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AS A BAR TO PROGRESS

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The Forum Series.—No. 12

RELIGION AS A BAR TO PROGRESS

BY

CHARLES T. GORHAM

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PREFATORY NOTE

BELIEVERS in Christianity are challenged to prove that their religion has on the whole been of service to mankind. I set forth facts which will demonstrate to an unprejudiced mind that in the aggregate the influence of religion generally, and of the Christian faith in particular, has been of a harmful character.

C. T. G.

August, 1930.

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RELIGION AS A BAR TO PROGRESS

THERE are people who doubt, and some who even deny, the reality of Progress. They admit that man has "found out many inventions," but they maintain that these inventions have not added to human happiness. This little book is not concerned with contentions of that sort. Recognizing that happiness is a relative term, depending on both external conditions and subjective experiences, it proceeds upon the solid fact that man has emerged from a state of savagery, and has gone on improving his conditions, materially, mentally, and morally, ever since, admittedly with many interruptions and retrogressive phases. It does not seem possible to account for civilization on any other assumption than that of a slow if somewhat irregular development. Civilization is, on the whole, a good thing, a necessary result of innate capacities and yearnings. It is the means by which knowledge is gained and extended, the means by which moral ideas are diffused and appreciated; it does, in fact, increase human happiness. The desirability of Progress is hardly a matter of opinion; the word may cover a variety of meanings, but that its primary and essential significance lies in the idea of improvement seems beyond dispute.

If Progress be a somewhat elastic term, how vastly more so is the word Religion! The variety of forms assumed by the connoted impulse makes a universally accepted definition impossible to find. From the fetishism of the ignorant savage to the imposing organization of the Church of Rome, from the barbaric blood sacrifice to the spiritual purity of the cultured Theist, from the Athanasian Creed to the Sermon on the Mount, a motley array of beliefs and practices, some good, some bad, may be grouped under the comprehensive name of Religion. All religions may be false, but there is no false religion, if by

that is meant a religion set up with the sole and deliberate purpose to deceive. Practically all religions are honest, if ignorantly guided, expressions of a deeply-rooted human sentiment.

This sentiment originated in the awe and fear felt by early man in the presence of the mighty forces of nature. These he personified as beings more powerful than man, who were capable of benefiting or injuring him, and to whom worship, gifts, and sacrifices were properly due. Starting with such primitive notions, it naturally followed that later developments of religion should partake largely of superstitious practices from which it has not yet shaken itself free.

The Jewish scriptures afford valuable help in studying the growth of religion. Glaringly, even shockingly, as its human origin is exhibited, the sacrificial system has been confidently attributed, by Christians as well as Jews, to God Himself. Some of the prophets, however, spoke boldly and at times scornfully of laws said to have been laid down by their own deity. "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah vi. 7). These words imply the prevalence of not merely animal but human sacrifice among the Hebrews—perhaps at an earlier time, of which the story of Abraham and Isaac may be an indication. Jeremiah, however, speaks of the horrible practice as current in his own time (whatever that was), when he reproves the children of Judah for burning "their sons and their daughters in the fire." Is it credible that such a thing could have continued after centuries of divine supervision? In fact, Jeremiah, in the name of the Lord, expressly denies that the Jews had been commanded to offer "burnt offerings or sacrifices" (Jer. vii. 22, 31). Isaiah stigmatizes the tribal ceremonies as "vain oblations" and the "solemn meetings" as "iniquity."

To examine the influence of religion as a whole on human life would require many volumes. In these pages only a brief and very imperfect sketch of its general, and especially its public, influence can be undertaken. The effect of sincere religious convictions on the lives of those holding them is

often markedly beneficial; but, being usually restricted to a comparatively small range, their actual influence is difficult to detect and estimate. In regard to national and international life, where, one would think, good influences would be urgently needed, religion has had singularly slight effects of a beneficial kind. As we shall see with wearisome frequency, the religious spirit has too often displayed itself in the most alarming ways, clearly opposed to improvement in social conditions. The fact shows, what the majority of people fail to realize, that religion, appealing mainly to the emotional susceptibilities, has little public value unless conjoined with that activity of the intellect, that extension of knowledge, on which progress in civilization depends. For this reason our inquiry must be confined primarily to the practical effects of a particular form of religion on civilized communities. And for obvious reasons the form selected for consideration is Christianity.

The Christian religion is claimed by its devotees to have been expressly made known to man by its real author, a being whose wisdom is perfect, whose love is universal, whose power has no limits. These attributes are ascribed to a being whose very existence, as a being, is admittedly incapable of proof and has to be assumed as a first principle for which no proof is needed. But as evidence of some sort is useful even for first principles, the assumption is supported by a string of inferences which are made to do duty as undoubted proofs. They will not be examined here. All that need be done is to ask each reader to give careful thought to the events of history and the phenomena of human and animal life, with a view to seeing how far they correspond with the attributes ascribed to Deity. It is very difficult to perceive how any attributes whatever can logically be assumed as making up the *nature* of a being whose *existence* is problematical. Waiving that point, however, it does not seem an unfair presumption to say that the wisdom and goodness, if not the power, of the assumed being are more or less open to question.

The fact that modern civilized nations have for the most part embraced the Christian religion has given rise to the idea that it is to the Christian religion that their civilization is due.

Few popular impressions are more firmly rooted, and few are more feebly supported by the facts of history. There were great men before Agamemnon; there were great civilizations before Christianity. Great civilizations still exist which have not been originated or continued by Christian influence. Without accepting Professor Clifford's drastic assertion that Christianity has destroyed two civilizations, we can hardly fail to perceive that, in its organized forms, Christianity has had a retarding influence on the progress of mankind.

Civilized nations owe their pre-eminence to a number of intricately related causes—their favourable geographical and climatic conditions, the resulting physical and mental energy of their inhabitants, the admixture of racial and culture contacts which has fostered a desire for the investigation of nature, the spread of knowledge, and the extension of commerce. To these results Christianity has contributed less largely than one would expect from claims which imply that a contributory cause may be treated as the sole cause. Nor must we forget that in all Western countries religion may be said to be only "skin-deep," even its sincerest supporters being more deeply interested in prospects of well-being in the present life than in the possibilities of another. One observes, also, that in even the most civilized communities the effects of those superstitions which have produced such baneful effects in the past have not disappeared. The claim that Christianity is the prime factor in civilization must be dismissed.

It now becomes necessary to show that, while Christianity must be credited with some beneficial influence, especially on the private characters of its adherents, its good effects on public and international affairs have been almost imperceptible.

The idea of God, the idea that one Being of infinite power and goodness exists and rules the world, is rather assumed than revealed in the sacred writings of Christianity. This idea developed slowly from the ignorance and fear of early man, and it is perhaps surprising that it has been accepted with little inquiry by civilized communities. Even to-day it is thought by many persons to represent the purest and most

reasonable form of religion. Yet it is still rejected by the Christian Churches in general as an inadequate statement of religion; indeed, sometimes as a weak-kneed concession to what is called "infidelity." The Churches imagine that by turning one God into three Gods they secure the inestimable advantage not merely of communion with their Father, but of having a "Saviour" also, and, as a supplement, a nebulous something termed a Holy Ghost or "Comforter" to make good any little defects in the theological structure, but who or which never does anything whatever.

In spite of all these advantages, the "Divinely revealed" Christian system has achieved only a degree of success which furnishes a bitterly ironical comment on its claims. Christianity has not "saved" the world, as was once confidently expected. It is doubtful whether it has improved the world; certainly it has not appreciably moralized the public life of any Christian nation. The benefits of modern civilization have resulted not so much from Christian influence as from the diffusion of humanistic ideas by means of secular agencies.

Here, then, we have a theme which deserves serious consideration: Has Christianity improved the world, or has it not? The easy answer is "in the affirmative." The true answer involves an examination of a large number of historical facts and some honest reasoning about them. Remember, we are concerned not with the intrinsic merits of the Christian Scriptures, but with the effect which organized Christianity has had on the progress of the human race.

In its early stages Christianity absorbed, for better or worse, many of the ideas, superstitions, and practices of the pagan religions which preceded it, such as the worship of a trinity of deities, the ideas of an atoning blood sacrifice, baptismal regeneration, a virgin-born redeemer, a future life, observance of particular days and seasons, and many others. Some of these the Church altered to suit its requirements, and, in a Christian setting, gave them renewed significance and vitality.

From very early times the Christian Church became a prey to internal dissensions, and, after long struggles, one branch became paramount on the hills of the "eternal city," whence

it claimed supremacy, temporal as well as spiritual, over monarchs, governments, nobles, and people; in fact, over the whole of mankind. The arrogant claim was at length accepted by an ignorant and debased society, and resulted in abuses and iniquities of every possible kind, until large sections of the European peoples had sense enough to throw off the yoke, at the cost of incalculable strife and suffering.

From the time of Constantine, who first debased Christianity by making it a state affair, the Christian Church has encouraged the spirit of persecution for religious opinions. This spirit was in the thirteenth century embodied and afterwards elaborated in a most ingeniously organized and powerful institution called the "Holy Office," or Inquisition—a system of sacred cruelty and "murder as a fine art," which was intended to advance religion, but proved its most indelible disgrace. In a mild form it still remains in existence, and learned theologians have found it possible to put forward casuistical pleas in its defence. The spirit of religious intolerance is not yet extinct, and, however barbarous we may deem it, finds a certain excuse in a Church which claims to have the "keys" of heaven and earth in its keeping as guardian of the only true religion.

Let any reader ask himself whether this encouragement by the Church of the spirit of hatred and injustice is in harmony with either progress in civilization or the better elements of religion.

Without asserting that there is a necessary and eternal opposition between religion as such and science as such, it is an undoubted fact of history that between orthodox Christianity on the one hand and the spirit of scientific investigation on the other there is a deep antagonism. The late Mr. W. H. Mallock cleverly contended that in the last resort science, like religion, rests on faith. Only in a minor sense can the resemblance be shown. Human knowledge is imperfect, and where it fails us faith may be of some service. But faith in what? Is it to be faith in an inflexible order established by research, each step being proved or rejected as the ascertained results necessitate? Or is it to be the rash

acceptance by an ill-qualified public of a series of doctrines which violate reason and throw the moral nature of man into perplexity? The general belief of the Christian world in an assumed divine and final revelation must necessarily tend, not perhaps to deprave the human mind, but to render it indisposed to seek a fuller knowledge which is deemed useless or even harmful. When thus influencing men and women of average intelligence but dormant critical powers religion further confirms—solidifies, as it were—their mental apathy, and by its powerful appeal reinforces the emotional at the expense of the reasoning faculties. The "Word of God" closes the issue as far as the main features of religion are concerned. Minor questions may and do arise as to the meaning of the supposed revelation, but in the main the relations between God and man are held to have been defined with sufficient clearness to afford a knowledge of God's will and a reliable guide to human conduct.

