ultimate and universal result, will not admit that the unflinching steadfastness of the laws by which the world is governed is the best thing for us? The more we come to understand nature the more we find that unchanging laws work out, in the end, good and not evil for the human race. Regarded on a wide scale and over reaches of time beyond the present hour, they are seen to be, on the whole, bearers of blessings and not executioners of curses on mankind. Individuals suffer from them, for a time, and grievously suffer; but, at last, God's great family benefits, and what we, in our selfishness, blindness, and impatience call plagues, visitations, and judgments, come to be seen, after the event, as the operations of Infinite Goodness for the welfare of the whole human race.

From time to time cholera comes to visit us. Typhus fever is always somewhere amongst us. Surely they teach us the necessity and the virtue of cleanliness alike in our abodes and our persons. Does it require any wisdom to see that we need these sharp lessons, and many of them? The truth is that, in spite of them, there is hardly any thing harder in this civilized nation of England than to persuade either private individuals to believe in the gospel of soap and water, or men in authority in our municipalities to remove the causes of those diseases, which never come without a cause. Genuine religious faith joins with an intelligent understanding of the laws of nature in assuring us, that it is a kindly and beneficent operation of the eternal laws of God that fire always burns, that water always drowns, that whirling machinery always crushes, that death always walks in the pestilent miasma in the summer's heat, that into the midst of uncleanness cholera marches with its quick, noise-

less, resistless step, that upon badly-drained homes fever makes its deadly inroads. We may sometimes incline to think that it seems like harshness and cruelty in God when the laws by which he works are so stern, unrelenting, unswerving ; but can we think it would be kindness to disturb and reverse the order of things for our individual comfort in answer to our prayers? Nay, in the very fact that these laws eventuate in the good of the whole human family, we see it to be supreme goodness that no prayer of man can interrupt their solemn, undeviating course. It is Beneficence that keeps them yesterday, to-day, and forever the same.

Prayer, then, is not a power that affects the purposes and ordinations of God in the physical world. True, that is a common idea of it. Hence on the one hand the presumptuous prayers, the profane petitions, that God would take some different course with His world and its relation to us than the course He does adopt. What are we that we should pray against what is done by Infinite Wisdom, and should ask for the laws of nature to be so adjusted as to come into harmony with our personal benefit or our private ends? And yet that is the kind of prayer with which many good people vex the still heavens to no purpose. Hence the re-action in men of scientific thought and philosophical inquiry, who propose statistical inquiries in order to ascertain whether it can be proved that God has ever effected certain results at the entreaty of man independently of natural agencies and processes. All such prayers and the inquiries which they naturally suggest are beside the mark : prayer does not alter the course of nature in relation to individual human life.

My faith in prayer is this—that it is a power which moves us and lifts us God-ward. It influences us to realize and to alter our relation towards Him, not His relation to us. It is not an entreaty to the Infinite that he would interfere with His method of government, but a breathing of the heart that He would help us to realize the wisdom and the

goodness of His method of government, and to raise our lives into the beauty and the health of obedience to His laws. Such is my conception of the use and value of prayer. It may be an erroneous conception, but to me it is a reality; it may be an inadequate conception, but to me it fills prayer with virtue and power. I will not be so profane as to beseech God to in anywise use the forces of the heavens and the earth to suit my personal gain; but I will bend low at His footstool with a yearning I care not to put into words, but which means, "O my Father, help me to understand Thy laws, help me to obey them; and, if I disobey, help me always, in whatever Thou dost purpose and fulfil by them, to say, and mean it too, 'Thy will be done.'" It is of no avail to pray that the cholera may not come, or that it may miraculously depart on our mere asking; but it is of avail to pray that I may have the will, and the courage, and the unfearing heart to go into the stricken districts and help in removing the impurities that have brought the terrible destroyer. It is of no avail to pray that the burning fire may not consume; but it is of avail to pray that my heart may be brave and strong to impel my hands to put it out. It is of no avail to pray for salvation from shipwreck when the sea, "mounting to the welkin's cheek," dashes a brave vessel on the rocks; but it is of avail to pray that one may meet one's fate with a calm heart, or may stand to one's post of duty to the last, with no thought of one's own personal safety, and then may go down amidst the wild waters with the feeling that, whatever follows, all is well. True prayer is thus an internal transaction, or a spiritual attitude, a disposition, a habit of mind such as puts us into harmony with divine laws. Instead of being a power to persuade God to change His perfect purpose and order—in other words, a power to induce Him to make the universe subservient to our colossal selfishness—it is a power to lead us into the spirit of entire harmony with His purpose and order. "Not my will, but Thine be done." "Our wills

are ours to make them 'Thine.'" Surely any other feeling is irreligious.

It may be said that this conception of the reflex influence of prayer—the conception that its beneficent operation is upon the offerer of prayer—reduces it to a process of self-magnetizing. The objection is a caricature of prayer. Were it valid here, it would be equally valid against the glories of nature, against poetry, music, painting, statuary—against any one and all of the hundred influences by which man, whose soul is touched in many and subtle ways, becomes enriched with the Spirit of God, and inspired to ascend out of the low level of his ordinary life to mounts of transfiguration. Religious worship, for example, makes no change in God; but it helps to change man—it aids him to "suffer and be strong," it gives him stoutness and bravery of heart, it inspires him to hold fast by the hand of God in all experiences of life, it makes him lie down in green pastures and leads him beside still waters. The use of prayer is exactly there too. Is it a delusion? Why, somehow, it is a law of man's being that he is irradiated and strengthened by it. A delusion? Of no use and power? I think of the martyrs who died rejoicing in tribulation. I think of old men who bowed their grey heads beneath the scaffold, or vaulted like conquerors into their chariots of fire, with their hearts filled with an unconquerable faith in God. I think of gentle maidens, once the pride and joy of happy homes, kissing the burning stake to which their delicate frames were roughly tied, while their eyes were lifted to the heavens with a light as of celestial glory; or standing fixed to a stake on the sea sands, and watching with a smile that seemed born of eternal joy the fatal approach of the tide, and the smile brightening as the waters folded round their forms, and the lips calmly praying as the waves closed over them for ever. I think of men who went to the furnace and the faggot in the persecutions of the early Christian eras—of mothers who sang melodies as they with their infants were dashed down the rocks of Piedmont—

of Wycliffe and Luther, of Milton and Bunyan, of Servetus and Biddle, of Latimer and Cranmer, of Wesley and Whitfield, of the wrestling Covenanters of Scotland, whose unwearied mountain-orisons took heaven by violence. I see,—I see?—nay, I *share* all the worth and blessing that have come of their mighty fortitude and faithfulness. And when I ask them the secret of the power that made them faithful unto death, their answer is, “Prayer,” which gave to their souls the strength of God’s almightiness and the repose of God’s own eternal peace.

TWO ASPECTS OF INFIDELITY.*



I.

THERE are some words which are more formidable than the things they are supposed to represent. Language sometimes creates an impression which is untrue to the reality it would express. Words are the signs of facts and of thoughts; but you must have observed that the signs are often broken or defaced, and then the facts are distorted and the thoughts marred. It frequently happens that they do not express with faithfulness the physical, or moral, or intellectual verity which they are used to express. They mis-express it; and then what should be seen as a verity upright and erect, is lamed and deformed. They half-express it; and then what should be presented to us as a ripe, full-grown product, appears immature and undeveloped. Words are used truly when there is a correspondence between them and the thoughts and things they are employed to interpret. And that true use of words depends upon a man's simplicity of character, upon his love of truth, upon the intensity of his desire to communicate truth with fidelity. Words are used untruly when the concordance between them and the things of which they are symbols is broken or imperfect. And that untrue use of words which perverts facts and thoughts, which, especially, adds to them moral odium—shall I say that it is born of rooted sectarian bias?—of inveterate carelessness?—of inexcusable ignorance? It comes, at least, from the want of exactitude in thought.

* From the *Inquirer*, March 13th, 27th, 1880.

Take the word "Infidelity,"—a word supposed to represent intellectual flippancy and moral ghastliness. It haunts the mind as an image of something dark and spectral. It is assumed to sum up a mind from which the highest things in heaven and earth have been cast out—a mind which has reared itself in defiance against God, because it cannot solve the secrets He hides away in nature and in human life. What is it used to indicate? Not an incapacity to fathom the depths of Providence—for the devoutest minds stand silent and bare-headed on the edge of the soundless abysses of moral mystery—but an attitude of moral antagonism against Providence. In what sense is it employed? In the moral sense of hatred to God, hatred to truth, hatred to righteousness and holiness of life.

But do not lift up your hands in horror at this word as at a monster. Do not imagine that it always and necessarily carries with it moral culpability. Rush not to the conclusion that it indicates depravity of heart. Consider before you take it as synonymous with malignity to God and hostility to truth. Ponder before you accept it as another term for haughtiness and arrogance of intellect. It may be that infidelity is not moral laxity; that, on the contrary, it is a deeper rectitude that will not bow before a God to worship whom would be impiety,—a saintlier holiness that will not bend at an altar where purity is sullied by insincerity, and righteousness dwarfed of power by cowardly conventionality. It may be that it does not take along with it enmity against God; but, rather, its thought of God is so vast that it reins in its tongue from the fluent lightness that makes free with His name, and closes its lips before Him whom no name can define. It may not be the despising of moral law; but such reverencing of moral law that it must cast off laws that claim to be of heavenly origin, but have no ratification in the heavenly sense within us. It may not be the quenching of light; but an intense longing for light more clear and steady than that which only makes visible the darkness around the throne of God. It is not,

therefore, always and everywhere chargeable with moral guilt. But it is so generally represented as the outgrowth of a corrupt mind that I ask consideration to some thoughts in arrest of the verdict of moral condemnation.

Infidelity has two aspects—a moral and an intellectual aspect.

Look at it in its moral aspect. Here it is simply unfaithfulness: nothing more, nothing less, nothing else than that. Disloyalty to what lies deepest in the mind is the moral form of infidelity; and its worst form, its most contaminating form, the form in which its influence is most pernicious. You may disbelieve this or that theology, and be upright, genuine, conscientious. You may disbelieve out of very allegiance to your inmost convictions as the result of anxious inquiry, ardent love of and eager search for truth. And honesty to an honestly formed opinion is not a crime. Unbelief here is no sin. It may be of the essence of religion, because it is holding fast, in simplicity and in sincerity, to that which has commended itself to the reason and the moral sense as true. The man who cleaves to whatever faith has gained the assent and consent of his understanding and his conscience, who gives himself to his conscientiously settled and supreme convictions, may be an unbeliever, as commonly understood; but his unbelief, so far from having its source in wilfulness and defiance of heart, is rooted in very uprightness of soul.

But, not to be valiant to what conscience commands and reason pronounces to be true, is infidelity of a pernicious nature. To have light burning clear in the tabernacle of the mind, and yet to darken or discolour it when it is sent forth; to see with the mind's eye the radiance of the Infinite Beauty within our own souls, and yet to veil and becloud it, lest it should startle those who are comfortable in darkness and who close their eyes to the day—*that* is infidelity of a blighting influence. To be convinced of truth, and yet to refrain from bearing witness to it, or to trifle with it, or to use language to pervert it into harmony

with the expressions of antiquated formulas—*that* is infidelity of a tainting character. It strikes at the root of integrity; it undermines simplicity, thoroughness, honesty; it lessens reverence for truth for its own sake; it offers abundant and subtle temptations to invent palliations for the violation of engagements; and, in this way, by unconscious but powerful influence, it sows everywhere about the seeds of disloyalty to conscience.

Where is this description of infidelity to be found? I may be judged and condemned as uncharitable; but charity towards men—an easy indifference as to men's conduct in relation to their most solemn obligations, which is impoverishing our judgment of the very pith and marrow of righteousness—must give place to justice and truth. Look at Broad-Churchism in the Church of England, in all the creed-bound Churches of Scotland, in the doctrinal trust-deed-bound Nonconformist Churches. The shuffling with formulas; the getting rid of troublesome dogmas and troublesome phrases by ingeniously sliding into them a non-natural sense; the playing fast and loose with words, which accompanies the prevailing lax notion of subscription to creeds, and which, by an easy descent, leads down to the playing fast and loose with conscience; the tampering and twisting of the language of creeds to prove with what admirable elasticity it fits in with "new truth"; the presentation of heretical beliefs in pleasing and alluring loose-fitting dress of speech that, chameleon-like, is capable of assuming many colours; the manipulation of heterodoxy for the preservation of a particular ecclesiastical status—all this constitutes a species of infidelity of a corrupting nature. Is not its influence plain? Whence issues the general atmosphere of insincerity in religious matters? Whence comes the scepticism that exists far and wide, not as to this or to that or to any theology, but as to the very reality of intellectual good faith? Whence arise the pleas and excuses with which it is now the pitiable fashion to minimize the crime of frauds and adulterations.

in commerce? What can be more natural than that men of business should resort to unscrupulous ways in order to maintain a position, when ministers of religion play hide-and-seek with their understandings and their consciences in order to preserve an ecclesiastical status of prestige and power, or to justify the retention of their position when they have broken the solemn vow which alone entitles them to the position? How can *these* press home to the consciences of *those* the momentousness of consistency between profession and practice—the obligation of contracts and engagements, entered into with an oath of fidelity from which nothing can absolve the oath-taker but a confession of inability to fulfil it, accompanied by an entire surrender of all that it involves—the righteousness to swerve from which a hair's breadth is a sin against the majesty of God's law—when they themselves are guilty of discarding and decrying creeds and articles to which they have set their hand and seal, and then of adopting various pretexts in support of their retaining a position which was conferred on them on the condition of their keeping whole and undefiled the very creeds and articles they now either openly abjure, or adroitly turn from their natural and original import?

I admit, and gladly admit, that the Broad Church has rendered splendid services to the cause of free-thought; but I cannot resist the doubt whether its services in this direction are worth the sacrifice of uprightness, downright-ness, and straightforwardness which, as it appears to me, they have cost. I acknowledge that its pulpit celebrities have contributed, in a measure incalculable, to the progress of liberal thought; but are we not, in our rejoicing at their undoubtedly great influence on the growth of liberal theology, apt to overlook the mischief which they do in justifying by their success the breaking or the non-fulfilment of a solemn oath? No one rejoices more than I do in the increase of free thought; but "free thought," "liberal thought," "advanced thought"—heaven forbid that *it* should be our highest gospel! Honesty, integrity,

the yea yea, the nay nay, truthfulness in word and thought : *that*, surely, is still and for ever the divinest word of the Lord ; and give me intellectual narrowness with that rather than intellectual breadth without it—the core, the life-blood, the soul of religion. Is it honest for preachers to claim the privileges, the prestige, the immunities of orthodoxy while they are not orthodox? Is it honest to take the favours of the Sanhedrim while they reject its traditions? These men have taught hundreds of preachers of lesser note that they may stay without blame as representatives of a creed which they have ceased to believe, or which they have schooled themselves to interpret in an utterly non-natural way. While they have humanized and rationalized the general conceptions of theology, have they not taught by their example that the violation of a contract, while holding fast to the advantages and emoluments the contract secured, is justifiable, and even praiseworthy? Have they not taught that it is the highest virtue of a contract to make its terms so general that what it compels is open to every variety of interpretation and to endless disputation, while what it confers is not open to a single doubt? As a result, does not Broad-Churchism stand before the world chargeable by plain common-sense men, who look at it shorn of all the subtle theological devices that are manufactured in support of its retention of a place in the Established Church, with something scarcely distinguishable from double-mindedness? To me its apostles stand in false positions. They disbelieve part or all of the old creeds, and yet “as servants of the Queen,” as “officers of the State,” they keep on repeating them as a pupil repeats a task-lesson set him by his master. They preach scarcely any of the ideas to which they have sworn, but those ideas for which Liberals have always stood. Is not this position fatal to their highest influence in building up real integrity in others, whatever its influence may be on themselves? The interval is short from cheating in religion to cheating in secular things. One who has broken through an agree-

ment on the most sacred things, and yet maintains his right to the status, the prestige, and the possessions to which that agreement alone gave him a claim, should not be surprised when his example is followed in other exigencies of life. Some of the eminent knaves, speculators and fraudulent bankers whose suspensions in late years have brought misery into hundreds of unsuspecting and confiding families, have been special patrons of the clergy; and may have learned from the example of their spiritual guides, all unconsciously, but too really, that they are not held even to their sworn-to promises, that they may break their oaths with impunity, and that they may stick to their position, be their relation to the conditions on which they obtained it what it may. Clerical equivocation, I verily believe, accounts for a great deal of commercial laxity. In view of it, the greatest need of the religious world just now is a strong wind of conviction that shall blow away the haziness and the clouds of tortuous ways which enshroud many men, and not a few Churches, but most of all the Broad Church party in the Establishment. As it is now, there is in Broad Churchism an infidelity which eats into the heart of real religion—an infidelity which tends to make life barren of valour and heroism and supreme allegiance to the soul—an infidelity which tends to weaken loyalty to the imperative claims of truthfulness; for while Truthfulness is the Lord our God, and beside it there is no other, we fall down and worship other gods when ease, position, status are preferred, because they are more comfortable than the self-denying obedience the Eternal Righteousness requires, and more influential than the lowly lot it proffers as our abode.

II.

Consider Infidelity in its intellectual aspect. Viewed in this light, and taking it popularly, it means the rejection of Christianity—Christianity being identified with the orthodox faith of Christendom. The common assumption is that infidelity in this form grows out of the corrupt soil of human depravity. Dr. Lyman Beecher, in his *Lectures on Atheism*, says that its generic cause is undoubtedly to be sought in man's deep aversion to the responsibilities of God's perfect and eternal government. Pearson, in his well-known *Essay on Infidelity*, traces it generally to the repugnance of "the carnal heart" to Christianity. Robert Hall, in his celebrated discourses on *Modern Infidelity*, declares that it is the joint offspring of an irreligious temper and unholy speculation. An eminent Wesleyan minister, the Rev. Richard Roberts, affirmed that its real cause is not intellectual but moral; not in the head but in the heart; not in the understanding but in the will; not in the reason but in the affections—in a love of darkness rather than light. At the Church Congress of 1876 Canon Garbett traced the root of unbelief to the corruption of human nature. It is ridiculous to suppose that these assertions are likely to be accepted as a solution of the difficulties of "unbelief." They are an easy way of disposing of the matter—were it but the true way. They have the one advantage of being the orthodox explanation. And yet look at the men who are accused of Infidelity. The thinkers, the teachers, the prophets who are classified and condemned as infidels—are they haters of truth? Are they opponents of virtue and righteousness? Are they examples of corrupt human nature? Many of them are men of the purest lives, of the most exalted characters, morally the peers of any saints that can be found, eminent for their earnest and even

heroic devotion to whatsoever things are true, pure, honest, and of good report.

There must be another explanation, and one that will bear a more searching examination than that so proudly assumed by apologists of orthodoxy.

The prevalent infidelity towards the traditional creed of Christendom is the protest—with some the quiet protest, with others the active and avowed protest—of the rational understanding against the doctrines of popular theology, and against the spirit of magisterial authority which seeks to rivet those doctrines on the human mind. It is the revolt of reason against irrational teaching: it is the revolt of the moral sense against repellent theories of religion: it is an insurrection against the distortions and misrepresentations of Christianity—against the terrible spectacle which priests and politicians have made of it, in employing it as a weapon of tyrannous authority to crush the thinking and aspiring soul, to strike the intellect with palsy, to haunt the imagination with superstitious phantoms, and to bend whole nations under the yoke of their despotic power. It is a rebellion against connecting with Christianity ideas of God, man, salvation and the future, spurned by the affections, condemned by the moral sense, and abjured by the enlightened reason. It is a reaction from the presumption which dares to gauge the Infinite, to map out the ways of the Inscrutable, and to draw a chart of heaven and hell.

This is the origin of the Infidelity of to-day. But it was not born only in modern times. It dates back from the first corruption of the primitive Gospel, and it has become more pronounced as the centuries have rolled on. It has created a literature, the richest contribution in the world to enlightened thought. It gave birth to the Protestant Reformation, whose heroes—the infidels of their day—it quickened and inspired. It is gathering force, accumulating power; and it is destined to accomplish another Reformation, more sifting and thorough than that of Wycliffe and Luther.

What sin is there in infidelity of this kind? I have referred to the infidelity which is sin: that which professes to have as a conviction what the mind has really eliminated from its faith: or that which, to maintain a certain status, equivocates, evades, shuffles with words rather than follow the direction of conscience in singleness and honesty of purpose wherever it may lead. But unbelief of the doctrines which are taught as Christianity, and which unless a man keep whole and undefiled he shall perish everlastingly—the Trinity, Original Sin, the substitutionary Atonement, the infallibility of the Bible—is that sin? Further, are doubts and difficulties with regard to religion of the nature of moral delinquency? Can the obtaining of correct opinions be justly made the condition on which a man's fate, either in this world or the next, is made to turn? If he doubts—or more, if he denies the credibility of, certain alleged facts; if he questions or rejects the interpretation or the authority of any assumed infallible standard of religion; if he disputes the accuracy of the deductions by which certain dogmas have been established, is it right to exclude him from all religious fellowship, and if he die in his “unbelief” to regard him as finally rejected of God?

I am counselled, in reply, to read the solemn asseverations of the Scriptures on the perils of unbelief. But it was pointed out long ago by Dr. Arnold that the heresies and false teachings denounced in the Scriptures are those which touch the moral life of man in some point or other. In the Scriptures unbelief means practical unrighteousness, want of obedience to truth, cherished sinfulness and malignant alienation from, or denial of, self-evident obligations of moral allegiance. It does not mean intellectual doubts, uncertainty, or even denial of dogmas. Those are things that depend on intellectual inquiry, and in their nature involve questionings and scepticisms. In this sense the most extreme Evangelical is infidel to some things. In this sense, for example, Lord Shaftesbury is infidel to the doctrine of the Pope's infallibility, Dr. Begg was infidel

to Professor Robertson Smith's doctrine of Deuteronomy, and Archdeacon Denison to the teachings of Bishop Colenso. Theological doctrines must be left to the results of intellectual inquiry; and there can be neither virtue nor vice in the opinions in which such inquiries end. Should any man arrive at the opinion that duty is not binding; that goodness is not to be honoured and served and embodied in his own life; that he is free to obey his personal inclinations at the expense of the well-being and happiness of his fellow-creatures, and proceed to act upon these opinions, he would be an infidel of the New Testament sort, and a denier, in the most practical way, of Christ, the Great Teacher and illustrator of the supreme obligatoriness of conscience. But belief and unbelief are acts of the mind to which, as intellectual judgments, neither moral merit nor demerit can be attached. Whether, for instance, the characters and events of the early period of Roman history are mythical and fictitious; whether St. Francis of Assisi was a bright and shining light of sweetness and gentleness, or, as Mr. Willis Nevins maintains, an instigator of wholesale cruelty and intolerance, are questions on which, along with a thousand others, different investigators may and do reach different conclusions. The conclusion you may have reached may be the right one, and you may flatter yourself by thinking that those who differ from you are less informed or of feebler capacity; but you never think of ascribing to them moral guilt, or of insisting that they should be punished for what you regard as their mistaken judgment.

Is there anything special in the province of theology which renders such considerations inapplicable to it? There is no reason why there should be one canon of historical criticism for events said to have happened in Italy, and another for events said to have happened in Palestine. What course is open to the searcher after truth but to collect the evidence for the alleged facts, reject what in his judgment is ambiguous, accept what he thinks is

trustworthy, and, having carefully deliberated, come to the conclusion to which the evidence conducts him? If he reaches the conclusion that the reported facts are true, who doubts his integrity? If, after the most careful investigation, he cannot disabuse himself of the conviction that fabulous elements have insinuated themselves into the historical books of the New Testament, or if he has in his mind a sense of uncertainty as to any of the great events in the life of Jesus—shall we, or ought we, to cast doubts on his integrity? Shall we, or ought we, to think less of his moral and religious character? Can we bring ourselves to believe it possible that he will be damned because of his historical or critical opinions? To conceive of God as casting into outer darkness souls that have been longing and seeking to discern between the true and the false, is to ascribe to His nature an incongruity and a self-contradiction more monstrous than to deny Him altogether.

