

CHRISTIANITY AND HISTORY

BY

J. NEVILLE FIGGIS, M.A.

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J. NEVILLE FIGGIS, M.A.

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TO
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PREFACE

THE following pages, are an essay not a treatise. They represent certain reflections which have occurred to the writer in regard to the relations between Christianity and historical enquiry. They do not seek to cover the whole ground. The question of the origins of the Christian faith is only incidentally discussed ; for I have neither the knowledge nor the skill to offer an independent opinion upon the problems of early Christianity. What I have endeavoured to do is to answer certain questions which the historical enquirer may be supposed to put. Why should I study Christianity, except as a matter of religious feeling? What good would it be to me if I did study it? I have tried to shew that no genuine student can fail to study the Christian religion ; and to indicate certain theoretical pitfalls from which it will deliver the pilgrims of the past. I have not discussed the question what Christians have to learn from history, or why they should have regard to its lessons. I have tried to avoid any assumptions about the truth or falsehood of the Christian creed, or the philosophical presuppositions which it implies. There is no theology in the essay. All I have endeavoured to

shew is, that the historical temperament, or whatever you call it, to be genuine must be deeply impregnated with the Christian story; and that the method of ecclesiastical history, as commonly understood (at any rate until very recently) is inadequate and fallacious because it is narrow.

This essay is not designed to make anyone a student of Church History in the sense of Robertson or Perry, but to counteract in the few, who really care for the study of human life in the past, the danger to fly from a subject which seems to many only interesting to clergymen or ritualists. History is not much honoured just now. To a world intoxicated with theories of electrons, and on fire for a knowledge of radium and its meaning, the study of history seems insignificant, purposeless and ignoble. If the true nobility of the story of man is to be restored in the general imagination, we must widen our conception of our task. We must strive to reconstruct, not only the ground plan of the building in which man lived, but the thoughts of his heart while he lived in it, and his "visions and dreams in the night." If this were done men would once more take interest in history. To do this means to pay a very much larger attention than we have done to the shaping ideas of the past. Incomparably the greatest influence among these belongs to Christianity. That is why we are bound to study it.

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J. NEVILLE FIGGIS.

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SUPPOSING that one of "the Martians," depicted by Mr. G. H. Wells in his "War of the Worlds" had conquered the microbes of our atmosphere, instead of succumbing to them, as did all his co-planetary; and supposing that the social and political affairs of earth resumed their normal course, what features would strike our strange visitor most acutely and lead to the keenest enquiry on the part of this spectator, *ex hypothesi* intellectual, observant, and unscrupulous? I think, that Christianity both as a living influence, and as the result of abiding historical forces, would be, if not the sole, at least one of the main objects of his attention and interest. He would find the study of its history necessary if he were to understand the world to-day, and interesting, if he desired an acquaintance with the strangest, the deepest, the rarest and yet also the commonest and most universal of all the activities

of the human spirit. Observe that we postulate mere curiosity and interest in human nature, as a phenomenon, we postulate no sympathy or interest in religious belief as such. For the Martian as described is a being for whom religion is an impossibility and the Christian ideal a subject for laughter. He would naturally pass by our churches, ignore our religious books and newspapers, and regard the denunciation of the advancing tide of infidelity by Bishops and Archdeacons, as a proof that the terrestrials are only still at the lowest rung of the ladder, scaled already by the inhabitants of Mars. Yet none the less such a being could not be long upon earth, before he would be driven to the conclusion that if he desired to understand the civilization of Europe and America, to enter into the meaning of its politics, its literature, its art, and even to appreciate its political geography, there was one subject of which he must strive to make himself a master—the history of Christianity, of the manifold forms which it has assumed, of the strange spell cast by it upon the most practical of the races upon earth, and the still stranger reactions which it has exercised upon politics and culture.

For let us suppose that “the Martian” came to England, and took up the newspapers or

entered into a police-court, what would he find? He would find in all parts of the country the simultaneous prosecution of a large number of persons, of respectable but common-place character and a middling position in life, for refusal to make the usual payment to the rate-collector. He would find that these individuals displayed most of them no other signs of lawlessness beyond this one omission and a desire for the display of indifferent rhetoric despite magisterial veto; that so far from regarding their action as discreditable they claimed for it high merits and a noble name. Moreover he would learn that this so-called "Passive Resistance," while it was ridiculed as insincere by one section of the community, was applauded by others, that meetings and even banquets were held in honour of the sufferers; and that it was the general belief, apart from any question of the merits of the case, that many previous supporters of the present government would change sides at the polling booth on account of the policy which led to these exhibitions. If he were to ask for information as to the meaning of such a sharp division and for the history of the controversy which had produced it, he would be told that it was concerned with the question whether or no the established

church of the country should teach its own children at the public expense. Passive Resisters, he would learn, declared it to be against their conscience to pay for the teaching of a faith in which they did not believe. Nothing would satisfy them but to emulate the achievements of those whom they regarded as their spiritual ancestors, who by a resistance similar in essence, if a trifle more severe in form, had secured to the whole body of their countrymen, that combination of toleration with public order which makes England "the joy of the whole earth" and Englishmen the admiration of one another. He would naturally be led to enquire about these so-called ancestors, and the meaning of "Passive Resistance," a phrase which seems a contradiction in terms. "The Martian" would learn to his surprise, that the existing divisions in English society on the subject of religion draw their origin from certain conflicts of opinions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These arose out of a great religious revolution which, in the opinion of one party, had not been carried far enough. In those days this conflict had even produced a civil war, and that in its desire for religious advancement the nation had sacrificed its sovereign on the scaffold and submitted to a

rule which had every merit but those of tolerance and suitability to the people. During the vicissitudes of this struggle, each side in turn had persecuted the other in a manner rather stupid than severe. These conflicts had left their mark on the whole of English social political life, and had embittered existing differences by adding to them the blood-feud of hereditary animosity. The very name adopted by the persons he had seen in court was borrowed by them in a zeal, more conspicuous for sincerity than erudition,¹ from the controversial phraseology of the Caroline divines; in a word, if the Martian really wanted to understand the difficulties of popular education and its political outcome in the twentieth century, he must learn something of the political and religious history of the past three hundred years, and realise that religious differences were so inwoven with political and so deeply welded into the whole structure of our social life, that it was idle to dream of knowing the latter intelligently without making himself acquainted with the former.

He would then naturally enquire wherein lay the difference between the two religions, the Established and the Non-established, and

¹The proper phrase is "Passive Obedience," not "Passive Resistance."

would be informed that they were not two religions at all, but different ways of apprehending the same religion. On his expressing surprise that adherents of the same faith should be divided by enmities more bitter than is commonly the case even with believers in different gods, he would be told that for the explanation of this fact he would need to know the whole history of politics and religion, since the down-fall of the system in vogue in Western Europe in the middle ages, a system half political and half religious, in which the supremacy among the powers of Europe had been reserved for him, who represented with a humility,—whose disguise was a proof of its sincerity—the Master who had bidden His disciples take no thought for the body what it should eat, or for raiment what they should put on, and that he that would be greatest must be the servant of all. It was in token of this that His Vicar, as he was called, was accustomed to prefix to His official documents the title “slave of the slaves of God,” while at the same time His supporters claimed for Him the prerogative of “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” This system which had at its disposal both the courts of earth and the portals of hell, was

manipulated by a vast body of officials, had developed an elaborate body of law, and was intertwined with the literature, the art, and the thought of the period known as the Middle Ages. But the edifice of mediæval civilization had fallen with a crash some four centuries ago, and though the chapel had been rebuilt on a different plan, the world empire which recognised an ineffectual secular and an effective spiritual head, each the viceregent of a divine but absent king, who had "gone into a far country," had disappeared for ever. Modern controversies are but the echoes of that monumental catastrophe which has affected not merely the religious life of Christians—a matter in which our observer takes no interest—but has changed the face of Europe, has influenced the alliances, altered the boundaries of States, and is above all responsible for that conception of civil authority, which is a part of the atmosphere of the twentieth century.

If the Martian were desirous of knowing something of the meaning of the system which Luther attacked, he would learn that for this purpose, he must go back to the state of Europe another thousand years, and study the relations between the barbarian races who overran the

ancient Roman Empire and the Christian Church which succeeded to its prerogatives. That the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages is "the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned on its grave," is a truth, which when understood, throws light upon the law, the politics, and the culture of the medieval world, and furnishes the best *rationale* of those changes which we call the Reformation. But in order to understand it an arduous enquiry into history is needed, and yet without it neither the past nor the present is really intelligible.