That events have not corresponded to this orthodox view of religion must now be shown. It may be "so much the worse for the facts," but, as far as possible, they must speak for themselves. Most of the particulars which follow have been extracted from Professor Andrew Dickson White's famous work, *The Warfare of Science with Theology;* but it may be well to do without detailed citations or references, merely recommending the interested reader to go to the book itself for fuller information. We shall see that the Church has shown towards science, not only an attitude of indifference which might be partially defended on the score of its official pretensions, but an active and bitter hostility which, making large allowances for human stupidity, cannot be justified. First let us see how the Christian world behaved towards the important science of

ASTRONOMY

The Christian Fathers held the most peculiar views about the earth and the solar system: excusable views in the circumstances, but views not based on knowledge and having

no other source than dogmatic preconceptions. Augustine, the famous Bishop of Hippo, declared (someone seems to have started thinking) that there could be no Antipodes because the Bible said nothing about that part of the world. If people really dwelt in those impossible regions, a previous Atonement would have been necessary, and on that vital point the Bible was silent. A further difficulty arose: how would people "down under" be able to see the Saviour's return in glory? The Christian Father, Lactantius, was even more emphatic. "Is there," he asks, "any one so senseless as to believe that there are men whose footsteps are higher than their heads? . . . that the crops and trees grow downward? . . . that the rains and snow and hail fall upward? . . . I am at a loss what to say of those who, when they have once erred, steadily persevere in their folly and defend one vain thing by another" (*Warfare*, I. 103). That last sentence has a prophetic significance which the worthy man could not perceive. The Christian world received with docility this kind of wisdom for more than a thousand years, and even long after the voyage of Magellan had proved the rotundity of the earth the illusion was still maintained. These good people were not fools. They merely knew nothing about the subject on which they so vigorously dogmatized.

The father of modern astronomy was Copernicus (1473–1543), who discovered that the earth was not stationary but had a daily revolution on its axis and an annual revolution round the sun. This does seem an improvement on the idea which represented, according to an old map, the hand of God holding up the earth by a rope and spinning it round and round with thumb and fingers. In those days God was thought to have a body, so one need not object to the hand or even the rope. Copernicus arrived at his great discovery in 1500, but, fearing opposition, delayed its publication for forty-three years, receiving the first printed copy on his death-bed. The formal condemnation by the Church of Galileo's researches is too well known to need repetition, but even after his time the orthodox theory of the earth continued to be taught by eminent ecclesiastics and philosophers. The wise

Melancthon declared that the earth was undoubtedly the centre of the universe. Calvin asked: "Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?" Luther was more vigorous when he said: "This fool Copernicus wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth." That made a lot of difference. At Wittenberg University Professors of Astronomy were forbidden to expound the Copernican system, while others were allowed to denounce it as "absurd and unfit to be introduced into the schools." A similar prohibition existed in the Universities of Spain, and the publication of works in favour of it was not permitted till 1822. The book in which Copernicus explained his views was honoured by being placed on the Index Expurgatorius, but in 1835 the Church began to think there might be something in it, and the ban was withdrawn. Rome, however, had committed itself by its official condemnation in 1664 of all books teaching the movement of the earth and the stability of the sun. In the eighteenth century so eminent a preacher as Bossuet declared the Copernican theory to be "contrary to Scripture"—as no doubt it was. Many truths have been in that position. Does not Bibliolatry make men stupid?

Kepler, Newton, Lamarck, and many others eminent in science were violently opposed and abused for their "infidel" speculations. Descartes, who strove to prove the existence of God, became very unpopular because he did not do so in the orthodox way. So strong indeed was the opposition that he felt compelled to abandon his great "Treatise on the World," thus wasting the labour of many years. The great naturalist and anatomist Cuvier was led by theological influence to oppose the then current theory of development of animal forms, while Buffon, who might have anticipated the conclusions of Darwin, found himself "up against" the theologians, and was forced to abandon everything which they declared was "contrary to Moses." The theological ferrets smelt out certain atheistical tendencies in the writings of Kant and Hume (one does not wonder at Hume being under suspicion), and similar

objections were raised in the nineteenth century against the author of *Vestiges of Creation*. Sincerely religious as were many of these truth-seekers, that failed to avert the clouds of suspicion and the torrents of abuse to which they were subjected.

An Academy of Science was founded at Naples in the year 1560. It was suppressed by ecclesiastical authority. In the following century the Royal Society was established in England under the auspices of that tolerant rake, Charles II. A famous preacher, Dr. South, denounced the undertaking as irreligious. It was never intended to be anything but scientific, though religious persons could and did belong to it. That hardly satisfied Dr. South. Newton was a sincerely religious man, but his system was attacked as irreligious by some of the clergy, led by the Rev. John Hutchinson. Their creed had cramped their intellects, as was the case with John Wesley when he declared that to give up witchcraft was, in effect, to give up the Bible. But Wesley had a certain logic behind his belief. It was long before Newton's theories gained general acceptance; even Leibnitz thought fit to protest against the law of gravitation. And so late as 1873 a Lutheran pastor contended that the question had been settled by the "wise and truthful God." For hundreds of years scientific investigation could be carried on only under the supervision of the Church.

It is impossible in our own days to realize the frantic alarm formerly caused by the appearance of those harmless objects known as comets. In 1556 the Emperor Charles V. resigned his vast power and retired to a monastery, mainly out of fear of the comet of that year. A similar phenomenon is pictured in the Bayeux tapestry, of which a copy is in the South Kensington Museum, London. It is not surprising that Europe was terrified when comets were looked upon as threatening portents flung about by a Deity enraged with human sin. When found by experience to be harmless, the fear of comets long persisted.

EVOLUTION

Foreshadowings of the true law of the development of animal forms had impressed the minds of many thinkers, particularly among the ancient Greeks, long before the middle of the nineteenth century; the *Vestiges of Creation* (1844), by Robert Chambers, being in this country the most intelligent of them. But Charles Darwin (1809–1882) was the first to elaborate the daring theory by a solid mass of research which has never been seriously shaken.

How was *The Origin of Species* received by the religious world? By honest examination, by reasoned reply, by at least a patient hearing? Nothing of the sort. It was an "attempt to dethrone God." It was an escape of "mephitic gas." Its "infamous doctrines" came from hell, and were the fruit of the most abject passions. Those who accepted such doctrines were "charlatans and dupes," destined to hell. Darwin was the "chief trumpeter of that infidel clique whose well-known object is to do away with all idea of a God." It even appeared that the modest and gentle scientist was a "persecutor of Christianity"! Needless to say, similar displeasure was caused by *The Descent of Man*. Most of this ignorant and vindictive froth spluttered from clerical throats, but the lay public was not much wiser. That master of the gentle art of mudslinging, Thomas Carlyle, called Darwinism a "gospel of dirt." Professor Whewell would not allow *The Origin of Species* to contaminate the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. The holy rancour remained active for a long time. In 1884 a Presbyterian minister, Dr. Woodrow, was expelled from his post at Columbia Seminary, U.S.A., for teaching that in its chief points the theory of Evolution was true. Similar instances were those of Dr. Winchell and Professor Toy, with the result that in each case a more influential position was secured for the heretic. These exhibitions of folly did not end with the nineteenth century. In 1925 a school teacher named Scopes was tried at Dayton, Tennessee, for teaching the Evolution theory—an event which afforded intense amusement

to people whose brains were able to function. Even to-day the voice of the heresy-hunter is heard in the land, though with less than its pristine confidence. The most recent trial is that of the Rev. Professor Du Plessis, of Stellenbosch, South Africa, who seems to have held a very mild form of Modernism, and has been acquitted. In Great Britain incautious Freethinkers are still now and then prosecuted for "blasphemy"—*i.e.* a trifling rudeness—but no one ever dreams of taking proceedings against the bibliolators, whose reverence for their Deity does not prevent them from attributing to him a wantonly bad character.

GEOLOGY

For a long time geological research made little impression on the public mind, though men felt, even in the early years of Christianity, some curiosity about the peculiar features of the earth's surface. In a world ruled by religious ignorance any discovery was an innovation, and therefore dangerous. The most singular explanations of natural phenomena were put forward in firm reliance on the supposed teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures. St. Jerome, for instance, concluded that the twisted and irregular surface of the earth was an evidence of God's anger with human sin. Naturally, he held the conviction, like many later writers, that fossils were the remains of the Flood. A Dr. Burnett contended that before that miraculous visitation there could have been no sea, or the wretched sinners would have built ships and somehow saved themselves. John Wesley argued that sin is the moral cause of earthquakes, whatever their natural cause might be: Adam was the chief offender, together, of course, with his two associates. Serpents had existed long before the time of Eden, but Adam could hardly have been aware of the fact. As to the physical characteristics of the joint tenants of Eden, some interesting but extremely fanciful particulars are given by a French writer of the seventeenth century on Biblical authority! Adam reached the majestic height of 123 feet

9 inches, while his fair partner is said, with even greater precision, to have stood 118 feet 9 inches 9 lines. The accuracy is as striking as that of Dr. John Lightfoot of Cambridge, who in the same century, after careful calculation, was enabled to fix the date of the creation of the world. At the fiat of God it came instantaneously into existence (out of nothing!) on the 23rd October, 4004, at 9 a.m.! A French writer, La Peyrère, assumed the existence of mankind on the earth before the time of Adam, and wrote a book in support of his novel theory, which, under the gentle pressure of gaol, he was forced to retract. That fossils were the remains of the Flood passed almost undisputed for at least three hundred years, and even Voltaire (unless he was joking!) thought it a possible explanation that they were the bones of fishes which had been cast aside by travellers! Not until it was proved that fossils were the remains of living beings did the stranglehold of theology begin to loosen its grip. The path of scientific research was bestrewn with the most formidable boulders, in addition to very probable penalties for surmounting them.

Only a few Christian scholars accepted the conclusions of Sir Charles Lyell. The orthodox who rejected them because they could not be harmonized with Genesis raised a storm of opposition and disparagement. Glimmerings of the truth had long been perceived by some inquirers, though the Church had successfully used the methods of persecution, torture, and death to suppress the knowledge. In the long run, however, the theologians, as usual, suffered the humiliating defeat they deserved. The vast age of the earth is now universally acknowledged, and no competent person supposes that "our first parents," Adam and Eve, ever existed except as mythical figures.

So seriously was progress in geology obstructed that many investigators dared not, even in the nineteenth century, publish the results of their researches, and those who did usually suffered for their temerity. Dean Cockburn, of York, roundly abused Mary Somerville by name, and the British Association for the Advancement of Science was his pet aversion. To the

theological world in general all science was anathema, and geology in particular was a kind of black art, which in the interests of " Holy Scripture " had to be sternly forbidden.

Throughout the nineteenth century scientific research was not exactly popular with the largest branch of the Christian Church, in spite of the fact that she is able to boast of eminent scientific men in her ranks. Many of these unfortunate thinkers, such as Prof. St. George Mivart, have been shamefully thwarted and anathematized for their trouble. In 1832 Keble protested against University degrees being conferred on leading scientific men, among them Brewster, Faraday, and Dalton. About 1850 Pope Pius IX. prohibited a scientific Congress which was proposed to be held at Bologna; and the same enlightened representative of divinity refused to sanction a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, on the ground that Christians owed no duty to them. In Australia certain Roman Catholic professors, before being permitted to teach arithmetic, were compelled on oath to state belief in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This was before that absurdity had officially been made obligatory !

