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CHRISTIANITY.

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THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY.

BEING

A Lecture

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SUNDAY LECTURE SOCIETY,

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BY

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SYLLABUS.

The development of human culture from a general historical point of view.

Our modern method of studying.

The Free-Thinkers of England, France, and Germany.

Evolution.

Myths and Miracles.

Astronomy, Geology, and Zoology.

Chemistry and Archæology.

Cosmogony, Gœthe, Alexander von Humboldt, Darwin.

Comparative Philology, Mythology, and Religion.

Comparative General History and Politics.

Emotion and Reason.

Art and Science.

Biology and Sociology.

Dr. Strauss, Biblical Criticism.

Agnosticism and Atheism.

The future of Christianity.

Conclusion.

CHRISTIANITY.

IV.

Emotion and Reason. Art and Science. Common Sense and Theology. The attainment of a perfect balance between the static (moral), and the dynamic (intellectual) forces working in Humanity. The future of Christianity.

THAT Christianity had an historical development I endeavoured to show in my three previous lectures. Pure Christianity, based on the unalloyed principles of its founder, was sadly changed, and dogmatic Christianity, with its admixture of Hebraism and Heathenism, remained stationary for a time. Its assumed spiritual authority was entirely devoted to a one-sided culture of emotional credulity in man, and with very few isolated exceptions in single individuals, it failed to keep pace with the suddenly aroused scientific tendencies of the seventeenth century.

In considering the development of humanity from a general historical point of view, we must necessarily become conscious of the fact that religion played a prominent part in the destinies of mankind.

In modern times we have learnt to combine facts, to draw analogies, and to decipher allegories. We point out similarities, ignore incongruities, trace affinities, and have thus succeeded in establishing, through a more logical treatment of our emotional (religious), and reasoning (scientific) faculties, a "oneness" and "sameness" in the most discordant moral and philosophical systems. Man in history had invariably to pass through certain stages of culture, which can be as clearly defined as the different geological strata in the formation of the earth's crust.

All was separation and isolation with the Orientals, as I endeavoured to prove in my former lectures. Their mystic symbolism exclusively occupied itself with the "One," the Monothêos, the "Nuk pu Nuk," the "I am I," the Javeh, the Brahmă. This mystic first cause was symbolized or personified in clay, stone,

marble, in *concreto*, or as with the Jews in *abstracto*, as an elderly human Being, whose actions were assumed to be arbitrary, cruel, jealous, revengeful, despotic, and full of wrath. The glance of his eyes was lightning; his voice was thunder. Fire and water were the paternal means which he used to correct, and punish his sinful, trembling, and crouching children. To terrify and horrify was his aim. This false conception of the Deity had its origin in a gross ignorance of the phenomena of nature, as I showed in my lecture "On Natural Phenomena and their Influence on Different Religious Systems" (1873). This ignorance was first dispersed by the Greeks, who, through their religious combinations and mythological conceptions in poetry and art, deprived the hideous divine phantoms of the East of their revolting attributes. The Greeks had a far purer notion of the abstract powers of the Deity, and of the phenomena of nature, which they personified as beautiful concrete gods and goddesses. They thus succeeded in blending the Divine with the Human, making their gods more humane, and raising men towards the Divine. This harmonious union between the universal or divine, and the special or human, is the most important feature in Greek thought.

During the mythical period, the natural causes of cosmical phenomena being unknown, they were assumed to be miracles, and miracles were transferred to the incidents of everyday life in a thousand different forms. This tendency still exists, as a survival of those times, amongst our prejudiced and untutored believers, or, as they prefer calling themselves, "religious people." The "mythical" was followed by a "symbolic" period, which again changed into a period of confused "dogmatism." The leaders of the people, the priests or religious teachers, and their subordinates, the kings and lay rulers, did not strive to promote knowledge or truth, but for thousands of years worked upon certain phenomena in politics, religion, and science, as the hidden, though sometimes revealed, mysteries of a God or several gods, or of some wicked and diabolical power, and they strove by sacrificial performances and prescribed prayers to appease the former, or to conquer and pacify the latter.

A similar change took place in the simple teachings of Christ, which were made wholly unintelligible by means of a complicated theological and dogmatic system, borrowed from the ancient heathen priests, and often directly opposed to the fundamental principles of true ethics.

With the Seventeenth Century a new impetus was given to the

intellectual development of humanity through the revival of the study of the ancient classics on their own general, moral, and scientific merits, and the study of nature inaugurated by Francis Lord BACON (1560-1626). This advance was followed up by the inquiring intellects of the world, and the "theological" age had to yield to a "philosophically speculative," and this again to a "purely scientific" age, in which our knowledge of the marvellous properties of matter has been increased to such an extent that we are in danger of assuming, that we ought to shun all speculation as vain word juggling, restrict our researches exclusively to mere matter, looking upon philosophy, art, history and religion (in the ethical meaning of the word), as so much idle and useless waste of time.

