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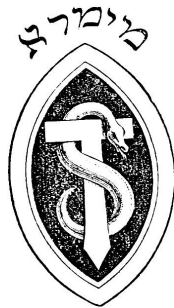
J E S U S

VERSUS

C H R I S T I A N I T Y .

BY

A C A N T A B .



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## JESUS *versus* CHRISTIANITY.

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THE most notable feature in the present condition of theology is, indubitably, the rapid multiplication of writings designed to point the contrast between the character, real or supposed, of Jesus, and the religion which bears his name and of which he is commonly regarded as the founder. The revolt, which every day but serves to intensify, is not against Jesus as *par excellence* "the genius of righteousness," but against the dogmatic system which theologians have substituted for him. The church, it is alleged, has outdone Iscariot, in that it has committed a twofold treachery : it has accepted the murder of its founder as a sacrifice well-pleasing to the Deity, and it has repudiated his simple heart-religion for metaphysical subtleties of its own invention. Thus, not content with making itself a participator in the murder of his body, the church has dealt a fatal outrage upon his spirit.

Among the writings to which we have referred as advocating the displacement of the *régime* of dogma and belief by the substitution of one involving character and conduct, we propose to note especially 'The True History of Joshua Davidson,' reputed to be the work of a lady well known for the vigour of her thought and style ; 'Literature and Dogma,' by Matthew Arnold ; 'The Fair Haven,' by W. B. Owen ; 'By and By,' by Edward Maitland ; 'A Note of Interrogation,' by Miss Nightingale ; and 'Modern Christianity a Civilised Heathenism.' All these writings, with the exception of the last, agree in rejecting

as unproved, unprovable, mistaken, or pernicious, at least much of what has always been insisted upon by the church, and in accepting the general character and teaching of Jesus as the most valuable moral possession of humanity.

We except the last one for this reason, though using it to point our argument: It gives up the state of society which has grown up under the sway of dogma as utterly un-Christian in character and conduct, but it does not give up the dogma. The work of the clergyman who gained an undesirable notoriety during the Franco-German war by his mischievous brochure entitled 'Dame Europa's School,' it manifests all the confusion of thought which distinguished that production. It was scarcely to be expected that the writer who could represent England as placed at the head of the school of Europe to keep the other nations from quarrelling, and declare that "neutral is another name for coward," would escape committing absurd inconsistencies when he took to writing about modern Christianity. In a dialogue with a Hindoo resident in London, he makes the heathen discourse in this fashion:

"How can you soberly believe and eloquently preach that an overwhelming majority of your fellow-creatures will be burnt alive throughout all eternity in the flames of hell, and yet can find time or inclination at any moment of your life for any other work than the work of rescuing the souls around you from their appalling doom? How contemplate even so much as the distant possibility of being yourself tortured with agonies insupportable, for ages and ages and millions of ages more, and all the while laugh and joke, and talk of politics and business and pleasure, as if you were the happiest fellow on earth? You parsons do actually stand in imminent peril of being burnt alive for ever, or else you do not. The souls committed to your teaching, or a



certain proportion of them, are destined to spend a whole eternity in torment, or else they are destined to nothing of the kind. If they are so destined, and if you, unless by precept and example you have done all in your power to save them, shall have your part in their unutterable woe, what can you do from morning to night but pray for them, and weep for them, and implore them earnestly to escape at any cost from the horrors of an unquenchable flame? Yet, in the face of your alleged persuasions that you yourself and all your flock are standing, for all you know, upon the very brink of an everlasting hell, you have deliberately chosen and cheerfully maintain a course of occupations and a position in society which no man could possibly endure for half a day who really believed himself and those dear to him to be placed in any such peril. What I say is that, if you are not leading a downright ascetic life—the life of Christ and nothing less—you waste words upon the air when you preach the punishment of eternal flames. Would you believe that my dearest friend upon earth was on trial for his life, and would very probably be hanged, if you met me somewhere at five o'clock tea, talking nonsense to some young lady? Whereas the average minister delivers his most awful message, tells his people plainly that they will be damned, knows for a certainty that they will go on sinning all the same, and, under a strong impression that several of his cherished acquaintances and kindly neighbours will be devoured by flames unquenchable, walks home to his vicarage, jokes with his wife, romps with his children, chaffs his friend, sits down comfortably to his luncheon, and thoroughly enjoys his slice of cold roast beef and his glass of bitter beer. Will any man, in his senses, believe that he means what he has just been saying in his sermon? Of course he will believe nothing of the sort; and therefore it has come to pass that England is full of intelligent laymen who doubt and disbelieve.

No; let me see Christians imitating, not a Christ whom I could fashion for myself out of heathen materials, not the pattern philosopher, not the ideal man—but a Christ who at every point is making himself an intolerable offence to the un-Christ-like, a thorn and scourge to every man who does not lie stretched at the foot of his cross! I know for certain how Christ would be treated if he were here; I can see the press deriding him, the fine lady picking her way past him in the street, the poor flocking round him as a friend, the magistrate committing him to prison. Let me see his witnesses treated thus, and I shall believe that he has sent them. But while I see them claiming the right to live as other men, glorying in the fact that they have no peculiarities, smiling politely on sin, and caressed by those who would have spat upon their Lord—so long as I see them thus, they shall teach me if they please the principles of Christ's philosophy, but they shall not dare to tell me that they are priests of a crucified Christ."