But now suppose our "Martian" to cross the Channel and visit Paris. What would he find there? One of the first books offered for sale would be the speeches of French Prime Ministers on the Associations' Law, prefaced with some passionate eloquence by the most eminent of French *littérateurs*.¹ On his reading the book and asking questions about it, he would be informed, that France was undergoing one of the phases in a struggle that was many centuries old—that between the civil power and the religious orders. He would be told that between these orders and the parish priests, there was a long

¹ *Anatole France.*

standing jealousy, only surpassed by that between the legal profession and the clergy; that in the days of the monarchy, the greatest of these orders had fought many a battle with the Parliament of Paris, and some with the University. What he saw now proceeding on was in fact nothing but the latest—by no means likely to be the last—phase of a conflict, which had been proceeding from the days when Pasquier thundered against the Society of Jesus, and Father Coton won the ear of Marie de Medici. Further, he would probably hear a good deal of discussion about the visit of the French President to the King of Italy, and the protest which it aroused from the Pontiff, who affects to regard that monarch as a usurper of his own legitimate sovereignty. People, he would be told, alarmed at the violence of the Papal protest, couched in terms haughtier and more uncompromising than a headmaster would employ to a fourth-form boy, were speculating as to the possible denunciation of the Concordat. On his begging for enlightenment on the meaning of that term, he would be told that it was an agreement between the greatest of modern conquerors and the Pope, signed a hundred years ago; and that while its immediate

cause was the period of revolutionary tumult to which it put a term; yet its fundamental principles must be sought in the Concordat of Bologna, signed between the last of the Renaissance popes and Francis I. in 1516; and that this again needed for explanation the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges; which itself was an expression of claims of independence, known as the Gallican Liberties, supposed to date from the reign of the sainted crusader, Louis IX., the flower of catholic chivalry and the model of kingly virtue to all succeeding ages.

Can we not imagine the astonishment and perhaps irritation of the "Martian," as he reflected upon public affairs in France or England—nor would the result have been different, had he betaken himself to different countries. "To understand these people he would say, observation alone is quite inadequate. Their words, their acts are alike unintelligible except through a long vista of historical development, which appears to have determined not what any man shall think but what every man shall debate. But this is not all. Regarding religion, as an enlightened being must, as the practical philosophy of undeveloped minds, and its utility as at best a political weapon, I had

thought there would be no need to take account of it, except as a proof of the inferior culture of the terrestrials. Being well aware of our own superiority to the race of earth, I was prepared to view with nothing but a tolerant contempt the uninteresting spectacle of hundreds of persons deliberately wasting their time in the performance of ceremonies, of which the highest praise would be that they were meaningless. This indeed I do find. But I find much more. Such it appears is the Cimmerian twilight of this race of earth, that in order to appreciate their current politics, to put meaning into their overheard discussions in the drawing-room or the railway train, I find it incumbent upon me to pay attention to their religious beliefs and the history of their ecclesiastical institutions. They cannot as I imagined be shut off from the main current of life, and relegated to the dreamer, the partisan, or the iconoclast. I am driven by the mere desire of picturing their life intelligently to enter upon the long and laborious process of a study of the phenomenon of the Christian religion; for I find that whether or no it be the guiding star of the life of these people, it is at any rate the goal of their controversial efforts, and the ground of their most important

groupings of ideas in regard to their politics, their art, and their social life. Indeed, the influence of a fact so utterly incomprehensible to me, as belief in Christianity must ever remain, has so far as I can observe, an importance only equalled in art by the beauty of those edifices, which it is a pity to see were not reared for the transaction of a business more interesting and valuable than that of religion. Driven then by my interest in human life, at the same time that I am repelled by my disdain for religious belief, I sit down to the study of Christianity, as being not the only, but quite certainly the main formative influence which by action and reaction has produced that state of civilization and culture which prevails at the moment in Western Europe, and is, despite all apologies for John Chinaman, the most advanced condition of the human race at present."

He would be right. Anyone who desires from a perfectly outside point of view to come to any tolerable understanding, not merely of the ceremonies, the superstitions, and the creeds of Western Europe, but of the stream and tendency of its politics, the basis of its social aggregations, and the spirit and significance of its culture is compelled, unless he is willing to see the whole thing out of propor-

tion, to take account of Christianity as a fact and to study the historical development and general influence of Christian institutions.

All this, however, is but another way of saying that anyone who desires to secure one of the main advantages which history can give him, must place the Christian religion in the forefront of his enquiries. Many, indeed, are the purposes of historical study, but for the moment we may confine ourselves to two: The object of history is to help us to understand the present by tracing its roots in the past. History seeks to solve the problem: "How human society in its existing form has come to be?" If we are indeed 'the heirs of all the ages,' what is the nature and value of our inheritance? What are the abiding gifts of those that have gone before to us that come after them? This is one side of historical study, and it has been shewn that for this purpose, Christianity must be studied, if we are to gain our end. But there is another. History not only seeks to explain the present, it strives to reproduce the past. It seeks to tell us what the life of the past felt like to the men who lived it. It attempts to answer the question what did men think and how did they act in the past? In

what respect if any, were their motives and aims different from our own? What were the conditions, economic, physical, political under which they lived? What would their world look like if we could see it? What was the aspect of their houses, their markets, their feasts, their courts, their temples? What went on in them?

The historical enquirer seeks to do, what Mr. Morris tries also, to think away the aspect of the moment, and re-imagine one that is gone by.

Forget six counties overhung with smoke ;
 Forget the snorting steam and the piston stroke ;
 Forget the spreading of the hideous town ;
 Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
 And dream of London small and white and clean,
 The clear Thames bordered by the gardens green ;
 Think that below bridge the keen-lapping waves
 Smite some few brigs, that bears Levantine staves
 Florence gold-cloth and Ypres napery
 And cloth of Bruges and hogsheads of Guienne,
 While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
 Moves over bills of lading.

This is what all historians at heart strive to do. The fact indeed is the great justification of that despised person the historical novelist. Men like Scott and Thackeray strove, and on the whole succeeded, in fulfilling a large part of the historian's office. They are not mere romancers. We cannot say that Macaulay is history and Esmond is not.

But the mention of this fact points us a little further. The historian cannot stop at the outward aspect of things. He asks not only how men lived, but how they felt. He seeks to do for the past what Mr. Henry James does for the present, to lay bare the inner world of thought and feeling, of which events are only the occasion and external conditions but the stimulus or the form. The historian must always be trying by such indications, as he has, to reproduce not merely the picture (say) of a mediæval town in all its mingled squalor and beauty, but the mind of the mediæval man with its strange limited horizon, its entrancing wistfulness, its vast and grandiose aspirations? If you were set down in a Cinque Port in the days of Edward I., what would you hear the folk talking about, how much of it would you understand? And if you could speak to the men on the quay, what words or phrases of yours would they respond to and how much would be meaningless? How much would reveal to them that the unexpected had happened, and that what they had looked for had not come about? If you could overhear the conversation of the Canterbury Pilgrims in Chaucer's day,—what would they have been discussing, and in their discus-

sion, what would they have taken for granted, and what arguments would they have used? Would they be the same as we should use on a similar topic, such (say) as the work of the parish priest, or would they be different, and if different, different in what way? Would they have expected the same things of their pastors, or based their expectation on the same grounds as we should, or would their demands and their reasons alike have been different? It is to help us to answer questions of this sort that we study history. Chaucer, indeed, has given us a very good hint of what we should hear on the topic above suggested. We must never forget that books like that of Chaucer or Dante or Virgil in addition to their value as works of art, are of almost untold worth as historical documents.¹ Indeed, many a writer in himself either worthless or pernicious becomes with the lapse of time of great interest, for he helps us to understand the state of things in which he would write in the way he did. "Sandford and Merton," for instance, is a document of uncounted value to anyone who wants to understand the educational ideals of a century ago, and in a couple of centuries even the "Visits

¹ The same is of course the case with styles of architecture, painting and music, to say nothing of fashions in dress and furniture.

of Elizabeth" may be the subject of learned German monographs not complimentary to England.

Thus then in addition to telling us what we owe to the past, history attempts to tell us what the past was in itself apart from any question of what came out of it. We seek both the abiding forces in human life, and also their transient forms. Neither side can be neglected without risk of error. History, which searches in the past for nothing but its influence on the present and the future will be abstract and over much given to généralization. History which seeks merely for

"The touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still"

will lay too much stress on mere colouring, and be apt for illusion by superficial contrasts. We need both sides. From the facts of human life in the past we must seek both the chains of causal connection, which prevents them being a mere heap of pebbles, and also the living thoughts and personal reality which makes them something more than "an unearthly ballet of bloodless categories." In our desire to get from the past, what it has to give us, we must not forget the men and women who gave it. We may ask what they did for us but we must

also ask what they felt and thought themselves. The former of these purposes is the most akin to science, the latter to art. For the former mainly tends to a definite arrangement of facts under certain tendencies, the latter refreshes the mind, weary with the turmoil of existence, with the sense of contrast between our own life and that of our forefathers, and with that touch of serenity and peace that belongs to

“ Old, unhappy, far off things
And battles long ago.”

Now we have reason to believe that for the first of these purposes, there is one fact or group of facts, which, for Europe at least, is more important than any other. We are bound to come to grief in any attempt to win the historical point of view in regard to the present-day world, if we leave Christianity out of account, or even relegate it to a subordinate position ; for it is the most influential of the forces which have made the world what it is. We cannot understand the politics, the education, the art or the architecture of Europe, without studying the institutions which caused them to develop in the way they did. Still less, as we shall find, can we hope without such study to have any true imaginative conception of the life of our forefathers, whether in its external

appearance or its internal development. Yet some people seem to imagine that they can study what is called secular history, and remain ignorant of the greatest historical force the Western world has ever experienced. Now of course a department of it such as the Peninsular or the Crimean War may be studied by a specialist who takes no account of the existence of the Christian religion, and results in a field so severely limited could scarcely be affected by such omission. But if we are seeking answers to the question, what the history of the past has to teach the modern world, such neglect would not merely be an error, but a vital flaw, which would vitiate all our conclusions and lead to hopelessly one-sided and inadequate conceptions. We should be making the same sort of mistake which the late J. R. Green used to ridicule in "the drum and trumpet historian," who wrote almost entirely about kings, and battles and treaties, neglected the whole life of the people, adding sometimes a perfunctory chapter on social life, which only showed how completely he misunderstood the subject.