The mental condition of humanity, fostered by this realistic one-sidedness, is, however, far less perilous than that engendered by an exclusive culture of the emotional and ideal, for the ignorant masses have been, and are always much more easily led by abstract speculations than by a hard study of facts, and their causes and effects. It is not without a terrible struggle that man will give up supernatural authorities, petrified into mental idols, which save him all the trouble of inquiry, ratiocination, and investigation. What Bacon began in philosophy, "was afterwards carried into politics by Cromwell;" and "during that very generation was enforced in theology by Chillingworth, Owen, and Hales; in metaphysics by Hobbes and Glanvil; and in the theory of government by Harrington, Sidney, and Locke."* The transition from blind credulity into violent scepticism may best be studied in the writings of Sir Thomas BROWN (1606-1682). In his "Religio Medici," published about 1633, he shares in all the vagaries of religious obscurantism. He professes his firm belief in spirits, tutelary angels, predestination, palmistry, and witches, and even goes so far as to say that those who deny the existence of witches "are not merely infidels, but atheists." He loves to keep the road in divinity. He follows the great wheel of the church, by which he moves. He has no gap for heresy, schisms, or errors of which he "has no taint or tincture." And yet we may trace in this work a mighty undercurrent of scepticism. The book was translated into French, German, Italian, and Dutch, and produced more than

* See "History of Civilization in England," by H. T. Buckle, vol. i., p. 333. London, 1858.

thirty independent works on the religion of soldiers, lawyers, noblemen, princes, bookworms, laymen, stoics, clergymen, philosophers, gentiles, and churchmen.

Only thirteen years after the publication of this apparently orthodox work, the same author published his still more celebrated "Inquiries into Vulgar and Common Errors." His faith in the infallibility of dogmatism, witches, and the philosopher's stone had disappeared as if by magic. He clearly and sharply pointed out that the two great pillars of truth "are experience and solid reason." "Adherence to authority," "neglect of inquiry," and "credulity," he set down as the main causes of error. He exposed some of the innumerable blunders of the Fathers, and to his influence may be ascribed the fact that Christians began to doubt, to inquire, to discover, and to seek to establish a correct and well-balanced union between empiricism and speculative philosophy, for the two are so closely allied that only a culture of both has produced our most modern unparalleled advance in sciences. It was Sir Isaac NEWTON (1642-1727) who, through the mystic word "gravitation," solved many unintelligible phenomena of the visible world in space and time. He did away with isolation in the material world by showing that cosmical bodies acted on other cosmical bodies, and that the minutest particles composing these bodies were all subject to immutable laws of combination and dissolution.

Why should these laws not apply equally to the variegated phenomena in plants and animals, and finally be found in man's historical development? Up to the Seventeenth Century, in spite of Greek philosophers and Roman orators,—Christian Casuists, miracle-mongers, and inspired emotionalists, Jewish Rabbis, Talmudists and Cabalists, learned mediæval Realists and Nominalists, Roman Catholics, Inquisitors, and Protestant witch-finders, Calvinists and Methodists, had continually confounded cause and effect, and pandered to credulity, prejudice, and mere authoritative assumptions, based on misunderstood and unexplained facts. John LOCKE (1632-1704) broke the spell, and showed humanity that we can know nothing beyond what our senses can grasp. Impressions, sensations (or emotions), and consciousness, are the only gates, windows, openings, and crevices, through which the dark night of our intellect may receive some rays of knowledge. From the times of the patriarchal beginnings of man's social condition, the efforts of all priesthoods have been directed to taking

possession of this earth, whilst creating somewhere in infinite space a more glorious abode for those who blindly followed their dictates. Through the whole sanguinary period of mediæval feudalism, during the Reformation, and down to our own times, all sorts of means were used to create false impressions, which produced corresponding false sensations or emotions, and having once become conscious of them, we cherished, fostered, propagated, and left them as sacred inheritances to future generations, thus sadly hindering, preventing, and retarding man's progressive culture. Single phrases, often single words, kept up false knowledge and credulity, and all this was done under the mystic pretext of religion which often showed itself to be the greatest irreligion, especially from a Christian point of view.

One of the greatest fallacies, blocking the path of inquiry, was the assumption that a thing must be true, because millions and millions believed in it. The question how, and in what way did these millions come to take some prejudice, some ignorant assertion for truth, was not even thought of, and never inquired into. "Credulity, however widespread, is no proof of truth," said Locke; and he went further, and insisted that "even revelation ought to stand the test of reason," and that "fanaticism was no criterion for the divine origin of any creed." Locke thus broke still more with the old traditional authorities in Philosophy and Theology. BASEDOW (1723-1790), in Germany, worked out a systematic method of education by means of "object lessons," without any intermixture of texts, or sentimental tales about sickly boys and girls who became little angels, playing endless hymns on harps that never required tuning. Before children became sectarians they were to be trained to be good, intellectual, and useful human beings, thinking, inventing, and arguing for themselves. Through the efforts of our liberal government we have, in most recent times, introduced the same system by rooting out denomination-ism in our Board Schools; and these unsectarian schools are sure to become the foundation of that broader Religiousness which was already dreamt of by the great philosopher SPINOZA (1632-1677), who opposed the priests of every nation, sect, or denomination as fostering hatred, and transforming synagogues, mosques, temples, churches, and chapels into mock-stages on which dogmatists were heard, "who did not care to instruct the people, but rather to excite their admiration, and to condemn publicly those who held different opinions, and to preach only what was new, in-

comprehensible, and most delighted the crowd." We have still many survivals of this species of "prædicatores" amongst us, industriously spreading "odium theologicum." If these prædicatores "possessed but one spark of the Divine light they would not be so senselessly proud, and would learn to worship God more wisely; and, instead of distinguishing themselves by hatred, would foster love towards everyone." For such ideas Spinoza was stamped an atheist—though he was one of the most pious Philosophers.

