# ON RELIGION.

BY

A FORMER ELDER IN A SCOTCH CHURCH.


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"If the religion of the present differs from that of the past, it is because the theology of the present has become more scientific than that of the past; because it has not only renounced idols of wood and idols of stone, but begins to see the necessity of breaking in pieces the idols built up of books and traditions and fine-spun ecclesiastical cobwebs; and of cherishing the noblest and most human of man's emotions, by worship 'for most part of the silent sort' at the altar of the Unknown and Unknowable."—Huxley: *Lay Sermons and Addresses.*

# ON RELIGION.

WORDS are things of extraordinary power. Although they possess only an arbitrary or conventional meaning, yet it is surprising to see the tyranny which they exercise over men's minds. This is especially manifested during a time of rapid change in opinion. It then becomes quite a study to watch how parties range themselves under the cover of words, and how multitudes are more scared by having an ill-favoured word applied to them, than by having done an evil action. To a student of English history, for example, how much is brought to mind by the mere words—Puritan and courtier; roundhead and cavalier; covenanter and dragoon; methodist, moderate, dissenter, churchman, &c. Not only is he reminded that such parties once existed in this country, and were in violent opposition to one another; but he is reminded, also, that the name often gave a title to favour and reward if its holders were great and in power, or was sufficient to call down ignominy and hardship if its holders were few and in subjection. The merit or demerit lay in the name, not in ability or character. Nor are things much different even yet. A great conflict in opinion is at present waging in this country, and, as in former times, great importance attaches to certain words. Thus when a man is said to be conservative or liberal in politics, we know what statesmen think about him; when he is said to be evangelical or infidel in opinion, we know what religionists think about him; and this,

although the person who may claim the favoured name is a much less honourable and useful member of society than the man who is spotted with its opposite.

In this conflict the word religion and its congeners not only perform most important duty of the kind referred to, but often blind even the rational inquirer himself to the perception of what is true. Thus, when the exposure of orthodox superstitions is sometimes being pressed to the last defence, is not the cover thrown out and too readily admitted: '*Man cannot do without religion:* therefore, until you find something better than the Gospel, leave him with his belief in God, in future life and responsibility.' The word *religion* has overawed the disputant. Or again, when the ignorance and badness of some religious professor has been made manifest, is judgment never arrested by the remark, he is a "good" man, a "religious" man; although he may be mistaken, or for the moment left to himself? The reason in both cases is alike. I hope to make plain to the reader, before concluding, both what I consider the nature of religion to be, and the meaning which is likely in the future to attach to the word.

Nor is it only by half-educated people that Truth is thus sought to be killed or protected by a word. The following is copied from the newspapers of the month of July 1870:—"A letter from the Bishop of Manchester was read at the meeting of the Manchester Secular Society last night, declining a challenge to meet one of their practised speakers in debate on the evidence and benefits of Christianity and the Church. His lordship justified his description of the Society as a manifestation of the powers of evil, by saying that though he respected the honesty of his correspondent, he was bound as a Christian to believe that a society which opposed and denied the principles of Christianity was a manifestation of a maleficent power. The religion which had survived the assaults of Hume, Voltaire,

and Tom Paine would survive the attacks of Holyoake and Bradlaugh."

I have no wish for the present either to defend secularists, or to say a word against their assailants, but surely there is misunderstanding or misapplication of words in the sentences quoted. There is no point at all in the Bishop's remarks unless the words "principles of Christianity" in the middle sentence are synonymous with the word "religion" in the last. And yet few facts will be more readily admitted than that the "religion" which the Bishop says has survived the assaults of Hume and others is a very different thing from what is commonly known by "the principles of Christianity." For are not these last always set forth as a series of dogmatic propositions, based upon revelation; and do not these propositions change in their aspect and form of expression with each generation of men, or at all events with each educational epoch; and is it not a recognized fact that such an epoch has been passed in the history of this country since Hume's days? If, therefore, religion is identical with the principles of Christianity, then, because it is matter of literary history that great changes have taken place in these principles during the last century, we shall most certainly fail to find the religion of Hume's time surviving at the present. More than this, if the identity is to be entertained, I wonder where we shall look for religion in what are called Apostolic days—for according to the most recent and most scholarly investigation of the earliest Christian literature no traces of what are now called principles of Christianity are found to exist therein.