WITCHCRAFT AND DEMONOLOGY

Little need be said on this painful but threadbare subject. Witchcraft arose from one of the most persistent tendencies of human ignorance, strengthened by certain contributing causes, of which reverence for the " word of God " was the most powerful. Belief in and fear of evil spirits are found in nearly all religions, more particularly in those practised by the lowest types of the human race. One might have expected that civilized peoples, enlightened by the Christian religion, would have repudiated this form of superstition. Christianity has not merely countenanced it, but enforced it with a severity which, however logical, has been inexpressibly shocking to our better feelings. The word " logical " may be objected to, but it seems defensible when we remember that in the sacred writings of that religion it is related that its

founder had a quite unmistakable belief in the existence and power of evil spirits. The superstition was reinforced by the barbarous command in the Old Testament, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," the credulity and horror of which passage the medieval Church was very slow to realize. This form of persecution was promoted by the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, who early in the fourth century enacted that magicians were to be burnt alive. Various Papal Bulls were issued in the fifteenth century, the most notable and influential being that of 1484, proclaimed by Pope Innocent VIII. A Churchman of Treves, who in the following century had his doubts about the subject, was condemned and imprisoned, his book being confiscated. Among the famous men who believed in witchcraft, chiefly on Biblical authority, were Richard Baxter, Cotton Mather and his father, Sir Thomas Browne, John Wesley, Henry More, Isaac Casaubon, Cudworth, Glanvill, and Sir Matthew Hale. In 1773 a Scottish Presbytery passed a resolution expressing belief in the reality of witchcraft. Even after Franklin's lightning conductor had proved successful, strong objections were raised to it as an interference with the mysterious ways of Providence. It was by some persons considered safer to trust to the bones of saints.

The effects of this dreadful superstition cannot here be related with any fulness. Witches were supposed to be in league with the Devil and his imps in order to vex and injure human beings. With supernatural resources at command, they were able to plague cattle, to ruin crops, cause diseases and bad weather, and generally to advance the reign of evil. James I., it will be remembered, attributed to witchcraft the storm which had given him an unpleasant experience on his voyage from Denmark in 1589. For this offence, of which he could not possibly have been guilty, a doctor was burnt after being shockingly tortured. The idea was to get rid of the evil spirit, but this usually involved the death of the witch by the most painful of methods. Under Roman law torture might be employed, but with limits. Christian justice set them aside, because, as the victims were strengthened by Satan, it was

necessary to make his task as hard as possible, and let the accused person make the best of it. How many people (chiefly old women) suffered from this appalling delusion one can only guess, but the estimates generally run to several millions.

Long before the Christian era the wise old physician Galen had taught that madness was due to brain disease. Under Christianity it was believed to result from possession by evil spirits—a belief which naturally increased the number of the insane and led to a brutality of treatment that lasted hundreds of years. And, strange to say, this cruel and foolish belief in evil spirits was thought to prove, not the error of the Christian Scriptures, but their Divine authority. That was why the superstition flourished for so long. The belief in a personal Devil and his followers has now only a fragment of its former influence, but those who retain it seldom perceive the logical consequences. Not reflecting that their Redeemer shared this terrible superstition, they thank him for healing a few sick persons out of millions. One instance only need be given of the prevalent credulity. A woman was thought to be possessed because she had eaten a lettuce without making the sign of the Cross. On explaining that she did not know the Devil was sitting on the lettuce when she ate it, a priest was kind enough to exorcise the spirit and absolve the woman.

Ready support was found in the Bible for these superstitions. The serpent in Eden and the Gadarene swine were proofs that animals could be possessed by evil spirits. A cock was once found in possession of an egg which he could not account for. It was a solemn affair for the poor bird when he was tried in a court of justice and condemned to be burnt as a dangerous sorcerer. Even insects, such was the logic of the Dark Ages, could not be held guiltless. St. Bernard excommunicated a swarm of flies which impiously interrupted his preaching, and they fell dead in heaps. Bossuet was so confident of the reality of evil spirits that he said "a single devil could turn the earth round as easily as we turn a marble." This egregious belief, shared by the great Reformers Luther and Calvin, was a necessary outcome of the belief in a personal

Devil, which is still held by many to be plainly deduced from various Scriptural passages.

A saner influence was due to the scepticism aroused by the writings of Montaigne, Malebranche, D'Aguesseau, and others, followed later by Hobbes, Shaftesbury, and the English Deists. We may even suspect that the spread of enlightenment was aided by the orthodox, though essentially sceptical, Bishop Butler himself, the clergy in general holding firmly to the dominant theory. Wesley's modification of it did not go far. He held that diseases might be caused by devils, but only sometimes. He did not doubt their actual existence. Belief in supernatural agencies was, in fact, so general that persons suspected of witchcraft themselves admitted their crime—generally under torture. On one occasion some poor wretches being conveyed to the place of execution declared that they saw the Devil trying to assist the proceedings by working to extricate the cart from the mud. The words of the Apostle, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" and the bewitching of the people of Samaria by Simon Magus, were considered by some theologians clear proof of the reality of the crime. Appearances to the contrary were of little weight, for did not St. Paul also say that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light"?

It is refreshing to learn that a famous Archbishop, Agobard of Lyons, was a valiant apostle of reason so early as the ninth century. He declared that "the wretched world lies now under the tyranny of foolishness; things are believed by Christians of such absurdity as no one ever could aforetime induce the heathen to believe." But one enlightened man could do little to stem the overwhelming tide of credulity.

The literature of Witchcraft is very large, and numbers of foolish instances of the delusion are "proved" by quotations from the Bible. One has only to read Meinhold's painfully interesting story, "The Amber Witch," to realize the reign of terror which prevailed in Europe three centuries ago and the strange superstition which afflicted people with a daily dread of the anger of a God whose ways were unaccountable.

That this curious belief had remarkable vitality is shown

by a statement in the 1797 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica:* "The reality of demoniacal possession stands upon the same evidence as the Gospel system in general." True enough, no doubt, for men have formed the strangest notions of what the "Gospel system" really is. Belief in evil spirits is now for educated persons an almost forgotten delusion, but the Christian Churches retain such parts of the "Gospel system" as happen to suit their requirements. Yet the superstition is not quite extinct. Exorcisms are still occasionally heard of as being practised among the less rational varieties of Christian belief.

MEDICINE

One of the first obligations that lay on the Christian Church in its desire to reform the world was the encouragement of medical research, so important to human progress and well-being. The conditions surrounding early Christianity were certainly very unfavourable, but they do not account for its later violent antipathy to this branch of science, or for the neglect into which the researches of the great physicians of antiquity were allowed to fall. Some concern for the general health was shown by the clergy, but religious prepossessions turned it in wrong directions. Science had to fight for its life against superstition, and the victory of knowledge was won with incredible slowness. A Scriptural text was a higher authority than the conclusions of experimental science. The bones of a dead saint were more efficacious remedies for disease than the skill (such as it was) of the physician. Prayers were safer than drugs. The relations of cause and effect were unknown, and nobody dared to investigate them. This credulous habit of mind arose from, and was intensified by, an ignorance too deep to realize its existence, too general to admit of alleviation. The teachings of Galen and Hippocrates were forgotten or scorned, and the Christian world readily swallowed the most absurd and impossible legends. St. Augustine had said: "All diseases of Christians are to be

ascribed to demons; chiefly do they torment fresh-baptized Christians, yea, even the guiltless new-born infants." St. Bernard warned people against the impiety of seeking medical relief from disease, and the canon law adopted that view. Municipal as well as ecclesiastical bodies became wealthy by the traffic in relics of particular sanctity and commercial value. The bones of St. Rosalia at Palermo had for ages cured disease and averted epidemics. They were pronounced by Professor Buckland to be the bones of a deceased goat, but the discovery caused no diminution of the popular faith in their efficacy. That this form of fetishism still prevails was shown in Italy only three or four years ago, when prayers to saints and displays of holy relics were resorted to in the hope of stopping or diverting the flow of lava from a volcano, and rival villagers came to blows about who should get the most benefit out of the miracle which did not happen.

It is not surprising to read that in a credulous world the practice of surgery was forbidden by many Church Councils; monarchs were unable to have a surgical operation performed; and in such dishonour was the science held that the most suitable men withdrew from it and left its practice to wandering quacks. In the thirteenth century physicians were forbidden by the Lateran Council to give medical treatment except under ecclesiastical advice, and more than two centuries later doctors were ordered, under penalties, to consult a " physician of the soul " to supplement their services. There was, in fact, little need for either medicine or surgery when relics were plentiful, their wonderful cures known to all, and Divine authority readily obtainable from the priest. If diseases are really caused by evil spirits, magical incantations may possibly be the best remedy. The methods of science are not necessary. And even relics known to be spurious had sometimes the same supernatural value. Did not the Saviour cast out demons and St. Paul recognize their reality; and did not St. James consider prayer and anointing better than any medical treatment?

It was generally believed that the human body contained a bone which was the nucleus of the resurrection body; for,

of course, everyone then was quite sure that the body would come to life again at that indeterminate time, the "Last Day"—or possibly earlier. It was found by Vesalius, the founder of anatomical science, that no such bone existed in the body, and also that the male skeleton was not short of a rib, as believers in the Bible story of the creation of Eve had long supposed. Vesalius incurred a dangerous unpopularity, and he died during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land—probably an enforced penance for the sin of investigating the works of the being he sincerely worshipped.

The world was convinced that smallpox was a punishment inflicted by God for human sin, and all medical remedies were denounced as inventions of the Devil. That such a belief predisposed people to fall victims to the disease was of no consequence. In the nineteenth century Sir James Young Simpson aroused a storm of clerical opposition by advocating the use of anæsthetics in surgical operations and obstetrics, the "primal curse" on Eve being thought a really good argument. Sir James neatly retorted by quoting the first surgical operation described in the second chapter of Genesis.

In discussing these mental aberrations it is to be borne in mind that all men did not exhibit them. The freethinking Emperor, Frederick II., allowed the dissection for scientific purposes of dead bodies. Charlemagne promoted the study of medicine and other branches of science. The famous Gerbert, afterwards Pope Sylvester II., who showed a friendly disposition towards medical research in the tenth century, was suspected of sorcery, though perhaps his exalted position saved him from a formal charge. Later Popes—Alexander III., John XXII., Eugene IV., Julius II., and Adrian VI.—issued bulls enjoining terrible severities against sorcerers and witches, thus stimulating the activities of the Inquisition and nearly stifling at birth the reviving spirit of medical science.

One of the greatest of all pioneers of modern thought was Roger Bacon (1214–1294), who is credited with being the inventor of the telescope, the camera obscura, gunpowder, and other novelties in natural philosophy, including, it would appear, clocks, lenses, steam power, and various chemical

formulas. These achievements were naturally inspired by satanic agency. Although a Christian, he was an " atheist," for to limit the power of Satan was hardly less impious than to limit the power of God. Though one Pope, Clement IV., had protected Bacon, two later Popes, in conjunction with the Franciscan authorities, thought prison was the best place for the daring experimenter. In prison he remained for fourteen years, and the results of his wonderful labours were lost to the world. That was the reward of many years' single-minded devotion to knowledge. The modern thinker finds in the terrible plagues and other diseases which afflicted the Middle Ages nothing more remarkable than neglect of the most ordinary sanitary precautions. In an intensely ignorant and credulous epoch these outbreaks were regarded by all as visitations of God's wrath against human sin. At Perth in one year of the fifteenth century a fourth of the population died of plague, while Marseilles early in the eighteenth century lost 50,000 out of 90,000. A noble prelate, Bishop Belzunce, who was humanitarian as well as theologian, worked heroically night and day to relieve the sufferers. The Church as a whole did nothing but stimulate the popular belief in " inscrutable providences." When, in the nineteenth century, scientific hygiene began to make its way the enormous death-rate was greatly diminished. What was thought to be God's work proved to be disastrous. The work of man was successful.