We may look upon the Seventeenth Century as a transition period during which a wholesome reaction against some of the most objectionable teachings of Luther and Calvin set in. Both repudiated "good works." The one declared them "mortal sins;" the other went not so far, but asserted "that God pays no attention to good works;" whilst some divines in England insisted "that works done before the grace of Christ, are not only not pleasant to God, but have the nature of sin." In 1618 (after Bacon had published his "Novum Organum") the Calvinist synod had the audacity to proclaim "that morality had nothing to do with justification." This teaching culminated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, asserting "that God has chosen those of mankind that are predestinated into life before the foundation of the world was laid, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, and that the rest of mankind God was pleased to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sins, to the praise of his glorious justice."

Horrified at these monstrous assertions, which trampled all moral laws under foot, the Eighteenth Century was ushered in by a long row of independent thinkers, who could only have been produced by a correct understanding of the truly moral in Christianity. The "Patres majorum gentium" of Free-thought, pure reasoning, and logical criticism began to proclaim the modern "gospel of common sense," and to turn the scapegoat of dogmatism into the wilderness, burdened with the dark sins of ignorance and superstition.

These "Fathers of free thought" were all Englishmen—their ideas were transcribed into French and German, and their homilies, essays, sermons, epistles, and commentaries, form the very elements of that progressive intellectual air which we are now allowed to breathe, without being compelled to filter it through a theological respirator. At their head stood the Earl of SHAFTESBURY (1671–1713), one of those independent thinkers so often found in the

ranks of the English aristocracy. The glorious spirit that inspired the Chandos on the battle-field, has never left some of the nobles of England on the subtle fighting-ground of advanced thought and free inquiry. Shaftesbury's works were to a certain degree the revival of the ideas of Plato, tempered by the notions of Aristotle, modified by an interval of more than 2,000 years, and transcribed into practical, plain English. To Shaftesbury "the world existed in all her glory and beauty through eternally contrasting, acting and reacting forces that formed a marvellous picture of light and shade." Life around us consisted of an everlasting change of matter. Plants died away, to foster with their death the life of animals and men; and animals and men died, to give life to plants in their turn. The air that surrounded us, the vapours that rose from the water, the meteors that shot above our heads, all followed their laws, and contributed to the preservation of the whole.

Next to Shaftesbury stood TOLAND (1670-1722), whose most important work, amongst many others,* was "Christianity not Mysterious" (1696). Though the book gave great offence, it was one of the most remarkable signs of the times, foreshadowing a treatment of Christianity which, after a lapse of nearly two centuries, is undoubtedly becoming more and more general.

The tendency to keep up mysticism is certainly on the wane. Astronomy has lost none of its importance or truthfulness because we have substituted the heliocentric theory for the geocentric, or because we no longer assume that the 365 days of the year are presided over by so many guardian saints, some of them of a rather doubtful character. The animal kingdom has not been deprived of its marvels, nor have public morals deteriorated, because we now know that Moses, in spite of his inspiration, was not deeply versed in zoology or geology. The sun has lost nothing of his splendour, because we are convinced that he is no Divine charioteer, driving across the heavens in a fiery chariot, drawn by four horses. Nor has the earth been degraded, because in opposition to inspired geography, it has been proved to be spherical in form, and not square or flat. Our moral sense has not suffered, even though we have learnt through chemistry that there are more than four elements. Are the master-works of art less glorious because through a correct knowledge of archæology we are able to trace in

* "Abeïsidæmon," "Nazarenus," "Tetradynamus," and "Pantheisticon," works scarcely known even by name in our educational establishments.

them a gradual and slow development from the most primitive stone weapons and pottery of pre-historic times?

Have religions been deprived of their moral grandeur and the Creator of His omnipotence, because we are convinced, as was already COLLINS (1676-1729), that "all religions were everywhere at first natural and simple, plain and intelligible"? Sir William JONES (Diss. vi. on the Persians) confirms the views of Collins, for he says: "The primeval religion of Irân, on the authorities adduced by Monsani Fârû, was that which Newton calls the oldest (and it may justly be called the noblest) of all religions; a firm belief that 'one supreme God made the world by His power' (acting on matter through motion, and thus producing all the different phenomena in the universe); continually governed it by His providence (manifesting itself as immutable law of causation: same cause producing the same effect); a pious fear, love, and adoration of Him (which can be best effected in reverential silence, and a deep study of His direct works in nature, or in the works of art and science made by the instrumentality of man); and due reverence for parents and aged persons; a fraternal affection for the whole human species; and a compassionate tenderness even for the brute creation. But like every other religion its simplicity was changed." "Myths and fables were added," as Collins says; "sacrifices, whether real or typical, were introduced which had to be paid for; the priests grew wealthy and fat, and the people became poor and lean." What we want in modern times is not exactly to invert the relation of leanness and fatness between people and priests, but in a true Christian sense to give only such hire to the labourer as he is worthy of. Would religion lose anything of its moral efficacy, if we were to assume with Dr. Matthew TYNDAL (1657-1733) that "Christianity is as old as the Creation," instead of having myths and miracles of our own, whilst constantly discrediting the myths and miracles of others? Would it not be far more reasonable to assume that the moral laws of Christianity must have existed from eternity, "as God acts (and has acted) in conformity to the Reason and Nature of things," and has never contradicted Himself by entering into old or new covenants with certain people, neglecting others? Dogmatically, only the chosen people and believers in certain "formulæ" are to be saved. According to the Romans "the welfare, or rather safety, of the Republic (of course of their own Republic, to the detriment and destruction of all the other surrounding States), was the foundation of all

morals ;" whilst Tyndal proclaimed "the good of the people to be the supreme law."