Evidently, the Bishop here uses the word "religion" as equivalent to the theological dogmas of his own sect; whereas correct thinkers now for the most part abstain from employing it in that antiquated sense. In very olden times, it is true, Religion was much less dogmatic than it has ever since been, but this was because everything was then placed under its control, and

none dreamed of questioning its authority. Family relations, business connexions, war, peace, the arrangements of national and social life, amusements, food, dress, &c., &c., were all regarded as part of religious service. This is very well illustrated in the social and national life of Hindostan at the present day; not to speak of other peoples, among whom the priestly authority is superior to the military. A careful student of English history and manners finds numerous illustrations of it also in his own country.—As men become wiser, the sphere affected by religion gets narrower; delivered from its governance they get experience of life under new conditions; and as members of a republic are emboldened to inquire into and criticize what is called the "divine right of kings," so when men are thus emancipated, they often seem disposed to analyse the "religious sense," and see what really originates and constitutes the essence of religion.

All men are said to be religious: religion is considered by most people the proper product of man's highest cultivation. Let us look at these two statements with some attention. *First:* When we speak of *national* religion, *Christian* religion, *Hindoo* religion, *Pagan* religion, and such like, it is evident that we do not refer to something which is common to man as man, but to something special to him as inhabiting a district of country or as dwelling in parts of the world which differ in thoughts and manners. The fact, however, that it is the same substantive which is qualified by these different adjectives indicates that it is the same phase of human life which is referred to, although the attention is immediately directed to the formal expression in ceremony or speech, rather than to the spirit which underlies the word or act. Religion in this sense is more properly a system of doctrine which metaphysically explains and systematizes the religious life of different peoples, than religion's self;

yet hitherto this has all but universally passed for religion, and he has been counted by his own nation or sect the most religious man who has been most skilled in its particular theology.

If religion, in the usual sense of the word, be common to mankind, is there not something unaccountable in the fact that, in all countries and in all times, a class of individuals has been singled out and called "DIVINES" because they were learned in that which separated them and their fellows from all others? Had they been so called because they were skilled in *all* the varied hypotheses and opinions which men had entertained respecting the mystery of Being, one could have understood the distinction. As a result of their theological knowledge thus widened, they would most certainly have exerted themselves to allay animosity and promote brotherhood. But it has been far otherwise. They have got the name, and worn the distinction, because they were masters of that dialectic skill which could prove to those of their own way of thinking that their notions were right. This might or might not be occasioned by men pinning their faith to the words of a consecrated book, or of a consecrated class of men; but the fact remains that hitherto it has been too much the rule to count other men's habits and opinions *ir*-religious—our own only, religious. The Christian has regarded Hindoo and Mahommedan as heathen; the Roman Catholic has regarded the Protestant as apostate.

*Second:* regarded in the light of these differences, one certainly cannot look upon religion as having as yet produced any very high style of humanity. I am aware that another aspect of religious life is more frequently presented than this one,—an aspect in which we are shown the enlightened, the graceful, the brotherly, the heroic adorning the religionist. I gladly admit it; but invite attention to the fact, that in all such examples, natural disposition or culture will be found to