Our error, however, would be worse than this. The drum and trumpet historian had a case. He could reply :—"All that you say is true enough. It is desirable that the social

and economic development be more fully investigated [as it has been since those days]. But that is not my business. I am not concerned with human life as a whole, but with the state. Men interest me only in so far as they have to do with government. To me, man is not merely a political animal. He is nothing else. While there is a place for the economic and social historian, no less than for those of architecture or painting of literature, it is not my business to consider these things apart from their influence on the organized life of the state. History 'simply and strictly so called' has always been and always will be occupied not with the whole range of human life, but with that part of it which concerns statesmen. This may be a poor subject. Many people think it is. But it is the subject of the historian and everything else comes in only as a *παρεργόν*."

Such an answer might do very fairly for the drum and trumpet historian pleading against the attacks of Green. It would not do for the "secular historian" pleading against the dictum of Lord Acton :

"All understanding of history depends on one's understanding the forces which make it of which religious forces are the most active and the most definite."

Of course this does not mean that there are not branches of ecclesiastical history which may be left to pure specialists. No ordinary student needs to know much of the history of ritual or of the minutiae of theological controversy. He need not learn the structure of the "mass," or the meaning of imputed righteousness and prevenient grace. But on the whole, Christianity as a faith, as an interest, as an institution, enters so largely into the historical development of Europe, that it not only may not be ignored, but for a long time at least it must be treated as the dominant part. To take an instance, the Papacy, whatever its faults, has succeeded in developing the most interesting political institution in the history of the world, and to ignore it or thrust it into an appendix is to misconceive the evolution of a thousand years. The influence of the Papacy on legal ideas is one of the salient facts of history. There is no other single phenomenon which plays so prominent a part, whether as an affluence in politics or as an instrument of culture, as Christianity. We are not concerned with its truth or falsehood, or even with the agreement of any one or other of the numerous forms it has assumed with the teaching and intentions of its founder. We are not even concerned with

the question whether or no its true founder was S. Paul, or Jesus himself, or only a resuscitation of an ancient mythical hero, developed out of the artistic ingenuity of the Hebrew peasant.¹ What we are concerned with is the fact that men believed themselves to be the followers of a certain Hebrew teacher, who met an early death at the hands of ecclesiastical authority ; that around His name they collected a number of stories of a strange and subtle beauty in simplicity and singularly coherent with one another even when they related preternatural occurrences ; that about His person they elaborated a doctrine asserting that He was the Son of God no less than the son of man, and that they believed Him to have revealed to man the truth of his own nature and to have risen from the dead in token that there is a world of spirits beyond ; and not merely to have

¹ Compare Mr. J. M. Robertson's "Pagan Christs." I may say, that one test of capacity to estimate historical evidence appears to me to be the inability to accept such a travesty of criticism as that practised by Mr. Robertson. Whatever critics may decide about some of the facts connected with the life of Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, the theory which dissolves Him into a mere myth is the most hopelessly unhistorical of all, and can only be maintained consistently by one like the late Mr. Johnson, who denies historical reality to at least half of the best known facts of the human story, such as Magna Charta and the Crusades.

shown to the human race the highest, but by His life and even more His death to have wrought its deliverance from that strange disease of the will, known theologically by the name of sin. More than this, men thus bound together by loyalty and affection to a Master whom they regarded as living, were bound also in a special closeness to one another; and hence there arose an organized society of Christians, which after a life and death struggle with the ancient empire became its favourite and its heir. First the enemy and then the favourite of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church ended by becoming its residuary legatee, the means by which its gifts of order and law and culture were impressed upon races vigorous indeed and young, but innocent of discipline and ignorant of the arts of life. This fact, and what naturally resulted from it, determined the course of mediæval history; and for five hundred years *la haute politique* was occupied in attempting to adjust with equity to other interests the vast array of pretensions put forward by the power which, rightly or wrongly, believed itself to represent the eternal order in a world of change, and to speak with the voice of God to the sin-stricken children of men. These facts are not merely an appendix to the

story of human life, they are its dominating feature for a long period in Europe. Even on the the drum and trumpet theory Christian history is probably the most important part of the subject. As we shall see later, the source of all the finer elements of life at this time was Christian. Education, art, architecture, learning, philosophy were pursued by officials of the Church under her ægis ; or by bands of her servants devoted to her interests. It was not an ideal but a fact to speak of the state, or rather, since the very name is a *misnomer*, the secular lords of the middle ages, as performing an executive function in the Church. Of this period it is true, or nearly so, to say that the secular power existed for the purposes of life, the spiritual for the good life. Not merely was the Church of the middle ages a state, it was the state. If we seek even in the writings of a man so modern in spirit as Wyclif for any words with the connotation of our "state," the nearest approximation in *ecclesia*, and that despite the fact that Wyclif emphatically repudiated the theory of the tutelage of the lay power by the ecclesiastical.¹ The

¹ The same is true of an earlier writer on behalf of the secular power, in the struggle between Henry II. and Becket. The object of "Tractatus Eboracensis III." (printed in "Libelli de Lite" vol. iii.) is not to assert the supremacy of the state over the church, but the rightful position of the King as a ruler in the church, the Civitas Dei.

famous words of Burke, that the state is a partnership "in every science and in every art ; in every virtue and in all perfection" are true of no other social union in the Middle Ages but the Catholic Church ; although it may of course be doubted whether they are true even of that. The fact remains that the higher our ideal of the state, the more we are driven to the conclusion that the only body which attempted to fulfil it in the Middle Ages, was the Church. The state of Bentham and the old economists, whose duty is merely a sort of bottle-holder of a perennial prize fight, may possibly be paralleled in a mediæval monarchy, but the mortal god, as conceived by Hegel, the embodied conscience of humanity, directing the citizen to find his true self in obedience to a law which is in the highest sense right can only be found at all in the period from the Sixth to the Fourteenth century, by reading Church instead of state.¹ This was the result of many causes, of which the influence of S. Augustine and the abilities of the Popes were not the least important ; but they all had their opportunity in the fact that

¹The Holy Roman Empire, the actual attempt to realise the Civitas Dei of S. Augustine, though it has its secular side is even then rather the civil embodiment of the Church, than a secular state in the modern sense.

in the Western Church there ruled the spirit of the ancient Empire transmuted indeed and touched to finer issues by the spell of Christianity, but still there—legal, organising, imperial. For everything that was to elevate or to ennoble life, man looked to the Church rather than the State, or if to the latter only as it was inspired by the spiritual power, which “is to the State as soul to body.” In other words, all that lent ideality to human life in society, all that lifted it above the vulgar level of daily needs or bodily security came or was supposed to come from the Church. It represented intellect as against brute force, justice as against violence, beauty as against ugliness, education as against ignorance, culture as against barbarism.¹ We are not saying that this ought to have been the case, or that men were right in dreaming of the Church as the power that added to every department of life

“The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet’s dream.”

But the point is that this was the way they

¹ See John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* for evidence of this. Nothing is more notable than that to this moderate and wide-minded man, the civil power meant nothing but organized violence, and the strong hand and the spiritual the sole security for justice and humanity. Perhaps he had learnt this in the reign of Stephen.

did dream. Only the Pope could found a university. The hospitals, the hotels, the work-houses and the schools of the mediæval world were all alike to be found in religious houses. The churches were at once their theatres, their concert halls, and their picture galleries. We may despise, if we are sufficiently ignorant, the men whose labours have enabled us to dispense with their help. But it cannot be denied that as a general rule to an existence tossed between savagery and a barbaric self-indulgence, in which security was a goal not an achievement, and comfort a far off ideal, it was the Catholic Church that lent such graces and adornments as it was capable of receiving, and alone inspired men with the courage to attack or the consolations to endure the evils and corruptions of a time which only ignorance can represent as idyllic. Only indeed, as the middle ages were passing away does this state of things tend to disappear. It is true to say that the mediæval world comes to an end, so soon and in so far as the secular control of culture succeeds to the ecclesiastical.

But the advocates of "secular" history might say: "Doubtless this is all true,—or at least we are not prepared to deny it. Nobody ever supposed that mediæval history could be

written apart from church history. But this is only one period—the nightmare of the human race. And the historian who deals with the modern world, at least since the close of the thirty years' war, or with ancient history up to the reign of Diocletian, need pay little or no attention to Christianity—at any rate a couple of supplementary chapters would suffice."