William WOLLASTON (1659-1724), more than 150 years ago, endeavoured to improve the religious feelings of the masses. He demanded that instead of being based on unintelligible dogmas, the whole of our State organization should have for its firm foundation the Triad: "Reason, Truth, and Happiness." His celebrated work, which appeared under the title of "The Religion of Nature Delineated," and the principles laid down in it are still applicable to the burning questions that agitate our own times. The demand for the disestablishment of the Church, and its separation from the State, as well as the refusal of the masses in Germany, Belgium, France, and Italy to leave education exclusively in the hands of the clergy, are natural out-growths of that intellectual movement which was inaugurated in England, and which, after an apparent inactivity of more than a century and a half, begins anew to disturb the dogmatic slumber of our stationary believers.

In studying the writings of MANDEVILLE(?—1733), and the accusations which theological charity hurled against him, we may learn that a free-thinker may be a far better Christian than those who throw their sharp missiles of abuse at him. Mandeville published in 1714 a poem under the title of "The Grumbling Hive, or Knaves Turned Honest," and re-published the same in 1723 under the title of "The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices made Public Benefits; with an Essay on Charity and Charity Schools, and a Search into the Nature of Society." One hundred and fifty-nine years ago a keen and honest writer, in a truly prophetic spirit, already exposed our present workhouses and their shortcomings; our charities and their atrocious uncharitableness; our hospitals, where a patient may hear an abundance of cant, but can never be sure that when a pious sister is engaged in meditation on the salvation of her soul, she may not make a mistake, and give him poison instead of quinine; our charity and industrial schools, where pious masters and mistresses flog the children of the poor almost to death, stint them in food, and leave them in the most revolting ignorance, consoling them with some reflections on the wickedness of poverty. As to the "Nature of our Society," we need only glance superficially over our so-called "Society papers," to convince ourselves that even if orthodox Theology, under the banner of dogmatism, may have regained the ground lost in the

Eighteenth Century, true practical Christianity has been left where it was 160 years ago. Mandeville was especially accused of having collected all the false notions of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Bayle; of having openly blasphemed, and denied the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity. He was further charged with having endeavoured to revive the Arian Heresy, with believing in Fate, and denying Providence; with attempting to undermine the order and discipline of the Church; with maliciously and falsely decrying the Universities, in order to prevent them from instructing youth in the Christian religion; and with recommending luxury, avarice, pride, and all the vices, as necessary to public welfare. Mandeville committed none of all these grave crimes. He showed that in the highly artificial society of his times, gross selfishness and unscrupulous egotism prospered—exactly as in our own day—that knavery and flattery could boast of success, whilst honesty and straightforwardness did not always bear out the modern theory of the survival of the fittest. This accusation can, however, no longer be advanced against the majority of our people, who, in opposition to dogmatism and social flunkeyism, have fortunately begun to free themselves from the fetters of prejudice, forged on the anvil of ignorance by dialectical blacksmiths.

Mandeville asserted further that falsehood, hypocrisy and crime ruled supreme, if their votaries could only succeed in making money. Money is still a very great factor in our social organization. In no direction are the enactments of Christ more discarded and ignored than in the paths of money-making. That all sorts of falsehoods are often propounded, that hypocrisy is made use of, that even crimes against widows and orphans, who are robbed of all they possess, are committed for the purpose of making money, cannot be denied. Let a statistical compiler collect the sums of money that have been extorted under the false pretence of “life and insurance companies,” “co-operative stores,” “commercial, railway, navigation, canal, building, and mining companies and societies,” and we shall find that the longing for turning an honest penny with Pecksniffian hypocrisy into a dishonest pound, is far from being extinguished. On the other hand, we must admit that our honest manufacturers, merchants, traders, and working men have on the whole become convinced that the opinion a man holds about “the colour of the beatitude,” “the efficacy of grace,” or “the power of election” has very little to do with his merchandise or his productions. It is the distinguishing feature of progressive

Christianity that it has step by step given up wild hatred and frantic religious "boycotting," the merciless torturing and burning of so-called heretics, the drowning and hanging of witches, Nonconformists, Papists, Latitudinarians, and Socinians. It has changed the cruel "Act of Uniformity" into an "Edict of Tolerance," emancipated Dissenters, Papists, and Jews, and will finally permit every one to be saved according to his own light. Bronze and marble statues are now erected to John Huss, Giordano Bruno, and Savonarola, who were burnt alive by the very ancestors of those who now, with truer Christian feelings, honour the memory of these fearless martyrs of free-thought. Christians at last have extended equal rights to their most hostile religious antagonists. We have public officials of many various religious creeds. Unitarians, Jews, Papists, and Nonconformists sit on the benches of our highest Courts of Justice. In this broadness of tolerance lies the power of Christianity, and all those who attempt to diminish this equalization of humanity, are men without any higher principles.