have predominated over religious feeling, so much that their contemporaries for most part knew them less as religious persons than as persons of extraordinary intelligence, force of character, patriotism, or humaneness. Oftentimes, indeed, they were put to death as having no religion. Succeeding generations, when educated in manners and general intelligence to their eminence, may have recognised and even paid homage to their religious spirit, but this only shows that Culture is at all times a generation at least in advance of Religion. In further proof of this, is it not an undoubted fact, that, when any great advance in knowledge, in social usage, in economic or industrial art has hitherto been attempted, religious thought and prejudice have had to be contended with, ministers of religion and their influence have had to be overthrown? And these contentions have been carried on with a bitterness unknown in any other human strivings. No matter to whom he was opposed, to the king, the philosopher, the man of science, or the philanthropist, as much as to the evil doer, the religious man always placed himself on God's side, and his opponent on the side of the Adversary. Hence the melancholy scroll of antipathies, feuds, and cruelties which religionists have now to answer for and explain. More than nationality, more than education, wealth, station, or age has religion separated between man and man. Fiercer than rage for political power, stronger than love of country, have been the passions which religion has awakened and fanned into flame. Cruel in hate and stubborn in opposition, even the ties of blood and the family relations are weak in the presence of the spirit of religion when intent upon the differences of its manifestation among men.

But while these facts prevent numbers now-a-days from awarding a high place to the religious sentiment, they nevertheless are conducting them to a truer knowledge than they have yet attained of its nature

and value. They prove that religion originates in feeling, and is sustained by feeling. Physiology makes plain that feeling is occasioned by things outside affecting some part or other of the nervous system. Rational philosophy maintains that thought is the expression given to our varied sensations; and by consequence that religious thought is just the expression given to one of these varieties. If this be so, then religion may be common to all men, provided that outward objects have impressed them all in the way calculated to produce the sensations and expressions we call religious. But this proves nothing respecting the superiority of these sensations, and rests the universality upon an entirely new finding; for hitherto it has been regarded as ascertained that religion was the product of a special faculty given to man, in virtue of which he was not merely religious, but also God-conscious.

This notion of a special religious faculty has evidently emanated from the mind of priests. Current with it is the corollary, that no races of men have been discovered, or are discoverable, who do not possess a religion, and a notion, however rude, of God. Our belief in the special faculty, however, is completely upset by the investigations of modern science and the logic of the phenomenal philosophy; and our belief in its corollary is fast giving way before the facts ascertained by modern travellers. According to some of the most trustworthy of these, including among their number Roman Catholic missionaries, many of the tribes inhabiting *South America* have no religion whatever, have no idea of a Supreme Being—consequently have no word to express it in their languages. Others, long resident among the Indians of *California*, affirm that idols, temples, religious worship or ceremonies were unknown to them, and that they neither believed in the true and only God, nor adored false deities. The five nations of *Canada*, and the North

American Indians, had no public worship nor any word for God. According to others, in a great many islands of the *Pacific ocean*, there are neither temples, nor altars, nor offerings; nor traces of any religious belief or observance. Dr. Schort, Captain Grant, Burchell, Baker, Palgrave, all speak of tribes in *Asia* and *Africa* who have no form of worship or religion.

The authentication and verification of facts like these, is of immense importance in an inquiry like the present. Some of the names quoted from are beyond suspicion, although the facts borne witness to are new and very hard of belief. In addition, a great number of similar witnesses are quoted, with considerable fulness of detail, by Sir John Lubbock in his 'Pre-historic Times,' and also in his recent book on the 'Origin of Civilization;' and the reports of several Royal Commissions for inquiring into the state of the working classes in our own country, furnish numerous proofs that human beings destitute of religion and of a notion of God are found elsewhere than in foreign lands and among 'savages.'

I am not concerned to account for the fact that some races of men, in their most savage state known to us, have no religious ideas, whilst other races, possibly in a more savage state, have such ideas. This is no more to be wondered at than the fact that some nations are naturally of a warlike and others of a peaceful disposition. But the facts, as certified by the best authorities, are serious difficulties in the way of those who believe in the Hebrew narrative, and in the theories which are built thereon. And what is most worthy of remark is, that in some cases travellers have been obliged to admit these facts much against their inclination. Thus Father Dobritzzhoffer says, "Theologians agree in denying that any man in possession of his reason can, without a crime, remain ignorant of God for any length of time. This opinion I warmly defended in the University of Cardoba, where I finished the four years'

course of theology begun at Gratz, in Styria. But what was my astonishment, when, on removing from thence to a colony of Abipones, I found that the whole language of these savages does not contain a single word which expresses God or a divinity. To instruct them in religion, it was necessary to borrow the Spanish word for God, and to insert it into the Catechism, with an explanation."

