

CHRISTIANITY:

ITS NATURE & INFLUENCE ON CIVILISATION.

A LECTURE

BY CHARLES WATTS, SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL
SECULAR SOCIETY.

It requires no profound knowledge of the human mind, to enable us to recognise the fact that some persons indulge in certain delusions, until such delusions become to the persons who indulge them, apparent realities. A striking illustration of the truth of this statement is furnished in the two great assumptions, which are entertained extensively throughout Christendom at the present time. First, it is supposed that what is termed Christianity, is sufficiently efficacious to remove all the evils of life; and in the second place, it is stated that England enjoys a high state of civilisation in consequence of the adoption of Christian principles. Hitherto, it has been the habit of Christian advocates, not only to ignore all in society that is evil and defective as belonging to their system, but also to credit Christianity with all improvements which have taken place in modern times. It matters not whether it be a steam engine, an electric telegraph, a printing press, the repeal of the stamp and paper duties, the establishment of working men's clubs, an industrial exhibition, or the co-operative companies; all are attributed by Christians to the influence of their faith. All such steps of progress are regarded by them as the gift of God to his creature man. While inquiring into these pretensions, and ascertaining how far such allegations are correct, the investigation shall be two-fold. We will endeavour to discover, if possible, to what extent the blots and blemishes which remain upon our civilisation are to be attributed to Christianity, and also, whether the progress that has been made, is the result of Christian influence; or whether, on the contrary, it is not the natural con-

sequence of the adoption of principles antagonistic to New Testament principles.

As a rule, man is supposed to know himself better than anyone else knows him. But there are many important instances, where other people can estimate a person more correctly than he can estimate himself. They will take a more dispassionate view of his character. They will be in a better position to compare him with others, and thus judge more accurately of his relations and comparative place in the scale of humanity. As with individuals, so it is with systems, and with generations. An age is incapable in many respects of properly knowing itself. It has only one test by which to estimate its merits and demerits. It cannot compare itself with future ages, which lie in the womb of the unknown. It can only judge of itself by times gone by. And as every age, even the darkest and most lethargic, is, in some instances, more advanced than its predecessor, a survey of itself is extremely apt to assume the form of self-gratulation.

Various designations have been given to the different phases of Christianity. We have had descriptions of "Hetical Christianity," "Muscular Christianity," "Objectionable Christianity," "Secular Christianity," and "Supernatural Christianity." Now it may be necessary here to intimate that I do not coincide with those who consider that what is termed "Secular Christianity" is identical with Freethought principles. Christianity appears to me to be objectionable under whatever name it may be presented to us. Of course there are many things taught in the New Testament which are admirable and worthy of acceptation, but then such beauties do not belong exclusively to Christianity. The practical portion of the Sermon on the Mount was in existence long before the time when Christ is supposed to have taught in Galilee. The phrase "Christianity" cannot be consistently used without conveying in some degree the idea of supernaturalism. The inspiration that induced Christ to say and do what is ascribed to him in the Four Gospels, was considered to have emanated from above. The power that moves and regulates the whole system of Christianity is designated by its believers as supernatural. The term "Secular Christianity" is therefore a misnomer. Christ never uttered one word, or performed one action purely from Secular motives, but thinking he was doing the will of his

“Father in Heaven,” he did it all for the “Glory of God.” It is important that this fact should be remembered, because we live in an age perhaps unsurpassed in the history of the world for the promulgation of systems, having for their professed object the advancement of mankind. It becomes therefore a duty that we should be judicious as to the terms we use, as well as the mode we adopt to secure the triumph of principles which we believe are essential to the permanent welfare of society. Many valuable systems are frequently deprived of much of their vitality, and some of the best efforts of men rendered comparatively useless through the lack of the observance of this very necessary precaution. The temporary success of bad and erroneous principles is often to be attributed to the fact that the manner in which they are presented to the world is the result of careful study, and well-matured thought.