MORGAN (?—1743) felt all this more than 150 years ago. The religion of pure reason alone was divine with him. Discussions on the parabolical or symbolical, the typical or mystical, or anything remote from human understanding, he treated with the utmost contempt. The salvation of persons "elected" could never be attained, save by their own individual moral exertions.

Thomas CHUBB (1697—1747) was more systematic than any of his predecessors. He must be considered the very founder of a regulated system of secular Christianity, which is still looked upon as very heretical in certain quarters. Chubb was "the partner of a tallow-chandler," and, no historian can deny, that he kindled a fiery torch of enlightenment which spread tolerance and freedom not only throughout all the classes of English society, but extended its rays to the mighty philosophers of France and Germany, and the entire Continent. He could not see the necessity of mysticism; his brain was not made for senseless impressions, producing dim and inexplicable emotions. He wished to honour the "Father," in asserting His supremacy; he opposed the immoral doctrine of "Predestination," destroying in man all his moral responsibility; he controverted the degrading assumption of "original sin," and contradicted the equally pernicious doctrine, that "man was naturally incapable of doing anything good."

The last, and by far the most celebrated of these English Fathers

of Free-thought, was the witty and learned Viscount BOLINGBROKE (1672-1751), the contemporary of Vico in Italy, and the fore-runner of Herder in Germany and Voltaire in France. His "Letters on the Study and Use of History," published for the first time in 1735, have become the corner-stone of that broad, ever-widening edifice of modern culture, in which all branches of arts and sciences are cultivated on entirely different principles. In accordance with Bolingbroke's teachings, history became, and is, and must continue to be, the most important branch of education. We must fight on for political freedom, but at the same time not allow ourselves to be fettered by dogmatism, otherwise our so-called freedom will prove a delusion. What is the use of our being free to grumble at a half-penny tax, when we are forbidden to compare one religion with another; when we are socially (and social tyranny is far worse than any other autocracy) bound to believe dates which we know must be wrong, or a cosmogony which is certainly contrary to the very laws which God teaches us in His Nature. Why should we not be permitted to draw analogies between the mythological and religious systems of different nations? Some persons consider that it poisons the mind of the people to tell them that Zerdusht (Zoroaster), long before Confucius, said, "Hold it not meet to do unto others what thou wouldest not have done to thyself;" and that Confucius, nearly 500 years before Christ exhorted his disciples "to do to another what you would he should do unto you; and not do unto another what you would not should be done unto you"; adding the memorable words, "Thou only needest this law alone, it is the foundation and principle of all the rest." Is telling the truth poison to the mind? Are we to be allowed to state truth only so far as it may suit the distorters of all history; and must we store our minds with crude undigested facts and sentences, with fables and myths, with improbabilities and impossibilities; are we not to be allowed to awaken in ourselves and others the latent energy of reason, and to find out a connection between cause and effect? Bolingbroke already scorned the idea of filling our brains with assumptions and details; with facts that never happened; with oracular sayings that have generally been written down long after the facts predicted had occurred. The ponderous works of Scaliger, Bochart, Petavius, Usher, and even of Marsham, were robbed of their dim halo of authority. These writers, like the generality of theological arguers, did not write to find out facts in their possible or probable

truthfulness, but continually practised deception, to prove, that what they assumed and believed to have happened, must have occurred. It is of little avail to connect disjointed passages, to use fantastic similitudes of sounds, in order to prop up some preconceived historical system. Egyptology, Assyriology; the decyphering of hieroglyphs and cuneiform inscriptions, have on all sides helped us to unmask the pompous dignitaries of stationary learning, however loudly the survivals of by-gone scholastic systems may clamour. For nearly 1800 years general history, and the comparative historical studies of special countries and nations have been distorted. Dates or facts, whole epochs of civilization and complicated religious systems have been, either altogether ignored, or if mentioned, the dates of their development altered. The priority of moral principles in other religions has been denied, and the world taught to believe them taken from *later* systems. All our studies have been made subservient to the requirements of the dialectical banner-bearers of some arbitrarily worked out theological system, who held aloft the flimsy flag of prejudice and bigotry, under which they gather the ignorant, and terrify independent inquirers and votaries of true morals and pure Christianity.

For more than half a century the reactionary opponents of progress were in the ascendant. This terrible period of Reaction, distinguished by an increasing power of stationary dogmatism and despotism, was due to that political, moral, and religious cataclysm, which took place in France. The French people had been left in utter ignorance by aristocrats, bureaucrats, priests, and monks; the normal development of the intellectual and moral welfare of the masses was prevented; everything was exaggerated, and all the ties of society were forcibly broken. Neither reason, nor a regulated emotion, but obstinate passion and fanaticism, the outgrowths of that very religious system which some wished to support, ruled supreme, and plunged Europe into mad rebellions and sanguinary wars. Whilst in France the demented lawgivers of the Convention deposed God (on the 7th of May, 1794); in England penal or civil laws began to protect old-fashioned theological notions; and in Germany the rulers gave up the supernatural to the people as a bone of contention, but kept them in strict order by means of severe police overregulation. The practical was to form the only aim of the English people; the French, with an utter contempt for all religion, began to occupy themselves with politics; whilst in Germany the spirit of inquiry was to find vent in pon-

derous critical volumes on all sorts of metaphysical and religious subjects. Only thus we can explain the following apparently incredible fact.