The truth is, that men and nations must have advanced considerably in civilization, before they could take up the religious idea, and the entertaining of it marks a period or era in the process of human development. For, as will appear presently, the rudest religious belief implies not only acquaintance with natural phenomena, but also reflection upon the way in which they relate themselves to man. I know that it is difficult, if not impossible, for the educated mind to understand the uneducated, and that when it speculates upon the bygone history of mankind, to a certainty it looks upon men and things in these former times through the eyes of its own experience. But when we seek for the dawn of "religion," we are not so much peering into pre-historic times, as tracing to its origin a state of idealism which could not belong to absolutely uneducated man; and which our knowledge of man's intellectual nature assures us could be the result only of a process of reasoning—however imperfectly or blunderingly that process had been followed through its successive logical stages.

It is in keeping with this conclusion that the earliest gods which savages worship appear to have been for the most part of cruel nature. They are such themselves; and besides, dangers and fears had more to do with their earliest reflections than pleasures and hopes. The reason of this is obvious. They are dependent upon soil and climate far beyond civilized men. Not having learned economy or thrift, they live

riotously while weather is good and food lasts, and then imagine themselves the victims of vengeance when their supplies fail. They battle fiercely with one another for the last morsel of food and the snuggest shelter. In consequence they think much of the club or stone which does them good service in the struggle, and are deeply impressed with any happy chance which they think has helped them to victory. Hence they get to worship sticks and stones, a gust of wind, a glint of sunshine, a stream of water, or any thing they have associated with their welfare or success. Their religion originates out of the accumulation of these mental effects or deposits—which in philosophic times are called ideas, knowledge, thought.

Now, observe the point where the religious sense begins. It is not to the act of the savage shrinking from the impact of the stone thrown at him, or exulting at its deadly effect upon an opponent, that we attach the term religious, but to his state of mind after he has come to regard the stone as possessed of qualities which will serve him advantageously if employed against his enemy, or on the contrary, injure self greatly, if used by the enemy against him. His fear as manifested in the shrinking, or his hope as evidenced in the exultation, may be the root of the whole matter; and the ultimate findings of reason may by and by shut us up to the conclusion that we have no nobler origin for religion in man than this instinctive love of life which he has in common with all animated nature. Meanwhile, I content myself with the remark, that in the mere perception that the stone possessed qualities which admirably fitted it for purposes of offence and defence, the untutored mind had not passed into the idealistic stage. It is to this stage that rationalism has as yet limited the application of the word religious. When our savage ancestor first thought of the qualities of stone being inherent in it as life is in man, and invested the stone with a will which he conceived

might be inclined to him or turned from him, and which will, working in the stone like passion in himself, rendered its hardness and power of motion more serviceable or more hostile to him—then we consider that he attained to the state of religious consciousness. Immediately he would resort to expedients to avert the stone's enmity, and to propitiate its favour. *This was his religion, and these acts of propitiation, &c., would constitute his religious service.*

A process of idealization originating in some such fashion as this appears to have been the beginning of all varieties of the religious idea. In some rude minds it began by imaginings suggested by a serpent or wild beast, in others by ponderings on the destructive forces of Nature or musings on its productive power; but in all cases it is to the ideal entertained, and not to the object that originates it, that worship is paid. I do not wonder at believers in a book-revelation being opposed to this theory, and disposed to question the facts upon which it rests, for it tells against them in two ways. It shows that the god and the religion of the "heathen" are not the invention of a devil; and that the god and the religion of the Christian can be traced to the same origin as those of the savage.