In studying the nature of Christianity, we recognise one or two features which are identical in all its different phases. Reliance on a supernatural power, faith in Christ, belief in the efficacy of prayer, and the immortality of the soul, are tenets professed, more or less, by most Christian sects. In addition to this, the New Testament distinctly teaches that poverty is a virtue, that submission is a duty, and that love to man should be subordinate to love to God. Now these principles, however consoling they may be to some, from their nature have checked and must check the progress of civilisation. The extent of their retarding influence depends upon the degree of veneration in which they are held by their professors. With Theists and Unitarians these theological notions are less dangerous, because such Christians are less dogmatic and less orthodox. But with a Wesleyan or a Baptist the profession of such notions frequently leads to conduct antagonistic to general improvement. With these latter Christians, Christ is “all in all.” In vain do we look to their teachings for those principles that are necessary to a progressive civilisation. On the contrary, experience has proved that as a rule, they have been injurious, and in proportion to their adoption has the Secular welfare of mankind been retarded. And we cannot expect aught else. The object of Christ was to teach his followers how to die, rather than to instruct them how to live. If therefore we press the question, “What is Christianity?” the answers given by the Christian world will be as varied as they will be numerous. The reply from a mem-

ber of the Church of England, would differ widely from the answer given by a Latter-day Saint. The fact is, according to the education of the individual, and the intelligence of the nation, so are the notions entertained as to what constitutes Christianity. For instance, religion with Mazzini is very different to the religion of Archbishop Manning. The faith cherished by Garibaldi, is not precisely the same article of belief as that indulged in by the present ruler of France. The Christianity of Professor Huxley is as different to the doctrines taught by Richard Weaver, as is the religion of a Maurice to that of C. H. Spurgeon. The same diversity exists in reference to nations. In Spain religion is cruel oppression, in Scotland it is a gloomy nightmare, in Rome it is priestly dominion, while in England it is simply emotional pastime. All these different phases of Christianity indicate that theological opinions depend on surrounding circumstances, and cannot therefore be the cause of the civilisation of the world.

To test the power of Christianity in organising a civilised state of society, it is only necessary to suppose a company of men and women going to some uninhabited island, and there attempting to form a constitution to meet the requirements of modern society based upon the teachings of the New Testament. First they must seek the kingdom of Heaven, and love not the world or the things of the world. This would at once put an end to all human effort, because if a person is not to love the world, his interest will be at once gone from things below, and directed to things above. It is impossible to get persons long to work for anything which they hate. Under a system of despotism, a certain amount of labour may be ground out of serfs or slaves, but once give a nation its freedom, and the inhabitants will only strive in a cause which they love. Secondly, they must take no thought for their bodies nor even their lives. This would prevent them studying the laws of health. Sanitary reform or physiological science would be deemed unnecessary. Hospitals would be superseded by a rapid increase of "God's Peculiar People." The recent unfortunate case of the two persons who were committed for manslaughter because they practically carried out New Testament teaching, is a potent answer to the alleged efficacy of Christianity for civilising purposes. The "Peculiar People" relied upon faith and prayer, instead of science and medicine, and, as a reward for

their Christian devotion, death and imprisonment were the results. Then Christians in this island must take no thought for the morrow. Economy and a desire for the future of this world would thus be entirely ignored. It would be a crime to establish post office savings' banks, inasmuch as laying up treasures on earth is strictly forbidden. The thought of a divorce must not be entertained for a moment, because "whosoever God has joined together, let no man put asunder." Those who are fortunate to be rich, must get rid of their riches, as they are pronounced in the New Testament to be a curse. If an enemy is cruel enough to invade this Christian island, the inhabitants dare not interfere, because Christ told them to "resist not evil." Should the invading powers succeed and establish themselves as governors of the island, then the inhabitants must quietly submit, as "the powers that be are ordained of God." If they are smitten on the one cheek, they must offer the other to be operated upon in a similar manner. Now, I submit, that a people living under a constitution framed by these Christian rulers would not be very progressive; neither would they be very happy. Apart from the menial dependent subjection in which they would be placed, they would have to listen to the comforting assurance that at the last day they will have to give an account for every idle word spoken through life. Need we wonder any longer that Christians are such "miserable sinners," believing as they do that their final doom may depend upon words spoken in the jubilant and joyous moments of life?