In view of these considerations I repeat that intellectual infidelity is not sinful. It has no moral quality. In itself it has neither the beauty of a virtue nor the deformity of a vice. It is an act of the understanding; and there is neither right nor wrong in an act of the understanding. What is it that invests thought with the character of goodness or badness? What is it that adds to an idea the moral element of virtue or vice? The motives and dispositions which pervade the idea. The judgment in its own nature is destitute of any moral characteristic. What endows it with that quality is the disposition that helps to determine it, the temper which pervades it, the spirit which circulates in it.

In this sense belief may be a crime, and unbelief the purest virtue. If Christianity, in any form, is adopted because it may advance personal interest or popularity; if faith in it is preserved only by steadily closing the eyes to objections to it, lest there should result loss of status and social influence; if the deliberate convictions of the understanding are tampered with, and for considerations of ease

and power the strength of the intellect is spent in defence of a faith which is really felt to be indefensible, but which is clung to because it is the prevalent, the popular, the paying faith, then belief based on these reasons is a mercenary act, if not a crime. It is nothing but irreligion, nothing but utter selfishness and worldliness to maintain outward conformity to Christianity from any such motive as that of standing well with the world, or out of blind devotion to inherited prejudices and unreasoning adherence to inherited traditions. There is virtue of the purest in the unbelief that prefers honest doubt and even open denial to the profession of religion for the sake of any personal or social interest whatever.

There is another consideration I would set over against the contention that intellectual unbelief carries with it moral culpability. It is that, sometimes at least, doubt and unbelief are only the veiled form of a deeper loyalty to truth than outward confession of faith. The time is gone by when it should for a moment be thought that men whose whole being throbs with sensitiveness to the speaking of truth and the doing of right—men as honest, as loyal to their convictions, as devoted to warfare against evil, as blameless and excellent in character as any who accept the popular Christian faith, but whose opinions only keep them outside the popular Christian ranks—I say the time has gone by when such men should be condemned as men of evil disposition. There is among us to-day little of the old flippant infidelity. The sneering and blaspheming tone in which infidelity used to indulge is no more to be found in our literature. The “sceptical” literature of our time is elevated in tone and pure in moral teaching. Mr. Spurgeon has declared that unbelievers are now unbelievers simply because they do not care about truth at all. Nothing can be more opposed to the fact. We may lament profoundly the intellectual attitude towards religion of some of our men of science, philosophers, and high priests of literature; but even Mr. Spurgeon does not feel more deeply than they

that religion is a solemn and serious subject, demanding the utmost earnestness of investigation and the utmost reverence of spirit. Unbelief is not sneering: it is eager, aspiring, hopeful, sincere; and to abuse it is no test of truth. It is not of the spirit of Mephistopheles; and to gibe and scoff at it is at once an easy and a contemptible method of evading its issues. It is not of the ribald temper of that which once reigned in France. It is asking everywhere, in intensity, the old question, "What is truth?" And alas! though passionately, it vainly longs for reply. It is an unbelief that is honest, pure, moral, heaven-aspiring—such as in their spheres of thought and duty Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Priestley, Channing, Parker, Robertson, Bushnell, must have felt at the moment when over their souls stole the first breath of doubt, and the voice of conscience whispered that, while it is a duty to affirm, it is also a duty, urgent and solemn, to deny. It is an unbelief such as prepares the way of the Lord for a nobler and more rational faith; and the way to meet it is not so much by the presentation of elaborate argument, as by so fulfilling in our lives the Christian ideal that we shall make the human life within our influence fruitful for noble purposes.

THE LAWS OF NATURE.*



MODERN science has demonstrated the universality of law. It reveals to us that law controls everything in heaven, and earth, and sea. It has established that law reaches to all parts of the universe, and to all departments of known being, vegetable and animal. It proves also that law is regular, steadfast, immutable; and common sense at once sees that human science is possible, and human skill and art useful, only on the basis of the uniformity of law. But there are those who maintain that in a system in which all things are bound and governed by immutable laws there is no necessity for a God. What room is there for God when in every motion in every region of the universe, from the march of worlds in their orbits to the crawling of the meanest insect on the surface of the earth, there is the controlling power of unchangeable laws?

The admission of the universality and constancy of law does not enable us to dispense with God. Laws ought not to be confounded with sufficient and eternal causes. A self-made law is an absurdity. A self-continued law is an anomaly. Law may be defined, both in etymology and in fact, as something laid down. This is its accurate sense—something constituted, established. Law, then, must have had some power before it to lay it down; it must still have some power behind it and above it to continue to lay it down; otherwise it would cease, and so be law no longer. What power established the laws? What power keeps them in unvarying operation? It is of priceless benefit in many

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, April 21st, 1876.

ways to bring within our knowledge the actual laws themselves, but it is a mockery of our intelligence to tell us that these laws are actual causality, or that they are anything more than the uniform and regular course of the operations of nature. The laws are simply the order of the universe, and nothing more. They do not account for the order of the universe.* To refer us back to them is no solution whatever of the arrangement of the universe: it is only to taunt us with the empty and meaningless assurance that there is arrangement in the universe because there is arrangement. Arrangement is an effect, and must have a cause. Law is an effect, and must have a cause: it is rule, and rule is a result which necessarily implies a ruling power.

In its ultimate analysis law is the expression of some will, the practical working of some thought, the order of some planning mind.† Acts of Parliament are laws, but who would be irrational enough to declare that they are self-originated? They are planned by the minds of members of Parliament, and are only the expression of the minds of their creators. In fact, in human affairs we do not know of a law which is not made by mind; and in the governing of the universe we cannot conceive of law which is not the expression of mind. One thing, then, seems perfectly plain, that if law has been reigning from the beginning, it is because a sovereign Mind has been reigning from the beginning; that if law reigns everywhere it is because

* "To speak of . . . *phenomenal* Laws, however, as *governing* phenomena, is altogether unscientific; such laws being nothing else than comprehensive expressions of aggregates of particular facts, and giving no *rationale* of them whatever."—Dr. W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, 4th edition, p. 693.

† "The sovereignty of law is certainly not an atheistic hypothesis, but the contrary. Law implies mind, will, executive force. It cannot by any possibility inhere in brute matter. It cannot be self-originating."—Rev. Professor A. P. Peabody, D.D., in *Theological Quarterly*, January, 1876, p. 38.

there is a law-upholding and a law-observing Mind everywhere throughout the universe. Law *there*, in the realms and motions of material things, as *here* in the realms of legislation, is but the way in which Mind utters itself and acts—it is the published will of a law-maker; and the statement, therefore, that all things are controlled by eternal laws may be resolved into the far more philosophical statement that all things are controlled by a law-maker who has presided from eternity.

And then, again, there comes the consideration that law has no force in itself.* The laws of Parliament cannot execute themselves. To give them effect there must be executive officers, and wherever they are in operation, they are in operation through the action of intelligent agencies. Non-intelligent instruments may be employed, but they must be employed by intelligence. It is incontestable that wherever law is put into execution, there is an actor. It is undeniable that where we find a law in operation we are confident, with a confidence and certainty that nothing can destroy, of the presence of some one so carrying it out. Where we find law we inevitably infer—and the inference cannot be displaced by argumentation; if it be shaken for a moment, it comes back again and abides with an indestructible trust—that there is presiding an executive

* "Law is not a force, but it supposes a force already existing. It expresses a regular mode in which a force acts in producing an effect."—Dr. Noah Porter, President of Yale College, in *Science and Sentiment*, p. 274.

Spinoza says: "The laws of nature are nothing else than the eternal decrees of God." And similarly K. E. von Baer: "Die Naturgesetze sind die permanenten Willensausserungen eines Schaffenden Principes."—*Studien*, p. 232.

Dr. M. E. Cazelles writes: "Let us not be beguiled by false appearances. There is no talk, yet, of a true explanation. The mind accustomed to abstractions is the dupe of an illusion when it takes laws for realities. Laws are symbols of order: they do not account for order."—*Outlines of Evolution Philosophy*, 1875, p. 22.

mind.* It is the law that water should evaporate and form the reservoir of clouds ; and just as surely as water evaporates and clouds gather in the sky, there is not only the law of its evaporation, but the executor of that law there. It is according to law that the heart beats, the lungs inhale

* “ The more constant and invariable the great Agencies of Nature are found to be, and the more what at first seemed exceptional phenomena are brought within the domain of law,—the more, on a superficial view, does it appear as if the Order of Nature were simply mechanical, going on *of itself*, as it has done through all the past, and will continue to do through the future. But a deeper scrutiny has shown us that the Man of Science cannot dispense with the notion of a Power always working throughout the Mechanism of the Universe ; and that, on scientific grounds alone, this Power may be regarded as the expression of Mind. And anything less than unvarying Uniformity in the mode of operation of that Mind would be an indication of its defect rather than of its perfection. For if all the agencies of nature are the unconscious ministers of an All-wise and All-powerful Ruler, they will work out His bidding like the disciplined members of a large and well-ordered household, in which everyone knows his work and does it. Surely it would be strange if anyone who should watch these servants in the performance of their several duties,—should study the succession of every hour, should find each doing at a certain prefixed time and place exactly that which proves most suitable to the occasion, and should thus finally arrive at a conception of the harmony and completeness of the whole scheme of domestic economy—were to be led by this very harmony and completeness to regard that as a mere mechanical routine which is really the silent, invisible action of the directing Will, and were to see the operation of that Will only in such departures from the system as may be required to meet contingencies for which no human foresight can provide.”—Dr. W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, 4th edition, pp. 699–700.

“ That any antagonism should be supposed to exist between those ‘ Laws,’ which express the Uniformities of Nature discovered by Science and the Will of the Author of Nature as manifested in those uniformities,—so as for the acceptance of the former to exclude the notion of the latter,—can only arise, either from an unworthy conception of the Deity as an arbitrary and capricious ruler, or from an unphilosophical conception of the real meaning of Science as the intellectual interpretation of Nature.”—Dr. W. B. Carpenter, *Ibid.*, p. 703.

“ The Scientific sense of the term ‘ Law,’—considered simply as Man’s expression of Uniformity of Sequence within the range of his

and exhale, and the nervous system feels ; and it is because there is in the animal system not only the law of animal life, but also the Giver of animal life, who adopts the law as His method of taking care of animate being. It is law which preserves the surface of the earth on land and sea, which pumps all the rivers into the great salt deep, and confines the ocean in its appointed bed, which keeps the earth steady in its mighty course, and holds in their path worlds flying through infinite space in every conceivable direction, and at all possible velocities ; but what invests law with this wondrous power but the presence in it of Him who holds all the worlds in the hollow of His hand, and to whom it is only the order He pursues in sustaining them ? Show law in operation, from a sparrow winging its little flight to the planetary worlds circling within their bounds, and there is the presence of a law-executing power. Why hesitate to call that power God ? We see that the universe in all its parts, and in each

limited experience,—so far from being in antagonism with the notion of Will, is only in antagonism with that idea of inconstancy in its mode of exercise which belongs to a theology now disowned by the best thinkers of our time . . . This constancy [of Nature], on which every man counts in the plans and intentions he forms for his future action, is, to him who has found the reconciliation between Science and Religion, nothing else than abiding testimony to the Infinity of the Divine Perfections.”—Dr. W. B. Carpenter, *Ibid.*, p. 705.

“The sovereignty of law is an inevitable inference from the being and attributes of an infinite God. In a God-made and God-governed universe, there can be no room for caprice, for after-thoughts, for empirical remedies, for intervention in unforeseen emergencies, all which imply limitation and imperfection : but Omnipotence must actualize the counsels of Omniscience : an all-embracing Providence must conduct the administration of Nature and all being in accordance with perfect fore-knowledge ; not a changeable will, but immutable wisdom, must preside over the march of events, the great and the minute, the movements of worlds, the destinies of empires, the lot of individual men, the sparrow’s flight and fall. Now, all this, and nothing more or less, is implied in the sovereignty of law.”—Rev. Professor A. P. Peabody, D.D., in *Theological Quarterly*, January, 1876, p. 33.

detail of its parts, is subject to law ; and we also see that in the operation of law it exhibits resources of superhuman power, knowledge, and wisdom. If law has made and presides over all this, it must be a being of boundless might, intelligence, sagacity, and excellence. To what conclusion does this conduct us ? It simply proves to us how much easier it is to christen agency with a new name than to disprove its existence. God is not dispensed with on this plan. We have only to look at the attributes with which law is invested by modern science, and the word at once is enlarged infinitely beyond its true meaning, and becomes another name for God. And when the *qualities* of God are admitted, we see no sufficient reason why the *name* of God should be rejected ; and we are at a loss to understand the modesty which shrinks from confessing the existence of a Supreme Being who made the heavens and the earth, but which is not restrained by any feeling of diffidence from ascribing to law all the properties of an Infinite Personal Intelligence.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE ON STRAUSS'S NEW FAITH
AND GOD.

In examining materialistic theories we discover that whatever is substituted for a Personal God, be it Impersonal Law or Chance or Necessity, is all-powerful, all-intelligent, all-wise, all-benevolent, and claims the reverence and devotion which are given to a Personal God. We have merely to pass by the usual meaning of the words, and then Impersonal Law, Chance, or Necessity, becomes another name for God. As one proof of this I refer to

Professor Frohschammer's analysis and examination, in the *Contemporary Review* for June, 1873, of Strauss's *The Old Faith and the New*. Strauss rejects belief in a Personal God, and tries to defend absolute materialism. In the second part of his work he raises the question, "Have we still any religion?" The answer to the question is not decidedly negative. Strauss finally confesses that his religious emotions are to some extent excited, not by a personal God, but by the "All" (Universum), which by its order and adherence to law, is the source of all truth and goodness, and which is regulated not by, but on, the highest reason. Strauss thinks it wrong of Schopenhauer, the pessimist philosopher, as an individual, to despise the "All" from which he derives his existence and the little reason that he misuses. "We see in this," Strauss says, "a denial of the feeling of dependence which we attribute to every man. *We ask for our Universum the same devotion which the good man of the old school feels for his God.* Our feeling for the 'All' reacts when wounded religiously." Strauss's remnant of religion consists in a feeling of dependence on the "All." It is, then, no surprise that he assigns the origin of religion to man's weakness and helplessness in the face of the powers of nature. Professor Frohschammer then discusses this theory of the origin of religion which Strauss takes up from Hume, and, in the course of the discussion, says that he who looks closely at the nature of religion, who rightly estimates its profound importance to the mind, instead of judging it by imperfect representations, will scarcely deny that, in religious feeling and faith, a divine essence is revealed as the basis of all existence and life. Strauss cannot withdraw himself from the influence of this feeling, for *he himself confesses that he is religiously affected by the "All," the universal order and reason.* Besides, he is wrong in saying, as Schleiermacher said before him, that the mere feeling of dependence is the essence of religion. Religion may begin in this way, but this is only a stage, and is entirely outgrown by many persons, especially

by those of a mystical nature. Strauss ought to have known, from his study of the life of Jesus, that religion includes infinitely higher and deeper feelings than those of dependence. No one gives so clear a testimony to this as Jesus. Even the religious emotion excited by the "All" is not merely a feeling of dependence. It is not the outward manifestation of power that excites Strauss's emotions, but the source of order, law, and reason. He feels Schopenhauer's pessimism and contempt for the "All" to be blasphemous, and demands the same devotion for the Universum as the good man of the old school feels for his God. Strauss certainly would not lay claim to have penetrated to all the heights and depths of the Universum, and his emotions cannot have reference to the mere outward manifestations of it. They must therefore have reference to the hidden as well as manifest reason of existence, *and they cannot really be so different from religious faith as he imagines.* He has not, therefore, succeeded in denying religion. . . . If Strauss feels his emotions excited by the "All" which he does not perfectly apprehend, as by a personal, intelligent being, he need not be so anxious to refute the ordinary proofs of the existence of the Deity, as if he had thereby refuted religion itself.

EVOLUTION AND MAN.



THERE are two theories concerning the origin of human nature. The first is, that God created it directly; the second is, that it has been evolved out of lower forms of life. It is unwise to dogmatize on either of these theories at present. Mr. Darwin holds that an act of separate creation is not indispensable to the origin of man. He argues that wide as is the gap between man and the highest animals, he has, nevertheless, been developed in accordance with essentially the same laws as have regulated the general evolution of the animal world. On the other hand, there are German and English men of science who accept Darwinism limited to the vegetable and animal worlds, but who hold that man came by a distinct and special creation. Mr. Wallace is a naturalist of the highest order, one of the most eminent of the disciples of Darwin; one indeed who may claim to have preceded Darwin in arriving at the theory of natural selection as the mode of accounting for the existence and variety of species. But Mr. Wallace differs from Darwin on one point of the very highest interest. He maintains, on scientific as well as moral grounds, that man could not have been developed out of an animal. But while differing from Darwin on the genesis of man, Mr. Wallace rejects the atheistic interpretation of Darwinism which is continually charged upon it. "It is simply"—these are his express words—"a question of *how* the Creator of life has worked." Has the Creator worked by development from a germ, or by special acts of creation? Whether you answer the question in one way or another, you neither deny the existence of an Author of life, nor

exclude Him from the government of His universe. It is a most unreasonable thing to infer that, in ascertaining the *means* and *methods* of the Divine Worker we are dishonouring the Worker, or necessarily losing sight of Him. In my mind the thought of God ascends, enlarges and ennobles; my sense of awe, reverence, and wonder deepens, the more I regard the creative act, not as belonging to the past, but as a continuous, omnipresent, divine activity. The idea of Divine *Power* is not only not narrowed, but it is broadened by attaching to it the constancy of a law by which the world and the forms of life upon it have been developed from anterior and less perfect states. The idea of Divine *Wisdom* gains grandeur and sublimity when I see that the lowest forms of life are endowed with the power of steadily going up, higher and higher, gradually unfolding, until at last manhood is attained, and the natural is crowned with the spiritual. If, then, the facts, when they are all collected and arranged, should show that man has been evolved by long processes from lower forms of life, that he is the result of an intricate growth through millions of ages, that he began his career in a few tiny atoms floating in boundless space, will this conclusion amount to the expulsion from the universe of divine creative and regulative Intelligence? God is in the nebula, as in the garden of Eden; in the rock-formations, as in the mind which reads the record of the past; in the eternal motions of the sea, as in the knowledge and skill which use it as a beast of burden; in the unsearchable potencies of the trivial seed, as in their multitudinous products—"the teeming world, and the embracing heavens, and the soul of man which interprets them in thought." The atoms in which man began his life in the dim far-off past were not Godless atoms. They were the dwelling-places of the Almighty—the temples of His Holy Spirit, the centres of His Infinite Energy. Do you ask—Is the mind of Plato, Shakspeare, Milton, Newton, in the mist, the atom, the monad? Yes, and infinitely more; the Soul of God himself; for there is not a point of space or

time but the reverent mind can see there His flaming altar ; there is not an unnoticed insect crawling on the earth, and not an unregarded bird winging its flight through the air, wherein the impulsions of His Spirit are not at work. Whether, therefore, the nature of man comes by special creation or by evolution, in either case it starts from the bosom of God.

Still, I do not look for man's nature simply in its primitive condition. If it began in an insignificant ascidian, a globule of sea-jelly, it has, by the marvellous faculty of unfolding with which it was endowed and energized, grown through successive ages to an enormous distance and elevation from its humble, obscure beginning. I find man's true nature, then, not in what it came from, but in what it has proved itself to be,—not in the motions of the pulp in which it may have had its birth, but in the powers of which its achievements are the conclusive witness. It is not to be ascertained by what it was when man was in embryo, but by what it is when he has reached full stature. It is not to the acorn wrapped in the cradle of the soil, but to the century-crowned tree with its massive trunk and giant arms and storm-bearing brow, that we look for the properties of the oak. It is not in the wild grain of the wilderness, but in the grain which has been brought to maturity and richness by culture that we see what is the nature of rice. It is not the unfledged eaglet in the nest, but the eagle soaring in space with powerful wing, and gazing on the sun with unblanched eye, that we royally call the king of birds. In the vegetable and animal kingdoms we do not seek for the nature of things in their small beginnings, but in the perfection to which, by development, they have attained. And why should we call *that* man's nature which it is when it is in the germ, undeveloped? We look upon man as he is ripened and unfolded. He builds steamers and makes a pathway through the sea ; he binds the winds of heaven to his chariot, employs the sun as his artist, and compels the swift-winged lightning to be his messenger : he weighs and

measures distant orbs, constrains them to yield to him the secret of their make and movements, analyses the subtle element of light, puts the air in balances and calculates its pressure ; why not call *that* his nature ? He writes histories, elaborates systems of philosophy, fills the air with the melody of glorious poems ; and thus proves in history, philosophy, and poetry, that he has within him something—call it mind, soul, what you please, the name is of little moment compared with the reality,—something which distinguishes him from and crowns him over all living things—something capable of being inspired by the glow of patriotism—capable of being stirred by a kindred humanity—capable of being glorified with the perception of beauty, the sentiment of grandeur, the radiance of fancy, the graces of culture. Why not call *that* his nature ? Come whence it may, what matters ? To this, to this it has ascended ! Brave human nature ! Sturdy and noble human nature ! Why, this is glorious ! And the development does not end here. I have not described all that man is. He comes into harmony with the spirit that pervades the phenomenal universe ; he is not only kindled with poetry, not only thrilled with music, not only entranced with art, but he is also inspired by religious worship, humbled and ennobled by secret prayer ; and so, through these and a thousand nameless influences, he passes within the veil, and, as a child, touches the hands of his Father, holds communion with all that is divine ; loves, trusts, and reverences the Infinite Being, and becomes perfect in oneness with Him : why not call *that* his nature ? From the ascidian he has become human ; from the human he becomes divine. What matters it where it came from ? *Here it is.* Is it not good ? I have seen an artist look with admiring eyes upon a rude block of marble, survey it, look round it, look under it. He takes it into his studio, and he cuts and carves and pares until that rude thing is transformed into the image of a man, a majestic statue ; and it is placed in a royal palace, and every one who sees it speaks of the genius of the artist.

And it is quite right to praise genius wherever it is seen. But something must be said for the marble, which has the power of being thus transformed. Wonderful is the work of God upon human nature. I bow my head in reverence and worship when I think of it—how the Divine Artist transforms, from glory to glory, the nature of man. But something must be said for that nature, too, which has the capacity, the power, and the quality of being thus enlarged and ennobled. The cloud is dull, heavy, leaden; but it has the power of receiving the light of the sun, and then the dull, heavy, leaden thing permeated and saturated with the light of the sun, floats through space, rich in gold and fringed with silver. Our human nature, as Darwinians say, may come from the animal, but it has the wonderful power of receiving the light of God, and then it radiates glory, as clouds that float in a calm atmosphere on a fine summer day. Its characteristics, then, are not discoverable in that which man was in the beginning, but in that which now makes him, in Darwin's language, "the wonder and glory of the universe." Man's true nature is that which he reaches when, under right conditions, under the influence of proper culture, and the stimulating power of God's Spirit, he is attuned into harmony with his highest self, and with the Infinite Soul.