The origination of the religious idea in respect of the heavenly bodies is another case in proof of the correctness of this theory, and I adduce it for the purpose of directing attention to the additional fact, that religion seems to have originated through men, in their ignorance, investing the images in their minds with attributes which they did not attach to the objects as known to their senses. Thus, it could not be the knowledge that the sun was the centre of light and heat to the earth which caused our forefathers to worship it; but it must have been a process of reasoning on the natural phenomena connected with the sun's rising and shining,

ingenious enough to us who look back and seek to unravel it, doubtless profound and conclusive to those early peoples who were impressed by it. When his beams in mild and placid mood gladdened the earth, primitive man saw that flowers blossomed and were fragrant, that corn waved, and fruits ripened, and that joy filled the breast of animated nature; when at other times the solar rays shot down upon the earth in strength, he saw the ground parch, plants wither, and man and beast smitten with heat run to shelter; and when in winter the ruler of day shone only for a short time, or hid his face altogether for a season, he found that the earth became sterile and cheerless, and that men and beasts shivered with the cold and often perished. Reflecting on these changes in the light of very imperfect knowledge, minds strongly imaginative and little educated conceived the force residing in the sun to be like the life in their own bodies, that its movements were directed by a will variable as their own, and fitful and partial as their own tempers. Hence they used sacrifices, libations, invocations, laudations, to turn away its wrath, and secure its favourable regard.

So was it, in short, with all the skiey influences and other natural phenomena. Even in the later deification of heroic men the same principles are found at work; and the best scholars now-a-days know of no other origin of the voluminous and marvellous mythologies of antiquity,—any of which, when read in the light of this hypothesis is full of beauty and meaning, however much it may have been a puzzle to our forefathers. In such rude beginnings erudite ethnographers and archaeologists see the starting point of the human intellect, and trace onward its growth to its present development. Working in the same light, and with the same materials, the greatest authorities in philology are studying the various languages of antiquity, and are gathering the fragments for the foundations of a science of religion,

which promises not only perfectly to explain the past, but also to make men feel truly akin to the present.

But the Evangelical school will not permit the name "religion" to be applied to any of these manifestations. They say that they are the *superstitions* of mankind. According to them, religion consists in those beliefs and services which take their rise from the revealed word of God. In their theory the religious is not only the highest product of human life; but man was created perfect in respect to all the requirements of religion—with conscience 'set' like the mariner's compass so that infallibly it could decide between good and evil; and he was animated with an entity, distinct from and superior to the life of the body—called spirit—a morsel of the Divine. These are held to distinguish him from all other creatures; and because of his distinction and superiority, God is represented as constantly dealing with man in special to prepare him for inconceivable dignity in a future world.

My present purpose does not require that I should further describe this hypothesis. In every particular it opposes the theory of religion and of the religious life as I have endeavoured to set it forth. It says that man in his earliest days was not uneducated, but perfect in wisdom and holiness; that the object he worships is not the product of his imagination, but a far-distant and inapproachable Being who, from time to time, acquaints a selected tribe of men with as much of his nature and character as they are able to comprehend, leaving it to the chapter of accidents to disseminate such revelation among the vast family of mankind. I have not the slightest wish for the present to raise even one of the many questions which such a theory suggests; but I deem it important to observe, that whether the religious sense is quickened in man's mind by natural phenomena, or by the words of a book, the mode of operation and the effect produced is much the

same, so that if the product of the Bible is religion as distinguished from superstition, the product of natural phenomena is no less so. There is indeed this difference to begin with, that what is termed the fundamental postulate of religion, the being of God, is taken for granted in all systems of revealed, more than it is taken for granted in any system of natural religion. Over and above this, we must remember that a book (even the Bible) stands as much outside of man as the phenomena of nature, and that its power to excite reflection, which is the true originator of *religious* emotions, is limited by the same conditions. It is true that without reflection its revelations can awaken emotions of wonder and awe, or paralyse with fear, for what the ear hears, as well as what the eye sees, acts upon the nervous system. But then, as we have seen, rationalists do not consider these things religion; and if any revelationists are disposed to maintain that they should be called the "beginning of wisdom," I commend to their consideration the following words of Sir John Lubbock.—"If the mere sensation of fear, and the recognition that there are probably other beings, and especially one, more powerful than man, are sufficient alone to constitute a religion, then indeed we must admit that religion is general to the human race; but if the definition be adopted, we cannot longer regard religion as peculiar to man. We must admit that the feeling of a dog or a horse towards its master is of the same character; and the baying of a dog to the moon is as much an act of worship as some ceremonies which have been so described by travellers."