The conclusion shows that the heathen, having found such a witness as he requires, accepts the life—though whether for the sake of the life or through fear of the hell, does not appear—while the parson retains the dogma described as above, impervious to any sense of its hideous immorality, "and walks slowly and sadly home, feeling more and more dissatisfied with his own position."

In 'Joshua Davidson' we have an attempt to transfer the Jesus of the gospels, poor and untaught, but enthusiast of noble ideas, to our own day, for the purpose of showing from the inevitable failure of his life and work, either that modern society is not Christian, or that Christianity as a system will not work. The hero of the tale, a carpenter by trade, early gives up Christianity as a dogma or collection of dogmas, and falls back upon the character and

social teaching of Jesus as the essence of the gospel, and alone possessing any real value for us. What would Jesus be and do were he to live now? This is the question essayed to be answered in 'Joshua Davidson,' by representing him as a plain working-man, attacking alike banker and bishop, advocating indiscriminate almsgiving, fraternising with the poor and discontented, unorthodox in faith, an ultra-radical in politics, exciting the bitter hostility of the whole respectable press, denouncing shams, clutching eagerly at any Utopian extravagance that had a heart of good in it, a red republican in France, an itinerant lecturer on the rights of man in England, and finally trampled to death by conservative roughs, hounded on by dignitaries of the Established Church.

Confident that such would be the career of Jesus among us, the author is justified in asking of us, why, if we should thus regard him, do we persist in calling ourselves by his name and pretending to be his followers. Surely a question not to be left unanswered. "We ought," says the preface to the third edition, "to be brave enough in this day to dare ask ourselves how much is practicable and how much is impracticable in the creed we profess; and to renounce that which is even the most imperatively enjoined if we find that it is not wise or possible. If our religion leads us to political chimeras, let us abjure it: if it teaches us truth, let us obey it, no matter what social growths we tear up by the roots. There is no mean way for men. To slaves only should the symbols of a myth be sacred, and our very children are forbidden the weakness of knowing the right and doing the wrong. If such a man as Joshua Davidson was a mistake, then acted Christianity is to blame. In which case, what becomes of the dogma? and how can we worship a life as divine, the practical imitation of which is a moral blunder and an economic crime?"

It is thus that the author makes the very humanity of Jesus the proof of his divinity. He is *extra-human*, not in any metaphysico-theological sense, but in the intensity of the sympathy which impels him to attempt to benefit his fellows. His very failures are more divine than the successes of other men. It is thus, too, that having at the start repudiated the dogmatic system attached to his name, we are called on to re-examine his ethical and social teaching, and to avow honestly our rejection of such parts of it as do not coincide with our notions of the practicable and right. In short, the appeal is to be neither to authority nor tradition, but to our own intelligence and moral sense.

This, too, is the import of Miss Nightingale's recent utterance (in *Fraser's Magazine* for May). Rebuking the tendency of modern reformers to ignore the character of God, as necessarily underlying the phenomena which form the subject of their investigations, this 'Note of Interrogation' calls upon us to regard the moral laws which govern men's motives as the real exponents of the divine nature. While thus adopting the inductive method of Positivism, she blames the Positivists "for leaving out of consideration all the inspiring part of life," and stopping short at phenomena, instead of seeking to learn that of which phenomena are but the manifestation, and to which, therefore, they must be the index. In this view, she rejects the main points of the creeds of Roman, Protestant, and Greek alike, and utterly ignores what is called "revelation" as a guide to the nature of God, and points to the character and teaching of Christ as among the best indications to that which ought to be the prime object of search. In all this it appears clearly that by the term *God* Miss Nightingale really means a human ideal of perfection, and that she would have us perfect our ideal for the sake of the reflex influence it would

exercise upon ourselves. It is by the adoption of the Christ-ideal of character, and rejection of Christian dogma, and those on the question of their intrinsic merits as estimated by her own mind and conscience, apart from tradition or authority, that Miss Nightingale justifies us in ranking her among the supporters of Jesus in the great cause of JESUS *versus* CHRISTIANITY.