John Wesley said a sensible thing when he pronounced that " cleanliness is near akin to godliness," thus reversing the medieval notion that filthiness is akin to holiness. One saint was quite emphatic about it, declaring that the purity of the body meant the impurity of the soul. In this matter the habits of the ages of faith were not pleasant. The human body was assumed to be essentially vile, and to treat it as such helped to ensure salvation, while cleanliness was due to unbecoming pride. Perhaps the people at large were not quite so dirty as some of the saints, of whom Dr. White says :—

St. Jerome and the Breviary of the Roman Church dwell with unction on the fact that St. Hilarion lived his whole life long in utter physical uncleanliness; St. Athanasius glorifies St. Anthony because he had

never washed his feet; St. Abraham's most striking evidence of holiness was that for fifty years he washed neither his hands nor his feet; St. Sylvia never washed any part of her body save her fingers; St. Euphraxia belonged to a convent in which the nuns religiously abstained from bathing; St. Mary of Egypt was eminent for filthiness; St. Simeon Stylites was in this respect unspeakable—the least that can be said is, that he lived in ordure and stench intolerable to his visitors. The *Lives of the Saints* dwell with complacency on the statement that, when sundry Eastern monks showed a disposition to wash themselves, the Almighty manifested his displeasure by drying up a neighbouring stream until the bath which it had supplied was destroyed (Vol. II., p. 69).

Of this last conception of Providence as a patron of dirt Lecky gives a fuller account in his *History of European Morals* (Vol. II., pp. 117, 118). These specimens of crazy asceticism are quite enough for queasy stomachs. The religious phase did not become permanent, but while it lasted it must have had anything but a civilizing influence.

" While we may well believe," says Dr. White, " that the devotion of the clergy to the sick was one cause why, during the greater plagues, they lost so large a proportion of their numbers, we cannot escape the conclusion that their want of cleanliness had much to do with it. In France, during the fourteenth century, Guy de Chauliac, the great physician of his time, noted particularly that certain Carmelite monks suffered especially from pestilence, and that they were especially filthy. During the Black Death no less than nine hundred Carthusian monks fell victims in one group of buildings.

Jenner's discovery of inoculation against smallpox was for thirty years denounced as sinful, a violation of God's will, " flying in the face of Providence "; the disease was (as usual) a judgment of God on the sins of the people, and attempts to avert it were certain to provoke him to further anger. Clergy, bishops, and even some of the medical profession, joined in the most violent language, with a profusion of Biblical texts. It was urged that one doctor in America who favoured the practice should be tried for murder, and the orthodox Cotton Mather had a lighted grenade thrown into his house. The question of vaccination still arouses so much controversy, sometimes of a needlessly embittered kind, that it cannot be further discussed here. But in view of the argument that the unmistakable decline of smallpox is due not to vaccination,

but to the improvement in modern times of sanitary and other hygienic measures, it must be pointed out that this improvement had scarcely begun in Jenner's lifetime. Yet in most civilized countries an astounding reduction in the number of deaths from smallpox was effected in a very few years after his discovery. The researches of that remarkable investigator, Pasteur, have shown that Jenner was at least on the right track. This benefactor of the race (he surely deserved his grant of £30,000) died in 1823.

The Apostle James thought that prayer and anointing were better than medical treatment, and many people have followed his " inspired " advice, as pious believers should. If he was right, the " Peculiar People " of the present day are right in submitting to sickness and death rather than call in a doctor. The epithet " peculiar " indicates that modern thought has advanced far beyond the medieval credulity in which the minority remains. In the words of Dr. White: " In proportion as the grasp of theology upon education tightened, medicine declined, and in proportion as that grasp has relaxed, medicine has been developed " (*Warfare*, II. 66).

Probably enough has been said to show that the development of one of the most beneficent branches of science has been consistently and resolutely opposed either by the official pronouncements of the Christian Churches or by the intensely conservative spirit engendered by their teachings. The state of things is now vastly more satisfactory (far more so, indeed, than is revealed by statistics), but we cannot suppose that the spirit which prompted the opposition to the progress can have been an important factor in the improvement. Chemistry was once assumed to be due to sorcery, disease to evil spirits, natural calamities to the wrath of God; while remedies were, with strange inconsistency, sought by prayers to the Being who was believed to have inflicted the evils under which man groaned. Modern thought finds in the operations of nature's inflexible laws the explanation of disease and the means by which its ravages may be ameliorated. We look to material rather than to purely spiritual agencies for the improvement of the human lot and the mitigation of human suffering.

Having discovered that the popular supernaturalism was mistaken, and that the misery it caused could have been averted if men had been able to reason, we may with the more confidence rely on the agencies which have proved successful in the past to achieve even more glorious triumphs in the future.

LANGUAGE

One would hardly think the subject of language would afford much scope for the cruelty of the bigot or the ingenuity of the apologist. Yet even here we find the race suffering from the vagaries of its religious teachers. The false notion that human speech, or rather its numerous varieties, originated as described in the Book of Genesis has greatly retarded linguistic studies. The idea prevailed that, as every good and perfect gift comes from heaven, the power of uttering intelligible sounds was a gift to man instead of being left to man to develop for himself. Look at the implications of the Tower of Babel story. If the " confusion of tongues " was a punishment on man for attempting to scale the ramparts of heaven, its absurd futility and injustice are obvious enough. A tower of some sort was built, of which the remains still exist; but its purpose, partly astronomical, partly religious, seems to have been transformed by the pious imagination of the writer of the story in Genesis, which was a myth invented to explain the inevitable divergences of human speech. The earlier form of the legend is found in the Assyrian inscriptions, but orthodox writers knew nothing of comparative philology, and were satisfied of the truth of a story guaranteed by Divine inspiration. Eminent scholars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries maintained, not without the customary heat, that Hebrew was a Divinely inspired language, even in its vowel-points and punctuation, and undoubtedly spoken by God himself. Only about the close of the seventeenth century did saner views begin to prevail. One of their most influential advocates was Leibnitz, while a Spanish

Jesuit named Hervas and a German scholar, Adelung, devoted their enormous industry to the cause of enlightenment. The various editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* issued between 1771 and 1842 show a gradual weakening of the support accorded in the first edition to the old dogmatic views as to the priority of Hebrew, and the issue of 1885 dispensed with the sacred theory altogether. It is hardly necessary to add that during a period of about three centuries almost every scholar who ventured to oppose or modify that theory was elaborately "answered," and often soundly abused for his pains. So late as the nineteenth century the traditional view of the Divine origin of language was, as against the "infidels," stoutly maintained by orthodox apologists, the kindly Cardinal Wiseman actually contending that the conclusions of the scientific experts had long been accepted by the Church as proving "the truth of Scripture"! Ingenious, but untrue!

The foolish fables (once universally believed) about Lot's wife and the curious rock formations of the Dead Sea region need only be mentioned as showing the vitality of superstitions which are a standing barrier to progress in knowledge.

ECONOMICS AND USURY

In the modern world a vast system of credit, both national and international, has become of such vital importance that civilization could not be carried on without it, and reasons to justify such a system are quite unnecessary. The taking of interest for money lent was sternly discountenanced by the Church in the Middle Ages, because it was regarded as "usury," and was therefore unjust. The Church, however laudable its purpose, was at fault in its economics. How can there be anything wrong in a lender requiring some return for the use of his money? Only by denial of all right to possess any property whatever could the prohibition plead some colourable excuse. But then the taking of interest was "contrary to Scripture," the usual obstacle to progress. "Usury" was, in the fifteenth century, condemned by the Council of Augsburg,

which represented the general practice in Germany. In England under Henry VII. a law was passed annulling the loan and imposing on the lender a fine of £100, the question of further punishment being left to the gentle discretion of the ecclesiastical authorities. The borrower apparently was entitled to no more than the return of the money lent. In such conditions there were presumably few lenders and scarcely any trade.

"Usury"—that is, the taking of any interest at all on loans—was forbidden by Pope Leo X.; it was easier and safer to sell Indulgences to help in providing funds for the rebuilding of St. Peter's at Rome. The public feeling against the sin became so strong that the bodies of deceased money-lenders were sometimes taken out of their graves in consecrated ground. In one case bodies were thrown into a stream in order to stop a rainstorm, though why and how the process worked does not appear. The punishment was not very severe, but in days when hell was a terrific reality the most severe sufferings were enjoined and sometimes inflicted on "usurers." In his strong condemnation of this sin Bossuet was merely following the example of twenty-eight Councils and seventeen Popes. The Canon law provided that if a loan was repaid exactly, without a penny of interest, the transaction was justly concluded: anything more was simply theft. In time the necessities of trade caused this strictness to be relaxed, and progress became possible. It was discovered that the Canon law defeated its own purpose. Some of the Popes themselves lent money at interest, and the uncertainty of getting repayment caused lenders to exact excessive interest, such rates as forty and even a hundred and twenty per cent. being not unknown. A further effect was that the wealthy, having little opportunity of employing their surplus cash productively, spent it in riotous living, the more readily as so much of it was wrung from the poor. A noble exception was the famous Chancellor Gerson, who aroused great opposition by contending that it was better to lend money to the poor at reasonable rates than to see them reduced to distress and robbery. The clerical objections to "usury" derived from traditional interpretations of the

Bible remained powerful for several centuries, though the Church was well aware of the implied sanction given to usury by its founder (Luke xix. 23). An English Bishop of the seventeenth century actually feared that, if the evil were not repressed, the nation would suffer from "the heavy hand of God."

No one need suppose that all this was due to culpable opposition to what was recognized as essential to human progress. It was due simply to stupidity, to the determined ignorance enjoined by the Church, and for which it is difficult to find any excuse. Professor White concludes that "the whole evolution of European civilization was greatly hindered by this conscientious policy." Conscientious it may have been, but the resulting evils might have been perceived by an organization which asserted its own Divine guidance.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

Undoubtedly the foulest blot upon the record of a religion claiming to be a religion of love is the organized cruelty by which it strove to suppress all opinions that differed, or were supposed to differ, from its official pronouncements. On the one hand stood the Church, claiming a Divine authority which few persons dared to dispute, and wielding practically supreme power in every department of human life; on the other hand was the human mind, striving, usually in vain, towards clearer light and fuller knowledge. Its activities could not be annihilated by force of reason or persuasion: the power of physical torture was believed to be more convincing. Ecclesiastical pressure could and did reduce the human mind to a stagnation which has reacted disastrously on progress and happiness. In the nature of things such intellectual torpor could not be permanent. The majority of the race are incapable of profound thought, but there is a minority to whom mental activity is the very breath of life. The work of the thinker cannot be utterly destroyed. One might paraphrase a gospel passage and say that, while the body might be slain, ideas survive and

pass on to other minds for use in happier times. Of new ideas the Church has always had a dread, because they would unsettle beliefs previously held to be eternally true. Even without a hearing, religious novelties were to be condemned as emanating from a faculty itself impious and sinful. Is not this hatred of reason, of what is admitted to be a God-given endowment, as absurd as it is harmful? Only by some slight use of reason can reason be denounced. The evil of this attitude of mind was well illustrated in the nineteenth century, when the famous Evangelical preacher, Mr. Spurgeon, hysterically committed intellectual suicide in words to this effect: If all the evil, all the wickedness, of the world were rolled into one vast ball of black corruption, it would be less than the sin of unbelief!