Judging from the Bible narrative itself, however, there is no sentiment which we can call religion till the mind is not only impressed with what it sees, or reads, or hears, but farther, till it believes that the things or beings it has thus become acquainted with, bear relation to itself, and have or can acquire influence over it—and is excited in the contemplation of them

by hope as well as fear. If, therefore, we must withhold the epithet, "religious," from the lowest manifestations of the feelings of awe, &c. (those feelings which horses and dogs have in common with man), even believers in Scripture must fall back upon the very process which we saw carried on in the case of those who had worshipped stones and the heavenly bodies.

As we have said, the attention must be fixed upon the Being the Bible speaks of, just as the worshipper of images fixes his attention upon figures, pictures, music, legends and acts of devotion, until not only is there an ideal formed in the mind, but also until the imagination has clothed this ideal with attributes such as it considers noble, good, wonder-working, and awe-inspiring. Nor must it be forgotten that this ideal is in every case conditioned by the natural constitution and experience of the person who beholds and reflects. Thus, 'the Bible being witness,' a man of pastoral habits conceives the Being whom he worships to be a wise and good shepherd—untiring in care and watchfulness over his flock; unerring and considerate in his choice of pasture, &c. A patriarch conceives the being whom he worships to be the acknowledged and revered head of tribes and families—supreme in authority, because his worshippers are his children. Religious kings conceive God to be as their own nature is inclined. One thinks him Lord of lords, God of battles, leading to victory or suffering defeat; another thinks him to be of milder mood—"ruling in righteousness," giving his people peace in their day. The sage and the prophet conceive of God after their fashion—rising early to instruct; patiently teaching the ignorant, "line upon line, precept upon precept;" laying open the future, and showing the consequences of conduct so that hearers may be restrained from wickedness, and encouraged in well-doing. So, also, in what is called the New Testament part of the Bible, we find the Hebrew student of Greek philosophy thinking of God as spirit unencumbered

with body, removed from the transitoriness, and passion, and corruption of earth, and having intercourse with it only for the purpose of electing a chosen number of its inhabitants to live with him for ever in the same state of ethereal perfection. This same Greek philosophy holds sway even to the present time over the cultivated mind in Western Europe, and hence the permanence of this last conception, aided by the circumstance that the revelation of the Book which contains and popularizes it, is believed to have been closed at the time when the civilization which gave birth to the philosophy was falling into decay.

Now in all these cases, which are merely suggestive of what might be greatly detailed, the most ardent Biblist must admit that the conception of God is conditioned by the habits and culture of the worshipper quite as much under the revelational as under the rational theory. This admission not only gives great insight into the nature of religion, but weightily determines the question of the necessity for, and usefulness of, a Book-revelation—which has hitherto rested mainly on the assumption that without the Bible man could not have discovered anything respecting the character and purposes of God.

But besides this, other very important conclusions also emerge, some of which relate themselves closely to not a few of the discussions of the present day —as for example to the Education question. For the second time in the course of our brief inquiry it is made evident that the religious state is a state of emotion, governed by ideals, and that these ideals are the product of a man's circumstances and training. In this sense it is impossible to communicate *religion* either by teacher or by book. By either or by both means you can teach doctrines and opinions, but these are not religion; religious service is the throbbing of the pulse in the presence of what we consider surpas-

singly good and beautiful and true, and you can no more produce that by instruction than you can make a man love by telling him to do so. To attempt to communicate such emotions by direct teaching and injunction will have a most injurious effect on the nature of man or child. A stronger and more suggestive statement than this, is, I think, warrantable, viz., that when you seek to teach men or children to be religious, the product is not religion, but hypocrisy or superstition; but I am content for the present with the more moderate and general way in which I have put it. It is in fact just as useful and as efficacious to say, be poetical, as to say be religious or good. We can give information one to another regarding phenomena, their similarities, differences, relations; we can draw out and quicken one another's powers of observation and comparison; and thus we can affect the nervous system of our friend or pupil. But whether his feelings shall express themselves in the way we call religious is beyond our control, and must be left to his own constitution and intention.