But modern professors of Christianity will ask, if their system is so unprogressive in its nature, how is it that men of intellect, of determination, and of scientific culture have accepted it as their faith? And they further inquire how it is that under the influence of Christianity, civilisation in England has progressed so rapidly? As these questions are considered by the religious world as very important, it may be necessary here briefly to examine them. Now the whole fallacy in connection with the first question lies in the interpretation given to the words "their faith." Any one acquainted with the early history of Christianity will know that the faith of Jesus as he preached it, and the faith of the Christians in 1868, are two entirely different things. Even if we accept the alleged dates of Christian chronology to be historically correct, Christianity began to alter and modify

itself immediately after the death of Christ. Paul preached a system of a philosophical character compared with that of Jesus. The Christianity of Paul was widely different from that of his "divine Master." The character of Christ was submissive and servile; Paul's was defiant and pugnacious. We could no more conceive Christ fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus, than we could suppose Paul submitting without protest or resistance to those insults and indignities which are alleged to have been heaped upon Christ. Neither could we for one moment imagine Paul advising his disciples when anyone smote them on one cheek, to offer them the other. Christ was an illiterate peasant; Paul, when compared with his master, was a polished philosopher. Paul introduced by his personal character a certain amount of boldness and energy into the Christian propaganda, and by the character of his mind he largely modified the Christian system. In fact, each successive age has left its mark and impress upon Christianity. No system was ever less rigid and more plastic. It has certainly come up to the injunction of St. Paul, "to be all things to all men." Persons of the most contrary dispositions and the most opposite natures have been its great illustrators, expounders, and living representatives. It has found room for all temperaments: the ascetic and the luxurious enjoyer of life; the man of action and the man of contemplation; the monk and the king; the philanthropist and the destroyer of his race: the iconoclastic hater of all ceremonies, and the superstitious devotee; Cromwell and Cowper; Lyell and Wesley; St. Augustine and Dr. Pusey; John Milton and C. H. Spurgeon. All these and many other similar opposites have found refuge within the pale of Christianity. But let it be distinctly understood that this heterogeneous family is by no means the result of any all-embracing comprehensiveness in the system of Christ, but rather the effects of a Theology characterised alike by its indefinite, incomplete, and undecisive principles. No man of action can possibly be a true and consistent believer in Christianity, for many of its teachings are the very incarnation and inculcation of forbearance and suffering. They clearly and emphatically teach submission to physical evil, tyranny, and oppression. They inculcate an unprogressive and retarding spirit; they draw the energies and desires of men from the duties of this life, fixing them on an un-

certain and unknown future. Until, therefore, Christians can prove to us that their principles are capable of producing uniformity of character; until it is satisfactorily explained that the precepts, as propounded by Christ, contain the elements of that greatness which has invariably characterised the lives of eminent statesmen, philosophers, and poets of all ages; until it can be shown by an appeal to authority and experience that the principles as taught in the New Testament are compatible with progress and human advancement; until the course pursued by Christ when on earth is adopted by his professed followers of to-day and made to harmonise with reason and humanity—I say, until these things are accomplished, Christianity will be incapable of furnishing a code of morals by which all succeeding generations shall be governed, and to which the great intellects of the world shall finally succumb.

The notion entertained by many that the present civilised condition of England is the result of Christian influence is decidedly fallacious. The progress of a nation cannot be attributed to any one thing or any one age, but rather to a combination of circumstances which have been in operation during many ages. For instance, had it not been for the scientific discoveries of a Watt, Dalton, and Black of the last century, the application of these sciences with which their names are associated, would not have been so easily applied to the ends of human utility in this present age; had it not been for the great French Revolution the name of liberty, for it is but little more, would not exist to-day in France; and had it not been for many attempts at revolution in this country, many concessions to liberty which we now enjoy, would never have been extorted. The Reform Bill of last year, incomplete as it is, would never have passed the House of Commons but for the meetings in Trafalgar Square, and the demonstrations in Hyde Park, Birmingham, Leeds, and other places. Disraeli boasted that he had educated his party; far be it from me to attempt to rob the Premier of the laurels he won in going through that painful operation, but it seems to me that the best lesson the Tories received in the reform educational course was from the Reform League and their co-workers. It is equally true that for the partial freedom from religious intolerance which we now enjoy we are as much indebted to the franklins and Paines of the past, as to any of their representatives of the