A chair for geology was founded at the Cambridge University in 1815, and down to 1830 not one student dared to attend the proposed Lectures of the Rev. Mr. Sedgwick for fear of being at once looked down upon as a *heretic*, and so blighting the whole of his worldly career. That this state of narrow-mindedness has considerably changed is in some part owing to a few English Divines. We have learnt to rise from particular and detached, to general and connected knowledge; from single incoherent facts to a higher study of the universal causal connection between incidents and incidents, and periods and periods. What is the use of all such studies is still the terrible question asked by tens of thousands, if they only serve "to disturb the peace of mind of believers." A peace of mind, based on ignorance, is a very poor peace.

This was deeply felt by the master minds of France and Germany. At the head of the French reformers stood MONTESQUIEU (1689-1755), who had seen and studied England, and who united in himself all the brilliant qualities of a Frenchman with the stern virtues of an independent Englishman. Next to him stood VOLTAIRE (1694-1778), the prophet, apostle, teacher, and idol of a court and people which produced a Louis XIV., a Louis XV., a Robespierre, and a Marat. Voltaire, though a firm believer in a God, was accused of Atheism, because he devoted all his genial powers to denouncing the false doctrines according to which Church and State ruled, oppressed, insulted, and beggared the people on the Continent. Only a Titanic spirit, like his, could have succeeded in counteracting the growing immorality of the State, the rampant hypocrisy of the Church, the revolting cant of priests, the foolish pretensions of the scholastics and Jesuits, and the sentimental distortions of the Jansenists. Voltaire was honoured, protected, and admired by Frederick the Great of Prussia, who never looked upon genius, truthfulness, and satire as dangerous foes, but, on the contrary, welcomed them as worthy helpmates to purify the sunken moral and intellectual state of Europe. That Voltaire was used by low scoffers and sarcastic critics, that he was misunderstood, and made a tool in the hands of headless revolutionaries in France, was not his fault. Nothing can excuse the duplicity of those aristocrats, bureaucrats, priests, monks, and bigots who, instead of studying his writings, and learning from

them, considered it their duty to abuse, vilify, and curse him. His spirit has never died away, and is even at this present moment far more active than the priests suspect. In France, as in Germany, if an idol of the past has once been dissolved in its component particles, and if these particles are found to have been incongruously put together, the idol is for ever destroyed. Not so in England. The powerful vested interests, living, thriving, and prospering on antiquated ideas, sometimes relax in their static force, and permit a dynamic current of progress to pervade the intellectual atmosphere of the people; but, trembling for their temporalities, they soon rouse themselves to oppose the progressive continuity of new ideas.

When the courageous LESSING (1729–1781) once attacked idling monks and nuns, bigoted pastors and ignorant preachers; monks and nuns began to vanish, and pastors and preachers were compelled to study, and to endeavour to attain the same degree of learning as that possessed by the better informed lay-world. This fact may serve to explain the existence of that phalanx of fearless Theologians in Germany who, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, influenced the Christians of all countries. After Lessing had exposed pedants to ridicule; hypocrisy to scorn; falsifiers to contempt; dialecticians to derision, and false moralists to mockery, men like Gesenius, Jost, Schleiermacher, Niebuhr, Schelling, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, were enabled, individually and collectively, to use the ponderous clubs of their deep learning and correct reasoning to prepare the way for the immortal Darwin, who put an end to the assumption of a detached, arbitrary, and special creation, and established the fact of "evolution," as the firm foundation of all our studies. Mental reforms are no longer hated, critical inquiries no longer despised, analogies and comparisons may be drawn even at the University of Oxford.

According to Dean Ramsay, four millions of sermons are preached annually in Great Britain; these four millions of sermons are only listened to by thirty per cent. of our population, whilst seventy per cent. can do without them. The 100 per cent. however, have to pay annually £10,211,321 (exclusive of payments made by Roman Catholics and Jews). All this is at the very lowest computation, and yet even these four millions of sermons represent a lamentable waste of time. Assuming that each sermon takes up only 30 minutes, we arrive at a period of 83,333 days, or 22½ years, half at least of which are annually spent by the combined

efforts of the clergy in discussing dogmatic matters. As to material,—if every sermon were only 15 pages in length, the amount spoken annually would furnish us with 60,000,000 of pages, or 83,333 vols. of 720 pages each.

It would be as well to enquire how much of this collective brain-force, and complex lung-power has been used to bring about a union between Christ's enactments, and our often diametrically opposed social organization, without which, however, our present state of civilization would be impossible.

Christ said: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. vi. 34). If we were to live according to this precept we should have long given up all progress in arts, sciences, discoveries, and inventions. We should have lived like Buddhist mendicants, and lost ourselves in useless meditations; mean poverty would have been our lot, and in carrying out the command of God the Son, we should have acted in direct opposition to the dictates of God the Father who endowed us with intellect and reason.

Christ said: "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8). And what do the heads of the different denominations do? They freely demand money, and as freely keep it. Church dignitaries are liberally paid, and leave the hard working curates to some 300 charity organizations.