MAN'S COMPOUND NATURE.*

It seems at present impossible to define the nature of the connection that exists between mind and body. That mind is connected in a mysterious manner with our organization, none can disbelieve; but we ask, and ask in vain, modern physiologists to explain the connection. Professor Tyndall says that "we soar into a vacuum," if we attempt to do so. Science cannot solve this problem. Philosophy cannot discover the secret. Religion cannot expound the riddle. It is outside the capability of demonstration. We only know that such a connection exists, through the agency of consciousness. We feel that in us mind and matter unite without blending,—that they are joined, but not interwoven. The precise point of contact we do not know. We are equally ignorant of the elements or essences (whichever they may be) constituting and perpetuating the union. The result is, that some men deny the distinctions generally accepted between mind and matter, and regard mind, and assert it to be, simply refined, etherealized matter.

To my own satisfaction, Nature enters a distinct protest against this idea, and emphatically disavows it. We have some knowledge of rarefied matter; it does not quite elude our observation and analysis. There is the thin, transparent air, of whose countless multitude of material particles, dancing about as the motes do in the sunbeam, and mingling harmoniously together in extended space, we can take note. There are the gasses of the atmosphere, whose wonderful operations and fabricating energies we can bring:

* From the *Unitarian Review*, Boston, U.S., August, 1879.

within the reach of human examination and scrutiny. There is light, with its various degrees of intensity, draping the world in beauty, whose glory is not so dazzling as to blind us to its composition, and whose speed is not so swift as to outrun our pursuing steps. There is electricity, with its inconceivable rapidity and tremendous destructiveness, but we can bridle and tame it, and harness it for beneficent service. There is the aroma of flowers and vegetation, softly circulating sweetness and fragrance through the air. These *all* are different forms of matter, some of them the most subtle, the most impalpable, the most spiritual we know. Yet none of these things perform the functions characteristic of mind. None of them possess the faculties attributed to mind. They do not think, reason, feel, love, hate, remember. We may present to them the questions that perplex us, but they return no answers. They unravel none of the mysteries of being, solve none of the difficult problems in reference to man, and God, and eternity. They leave us upon the boundaries of the dark, solemn, awful, eternal, without one ray or even glint of light,—without one word of instruction, one throb or thrill of intuition or inspiration. We may call in agony across the sublime void, but the call dies away in empty echo. Had they intelligence, consciousness, we could speak with them somewhat concerning themselves; but they are dumb, because they are deaf, to our questionings. Even reflection and refraction, the recoil of the sunshine from a brilliant surface, the beautiful, intangible bow in the clouds, the most ethereal matter we can have a conception of, has not revealed to us its possession of anything even remotely analogous to the faculties and functions of what we call mind. An impassable gulf—an entire incapability of mutual association—separates man from all the delicate essences of material things. No one of them can intelligibly hold intercourse with man. There seems to exist no community of nature, of thought, of will, and of love—the characteristics of man—between these delicate essences and man himself.

Our own consciousness seems to testify, emphatically, of the combination of various phases of existence in our nature, and we have diversified operations as the result. We feel that by death there is something removed unknown to, unrecognised by, any one of our senses; something we can neither see, smell, taste, hear, nor touch. But the departure of this something leaves the body entire. Examine a frame just become lifeless. The mechanism is perfect. Not one part of this fine machine is wanting. Every one of the constituents of the human system, from the bones that form the foundation, through all the varied economies, to the brain with its convolutions that have responded to movements of the mind, to the senses that have been the mind's ministers, informing it of all that has been necessary either for its pleasure or its use, to the heart that has preserved all the complicated machinery in constant operation—*all* are there, entire. Physiology may gaze and search in every organ, but it fails to detect a material palpable loss when the bodily form alone remains. Each part is there, still placed in exquisite adaptation to every other. The whole is there, still in matchless, inimitable perfection; but the eye returns no glance of affection, brightens with no lustre, flashes with no living fire: it is cold, fixed, glassy; from the tongue there come no longer stealing over you tones like a sweet beguiling melody; the lips, still exquisite in formation, utter no response of love and speak no emotion of the soul; the face, perfect in its symmetry, warms with no mantling blush. Apply your electricity: it will mock you, for it will fail to re-animate that form and add to the number of its days. The matter of man's nature is as complete, as elaborate, as it was an hour ago before something left it a dead, inactive, powerless mass. But man himself is gone, and to endow that form again with the one thing it lacks—with life, life glorious with thought and love—is beyond the compass of the highest human skill.

True, there is a connection, as well as distinction, be-

tween body and soul, matter and mind. We are *composite* beings: not merely an elementary order of creation. We cannot assert ourselves as simple or uncompounded entities. We have united in us the angel and the animal, the earthly and the heavenly. We are constituted of matter, under an especial formation, and of mind, or what, for the sake of being understood, we term mind. But while so constituted, each of these divisions of our nature maintains its own distinctive characteristics and performs its own distinctive specific functions. Neither can do the work of the other; and neither, so far as we know, can beneficially operate without the other. A transposition of functions and operations is quite impossible. The visible, material Nature cannot think, reason, nor will. These are not its works. We have never heard of its performing these works. We have never felt it perform them. That it does so perform them, has never been known in the realm of science, nor in the more truly verifying kingdom of our own consciousness. It is not thrilled with joy, distressed with sorrow, sweetened and calmed with love, embittered and stormed with hatred. Whatever may move us while we live here, fails to arouse and charm when only the frame is left. At most, the material nature in some of the delicate portions of its composition is but the vehicle of emotion to the realizing, verifying something within,—that which is called mind.

On the other hand, the mind has its allotted sphere of toil. It cannot perform physical actions. It cannot wield the mechanic's hammer, nor guide the artist's pencil, nor grasp the author's pen, nor vocalize the orator's eloquence. It can conceive and plan the work to be executed, the picture to be painted, the song to be sung, the thought to be written; but it cannot do the work, nor paint the picture, nor sing the song, nor speak the thought. There are limits to the larger circle of mental capacity, as to the smaller circle of physical capacity.

But while these facts compel us to admit two things,—

first, that the material nature cannot fulfil its functions without the vivifying movement of an inward power, the mind; second, that the mind cannot fulfil *its* functions without the agency of material organs,—they also show that body and mind are totally dissimilar in their characteristics,* and so warrant the conclusion that things which are unlike in their properties are unlike in their nature.†

The physical nature depends upon material sustenance. It cannot be fed and strengthened by the melodies of the poet, or the glowing words of the orator. Philosophies will not nourish it. Only the palpable bread of earth, and all that bread symbolizes, can keep the clay walls from tumbling completely down. In vain we strive to build up muscle, and bone, and sinew with contemplation and enthralling thought. But observe the mind. It cannot satisfy its hunger and thirst with material food. It has often thrust itself upward—bravely, triumphantly upward—

* “Between thought and the physical phenomena of matter there is no conceivable analogy.”—Allman, in Sheffield Address.

† The attributes and properties of one substance cannot be transferred to another. The attributes, properties, and qualities of mind cannot be predicated of material brain atoms, and the attributes, properties, and qualities of brain atoms cannot be predicated of mind. “Anger and fear,” as a writer in the *North British Review* (Vol. 53, p. 125) says, “are qualities incapable of being exhibited as functions of brain matter”; and on the other hand, extension, resistance, gravity, colour, are terms incapable of application to mind.

“What is called matter may pass through many stages, may assume many phases, and may perform many functions; but in all its transformations, even the most surprising, it never ceases to be an object of sense, a something external, extended, bounded, divisible, movable, etc.; while no phenomenon of mind—no thought, volition, or feeling—ever has any of these properties, but has a number of other properties never found in matter. The perception of this truth early led men to believe that the phenomena called mental could not be resolved into, or accounted for, by those called material; and the most recent materialism has not succeeded in showing that any other belief can be reasonably entertained.”—Professor Flint, in *Anti-Theistic Theories*, Appendix, note xviii., p. 498.

from the hut of gnawing hunger and want. It drinks in the songs of the birds, and the tones of the winds enrich it with joyous health. The dawn is to it a daily feast. It revels in the azure of the sky, and its fires are kindled by the light in which the planets roll. The daisies in the meadow are luxuries to it. It glories in the majesty of ocean. For it there is a daily banquet in the smiles of little children, in the laughter and buoyancy of gambolsome youth, in the heroic deeds and endurance of manhood, in the expectant tranquility and calm waiting for the morning of fading age. It is nourished by the events of history; enlarged, ennobled, by the truths of science; inspired by the beauties of art; crowned and glorified by the commanding sentiments of religion. Living, as they do, on different elements, are body and mind identical in essence?

Again: the material nature, instead of being that permanent thing we imagine it to be, is, in truth, full of changes, unstable, and passing through constant variations. Decay and renovation, life and death, are working in it perpetual alterations. Change, increase, and decomposition are ever going forward in it. Our bodies are daily parting with their identity. My present physical frame is altogether a new thing compared with what I called my body in childhood. Were matter and mind one, I should, therefore, have long ago ceased to be that individual whom I call *Self*. But I am conscious of an unchangeable personal identity. I have a certainty which nothing can shake, that I am the same individual I have ever been. There is no moment, from my earliest consciousness, in which I did not feel myself a simple, uncompounded spirit, the same amid all outward changes. Since, then, I feel myself to be the same being I have ever been, the distinction of my body from my mind or *Self* is certain.*

* "Materialism fails to explain the unity of consciousness. This is an old because an obvious argument, but the ablest thinkers in Europe still regard it as valid and invincible. It has been presented with

That conviction is never lost, and never falters so long as reason remains. The Mind enjoys the high prerogative of immutability. It is in the image of Him who created it, of that Being "with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning." Can we, then, regard its interests with distrust, and as of a doubtful character? Are they, in this view of them, entitled to less confidence than the qualities and operations of matter, "which waxeth old, and is folded up as a garment, and is changed"?

The material nature is divisible: the mind is indivisible. Matter can be extended. It can be made long or short. It has height and depth, length and breadth. It has parts,—a right side, a left side, an upper part, a lower part. It assumes colour, exhales flavour, emits odour. It can be touched, tasted, and handled. But mind cannot be conceived of in this way. It is an indivisible principle; it is one and entire. I know that Professor Bain declares that this distinction between the divisibility of matter and the indivisibility of mind is blown to tatters like a cobweb by the materialists. In his book, *Mind and Body*, he says: "A lump of brass is divisible; but make it into a watch, and you can no longer split it into two without destroying it as a watch. You can no more cut a man's brain into two working brains than you can bisect his intelligence." But this reasoning is based upon a complete misapprehension of an important argument. The argument, of course, is, that matter, as such, can be divided as often as you please, but that you cannot even conceive mind as divided. My body may be divided into fifty pieces, but I cannot conceive myself—that is, my mind—cut into two halves. You divide a watch. True; but is a watch representative of

masterly skill by Lotze, both in his *Medical Psychology* and in his *Mikrokosmos*. A careful statement of it, with reference to recent theories, will also be found in an article by Professor Bowen in the *Princeton Review* for March, 1878, 'Dualism, Materialism, or Idealism?'—Professor Flint, *Anti-Theistic Theories*, Appendix, note xviii., p. 499,

matter, as such? And is there not something *indivisible* in the watch? To be sure there is; namely, *what the watch has from the mind*. The watch has an idea in it. This idea gives it a unity. This idea is a birth of the mind, and as derived from the mind is indivisible. You can divide the *matter* of the watch, but you cannot divide the *idea* of the watch, which is, so to speak, the soul of the watch. The ancient argument of the indivisibility of the mind remains, therefore, valid, and the arrow of the materialists glances aside, and penetrates their own armour.*

Consider, again, that the material nature is marked by an inability to change its sphere. We cannot transport it into another world. We are earth-bound. There is a gravity which keeps it here. We cannot walk the atmosphere, nor wing our way across the world. Out beneath the stars of the midnight, we may long for a dwelling in some distant sphere, the glory of whose life streams down to us from the orbit where it revolves millions of miles away; but we long in vain. We cannot tread the glowing bands of Orion, nor walk the glimmering path of the Milky Way. Here we are chained, and have no wings to fly in the body away. Very dissimilar is the Mind. It removes its observation to any sphere of the universe, to any point of time. It is at home in Venus, and amongst the satellites of Saturn. It wings

* In his *Mind and Body*, Prof. Bain explicitly admits that mental and bodily states are "utterly contrasted," and "cannot be compared." But he maintains that the physical and mental are "the two sides of a double-faced unity." Still, as Prof. Flint observes, he has not shown that utterly contrasted qualities can combine in a single substance, nor that what is unextended can either be a side of anything or have a side of its own. Further, as Prof. Tyndall remarks in his Birmingham lecture—"It is no explanation to say that the objective and subjective effects are two sides of one and the same phenomenon. Why should the phenomenon have two sides? This is the very core of the difficulty. There are plenty of molecular motions which do not exhibit this two-sidedness. Does water think or feel when it forms into frost-ferns on a window-pane? If not, why should the molecular motion of the brain be yoked to this mysterious companion—consciousness?"

its way through the depths of space to discover new worlds in the limitless immensity. It is swifter than light, and grows familiar with creation. It catalogues and names God's remote, as His near works. To it nothing is far off. Sirius is as near to it as Mars. The pre-historic earth is before its vision as clear and luminous as the newspaper annals of yesterday. It talks with the child which only lisps ; it speaks with the sages of old Greece ; it converses with the men of pre-prophetic time. Sir Walter Scott sits in his study at Abbotsford, but his memory and imagination are unconfined, busy with the scenes and adventures and blazonry of the past, re-animating them, and weaving them into the present. Milton, advanced in years, blind and in misfortune, is within a little room, now in London, and now at Chalfont ; but his mind roams unrestrained over the vast fields of the classic ages, and his imperial fancy knows no bounds. Sir Walter Raleigh is imprisoned in the Tower of London, but his mind cannot be chained there ; it travels the ancient kingdoms of the East, and calls them up to life from the depths of ages, and visits the empires of Greece and Rome.

“ Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage ;
Minds innocent and free do take
That for a heritage.
If I have freedom in my love,
And in myself am free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty.”

Reflect further : The *direct* action of the material nature is upon material things alone, contributing to our comfort and luxury in mechanics under their very multifarious forms. The frame, the physical being, can dig and smelt the ore, quarry and carve the stone, fell and fashion the timber, weave the fabric in the loom, build the house and fill it with all the luxurious commodities of this outwardly civilized age. But with what is material, tangible, its

functions begin and end. But Mind imagines a universe based upon the visible and known. It creates a world out of all that is most beautiful in the real, and idealizes it until the ideal becomes the real, and the invisible is the seen. Wonderful is its power of vision as it exercises its faculties in discovering the essences, properties, and utilities of things. It is impossible to state its achievements in this direction. It is not within the compass of language to declare, nor within the reach of thought to conceive, what it can accomplish. Who can set a limit to its power? Who can measure its bounds? Who can discern the wall of circumference on which is written, "Thus far, but no farther"? Who can even adequately translate its registered triumphs into words? It has covered the barren desert and the waste howling wilderness with grand cities. It has converted the barren wild and the unmeasured prairie into fields of rich fruit and golden grain. It has scooped out a highway in the mountains, and ribbed the earth with railways. It has annihilated space and time by the electric telegraph, and bound peoples and nations together in commercial and intellectual intercourse. It has turned the earth round like a toy, and examined it on every side. It has cut open leaves of rock, and read the history of physical life from the beginning. It has pierced the everlasting hills, and discovered the forms of creatures who peopled the world long before man had his dwelling here. It explores the regions of space, tracks the orbs in their circuits, examines and analyzes the chemistry of solar fire. It instructs and blesses us with intelligence from the illuminated sky, from the water-belted earth, from the abysmal ocean. It has tamed the mightiest power in Nature, steam, to do its bidding. It unrolls the bands of the light; it puts the air in balances and weighs it; it sits as a charioteer upon the wings of the wind; it makes the sea its beast of burden; it employs the sun as its artist; it compels the swift-winged lightning to be its messenger. And still it reaches upward and delves downward. Still

it yearns, longs, aspires. Still it cries, "More light!" Where is the boundary of its power? Where, in what region of the universe, is the spot where it will hear the command "halt!" Looking upon these few of its achievements, which are the strength and inspiration of further victories, can we believe that it is from matter, however fine, that this grand and daily extending dominion over matter has its rise?

And, further still, is it matter which has made man a conscious and rational being, capable of knowledge, though itself knows nothing? Is it matter which has made man capable of generosity, affection, courage, ideality, faith, and hope, though it is itself incapable of even understanding these sentiments? Is it matter, bound fast by natural laws, and acting only by mechanical and chemical necessity, which has made man free?—matter, incapable of virtue or vice, which has made man capable of both? Is the law that the greater produces the less, true of every created thing except the highest, man's mind? And, in the instance of that crowning product of Nature, let us say, is it true that the law, everywhere else invariable, has been reversed, and that in this case the less has produced the greater? Is the law of cause and effect here turned completely upside down, and the smaller (matter) become the maker of the greater (mind)? Is it from a little gray pulp in the brain there have come the intellect which can mete out the heavens with a span, and comprehend the dust of the earth in a measure, and weigh the mountains in scales; the patriotism with which young men leave the luxury of life and go to die in the cause of their country, "stormed at by shot and shell," amid the rage and curses of foes; the ardour with which Socrates pursued truth and beauty, and the wisdom with which he taught the grandeur and immortality of the soul; the genius which Angelo has displayed at St. Peter's, with which Raphael has inspired the world with immortal pictures, with which Handel, Mendelssohn, and Mozart have filled Europe with divine melody, with which

Milton has sung of his conceptions of the ways of God in sublime strains, with which Shakespeare has interpreted man in "warbles of native wood-notes wild"? Have all these capacities had their birth merely in the movement of fibres of the brain? The swift and certain answer of the mind itself is found in the grandly simple, old-fashioned, but none the less true because old-fashioned words of the book of Job; "There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." *

* It has been affirmed that Prof. Tyndall ascribes to brain-matter what is here ascribed to mind. And, in proof of the affirmation, these words have been quoted from him: "Given the state of the brain, and the corresponding thought might be inferred. Or, given the thought, and the state of brain might be inferred." But he admits that this is all mere assumption when he says: "Molecular groupings and molecular motions explain nothing." No kind of reasonable conception can be formed of the process by which molecular changes will pass into or produce sensation, pleasure or pain, perception, memory, judgment, desire, or will. Prof. Tyndall himself puts the objection to materialism admirably and unanswerably when he writes: "The passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is unthinkable. Granted that a definite thought and a definite molecular action in the brain occur simultaneously; we do not possess the intellectual organ, nor apparently any rudiment of the organ, which would enable us to pass, by a process of reasoning, from the one phenomenon to the other. They appear together, but we do not know why. Were our minds and senses so expanded, strengthened, and illuminated, as to enable us to see and feel the very molecules of the brain; were we capable of following all their motions, all their grouping, all their electrical discharges, if such there be; and were we intimately acquainted with the corresponding states of thought and feeling,—we should probably be as far as ever from the solution of the problem, How are these physical processes connected with the facts of consciousness? The chasm between the two classes of phenomena would still remain intellectually impassable."

On this Prof. Flint remarks: "Materialism presents itself as an intelligible theory of the universe, and yet it has not succeeded in explaining a single fact in the world of consciousness."

So also Du Bois-Reymond: "Not only is consciousness unexplained by material conditions in the present state of our science (which all will admit), but, in the very nature of things, it never can be explained by these conditions."—*Ueber die Grenzen des Naturerkennens*, pp. 20-21.

More wonderful than all: Mind has searched into and analyzed itself; discovered the laws of its own operations, the nature and modes of its own thought. It has discovered means for its own guidance, and given maxims for its own welfare. It not only has a personal consciousness,—it recognises itself. It certifies its own existence; and if that is an illusion, what then is real?

Once more: The material nature decays. Like all matter, the visible dissolves. We cannot break the wand and destroy the power of death. No mailed and skilful hand can intercept the last shaft from the unseen archer's bow, and dexterously turn it aside from the current of life. It was but a dream of the writer of Genesis,—that Garden of Eden, with its tree of life, and the anxiety and fear of the Almighty lest man should eat of the fruit and live for ever. Man was made mortal. His digestive organization asserts his mortality. "No sin, no death," is a beautiful dream; but it fades with light and morning, fuller knowledge and clearer vision of truth. All that is physical must be changed, or transmuted, or, in popular unscientific speech, must *die*.

Does the mind dissolve or die? We may neglect its native powers, and so wither and shrivel them; but it does not thus cease to be. It does not change and transmute into something lower than, and unlike, itself. Its progress from the past to the present, so marked by the memorial stones of civilization and of knowledge, is the hint and prophecy of broader and higher growth. The incomplete state of its education is, also, an indication of its coming advancement. It has a thousand ideals and a thousand recognitions of possibilities which it cannot realize nor fulfil in this world. There is no mind with any great breadth in it that does not feel that there is much more in it than it can bring out on earth; like a bird caught in a thicket, with the whole heaven above it towards which it vainly yearns and attempts to fly. The wisest men feel that they know nothing compared with what they are capable of knowing.

When they have mastered the contents of the globe, catalogued the stars, deciphered the system of the universe, and heard the name of its Infinite Author, they have only read the picture-lessons of their nursery, and learned to lisp the name of their Parent. No philosopher, no scholar, no inspired poet, no man of any considerable understanding, ever lived who did not feel in the end that he had opened the faculties of his mind but a little way,—that he had not developed their full power. The body grows to its full stature; but no man has ever yet persuaded himself that he has reached his loftiest mental stature, or the plenitude of moral strength and beauty of which he is capable. Just when the capacities of the most laborious and aspiring man are sufficiently unfolded to indicate the unfathomable wealth of his endowments, he dies, with immense and unmeasured resources within him undeveloped, and without him unappropriated. If it be true that the body is the scaffolding and the mind the temple erected within it, we behold this strange anomaly: a mere framework made so perfect that it could gain nothing were it preserved to the fabulous age of the patriarchs, while the temple within is destroyed unfinished. Is the City of God built of piles never to be completed? If it be so, man is only a brilliant and elaborate falsehood; and as the human race advances, when one passing specimen vanishes away it is only to make room for still more splendid and imposing frailties. The largest mind is an edifice sublime only in outline; and if death annihilates it, some Stupendous Power must have begun to build and is not able to finish! *

* "Here sits he shaping wings to fly:
His heart forebodes a mystery:
He names the name Eternity."

—Tennyson, *The Two Voices*.

"I cannot believe and cannot be brought to believe, that the purpose of our creation is fulfilled by our short existence here. To me the existence of another world is a necessary supplement of this,

No. The Mind is the divine in man, the image of God ; and, like Him, lives for ever, to advance in knowledge and love. How live? Where live? No man has yet told us. In what relationship to a physical structure, no man knows. Will it again be united to some conditional materialism? What will be the condition? How will a material frame be sustained? And will it be endowed with freedom from corruption—immortality? If again allied to the physical, will it be localized? To these questions no answer comes. But, seeing that we are allied by spiritual constitution to God ; that we have a real though invisible mental nature ; that all the works of God are educators of that nature ; that the progress of that nature is, apparently, limitless, unconfined, let us give ourselves to the education it demands. He who advances farthest in culture now, will be best prepared for the activities, whatever they may be, of the future life. Each one of us is now making his own future, and he who most fully calls out and exercises his mind here, is best prepared for a full and noble work hereafter.

Give to the body its due and needful care. To neglect the life and health, is to neglect the essential associates of mental and moral soundness. With them morality is vitally connected, and their purity, strength, and vigour are sacred duties. But as a body in perfect health may accompany

to adjust its inequalities and imbue it with moral significance.”—Thurlow Weed.

“My belief in the immortality of the soul springs from the idea of activity ; for when I persevere to the end in a course of restless activity, I have a sort of guarantee from Nature that, when the present form of my existence proves itself inadequate for the energizing of my spirit, she will provide another more appropriate.”—Goethe.