present. But waiving this point, I ask, is it true that we have a high state of civilisation? Notwithstanding an "Open Bible," and "general dissemination of Gospel truths," which we have had in this country for the last 300 years, can it be denied that the major portion of our rural population are sunk in the deepest ignorance and the most depraved wretchedness? Is it not a reproach upon Christian influence that, after three centuries of the rule, discipline, teaching, and example of 20,000 clergymen and a host of Dissenting ministers, that the very classes of society which have been most under their direction and control, should be the greatest stigma upon our social condition? Can it be alleged that anything like an approach even to a proper adjustment of the relations between capital and labour has been arrived at? Those who pride themselves on the present state of Christian civilisation should ask themselves the question, does labour receive anything like a fair quota of the results of the wealth towards the production of which it contributes more than the "lion's share?" Can an age or a country be considered civilised in which so large an amount of abject, and, to all appearance, hopeless poverty prevails? Have we not ignorance, sickness, and sorrow existing on every hand? Are there not thousands who wake every morning tortured with anxiety as to how they are to obtain food for the day, and when the hour for sleep again returns, they know not where to lay their heads? Parade the glories of Christian civilisation to those unfortunate creatures who are driven to misery, shame, and madness by the want of the necessaries of life. In noticing the deplorable condition of "Christian" England, the *Morning Star* recently asked—"When shall starvation die out of the land? When shall we cease to hear that in one part of the country a man lies dead of a debauch on roast goose, while in another a woman perishes of sheer hunger, with her teeth locked in the flesh of her own arm? Must we wait till East London sits down to this sickening meal? Can Government, Whig or Tory, do nothing? Within two years, more than a million of human beings under its care have died of starvation alone." Witness the fate of many of England's daughters who, amidst Christian civilisation, have either to drag out a wretched existence by continual slavery, as pictured in the "Song of the Shirt," or else to sink into utter ruin and hopeless degradation. It is an insult and mockery to tell such victims of a misruled

world that their position is the result of their own conduct. One of the principal causes of such calamities is to be found in promulgating doctrines which destroy man's energy in worldly pursuits, rendering him a dependent, poverty-cheerished suppliant.

The history of Christianity is a gloomy illustration of its influence and tendency to maintain those conditions which are unfavourable to individual progress and national greatness. Among other requisites to a civilised condition of society it is necessary to have national wealth, the cultivation of the sciences, the acquirement of knowledge, and freedom of inquiry. Without these agencies, civilisation as we understand the term cannot exist. How far then has Christianity encouraged these agencies? Now it is certain that the Religion of the New Testament is opposed to material wealth. While poverty is there magnified as a virtue, riches are denounced as a vice. If those who had wealth were to sell that which they had, and give it to the poor, as Christ commanded them, and at the same time omit to accumulate any more, individual and national bankruptcy would be the result. The influence of religion on scientific pursuits is well known to students of history. The great impediment to the progress of scientific truth in the past, has been religious bigotry. First, such sciences as geology were alleged to be untrue; every fact demonstrated by early writers was regarded as an instance of the insanity of the writer, and every fossil wonder disclosed, was referred to the limited explanation of the Noachian deluge. Finding that threats and intimidation failed to check the advance of truth, persecution and imprisonment were the weapons used by Christian hands towards those whose crime consisted in investigating the laws of nature, and making those laws known to their fellow-creatures. Dr. Ferguson in his "Penalties of Greatness," acknowledges that theology, as embodied in the Christian church, was the first to extinguish the light of reason. But truth existed in spite of the deadly agencies which surrounded it. Not only did the church employ means to prevent the least difference of opinion on religious subjects, by the invention of the most finished instruments of torture, but science itself became the object of burning jealousy and persecution, and men were made to deny the very laws of nature. The same spirit pervades to a certain extent a portion of the Christian world at the pre-

sent day. Every scientific discovery, opposed as it is to popular theology, is suspected with pious horror by orthodox Christians. The *Morning Advertiser* and other orthodox papers have denounced such men as Huxley, Darwin, and Sir Charles Lyell as enemies to the welfare of mankind. "Real knowledge," says Buckle, "the knowledge on which all civilisation is based, solely consists in an acquaintance with the relations which things and ideas bear to each other and to themselves; in other words, in an acquaintance with physical and mental laws." The history of the Christian religion proves that the object and aim of its advocates have been too frequently to discourage and prevent the acquisition and dissemination of this scientific knowledge.