How was it that the idea of punishing people for their opinions ever got into the human mind? Why should one man or one body of men think it their duty to inflict suffering for wrong opinions? The sin lies mainly at the door of Christianity. The Christian Church claimed, and still claims, on no other authority than its own, that certainty in religion is not only possible, but is actually possessed by that Church. It thus considered it right to suppress ideas which in some undefinable way conflicted with the absolute knowledge supposed to have been assured by a Divine revelation. That God actually gave to some human beings certain knowledge which He withheld from all the rest is an assertion so widely open to dispute that it must here be left on one side. One can only remark that so momentous a fact would, if true, have surely resulted in the display of greater wisdom and greater goodness than has been the case with the Christian Church. But to this claim the world in general, after two thousand years' experience, is still indifferent. Undeterred by the uncertainty of its foundations, the Church of Rome goes on insisting upon a Divine commission at which the reasoner smiles.

Theologians now admit that unbelief, or at least indifference, is prevalent to a serious degree. They sometimes put it down to "the spirit of the age." The shame of religious

persecution is explained in the same way. There is some truth in the explanation. But if it in any way justifies the Church, it equally justifies the scepticism of to-day. Does it, however, justify the Church? When we speak of "the spirit of the age" we cannot be referring to anything but the prevailing tone of thought of a particular epoch. Perhaps one can only say that in times of general ignorance the prevailing tone of thought is definitely religious, and very few people can remain unaffected by it. But if the spirit of the age is in any way morally defective, why should a Divine revelation be limited by it? Why not correct the errors? The revelation, if intended to teach morals to humanity, might be expected to act continuously, and not be so disastrously hampered as it has been. In medieval times the spirit of the age was desperately religious, and the writings of Christian scholars abound with the most fanciful interpretations of Biblical events and symbols. Dr. White quotes a number of these which read like the ravings of unsound intellects. In times of general enlightenment the dominant tendency is to relax the strictness of religious dogmas, if not to discard them altogether. But what was the cause of the doctrinal rigidity of the medieval period? Why the strange variations in man's perceptions of truth? Many answers may be given, and among them we must include the influence of the Christian Church. The first Christian Emperor, Constantine, probably following the bad examples of Decius and Diocletian, availed himself of the human tendency to destroy what we dislike, and started religious persecution. Theodosius elaborated his predecessors' schemes; some of the Christian Fathers, notably St. Augustine, fostered the spirit of intolerance to a dangerous extent, and the rest was a natural result of an abuse of power. This was due, it may be said, to the true spirit of Christianity being greatly misunderstood. Yet we can hardly fail to notice some passages in the New Testament which appear to lend countenance to a spirit of intolerance quite alien to that generally attributed to its founder. To the modern mind these inconsistent and morally defective passages, especially those emphasizing the shockingly cruel

punishment of evil-doers in a future life, are very serious blemishes in an alleged Divine communication, and could not fail to stimulate that spirit of intolerance which has led to religious persecution. Indeed, it may be said that religious persecutions have been caused chiefly by the conviction that the collection of books known as the Bible constituted the veritable " Word of God." Rejection of this view could be due only to wilful blindness to wickedness for which no punishment could be too severe. Nor was any compunction felt about forestalling that wrath of God which was so real to the persecutors, though milder ages may deem it a barbarous superstition. Hence the sword, the torture chamber, and the stake—all for the " glory of God " !

It is generally recognized that on some occasions these horrors were inflicted from justifiable, possibly even laudable, motives ; " but the history of medieval persecution leads one to infer that the clergy as a whole were roused to much greater activity by menaces to their material comforts in this world than by an altruistic anxiety for the fate of lay souls in the next " (E. S. P. Haynes, *Religious Persecution ;* R.P.A. edition, p. 33). The strange perversion of the idea of justice which professed to save the sinner from a possible hell by inflicting death in this world must, nevertheless, be condemned without reserve. Frequently the pretext was hypocritical, and, even if genuine, meant a serious injury to the advance of civilization and human happiness. The Church might declare (sometimes) that it had no wish to harm its victims, but merely to eradicate their sins. It forgot that, sin being manifested by conscious beings, it was difficult to abolish the one without causing suffering to the other. More reasonable means were known, but their religion had not enlightened the persecutors on that point, and the Biblical representations were thought to justify the extremest severity. God's own opinion was neither sought nor vouchsafed, but had it been announced it would have faithfully reflected that of his devotees. This suffocation of the human mind went on for century after century, with effects which it would be difficult to exaggerate.

A few words may be said about the most efficiently organized

form assumed by attempts to suppress thought on matters of religion. Under the influence of Dominic, a fanatical " saint " of the Roman Church, the Inquisition was established early in the thirteenth century. In order to destroy by any means, however merciless, the promising but heretical civilization which was arising peacefully in the south of France, certain decrees were issued by Pope Innocent III. about 1216, and by Pope Gregory IX. in 1233, previous punishments ordered by another pontiff, Lucius III., having proved too mild, although strengthened by a gospel passage (John xv. 6), which was held to authorize death by fire. Raymond of Toulouse, indeed, though a good Catholic, was himself " excommunicated for not persecuting his heretical subjects, and his case was looked upon as a precedent in after years " (Haynes, *Religious Persecution*, p. 33). By the middle of the century the Holy Office was officially established and in effective operation. Heresy was the greatest of all sins, and to those who could adopt that view it appeared a holy duty that every effort should be made to stamp it out. The flagrantly unfair means of eliciting evidence against accused persons, and the horrible cruelties employed, were winked at or favoured, and sometimes practised, by the Church. The object was not to get at the truth, but to ensure confessions, though the fullest admission did not necessarily secure the pardon of the offender. Torture was expressly authorized by a Papal bull of 1252; and, though an unenlightened public feeling usually favoured severity—a fact of which apologetic writers have gladly availed themselves—protests were at times raised, but with so little effect as to be met by repeated Papal bulls urging greater zeal in the holy work. Only with the slow growth of humane feeling and of secular civilization did the persecuting frenzy die down and virtually disappear.

The most serious form of organized religious intolerance has yet to be noticed. Operating within a more restricted but even more congenial area, the Spanish Inquisition, thoroughly well organized by the relentless bigot Torquemada (ominous name !), was an institution of terrible efficiency. From the ecclesiastical point of view there were peculiarly strong

reasons for it in Spain. The country was almost isolated from the rest of Europe, large sections of the people were more or less antagonistic to the Christian faith, and the store of religious intolerance which was the chief result of the long struggle with the Moors, combined with the presence of great numbers of Jews, was employed in the most determined efforts to turn them into Christians. Persecution was the proper method, robbery and murder were elegant accomplishments, when used for the glory of God. Towards the end of the fifteenth century Ferdinand and Isabella, anxious to roll back the threatening tide of heresy, applied to the Pope Sixtus IV. for help and authority to establish in Spain an improved edition of the old Roman Inquisition. Inquisitors were promptly appointed by his Holiness, who, like his successors, warmly approved their severities. The first Inquisitor General was Torquemada, who is said to have overcome, by a dramatic appeal to the Cross, the reluctance of Isabella to share in cruel persecutions. This hateful person became what may be called the Managing Director of the concern, with full powers of plunder and destruction. The monarchs (*Los Reyes*) desired no injustice, and the death penalty was not usually inflicted on voluntary penitents. In 1481 the first *auto da fé* (act of faith !) took place at Seville, and by the end of the year nearly three hundred persons had been burnt and many others sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, their property and that of thousands of semi-Christianized Moors being prudently cared for by the ever-vigilant authorities.

The Inquisition was established at least as much for State as for religious reasons. Its procedure against accused persons was elaborated with such injustice, secrecy, cruelty, and calculated greed as probably the world has never before or since beheld in combination. Two historical events—the expulsion from Spain of many thousands of its most industrious inhabitants, the Jews, in 1492, and the Moriscos at various times during the following century—present an interesting comment on the influence of religious zeal on the progress of civilization. Two or three times abolished and restored, the " Holy Office " came to an inglorious end in

1834, Spain having taken over three hundred and fifty years to realize its infamy. No adequate idea can be given of the suffering, the poverty, the national ruin, the harm to civilization, caused by this wholly unnecessary and pernicious organization.

In so brief a sketch as the present it is not necessary to dwell in any detail on the numberless cases of religious intolerance which stain the pages of history. Could any crime be greater than the extirpation of the Albigenses or the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, 1572, when ten thousand Protestants were mercilessly slaughtered, in honour of which event Pope Gregory XIII. had a medal struck—of course to the "glory of God"? Statecraft had much to do with these horrors, but the influence of the Church was paramount, and on the Church must lie the chief shame. Public opinion has at times warmly approved religious persecution by secular states, but it must be borne in mind that this has only been done for reasons of state, while the motives of the Church in thus outraging liberty have been almost invariably, at least ostensibly, of a religious nature, and in reliance upon alleged divine authority.

Mr. E. S. P. Haynes's excellent little book makes it unnecessary to enter into particulars, but the curious reader, if so disposed, may with interest and profit consult the well-known historians, Prescott and Motley, for lurid accounts of the perfectly appalling cruelties inflicted on the peaceful Dutch for resisting the yoke of the Inquisition. The wars in France aroused by the persecution of the Protestants, the massacres of the Waldenses, the Hussite wars in Bohemia following the indefensible breach of faith which brought Huss to the stake, the Thirty Years' War, which nearly depopulated Germany—these and scores of others need no more than passing allusion. In Ireland the "Ulster Settlement" settled nothing: in England Catholics persecuted Protestants, and directly they got a chance Protestants returned the compliment. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a crazy epidemic of persecuting zeal swept over the most "civilized" countries of Europe. Heretics were hunted out everywhere, and anyone

might be a heretic without knowing it. In every age the heaviest sufferers have been the unfortunate Jews, chiefly because, according to Christian tradition, they were the "murderers of Christ." A frantic bigotry caused the assassination of some of the better monarchs—Henry IV. of France, William of Orange, and others. Even in much later times two or three American Presidents have paid the penalty of being too advanced for their time. Religion is not answerable for all these crimes, but there is reason to believe that it had a great influence in preparing a suitable soil.

How slowly this influence wanes is shown by the examples of mild persecution which occurred in the enlightened nineteenth century, and even in its still more enlightened successor. A poor old half-witted working man was prosecuted by a clergyman for writing some silly words on a gate, and in prison lost his reason. In 1842 George Jacob Holyoake was clapt into gaol for stating that, finding God of no utility, he (that is, religious institutions) should be put on half-pay. Richard Carlile suffered nine years' imprisonment for selling copies of Paine's *Age of Reason*. No notice need be taken of the virulent and cowardly attacks on the memory of Voltaire, Paine, and Ingersoll; they are quite in the line of the old orthodoxy. But the ground shifted a little at times. It was discovered that these terrible sinners repented at the last moment and endured on their death-beds agonies of remorse! To the gentle Darwin special indulgence was accorded. A legend grew up and still flourishes that before death he became an earnest Christian! The romantic falsehood had to be shattered by the evidence of facts.

A person whose mind has in youth, either by reason of his upbringing or in obedience to authority, been committed to certain religious beliefs has little wish to inquire into their truth. Such questions are for him already settled; they have passed into a body of ascertained truth which he has no wish to disturb. And any disturbance by other people is for this reason to be resented. He imagines that the foundations of society will be shaken, and his own eternal welfare forfeited or endangered. This fear seems to underlie that

distrust of the intellect which has rendered, and still renders, the majority of human beings averse to novelties in religion, and indeed in any department of life. It is hardly necessary to show how this contented ignorance contrasts with the equally natural desire for knowledge which kindles and carries on progress in civilization; but a few further illustrations may be usefully given. They exhibit that distrust of fresh ideas, that general lowering of mental activity, which accompanies subservience to conventional opinions.