“God himself cannot compensate us for being born for any period short of eternity. All the misery endured here constitutes a claim for another life, and, still more, all the happiness ; because all true happiness involves something more than the earth owns, and needs something more than a mortal capacity for its enjoyment.”—Nathaniel Hawthorne.

sometimes an empty and sometimes a corrupt mind, let us take heed, daily heed, to the mind; be careful of the thoughts it harbours, the feelings it cherishes, the motive-forces of its activities. Mysteriously elastic is the mind. It can shrink almost to a point, and expand almost to the capacity of infinitude. It will thus shrink or expand, contract or grow, as we neglect or nourish it. Give all its faculties sway and swing. Repress not any of its aspirations. Its mercifulness, its sense of righteousness, its desire for devotion, its native love of and hunger for perfect purity, nobleness, divineness,—let us not for a moment weigh down. Remembering that chains and bondage cramp and hinder its growth, we will loose it from all conscious fetters riveted on it by custom and prejudice. We will let the winds of God's truth, the breath of a divine life, play upon it. We will not prevent its direct intercourse with the Father, the All-Mind of the universe. Wherever it finds the Father, there it shall worship unrestrained. Only so can it increase in strength, in beauty, in truth. Only so can it grow to be one with Him who has made it like Himself,—to know, to love, to serve Him, in the feebleness of its childhood here, in the fulness and maturity of its eternal manhood hereafter.

THE CAUSES OF RITUALISM.*



As I was travelling recently in a railway train, a most interesting conversation sprung up between the passengers in the compartment where I was seated, on the religious condition of the times. One gentleman deplored what he called the rampant infidelity that is abroad, and wondered how people could disbelieve what educated men like the clergy told them. Another said, I am afraid not very politely, that the clergy were old fossils, and that about the only use they could be put to now was to show the world what had been. A third thundered away at the Ritualists, denounced their superstitious teaching and their pitiful practices, accused them of Jesuitism, and warmly contended that the time had come for their extravagances to be banished from the State-church by excommunicating them. The talk took this turn. Look, it was said, at the deep, restless, mental activity of England. Enlightenment is growing. Education is advancing. People are coming less and less to believe simply because churches order and creeds command, and more and more to search out a basis of belief for themselves. This is an age in which many minds, whose earnestness and religiousness cannot be questioned, have been impelled by their very devotion to the Highest to cast behind them a traditional faith and a traditional worship. It is seen more clearly than ever that historical faith is no saving faith. What is wanted is a foundation of belief which shall be in our own consciousness, and not in that of our

* From the *Liverpool Mercury*, August 7th, 1877, and the *Inquirer*, August 11th, 1877.

fathers. Men are longing to hear the voice of God in their own souls; not in echoes, but in living tones and living power. Science is dethroning many of the old conceptions of God and His relation to the world, and crowning in their place nobler ideas. Our literature is being permeated with principles and opinions which soften down and modify, or, it may be, altogether destroy, notions which have been clung to as the very truth of God. "The thoughts of men are widening with the process of the suns." And yet, side by side of this increase of the larger thought, side by side of these signs of intellectual expansion and of accumulating knowledge, we find thousands of Englishmen and Englishwomen running after Anglican-Romanists, and accepting a system which is essentially antagonistic to intellectual liberty. We thought we were about to establish the millenium, for, with Tennyson—

We dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be ;

but they have been re-establishing the middle ages, or at least trying to do it. We thought that Romanism was falling, not only into the complaints, but into the decrepitude of old age; but, lo! it has taken a new lease of life, and, strange to say, it has taken up new quarters.

What are the facts? Why, that a body of the clergy of the Church of England are claiming to be sacrificing priests, prostrating before the altar, waving the incense-pot, adopting the postures, robing in all the paraphernalia, and, what is far more important, teaching the distinctive doctrines of the Church of Rome; and teaching them with such power and success that Monsignor Capel has declared his satisfaction with it, and Cardinal Manning has stated that the Roman Catholics have now the happy and peaceful task of reaping the harvest sown by the Ritualists. Dr. Littledale, an authority, says that of the 20,000 clergy of the Church of England, 10,000 are High Church, 5000 Evangelical, 2000 Broad, and 3000 Nondescript. The *Church Herald* affirms

that to speak of the Evangelical party as having any present existence is an absurd fiction; it is almost extinct, like the dodo or the pterodactyl. Some four years ago, 483 clergymen put their names to a paper asking Convocation to appoint confessors, and establish and ratify the confessional in England. Archdeacon Denison then gave "thanks to God that the clergy by thousands are practising confession, and that the laity by tens of thousands are rejoicing in the comfort of it." What are thousands of the clergy saying now? They are denouncing the very term Protestant by which their church is designated in acts of Parliament. They are affirming that the Reformation was a great calamity, and separation from the Church of Rome a great crime. They say that the Reformation was an act of wantonness and schism—an act which must be reversed! and their mission as Anglo-Catholics is to reverse it. They associate the names of Cranmer, and Latimer, and Ridley, with those of Robespierre, Danton, and Marat. They are labouring to restore practices which the Reformers contended against unto death, as in deadly hostility to the political no less than the religious interests of the country. They are labouring to undo the whole work of the Reformation, by saturating the religious department of the State with the enslaving doctrines of Rome. Their progress has been ensured rather than hindered by that Public Worship Regulation Act which was passed by Parliament in a moment of alarm, at the entreaty of a Prime Minister whose own spirit was too much a stranger to earnestness to gauge a fervour too deep and vital to be quenched by a decree of Parliament. It was intended to stamp out Ritualism, but its effect has been to vitalize the spirit we were assured it would paralyze. The principles it was expected to root out have been steadily developing into proportions of which even the bishops seem to have been unaware. Now we hear of a society of some 700 clergymen banded together to promote auricular confession. We hear of a pestilential book published by that society. The late

Archbishop of Canterbury described it as a book that no one could read without a blush, and was startled by it into the unwonted decisiveness of saying that it is a disgrace to the community that it should be published by the authority of clergymen of the Church of England. The late Earl of Harrowby emphasized its nature when he declared in the House of Lords that no father of a family should allow the user of it to enter his house ; and he added that, of his own knowledge, what it inculcates is widely followed. How do you account for all this? asked my fellow-travellers in the train! Men ascending in ideas—men descending in ideas? Men going forward toward the sunlight—men going backwards towards the darkness which it was thought the Reformation had for ever broken up? How do you account for it?

I ventured to say that there are several explanations of it.

There is the first fact that the Reformation, effective as it was, was not a thorough regeneration of theology, but was a compromise between free thought as the fundamental principle of Protestantism, on the one hand, and sacerdotal authority on the other. So far as the Book of Common Prayer represents the work of the Reformation, there was no radical reformation in England, in even the evangelical sense. The Reformation cut off supremacy from the Pope, but transferred it to Henry VIII. That was about all it did, from the ecclesiastical point of view ; for having substituted the king for the pope, it retained in the Prayer Book the Roman Catholic doctrines of apostolical succession, baptismal regeneration, and the priestly authority and function of ministers. The Church of England is professedly the Protestant reformed church ; but it is radically Popish, corrupted to the core by the fiction of apostolical succession. The entrance to its communion is by baptismal regeneration. The entrance to its priesthood is by a Popish form of ordination. The bishop says, "Receive the Holy Ghost. . . . Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven ; whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained."

The late Dr. Wilberforce, when Bishop of Oxford, said in a sermon, unless he was falsely reported, "All this is the most blasphemous frivolity, if it be not the deepest truth." The same virus pervades the form of absolution in the Visitation of the Sick. "So long," says Dr. Pusey, "as that jewel, the Prayer Book remains, we cannot either weaken or destroy Ritualism." And the legal decisions in the Mackonochie, Tooth, and Ridsdale cases do not touch the soul of the question, only the raiment of it. To cleanse the Church of Romanism, essential changes must be made in almost every one of its services; and what is the use, therefore, of compelling the throwing away of the mere crust, when the kernel itself is sacredly kept and firmly guarded from destruction? The Prayer Book, said the Rev. George Chute, vicar of Market Drayton, in retiring from clerical orders, is full of pegs on which Romanism may be hung. The *Pall Mall Gazette* sees plainly that ample justification may be found there for the pretensions of the sacerdotalist; and in a very significant article it has insisted that the Legislature must "strike out of the Prayer Book all passages in which there is the appearance of priestly absolution," and, above all, that it must "strike at the root of the priestly superstition by omitting the laying on of hands in the ordination service." Equally significant is the pronouncement of the *Spectator* that "the very least that could be done to free the church from ambiguity on the subject of the Confessional would be, to recast the service for the Visitation of the Sick in a new and different spirit." I do not quote these opinions to approve or to disapprove, or even to discuss, the policy here advocated, but to present from sources that cannot be accused of Nonconformist prejudices support for my contention that Ritualism has its strong tower and defence in the venerable Prayer Book of the Church of England, and that the attempt to get rid of it without reforming the Prayer Book will be as futile as the attempt to dry up the sap and wither the root of a tree by simply cutting off a twig. The first explanation of the

prevalence of Ritualism is that it is promoted by the formularies of the Church of England.

There is the second fact that Ritualism owes much of its popularity to its adaptation to the æsthetic, the young, the sentimental. It is too effeminate to be of any assistance to the man who prefers the sturdier virtues. It affords no rest to minds disturbed with the mysteries of existence and the deep problems of religion. It does not supply the religious needs of the free thought and science of the age. If it be, as I believe it to be, one of the proofs of its divinity that Christianity possesses a large-hearted, mighty, expansive humanity, an elasticity with which it adapts itself to every varying feeling and experience of man, and assimilates to itself every new truth, then Ritualism, tried by this test, is wanting in the element of permanent vitality. No form of religion can retain a profound and lasting hold on the world which does not let the mind of every age freely breathe the air and ascend to the height of the highest knowledge of the time. Whatever is to live as a real force must move the mind forward, and not backward; not trammel it to "Fathers of the Church," to traditions, to men, to books, to creeds,—those feudalisms of the religious life,—but give it perfect freedom to derive nutrition from the whole continent of truth, and in faithfulness to seek the revelation of God within, where the Spirit of Truth dwells to guide us into all truth.

There is a third fact to be taken into account, the fact that there is a class of mind which will always start with the assumption that there is some authority outside of itself to direct it what it is to accept, and what to reject. This class of mind will ultimately be landed in either Roman or Anglican Catholicism. There are men who, distrusting themselves, and distrusting that Divine Spirit of which they were made to be the temple, are afraid to believe that God reveals Himself to them, but are troubled by no doubt that He does reveal Himself to a few chosen souls, on whose lips, therefore, they hang for the words of eternal life and

truth. They shrink timidly from tracing His abiding presence in themselves, and in everything around. They anxiously seek for manifestations of God in some visible authority. Ritualism meets their state of mind. Then there are men who feel the toil and agony of thought. Not a few persons long for something—be it an abstraction termed the church; or a pope; or a class of men; or forms or formulas—something which puts them in ease of thought as to religion. Even Professor Huxley witnesses to this disposition. He has said that he would be glad if some power would communicate to him truth which he could accept as authoritative, and save him from the dark and dangerous defiles which human search must explore foot by foot. He is too brave to yield to the timid prompting; but many have not the courage, and Ritualism steps in to relieve them from the trouble. Then there are men who like to nurse an easy gospel for themselves, and to have a comfortable path to heaven. I was told recently by an intimate friend of his, of a well-known Liverpool merchant, a man of great sagacity and of great success in his business affairs, who said seriously that it was a grand thing to have a broker to do business for you on the exchange, and keep your commercial position safe, but it was a far grander thing to have a broker to do business for you in heaven, and secure your safety there. I believe that there are multitudes of persons of this type—persons who care not to work out their own salvation, but who like to have it worked out for them—persons who prefer this comfortable, easy, tranquilizing Christianity. It is pleasant to the flesh, and Ritualism is essentially a fleshly faith; but it is deadly to the vigour of the mind.

But there is another and a still more powerful cause of the success of Ritualism. There is the fact that its ministers and devotees are profoundly earnest believers in it. This is a point especially worth considering, because it bears most closely upon one of the aspects of liberal Christianity. Ritualism possesses the virtues of unhesitatingness

and definiteness. There are numbers of thoughtful people in our time travailing for rest for the sole of their feet. They see that nearly every section of the Protestant church is floundering amidst difficulties ; and in the changing conditions, in the varied and varying moods, in the theological contradictions of Protestant theology, they are unable to find that solid ground for which they search in connection with religion. In our times, Protestant divines speak with less boldness, less clearness, less confidence than their predecessors of the last generation. Science and historical criticism have shaken the doctrines in which they were brought up. The effect is seen in the comparative feebleness and hesitancy, in what is sometimes the sophistry, sometimes the coldness and mechanism, sometimes the honest diffidence of our Protestant sermons. On the other hand, the Ritualists, in common with the Romanists, have taken advantage of this state of things. They have availed themselves of this transitional state of mind, and taken at the flood the tide which leads on to fortune. They give the assurance of certainty where the Protestant speaks with bated breath and whispering humbleness. They are unfalteringly and absolutely positive where the Protestant is in doubt, and confident where the Protestant pauses. And they are enabled to adopt this tone because they cleave to their faith with heart and soul. They are true to their faith with an allegiance which cannot be shaken, and with a devotion which cannot be cooled. They lose nothing for want of thoroughness. They are animated by the spirit which has taught them not to despair even in the darkest moments, nor to doubt of what seemed the most impossible achievements. They know no indifference. Doubt is foreign to them. They plant their feet firmly as on a rock. They believe in themselves. They are possessed by the conviction which cannot be shaken, that their principles are strong and will ultimately triumph. Unlike the Evangelicals, who tremble and totter, and only make believe that they believe, the Ritualists have a faith which possesses

them. And faith always overcomes—even a faith built on the sand will stand when no force can be gathered together to beat upon it. It is to the thoroughness of the Ritualists, a thoroughness compared with which much of our Protestantism is weak and feeble, that I attribute, in a large measure, their success.

What are the remedies for this state of things? I will not discuss here whether coercive legislation is wise or even politic. I believe that it is unwise, and will prove disastrous, from the Establishment point of view. I believe that it is unjust, since Ritualism has its sanction in the Prayer Book, and since also its claim to a position in the Establishment is implicitly conceded in the claim of the Establishment itself to a national representative character. But there are certain principles with which Ritualism must be encountered. I have tried to show that there are certain tendencies in human nature from which it springs, and in which it finds a congenial soil. Endeavour to cripple it by legislation, and it will burst its bonds. I would say, then, in the first place, as a Christian politician, there is only one effective thing the Legislature can do—it can bid the Anglican Church go free, and do its own work according to the best wisdom it can draw from heaven and earth. This will not of itself destroy the Romanism now so rife in the Church, but it will save the nation from all complicity in its propagation; it will deprive it of the prestige and advantage it now derives from the connection of the Church with the State; it will give free play and open field in this great conflict between truth and error—between an arrogant priesthood and the rights of human conscience—between the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ and the enslaving superstitions which are seeking to take its place. It would leave a free field for that struggle, and then, when we meet this movement in the open field, we shall have no fear of the issue, for amidst the general unsettlement of the times, one thing at least is certain, that freedom is stronger than slavery, and will ultimately come off more than conqueror.

I would say, in the second place, as a true son of the Reformation, and as a Christian, over against the basal position of Ritualism that the priest is the sole medium by which God communicates light and truth and salvation to mankind—I would say, we must rear the doctrine that man's relation to God is entirely and absolutely free from any such thing as efficacy in baptism, or any mysterious power in the sacraments, or any sacrificial virtue in a minister, or any authority with God in an assumed substitutionary pleader. We must proclaim for those religious powers which seek and long for truth and God, which lead men to go to Him face to face, and which carry with them their own authority, perfect freedom—freedom untrammelled by priest, unfettered by church, unlimited by book. We must kindle in men's hearts and minds the glowing truth that they are themselves, each of them, the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God speaketh in them. We are all slow of heart to believe that. Did we but realize it—did we but know for ourselves that God pours out of his Spirit upon all flesh, so that his sons and daughters prophecy, his young men see visions, and his old men dream dreams, we should have in our hands a truth and a power under which Ritualism would dissolve.

I would say, finally, that we must be in earnest. Let it be seen that our faith does not hang about us like a loose-fitting robe, but that we grasp it tightly in our hands as a weapon for righteousness, for human liberty, for God. Let it be seen that we have honest, earnest opinions. Let it be seen that we value them as the most precious of all the things we possess. Put away that lifeless eclecticism which toys with all opinions, and considers, with Talleyrand, that all religions are equally true to the religious, equally false to the philosopher, and equally useful to the politician. Put away that withering tone which casts doubt on everything, which knows no certainty other than that nothing is certain, and which has but one definite conviction, that truth cannot be seen for mist and

cloud. Let us have a real belief; for a real belief inspires a man with earnestness, and arms him with courage. A man with only half convictions will never convince other people. But convictions that fill the whole soul, of which the mind has a strong hold, and the heart a deep love—these are power and success, and the secret of influence. Sincerity is the power that moves and conquers. Sincerity is better than gracefulness. Gracefulness would not have given birth to the great movements of the world. Reformations have been accomplished by other agencies than taste. Refined indifferentism is not the lever that moves the world. I tell you that if you want to impress your thoughts upon other people you must first of all believe in them yourself, and cling to them with all your heart. To speak with only a half-belief—a shadow of belief—a make-believe belief—only to suppose—only to incline to think—is to be ineffectual, inoperative, unproductive. If, as Carlyle says, we cannot have the speaker and doer of the truth, by all means let us have at least the melancholy pleasure of beholding a decided liar. What we as Protestant Christians want is, to let the world know that we have a religious faith which enables us to put aside every form and usage, every utterance and belief which denies, distorts, or interferes with the truth that God unfolds Himself in many ways to each and every human soul; that this religious faith is inwoven into the fibre of our heart; and the world, knowing that, will be wrought upon more deeply by us. The faith that conquers must have convictions. It is not the men who have been satisfied with a surmise, with a doubt, with a “perhaps,” with a “may be,” who have achieved the great moral conquests of history. It is the men who were persuaded of the reality of their faith. No wet blanket will ever conduct an army to victory. It wants a silken banner, flashing in the sunlight of heaven, and quivering with the breath of God.

CHRISTIANITY AND HIGH CHURCHISM.*



HIGH CHURCHISM is not confined to the Establishment. There are Methodist High Churchmen who guard the portals of Christianity with class-tickets. There are Congregational High Churchmen whose interpretation of Christianity is inseparably bound up with the observance of the Communion Service. There are Baptist High Churchmen who make a select class of the disciples of Christ, and write over the entrance to this inner circle, "Let none enter here who have not been immersed." There are Unitarian High Churchmen—a diminishing number—who think that worship in high-backed pews carries with it a virtue richer than that which flows into those "low Republican seats"; others who hold that they are nearer heaven in a Gothic "Church," and joining in a liturgical service, than in a Presbyterian "meeting-house," listening to an extempore prayer; and others, again, whose gospel is "By taste ye are saved," whose creed is "The way to heaven is through the proprieties," and whose special abhorrence is religious enthusiasm. The Church of England does not monopolize High Churchism.

In whatever religious society, or in whatever individual mind High Churchism is dominant, there prevail conceptions of Christianity which seem to me to stand in vivid contrast to the New Testament idea. Perhaps the most fashionable notion is that of "a church." It is to a corporate organization that people look for a manifestation of religious power. Churchly observances are expected to supply the vitalizing energy that should advance Christian

* From the *Inquirer*, March 29th, 1879.

civilization. It matters little what form the notion takes : the substance is always the same. The force that will regenerate the earth is vested in an infallible church ; or it is communicated by the touch of fingers which claim to have a priestly virtue derived in uninterrupted flow from St. Peter ; or it inheres in a particular mode of baptism ; or in reverencing and obeying the priest as the sole medium by whom truth and salvation come from God to mankind, and by whom pardon is conveyed to sinners—for in something like a five-minute ceremony the newly-ordained priest receives the Holy Spirit and is endowed with the power both to forgive sins and to retain them. Cardinal Manning has told us that we shall not be able to deal with the great evils of mankind until we yield to the priesthood as a body of men chosen by our Lord, illuminated, trained, and conformed to himself, to be the guardians and transmitters of the truths he reveals to them, and of the laws he gives into their custody. Cardinal Manning is not alone in claiming special spiritual power and pre-eminence for an organized hierarchy. As well as Roman Catholic and Episcopal High Churchmen, there are Baptist, Methodist, Independent, and Unitarian High Churchmen—men in every communion who, in one way or another, put the Church before and above the individual, and thus admit the essential principle of Rome. It was against this enslaving error that Tyndal, Latimer, and Luther consecrated their energies ; and the spirit of the great Reformers is needed now as much as ever, for the doctrine is being persistently, steadily, stealthily inwoven into the fibres of our religious life, until by multitudes of Englishmen Christianity is identified with a sacramental religion, with forms, rites, creeds, exhibitions of millinery, apocryphal successions from the Apostles, powers of unearthly origin (and yet not of heavenly lineage), mystical and cabalistic virtues, and sacred enclosures wherein spiritual vitality is manufactured and imparted by machinery. Are these revivals of the Middle Ages likely to advance real religion ? Are these figments of the centuries of old the

true representatives of the Christianity that is able to win illustrious victories—the simple but potent Christianity, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, mighty as an army with banners? What are they doing now but presenting in fascinating forms pretensions the most intolerant and dangerous—pretensions hostile to the liberties which the Reformation secured, inimical to the free exercise of man's highest faculty, the reason, and antagonistic to the play of that personal, intellectual, and spiritual power which it is the object of Christianity to evoke and develop? What are they doing but letting in the monstrous doctrine of the supernatural authority of the priesthood, and thus opening the door for whatever claims they may presumptuously put forth? "All this clamour about Church," said Dr. Arnold, "is only a clamour about priest," and it really means that there is no Divine power in Christianity apart from the priest.

The New Testament idea is of an essentially different type. To-day Christianity is taken to mean a church; and when we speak of it people think of it as the Church, the book, the ministry, the organization, rarely as a personal moral quality. *Then* Christianity meant a divine individuality. That is a vast, a fundamental distinction. The one is an external corporation—the other an inward excellence. The one is an article of machinery—the other a spiritual power in the individual soul. The one preaches dependence upon the forms and sacraments of the Church; the other the indispensableness of cultivating a divine manhood in each human being. The one says that the power of the Spirit of God comes only through the priest to the souls of men; the other says that it consists in a living holiness which flows, not through priestly mediums, but in a direct line from God to man, and which pours itself into everyone who surrenders to the heavenly will. The one, in short, builds religion on the outside, and strives mainly for such a material kingdom of God as may be represented in visible imposing organizations of Christianity; the other builds religion within the individual man, and strives mainly

for such a kingdom of God on earth as can be seen, not in the cathedral, the temple, the synagogue, the church, the denomination, the organization, but in the living force of holy women and great-souled men.