Christ said: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses" (Matt. x. 9, Luke ix. 3, x. 4, xxii. 35). The eternal collections, the everlasting sending round of plates, the merciless exactions of tithes are in contradiction to this law.

Christ said: "I say unto you, swear not at all, neither by heaven . . . nor by the earth . . . neither shalt thou swear by thy head . . . But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." (Matt. v. 34-37.)

We boastfully call England a "God-fearing and Christian" country, and yet we ignore God's direct, and most explicit command: "swear not." After many tardy steps in tolerance, we are sure not to stop half way. The greatest and wisest in the land will out-number the prejudiced and narrow-minded, and free every citizen from all the shackles of religious qualification. Not what a man "professes to believe," but how he acts, ought to be taken as the criterion of his character.

The higher inner life of the masses, in spite of the 4,000,000 of annual sermons, was till lately sorely neglected. We at last attained the conviction that Reason, Politics, and Science, as well as Emotion, Religion, and Art, had their rights. We have learnt that Reason cannot be satisfied with mere dogmatic assumptions, and, that to be truly free, we must emancipate ourselves from all fetters imposed on our development as human beings.

What is Man ?

Man consists of *matter*, forming the constituent particles of his body. The study of this, his material constitution, has led to Biology. Biology must not be treated one-sidedly, as if there were in man nothing but matter. For man consists also of *mind*, a power of doing work, receiving impressions, which produce sensations, of which we become conscious. Man has, therefore, a double nature, composed of matter and mind. Both matter and mind can only be brought into life and activity by a force ; and wherever we are able to trace a force, we can trace law. We may thus treat man scientifically as a unit, and consequently we can similarly consider any number of these units. This is done by Sociology and General History. For, any principle applicable to the unit, must similarly affect any number composed of the same units.

All natural science is based on tracing the working of acting and counteracting, combining or dissolving forces. In mechanics those forces are assumed to be two in number, the one static, the other dynamic. The first manifests itself as the law of conservation of force or energy, the second as the ever-varying, creating, changing, combining, transforming force of activity.

We here face the mystic Indian Trimurty (Trinity), as Creator, Preserver, and Transformer ; or the great Egyptian "Unity in Trinity" of their more advanced religious and philosophical development—as "Creator, Created, and Creature." Leaving the Creator, in humble reverence, we have around us the Created world (the phenomenal) and the Creature (as the embodiment of the noumenal), and in this Creature we find combined the two acting and reacting forces, pervading the universe as static and dynamic energy, which manifests itself in man as morals and intellect. Morals are and can only be static ; they are a restraining, correcting force—they are the *passive* element in our nature : moral laws are generally given in the *negative* form. On the other hand, intellect is undoubtedly the dynamic pushing, inquiring, inventing force—the *active* element ; for all efforts in arts, sciences, and discoveries

are of a *positive* nature. The working of these two forces may be either conflicting, or harmonious, and on the greater or less degree of harmony must depend the progressive development of single individuals, and that of whole communities, nations, and Humanity at large. We may thus scientifically reduce all the phenomena of history to a *plus* or *minus* in the relative quantities of the two acting and reacting forces in man.

Those who, under the pretext of religion, wish one-sidedly to cultivate the moral force in humanity, often commit the most revolting immoralities. We have on one side the Mormons, a sect living in polygamy, according to the practice of the Patriarchs as recorded in the Old Testament, and we have opposed to them the state authority quoting the same sacred Book, protesting against polygamy, and endeavouring to put it down by the force of law. And intellect, reason that could alone decide between the two sects, is abhorred by both. For controversy and contradictions are the eternal outgrowths of so called sacred Books which, assumed to have been inspired by infinite wisdom, are so little understood by finite commentators that they have led to nothing but confusion in our most important social relations.

A popular preacher protests against "vivisection," and this preacher feeds on killed fishes, eats oysters with delight, enjoys a brace of partridges, and has no condemnation for fox-hunting, deer-stalking, pigeon-shooting, &c. Now, if a Buddhist priest or teacher who never touched food that was derived from any creature once alive, were to speak against the dissection of living animals, with the object of extending our knowledge of physiology and biology, in order to lessen the sufferings of our more highly developed fellow-creatures, we could understand his horror of the practice; but it can only be mere verbiage and hypocritical rodomontade when some priests, who feed on mutton, beef, and pork, rave against vivisection in order to stop the prying into the wonderful, and awful mysteries of God, and declare that the Darwins and Huxleys of our times should not be furnished with more facts for their unorthodox theories.

These contradictions between practical life, and the enactments of religious books, at last led men, like Mr. Houston, to devote themselves to biblical criticism in the spirit of simple reason, unassisted by assumptions, theological dictates, dialectical distinctions and differences, and the amount of work since done in this direction is incredible. Houston published in 1813 a book under

the title "Ecce Homo," or a "Rational Analysis of the Gospels," which created a tremendous sensation. The clergy took no trouble to refute the writer, but set the courts of justice in motion, and Houston was condemned to two years' imprisonment, and a fine of £200 to be paid to the king!

The enactment of "judge not that ye be not judged" (Matt. vii. 1) was disregarded by King and Judges. Neither Houston, nor Dr. Strauss in more recent times, did "judge." They simply applied the commonest rules of criticism to a compilation of writings which were pronounced to be infallible; and for this use of their reason, the one was imprisoned and fined, and the other sent out of the country as a detestable heretic, and nearly murdered by a fanatical mob in Switzerland.