Not only has Christian influence affected the acquirement of scientific knowledge, but it has also interfered with the progress of general education. Fortunately at the present time, many professed Christians are advocating a national system of education, but this advanced policy is not the result of their faith, but a proof that the Secular aspirations in man are less fettered by theological restriction, than they were in the palmy days of Christianity. It has taken the Christian world nearly eighteen hundred years to arrive at the conclusion that the people ought to have adequate means of education at their command. As recently as fifty years ago, pamphlets were written by clergymen warning the nation against the horrid democratic consequences of giving to the labouring classes education. In our time it is Freethought which has extorted, not the Church which has granted, National Education. Dr. Johnson, the great lay pillar of the Church in the last century, had the honesty to state that he objected to education for the poor, because it would teach them politics. He might have added with equal truth, that it would teach them to think for themselves, instead of allowing the Church to do it for them. At last, the hour of victory, partial though it was, arrived. The educational Reformers had their triumph. The legislature decreed that to some extent education should be national. £20,000 were voted for that purpose. Then it was that the Church again exerted her influence. Finding she could not resist the progressive stream, she sought to pollute it and destroy its refreshing power. Failing to prevent, she endeavoured to contaminate. And what is the result? National education is but half accomplished. Thousands are growing up as monuments of imperfect edu-

cation. Believing that the "wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," the Christian governments, in the words of Buckle, "Where they have not openly forbidden the free dissemination of knowledge, they have done all they could to check it. On all the implements of knowledge and on all the means by which it is diffused, such as papers, books, political journals, and the like, they have imposed duties so heavy that they could hardly have done worse if they had been the sworn advocates of popular ignorance. Indeed, looking at what they have actually accomplished, it may be emphatically said that they have taxed the human mind." Fortunately many of these impediments have been removed, not, however, with the free consent of the Christian world. This victory was achieved by the dauntless efforts and heroic sufferings of Freethought martyrs in the face of Christian opposition and Christian persecution. Domestic loss, pecuniary ruin, and the horrors of imprisonment, were the prices paid for the removal of those hindrances to the people's educational advancement.

Doubtless the power of Christianity has been great upon the civilisation of the world. Nothing influences the human mind either for good or for evil more than the Christian's notion of supernaturalism. If a person is induced to have absolute faith in the fatherhood and sovereignty of God, he deems it his first duty to carry out that which he considers the will of that God. Hence it is, that during intellectual periods men's notions of Deity have been refined and cultivated; and, as a consequence, oppression and persecution for scepticism have been more rare. While on the other hand, when the multitude held rude ideas of divinity, the pure and chaste were sickened at the scenes of cruelty and bloodshed which were enacted in accordance with what was supposed to be the "will of God." If any doubt existed upon this point, it would only be necessary to study carefully Buckle's "History of Civilisation." In that work ample proof is given of the contracting influence of religion. Nothing tends more to limit progress than the attempt to prevent freedom of opinion, and the enforcement of penalties for the exercise of this right. "During," says Buckle, "almost 150 years Europe was afflicted by religious wars, religious massacres, and religious persecutions; not one of which would have arisen, if the great truth had been recognised that the state had no concern with the opinions

of men, and no right to interfere, even in the slightest degree, with the form of worship which they may choose to adopt." The same writer goes on to show that the increase of perjury and hypocrisy has been the result of the policy of the Christian governments, arriving at the conclusion that it is folly to ascribe the civilisation of a nation to any creed.