Little need be said about the British House of Lords. That august body contains a good supply of legislators who by divine grace have been endowed with remarkable wisdom, the purpose of which is to promote the welfare, material as well as spiritual, of the community. By virtue of their office they have a voice in secular legislation, and if their decision is a wrong one they cannot easily be called to account for it. It is natural to inquire how they have used their powers. The Puritan Long Parliament thought so little of their services that they were expelled from the Upper Chamber, but " with the Restoration the opportunity of the clergy came, and they were not slow to take advantage of their position. It was made criminal to deny that the king reigned by right divine. It was held to be unlawful, on any pretext whatever, to take up arms against the king " (*Popular Progress in England*, James Routledge, p. 7). That semi-religious doctrine, that " the king can do no wrong," has produced consequences so mischievous that it would require a volume to describe them. The " Corporation Act " of 1661 provided that no one should take a seat as member of any corporation unless he had received the sacrament in a stipulated manner according to the rites of the English Church (*Ibid.*, p. 10). The " Act of Uniformity " came into effect on August 24, 1662—curiously, if an accident, but probably by design, on the anniversary of the massacre of St. Bartholomew's day. Enforced uniformity was by no means new; but the new Act was carefully constructed to leave no loopholes for escape. The day when this Act came into force has been called the birthday of modern Nonconformity; and not without reason, for

on that day two thousand clergymen, comprising men of eminence, learning, and piety, gave up stipends and houses, and went out, in many cases, into helpless, hopeless poverty (*Ibid.*, p. 11). Some years later the Scottish Parliament declared that toleration of episcopacy would mean establishing "iniquity by law." There was plenty of iniquity without. Public morals were deplorable. "In 1664 the 'Conventicle Act' was passed in England. It was the natural sequel to the ejection of the two thousand clergymen. At the root of its provisions was that famous one that no more than five persons, in addition to the family forming the conventicle, should meet together for worship, or without the securities of the oaths already devised" (*Ibid.*, p. 11). In the following year some further strengthening of the restrictions on "Christian liberty" were thought advisable. They were embodied in the "Five Mile Act," under which Nonconformist ministers were rigorously prevented from coming within five miles of any place in which they had formerly preached. Religious zeal was on the war-path, and even religious people could not escape its dire effects. Those who claimed freedom for themselves had not the least idea of granting it to others. The author just quoted adds: "It were hardly too much to say that the principles represented by an extreme portion of the clergy of the English Church at and after the Restoration were among the worst political principles ever known. It would be difficult, indeed, to conceive anything more despotic. If the laws had been carried into effect, England had become a pandemonium" (*Ibid.*, p. 25). The doctrine of the Divine right of kings was becoming ludicrous when a man like Tillotson could declare that the King (Charles II.) had the sole right to choose the religion of his people, whose duty was to keep silence.

These extravagances of the religious temperament passed away in time, but their effects long remained. Some of the Bishops' achievements in the legislation of the nineteenth century reflect little credit on their sacred functions. The following selection is taken mainly from Mr. W. Clayton's *The Bishops as Legislators*; but I have not hesitated to correct

certain obvious errors, and some of the information has been brought up to date.

Early in the century a Bill was brought before the House of Lords enabling Roman Catholics to marry according to the rites of their Church. No Bishop supported it. Dissenters desiring " holy matrimony " had to get it in the parish church : they had formerly been penalized for not attending the Anglican worship. A Bill of 1812 repealing the penalties was rejected by the Lords, all the prelates in the House concurring.

The Whitbread Poor Law Bill of 1807, which included State provision for Elementary Schools, passed the House of Commons, but was thrown out by the Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury helping the process of wrecking.

A measure of 1839 providing for the training of teachers was defeated, but the votes of the Bishops are not known to me.

The " Religious Disabilities Repeal Bill " was repeatedly thrown out, an Archbishop declaring that Parliament would be degraded if it contained any non-Christians, and that the proposed measure would " shake the foundations of religion." Finally the Bill passed.

In 1838 a Bill to permit affirmations in lieu of oaths was rejected by the Lords.

When the decision in the matter of Lady Hewley's Charities had shaken the security of a large number of Nonconformist congregations, the Government of the day brought in a Bill providing that, where no specific creed or observance had been prescribed by the founders, the usage of the congregation for twenty-five years preceding any suit should be conclusive evidence that such usage was lawful. Such an enactment might be thought entirely harmless. Yet in the opinion of the then Bishop of London (1844) it " contravened every principle of truth, justice, equity, and religion " ! Possibly the anger of the Bishop may be explained by the fact that the majority of the congregations which would benefit by the Bill were known to be Unitarian.

A little later some men charged with poaching could not be convicted of that offence, but they could be and were convicted for non-attendance at the parish church !

No fewer than twenty-four Bishops voted in 1858 against the proposed abolition of Compulsory Church Rates; none for it.

The savage laws formerly in force against minor offences did not stir the tender feelings of the Episcopal Bench sufficiently to cause their repeal. The Bishops seem to have had a tradition that humane laws must be defeated. When in 1820 a Bill reducing the barbaric penalties was introduced an amendment was suggested which still retained the capital sentence for illegally felling trees and a few other offences. To this amendment four of the Bishops agreed. It is said that during the first sixty years of the century no Bishop voted for the removal of such bloodthirsty laws.

The Reform Bill of 1831–1832 aroused keen opposition, in which the political wisdom of the Episcopate shared. Twenty-one of its members voted against the Bill, though in time their dislike of reform weakened.

Against Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule for Ireland Bill in 1893 twenty-two Bishops recorded their votes.

In 1842 it was proposed in the House of Lords that an official inquiry should be made into the distressed condition of the country. Four Bishops voted against the suggestion.

The Episcopate can scarcely be congratulated on its share in abolishing slavery.

The Bishops' adverse vote on the question of reform in factory legislation provoked Lord Shaftesbury in 1844 to say: "They are timid, time-serving, and great worshippers of wealth and power."

Only one Bishop spoke (1818) in favour of limiting the hours of child labour in cotton mills.

Only one Bishop attended (in 1819) the debate on the Bill for regulating the hours of boy chimney sweeps.

When the "Deceased Wife's Sister Bill" was debated the ecclesiastical influence was powerful enough to defeat the reform on at least five occasions. The Bill passed in 1907, after a fight which had lasted for more than fifty years; even then fourteen Bishops voted against it.

Fourteen years later, when the same principle was extended

to the deceased brother's widow, the courage of the episcopal bench had sadly fallen, only a miserable remnant of two being found in opposition.

A much more modest measure of the same kind was resisted by the Bishops, though not with the same pertinacity. It had been decided that marriage with a deceased wife's sister, contracted by persons domiciled in a country where the marriage was lawful, was a good marriage in this country for every purpose but one—the inheritance of land. It was proposed to remedy this anomalous position so far as persons domiciled in the British Dominions were concerned. In 1900 five Bishops voted against the Bill, but it passed with little difficulty in 1906.

The " Restriction of Cruelty to Animals Bill " in 1809 had to be withdrawn for lack of support.

A proposed Amendment of the Game Laws (1824) also received little encouragement from the Bishops. Some did not vote, some did not attend the discussion. No Bishop voted against pigeon-shooting.

The same may be said of the Corn Laws, the Disestablishment of the Irish Church, the Education Bill of 1870, and a host of other proposed reforms.

Doubtless all this indifference and hostility to advances towards civilization have been prompted by sincere and worthy motives. But we have to judge by results rather than motives. Do the results justify any particular wisdom being ascribed to clerical influence in political life ?

Though it is useless to blame the clergy for what they could hardly help, that does not recommend organized religion as a system. Its distressing effects on material well-being and intellectual honesty might surely have been foreseen by men of education and intelligence. But theology has an extraordinary power to deaden, and even pervert, the natural activity of the mind. The want of fair play so conspicuously manifested against Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant had its roots in theological prejudice of the most unworthy kind—that prejudice which insists that it possesses knowledge that it cannot possibly possess, and abuses inquirers

who feel their limitations. Even the success of the proposed reforms sometimes fails to convince the dogmatist that he was wrong in opposing them.

On the whole, one is inclined to echo Lord Shaftesbury's question: "Of what use are the Bishops in the House of Lords?"

An admirable scheme of public instruction in France proposed by Turgot in the eighteenth century was wrecked by theological opposition. So great a distrust of science existed in Spain that, until recently, professors who held to the Newtonian system have been excluded from the Universities. A Scriptural reference to "science falsely so called" has been assumed by large numbers of persons to be a denunciation of all science, whether false or true. The misunderstanding has furnished a handy stone to hurl at the heterodox.

Telegraphs as well as railroads were discovered by pulpiteers to be heralds of Antichrist (a mysterious personage whose identity has always been obscure), and therefore to be opposed by the religious world.

In the opinion of a French Archbishop, railways were a judgment upon country innkeepers for allowing guests to eat meat on fast days!

In an accident which took place during the construction of the Thames Tunnel was seen a "judgment" on presumptuous men. Sudden deaths are perpetually happening, and if they occur to persons whose theology may be a trifle shady, they are divine judgments; if a parson drops dead in his pulpit, God has called him to a better world!

Early in the nineteenth century gas was discovered, and in 1814 the daring proposal was made that it should be used for lighting the streets of London. A host of theological voices arose in disapproval, possibly as a survival of the old superstition that noxious emanations from mines and caverns were due to the direct action of evil spirits. In the writings of the ancients a truer explanation might have been found. The very useful system of life insurance was established at the beginning of the eighteenth century, despite the objection of the orthodox that it was an attempt to thwart the "will of

God "—which had not been made known. In a similar spirit the disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869, and of the Welsh Church in 1914, were looked upon by some of the clergy as events which indicated the Divine wrath against human perversity. When in 1828 it was proposed to establish under royal and clerical patronage, and "on Christian and Constitutional principles," a great metropolitan school, to be called King's College, it was hoped by a London newspaper that "with such a seminary in a prosperous position there will be neither motive nor excuse for any parent to inflict upon his offspring the disgrace of education in the infidel and godless college in Gower Street." This abode of iniquity was supported by Lord Brougham, and has long been famous as University College, London (now part of London University).

An extraordinary petition was in 1864 presented to the U.S.A. Congress objecting to the "irreverent and irreligious" extraction of petroleum from the earth, thus "checking the designs of the Almighty, who has undoubtedly stored it there with a view to the Last Day, when all things shall be destroyed" (*Daily Chronicle*, May 18, 1911). Can you beat that?

THEOLOGY IN DECAY

There used to be, perhaps still is, an idea that theology is a science. How can it be when the materials for scientific investigation do not exist, and the power of verifying speculations is practically impossible to exercise? Yet scientific methods can be brought to bear in the examination of such credentials as theology has to offer on behalf of its claims.

For civilized nations, which are in the main and at least nominally Christian nations, these credentials consist of the collection of Jewish writings translated into their respective languages and known as the Bible. So much misapprehension exists as to the meaning of this collection that one is compelled to doubt whether the Christian Churches have really understood or properly accomplished their self-imposed task of

making known to the people the origin and purport of its contents. We shall find that this important duty has been all through its career neglected or frustrated by nearly every Christian body. If we ask why, I can only say that the reasons are too complex, and by Christian writers left too much in the background, for adequate explanation to be given in the present essay. A meagre selection of instances is all that can be adduced in support of the assertion that the great obstacle to theological progress has been that erected by Christian theologians themselves.