It is this power of the interior life of man that is wanted to-day especially to be cultured, strengthened, and inspired into play. Why is it that Christianity has made so little progress in the world? Partly because its professors have devoted their energies to analyzing and defining it rather than to circulating it as a living power through all the activities of life; because they have given themselves to formulating creeds about it, and creeds that have fostered a malign element as a moral force, creeds that have presented God as a Being that never would subdue the world, and never ought to subdue it; because they have been less bent on inward piety than on forming churches with outward unity and powerful hierarchies. Why, organized Christianity, so far as it has yet been seen, has been the bane of religion. Religion has been preserved and kept alive in the world, not by the priesthood, but by radiant, attractive, individual lives here and there, which have been the salt of the earth. The vast corporations of the religious world have been the oppressors of the spiritual life; and they have generated such dreadful discords, such bitter quarrels, such outrageous cruelties, such immeasurable evils, that one almost wonders there has been any beneficence at all in religion; and there would not have been but for individuals giving forth the blessing of their Christ-like fruitful natures. And now, as of old, the real enemy of Christianity is to be found, neither in theological speculation nor in scientific theorizing, but in those efforts in which powerful parties in the Christian world are now busily at work—those efforts to spread and exalt Christianity, as they think, but really, alas! to limit and degrade it!—in constructing outward organizations, in establishing spiritual despotisms. It is Christianity made known to the world as a personal moral quality that is the deepest want of the hour. It is the

grandeur of the Kingdom of God in the individual life that is the supreme need of the present age. The enormous and pompous organization of Churches has been tried through ages, and Christianity does not yet reign even in Christendom. Christianity will not attain supremacy until for reverence for Churches there has been substituted and made regnant the culture of the living power of individualism as the true aim of all Christian teaching and effort. It is the indoctrination of this truth which alone will vitalize Christianity, and effect the true intellectual freedom and spiritual reformation of the world.

See, then, what has yet to be moved out of the way ! High Churchism is fed by all those Churches which erect any external observances whatever into essentials, or which place Christianity in indissoluble association with any rites, or which interpose any veil, any agent, any mediator between God and man as the sole means of communication between heaven and earth. It will be impossible to effectually break the power of sacerdotalism until the churches, now nominally non-sacerdotal, but practically supporting ideas essentially sacerdotal, definitely take their stand upon the ground that man's relation to God is entirely and absolutely free from any such thing as any efficacy in baptism, or any mysterious power in the Communion Service, or any sacrificial virtue in a minister, or any authority with God in a substitutionary pleader. High Churchism is but the full and consistent development of practices and principles which are cherished by most Non-conformist churches, not merely as helps, but as essentials of Christianity ; and its position cannot be logically assailed, its power cannot be materially weakened, its dangers cannot be wholly averted, Christianity cannot have free course and be glorified, the Gospel of Christ cannot exercise its natural and rightful influence, until the faith that Christianity is in a life reigns, in place of the now popular faith that Christianity is in, and is dependent upon, ecclesiastical externalisms and doctrinal interpositions between a man's own soul and God.

MATERIALISM IN RELIGION.*

RITUALISM is but materialism in a religious dress. Like other phases of materialism it is an exceedingly powerful attraction. With its elaborate forms and graceful rites, accompanied by the enchantments of art and the adornments of florid taste, it appeals to the senses with an influence difficult to resist. The wonder and admiration of the people may always be obtained by magnificent ceremonial. An instance was reported some time ago, when it was said that in a continuous line of thirteen parishes there was only one parish church where an elaborate ritualistic service was not performed, and that that one had been deserted by its parishioners, who had gone where their senses could be fed by gorgeous ceremonies. There is fascination in all this pomp and ostentation. But are there not also in it a materialistic element and a materialistic tendency? Is it not the unanimous testimony of history that when symbols are multiplied, perpetually insisted on, reared into undue prominence, they tend to rob religion of its power as an inward, spiritual reality? When appeals are made to the æsthetic side of human nature by gorgeous exhibitions, vestments, crucifixes, and when it is proclaimed that the vitality of religion is dependent upon the adoption of certain attitudes, what is the result? Worship founded on intelligent faith gives place to a devotion which is a species of mechanism, and to rites which operate as by magic. It is true that as religion appeals to every part of man's complex nature,

* From the *Inquirer*, July 26th, 1879.

rites and symbols have their use, and are not to be wholly neglected. Whether they be beneficial or not will entirely depend on the place they hold in the system. As the history of religion shows, nothing is more difficult than to prevent the material from debasing the spiritual—the senses and the imagination from assuming an undue influence. Let the balance be destroyed, and spiritual truth will be smothered beneath paraphernalia. Let a man be taught to gaze in wonder on a display of rites and symbols, whether it be on the splendid and original magnificence of the Romish Church, or the no less splendid but borrowed scenery of our Anglo-Romanists, and his religion stands a chance of resembling that of the formalist who was eulogized by Dr. Johnson in the remark—“He never passes a church without pulling off his hat,—this shows he has good principles.” Let his attention be directed principally to the cross or the crucifix, to vestments in the colours of the rainbow, to pulpit-hangings and altar-cloths, to postures and attitudes, and the process of degeneracy is inevitable. It was so with the ancient churches which we are now so earnestly exhorted to take as our models. No one can read the writings of the Fathers without feeling that they gradually became more intent on the circumstantials than on the essence of religion, more solicitous about the modes in which religious duties should be performed than about the spirit of them. It is all over with religion when this is the case. The process of corruption is soon complete. The principles of religion die away under the mass of ceremonial materialism; and while its forms are clung to, its essence departs. The priest is the father of the unbeliever. The theatricalism of ecclesiastics gives rise to the rejection of the reality of Christ. A God who comes only to a cleric in a sensational dress performing a sensational ceremony is not worth worshipping. Scepticism is the natural reaction of excessive form and rite; and religion itself, which priests intend to make impressive by their masquerade, is ridiculed as effeminate, childish,

a pretty nonsense for young ladies who have nothing better to attend to, but not of any value to men of sense and culture.

It is pitiful that amidst the present earnest discussions on questions of infinite import so much devotion should be spent upon a materialistic religion. It is one of the most mournful sights human eyes ever looked upon that clergymen should be absorbed in the trivialities of ecclesiastical gear while millions of men, women, and children in England are at this moment living in a condition scarcely superior to that of the aborigines of the interior of Africa. Here we are, in England, with a real education of our people but just begun; with a million of paupers; with the deep national damnation of drunkenness settling down upon us more densely than ever; with crime breeding a succession of crime; with the increase of enervating luxury among the rich, and of the spirit of rebellion against their lot amongst the poor; with the chasm between rich and poor growing wider; with incessant war between capital and labour; with a thousand social and economical questions remaining a perpetual irritation in the life of the people. This condition of things fills the minds of earnest men day and night. Every true man that seeks the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness is painfully exercising himself to find a solution of these problems. They will be solved assuredly: and in the end will be accomplished, too, the elevation of the entire community. But what contribution to that end are our spiritual guides and teachers making? They are spending their strength upon such peddling matters as ancient symbols and clerical raiment. It is said of poor Louis XVI., that he was filing and fitting his locks when the Revolution was at the gates of his palace. Here is Materialism banishing God from the heavens and the earth, conducting Him to the frontiers of the universe and politely bowing Him out with the haughty civility, "Thanks for your services in the past, but we have no longer any need of you"; but the clergy ignore that, to dispute about

the wearing of a cope. Here is Agnosticism proclaiming it a matter of no vital moment to morality of life whether there be a God or not; and men who ought to show that faith in God gives a beauty, a nobleness, a dignity to life, that it lifts life above all smallness and triviality, and crowns it with loftiness of aim, and thought, and conduct, debate whether a few inches more or less of elevation of the host is not of supreme seriousness, whether the knees should not be bent at a particular angle, or whether they should be allowed to touch the ground during the operation. Here we are confronted by a science of human nature which affirms that man is but a compound of hydrogen and carbon, brought together and organized by something termed Force, humanized by a process of evolution, destined to dissolve, at last, as the end of him, into carbon and hydrogen again; and in the midst of this subtle, powerful philosophy, which is busily at work, the highest Court in the land, composed of learned judges and distinguished prelates, sits for days to determine where and how a priest should stand while performing a certain ceremony, what kind of garments he should wear, what sort of bread he should use. Can there be a sadder contrast under heaven than that? Thousands of the working and of the middle classes are standing aloof from all churches and religious institutions, some in hostility, some in indifference; and to their inquiry, "What is religion?" the Rev. Orby Shipley writes that religion is in fasting, in the belief in the seven sacraments, in the practice of confession. These he solemnly enjoins as essentials of the true faith; and not only these but also the sprinkling of holy water, the burning of incense at various parts of public worship, the crossing, censuring, and kissing of *the Gospel*, the kneeling of the priest and people at the *Incarnatus est* in the Creed, the public and reverential use of the sign of the cross. It is sometimes with minds moved to laughter, but when we recall the temper of the times it is with minds astonished and humiliated and with hearts stirred to sorrow, that

we see these things considered so vital, that the Church of England is rent and torn by such miserable questions as the clothes and postures of the clergy. Instead of taking no thought for raiment, it is a serious business with them—the main work of their life. Decoration is said to be the first, and sometimes the last, wish of woman's heart; but leading Ritualists are no strangers to this desire. Nay, they tell us that to be arrayed in certain fine linen is to them "dearer than anything which the world can offer in exchange"!

There is a deeper materialism than that of the mere upholstery of Ritualism—the materialism of its doctrines. It is materialism when the priest by some magical skill, or by the utterance of some form of words, professes that he has the power of making his deity out of bread and wine—a deity which he proceeds to eat after he has made him. It is materialism when he professes to regenerate an infant by baptism. It was materialism when a clergyman, holding up in the midst of his Sunday-school children an infant before its baptism, asked, "What do I now hold?" and received the answer the children had been taught, "A child of wrath, sir"! and when, after its baptism, holding up the infant again, he asked, "What do I now hold?" and they replied, "A child of God, sir"! If baptism be regeneration, it surely ought, to justify such a term, to produce a stupendous visible and recognisable change. Thousands of infants thus regenerated every year with drops of water, present, in all respects, just the same qualities, physical and moral, as characterize those who have not been subjected to the process. Visibly they grow up neither wiser, nor holier, nor in any way better than the less fortunate infant who has received but the unavailing baptism of the Nonconformist minister, or no baptism at all. There is supposed to be wrought by water from the tips of consecrated fingers an amazing spiritual revolution, which yet leaves absolutely no traces behind it, physical or moral. Nothing less than Omnipotence is introduced to effect that of which when,

it is effected, we have not the slightest evidence. Baptismal materialism makes the priest a magician, and the Infinite a pretender who leaves the child to-day what it was yesterday. It is materialism which affirms that the presence and blessing of the Spirit of God with the humble, penitent, waiting soul of man, depend on men who can trace up their priestly pedigree to Peter or Paul, and whose consecration has come from a bishop's hands. It is materialism which affirms that we are God's sons only when we have the priestly benediction on our head, the baptismal water on our brow, the eucharistic symbol in our hand.

Is it not supremely pitiful? We do not want a God who can be manipulated by a priest out of a piece of baker's loaf, but a God present and active in every atom of matter and in every throb of spirit; who, as an illimitable Life, inhabits air, earth, and sea, and dwells in the human soul, and who yet so transcends all forms of existence that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. We do not want a man whose holiness has no better guarantee than that when he was an infant, water was sprinkled on his brow by a priest claiming to descend from the Apostles; but a man whose holiness has the value of being won in a strife against sin, whose righteousness has been attained by toil and tears. We do not want to belong to Christ by mere sign and symbol, but by having in us the life and light itself—the Christ that was, and is, and is to be. We want to feel beneath our feet, not the treacherous quicksands of varying rites and customs, but the enduring rock of personal communion with God.

But let us not be unjust. Can we pronounce that the churches generally called Evangelical are exempt from a deplorable materialistic tendency? The Bibliolatry so common in all Protestant churches, which confounds the Word of God with the writings of certain Hebrew and Christian authors, gathered by decisions of Councils within one cover—is not that also religious materialism? The doctrine of salvation through the merits of atoning blood

—what is that but materialism? The hymns professedly evangelical in which the faithful are exhorted to plunge themselves by faith in a literal bath of blood to escape by such thermal treatment the horrors of eternal judgment—what is that but materialism, gross, repulsive, horrible! The revivals of our day, wherein nervous attacks are mistaken for movements of grace, and hysterical excitements for operations of the Spirit, and rhapsodies for revelations of the Truth—what are they but materialism? It behoves Evangelical Protestants to be modest when they sit in judgment upon the sensuous aspects of Roman or Anglican piety. The evil extends far beyond the limits of Romanism or Ritualism. It clothes itself in other forms and speaks in other tongues. It is a virus which in a greater or less degree is universally diffused.

Are we to conclude that the evil is incurable, and allow ourselves to be discouraged for the future? By no means. It is remarked, I think, in one of Henry Rogers's Essays, that in the last days of Paganism the old religions, about to founder, re-enforced their superstitions, became more pompous, more tragic, more materialistic than they had ever been. History repeats itself. These furious tides of materialism in religion, which in our very sight threaten to engulf all the territory we believed Christian spiritualism to have won, are, in fact, but indications of the end of those various orthodoxies which, under different forms, have so long divided Christianity among them. They are the results of age and of false excitements which cannot last long, and, after which, the orthodoxies will fall back into despairing barrenness. They may incite us to watch and guard against the evil, but they ought not in the least to shake our faith in the future of a purified Christianity, which shall in the end ensure the complete victory of that worship of God "in spirit" which is also the only worship "in truth."

And towards that victory the truth to be placed before the world is, that God is *in all* and *through all*, the Life

and Light of every man that cometh into the world. He is not far from every one of us. He is everywhere present, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear. You want a priest, you tell me. But God Himself dwelleth in you. Cherish that for the enlightenment of your conscience and the inspiration of your heart. Receive your guidance and authority from Him who takes up His abode in your own being. Tradition seems venerable to you; but the living Spirit of God is more august and sacred than tradition. Tradition is the voice of man, often harsh, discordant, dissonant; often, too, sounding faint and distant through the corridors of the past; but you may hear if you will the clear and melodious words of God as they are uttered in this hour in the oratory of your soul. The sacraments, you say, seem beautiful, mysterious, wonderful; but it is better to make the whole circle of existence sacramental, and to find the Spirit of God looking upon you from the sphere of your daily duty as well as from the universe glowing with His life. And as for ritual, what better ritual can you have than that grandest of all, "to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"? This is the one true, beautiful, unvarying, eternal ritual of the Catholic Church of God; and as many as worship and live according to this rule of service to humanity, among all peoples, in every clime, throughout all time present and to come, peace be upon them and mercy, for they are the Israel of God.

PRIESTISM AND ITS INFLUENCE.*

THE Christianity of the New Testament is anti-hierarchical. It is an emphatic proclamation of religious equality,—not in the sense of the equality of sect with sect before the law which seems to be the current interpretation of this doctrine of the Gospel, but in the sense of the equality of man with man before God. The Christian religion knows nothing of human priesthoods, other than the priesthood that is common to all men who render to God the service of purity of heart, and to man the service of righteous and beneficent conduct. The Gospel addresses the honourable title of a “holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices,” not to a select and episcopally-ordained few, but to “strangers scattered abroad.” Christianity broke down the old priestly monopoly, Jewish and heathen, and made every man “king and priest unto God” on his own account. It neither constitutes nor recognises any sacerdotal caste, any spiritual aristocracy, any order of men standing in *ex officio* relations to Deity. It makes the relation of man to God individual and immediate. As represented by its Founder, its spirit is not that of the ecclesiasticism which lifts a mitred front in Courts and Parliaments. He who declared that his kingdom is not of this world discarded and disowned uppermost rooms at feasts, chief seats in synagogues, and all other great and small prizes of ecclesiastical ambition. In the solemn address to the people which closed the series of his public

* From the *Inquirer*, August 16th, 1879.

teachings Christ enjoined, "Call no man your Father upon the earth." Yet "Father," "Right Reverend Father," "Right Reverend Father in God," are the styles and titles of modern Christian Episcopacy. It is surprising that the possessors of these proud titles do not in the spirit of their Master refuse such appellations of superiority, or strike out the passage as a heretical interpolation.

The root of this departure from the New Testament is the doctrine of a priestly order, distinguished from the common multitude of Christians by certain outward marks, endowed with authority to expound religion and administer certain sacraments, and entitled to claim, nay, to demand, not the attention only, but the homage and submission of "the common people." Grant *that*, and all that is set up as apparatus, as machinery, as elaborate and impressive ceremonial, to exalt the dignity and reinforce the power of this priestly order, naturally follows. The one wonder is that, in that case, the whole New Testament is not crowded with evidences of it. We should expect to find the gatherings of the early Christians churches whose atmosphere is grey with pastiles and smoking incense; but we find them assemblies whose atmosphere was free and clear as that of the open unclouded sky, and whose services had no rubric and only two ordinances of the simplest character. We should expect to discover a despotism formed by a class; but we discover, in reality, a republic, in which good and capable men naturally governed. We should expect to see figures clothed in gorgeous cloaks, crowned with indescribable hats, and praying with their backs to the people; but we see instead lowly fishermen, to whom the display of canonicals was but a beggarly element, who had been warned against exercising dominion, to whom had been given the solemn injunction, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." We should look to see whether there were his Excellency a Cardinal, or my lord a bishop, or other reverend priests sternly partitioned

off inside altar railings from the priests of God throughout the Church; but we see that there were no "lords over God's heritage," but all alike were "holy brethren." We should eagerly look to behold priests curtsying and crossing and muttering at the altar, and as eagerly listen to hear that they are making the body of God; but the vision we see is that of altar, ritual, and temple passing away, and the words we hear are these: "God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things. As, then, we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." Did the heavenly powers solemnly institute and carefully sustain any human authority for the infallible intellectual direction or for the infallible spiritual guidance of men, we should expect to find that they would supplement it with a gorgeous ritual, that they would dress their delegates on earth in vestments of surpassing splendour and fling around them a cloud of incense, to awe men into the belief that the fellow-mortals whom they saw through this blaze of glory were clothed, both in their words and in their works, with the awful power of God. But we search the Gospels in vain for the institution of any such order, or of its ceremonial supplement. The only authority we recognise there is the authority of whatever truth Christ's lips spoke, the authority of the love that consumed Christ's life, the authority of the inspiration that flowed from Christ's being. The only claims he presents are those of that truth, that love, that inspiration, to awaken and energize what is spiritual in man; and the only method he adopts to vitalize the divine in men is to bring his everlasting verities and his glowing affection to bear upon their hearts and consciences. The priesthood is, therefore, branded with the terrible condemnation that it flings away as a broken

sceptre that spirit of Christ which rules by trusting to the power of truth and love alone.

We are not insensible to the singular attraction which the idea of authority presents. To some minds there is a fascination in the idea of a paternal authority in spiritual things visibly manifesting itself and audibly expressing itself in the world. To the child it is an invaluable guidance, and it is in the order of things. We are all children, in a large measure, through life. Is it not likely that God would provide for the continuance of that paternal authority? Is it not likely that He would secure guarantees for our further guidance in our ignorance and weakness? We answer without hesitancy. We hold it as indisputably certain that God has provided some paternal guidance and government for the souls who pass, full of ignorance and weakness, out of the haven of the home on to the mist-enwrapped and storm-vexed sea of life. But *where* has He provided it? *Where?* In him who as "Holy Father," as "Papa," as "Pope," claims the submission and allegiance of mankind? In those who as "Right Reverend Fathers" arrogate to themselves the right to dominate our minds and order our worship? In those priests who profess the impiety that God has promised to impart His guidance to us only on our surrender to their self-asserted infallibility? No. Where, then? In the whole system of things with which we find ourselves in contact. It is a system intended, as we think, to teach us, and that the more we study it does teach us, of Fatherly guidance and benediction, intended to make us conscious at every point of the tones of a Father's voice and the touch of a Father's hand. The world is full of voices which have a message to our spirit: it is full of expressions, as of a living countenance, which have a meaning to our hearts. There is help everywhere, guidance everywhere, if we will look for it; and it is the help of God our Father, whencesoever and howsoever it may come. It is part of the method of that Fatherly government of our spirit into which we have

passed out of the home of our childhood. Whoever or whatever has a word of truth to speak to us, a ray of light to flash on us, a strengthening hand to lead us, is the Father's minister to bring home to us the Father's help in our hour of need. If, then, we keep our eye and our heart open to watch for the revelation of God in everything, material and human, which is around us, His aids will never fail us, we shall never lose the sense that it is a home which is around us, nor shall we miss the shield of a Father's power and wisdom and love in our life. But if we suffer ourselves to dream that the communication of the Infinite can come to our spirit only through an order of men poor and helpless as ourselves; if we yield to the authority of this order of men as the expression and embodiment to us of the paternal authority of God, then, though we may think we honour Him, we really deny the Father and rest our hope on an idol in His room. For the principle of human, priestly authority in spiritual things inevitably weakens and ultimately destroys that which is divine. The man who stands for God becomes as God, and in the end fills the place of God. "Our Lord God the Pope" is not the only sentence recorded in history which gives awful warning of the practical atheism in which priestism must land humanity at last.

We do not wish to trace the practices and doctrines that have been the strength of the priesthood. Such an investigation would disclose to us that *ceremony* has been a powerful agent in dazzling the senses at the expense of the reasoning powers. It would show us that *auricular confession* is one of the keys to the vast influence of the sacerdotal order. It would reveal to us that the dogma of *transubstantiation* has been, perhaps, the most potent instrument in exalting the dignity of the ecclesiastical caste. But we are not much concerned with ceremony, auricular confession, and transubstantiation, because they wither away when the root of them, the doctrine of the priest, is torn up as the noxious seed of that

spirit which limits the sphere of the presence and power of God.

We, therefore, pass on to note the kind of influence exercised by the priest. In the long run it is an influence of mischief. The priest has in all ages been the father of idolatries; the prophet has been their destroyer. The priest lives by the mental ignorance and moral feebleness of the people; the prophet lives by their intelligence, their intellectual emancipation and moral strength. We dare to say that, though they may not consciously have cherished that purpose, the world's priests have been in all ages, and are now, the conspirators against the world's liberties. If we trace to their source the evils under which European society groans, we are compelled to attribute a great proportion of them to the influence which ecclesiastics have managed to obtain over the public mind. If we note the effects of the sacerdotal order among civilized races and among savages, in Spain and the South Sea Islands, on the banks of the Ganges and on those of the Danube, in the deserts of Arabia and on the Russian plains, in the Roman Catholic cantons of Switzerland and in the streets of Naples, we find everywhere, on the one hand, a priesthood deceitful, heartless, despotic; and on the other a people unmanly, grovelling, helpless, addicted to the most abject slavery. If, without travelling to the Continent, we study the contrast between the civilization of England and Ireland, nay, between that of the North and that of the South of Ireland; if we investigate the Roman Catholic quarters of Liverpool and Salford, and observe the striking difference between the habits and home life of the English Protestant and the Irish Romanist, we shall be driven, however reluctantly, to the conclusion that ignorance, poverty, stagnation of intellect, absence of all progress in those things which constitute prosperity are the invariable and inevitable accompaniments of the submission of the people to the priesthood. Should we inquire what has been the influence of Clericalism in connection with knowledge,

the sorrowful answer is, that wherever it is in the ascendant—as in Spain, in Portugal, in the mountainous provinces of Austria, in various regions of the East, across the Atlantic, in Mexico, and the Spanish Main—there it and the deepest ignorance are conjoined. Were our examination confined only to countries where it is, not to say in ascendancy but in authority at all, as in England, there we should find that men of science pursue their researches and publish their discoveries under constant assaults from those who show the value of their special intercourse with God and the depth of their belief in the guidance of heaven by being alarmed for the truth; there we should find also that prophets announce their readings of old faiths, their larger interpretations of the Scriptures, their revealings of the divine realities vouchsafed to their vision, to touch, in the heart of men outside of churches, a chord responsive to their richer music, only, alas! to provoke in the minds of the sacerdotal order alarm and anger that *their* notes are in danger of becoming inaudible amidst the strains of the higher melody; there we should find, finally, that Governments are constrained to consider as a matter to be reckoned with what effect legislation will have upon the clergy, what must be done and what left undone in obedience to their wishes, what compromises must be adopted in order to preserve their status, what rights must be withheld from the nation that their exclusive privileges may be left intact. Yes, be it the operation of cause and effect or not, it is true that the accompaniments of the priesthood are intellectual backwardness, moral nervelessness, and political servitude.