But is this true, or is anything like it true? Our opening illustration will afford some grounds for thinking that it is not true. A single week's reading of the newspapers will convince any intelligent person that if he wants to understand many of the most important currents of modern life in Western Europe, he must take into account the Christian religion, and not merely the Christian religion, but the historical development of the Christian Church and the problems to which it has given rise. It is indeed the case that life has become more complex since the fourteenth century, and it is easier to treat every subject departmentally; national states and national religion make universal history more difficult, though they do not make it less important. The mediæval ideal of Western Europe conceived all Catholics as bound together in a single society in the world

polity of the Holy Roman Empire with its twin heads, Emperor and Pope fighting like brothers. So long as this remained even a dream,¹ so long as the Emperors had to swear at their coronation never to make an alliance with the infidel, so long as the whole of European history best treated together, and the Papacy as its central point. That world, however, passed away in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The network of lordships gave way to a number of absolute princes, ruling over strong nations, or at any rate compact territories. The feudal magnate became either a sovereign or a subject. The imperial dignity as a world power was transmuted into an appanage of the House of Hapsburg. The Papacy, for a long time the only effective supreme governor in the Empire, maintained its position for a considerable time. Religious considerations became more, not less, dominant in politics for the hundred and fifty years succeeding the outbreak of the Religious Revolution, but that did not last. The unity of European civilisation may in some respects be greater than it was in the middle ages,

¹ Dante, for instance, though he was strongly opposed to the Papal claims, only proposed to himself (in the *De Monarchia*) to revise the internal arrangements of the *Civitas Dei*; no more than his adversaries did he look forward to a family of frankly secular states co-equal and independent.

but it is less obvious to the historian. For him it is easier to take each nation apart from the rest. It is the last and most difficult result of scholarship to discern the universal aspect of modern history.¹ It is not surprising then, if the same process applies to ecclesiastical as to general history, and it is split into fragments and separated from secular affairs for the past two centuries. But it remains true that even of the eighteenth century, the most secular of all periods, no adequate understanding can be given without going into the history of Christianity. In this, indeed, both the adversaries and defenders of Christianity must be included. The spirit, which ruled in the Revolution, was the main theme of the eighteenth century historian. The eighteenth century, the age of the *aufklärung*, was embodied in Voltaire, perhaps more completely than in any other single man. Yet to understand Voltaire without a knowledge of Christianity or the French Church, is as impossible as it is to talk of the French Revolution without referring to Jean Jacques Rousseau.

If again we look at the Europe of the last century, how can it be considered apart from

¹Cf. An article on Lord Acton at Cambridge by John Pollock in the "Independent Review" for April, 1904.

the romantic movement, of which De Maistre and Newman were the exponents no less than Tieck and Novalis; while as to England alone and to pure politics there is not a Parliament which can be understood without a knowledge of Church History. The struggles over Catholic emancipation, university tests, the admission of Jews and atheists to Parliament, Irish Disestablishment all show how inextricably religious is still bound up with political history. It is worthy of remembrance that the best known of all the cartoons of *Punch* is that which depicts Lord John Russell as the naughty boy chalking up "No Popery" and then running away.

With the most characteristically English institutions it is the same. The laws and liberties of this country owe their preservation to the religious animosities of the seventeenth century. Had not the dissensions of the civil war and the struggle against James II. been stimulated by a strong religious sentiment, there is little doubt that despotism which triumphed everywhere but in Holland would have been victorious even here. We must not allow what happened in England to blind us to its improbability. But for the temporary Gallicanism of Louis XIV., and for the

fortunate bigotry of James II.,¹ it can hardly be conversant with the politics of either Charles II. or Queen Anne,² that monarchy which destroyed constitutionalism everywhere else, must have rendered it impotent even here.

The very ideas of the glorious Revolution and the triumph of limited monarchy in 1689, which have been perhaps more than anything else the gift of England to mankind, cannot be understood without going back to their most able previous expression in what is known as the Conciliar movement of the fifteenth century. There we find much that is distinctive of Whiggism, the treatment of the monarch as the minister of his people, the claim to depose for misgovernment, the belief in a "mixed" or limited government with a balance of powers all proclaimed on the highest ground, that of Divine right and applied not to mere secular lords, but the sovereign of the Church militant and Vicar of Christ.³

With regard to the history of the world before Christ, it may be briefly stated that what will

¹ See on this point Seeley, "Growth of British Policy."

² Cf. Lecky "History of England," chapter I.

³ See a paper of mine, "Politics at the Council of Constance," "Transactions of Royal Hist : Soc., 1899.

be said later, as to the preparation for Christ in history amply justifies the inclusion of it as a part of the Christian view of history ; although of course nobody means that the records of Greek conflicts or Roman conquests need the definite introduction of Christian ideas to explain them. All this will have made clear some at least of the grounds for asserting that nobody who is striving for the historical habit of mind and who desires to view the present and the future by the light of the past can do other than pay a large, though not an exclusive, attention to Christianity. As this is the most important and obvious use of history, and all subjects have now to justify themselves on the score of utility, it has seemed right to dwell thereon at some length.¹

But as we said, this is not by any means the sole ground for which we study history. There are some who desire to escape from the passion and controversies of the hour into an atmosphere which is attractive owing to its very difference from the present, and in the still world of the dead to try and re-imagine the life of the past, and picture to themselves the in-

¹Of course it may be doubted, how far the historical attitude is desirable. Few would maintain that it alone is sufficient for the conduct of life. It is liable to degenerate into conservatism or antiquarianism. Its real dangers are admirably pointed out by Nietzsche "Unzeitgemasse Betrachtungen" I. 2.

fluences which enobled and dignified it. Now when we study history from this point of view and ask what it was that gave to men's lives their highest value, and made them most interesting to themselves, it is even more certainly true that we cannot ignore the Christian religion, than it was in treating of history as the record of the activities that subserve social development. Whether or no Christianity is founded upon truth, whether or no it has made men happier or better, it has indisputably been the influence which has given the highest value to their moments and inspired them with the power to do work which should outlast their personal remembrance. If we seek to know wherein lay the highest aspirations of the thirteenth century, what power it was that pulled out of men more than they thought they had in them, it is only necessary to walk through the aisles of some building, such as York Minster or Rouen Cathedral. Of all the monuments of past ages which have come down to us, none assuredly are so impressive or so significant as those "mystic and massive piles which rise above the roofs of our ancient cities," and speak to us as nothing else can of the deepest longings and dearest thoughts of the unknown architects who planned and the forgotten labourers who reared them.

“All else for which the builders sacrificed all their living interests and aims and achievements has passed away. We know not for what they laboured, and we see no evidence of their reward. Victory, wealth, authority, happiness—all are departed, though bought with many a bitter sacrifice. But of them and of their life and toil upon earth, one reward, one evidence remains to us in those grey heaps of deep-wrought stone. They have taken with them to the grave their powers, their honours and their errors—but they have left us their adoration.”¹

To those foolish and ignorant persons who mass together the history of a thousand years under the contemptuous title of the dark ages, the best answer that may be given is to ask them to contemplate such a building, as Salisbury Cathedral and compare it with Waterloo Station or the Hotel Metropole as the symbols of nineteenth century culture. But if we reflect that these buildings are not like the remains of ancient city castles, or the few relics we have of old city walls, merely a spectacle for the curious, or a problem for the learned, but are still the home of human souls on fire with the love of the highest; that they still breathe from their serene spaces of nave and transept

Ruskin, “The Seven Lamps of Architecture,” p. 28.

the same message of peace amid strife and rest after labour, that their soaring roofs and springing vaults still echo to the old strains of uplifting and self-forgetfulness; assuredly the coldest and most unbelieving observer must feel that, (even should religion be false, and Christianity a dream) it is as a matter of fact that form of dreaming which has had for longest the power to exalt and refine the human spirit and testifies more than anything else to the presence of the abiding amid the transient.

Of course it may be argued that other buildings, such say, as a Greek temple, would awaken the same sentiment. But this is denied. The sense of sublimity indeed may be as great, and the artistic perfection even greater, but it is assuredly the case, that there would be absent that sense of aspiration beyond earth, which is the irresistible attraction of a Gothic building. Indeed, one of the main grounds for studying Christianity is, that to the Western world at least, it alone gives us insight into the characteristic differences of classical and romantic art, and these differences come out most completely in regard to architecture!¹

¹ For this purpose we may take the definitions proposed by Mr. Theodore Watts, that of classical art as "simple representation," romantic as "apparent pictures of unapparent realities."

A visit to a country churchyard would arouse a similar feeling, except that here the sense of sublimity would be less, and that of the unity of the past with the present and the influence of the religious spirit on the common joys and sorrows of life would be heightened. One of the reasons for the slight hold, which Gray's *Elegy*, despite its perfection of form and detail, has upon the average reader is surely this :—The poem does not give utterance to the natural and universal feelings of the human heart in the scene described. Its point of view is snobbish ; and the author is solely concerned to point out what a pity it is that the names of the villagers are unknown to “society” and unregarded of the great world. He implies that they ought to be.