In 1753 appeared a work on the Book of Genesis, written by the French physician Astruc, with results which, though sneered at and covered with contempt, have since revolutionized the study of the Bible. Suspecting its historical deficiencies, he set out to trace its composite authorship, and his researches have long ago been accepted as correct in the opinion of practically all Biblical scholars. Astruc was the real founder of the "higher criticism," and the German Eichhorn further confirmed the conclusions of the scholar, disregarding the obloquy and insults showered upon him. A Catholic priest at Mayence, a Greek and Hebrew scholar, happened to make known the correct interpretation of certain Scriptural passages. His book was confiscated, and its author found himself in gaol. He escaped, but was forced again to prison and, falling under the papal ban, recanted. Thereafter the poor man was left in peace till he died. Spinoza, the "God-intoxicated man," was abhorred by both Jews and Christians, publicly cursed by the former and expelled from the synagogue; and regarded by the latter as Antichrist. At the instance of Bossuet, the publication of the learned Richard Simon's book on Biblical interpretation was prohibited and the edition burnt. Herder set aside the mystical meanings of the Song of Songs, and showed its true character, that of a Hebrew erotic poem. He found refuge in another State. For a similarly heinous offence the Protestants drove Castellio to starvation and death, and Philip of Spain allowed the pious and gifted Luis de Leon to be kept by the Inquisition in one of its comfortable dungeons for five years. Another fine

theologian, De Wette, was in the nineteenth century driven out of his native country for his *Introduction to the New Testament;* Alexander Geddes, a Catholic priest, was sneered at as " a would-be corrector of the Holy Ghost " ; and in America Theodore Parker incurred great unpopularity by his translation of De Wette, as well as by his *Discourses on Religion.* So many more conscientious and learned men were during the stodgy years of the nineteenth century pitilessly belaboured and covered with odium that one begins to wonder why orthodox Christianity did not feel a little ashamed of its champions.

Of the unaccountable orthodox mentality only one more illustration need be given. In 1861 the theological ferment was at its worst. Preaching at Oxford, that stiff-necked dogmatist, Dean Burgon, let off the following escape of gas : " The Bible is the very utterance of the Eternal : as much God's own word as if high heaven were open and we heard God speaking to us with human voice. Every book is inspired alike, and is inspired entirely. Inspiration is not a difference of degree, but of kind. The Bible is filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit of God ; the books of it and the words of it and the very letters of it." The man was an educated man, not a hopeless ass. He was merely the victim of a foolish theory.

But Reason was getting in the thin edge. Dean Milman had aroused keen opposition by the issue in 1829 of his *History of the Jews,* in which, calmly ignoring the divine origin of the " chosen people," he treated the subject as simply the development of an Oriental tribe. A " Family Library " in which the work appeared was banned and its further publication stopped. It was too late in the day for physical torture, but for years Milman was debarred from the preferment which he richly deserved, and must have endured bitter suffering. His later and more important *History of Latin Christianity* is crammed with valuable knowledge, and should be read by every student. Only it is in nine substantial volumes !

The famous *Essays and Reviews* appeared in 1860, and almost at once the floodgates of theological wrath were opened, and a

torrent of unbecoming abuse was let loose. Bishop Wilberforce, following up his attack on Darwin at Oxford, in which he was so decisively answered by Huxley, published an article in the *Quarterly Review* which aroused a veritable storm. Many of the clergy had fits of hysterics. Archdeacon Denison feared the book was thrusting the young (were they likely to read it?) almost to hell, and added: "Of all books in any language which I ever laid my hands on, this is incomparably the worst; it contains all the poison which is to be found in Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, while it has the additional disadvantage of having been written by clergymen." Two of the writers, Dr. Williams and Mr. Wilson, were prosecuted by their clerical brethren and suspended for a year; but on appeal to the Privy Council the Lord Chancellor and the lay judges found the accused innocent, and that Mr. Wilson had committed no legal offence in questioning the dogma of eternal punishment. The Archbishops dissented from the obnoxious judgment, which, as a cynical wit remarked, "dismissed hell with costs," and were thanked for their valuable assistance. A Declaration posted shortly afterwards to every cleric in England and Ireland was signed by eleven thousand of their number, and, despite the scorn of the scholarly Bishop Thirlwall, Convocation duly passed a resolution condemning as blasphemous and heretical a book which no one nowadays would make the least fuss about. Dr. Tait, the then Bishop of London, who was one of the ecclesiastical judges, had been appealed to by Dr. Pusey and others to vote against the offending book, but he very properly took no public notice of the request. Tait's own attitude was for a time half-hearted, and Dr. Temple reminded him that he had formerly been advised by Tait himself to study the Bible critically. He added: "To tell a man to study, and yet bid him, under heavy penalties, to come to the same conclusions with those who have not studied, is to mock him. If the conclusions are prescribed, the study is precluded." In another letter to the Bishop he said: "What can be a grosser superstition than the theory of literal inspiration?" The majority of the clergy clung like barnacles to their superstition.

The agitation caused by *Essays and Reviews* had not entirely died away before another scare of still greater intensity arose and brought the Church of England to the verge of insanity. It was caused by the appearance in 1862 of the first part of *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, written by John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal (1814–1883). Of this epoch-making work Professor White says: "Its author had formerly been highly esteemed as Fellow and tutor at Cambridge, master at Harrow, author of various valuable text-books in mathematics; and as long as he exercised his powers within the limits of popular orthodoxy he was evidently in the way to the highest positions in the Church; but he chose another path. His treatment of his subject was reverent, but he had gradually come to those conclusions, then so daring, now so widespread among Christian scholars, that the Pentateuch, with much valuable historical matter, contains much that is unhistorical; that a large portion of it was the work of a comparatively late period in Jewish history; that many passages in Deuteronomy could only have been written after the Jews settled in Canaan; that the Mosaic law was not in force before the captivity; that the books of Chronicles were clearly written as an afterthought, to enforce the views of the priestly caste; and that in all the books there is much that is mythical and legendary" (*Warfare*, II., p. 349).

To a large extent Colenso's arguments were answered by the time-honoured method of vulgar abuse. By his nominal superior, Bishop Gray of Cape Town, he was excommunicated in his own cathedral and "given over to Satan"—whatever that may mean. His book was condemned in Convocation; his supporters were deprived of their stipends. At his consecration in Westminster Abbey Colenso was addressed by Bishop Wilberforce in these words: "You need boldness to risk all for God—to stand by the truth and its supporters against men's threatenings and the devil's wrath; . . . you need a patient meekness to bear the galling calumnies and false surmises with which, if you are faithful, that same Satanic working, which, if it could, would burn your body, will assuredly assail you daily through the pens and tongues of deceivers and

deceived, who, under a semblance of a zeal for Christ, will evermore distort your words, misrepresent your motives, rejoice in your failings, exaggerate your errors, and seek by every poisoned breath of slander to destroy your powers of service" (*Warfare*, II., p. 355).

As a self-drawn picture of Christian charity the Bishop's words "fill the bill." Colenso followed the advice, but Wilberforce, who most needed it, forgot it, and afterwards "became the most untiring of his persecutors."

Defeat again awaited the bigots. Colenso "went to law about it," and won his case. While it was pending great efforts were made to defeat him and "to reduce to beggary the clergy who remained faithful to him; and it is worthy of note that one of the leaders in preparing the legal plea of the committee against him was Mr. Gladstone" (*Warfare*, II., 351). Such was the power of religious prejudice! Both the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and the Rolls Court decided in favour of Colenso, thus safeguarding his salary as Bishop and making his excommunication null and void. Bishop Gray was very dissatisfied; he declared the judgment to be "awful and profane," and the Privy Council "a masterpiece of Satan." This gentleman was sometimes called "the Lion of Cape Town"—perhaps the skin misled people. Did the poor man then dwell in peace? Not a bit of it. Colenso was socially a black sheep as Lyell had been; he was held up to the public as an apostate with whom decent people could not live; servants left his house in horror; F. D. Maurice, a fellow heretic whom Colenso had defended, forsook him, and even Matthew Arnold, that apostle of "sweetness and light," thought fit to make an attack on the pariah Bishop. Colenso went quietly on with his great work. And no theological treatise has had a greater influence on human thought. One cannot believe that men holding these heterodox views could have continued to believe in the traditional theory of Biblical inspiration. To-day they would probably be still bolder.

In 1862 Dr. Samuel Davidson published his learned Introduction to the Old Testament. The usual storm burst, and

he was driven from his professorial chair. Renan's *Life of Jesus* brought him a similar dismissal; the Abbé Loisy was deprived of his professorship and expelled from his university; the noble but hated Theodore Parker was driven out of the American Unitarian Church, and several eminent German scholars underwent penalties and sufferings of a like nature at the instance of their co-religionists.

Little need be said of the theological progress made since these memorable controversies; it has been continuous and full of hope for future victories of Reason over Superstition; it has been an almost unbroken story of concessions by orthodox Christians to the growing power of knowledge. Much of the advance has been made by the clergy, among whom, happily, men are to be found who combine learning with candour and a sincere desire for truth. These men, however, are exceptions to a rather lamentable rule, and even they are more or less restricted by their ordination vows and by the pressure of traditional theories. Thanks to the "advanced guard," these theories are now largely discredited by Christian scholars themselves, while the average man has only a trace of that belief in supernatural influences which was once almost instinctive, and when Augustine's dictum, "Greater is the authority of Scripture than of human capacity," was thought quite a wise saying.

Several of these ecclesiastical sensations arose in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which seems to have been a time of unusual theological sensitiveness. Perhaps the most important case was that of Professor William Robertson Smith (1846–1894). He was a man of vast learning—philologist, physicist, archeologist, and, above all, Biblical critic. In addition to being editor of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he was Professor of Oriental Languages and Old Testament Exegesis in the Free Church College of Aberdeen. His articles, especially that on the Bible which appeared in the *Britannica*, aroused so much suspicion and distrust that in 1881 he was relieved of his duties, after a trial for heresy which resulted in an acquittal. He was a man of the finest character, kind, sweet, and generous in

disposition, and a brilliant conversationalist. Such personal merits count for little in anyone charged with deviations from orthodoxy. It is pleasant to learn that Robertson Smith from 1889 until his death held the Adams professorship of Arabic at Cambridge.

For the last half century keen dissatisfaction has been felt and expressed by the Christian Churches with regard to those among them who have accepted at least some of the results of modern criticism. For such departures from the arbitrary standards of orthodoxy honourable men and competent scholars have been branded as deliberate deceivers, traitors, apostates, infidels. Churches have shown themselves very slow indeed to recognize the sincerity of their more advanced members, or to realize the horrible implications of their own theology. Sincerity is an admirable quality, but much less valuable if divorced from the knowledge which justifies it. Ignorant sincerity is a daily spectacle. Without commanding the belief of others or establishing the accuracy of its assertions, sincerity has at least a right to fair treatment. To receive it would have struck Colenso with astonishment, but in the present day it is possible for both sides in a theological dispute to conduct it without resorting to " Billingsgate " or incurring personal danger. This agreeable change has been brought about not only by the bold criticism of avowed Freethinkers, but by the influence of Christian scholars who have not been afraid to show some inconsistency in their partial adherence to the methods of reason as opposed to blind faith in religious tradition and religious authority. For is not orthodox Christianity a conglomeration of unreason? It postulates a supreme but limited Deity, creator of all things visible and invisible (except evil things !), contriving the Fall of Man, yet punishing man for it with incredible injustice, and arranging a revelation of Himself which no sensible man can accept. Religion cannot hope to save the world by preaching this immoral nonsense. Yet vast numbers of people, with all the sincerity of invincible ignorance, continue to attribute to the God they worship the institution of a system which revolts the conscience of civilized humanity. They still declare in

calm defiance of history that it has been the principal factor in the progress of the race.