Nor those only. Political tyranny lies under unspeakable obligations to it. The two go hand in hand, working diligently and harmoniously to keep up despotism where it exists, using constitutional liberty to again set it up where it has been destroyed. At this moment ecclesiastics are menacing the Empire of Germany; plotting the destruction of the unity of Italy; manœuvring, with all their characteristic

devices, for the restoration in France of that Clericalism under which the second Empire was covered with leprosy from the crown of its head to the sole of its feet, till its lofty looks were humbled, its haughtiness was bowed down, its glory trampled in the dust, and its religion produced its natural reaction in a gross, wild atheism. Germany and Italy have learnt, France is learning, Spain will come to learn—we devoutly hope to see the day—what England learnt centuries ago, and what it would be fatal to her future to ignore, that priestism and political liberty are essentially antagonistic, and that nations can enjoy the inestimable blessing of civil freedom only in proportion to the degree in which they shake themselves free from ecclesiastical domination. Priestly usurpation is altogether inconsistent with true liberty. The claims of the priest undermine the rights of manhood. The sacerdotal order always allies itself with despotism, even when in constitutional countries it endeavours to hide its real character, and preserve itself from disagreeable consequences by feigning an unnatural love for liberty. It is, therefore, or it should be, the first care of every wise statesman and of every free people to guard diligently against encroachments from this quarter, to avoid the very appearance of governing or of being governed by the clergy, and to treat them as other citizens are treated, as simply members of the body politic. They are servants of One whose kingdom has suffered less real injury from the attacks of so-called infidels than from the tricks and devices, the pretensions and arrogancies of the priesthood.

• We need not be alarmed by the priestly assumptions of our times. We may confidently predict in what way the conflict of the Priesthood with Free Thought, with the Intelligence and Conscience of the individual and the community will terminate. Over against it we recognise the development of the democratic principle. We see around us the growth of a regard for the liberties of man. We have now raised the great Christian idea of the value of

the spiritual rights of man. One of those rights is that of direct and immediate access to God. Any theology that denies this is anti-democratic and anti-Christian. The priesthood cannot stand against this principle of democracy, which is felt more in the schools of theology than anywhere else. We may confidently predict the coming of a future in which we shall have certainly not less religion, but less religious institutionalism. The moral element will not be dissipated. It will be diffused in its power, and by men's larger knowledge of nature, will become more potent in its influence. Having constrained thrones to take their law from the workman's cottage, so we shall constrain ecclesiasticism to take its law from the conscience of the common Christian people. The time is coming when the democratic element in religion will effect just such a revolution as democracy has made in politics—revolving kings down that the greater people may come up. For in religion, even more than in civil affairs, the power of truth is not in institutions or laws, but in the innate dispositions through which God impresses upon us the image of Himself. We therefore look for the day when theology will receive its tone, not from councils, convocations, conferences, priests, but from the heart of the Christian people. Then, when the conscience of the whole community will prevail, churches, assemblies, synods of every name that have supposed themselves specially and exclusively authorized to teach, and to assume airs of superiority over the great unordained mass, will be obliged to recede, as have civil governments, and to receive from their superiors, the intelligent community, their law and their permissions. And as the mass of citizens have shown themselves greater and wiser than their kings, so the great democratic body of Christians will show themselves better and wiser than their professional leaders. We are only sorry that the wheels revolve so slowly. The dawn of that day comes, but it may not be so near as we think. Still we are sure that it will break upon the world. Still we are sure that the voice of God will speak through the race, and, so

speaking, will silence the voice of classes, orders, hierarchies. Still we are sure that there will be such a growth of an intelligent Christian people that they will be superior to council, assembly, synod, and will manifest their superiority, not to narrow and so degrade religion, but to broaden its conceptions, to enlarge its expressions, to ennoble its functions, and give power to its teachings.

THE RELIGION THE AGE WANTS.*



ONE of the most pressing demands of the present age is for a practical religion. Not a religion that rears the acceptance of doctrine into superior importance, but a religion that addresses itself to moral and social reforms. Not a religion that expends its force in contending for creeds and confessions, but a religion that exhibits its power in grappling with the evils and vices of the time. Not a religion that simply satisfies itself with "getting into the tongue and making melody with that organ," but a religion that will help us in solving the difficulties and removing the curses of drunkenness, immorality, pauperism, and beggary. Can we wonder at the earnest call for a practical philosophy and a utilitarian religion? The spectacle of crime among high and low fills one with astonishment, and with a momentary feeling of despair. The contrast between the condition of the poor and the rich—the dark places full of the habitations of cruelty—the numbers of outcast and unfortunate who are living in lewdness, some of them living in it with the misery of a broken spirit, some of them driven to it by men who glory in corrupting the virtuous and staining the face of the beautiful, and whose unchastity yet seems not at all to tell against their standing in society—the abodes of vice and wretchedness where walls of dirt shut out human hideousness from our eyes, where men and women curse God to His face, and where little children are done to death—the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, in which thousands of our fellow-creatures pass their existence

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, August 25th, 1876.

—the wickedness in high places—the zest with which even women novelists write of seduction, adultery, and intrigue, and with which the ordinary novels of the kind so written are devoured—are not these things that make the heart ache, and wring out the cry for a power mighty to save ?

Is Christianity a practical religion adequate to meet these social and moral evils ? I believe that it is ; and it is not an unwarrantable inference from facts, that had Christianity been regarded more as a daily doing of righteousness and less as a creed, these miseries would not have stained and saddened our country to such a large extent. And has not Christianity been so misconceived that it has been robbed of practical influence on the realities of life ? And has not the exclusion of it from the actualities of the day been intensified, and so its native potency weakened, by the cruelties, persecutions, and wars waged in its name by ecclesiastical hierarchies and priest-ridden nations ?

But Christianity is eminently a practical religion. It commands us to follow in Christ's steps and work. It bids us love, worship, adore ; but these are inspirations and inducements to action. It seeks the cultivation of religious thoughts ; but it is not merely an aerial sail of reverie, a play of emotion, an embrace of ecstasy. When men forsake the busy walks of life to try, in indifference to the world, in silence and calmness, to reach a state of absolute repose on this side of the grave, while the tide of human needs roars along unheeded, they turn a deaf ear to the most important demands of religion. When men, like the seventeenth century theologians, exhaust their energies in elaborating creeds and encrusting the spiritual life in rigid formularies to be used evermore as fetters upon the inquiring, expanding spirit that will not be bound, they, too, put in the rear the vital claims of religion. Religion is righteous work. Fed by devotion, it does not stop there. Animated by fervent feeling, it does not cease there. Elevated and deepened by the noblest thoughts of the human mind, it does not rest there. It is not alone to know, but to act

according to knowledge. It is not indolent contemplation and study of self, not brooding over emotions of piety ; it is doing wholesome work among the anomalies, inequalities, and iniquities of social life—spreading truth, honesty, integrity in our commercial life—struggling for righteousness, justice, purity in our municipal and political life—deepening and enlightening our religious life. It was this that Clarkson meant when he said that he had no time to give to his own salvation, because that of the slave absorbed all his thoughts and energies. The religion that is confined to thoughts, raptures, devotions, does not embody the loftiest ideal. Religion is to stir the hands and to be busy with the feet in cheering the sorrowful that their mourning may be mellowed, in healing the broken-hearted that their tears may be wiped away, in taking up the wounded from the roadside, that with wine, oil, and refreshment they may be restored. The religion of sentiment may pour forth the epithet, “ Lord, Lord ”; but the religion of useful service helps on those causes by which the degraded are regenerated through the agency of generous sympathies and kindly deeds. Spiritual rapture may be good, but far better is honest and faithful work in repairing the breaches and building up the waste places of human life. There is something more precious than glowing sentiment—something always in season. It is putting hand and heart to laws, institutions, and movements by means of which human woes will be alleviated, and human wrongs by slow degrees will be redressed—by means of which knowledge will have free course and be glorified, and there will be born into the homes of our fatherland higher tastes, “ sweeter manners and purer laws ”—by the influence of which men, one by one, in ever augmenting numbers, will be stimulated and strengthened to fulfil the ideal of Tennyson’s Knight who “ revered his conscience as his king.”

Is there in Christianity motive adequate enough, power impelling enough to secure consecration to this practical kind of work? I believe there is. What was it that in-

spired Jesus, what was it that constrained Paul in their spiritual reformation? It was love for man as man. It glowed in them as an enthusiasm. It was the travail of their soul to benefit, not one class of men, but man. Their love was a pure, deep, consuming passion for humanity, and it proved not only a motive sufficient to inspire and sustain them in the midst of persistent opposition and difficulty, but a power to awaken the divine in human souls. And when we look through history, we see that as men, whether moralists, social reformers, philanthropists, or statesmen, have come to realize the truth of human brotherhood, so have they been able to lift men upwards out of social degradation, political serfdom, and moral ruin. The enthusiasm of humanity is the reforming power. Xavier draws the hearts of others with an irresistible spell. Wesley's spiritual influence converts a generation. Whitfield moves England and America towards an activity which has never since ceased to operate. Fox instils into the minds of thousands throughout England faith in the Divine Spirit as dwelling evermore in man, and faith in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick as the essential elements of religion. There was with these prophets a motive strong enough to compel and sustain them. What was it? It was devotion to mankind—the loving of their neighbours as themselves. We may glance at the annals of philanthropy. Oberlin, with a joyous willingness to endure all things, enters as its pastor upon the Ban de la Roche, among a people wretched, ignorant, a prey to laziness and hunger, without the merest necessaries of life, and contented to remain so. In a few years he turns this wilderness into “a garden of God,” and works in the people a change so remarkable that where ignorance and its never-failing attendants, cruelty, vice, poverty, reigned supreme,—piety, intelligence, meekness, and plenty, hold triumphant sway. Charles Beckwith, reading a book on the Waldenses in the library of the Duke of Wellington, is seized with a desire to see for himself the people of the

Vaudois Valleys, finds them suffering all the evils of tyranny, throws himself into the work of their reformation, sparing neither time, strength, nor money in the effort to accomplish his mission. Chalmers goes into the largest, poorest, and most degraded parish of Glasgow, sweeps it clean of all poor-rates, workhouses, and public parish aid, and transforms it into what for its crushed poor is a Paradise. Guthrie rescues from starvation and ignorance thousands of the outcast children of the city streets, most of whom might have said, as one little girl among the two hundred and thirty children from his original Ragged School, in the funeral procession, was heard to say, "He was all the father I ever knew." Zeller, in the devotion of his life, redeems a race of outcasts in a German school; and Pestalozzi, in his wonder at the man's influence, says, "What a power, what a power! I wish I could begin my life over again!" The power was in the love the man had. Howard, Elizabeth Fry, Sarah Martin, strong in hope and love, conquer selfishness and disgust, go into dens of indescribable foulness, and prove that even the most vicious are not beyond reclamation to the ranks of humanity. Florence Nightingale leaves a lovely Derbyshire valley for the scenes of war's carnage, nurses the wounded brought in from the field of slaughter, diffusing among them a healing gladness, and winning from them a profound affection. Mary Carpenter spends her life for the neglected children of the lowest and most abandoned classes of her own country, and crosses the seas to elevate the women of India above the condition of "things" to that of human beings. What was it that animated and upheld all these ministering spirits? It was an unquenchable love of man, and an unconquerable faith in man's salvability. To whom is it, then, that we are indebted for the better treatment of our criminals? To whom is it that we must ascribe the provision that is made for the suffering, the diseased, the destitute, the widow and the orphan? To whom is it that we owe the abolition of

slavery? It is to men and women whose life-blood has been love for the human race, with whom sympathy with man was such a power, and such a passion, that it enabled them to work these noble deeds.

Then, again, when we consider the legislation of the last half-century, its predominating motives, its unquestioned bent, we find the same aim held aloft, and the same principle triumphing. Why has the legislation of the last fifty years been in the direction of destroying class distinctions? Why is it that the genius of English politics has been to uproot sectional privileges, and, instead of making war between classes, to bring them into reconciliation by a better understanding and a better appreciation of each other's interests? It is because statesmen have come to respect man as man, to learn that all real improvement, while it promotes, also springs out of, love to each other. Here is the motive sufficient for practical work. As long as men are divided into opposing camps, so long will our social and moral problems remain unsolved, our social sores continue open, and our social warfares be prolonged. But let our social relations be suffused, let the work of commerce and the conduct of legislation be pervaded, and let the ministrations of religion be permeated, by the spirit of brotherhood that recognises identity of interests as a fundamental principle, and there will then be in operation an influence that will really mend the world.

RELIGION AND POLITICS.*



THERE is a baneful idea still held by many religious people that it savours too much of "the world" to mix in politics. Their duty is to be godly; and to be that, it is necessary, or at least desirable, to abstain as much as possible from being political. They fear that to mend human laws is to run some peril of disobeying divine laws. So that they secure their own safety hereafter, they think that it does not much matter whether the soul of the State be healthy, and they stand by in an attitude of indifference or neutrality while great rights are struggling for vindication, and great wrongs are crying aloud for redress. They think and act as saints, for themselves; but it might injure spirituality to think and act as citizens for the community. The supreme interest they take in the affairs of heaven deprives others of the nation to which they belong of the benefit of their attention. They look at the glory of the heavens with an admiration which excludes all thought of the needy meanness of earth to which they should minister. Absorbed in preparation for the New Jerusalem, they overlook the many things in this Old Jerusalem which want attending to. They are not doing in the world the work which makes its social life more wholesome and its political life more just, but cultivating a goodness which is simply want of force, a spirituality which is only another name for cowardice. Religionists of this class may be a diminishing number, but we are constantly meeting specimens of them, and hearing them admonish us

* From the *Liverpool Mercury*, March 19th, and the *Inquirer*, August 25th, 1877.

with the mischievous maxim to which I have referred. It may, therefore, be worth while to look a little into this singularly narrow notion.

It cannot be denied that the advancement of religion and the welfare of mankind depend greatly upon the principles on which the affairs of nations are managed. The man who says he cares not how the business of this country, the government of the people, is conducted, means what? He means that political enfranchisement, though it is a condition preliminary of a true and entire service of God; that civil rights, though they are needful to intellectual and moral health; that social justice, though it is the atmosphere in which the virtues and charities best grow—are all nothing to him. He means that, rather than put his hand to politics to improve their condition, agricultural labourers may exist on twelve shillings a-week. He means that it is better to dream of a life of rest in heaven for himself than to help political action in raising hereditary paupers, born to wretchedness and helplessness, into a life of manliness and self-reliance on earth. He means that if he can “read his title clear to mansions in the skies,” it is no concern of his that children born of criminal parents and trained to crime, find their mansions in gaols for offences committed in ignorance. He means, in truth, that, compared with having a place for himself among the angels, it matters not whether his countrymen are enjoying the blessings of peace, plenty, and liberty, or are sunk in crime, ignorance, and misery; whether the nations of the earth are spending their energies in the promotion of commerce, living in the interchange of social amities, or perverting their skill and power in unjust wars. All these things depend upon political action and administration, and the man who cares for none of them, preferring a life of self-absorption, is an infidel to the principles of religion, an unfaithful servant as to real religious work, a hinderer of religious progress.

Besides, it is impossible for a man to live as an independent and isolated individual. The religious Englishman

is not only a man, but a citizen, a member of political society. He may neither wish, intend, nor suppose himself to be political, but he is and must be so. He is compelled by the State to pay political taxes, to support political services, to maintain political rulers and institutions, whether good or bad, whether beneficial or disastrous to the country and to the world. The question, therefore, which he has to consider is, not whether he will be political or not; but whether he will be political blindfolded, or with his eyes open; with a reckless apathy as to what men or measures he supports, or with a devout and thoughtful concern for human improvement.

See how the policy of abstention tends to work mischief. The man who will not put his best influence into the State abandons the government of the nation to men of mere expediency, cunning, self-aggrandizement; and the power which he will not exercise for good becomes negatively a power for evil. If he will not bravely fight against evils that need exterminating, he shares the reproach of their continued existence, and the responsibility for their results. By taking refuge in a maxim which has been urged as an excuse for injustice of all kinds, he becomes a party to unrighteousness. Justice stands afar off, because he will not take it by the hand. Truth halts or but limps along, because he will not support it. He suffers the country to get into the hands of the mere trading politician, and allows intrigue and self-interest to take the place of principle. He abandons the world to the Devil, who—if there be a Devil—is considerably in debt to a good many conventional religionists.

Then, again, the religionist of whom I speak has a good deal to answer for in the present relation of the working classes to religious institutions. When working men see that many Christian people are indifferent to social and political reform, is it any wonder if they conclude that religious societies are of little value to them? The sin of this lies very largely at the door of those who are silent on the

message of Christianity concerning the great questions of social and political justice. Christianity, as it was in Palestine eighteen hundred years ago, is a question of historical interest; but Christianity as it is in England to-day is a question of throbbing life; yet how much more do we hear of what was seen and done among the people of Jerusalem than of what Christianity should do in the public life of London or Liverpool! As it is written in the pages of the New Testament, it is a literature and nothing more; as it is threaded and inwoven into politics, society, commerce, into all the departments and activities of life, it is the power of God; yet how much more readiness and heartiness is there to argue on the record of it in the Gospels, than to infuse the spirit of it into civil laws and social habits? Its connection with metaphysical theories is of philosophic interest; but its connection with the realities of every-day life is of supreme and universal interest; yet how much more we hear of its relation to questions which the first man started, which the last man will not get answered, and without complete solution of which human life has managed to get along fairly well, than of its relation to the practical affairs that push forward or backward, ennoble or degrade, the life of communities!

I sometimes think, from the manner in which the pulpit suffers the army of human deeds to rush heedlessly and unchecked along the thoroughfare lest it should desecrate itself by taking hold of them and bringing them to the test of the eternal moralities, that the Bible must be supposed to have warned us to keep our hands from civil affairs. But I find that the noblest characters delineated there brought politics and the laws of righteousness into close quarters. Abraham was political; Moses was political; Elijah lifted up his voice against monarch and people. The prophets of Judah and Israel were terribly in earnest as politicians, censuring or applauding public measures with the utmost freedom. Paul was political, insisting as a Roman citizen upon his rights and privileges. Christ was political, laying

at the bases of Christianity ideas and principles which have a profound political bearing, and in the light of them holding up Herod, and the Scribes and Pharisees who sat in Moses' seat, to the reprobation of the world. I do not mean that Christ was a "political preacher," nor do I mean that the pulpit should turn aside from the great themes for which it exists, to deal in the personalities and discuss the measures of partisan strife. But I mean that he consecrated and sanctified principles with which social and political injustices are entirely inconsistent, by which social and political rights may be most effectually vindicated, on which national life alone securely rests, and to which therefore the pulpit should bring civil and social arrangements, to discuss them and try them in their moral character. The New Testament has assuredly a clear, decided voice on social theories and politics. And yet Christian people are puzzled and offended, and smile at you as a visionary, if you ask them to examine social questions and political acts by the light of the Gospel. They profess to believe the Christian teaching that every man, no matter how obscure his station, how menial his occupation, how defective his culture, is made in the image of God, and shares in elements of the divine nature. But they do not heartily believe this, and one result of their apathy is, that the redressing of social and political wrongs, the assertion of social and political rights, the vindication of the claims of citizenship, and the application to public life of the highest moral laws, seem to be no longer recognised as part of the mission of Christian teachers. Is it any wonder that millions of people stand aloof from Christian churches, when the representatives of Christianity speak not at all, or speak with but tremulous and temporizing utterances on the living, public questions that pulsate in the minds of working men? Can anything be more calculated to alienate the masses from religion than the conduct of those who regard Christianity as having no relation to the social and political struggles of the day? Can anything more sharply exhibit the imbecility that has

come upon us than the unwillingness to bring these things, and every act of man, to the bar of the Gospel, to set them forth as upon the background of eternity, in their relation to the great truths of religion ?

Consider, further, the blindness to history and the ingratitude to their forefathers which these religionists display. It is a pity they were not projected into this planet two or three centuries ago, for they do not deserve the civil and religious liberties their fathers have won for them. They would not then have stood condemned for base unthankfulness in eating of the fruit of a tree they would not have planted. They would have thought only of expediency and "living peaceably with all men" in a bad sense. They would not manfully have borne testimony to scorned rights and hated verities in the midst of a crowd of time-serving men. They would never have been followed by love and admiration for great deeds greatly done ; and their memory, instead of remaining in the heart of after-ages exceeding precious, would have perished at once in bottomless oblivion. There stand up in perpetual rebuke of them, in earnest appeal to them, the religious benefits conferred on mankind by political action. History entreats them to see how the most notable of our political improvements have been essentially religious. The salvation of the liberties of England by the Puritans and early Dissenters from the machinations of Laud and the Stuarts was a political act ; and it was charged with fuller life and health to the Protestantism, therefore to the freedom, and therefore to the intellectual and religious development of the nation. It was by political means that Wilberforce and Clarkson, with their associates, struck off the fetters from the 800,000 slaves in the West Indies ; and it was an act inspired by the religious spirit that listened to the cry of the oppressed and broke in pieces the oppressor. It was by political means that the corn laws were repealed ; and if ever God's will was done on earth as it is in heaven, it was when the people, faint from want of bread, had the sin that starved them swept

away, and their life renewed from the valleys covered over with corn. It was by political means that free trade was established; and it brought with it a religious gain; for free trade is not only a law of wealth and prosperity, but a law of friendship and kindness, not, it may be, among monarchs and cabinets, but among the peoples of various nations. It was a political act that abolished the taxes on knowledge; and it was a precious service to religion, for the true glory of religion is hidden when ignorance beclouds the eye and narrows the intellect—it is seen only when intelligence opens the vision and enlightens the mind. It is by political means that England has resolved that her children shall not grow up in ignorance, but shall start in the world with some knowledge of their duties, and some means of becoming useful citizens; and if it be not religion to fit them for a manly and honourable life in society, to take under care the little ones born in crime and wretchedness, and put into their hands that which tends to virtue, comfort, and self-respect, I know not what religion is. Politics irreligious! Surely, if Christ were among us to-day, and entered our schools, where the mind and conscience of co-workers with him are preparing the young for the battle of life, there would fall from his gracious lips, in sympathizing accents, the benediction, "Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these, ye do it unto me." It is by political means that our large towns are being cleared of dwellings that knew not the freshness of the air and the gleam of the sunshine, nests of fever and haunts of disease, where it was folly to insist on health of soul; and as I see miserable dens being replaced by bright and cheerful homes, I say—Surely that is preparing the way of the Lord and making His paths straight. All these acts of the civil power are likewise acts that tell on religion. The aim of religion is the perfecting of man in whatsoever things are true, just, honest, virtuous, lovely; and whatever in legislative enactment or social custom furthers that aim is religious: whatever hinders it is non-religious and anti-religious. The religious English-

man who stands aloof from politics is faithless to the principles of the Gospel, faithless to the spirit that by toils and martyrdoms has set him in a large place, faithless to the genius that, embodied in various laws, is bringing the kingdom of heaven nearer realization. The religious Englishman who resolves that the best he has and is shall be expressed in social and political results, is working on the temple which God is building, and which at last is to be filled with His glory.

BELIEF IN GOD.*



I.