But the churchyard does not awaken this feeling any more than the cottage does, if so much. What it does excite is a sense of reverence for the common faith of many generations, of kinship between the past and the present, the known and the unknown, of trust in the power that proclaims rest to the tired and the sorrowful in all ages, of the continuity and essential community of human life, and of the recognition of it all in the Christian faith and its symbolic expression in outward form. Gray spends the time in

meditating on the difference between "the rustic" and "the polite." The natural thought is assuredly the opposite. A country churchyard teaches more deeply than any creed or preacher, that human life has in it an eternal element, that what binds men together is real, and what separates them is transient and superficial; and that the aspirations, the regrets, and the achievements of the human spirit, diverse in form and in circumstance and in historical setting, are like the goal of its hopes and the source of its abiding peace, essentially and universally the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

If we turn from architecture to painting, we find results not so impressive, yet equally significant. Nowadays it is the complaint of the half-educated, that all the great galleries are filled or nearly filled with pictures illustrating religious subjects, that they are weary of Madonnas, and that the Holy Family, the Crucifixion, the Martyrdom of S. Sebastian are uninteresting both in subject and treatment. Were this criticism as true as it is silly, it would be even more remarkable than it is, that art should have reached its highest, only in contemplation of such subjects. It has taught us the lesson that the idealisation of human life at

its simplest is also its highest. This which is the supreme truth of the teaching of Jesus, is also the noblest discovery of art. For it may be taken as the verdict of all competent judges, that painters as a body have never produced anything approaching to the efforts of Italian genius—even if there be parallel cases of individual excellence. This fact does not indeed prove the truth of Christianity—with which we are not concerned—but its influence with which we are. For it shows that no other theme, but the stories connected with the Incarnation, has yet had the power so to elevate the minds (or string the nerves, if you will) of a large school of workers, not an unaccountable genius, that they have left to posterity a mass of distinguished work, which impresses all but the vulgarest, and has ever fresh lessons for the student and the lover of beauty.

It is perhaps needless to add to these illustrations of the truth, that Christianity as a fact, is the influence which has raised human thought and feeling to its highest power. But it may be mentioned that since the barbarian invasions, no single work has given to the world the impress of reality as the “*Divina Commedia*,” and that since the Reformation no writer for sublimity and mastery of the grand style has

approached the author of "Paradise Lost," and that both these poets were not artists working purely for art's sake, *i.e.*, with no idea beyond the decorative adornment of life, but each had a passionate faith in the importance of righteousness, each though very differently was an ardent Christian, and each was possessed of the tremendous issue offered to the choice of the human will by the conditions of earthly existence.

Music has been called pre-eminently the Christian Art. How far that view is correct as regards its modern developments need not be here discussed. Yet it may be asked of those who know by one who is ignorant, whether in all the wealth of modern compositions, weird and brilliant though it be, there is anything which touches the universal heart so deeply as these familiar strains in which Handel rendered yet more moving the most pathetic passages of Isaiah.

If we turn from the arts and probe a little further into the arcana of the human spirit, we shall find once more that Christian forces have caused man to dive deepest into himself. It is Christianity even more than Philosophy that has caused man to "know himself;" and of all the expressions of the human spirit in its most intimate and isolated self-communings, there are

none that penetrate so profoundly as the Confessions of S. Augustine, the *Pensées* of Pascal, or the *De Imitatione* of Thomas à Kempis. If we compare any of them with the meditations of the great emperor, or the discourses of the greater slave,¹ we cannot but discern in the Christian saints not indeed, intellectual superiority, but a depth of spiritual vision for which elsewhere we seek in vain. Such books are only one among the many evidences—of which the writings of Luther are another—that of all the methods by which man has been made interesting to himself, none is comparable to Christianity. This, again, does not bear directly on the question of its truth. But the historian can but note the fact that neither any other religion nor any non-Christian philosophy, neither love for any art nor the pursuit of any science has made life so well worth living to its adherents as Christianity, and that none has penetrated so profoundly into the “abysmal deeps of personality.” Of all the words attributed to Jesus Christ, none has been more thoroughly borne out by the facts of history than this, “I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” The seeker then, after the thoughts of men in the

¹ Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus.

past and the meaning put upon their deepest experiences, cannot avoid whether or no he dislike it, the duty of treating Christianity as a phenomenon. For none other that he knows, has either elevated human nature to such otherwise undreamed of heights, and none other has so probed into such (before) invisible depths—none has helped the will to soar so far beyond its previous grasp, and none has driven the mind to sink so far beyond its wont in psychological self-knowledge.¹

Having thus shewn, that for the two chief purposes for which history is studied, that of throwing light on the present, and that of re-picturing the past, Christianity forms a very important part of the work of the historical enquirer, we have at the same time indicated the disastrous results of allowing it to be treated as a thing apart. These results are not merely dangerous to the ordinary "profane" historian, who gets an ill-proportioned view of his subject, and a wrong estimate of human life, but they are equally dangerous to the so-called ecclesi-

¹ Cf. The words of Walter Pater on the Monna Lisa. "Set it for a moment beside one of these white, Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty into which the *soul with all its maladies has passed.*"

astical historian, who approaches his material with a mind either bent to some theological prejudice whether defence of truth or anti-theological, or else insufficiently trained in the methods of historical enquiry, and ignorant of the broad lines of social evolution. It was this habit of treating Church History as a thing apart that caused Dr. Hort to say of a certain writer: "He is a very fair specimen of the English ecclesiastical historian, who cannot so much be said to be opposed to truth, as to have no notion that there is such a thing." It may also be added, that some of the vagaries of the wilder school of critics and sociological enquirers are due to their having no other knowledge of historical or literary investigation, but that which is employed for this one special purpose. An acquaintance with the general principles of literary evidence would have prevented such exhibitions, as certain critics have recently treated the world to, and made impossible the history *pour rire* of Mr. J. M. Robertson in his "Pagan Christs."

These errors have another cause in the unconscious bias afforded by the study of pre-historic history. There can, I think, be no doubt that there are two fundamentally different ways of approaching historical documents,

the first, which believes in the probable truth of a story or a tradition, and refuses to discredit the authenticity of a work, until the fact be demonstrated; the second, very prevalent to-day in the study of Christian origins, assume that a story is improbable merely because it exists, and treats every record as guilty of being a fabrication until it is proved to be innocent. These two presuppositions will affect all the conclusions of the enquirer. So far as historical times are concerned, the former is very much more correct than the latter. Unfortunately the training of many of those, who proclaim the incredibility of the early records of Christianity, has resulted in an unconscious bias, derived from a study of savage races or early myths, in which conjectures on all sides are necessary, and the probability is against any custom or name meaning what it is given out to mean. There is all the difference in the world between the temperament which pure historical research generates, and that produced by anthropological theorising. Recent discoveries in Egypt and Crete have shown the value of discredited traditions. The sober historian must always beware of the desire to transmute his material, and remember that the hypercritical attitude of

mind must inevitably lead not merely to the denial of religious stories but of all history.

These extravagances come from the one-sided study of Christian history and literature, and the attempt to isolate from the main stream of human development one of its most important influences. One of the main lessons which the historian should derive from reflection upon the Christian religion is the need for any philosophic treatment of history of considering the development of civilisation as a whole. Isolated subjects no less than separate periods, may, and indeed must be, investigated by different enquirers. But when we are seeking for the light which history throws upon human life we cannot rule out any part of it; we must in fact proclaim that the unity of history is a truth no less in respect of all the activities of human life at a given moment, than it is in respect of all the phases of human life in the relation of present to past. Both of these lessons can be learnt from reflection on the Christian religion. It shows us the absurdity of trying to isolate our conception of history into absolutely separate periods; it shows us the vanity of trying to rule out of our picture of the world of human life any of its chief interests, and the

futility of trying to compensate for this by treating the interests as a separate compartment.¹

What has been already said illustrates the latter of these topics, and has some bearing on the former. It may be well to develop this a little further. Christianity teaches the unity of history more than any other subject. It is the bridge which connects the ancient and modern world. The life of Christ is the watershed that makes the supreme division in history, just as the Incarnation is its profoundest philosophy. Our chronological terminology is justified

¹ It is fair to say that Mr. Robertson professedly writes in the interest of a dogma, the dogma of secularism. He does not profess to be a merely disinterested enquirer. Amid much that is ingenious, and a little that is even valuable—it is for instance very possible that the worship of Mithras has had an influence on the ceremonies and even the phrases of the Christian cult, it would be strange if it had not—Mr. Robertson goes out of his way to declare his suspicion that Montanus was not a historical person. Buddha and Jesus Christ are, it goes without saying, mere figments of the pious imagination. It will only take a few more centuries for an author of a similar temperament to assure us and develop his assurance with superficial plausibility and an array of sceptical argument that Socrates or Peter the Hermit were equally imaginary. The famous "Historic Doubts" of Whately showed how the thing can be done. This whole book, however, is an unconscious tribute to the truth of the main thesis of this essay.

by the fact that history leads up to and down from the story of Jesus.¹

Leads up to it—we must bear this in mind. The life of Jesus is not to the Christian a mere theophany. It is not a vision of the eternal apart from terrestrial conditions. It is the life of a man under the ordinary circumstances of human life at a particular epoch. The language, the illustrations,² the thoughts take the colour, not of our own age or of a northern people, but of the Hebrew people under the Roman yoke. If history is forced to a reverent study of Christianity as a phenomenon, it is study and not mere hagiology to which it is drawn. There is no fact related of Christ, which does not require to be examined, and our knowledge of Him rests on certain documentary evidence and traditions, which must be interrogated like all other historical testimony. But we must not allow

¹ Even if the view that Jesus is unhistorical were adopted, this would still remain true. Only instead of Jesus we should have to put the belief in Him. But since all sane historical criticism has long been agreed on this point, there is no need to do more than indicate the fact, that writers of ability and learning have allowed their bias so to run away with them as to uphold the opposite view.