The enemies of progress, the controversialists on doctrine, the propounders of revelations had continually to take refuge behind new inspirations and new revelations, till the people became convinced that a revelation which produces so many contradictory deductions, must be after all simply a revelation worked out in the inner consciousness of the prophets and revealers themselves. But as feelings, emotions, and ideas, through self-consciousness, have but a *subjective* meaning, the independent thinkers of Christianity have now turned to a more correct contemplation of nature with an entirely *objective* tendency. The province of the emotional has been thus assigned to art, morals are studied as natural effects of our very bodily organization, the quarrels about formulæ have become fainter, and man begins to understand true religion.

What is religion in a Christian sense?

It is neither Pessimism, nor Agnosticism, and least of all, Atheism.

Pessimism is a morbid craving after an ideal world, which condemns the present variegated reality, because optimism has not worked itself into a tangible entity.

Agnosticism goes as far as our finite senses can go in grasping the phenomenal outward nature, and stops at the first cause of which it professes to know nothing.

Atheism has, in its dogmatic assertions, the most repulsive similarity to orthodoxy. It is, in fact, nothing but an illogical negation of a positive assertion, and has therefore no sense at all.

True religion, according to the origin of the Latin word "religo," means to honour, to take care of, to order, to treat, to observe carefully, or to be bound down, which does not mean to observe or

to be bound down to ritualistic performances, the burning of candles, embroidered altar-cloths, sacrificial symbols and types, but to take care of, and honour a close study and understanding of the laws of nature in a clear recognition of our relations to our fellow creatures.

Mind and matter : the one the cause, the other the effect ; the one the pervading ideality, the other the pervaded reality ; these two completing each other, and manifesting themselves as combined elements in the variegated phenomena of the universe, can be the only objects of study for Christianity in the Future.

Christianity which is the only Religion through which inward reflection, and outward contemplation may be best evolved in man, as a complex power to balance morals and intellect, emotion, and reason in us, will have to accomplish the following glorious tasks :—

(a.) To bring back Christ's teachings to their primitive purity and simplicity ; to eliminate everything that has been imported into it from older heathen religions and creeds, in the shape of ceremonies and contradictory mysteries.

(b.) To fulfil what the Reformation began in the sixteenth century, and not to stop half-way in the purification of faith, allowing dogmatic petrifications to hinder the progressive development of Humanity. We must try to establish a perfect balance between our morals and our intellect, basing all our actions on such principles as are universal, and easily understood by reason.

(c.) To educate our clergy in all the branches of true knowledge, that the people may not accustom themselves to look down upon them as survivals of a by-gone, bigoted, ante-intellectual period, and only attend their sermons because it is respectable to be seen amongst one's neighbours at a place of worship on a Sunday. Let the teachers of the more than two hundred quarrelling uncharitable sects of Christendom stand on the common platform of human nature, loving and not hating those who, through self thought and indefatigable study, have acquired a different mode of seeing, judging, and believing, and they will be sure to regain that beneficial influence on the fields of pure ethics which they have lost in the dark labyrinths of mysticism.

(d.) To find a common ground in Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Sokratic principles, Hebraism, and Mahometanism, connecting all that is pure, moral, and intellectual in all the different religious sects into one grand whole, cemented together with brotherly love and forbearance, allowing to art and

science their free, purifying, and elevating influences, and fostering them to the fullest possible extent.

Similar notions were already set forth in the Twelfth Century within the Romish Church, in a new gospel, called "Evangelium Eternum," preached for some time by Joachim, the Abbot of Sora, in Calabria. This gospel was also called the Covenant of Peace, or the Gospel of the Holy Ghost. It taught that the two imperfect ages, that of the Father and of the Son, represented by the Old and New Testaments, were past, and that that of the Holy Ghost, the perfect one, was at hand. According to this gospel Jews, Christians, Mahometans, and all other sects were to be united into one loving brotherhood. For upwards of thirty years the Roman See supported this gospel.* In 1250 A.D. a Franciscan monk, Gerhard, published an introduction to it, in which he prophesied the destruction of the Roman See, in 1260; but neither the moon nor the stars fell from heaven to bring about the Millenium—so the prophecy is yet to be fulfilled; and we still wait for the time when Indians and Chinese, philosophers and free-thinkers, Hebrews, Mahometans and Christians, will be enabled to raise to their different teachers one grand Walhalla in which all who have contributed to the fulfilment of Christ's promise of One Shepherd (God in Heaven, or first cause in the universe), and one fold (enclosing the whole of Humanity), might find a place.

To sum up, we have individually and collectively :

- (1.) to purify Christianity of all Dogmatism and Mysticism;
- (2.) to make morals, which are ingrafted in our very nature, the foundation of our social organization;
- (3.) to enlarge religion through genuine tolerance into a code of our duties towards our fellow-creatures;
- (4.) to educate our public teachers so that with broad hearts and independent thoughts they may propagate the beauties of art and the truths of science.

SO MAY IT BE!

* For further information see "The Gospel History and Doctrinal Teaching" critically examined by the Author of "Mankind, their Origin and Destiny." London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873.