A further important remark occurs here, in close connection, viz., that it is the ideal and imaginative alone which man worships—not the real and substantive. In other words, it is round a being and towards attributes which have no existence save in the mind, that the ideas and services usually called religious centre; and religion thus becomes a varying and diminishing thing as men get better informed. A curious illustration of this is furnished by the negroes on the west coast of Africa. They have deities—who are charged with all the evils that befall them; so much so, indeed, that the negroes represent them as "black and mischievous, delighting to torment them various ways." "They said that the European's God was very good, who gave them such blessings, and treated them like his children. Others asked, mur-

muring, Why God was not as good to them? Why did not he supply them with woollen and linen cloth, iron, brass, and such things, as well as the Dutch? The Dutch answered, that God had not neglected them, since he had sent them gold, palm-wine, fruits, corn, oxen, goats, hens, and many other things necessary to life, as tokens of his bounty. But there was no persuading them these things came from God. They said the earth, and not God, gave them gold, which was dug out of its bowels; that the earth yielded them maize and rice, and that not without the help of their own labour; that for fruits they were obliged to the Portuguese, who had planted the trees; that their cattle brought them young ones, and the sea furnished them with fish; that, however, in all these their own industry and labour was required, without which they must starve; so that they could not see how they were obliged to God for any of those benefits." They knew not whence their diseases and calamities came, therefore they attributed them to gods, whose favour they sought to propitiate, so that these things might be averted: they knew whence gold, palm-wine, fruits, &c., came, therefore "they could not see how they were obliged to God for any of those benefits." If they had known how cloth, iron, brass, &c., were produced would they have had the thought of God and of His goodness suggested by the sight of "such blessings?"

So, I believe, it has been in all cases and in all times. That which our ancestor *knew* about the stone—its colour, its hardness, its sharpness, &c., he never thought of worshipping; the qualities he *supposed* or *believed* it to possess, viz., the ability to help him and the willingness, toward these he directed his religious acts. So with the worshipper of the sun or any other heavenly body; so with the Egyptian and his deified animal—with the Greek and his apotheosized hero—with the Hindoo and Brahm—with the Hebrew and God—with the Christian and Emmanuel. Moreover, while man

never worships an object or being for those qualities which he knows it to possess, it appears an inevitable result, that as soon as he becomes convinced an object does not possess these qualities which in his fondness he had attributed to it, he diminishes his reverence and ceases to worship altogether. Thus, when his growing intelligence assured him that the sun in the heavens had no passions and no will, as he had in the days of his ignorance supposed, but was only matter in a certain mode of existence, he ceased to worship it; when our not very remote Catholic forefathers came to look upon departed saints as only dead men, and Mary the mother of Jesus as only a beatified woman, their religious services towards them were brought to an end. In all these cases, in a wonderfully true sense, Protestants are able to see the old saying verified—"Ignorance is the mother of devotion." In like manner, is it not equally true that when modern Christians come to see that it is entirely ideal qualities with which they have invested the historical Jesus, (qualities become now as much inconsistent with our conception of the divine as of the human) they cease their Christian worship? While men remain unaware that it is their own conceptions and idealizations only which they worship, they continue to address prayers and praises to them; it remains to be seen whether, after they learn that the only God man has hitherto known, possibly can know, is an ideal one, they will continue religious service—in the form of prayer and praise.