² It may for instance be regarded, as certain that the illustration of the vine and the vineyard would be replaced by some other, had the life of Christ been spent among a northern nation.

our view of the miraculous to determine unconsciously our view of the genuineness of the documents. The question of miracles can never be decided by evidence alone.¹ No evidence can be strong enough to overcome the presumption against miracles in some minds, while certainly to many in the past the presumption was not a bit stronger than that against any one player having all the trumps in a deal of the cards.

What is essential is that the picture of Christ be really historical, drawn upon grounds of evidence, not from an abstract theory of his person: and placed in the *milieu* in which he lived upon earth, and not treated in isolation by the method of theological or imaginative deduction from scholastic premises. If such be the case with some of the detailed criticisms of the Abbé Loisy—and to the writer they seem very startling—nothing but praise is to be given by all true historical students to his refusal to allow the interpretation of difficult passages, such as the predictions of the second advent, to be decided apart from the known circum-

¹ M. Langlois and Seignobos, in their "Introduction to the study of history," regard it as a fundamental canon of historical criticism that "miracles do not happen." This is to put the cart before the horse, and to lay down before proceeding to the record of experience as a *priori* rule as to what experience must and must not be.

tances of Christ's life by arguments drawn from the Christology of the fourth and fifth centuries. The life of Christ is to be treated as a historical fact, and His mission is to be understood amid the circumstances in which it took place. His influence was able to work just because he came "in the fulness of time." Harnack has recently pointed out the incalculable importance of this truth, which is commonly expressed in the words: "the preparation in history for Christ." Indeed, all the evidence seems to show that the Roman world would have found a new, and perhaps an invigorating, religion had Jesus never lived upon earth. But it would not have been Christianity. No admiration for the ideas which Christianity expresses can do away with the fact that it is a historical religion, that it was developed under historical conditions and took up into itself ideas and usages derived from many sources, raised them to a higher level, and gave them a deeper significance.¹ The most disastrous of all forms of Christian apologetics is that which is so intent upon showing

¹ Supposing, for instance, the image of Jesus as the "Lamb of God," were derived from Mithraism, this in no way militates against the soteriological conception of Christ, for it only concerns the form it assumed.

the unique character of the Christian religion that it tries to treat it in isolation from all others, and thus implicitly denies the claim that it satisfies the universal instincts of humanity. That the Christian Church in its cult, in its organisation, in its theology, assimilated and transmuted notions and usages of many peoples, nations and languages, is a historical fact, and is an objection to the Christian Religion only in the minds of those who confuse origin with significance, and think that what has developed from a simpler state may be judged by the criterion of its earlier form. The true nature of a thing is not what it starts with but what it becomes. Years ago, Mrs. Carlyle said in her pithy way that it did not interest her to know whether or no her grandfather was an oyster, as she certainly was not one herself, a saying which implies the only true method for regarding any historical institution.

Long ago, John Henry Newman saw the fact that Christianity did not develop in isolation, but by assimilation.

“The doctrine of a Trinity is found both in the East, and in the West; so is the ceremony of washing; so is the rite of sacrifice. The doctrine of the Divine Word is Platonic; the doctrine of the Incarnation is Indian; of

a divine kingdom is Judaic; of angels and demons is Magian; the connection of sin with the body is Gnostic; celibacy is known to Bonze and Talapoin; a sacerdotal order is Egyptian; the idea of a new birth is Chinese and Eleusinian; belief in sacramental virtue is Pythagorean; and honours to the dead are a polytheism."

There is nothing alarming in this to the Christian, but it is of great importance to the historian. It demonstrates the unity of history more impressively than any other single phenomenon. "Christianity," said the same writer, "has always been a learned religion,"—by which he did not mean that it only appealed to the learned, but that it cannot be understood adequately apart from the knowledge of previous history and current philosophy. If it points this way, it also points the other—it shews us the true nature of historical changes. They are never changes *in vacuo*, isolated from the normal course of things, yet they are real changes. Christianity is like the householder who brings of his treasure "things new and old," but it makes them all afresh by its own special creative force. Religious teachers, like all workmen, do not create their material, they arrange it. But the result is "a new heaven

and a new earth." Change in history is not the violent irruption of the unexpected; it is the significant entrance of a new spirit. The British Constitution may have been, as Freeman thought, latent in the folk moots of Uri and Unterwalden; but it is not the same thing.

The great reformers of history, whether political or religious are men like Abt Vogler, who had the power,

"Out of three sounds to make not a fourth sound, but a star."

The attempt to explain away Christianity or indeed any other institution or belief, by merely analysing its elements is to make the same error as the man would do who attempted to explain away the appeal of the Sistine Madonna by exhibiting in a series of little pots the exact amount of each material used in painting the picture.

There is little need here to develop elaborately the way in which Christianity took up the old elements of Hebrew religion and Greek culture. It is a familiar story how just at the moment when the Jews had lost all likelihood of regaining their kingdom, they were by their dispersion throughout the Roman Empire, enabled to give and receive impressions upon other races in a way their peculiar characteristics had pre-

vented in the past ; how, at the same time, the genius of Rome, which had destroyed all distinctions of race and state in the interests of universal order, was singularly lacking in ideals, and needed a faith to breathe life into the dry bones of material force. After various other experiments, Christianity on the principles of natural selection was accepted, as the only living power capable of doing this. It was the actual form, in which the *cachet* of the Hebrew people, its genius for religion, paused to influence the Western world. No less was it the form in which Greek thought, while itself transmuted, passed on to the mediæval world. It is probable that just at present the influence of Greek thought on Christian theology is rather over than underrated. But at any rate it is clear that the Christian theology absorbed into itself very much of what was most distinctive in Greek culture, and passed it on to a world which knew no Greek. Until the Renaissance, the Christian Church was the form in which Hebrew and Hellenic ideas reached the Western world, no less than it was the means by which the Roman genius for order and discipline educated the child-races that poured into the Empire. Christianity, in fact, affords

a philosophy of history which even those who dislike it can hardly ignore.

In addition, however, to its lesson of the unity of human life, Christianity teaches us another. It guards us from the danger which besets all those to whom this unity presents itself, of undue systematisation, of attempting to deny the real operation of personal causes. In days when the categories of natural science are apt for employment in other subjects, there is always a risk that history, which as the record of human life ought to be the best preservative against this error, should itself be the victim of it, and the whole development of human affairs represented, as the inevitable outcome of the principles of natural selection or whatever form of mechanical causation be at the moment in fashion. Thus the very subject which looked at with honest and unbiassed eyes, gives the *coup de grâce* to the mechanical theory of the universe, is made by ingenious manipulation and a plausible though superficial method of presentment to minister to the actual mental vice it seemed designed to avoid.

Such works as the late Mr. Buckle's "History of Civilisation in England," or Mr. Spencer's exhibition of what the unhistorical

temperament can do with the facts of history, in his "Political Institutions," may be taken as instances of this. The true principle on which they proceed is that of the continuity of human affairs, and the necessity of studying the *milieu* as well as the man—for even the greatest man will fail to affect the main course of human development, if he be not in some way, whether by sympathy or contrast, fitted for the condition in which he lives; while it is also true, that very large numbers of men let themselves be swayed by their environment, and only a few rise above it by an act of choice. These truths are, as we have already seen, exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ and the history of the Church. We need to study the nation in which Christ lived if we would understand His teaching, His influence, and His death; we need to study the condition of culture, worship, and thought of the early Christian Church if we can appreciate the significance of Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical organisation.¹ As M. Loisy says, we need to supplement to the notion of philosophic relativity, with which from the days of the schoolmen all statements of doctrine must be qualified, the much more modern conception of historical relativity which is only beginning to

be generally apprehended. Moreover, the loud-voiced emphasis and uncritical dogmatism, with which the personal aspect of history was preached by Carlyle and still more by Froude, and the worship of the strong man apart from his morality, provoked a natural reaction on the part of those who saw that history was something more than a stage for the exhibition of individual eccentricities against the background of the passions and interests of the crowd. Besides if it be merely the strong man, like Henry VIII. or Napoleon, whose actions are of such importance, it might be possible to explain history on a purely mechanical theory of things.¹ "He speaks of me as a person, I am not a person I am a thing," said Bonaparte. The writer who in recent years has resuscitated the belief in the strong man, whose philosophy is the (unconscious) but heartfelt inspiration of men such as Jay Gould or Whittaker Wright (to omit any reference to the living) did as a matter of fact develop his theory of the superiority of greatness to morality on the basis of a purely physiological

¹ See an interesting essay by the late Mr. R. H. Hutton, on the "Limits of Free Will in Aspects of Scientific and Religious Thought." It is because much of popular writing ignores these limits, that the pure determinist is able to attract so many votaries.

doctrine. Nietzsche claims to teach only the logical development of Darwinism, considered as a philosophy of life, not merely as a science of natural forms.¹ The true and final refutation of the mechanical theory of life can never be afforded by a contemplation of great military or political conquerors, dealing with material forces by material motives, rating (as Machiavelli bade them) human nature, as essentially bad, *i.e.*, moved only by self-interest and fear. Bismarck or Cavour, Metternich or Richelieu, in so far as they were successful, are not insurmountable obstacles to the naturalist conception of human life.