THE subject of this article is the grandest which by any possibility can occupy the thoughts of man. It should be approached, therefore, with the profoundest feelings of reverence, solemnity, and awe. It is a subject, too, which is full of mystery, a mystery which amid the very increase of our knowledge about God is itself ever increasing. Theologians in past ages have attempted to measure Deity with the line and plummet of the understanding; they have sought to demonstrate His existence as they would a question of arithmetic or a problem of geometry; they have made a catalogue of His attributes and built around His name in their creeds a set of adjectives, and then they have said to the world, Lo, here is your God; believe it, or you will be lost for ever! Vain labour! As if it were possible for the Infinite to be compressed into the finite, possible for Him who is too large for the universe to hold, to be brought within the compass of a theologian's thought or a church's creed. As little as theology, indeed, has science ever comprehended God, but its investigations have at least revealed the inadequacy of the old conceptions of His nature; have revealed Him as wiser, mightier, more inscrutable in His operations, more wonderful in the ranges and reaches of His being than was ever dreamed of under the reign of the old ecclesiastical teachings. This material world, each star of heaven, each flower of earth, yea, each atom of dust beneath our feet, is found to have within it

* From the *Unitarian Herald*, March 13th, 20th, and 27th, 1885.

that teaching about Him which no creeds, no words of man have even begun to express. And now in the full light of science, we have reason as never before to exclaim with Zophar, "Who by searching can find out God?"—now in the full blaze of Christianity, we have reason such as the old Athenians never had, to write over our altars, as the highest result of our wisdom, the inscription, "To the Unknown God."

It is in this spirit of humility and reverence, this consciousness of how little the finite can ever comprehend of the Infinite, that I take up His name as the subject of our thoughts. The title of this paper is simply "Belief in God." It is not a theology, not a discussion of all that He is; not a dogmatic statement to be forced on any one as the whole truth about Him, but only an account of how He has been revealed to some of us, only a glimpse of the knowable about Him as it stands forth like the stars of night against the infinite background of the unknown. Without denying the difficulties of the subject—difficulties which themselves, perhaps, are the satisfaction of a human want,—without denying that other views can be honestly taken by men just as capable and just as Christian as ourselves, there are some conceptions of Him which to our hearts and souls, if not to our understandings, are absolutely true, some ideas that we insist upon with all the more emphasis because they are so few, and because there is so much else about Him with reference to which we freely confess our ignorance; and it is these points, the views of Him which are printed not in our creeds but on our souls, that I propose to state.

But, before I proceed to expound these views, let me clearly indicate the position I take as to the existence of God. I do not intend to discuss the question whether there is a God or not. There are truths that take up their abode in us, and become one with our nature. They may be called vital in the sense that we instinctively and unconsciously live them. We may throw doubt upon them by our formal logic, but our conviction of them perpetually

returns. The attempt to get rid of them is like trying to sweep back the rising tide of the ocean. They underlie all our thought, feeling, and action. To deny them is to make our whole being an illusion. Among these truths are, for example, the reality of the external world, the future invariableness of the laws of nature, our own personal identity, the freedom of our wills. We may logically disprove either and all of these truths, but our conviction of them remains ; or we may establish their truth by very plausible arguments, but those arguments are not the real foundation of our belief of them, nor do they justify the strength of the conviction that we already possess. In all scientific inquiries there are certain things, essential and fundamental things, taken for granted. One is that the material universe is an objective reality ; but science cannot justify that assumption. Another is the immutability of natural law ; but science has not any right, on any grounds of her own, to affirm that gravitation may not cease throughout the universe to-morrow. In all her investigations science proceeds upon a faith which is not in its nature scientific, but must be acknowledged in the last analysis to be religious ; a faith that there is somehow in the universe an honesty that will deal fairly with us, and will keep in the future the promise that the past has pledged to us.

I conceive the existence of God to be a truth of the class I have described. I conceive it to be *given* in our nature ; that, consciously or unconsciously, we assume it in all our thought and live it in all our life. The idea naturally arises in all men, in different degrees of purity and elevation, according to each individual's previous mental, moral, and spiritual culture. But in some form or other it all but invariably presents itself. Atheism is an exceptional and rare state of mind. It is out of the rule of human life and feelings. A nickname, the saying runs, is the hardest stone the devil can throw at any man. The imputation of atheism is the hardest of these stones ; it is nearly always a mere calumny. Often the imputation

has no other basis than the language a man uses to express his sense of the Supreme. With Tyndall, he speaks of Nature or Law; with Strauss, of the Universum; with Darwin, of Evolution; with Herbert Spencer, of Force and Energy; but he admits the existence of the Quality so diversely named—only, the cognisable sum and representative of that Quality is called Nature, Law, Universum, Evolution, Energy, and is not called by the theological term God. His atheism is not real, only formal. It is not atheism of thought—nay, it may be the deepest religious thought—it is simply non-theological in its nomenclature. Scarcely an instance can be found of an intellectual life the whole of which bears the mark of atheism. It is a phase, an exception, a variation, holding such proportion in the lives of those who avow themselves to be atheists as disease does to health in the ordinary routine of human affairs. In recent years, horror has been excited by the profit made by burial societies where parents have trafficked in the lives of their infant children; but who infers from this that the parental instinct, the parental affection, is not essential to the human constitution? To great and pervading principles instances like these offer little difficulty; and against such exceptions as these we have the otherwise universal voice of human nature. I may be reminded of tribes or hordes of men, in perhaps the interior of Africa, or among the hills of India, or in some other locality far removed from the pale of civilization, who have no religious ideas, and in whose language no word for God can be found. It may be so; but suppose it were true? To point me to them as the type of humanity is to mock my reason, as much as to point to the savage who cannot count beyond twenty as a proof that the calculation of higher numbers is unnatural to the human mind. I make this broad assertion—there is no nation raised above the lowest level which is without a belief in some higher Being or Beings. The voice of humanity is distinct and clear that the human race ever believes in some Supreme Power.

Hence I have never been tempted to enter into any formal argumentation as to the existence of God. All such argumentation is more or less unsatisfactory. The very attempt at proving a truth of such transcendent importance produces a feeling of dissatisfaction, by seeming to imply that the opposite of the truth is at least supposable.

I will not, therefore, discuss the question whether the existence of God can be proved scientifically and logically. Happily, human nature is not composed entirely of logic. It is composed also of needs, and aspirations, and sorrows, and experiences which impel it to God. Human nature is not intellect alone; and therefore intellect is not the only voice that has a right to make itself heard on this question. We are heart, as well as intellect; we are conscience, too; we are moral beings; and heart, conscience, and moral nature have authority as valid and as trustworthy as the logical faculty. And they affirm that God is. "I feel the God within me," said a Greek philosopher; and this consciousness is beyond all argument. Compared with this, "proofs" are vain and idle things.

Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound, nor doubt Him, nor deny;
Yea, with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

Rather the earth shall doubt when her retrieving
Pours in the rain and rushes from the sod,
Rather than he for whom the great conceiving
Stirs in his soul to quicken into God.

Ay, tho' thou then should'st strike him from his glory,
Blind and tormented, maddened and alone,
Even on the cross would he maintain his story,
Yes, and in hell would whisper, "I have known."

II.

We believe in God as a conscious infinite Being, fountain of all life, centre and circumference of all worlds. Nothing can be more utterly untrue than the charges of atheism, scepticism and negativeness sometimes urged against the Unitarian faith. It is the reality of God's existence which is the grand central truth of our religion, the one fact that amid all other questions we cling to and defend with unwavering fidelity. The attempts to have a religion without a God, a fancy for the form and not a reality for the life and the soul, are as foreign to Unitarianism as they are to any other form of Christianity.

And why do we believe in Him? Not merely because His existence was revealed to certain wise and holy men who lived 1800 and 4000 years ago; not merely because we find His name written here and there on the pages of an ancient book; but because the whole universe this day, this hour, is alive with His presence; even more, because of the revelation He is making now and evermore in the depths of our own souls. There are ten thousand sacred books which to our eyes are written all over with His name. The flowers of the field spell out its wondrous beauty. The stars of heaven flash down its glory. The mountains and the rocks are witnesses of His being that are still left in the world; the winds, the clouds, the falling rain, and the singing birds, are prophets that He raises up age after age to proclaim His truth. All history is but a larger Bible written over with the name of God, and profane only when it is read with unbelieving eyes. Humanity itself is an image of Him, an image even of His mystery and unsearchableness; and better than all else, worth more to us as evidence than any flower or star, or Bible, or history, or universe, we know that He is, because we have seen Him with the eye of faith, because we have been to Him in the hour of prayer,

because we have felt the touch of His spirit upon us in our times of sorrow, yea, because in Him we have lived and moved and had our being. Not believe in God! Why it is easier to us to doubt the existence of matter, to doubt the existence of the friends we are meeting from day to day, to doubt almost our own souls, than to disbelieve in Him who is nearer, more alive, more permanent, more a part of ourselves than all else put together, even as the Persian oracle represents Him as saying, "I am nearer to thee than thou art to thyself."

III.

Again, we believe in Him as an all-present, all-ruling God, comprehending and dwelling in the universe, and constituting that in which all its substance and all its forces have their existence, yet with a life and being of His own entirely transcending those of all things besides. The theory which makes Him a Deity who created the universe with its laws and forces out of nothing, and set it going as a man does a clock, and who Himself ever since has been outside of it in some distant heaven, reaching into it only now and then with a miracle or a special revelation,—this theory most Unitarians entirely reject. We believe with Goethe when he says:—

What use the God who sat outside to scan
 The spheres that 'neath his fingers circling ran?
 God dwells within, and moves the world and moulds,
 Himself and nature in one form enfolds.

We believe that He is in nature as the soul is in the body, Himself its substance, its forces and its laws. Light is but the flashing of His eyes; gravity but the swing of His arm; all motion, all growth, all life but the direct volition of His eternal will. There is nothing outside of God, no substance, no world, no angel, no man, no good and no evil, no devil and no hell—otherwise He would not be infinite and omnipresent.

All are but parts of one majestic whole,
Whose body nature is and God the soul ;

or rather, both whose soul and body God is. And yet all this does not exhaust Him. The bounds of the universe are not the bounds of God ; the metes and measures of suns and stars and nebulae are not the metes and measures of His spirit ; the sum of nature is not His sum ; and though a man should know all things, there would still be the One Unknown. As Swinburne writes :—

Mother of man's time-travelling generations,
Breath of his nostrils, heart blood of his heart,
God above all gods worshipped of all nations,
Light above light, law beyond law, Thou art.

It is a view of Him which is sometimes called pantheism, but, as one of our writers says, it is the pantheism which has ever been the doctrine of the deepest piety and, among all sects, of the devoutest men. It is the pantheism of Berkeley when he speaks of "finite agents embosomed in an Infinite mind"; it is the pantheism of Newton when he recognises "a Being pervading all space, who, present to all things, sees and embraces all things present to Himself"; it is the pantheism of David in the magnificent Psalm,* where he exclaims, "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there"; it is the pantheism of the old Greek poet, quoted and approved by Paul, "In Him we live and move and have our being";† it is the pantheism of Paul himself, when he says, "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we in Him";‡ it is the pantheism which Jesus had in mind when he taught, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work";§ and when he prayed that "they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."¶

* Psalm cxxxix. † Acts xvii. 28. ‡ I. Cor. viii. 6. § John v. 17.
¶ John xvii. 21.

IV.

Once more, we believe in Him as Person, not a person, as if one of many, but as Person. It is not within my purpose to go into the etymological meaning of this remarkable word, or into all the subtle metaphysics with which the question of the possibility of Infinite Personality is bound up,—it would take a long course of discussion to do that,—but only to indicate the practical faith about it in which Unitarians as a whole have found rest. There is the definition of Deity given by Matthew Arnold, “The not ourselves which makes for righteousness”; there is the idea of Hegel and of other German thinkers that the Divine comes to consciousness only in Man; there is the scientific conception of God as Force; there is the philosophical conception of Him as impersonal goodness, intelligence, and power; there is Tyndall’s finding in matter the promise and potency of all life; and there is the identification of Him generally with Nature, Law, and Being. But each of these fails with us, as it does with the great body of Christians, to satisfy the wants either of the intellect or the heart. Self-consciousness, that wonderful something which binds all attributes, all forces, all parts into one living unit, we conceive to exist with God as it does with man, differing from what is human not in being less, but in being more. God is not Person because He partakes of us,—Hegel’s idea,—but we are persons because we partake of Him. The stream cannot rise higher than its source; man, the image of God, cannot have anything in him which is more divine than God Himself; personality cannot come from where no person is. It is a possession which increases, not diminishes, as we go up the scale of earthly being. It is least in the idiot, it is most in a Moses, an Isaiah, a Paul and a Jesus, a Shakespeare, a Milton, and a Newton; and what reason is

there to suppose that this law is reversed in leaving earthly being and going on to the Infinite and Divine? No: God is a Being we can pray to, commune with and love, not merely as we do with woods, seas, and stars, but as we do with a friend; and, above all that He is as wisdom, goodness, love, and power, the pinnacle of the divine as it is of the human, there stands that inscrutable and wonderful something,—as inscrutable and wonderful in man as it is in God,—which enables Him to say, as He said to saints and sages of old, and as He says now to many a seeking soul: “I, I the Lord God have spoken it.”

V.

Passing onward another step, we believe that God is One, one Being, one Mind, one Will, one absolute, undivided, indivisible Person. It is in this part of our faith with regard to Him that as Unitarians we divide from the great mass of Christians. Orthodox Christians do indeed believe in one God,—I would not on any account misrepresent their faith,—but they believe that this one God exists in three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all equal, all God, and all distinct from each other, so that they can be prayed to separately, yet all together not making anything which is more God than each one alone; they believe that there is no one person embracing all the others and all of the Divine Nature that exclusively can be called God, but a Trinity, three persons who together constitute His oneness. We, on the other hand, in opposition to all such metaphysical distinctions—the last stage of the world's polytheism before it developed into the grand truth of monotheism,—we say one God, one Person, one Life, one centre and circumference of the whole vast range of being, above, below, without and within, now and forever.

We are then Theists, and not Polytheists—Unitarians,

and not Trinitarians. We believe with Moses and with Jesus that the Eternal, our God, is One Eternal. We believe with Jesus that the Divine Father is greater than all, that He doeth all things, and that all good is derived from Him. This bright faith in One Only Omnipotent and Omniscient we keep because it is simple and rational, and best explains the work of Creation and Providence. We want only Him, Him above all and over all; Him for and in us all, for ever! The All-Father is our God. It is He who is our Providence in nature, our ruler in history, our inspiration in joy, our comforter in trouble, and the receiver of our spirits in their parting hour. Under His unity all things work together for good, and will result in ultimate harmony and final bliss. We bow down in worship to Him alone, as the only proper object of prayer and adoration; and when we pray, we say with Jesus, "Our Father," trusting in the love and mercy of his Father and our Father, of his God and our God. We are Theists and Unitarians, and we use these names because they best express our firm faith in the unity of the only living and true God.

VI.

But we do not lay much stress on belief in the unity of God in its merely doctrinal connections. We value it because it has *moral* relations far more important than doctrine. We value it because as the Apostle says, "To us there is but one God, *the Father*." "The Father"—this is the one word, we believe, in which the Gospel has summed up all the sublimest and most precious truths concerning God. What of the mode of the Divine existence? We do not know. Is God one or three? It is a question of some importance as a philosophical speculation; but for our practical religious life, into which is crowded all that is of

most interest to us, and in comparison with which all other questions are utterly without consequence, the supreme consideration is, What is God in His relations and feelings towards us? Shall we speculate where He is? Shall we speculate how He exists? Shall we speculate through what medium He acts in His control of the universe? Some persons are fond of indulging in speculation on these questions, but they are none of our concern. By the limitations of our nature, we are incapable of solving such problems. But *what* He is in His relation and in the spirit of His government towards us, we can understand: and this is a question which it is not only legitimate for us to raise, but which, before all others, it is essential for us to answer.

What is He really to us? Is He simply a sovereign ruling us only as subjects, or is He our Father, dealing with us as His children? Has He put us here, and then withdrawn into the seclusion of an infinite solitude, or does He occupy Himself elsewhere with interests more important, or is He still present with us? Is He good to a few, or alike good to all?—good for a season, to change by-and-by into indifference or malignity, or good unalterably and for ever, with all the resources of His infinite wisdom and power pledged to our welfare? May we trust Him unreservedly, or must we fear and tremble before Him in apprehension of His displeasure? *These* are the questions which every thoughtful man and woman finds the heart instinctively asking concerning God, and the favourable answer of which is the first condition of the soul's peace. If He is not our Father and our changeless Friend, it is all the same to us whether He is one or three; and it will not send a ray of light through the darkness thus occasioned, nor lift a hair's weight of the burden thus laid upon our hearts, whether we say the one thing or the other, Unity or Trinity.

And the questions thus fundamental with respect to God are the questions that we see for ourselves answered, or having light thrown on them, in the relation of Father. An

infinite breadth there is in the character thus disclosed. We confess and adore the holiness and wisdom, the justice and power that concur to make Him the being that He is. But amidst all that the Bibles of every nation say in describing Him, we see these words, "God is Love," shining as the sole definition of His essential nature: and hence we learn what is the spirit and purpose of His being. This word, Father, therefore, stands to us as the symbol of what He is, not in name only, but in all the beautiful meaning of the word. Law-giver, Sovereign, Judge, we believe Him to be, as every father is in his family; but, above all, He is the Father, comprehending in this one fact all other relations: *the Father*, not of a few, nor of a part, but of all; *the Father*, by no mere act of creation, and by no mere grace of adoption, but by virtue of an absolute and original spiritual paternity, and in all the intimacy and tenderness of a Father's love, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; through all the variety of His providences, dealing with us as a Father; as a Father, disciplining us through sorrow and trial; as a Father, no less in the punishments than in the blessings of our conscience; as a Father, purposing and working to at last bring home His whole family to Himself. I know no faith so suited to rebuke us for narrowness, hardness, or unkindness,—so fitted to nourish us in love, tenderness, and the pitying and forgiving temper of Christ. I know no faith to which I would choose to have children conformed, or after the likeness of which I would prefer to have them. I know no faith more chastening and sanctifying in its influence on the character, more positive in its power for good in our life, than this benign and loving view of God, this view of the large and tender affections we ascribe to Him, this view of the beneficent work in which He is constantly engaged. If I did, I should be where it is taught, and not in a Unitarian Church. But as it is, I am there; and of us who profess this faith, let it not be said that we dishonour it by living unworthily of its inspirations, or below its just demands.

Let those of us to whom this faith is our meat and drink, not only affirm its superiority in argument—that is a small matter,—but demonstrate it in action, exhibiting the large, noble and loving life which shall at once both reflect the spirit and attest the truth and power of the belief we profess, in our growing likeness to God, the Father.

WHAT HAS UNITARIANISM DONE FOR THE PEOPLE ? *



SOME time ago an intelligent working man put to me a question which, though old, merits renewed consideration. It was this : "What has Unitarianism done for the People?" He was familiar with its history. He described it as adorned with those gifts—graces, perhaps, they should be called—of "sweetness and light," the want of which in Mr. Matthew Arnold's estimation constitutes the characteristic failure and the crowning dishonour of Dissent. He acknowledged that it had addressed itself to cultivated minds, and granted that it had obtained a high intellectual influence which, he admitted, was increasing both in depth and extent among the thoughtful and inquiring. He confessed that it had contributed important services to the establishment, on its broadest foundations, of the great principle of Protestantism—the right of private judgment. But he failed to see that it had accomplished any good work among the masses. He evidently thought that Unitarianism was, among other religious faiths, what the *Pall Mall Gazette* at its beginning assumed to be among newspapers,—it was the religion of gentlemen *for* gentlemen. It was what Carlyle terms "the religion of sweet oil and graciousity."

At the moment I answered my querist, that to the fields of social, political, and philanthropic reform Unitarianism had furnished numerous workers for "the good time coming," whose services, though they had not been sounded in the synagogues and in the streets, had ameliorated and

* Lecture in St. James's Hall, Douglas, Isle of Man, on Thursday, October 12th, 1882.

enriched the social and civil condition of the people. I conceded that in its especially religious ministrations it had not come into direct relation with the masses,—and it would appear, from recent religious censuses, that in that respect it does not stand alone. But what if it had not come into immediate contact with the multitude? As religion grows more healthily in an open atmosphere where *all* the faculties of man's nature have freest and fullest play, than in a close atmosphere where *some* of them are stifled, Unitarianism has *indirectly* done a priceless service towards the religious future of the masses; for it has powerfully aided in procuring for them a wider freedom of thought. It has helped to relieve them from the cramp of creeds. It has hastened their liberation from the bonds of sectarian theology; and, just now, having fulfilled the task which has fallen peculiarly upon it, of placing the intellect in the rightful position towards religious truth, it would address itself, and is now more than ever addressing itself, to the heart of the people.

Perhaps it cannot be denied that my questioner had formed, if not a perfectly true, yet a tolerably fair idea of the position which Unitarianism has occupied, and the work it has prosecuted. Unitarianism has vindicated and extended the right of liberty of mind. It has fought a long and earnest battle against those who have set up a frontier to investigation. It has lifted up a clear-toned and persistent voice against those who have said to the researches of science, to the deductions of reason, to the questionings and conclusions of enlightened moral sense: "Thus far shalt thou go, but no farther." Vainly has that mandate been issued by ecclesiastical authorities, councils, synods, and conferences. The more it is attempted to confine the mind, the more strongly does the ruler within assert its authority. Put it in stocks, and it will wriggle a way out. Shut it up in a narrow room, and it will destroy the walls that impede its egress. It is as Emerson says of the child in church: insist that he shall sit in one particular part of the pew, and the little fellow will secretly determine to sit in

another part. The Chinese who was resolved to know what was beyond the boundaries of his country had his determination intensified by a royal edict forbidding all travelling out of the land. The human mind refuses to be circumscribed, and claims as its divine right to follow to their fullest extent the leadings of reason and the instincts of the soul. Unitarianism is based upon that divine right. Its fundamental principle is not simply that every man has a right to think for himself, but that every man has it laid upon him as a solemn duty, as a high and precious obligation, to think for himself, holding responsibility for his opinions to none but the Supreme Judge. It is to the assertion and establishment of that principle, against the traditions and commandments of fallible authorities, the pretensions of ecclesiastical corporations, the despotic government of religious societies, that Unitarianism has had to devote most of its powers and energies. It has stood to that grand principle with noble fidelity, maintaining the rights and dignities of the human mind against bigotry and superstition, against the tyranny of tradition and the arbitrary rule of ecclesiasticism. *That* has been imposed upon it by its environment as the supremely important thing; and the fact that it has had to contend for the recognition and maintenance of the principle of freedom of thought may account for its not having as yet had much influence among the masses. *It has had to establish its right to be*, and, therefore, has not been surrounded by genial conditions for presenting to the multitude those simple truths of religion which are best adapted to meet the deepest wants of humanity. It has had to labour for the restoration of what was emphatically the religion of the people in the early ages of Christianity, but which became obscured by the subtilities of philosophic speculators, and corrupted by the jealousies and contentions of ambitious theologians. To the purification of theology its work has been mainly confined by the conditions of the case. Before it could scatter the nourishing fruits of a pure

Christianity among the people, it has been compelled to employ its powers in clearing away the noxious herbs and weeds which have cumbered the ground and weakened the tree of life. With what result? As one of several influences or factors, it has aided in faithfully accomplishing this regenerating mission; for in churches outside of Unitarianism,—in all the three Presbyterian churches of Scotland, in the Broad Church party in the English Establishment, in the Congregational Churches of England, among the younger men in the Wesleyan Church,—there is a healthy departure from the traditions and superstitions which have accumulated since the third century, encrusting Christianity; and a healthy return to the pure light of the Gospel as Christ preached it, and to the pure light of reason, which, as I think, are one light; for the truths of the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of Jesus have their beginning, their confirmation, and their only validity in the soul of man.