Unfortunately Christianity appeared at a very inopportune period of history, just when there was no indication that the world would throw off supernaturalism. The old Pagan creed which Christianity supplanted, was by far the better of the two, because it contained most promise for the world. The Roman religion sat but lightly upon the Romans. It was just a body of mythological tales, which perhaps was useful in the world's infancy, but which was certainly not required in its more matured age. The grand feature of the old Pagan faith was its true tolerant spirit. Death for religious belief was unknown to the Romans. They allowed every one to worship according to his or her own conscience. Persecution for non-belief was reserved for Christianity. As soon as the disciples of Christ possessed the power, they commenced by persecuting those who did not accept their faith, and endeavoured to crush all systems that were antagonistic to their own. Instead of Christians talking so foolishly of the depravity of the ancients, it would be far better if they endeavoured to emulate Pagan Rome in their love of toleration. Even from the New Testament we learn the extreme reluctance with which the Roman Governor of Judea signed the death-warrant of Christ. The Romans were so tolerant—in other words, they were so little religious, and therefore, so ripe for becoming converts to Secularistic truth—that whenever they conquered a new territory, they at once added to their own number of Gods those whom they found to be worshipped by the inhabitants of their new conquest. Now, if Queen Victoria, by royal mandate, were to order to be added to the objects of English worship, all the gods worshipped by her coloured subjects, all over the world; if, whenever we achieved a new conquest, it became the duty of the Archbishops and Bishops, the Spurgeons and Cummings, to add a new batch of deities to the objects of worship, what would be the result? Why religion would fall rapidly into contempt, and mankind would see at once its utter folly and absurdity. This is precisely what was

fast happening amongst the Romans and all through their empire, when Christianity came upon the scene, stopped the progressive spirit, and deferred the reign of human happiness.

If we take a historical glance at countries where Christianity was professed, and at one time, to a large extent, acted upon, we shall at once recognise the influence it possessed on national progress. First, we may take Scotland. In the most comprehensive sense of the word, Scotland at no very remote period was strictly a religious nation, and what were the fruits of that religion? The most miserable and unprogressive state it is possible for a civilised people to live in. And let it be distinctly understood that Mr. Buckle in his "History of Civilisation," attributes this non-progressive spirit, this lack of happiness, entirely to the fatal influence of religion. And can we expect aught else? Here is a country acting, as far as a people can possibly act, upon the principles of Christianity. And what do we find? "An entire absence of all true toleration; an aversion even to innocent gaiety; a desire to limit the enjoyment of others, and a spirit of bigotry and persecution; yet in the midst of all this," as Buckle properly observes, "there existed a gloomy and austere creed. The churches were as crowded as they were in the middle ages, and were filled with ignorant worshippers, who flocked to listen to opinions of which the middle ages alone were worthy." What effect has such teaching had upon the Scotch mind? Has it imparted to the people any progressive aspirations? If we read the history of Scotland during the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth century, we shall find that Buckle stated the truth, when he said that "Some of the noblest feelings of which our nature is capable, the feelings of love and of gratitude, were set aside, and were replaced by the dictates of a servile and ignominious fear." But the sad effects of Christianity were not confined to Scotland. If we take England during what is known as the "dark ages," the brightest era of Christianity, then she had no rival: assisted by kingcraft she ruled the civilised world through a thousand years, without one ray of light, without any addition whatever to the arts and sciences, and then bequeathed to mankind a heritage of cruelty, bloodshed, and persecution. In the middle ages there was a great impetus given towards science and philosophy. Some of the most splendid intellects that ever appeared in the world, and that might, under more