All through our inquiry it has been evident that when man reflects upon anything which affects and interests him much, he is prone to form an ideal of it to worship. We have moreover seen, that the religious idea took its rise in man after he had risen so far in the scale of civilization. The question which now occurs, presses heavily upon some of the most thoughtful minds of

our time, viz., whether, when in the progress of development, he has attained a certain point in civilization, he may not leave the religious idea, *in every sense in which it has hitherto been understood*, altogether behind as no longer compatible with his education and knowledge. The evolution of events will supply the only satisfactory answer; but a very common experience in human life often forces itself on our attention when revolving this speculation. The youth when courting the mistress of his affections is very worshipful, in the old sense of that word. He is, moreover, full of visions of excellence, which all crystallize round her. By and by they get married, and they come to know each other more truly. The worship becomes tamer, and the visions more like the reality. But if they are honest natures, properly mated, as the bright visions get dull, purpose and action coalesce more promptly and fitly, and grow into that noble, and beautiful and durable thing known as *wedded life*. Shall it be with mankind that, as they become better acquainted with the processes and powers of Nature, they will be less influenced than they have been by their speculations upon the Unknown, less prone to resort to intreatings and commendations addressed to it, and more intent promptly to conform themselves to Nature's regulations, wisely to avail themselves of her helps, and composedly to submit themselves to her decrees? It may be; but analogies are not arguments.

Two things, however, are already evident from the thinkings and sayings of educated men; (1.) As regards the ideal, which we have seen holds such a prominent place in religion: cultivated men seem unable to live without an ideal; and admit it to be axiomatically true, that no man can improve in intelligence and manners without one. To quote the words of Principal Shairp: "You may dislike the word, and reject it, but the thing you cannot get rid of, if you would live any life above that of brutes. An aim, an ideal of some

sort, be it material or spiritual, you must have, if you have reason, and look before and after." (2.) As regards the question of religion: some of the most highly educated of the present day, while renouncing religion in every sense in which it has hitherto been understood, nevertheless claim to be counted religious, because they are silent and conscious of ignorance, when worshippers after the old fashion are loud in prayer and praise; or because they are devoted to the discharge of duty, a thing which former religionists called mere morality. Thus, to cite a recent extreme example, the philosopher Comte idealized the human race, past, present and future, and invested it with attributes fitted to call out and occupy the best sympathies and services of which his nature was capable. Our fathers, if not also most of our contemporaries, would see in all this only the commonest acts of morality; in virtue of these services, however, Comte claimed to be called religious, because he believed in "the Infinite nature of Duty." I need make no reference to the spirit and manner in which he might seek to discharge these duties; for all hitherto known as religionists would say, the distinction lies not in the *mode*, but in the essential nature of the two services.—So, to cite another example, furnished by a different type of mind, and a different kind of training, the late James Cranbrook, in his later days, often said that, when thinking of God, the only ideal present to his mind (if ideal it could be called) was that of force—Force, not defaced by quality, not limited by time, nor space, nor knowledge. In the presence of such inconceivable mystery, he said he was for the most part silent when worshipful, and that his religious service consisted in humbly inquiring into the modes by which this Mystery manifests itself, through the co-ordinations and successions of phenomena.—John Stuart Mill, also, in treating of this subject, remarks:—"It may not be consonant to usage to call this a religion; but the term so applied has a

meaning, and one which is not adequately expressed by any other word. Candid persons of all creeds may be willing to admit, that if a person has an ideal object, his attachment and sense of duty towards which are able to control and discipline all his other sentiments and propensities, and prescribe to him a rule of life, that person has a religion."*

One word in conclusion. I beg to remind my readers that in the present paper I have carefully abstained from introducing any questions relating to the existence and nature of Deity. These I consider extraneous to the subject which has been under review. In proof that the nature of religion may be discussed without dealing with these other topics of controversy, may I not appeal to the personal experience of many "free inquirers," who must be conscious of the endurance of those feelings they call religious, notwithstanding the change which has taken place in their theological opinions? In this conviction, I leave it for earnest consideration.

* Auguste Comte and Positivism, by J. S. Mill.

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The Editor of this series, anxious for outspoken inquiry on these great topics, from which true philosophy will never shrink, counsels the reader to study, along with these pages, the essay "On Matter, Force, and Atheism," by the Rev. T. P. Kirkman, M.A.

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