It is in the great spiritual personalities of the world that lies the final impossibility of accepting a theory which does such violence to ordinary consciousness as the mechanical.² Besides the facts of our own inner life, it is men like Luther, S. Paul, S. Francis of Assisi, John Wesley, Ignatius Loyola, which render impossible to

¹ The same may also be said, though here the reference is of course largely unconscious, of Machiavelli. Of him Nietzsche is really only a modern exponent expansion.

² It can never be too often repeated that the theory of pure determinism declares the whole inner life of man to be a lie, and the involuntary presupposition of all human society and every moral judgment to be a delusion. No religious theory ever was so mistaken as this.

the candid inquirer a conception of history which denies that personality is real. Now, of all these instances there is none which is comparable to that of the life of Christ himself, even apart from the fact that everyone of the others believed himself to have attained his power to work (moral) wonders only by belief in this greatest of all personalities. If Christianity is essentially a historical religion, it is also fundamentally personal. "Der ganze Inhalt der religion, des Leben in Gott, die Vergebung der Sunde, den Trost in Leiden bindet sie an diese Person." This is the dictum of the great German, who despite all limitations and a certain bias against the supernatural, remains one of the supreme historians of the day—Adolf Harnack. "Christianity is not a system of doctrine, not an organisation, not even a church first and foremost. It means a Person—Jesus"—these were the words of another scholar occupying a very different position, dogmatically and ecclesiastically, whose studies had been mainly in a different period, the late Bishop of London. This agreement of two men, who with all their differences were both of them essentially students—*i.e.* seekers after truth—may be taken as illustrative of a fact, which is apparent to every-

one who looks below the surface of theological controversies. Christianity is remarkable for the variety of forms which it has assumed, and its adaptation to very different psychological climates. But amid all the varieties, all the superstitions, all the crimes to which it has given rise one point has always remained fixed at least in the aspirations of its believers, however little their life or some of their doctrines might be consistent therewith—that Christianity means Christ. Loyalty to a person is of its essence, whatever else be an accident.

This is the case, however diverse be the views that are held about the meaning of this loyalty. This it is which unites men so diverse as Harnack, Martineau, Newman and Arnold, and forms a gulf between them and men such as Huxley, Mill, Comte or Carlyle, despite the moral elevation and intellectual passion which distinguishes the latter more than it does very many of those who profess the Christian name. Some, like Dr. Harnack, may hold as in the essay as above quoted that, it is to the general impression which Jesus as the Revealer made that the Christian is bound, and that narratives, like the miraculous birth, or the resurrection story cannot, even if true, be the essence of our faith. Others will regard such

a position as not merely erroneous, but almost a blasphemy.¹ Some, like the Abbé Loisy, will hold that the doctrine of the Incarnation as expressed in the Catholic creeds is a statement of the mysterious truth of the Person of Jesus, in the intellectual forms of an age dominated by the notion of the Divine transcendence and by the methods of Greek philosophy, and that it needs restatement in terms of present day thought and according to the standpoint of modern philosophy which recognises the truth of the Divine immanence. Others will hold the very demand of any restatement as dishonouring to the divine Lord, and that the man who makes it is rather more dangerous than an athiest. Some will teach that Jesus founded a society, which exists to express his will, to teach all nations, mighty to build up, to break down, to destroy, certain of enduring inspiration from his spirit, and in the strength of his promise the pillar and ground of all truth.

¹ "Das Christenthum und die geschichte." Reden and aufsatze. The closing paragraphs of the essay may seem as if the Professor were taking away with one hand what he has given with the other. But a comparison with the essay on "Pagan Christs" will show that this is not the case. Harnack, in the opinion of the writer is far more limited by German academic Protestantism than he imagines; but he is a historian, not a mere theorist, stretching the past on the Procrustean bed of *a priori* anti-religious dogmatism.

Others will assert that the main purpose of his life was to draw man away from all instruments and media of which even the church only claims to be the highest, and to set him upright apart and alone in the presence of the eternal Father. Some will declare that Jesus is to be honoured as above all the Redeemer who bore man's sins upon the cross, and relieved us by an act of self-sacrifice from the penalty which was justly laid upon us. Others will declare that such a view is alike impossible and immoral, that it is dishonouring to the nature of Eternal love, and false to the facts of human experience. Some will see in Jesus the greatest of Socialists, the enemy of all inequalities of wealth and position, who preached a gospel for the poor, and warned off the rich from the kingdom of heaven ; others will see in him a purely spiritual enthusiasm, or an aloofness from earthly concerns, political or social, crying to those who strove to make him a partisan—"who made me a judge or a divider," and brought at last to his death through teaching that "My kingdom is not of this world." But whatever aspect be seized upon, and whatever interpretation of the Person of Jesus be accepted or denied, each claims its authority as being the expression of the mind of Christ, each claims as its ideal of conduct

the hope of pleasing Him. All alike confess that in some unique sense Jesus is the very Christ, the anointed of God, the Redeemer, the Master, the Friend of man, who showed to man what God is and what man may be, and gave to him the means of becoming it—by faith in Him, who was son of God and Son of Man.¹

Now it is this fact that Christianity is so intensely personal a faith that has enabled it to develop so deeply the conception of personality, and to teach man better than any other creed the dignity of himself. But it does more than this. It forms the supreme refutation of the impersonal view of history. We have seen some of the grounds for regarding Christianity as one of the most influential of the forces that have made the world what it is; how it affects all that we do and all that we admire. This it must be borne in mind is true of non-Christians no less than of Christians.

Such a book as that of Mr. Cotter Morrison on "The Service of Man" would have been

¹This is true even of a view so dangerously defective from the ordinary standpoint as that of Dr. Harnack in "Das Wesen des Christenthum." For the purpose of the historian such a view must be treated as merely an expression of Christianity, whatever the theologian may say of it.

an impossibility but for the Christian atmosphere in which the writer had lived. Christianity is in fact so much a part of our world, that one of the difficulties of missions arises from the entanglement of its essential religious truth with a special phase of civilisation, which it is neither possible nor desirable to transplant.

What inferences for historical enquiry are we to draw from the transcendent power which Christianity has shown in the past, that of overcoming all reasonable calculation?

Nothing, for instance, could have been more improbable than the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire. No attempts to show the contrary after the fact will avail to overcome the antecedent impossibility, as it must have seemed to all but the strongest faith. It is the verdict of mere common sense which Agrippa uttered "Paul thou art beside thyself." All the great triumphs of history are spiritual, and all are improbable and even impossible from the standpoint of common sense. All ordinary calculations of probability are based on the assumption that there are no personal or spiritual forces, or at any rate none that can do more than keep the existing ideal of

righteousness in the ascendent. The stock-exchange and the economist only reckon with the normal selfishness of the normal business man in normal conditions. And for a large number of what may be called "short period" values, this calculation is reasonable. But all such calculations are from time to time shown to be based on an inadequate view of human nature, and to ignore the spiritual, *i.e.* the personal element in man. This was the mistake of the Roman curia about the outbreak of the Lutheran revolt. It is the mistake of the historian who attempts to treat all history as if it were inevitably dependent on climate or economic needs, and aims at one day reducing it to a branch of mathematics. Now, Christianity is not the only, but it is the grandest and most moving corrective of this error. Not only does it depend for its original force on the power of personality, so that a non-Christian writer can say :—

“The moral progress of mankind can never

¹ If the reader desires evidence of this in regard to ordinary affairs, let him read Gentz, "Consideration on the Balance of Power in Europe," written in 1806, when Europe was groaning under the Napoleonic empire. It is against the belief in the impossibility of resistance that the writer classes himself. That the victory over Napoleon was the triumph of spiritual forces over material is shown by Seeley in his *Life of Stein*.

cease to be distinctively 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 civilisation, and infusing its beneficent influence into every sphere of thought and action.”

The fact that the greatest of all the formative forces of history was personal is surely a proof that, whatever the justice of Christian belief, no theory of history which attempts to treat personality as the mere resultant of mechanical forces is likely to lead to valid results. For it is not only true of the original force of Christianity, but of the frequent reformations to which it has been subject.