But, granting that we owe to Unitarianism, in conjunction with other liberal influences, the possession of entire mental freedom, the inquiry may be put—indeed it has been put,—whether we have any new truths to proclaim to the people? I answer, none. God's truth is not new, but old as His creation. We have only walked upon its shore, and found some gems our brethren had buried under the accumulated sand of old traditions; and of these we have disinterred a few of priceless value. Here are five of them:—

1. The first is, the immanence of God in nature, in history, in the souls of all men,—the presence in every atom of matter, and in every throb of spirit, of that all-encompassing Soul who fills the heavens with glory and the earth with bounty, who also, in gracious guidance, in kindling aspiration, in high command, and gentle leading, and healing rebuke of conscience, dwells in the human soul. It is the truth immortalized by Wordsworth, when he felt, as he says,—

A Presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

2. The second is, that communion with God is possible to every individual soul. The deadness of much of the Christianity of the present day arises from the fact that it looks on inspiration as altogether a thing of the past ; it treats revelation as only a historic fact which occurred up to nearly nineteen hundred years ago, and of which we can study but the record. It says that God spoke to men of old, but speaks not to us,—we to-day hear only the far-off echoes of His voice, and must be content to receive second-hand, through them, the word thus given. But Unitarianism has assisted in bringing again to life and light the truth that the roll of God's prophets was not closed when the walls of Jerusalem were levelled to the ground, but that God's spirit informs human hearts in the living present, inspiration not being confined to any one age or race. Thus it gives reality to the teaching of ancient prophets, and links them in vital relation with the present ; and it animates us to reproduce the life of Jesus by opening up to us the reality for every receptive soul of Christ-like communion with God.

3. The third is, that human nature is ever made capable of the life of God. Unitarianism has affirmed that human nature is imperfect, but not inherently evil ; that it has been wisely appointed to man to rise out of low conditions and find his way to the light above him, and not that we are the degenerate offspring of pure and spotless creatures in some remote past, by whose transgression we have been rendered incapable of doing any good, and inevitably compelled to do all evil, and for whose transgression we are held guilty, and are doomed to eternal death,—not that, because a man and a woman gave way at the first tempta-

tion, every infant at its mother's breast has within it a heart utterly vile, and impending over it a curse and a fate compared with which—

The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise.

No: Unitarianism has affirmed that all purity and moral courage, all wisdom and sanctity, all virtue and strength, are in the inherent possibilities of humanity. It has also affirmed that the true aim of life is not to escape a future condemnation, nor to ensure a future salvation, but to subdue the passions, to cultivate pure affections, to strengthen the moral will, to give to the noble powers of intellect with which we are endowed fitting culture and expansion, to work out our own salvation and enter into eternal life—which consists more in quality than in duration,—here and now, even amid the cares and struggles of the present; and to attain this aim it has found its richest and strongest inspiration in the teaching and guidance of Jesus. Sitting at his feet and touched by his spirit, it has affirmed that we are not under the curse and wrath of God, but that the Infinite Heart is ever turned towards us in love and benediction; that the Divine Spirit is ever striving with the sons of men to lift them up and bring them more and more into accord with the Supreme Will. It believes that humanity, as a whole, is stronger, wiser, purer, nobler to-day than ever before since it had existence here; and that because it bears within it the breath of divine life, it is destined to go on and on, casting off ignorance, overcoming evil passions, retrieving mistakes, correcting errors of opinion, and achieving ever grander victories in the world of matter and of mind.

4. The fourth is, that religion is not a substitute for right living, but the highest form of right living. While some have affirmed that there is a shorter and easier way to God's favour than by obeying His law, Unitarianism has affirmed

that God's benediction is to be won only by the homage of the heart to perfect goodness, and the effort of the life to reach it. While some have affirmed that Christ has provided a perfect righteousness as a substitute for ours, that we can have it any moment if we will, for it is all ready and we have only to accept it, Unitarianism has affirmed that he only is righteous who doeth righteousness; and, as to the work of Christ, that he lifts men into goodness, instead of saving them from the necessity of goodness; that in him is declared the Divine forgiveness, but always with the added message, go and sin no more; that he did not come bringing a signed and sealed pardon or title deed; that his work was to plant the kingdom of God within men; to kindle in them his own spirit; to touch them with a longing for goodness, an ardent love for men, a consciousness of their Father-God that would make them blossom and bear fruit in all the sweetness and glory of life; that the whole New Testament may be said to be a sublime expansion of this idea,—the growth of the soul into likeness, and at last into absolute oneness, with Christ. Compared with this, how unspeakably poor and degrading is the view that we come into the benefit of his life and death by some mechanical transfer outside of our own character!

5. The fifth is, the persistent and immutable love of God to every soul, whether it be on earth, in heaven, or in hell; and His readiness to save it whenever it shall arise and go to Him with a yearning desire for reconciliation, whether in this state or the next. It is that, instead of sin and misery and woe obtaining an everlasting dominion over millions of God's children, instead of the Infinite One Himself having his throne disputed by the everlasting perpetuity of rebellious evil, the Infinite Goodness will pursue the wandering, the lost, the friendless, the forlorn, and, at last, through whatever ordeal of shame and sorrow and remorse they may have to pass, to whatever "powers that tend the soul to vex and plague it" they may be subjected, will win them to a loving and beautiful obedience; so that by His healing

chastisement God will banish sin and misery from the heart of all His creatures, and from every region of His universe, that He may be All-in-all,—

The one, far-off, divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

What new truth has Unitarianism brought to the people? It is unveiling before the eyes of men the height and depth and length and breadth of these old truths. How is it possible for any one of us to do more than repeat the eternal realities? The spring comes back to us every year, and yet it comes with the charm of a perpetual novelty; and so it is through all the range of human thought. The truths Unitarianism has used its power to revivify are as old as religion.

(1.) The immanence of the Divine Presence in the world, filling all things with Life, Order, and Progress, and in humanity glorifying the human soul by making it the temple of the Living God, was taught by Buddha and Plato, sung by the Psalmist, and uttered richly by the lips of Jesus, who saw God in the sparrow's fall, in the lily's beauty, in the little child's heavenly face, in the mother's tenderness, in the father's care. (2.) The inspiration of the Almighty given, not to Moses, Isaiah, and Paul alone, but to man; not to Judaism and Christianity alone, but in varying degree to all religions, teachers, and churches of every time and race, has been guiding and training the world from the beginning; and yet only now are men one by one confessing that God's revealing spirit has not been confined to the seed of Abraham, nor limited to those who bear the name of Christ. (3.) The essential and inextinguishable divineness of human nature has been felt from the beginning, and yet only now is it becoming powerful and effective in human life. (4.) The obligation of right living has been recognised, and yet our Protestant churches have often presented systems of doctrine which put the essential condition of salvation not in what a man *is*, but in

what he believes or feels, in some operation of the mind, in some emotion that is outside of and apart from the conduct of his daily life ; and only now is it beginning to be realized that Christianity is a call to right living, to honesty, purity, truth, love, and whatever in character is morally lovely. (5.) The depth of the love of God, deeper than the abyss of death, and the breadth of it, encompassing all souls in this life and in all lives to come, has been a thought dear to the human family since the human family in the far-off ages, as Max Müller tells us, lifted their faces to the sky, and prayed, " Our Father, who art in heaven," * and yet even now the churches are almost afraid to believe in the final triumph of God's goodness, the essential need of this age, according to Mr. Baldwin Brown, being a theology the heart's core of which is the Divine love. These great truths, which beneath all varieties of form have been the same, are the essential substance of Unitarianism, and they have been repeated many times over by single voices here and there ; but their still small utterance has been drowned by the multitudinous roar of ecclesiastical councils, synods, and assemblies. We have kept on repeating them, giving to them new forms, making for them new applications, with every day's dawn receiving them anew into our hearts as the best part of our lives. One part of our mission has been, and is, to unbury these old truths, too long interred, and to put into them a new spirit, to give to them a new power, and make a new application of them to all the ways and walks and conduct of our lives.

With what effect? Have we become a great and dominant ecclesiasticism in this country? No. And what matters it that we have not? If you measure religion by splendid and wide-spread organization, what have you to say to the Roman Church? A single truth is mightier than the most perfect and powerful machinery. What have these truths of Unitarianism done for the people of this

* *The Science of Religion*, Third Lecture, " Fraser's Magazine," June, 1870, pp. 703-704.

country? And in no spirit of boasting, but in the spirit of soberness and truth, I maintain that they have reconstructed for the people the theology of this country. They have not reconstructed the theology of the Prayer Book, though Convocation could stand up in the broad light of to-day and permit the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primate of the Established Church of England, to declare, without contradiction then and there, that no one in the assembly believed in the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed. They have not reconstructed the theology of Declarations of Faith from the Congregational Union, though the Declaration passed at the Union in London, in 1877, is significantly silent on the Trinity, on the Infallibility of the Bible, and on Eternal Punishment. They have not reconstructed the theology of Watson's Institutes and Wesley's Sermons, though it is said that in Wesleyan pulpits the doctrine of the total depravity of every new-born babe on its mother's bosom is dropped out, and though it is known that many minds in the Wesleyan Communion are grievously troubled about endless punishment. They have not reconstructed the theology of the Westminster Confession, though the most popular preachers in the three churches of Scotland hold up that document to scorn as a libel on God, and though several ministers of the Scottish Establishment have published a widely-read and heartily welcomed volume of sermons, in which every one of its leading doctrines is put aside as effete. When I say that the truths which are the essence of Unitarianism have reconstructed the theology of the country, I do not mean the theology of the written creeds; but I mean the theology of the leading preaching, and the theology of the popular consciousness. Many are the preachers now in the Evangelical churches, most famous too, to whom a Unitarian can habitually listen with little or no shock to his cherished convictions, because they press views that once were peculiar to him, with an earnestness and an effect which bear witness that these views are mighty in the salva-

tion of souls, and that all redeeming power is not fixed in the machinery of the old evangelical scheme.

Nor is this all. The movement of which Unitarianism forms a part, is manifold. It has reconstructed the moral teaching of popular literature. The ablest religious journals of this country—notably the *Christian World*—are declared to be propagators of something very near akin to Unitarianism, yet the cry does not frighten them into recantation. Confessing defections from the ancient faith, they have gone on farther than they know. You cannot read a journal of note that intimates that it is conducted exactly on the lines of the old theology. Take up the three great monthly reviews—the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Contemporary*, the *Fortnightly*,—read the weeklies—the *Spectator*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Academy*, the *Athenæum*,—and you will find them permeated by sympathies and convictions which have always characterized us, and which a century, nay, half-a-century ago, were ours almost alone. Read the leading journals in the provinces—those especially of Edinburgh and Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool, Sheffield, Birmingham, and Leeds,—and you will not charge me with overstating the case when I say that they are fighting the battles of our time upon maxims, as the bases of civil constitutions and as formulas of practical virtue, which have ever been our ethical principles. The poetry of Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Robert Buchanan, Matthew Arnold, Lewis Morris, Walter Smith, is all in harmony with a liberal theology. The tone of every form of art approves the idea of universal Divine presence, human nobleness, and human brotherhood. The sermons which men will not come to hear in our churches are applauded in Westminster Abbey, and fall like a refreshment upon ears tired of the technicalities of salvation by creed and scheme. There are in England and Scotland whole files of learned, accomplished, and influential ministers who, in their own words and their own way, preach and defend essential Unitarianism with more or

less distinctness. They shun the name, but they cannot shut out, and do not want to shut out, the thoughts included in it. There are more Unitarians—a thousand to one—outside of the Unitarian organization than inside of it; that is, Unitarians essentially, in spirit and in principle, without the name, and without the technicality. In a word, Unitarianism has powerful allies, for literature, poetry, science, the free intellect of the age are almost universally on its side. “Unitarianism,” writes Dr. George Putman, “considered as a lump, is very small; but considered as a leaven, it is vast and omnipresent. As an organism, it is feeble; as an influence, it is irresistible. It is not on account of the superiority of its men, not from any great things they can do, but because it has been their fortune to take up certain great principles which, by their intrinsic divinity and a power of their own, go forth almost unaided, conquering and to conquer, and win their silent victories without any visible assault.”* What, then, if the name went out of existence? What if Unitarianism, as a direct sectarian work, were set aside? What if, as a distinct religious agency, it ceased to be at this moment? “Its essential principles will go on, rising higher and higher towards the ascendant as long as God reigns, and man thinks, and loves, and worships.”

“But,” you say, “you are speaking of what various liberal influences have done in reconstructing the theology of popular preachers, and in broadening the spirit and aim of popular literature. Come back to Unitarianism proper, and tell us what has it done amongst its own people?” Some years ago a man who had been listening to brave words in a lecture-hall about our Unitarian literature, our Unitarian doctrines, our Unitarian history, stood up and said: “Show your men,—that is the real test of theology and of religion.” During the autumn of 1877, while travelling in Scotland, I happened to meet with a minister of the

* *Sermons*, preached in the Church of the First Religious Society, in Roxbury, Mass., U.S.A., p. 133.

Free Church of Scotland. In the course of our conversation he told me, with great earnestness, of the great obligation, the eternal obligation, he was under to the works of Channing, Theodore Parker, and Dr. Martineau. "Much in those works," he said, "I have been hungering and thirsting for, and now I have it I will thank them for it with all my heart when I meet them in heaven. I acknowledge the work they have done for us all, and now," he said, "don't answer this question I put to you, if it is not a fair question. I know it is a delicate question. Here you have a theology which, I confess, impresses me as really a near approach to a true theology; you have a religious statement, which is clearly the simplest statement of the relation between God and man; many of you know how to put it with both clearness and power. *Where are the men it has made?* Tell me this. If it is not a fair question, say so. The men and women who are trained under this faith, are they, on the whole, better men and women than those who grow up under other faiths?" I answered, "You are quite right: of course, that *is* the question. We know it is the test question. 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' and we are willing to meet that question." I said, thinking at the moment of my own district, "If you will go to Manchester or Liverpool, where they know the Unitarians of Lancashire, and go into any manufacturer's or merchant's house, and ask them what credit they would give to a man of whom the only thing they knew was that he had been a steadfast, faithful, and manly supporter of a Unitarian Church for twenty years, you will find that simple fact about him will be considered an ample guarantee of his integrity and rectitude." I tell you that story, because it is a story which shows what is the test that we have got to come to. It is not by the eloquence of our saints, not by the learning of our theologians, not by the brilliancy of our education we are to be judged; it is by the character of our men and women; and when another age comes to pass judgment upon the theology of

to-day, I am not afraid to let it make its determination of Unitarianism by the men and women of the Unitarian churches of this hour.

It may also be judged by its realized and admitted power to produce the work of godliness, to make Christian lives and Christian deaths. We have numerous stories, which none can gainsay, of men and women who were formed by this faith to virtue and holiness. These even the stigma of our name cannot take from us. We have lives as finished, as noble in all the element of Christian heroism as any to be found in the records of the Reformed or Roman churches, names worthy to be joined to those of Melancthon and Baxter, of Borromeo and Xavier. We are able to show instances of every type of Christian philanthropy and Christian piety, not even falling short of literal martyrdom. All that any religious community has tried to realize in the lives of its members we have realized in the lives of some of our brethren. This is not our assertion merely; others acknowledge it. And when any complain of our faith that it is inadequate to the highest style of Christian life, we have the answer at hand in the treasures of our biography. Considering the number of our churches and the duration of their existence, I unfeignedly believe that we could compile as fine a calendar of true saints as any church in Christendom. It is not in the world of letters alone that their labours of love are recorded, but from north to south, from east to west, in the memories of our town and village communities, as those of men and women who, wherever a good work had to be performed in which they were permitted by the intolerance of the sects to bear a part, were always among the foremost. If I am asked to mention names, I commend to you the biographies of Joseph Priestley, Theophilus Lindsey, Lant Carpenter, Joseph Hutton, Newcome and Mrs. Cappe, William Ellery Channing, Henry Ware, Mrs. Henry Ware, C. Follen, F. W. P. Greenwood, O. B. W. Peabody, S. Judd, E. Peabody, F. Parkman, Samuel J. May, J. P. Walker, S. A. Smith,

Theodore Parker, Ezra Stiles Gannett, George Armstrong, Samuel Greg, Edwin Field, John James Tayler, Thomas J. Mumford, Charles T. Brigham, Mary Carpenter, Philip Pearsall Carpenter, George Washington Hosmer. These are a few of those in the light of whose lives we rejoice, yea and will rejoice, as affording impregnable evidence that Unitarianism is not a system of negations, but a channel of Divine life, full of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ from God our Father, quickening a holy spirit in those who receive it with the humility of children.

Another question often put to us is this: What philanthropies have we set on foot for the benefit of the people? I reply (1), the Sunday Schools, for the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, Mrs. Lindsey, and Mrs. Cappe (then Miss Harrison), were in the field picking up the neglected little children some years before good Robert Raikes. I answer (2), the Ragged Schools, for John Pounds was indisputedly the first to set the example of those noble institutions. I answer (3), the Domestic Missions, for Joseph Tuckerman was distinctively and unequivocally a Unitarian. I answer (4), the beneficent modern ambulance society in warfare, for though it was initiated by French officers under Napoleon I., it never entered into practical life till an angel of God, known on this earth as Florence Nightingale, born of Unitarian parents and reared amid Unitarian influences, consecrated her Christ-like being to its service; and the system was organized and carried to its perfection during the American civil war by the Unitarian Rev. Dr. Henry W. Bellows, of New York, and his co-labourers. I answer (5), the Reformatories for criminal boys and girls, for they sprang from the large motherly heart and organizing brain of Mary Carpenter, who also thrice sailed the seas to confer on the women of India the benefits of a freer life and a larger culture. I might add (6), the modern treatment of the blind, the deaf, and the dumb after Dr. Howe's treatment of Laura Bridgman; and (7) of the insane, after the almost superhuman labours of Dorothea

L. Dix, the tale of whose marvellous life, a life given as a ransom for many, has yet to be told.

And what shall I say more? The time would fail me to mention the names of those famous in history for their noble contributions and eminent services to humanity, and the thousands of those less known to fame, whose beautiful lives, like fragrant flowers pressed between the leaves of some sacred volume, have sweetened the whole history of humanity.

These are some of the ripened fruits of Unitarian Christianity. Now, judging the tree by its matured fruits of manhood and womanhood, what must we say of it? Or, to change the figure, judging the school by the scholars it graduates, what shall we say of this Unitarian school of theology?

Surely this is a goodly fellowship. If men and women have any affinity for good company, can you wonder at what the Methodist Father Taylor said? The sailors' brave old chaplain, of Boston, had a personal acquaintance with several of the men and women whom I have mentioned, and when he was asked by some of his bigoted brethren if he thought it possible that any Unitarian could go to heaven, he replied out of his great heart, "Well, if the Unitarians go to the hot place, I think they will change the temperature, and the tide of emigration will turn that way."

But why are all these names of noble men and women brought before you? What of it all? Are there not hundreds and thousands of equally noble souls identified with other orders of faith? Have not our Catholic brethren and our Protestant brethren of all denominations their calendar of saints? Certainly they have, and we rejoice in the fact. We crown them with our benediction. We are kindled by the fellowship of that Spirit which is within and beneath and yet above all creeds, and which alone makes the one universal church. We join hands with the fellow labourers with God of every name, and of no name, in every good way and work. We look for that city of God

the vision of which cheered the heart of Socrates and of Augustine, into which shall be gathered the good of every race, every nation, every tongue, and every time. But I have brought before your minds this bright array of illustrious names, not to advertise a sect, for we are not a sect; not to boast of our fellowship, for this would be a shame; but, rather, that you may be informed of the character of some of the representative people of Unitarian Christianity, and that you may understand more clearly the position of those exclusive ecclesiastical bodies who first elect themselves to the privileges and honours of the Christian Church, and then by their terms of admission exclude such true and noble men and women as I have named.

And out of what have all these philanthropies come? Out of the faith which exalts practical religion above theoretical religion, and makes the principle of active virtue the ground and essence of salvation. It is in harmony here with all the teachings of Jesus, with all the clear teachings of Paul, with the Epistles of James and John, with the elder Scriptures of the Prophets, Psalmists and Proverbs. Sometimes it is objected to our faith that it is *mere morality*. The charge is *blame* only when morality is taken to mean formal and stinted legality, decent and compulsory social virtue, a low prescribed measure of good work. But the charge is *praise* if we consider that morality, as I maintain, means that love which the Apostle commends as the chief of graces. And when virtue means Christian righteousness and Christian brotherhood, when to be good is to be Christ-like, then we may count it all honour that we set before the people personal righteousness as the principal thing. And whatever theologians say against practical personal righteousness and goodness as the very essence of religion, there is no other evidence of religion which the people so readily acknowledge and so universally yield to. A good man in any church gets the approval of reasonable men in all churches. The sober

thought of the most rigid excepts from anathema any heretic who, by his uprightness, his honesty, his benevolence, his true word and his generous deed, has proved himself a true follower of Christ in active reality, whether he accepts or declines the name. Every calendar has many honorary saints in the good men outside of his own communion. Every church has a private door through which it admits such into its society. In insisting, therefore, upon the superiority of goodness and upon character, we have the sympathy of the world with us,—we declare as our gospel for the people what the instinct and wisdom of all the churches endorse.

My final word, therefore, is that what Unitarianism presents to the people is practical Christianity; not any theory or definition of Christianity, not any gush, sentiment, emotion, or rapture about it, but the actual working force of it in the every day lives of men and women. It admits that the Baconian method is as necessary in religion as in science—the method whose sole end and aim is fruit. “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” There is no other way to comprehend religion so clearly. We can put philosophy into high sounding phrases; we can put poetry into fine word painting; we can put imagination into the breathing statue and marvellous picture; but religion must be put first into personal purity and righteousness, and then into clothing the naked, visiting the sick, sheltering the homeless, raising the depressed, giving meat to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. It can be expressed in nothing else. There is no religion until there is a pure heart, the spring of a beneficent life. If any one asks me what Unitarianism for the individual is, I should reply, with all my heart, it is a soul of purity and righteousness, and again a soul of purity and righteousness, and yet again a soul of purity and righteousness. If any one asks me what the relation and the duty of Unitarianism to the people is, I should reply with fervour, it is beneficent action, and again beneficent action, and again beneficent action. That is all

the definition that I care to give. It is living virtue ; it is upright and downright honesty ; it is doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. I would not undertake to define Christianity, except that it is visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping one's self unspotted from the world. No words can contain its fine, illimitable spirit. It can only shine in action. It can be crystallized only in self-sacrifice. Can the dictionary give one the glow of the Alps, the splendour of the ocean, the roar of the pines, the thunder of the cataract? No ; one must see and hear these things in vivid action. So with Christianity. The finest array of words cannot express its subtle glory ; but when we see it in Channing, in Elizabeth Fry, in Florence Nightingale, in Sister Dora, in Francis Xavier, in Henry Martyn, in Thomas Chalmers, in Thomas Guthrie, in Frederick William Robertson, then we know it ; and what is more beautiful and divine ?

Right moral action, the doing of some redemptive service, the choice of the soul towards universal goodness,—this is that masterful, commanding excellence in relation to which there is no controversy. Any motive, any knowledge, any glimpse of the universe in cloud or star that influences one to minister to others, should be made a part of our gospel. Ransack all Bibles and all literatures and all science ; invoke the dead past ; unfold the living present ; flash out sweet pictures of the measureless future, that the world of to-day may grow heroic, noble, and self-sacrificing ; that honour may dwell in the high places of the earth ; that love and purity may shine in happy homes ; that the sick and the poor may be taken care of ; that the wandering may be brought back, and the sorrowful consoled, and the stained cleansed,—no faith can do this so mightily as the faith in God's Fatherhood and man's brotherhood, rooted in the fibres of our being and manifesting itself through the strong heart in fruitful action ; and this is the faith, this is the aim, and this in a large measure is the actual moral achievement of Unitarian Christianity.

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