favourable conditions, have adorned humanity, enlightened society, and held on progress, appeared in those days. But their intellects were stifled and rendered comparatively useless by the influence of Christianity. Those were the times when Christianity was paramount, unrestrained, and untrammelled, when the blood, the genius, and the chivalry of Europe were all wasted in the mad and useless crusades, when in one expedition alone, instigated by fanatical priests, no less than 560,000 persons were sacrificed to the superstition of the cross. Do we require a proof of the legitimate effects of Christianity? Behold the history of the seven crusades, which will for ever remain a lasting monument of a blood-stained faith. For nearly 200 years did the followers of Christ lay desolate one of the finest and most romantic portions of the known world, and laid prostrate thousands of human beings. Do we wish to know the sad influence of religion? Read the history of the Christian Emperor Constantine, who with the sword in one hand and the cross in the other, pursued his slaughtering and relentless career. Go to the streets of Paris, when in the fifteenth century they flowed with the blood of defenceless Protestants, and when 10,000 innocent persons were massacred by the believers in a meek and lowly Jesus. Visit the valleys of Piedmont, which were the scene of a most inhuman butchery, when women were suffocated by hundreds in confined caves by the bearers of the cross. Study the history of the Inquisition, to whose power three millions of lives were sacrificed in one century. Peruse the records of the actions of a King Henry the Eighth, a Queen Mary, and a Queen Elizabeth, in whose Christian reigns hundreds were either condemned to die at the stake, or to endure revolting cruelties in loathsome dungeons, because they differed from the prevailing faith of those times. These were the effects of religion when it had absolute power. When Christianity exercised her legitimate influence, the maxim was "Philosophy is the handmaid of Theology," every philosopher, therefore, who did not so philosophise as to bring up new arguments to support some one of the absurd tenets of Christianity, had either to submit to a life of seclusion and persecution, or to an immediate death. But Christianity not only interfered with the high intellects of the earth, she also influenced every relation of life. The sum of almost all history for centuries after Christ may be compressed in a few sentences.

Every rascality that kings and nobles wished to perpetrate they got the bishops and priests to consecrate and make holy. Had it not been for the strong Christian notions of those sovereigns, James I. and Charles I., in all probability we should not have found such an abominably unpatriotic period succeeding the splendid era of Queen Elizabeth. And how lamentable it is to think that the noble-hearted English puritans, with men like Falkland, Cromwell, and John Milton at their head, lost all their chance of reforming the nation and establishing those ameliorations which certainly were so very necessary, through their unfortunate slavery to Christianity. Never did men exist whose minds by nature were more magnificently tolerant and truly secularistic than those of Milton and Cromwell, if the religious element had been kept apart. But unfortunately it mastered Cromwell, or perhaps to do him justice, it mastered his contemporaries, and they mastered him, and then he sickened the very country he had saved, by forcing upon them a religion they were weary of. The fate of Christianity was sealed in England the day that Cromwell died. Some writers have made it the great reproach of the reign of Charles II. that it was "Godless," yes, but its godlessness was the one redeeming trait of that "Merry Monarch's" reign. Reckless as he was, during his reign reforms were accomplished, the results of which cannot be too highly appreciated. It was during his reign that a law was passed which deprived the bishops of the power to burn those who differed from them in theological opinion. It was during his reign that the clergy were deprived of the privilege of taxing themselves, and were compelled to submit to the ordinary mode of assessment. It was during his reign that a law was passed, forbidding bishops to administer the oath by which the church had hitherto compelled suspected persons to criminate themselves. It was during his reign that it was settled, that the taxation of the people should be decided by their own representatives, and it was during his reign that certain restrictions on the press were removed, whereby knowledge had a better opportunity of being disseminated among the masses of the people. Notwithstanding the calamities occasioned by the great Plague, and the great Fire of London, greater improvements, says Buckle, were effected, and more progress made during this reign than had been accomplished during the twelve previous centuries of English history. The cha-

racter of Charles II. as a whole was one not to be emulated; but living amidst a profligate court, venal ministers, and constant conspiracies, he was enabled to recognise two great obstacles to the nation's welfare; these obstacles were the spiritual tyranny of the priests, and the territorial oppression of the nobles. Having but little regard for theological dogmas, he was determined that such Christian evils should be swept away.

If Christianity contained any real remedy for existing evils, it would have displayed itself ere now. It has had every advantage in its favour; the influence of the priests, the patronage of kings, the alliance of the great and powerful, the use of untold wealth, the command of the armies, first place among the councillors of nations, the willing subjection of the populace, the command of their affections, and the dominance of their fears. Science, art, education have humbled and enlisted themselves in its train. The brightest intellects of humanity have laid their treasures at its feet. The ties of domestic affection, the bonds of the social compact, the political relations of ruler and ruled, all have surrendered themselves to its influence. It has been absolute monarch of the world. Yet with all these advantages it has proved unable to keep pace with a progressive civilisation.