A further point may be mentioned here. The Revised Version of the New Testament appeared in 1881. It is admittedly a more accurate version than that authorized by James I. nearly three centuries earlier. Yet it has not up to the present met with universal acceptance in this country. It deletes several passages because they are not in the oldest manuscripts and therefore show that certain Christian dogmas may be no part of the original "revelation." Some people decline to use the Revised Version at all. What can that mean but that they prefer their traditions to the truth as avouched by the consensus of Christian scholars? Of course, the newer version is not perfect, and cannot be made so, for no original manuscripts of the New Testament exist; but that anyone should prefer the less accurate to the more accurate translation can only be regarded as a typical example of pious perversity. Another point is that theology has led the Churches to attach too little importance to the simple ethical elements of their teaching, while insisting on the absolute truth of dogmas that outrage probability, history, and reason.

CONCLUSION

The facts enumerated in the foregoing pages do not disprove the Christian religion. But do they not shatter the dogmatic claims made by its exponents? Its moral influence will remain powerful for centuries, but to regard even that prospect as final and infallible would be ruinous to mental progress. The human mind varies little from age to age in natural capacity, but its stores of knowledge are for ever increasing, and no limit can be put to them. Theology, though not strictly a science, shares the general trend towards expansion rather than stagnation. The mind cannot be kept for ever in a dungeon.

Some important features of the history of Christianity have been purposely omitted from consideration in this Essay, and

of its imperfections I am uncomfortably conscious. The hideous doctrine of Original Sin, so manifestly untrue to the commonest facts of every-day life, was formerly one of the leading tenets of orthodoxy. After creating untold misery, it has disappeared alike from the popular consciousness and from the Christian pulpit. No preacher who values his reputation now ventures to uphold that unspeakable doctrine of the everlasting punishment of sinners. Slavery has been scarcely mentioned, though it was retained by a Christian nation till the latter half of the nineteenth century. On the question of the relation of Christianity to War, I have left the Churches to explain their very unsatisfactory attitude. That Christianity has improved and uplifted woman is a claim more plausible than solid. The reasons for the improvement which has taken place are to be found in all-round secular progress rather than in religious zeal. The old idea of the Divine right of kings, once so strongly advocated by the Church of England, has been almost ignored as valueless. Theology in the old sense is an extinct volcano. The only reason for remembering it is that it still has unexpected eruptions.

Modernist theologians have a habit of pouring new wine into old bottles; in other words, of giving fresh interpretations to texts once read with a literality that would not work. The doctrines of vicarious righteousness and of petitionary prayer, both not peculiar to Christianity but essentially pagan, may be briefly mentioned as pathetic expressions of the dependence of man on forces mightier than his own. Ever since man developed the form of social protection which we call conscience he has desired to escape the consequences of failing to obey its dictates. To commit wrong is easy, to do good is difficult. "I am not capable," he says, "of true righteousness, which belongs to God alone. But his anger is terrible and enduring. I need a mediator whose righteousness will serve instead of my own and save me from just punishment." This idea has been adopted by Christianity and elaborated by its ingenious theologians into a mysterious and never-to-be-questioned doctrine known as the "Atonement," the virtual

keystone of its triumphal arch. Nothing could more effectually paralyse moral effort and the sense of personal responsibility than this doctrine. To be of any value goodness must be a man's own work, not the work of someone else. Why impute to anyone a righteousness which he does not in fact possess? This is a cardinal doctrine of theology. How many theologians have perceived its fallacy? Similar objections may be urged against the favourite religious practice of prayer. No inquiry is made as to whether any being other than human actually exists who *can* hear the prayer, or, if he does, whether it will be answered. These things are taken for granted, and thus each day millions of petitions are offered up which are so foolish that they do not deserve an answer. They seem to lie in heaven's dead-letter office. Prayer for spiritual and mental benefits may have a defensible side, but nearly all prayers are for material benefits, and the fact that they are not answered makes no difference to the petitioners. The desired result comes about sometimes, but always by human means—a fact commonly overlooked. Indeed, I doubt whether any prayers, single or united, have ever in the history of the world met with any verifiable response from what is vaguely called "the Beyond." At any rate, my point is that the practice of prayer necessarily militates against self-reliance and personal independence, and in varying degrees unfits the devotee for the practical duties of life, and thus becomes, so far as it is consistently acted upon, a further obstacle in the path of progress.

The people who look upon Christianity as the one perfect, Divinely-revealed religion seldom realize its extremely composite character. If they did, they would not attribute both its finer and its inferior elements to one Divine source, which is assumed to be capable of originating nothing but what is good. The difficulty is keenly felt by those whose efforts to reconcile the existence of evil with the conception of perfect creative wisdom and goodness merely involve them in never-ending perplexities. But while the few struggle and inquire, the many bow to convention, to tradition, to social influence. That does little to advance civilization or humanize

religion. Human nature being what it is, the tendency to push a fixed standard of faith, to resent the smallest deviation from it, accounts to some extent for the proneness to repress heresy by physical force. It is natural, but it is lamentable. The persecuting spirit cannot foresee the ultimate consequences of its action, but surely it might be remembered that religion affords the widest scope for the immense variety of opinions which have always existed.

In one of his articles Dean Inge quotes a pregnant sentence from Erasmus : " By identifying the new learning with heresy you are making orthodoxy synonymous with ignorance." Ignorance may not be sinful; we are all more or less ignorant, but " evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart " (Hood). And is there not a sense in which Shakespeare's great thought, " There is no darkness but ignorance," is profoundly true? It is pitiable that, at any rate in its organized and official forms, religion should so often have shown, and still shows, a pronounced distrust of any mental activity that is devoted solely to secular matters. The average man does not inquire or originate—he accepts; it is the minority which gives the impetus to civilization. It is an ironical comment on Christian theology that, while God is represented as almighty and man limited and evil, the work of evolving civilization out of savagery which the one could accomplish with ease is left to the slow drudgery and interminable suffering of the other. Any religious system which keeps the human mind at a fixed level is bound to do much harm. It is foolish, and in a sense contrary to natural law, to attempt to impose mental stagnation on a changing world. That is perhaps the worst effect of Christianity.

I am not unmindful of the services to religious thought of such men as the Bishop of Birmingham, Bishop Gore, Dean Inge, the Rev. Vincent Taylor, the Rev. J. M. Thompson, and others, who have virtually given up or lavishly "reinterpreted " the whole system of orthodox Christianity—not only its particular dogmas, but the theory of Divine inspiration which was formerly supposed to guarantee their truth beyond question. Heretics and traitors as they have been

called, it is obvious that they are sincere and brave seekers after truth.

It may not be out of place to insert here yet another quotation from the masterly book which has been the principal source of the foregoing particulars. Dr. White's final chapter concludes thus :—

> If, then, modern science in general has acted powerfully to dissolve the theories and dogmas of the older theologic interpretation, it has also been active in a reconstruction and recrystallization of truth; and very powerful in this reconstruction have been the evolution doctrines which have grown out of the thought and work of men like Darwin and Spencer.
>
> In the light thus obtained the sacred text has been transformed : out of the chaos has come order; out of the old welter of hopelessly conflicting statements in religion and morals has come, in obedience to this new conception of development, the idea of a sacred literature which mirrors the most striking evolution of morals and religion in the history of our race. . . .
>
> As to the Divine Power in the universe . . . the higher races have been borne on to the . . . belief in the Universal Father, as best revealed in the New Testament. As to man : beginning with men after Jehovah's own heart—cruel, treacherous, revengeful—we are borne on to the idea of men who do right for right's sake; who search and speak the truth for truth's sake; who love others as themselves. As to the world at large : the races dominant in religion and morals have been lifted from the idea of a " chosen people " stimulated and abetted by their tribal god in every sort of cruelty and injustice, to the conception of a vast community in which the fatherhood of God overarches all and the brotherhood of man permeates all (*Warfare*, II., 394–395).

The striking facts and opinions set out in the foregoing pages reveal the great changes which have taken place in Christianity, or rather in the estimation of its tenets. The old words remain, but they are inspired by a new spirit—a spirit concerned less with the supernatural and more with the human. The Bible still has an enormous circulation, but for the educated public its meaning, its significance, are transformed. We find its supreme value, not as a Divine revelation, but as a human product, with a human appeal. Christianity, as understood

by the Christian scholars of to-day, is virtually a new religion. Our task is not so much to blame the past as to profit by its errors.

Are we, then, to hail this newer Christianity as a religion to be followed? Or are we to do without religion altogether? If human beings were more enlightened and more unselfish, I should say the latter course would be the preferable one. But, people being what they are, is it practicable to capture the finer Christian ideals and throw the rest on the rubbish heap? Is the world to give up its religious traditions, even to the extent of doing without belief in God—though probably that great belief is even now generally ignored? In short, is religion without dogma a "business proposition"? Advanced as the present day may be, I do not think it is capable of such a change. For we must remember that the only indications in that direction are perceptible among the intelligent minority. Most of us are certainly not learned, and I much doubt whether we are reasonable. There are thousands of people who have to some undefined extent accepted the main conclusions of modern science. Yet they still go to church, sing hymns, pray with their lips, or even attend Mass, and pass very well for sound Christians. Such people do not change rapidly. That progress will continue to go on is certain; that it is well to strive towards it is also true; but in religion opinions will always differ greatly as to what progress means. What has been achieved is rather in the direction of increased indifference to religion, absorption in the affairs, and particularly in the amusements, of daily life, within the Church as well as out of it.

It is a big stride from the anthropoid ape to Mr. George Bernard Shaw, and a very long time must elapse before the race as a whole approaches Mr. Shaw's level; nor is it likely ever to attain it. But man has done something. Mr. James Harvey Robinson remarks on the "incredible revolution" which has become a fact. It is this: "It has been demonstrated, in short, that religious dogma can be neglected in matters of public concern, and reduced to a question of private taste and preference" (*The Mind in the Making*, p. 161).

Our religion has got beyond the stage of reliance on unquestioned authority, and has arrived at a faith which has at least some glimmerings of reason to light up the records of the past.

I am not preaching Atheism, not because I fear Christian disapproval, but because I think Atheism fails to offer any attraction to people who must have explanations of some sort. Even the despised Atheist, however, has some good sense on his side. The definite doctrines laid down by the Christian Churches are even more indefensible than the scepticism of the unbeliever, because they assume a knowledge which appears to be limited to the realm of imagination. The Atheist aims at correcting the common error of supposing that an infinite being can be so far within the grasp of the human mind that its nature and relations with humanity can be and are understood. I prefer the term "Agnosticism" to indicate that unknown sphere of which our present knowledge is but scanty or non-existent. We have to recognize the limitations of our knowledge, even of the world in which we live; and of a world admitted to be unknown it is presumptuous to claim any knowledge at all.

See next page for a list of Mr. Gorham's other books.