“The organisation of the Church, following the law of organisations, has frequently sought to limit and define the means by which God could be known, the sphere within which He might be worshipped. Such efforts have been termed vain. The individual has always risen to protest against the tyranny of the society. . . . Christianity is always deterio-

¹ Lecky : Rationalism in Europe, 1337.

rating in the hands of the multitude, and is always being restored by the enlightened conscience of the individual.”¹

Both in its conflicts with the world, and its internal development, Christianity witnesses more than any other historical phenomenon, to the truth that personality is a real cause and not merely the meeting point of other forces. It gives the lie to the conscious automaton theory of history, so far, that is, as any record of fact can give it the lie. Facts can always be fitted into the mechanical theory by some ingenious plausibility, provided we are prepared to do violence to all our inner life, and to treat the whole development of our personality as an illusion. The person who has ceased to believe in himself is not likely to be restored by a contemplation of Christianity. But it may arrest the process of disbelief and moral decadence, which is so characteristic of our time; and it will certainly come as a corrective to the force with which the strongest believer in personality, *i.e.* in the humanity of man, will now and then be assailed by the sophistries of

¹Sermon on “Liberty,” by M. Creighton. “The Mind of S. Peter,” 85. The whole sermon is an admirable exposition of the relations of “Christianity” to human history.

science, masquerading as a philosophy.¹ The cardinal difference between human beings, on the side at least of belief, is between those who believe and those who do not believe in human personality. Not merely this; it is the cardinal error in the treatment of history to disregard it. A good deal of the atmosphere of popular thought is in favour of this error; the reaction against the merely dramatic view of history is also in favour of it; the truth, that history is one, and that genius needs conditions to work in may, if not properly understood and guarded, be also a wandering fire which will lure the student into the bypath meadow of impersonal formulae, hard by the stronghold of the Giant Despair, Fatalism. The contemplation of the facts of psychology, so far as the individual is concerned, is the best preservative against this danger.² But an unbiassed study of human history, as a whole, is also a help towards the same end, and of this whole, as we saw, Christianity forms a considerable part. Valuable to the student in many ways, its highest worth

¹ It has often been pointed out that "naturalism" is not science any more than "idealism"; in such writers as Grant Allen it is a special metaphysic or anti-metaphysic which professes to be nothing more than pure science.

² See William James, "The Will to Believe."

perhaps lies in this that it shows to him that "not once nor twice," but through a long history development is not inevitable; that progress is only the law of our being in the sense, that is the true purpose of our life, which it rests with us to realise or to defeat; that the vital truth of our own experience of

The living will that shall endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock

is not belied by reflection and turned into a delusion by science, provided that the reflection be upon all the facts of human life, and science is the ordered arrangement of what we know, and not the *a priori* dogmatism of abstract theorizers.

Connected with, and a consequence of the fact, is it the case that freedom is the child of the Christian Church. If it be true to say that history is the record of the process towards freedom, that the East recognised that one is free, the ancient world that some are free, and the modern that all are free; even though the lesson be imperfectly carried out it is certainly the case that the progress of Christianity is the formal means by which it has been taught. This is not to say that Christianity comes as a programme of political liberty, or that it is incompatible with any one

or other particular form of government. That would be to make a worse mistake than the upholders of the Divine right, of kings a couple of centuries ago. Christianity does not, as such, come to men recommending despotic or aristocratic or democratic government.

What it does do is to assert the principle of the infinite worth of the individual, and of the brotherhood and the duty of mutual service. It asserted these truths and left it to time and circumstance to work them out. It did not destroy slavery, but it made the servile habit of mind impossible, to all who sincerely realised its meaning. It does not attack despotism, but it trains its members to freedom. And this, despite all the many acts of tyranny and crime with which ecclesiastical organisation has been justly charged. No abuse of authority can do away with the fact that liberty is the result of the recognition of the spiritual nature of man. This it is which is the significance of Christian history, and more especially of the conflicts of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It can hardly be said that any of the religious bodies really believed in liberty as we conceive it—but they believed in the transcendent importance of character as moulded by their own religious system. For this reason and this

reason only was it impossible for them to be overcome by the general trend in favour of despotism and the utilitarian arguments of writers like Barclay, who asked whether any suffering caused by a tyrant was equal to that of civil war. The answer is in the negative, and it is only as liberty is seen to have its true ground in the inalienable right of human character to be its best that there ever is or ever will be any adequate defence against the the claim of organisation to consider only efficiency or the desire of administrators to think of order before righteousness. In the actual and direct acquisition of political liberty, it is easy to claim too large a part for the Church; in the indirect and fundamental basis of freedom her part is larger, than even her own representatives have often either known or desired. There is, for instance, no ground whatever for alleging that S. Paul was opposed to slavery or even that he disliked it as a system. Those who strive so to manipulate his language as to prove that he did, do an ill-service to Christianity and the Apostle whom they would turn from a great and successful preacher of spiritual ideas, into a mere futile and ineffectual agitator for political measures. But it is indisputable that S. Paul laid down principles of

which the natural and implied consequence was the abolition of ordinary slavery. That he saw the result is not probable, nor was it needful. The parable of the grain of mustard seed is so familiar that its significance is often forgotten. Its significance is indeed a large part of the lesson that Christianity has to teach the historical enquirer that once a new principle be accepted in human life, it may be left to develop institutions, and philosophy influenced by all the means to hand ; that it is bound to use those means and is certain to do so. It is not circumstances that generate ideas, but ideas that absorb and control external material—or in other words “all things work together for good to them that love God.” No event, no condition, no state, but may subserve the advancement of a great idea. None so alien but it may wrest them to its purpose. None so trivial but it may use it as an instrument. True greatness in human life lies not in the application of principles—it lies in the bringing them into men’s minds, where, of themselves, they will bear fruit. All real originality is an originality of thought and will. So much is, or ought to be, clear to the student of the Christian history, woefully though it has been forgotten by the exponents of ecclesiastical systems. It is the

error of all such men that they confuse the end with the means, the idea with its temporary expression, and the nobility of spiritual force with the mobility of ecclesiastical machinery.

Such are, it seems, to the writer, some of the reflections which in those who seek to master the meaning of historical study, the phenomenon of Christianity is bound to excite. Firstly it demands attention, it cannot be ignored. Secondly it shews us the futility of treating human life in water-tight compartments, or in trying to separate arbitrarily, sacred and secular history. Thirdly, it shews us how, for a long period at least, Christianity was inwoven with the politics, the art, and the thinking of the civilised world, so that without some knowledge of, and even sympathy with this many sided institution, culture, as modern Europe understands it, is impossible. Fourthly, it demonstrates, as nothing else does, the unity of past and present, and shews that, however convenient for temporary purposes may be the hard-and-fast divisions of history they are merely relative and inadequate; above all, it shews the error of judging the whole of human life by a part. On the other hand Christianity is the most impressive of all the social institutions which teach us the fallacious-

ness of the mechanical view of human life ; for again and again in the life both of its founder and its greatest exponents it brings out the importance of personality as a factor in history, and the futility of supposing all events to be the inevitable and unalterable result of the clash of impersonal forces. In this sense—apart from any question of the truth and merits of its theology—Christianity, as a fact, enforces, though it does not demonstrate, the spiritual view of human life, which allows us to say,

I think we are not wholly brain
 Not merely cunning casts in clay
 Magnetic mockeries—not in vain
 Like Paul with beasts I fought with death.

This fact and not any special pre-dilection in favour of a particular political theory is at the basis of the claim, that Christianity has done more than any other influence to bring about freedom because it recognises, and by recognising enhances the dignity and worth of human nature. Finally, its history guards us against the danger inherent in mankind of paying too much regard to machinery and too little to ideas, of mistaking the temporary applications of truth for its eternal reality. On these grounds, it may fairly claim, that those who desire to attain the historical mind, those who

are disinterestedly endeavouring to seek from history its answer to the question what is the best that has been known and thought in the world are (so far as their historical studies are concerned), free to adopt any attitude they please to the system of Christian doctrine or the forms of the Christian organization, but that only at the risk of losing that which they seek, and of acquiring notions false to the whole truth of human life or viewing out of perspective the panorama of human development, can they either ignore the fact of Christianity, or refrain from devoting to it a large, though never an exclusive, attention.

The treatment of Church History as a thing apart is an evil. It plays into the hands of the fanatic, and strengthens the bias of the partisan. It ministers to the superstitions of believers and infidels with impartial noxiousness. It makes the subject dry and technical and denudes it of attractions and utility, for all save the ecclesiastic and the specialist.

A still worse evil however it is to treat of secular history in abstraction from Christianity. The contemplation of the world apart from religious influence tends inevitably to pessimism. History so seen is truly nothing but "the record of the crimes, the follies and the misfortunes of

mankind." It leads to an external view of human life, and promotes an unreal simplicity in our categories of motives. It treats men too much on a level, for to its view are not apparent the finer influences and the higher aims. In the development of human life such an abstract method substitutes anatomy for psychology and seeks to analyse the mechanism and institutions instead of realising the spirit of natural life. Only in so far as we include in our survey the eternal mystery-play of the gospel and its appeal to the human heart, shall we gather hope instead of despair from the spectacle. Only so can we catch the glimpses of romance behind the sordid and squalid representation of greed and selfishness which is too often in the foreground of our picture ; only so is it possible even in the spectacle of shipwrecked nations, and fleeting glories to discern the true dignity of man's destiny and the splendour of his undying aspirations, for only so through the twilight of social insincerities and individual iniquities shall there dawn for the patient watcher the vision and the wonder of the past.

The lesson of history to the patient seeker after truth, is when all is said, one and the same with the supreme message of the gospel.

The picture of human life in the past tends to produce weariness and despair, except in so far as it be illuminated by Hope and transfigured by Love.

THE END.

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