'The Fair Haven' is an ironical defence of orthodoxy at the expense of the whole mass of church tenet and dogma, the character of Christ only excepted. Such, at least, is our reading of it, though critics of the *Rock* and *Record* order have accepted the book as a serious defence of Christianity, and proclaimed it as a most valuable contribution in aid of the faith. Affecting an orthodox standpoint, it bitterly reproaches all previous apologists for the lack of candour with which they have ignored or explained away insuperable difficulties, and attached undue value to coincidences real or imagined. One and all they have, the author declares, been at best but zealous "liars for God," or what to them was more than God, their own religious system. This must go on no longer. We, as Christians, having a sound cause, need not fear to let the truth be known. He proceeds accordingly to set forth that truth as he finds it in the New Testament; and, in a masterly analysis of the accounts of the resurrection, which he selects as the principal and crucial miracle, involving all other miracles, he shows how slender is the foundation on which the whole fabric of supernatural theology has been reared. Rejecting the hypothesis of hallucination by which Strauss attempts to account for the belief of the disciples in the resurrection, he shows that they had no real evidence that Jesus had died upon the cross at all. It is true that the disciples believed him dead; so that we need not charge them with fraud. That charge he



reserves for the Paleys and Alford, whose disingenuousness he scathingly exposes, using the arguments of the latter to show the absence of any proof that Jesus died either of the cross or of the spear-wound. All that the evangelists knew was that the body was deposited in the tomb apparently dead, and that at the end of some thirty hours it had disappeared. Rejecting the statement in Matthew as palpably untenable, he makes that in John the basis of the true story, this being the simplest and manifest source of the rest.

As told by our author, the whole affords an exquisite example of the natural growth of a legend. First, we have Mary Magdalene, who, finding the stone removed, investigates no further, but runs back and declares that the body has been taken away (not that it has come to life). Then we have John and Peter ascertaining for themselves, by looking in, that Jesus was no longer there, but only the linen clothes lying in two separate parts of the tomb. Then, these having taken their departure, we have the warm, impulsive Magdalene remaining behind to weep. At length, mustering courage to look into the sepulchre for herself, she sees, as she thinks, sitting at opposite ends, two angels in white, who merely ask her why she weeps. She makes no answer, but turns to the outside, where she sees Jesus himself, but so changed that she does not at first recognise him.

How from this simple and natural story of the white grave clothes, in the dark sepulchre, looking like angels to the tear-blinded eyes of a woman who was so liable to hysteria or insanity as to have had "seven devils" cast out of her, grew, step by step, the myth so freely amplified in the gospels, the reader must find in the book itself.

If he can once fully grasp the intention of the style and its affectation of the tone of indignant

orthodoxy, and perceive also how utterly destructive are its "candid admissions" to the whole fabric of supernaturalism, he will enjoy a rare treat. It is not, however, for the purpose of recommending what we, at least, regard as a piece of exquisite humour that we call attention to 'The Fair Haven,' but in order to show how, while rejecting popular Christianity, we may still accept the "Christ-ideal," to use our author's phrase, and this with an enhanced sense of its beauty and use to the world.

One of the most characteristic parts of the book is that in which he argues in favour of the providential character of the gospel narratives, notwithstanding their inaccuracies. After stating that no ill effects need follow from a rejection of the immaculate conception, the miracles, the resurrection, or the ascension, because "the Christ-ideal, which, after all, is the soul and spirit of Christianity, would remain precisely where it is, while its recognition would be far more general, owing to the departure on the part of the Apologists from certain lines of defence which are irreconcilable with the ideal itself," he says:

"The old theory that God desired to test our faith, and that there would be no merit in believing if the evidence were such as to commend itself at once to our understanding, is one which need only be stated to be set aside. It is blasphemy against the goodness of God to suppose that he has thus laid, as it were, an ambuscade for man, and will only let him escape on condition of his consenting to violate one of the very most precious of God's own gifts. There is an ingenious cruelty about such conduct which it is revolting even to imagine. Indeed, the whole theory reduces our heavenly Father to a level of wisdom and goodness far below our own, and this is sufficient answer to it."

There is, however, a reason why we should be required to believe in the divinity of the Christ-ideal, and regard it as exalted beyond all human comparison;

namely, in order to exalt our sense of the paramount importance of following and obeying the life and commands of Christ. And this being so, "it is natural, also, to suppose that *whatever may have happened to the records of that life* should have been ordained with a view to the enhancing the preciousness of the ideal." Thus the very obscurity and fragmentariness of the gospel narratives have added to the value of the ideas they present, just as the mutilations of ancient sculptures serve to enhance their beauty to the imagination. Or, as "the gloom and gleam of Rembrandt, or the golden twilight of the Venetians, the losing and finding, and the infinite liberty of shadow," produce an effect infinitely beyond that which would be gained by any hardness of definition and tightness of outline. The suggestion of the beautiful lineaments to the imagination is far more effective than would be any minutely detailed portrait. "Those who relish definition, and definition only, are indeed kept away from Christianity by the present condition of the records; but even if the life of our Lord had been so definitely rendered as to find a place in their system, would it have greatly served their souls? And would it not repel hundreds and thousands of others, who find in the suggestiveness of the sketch a completeness of satisfaction which no photographic reproduction could have given?"

The fact is "people misunderstand the aim and scope of religion. Religion is only intended to guide men in those matters upon which science is silent: God illumines us by science as by a mechanical draughtsman's plan; he illumines us in the gospels as by the drawing of a great artist. We cannot build a 'Great Eastern' from the drawings of the artist, but what poetical feeling, what true spiritual emotion was ever kindled by a mechanical drawing? How cold and dead were science, unless supplemented by



art and religion! Not joined with them, for the merest touch of these things impairs scientific value, which depends essentially upon accuracy, and not upon any feeling for the beautiful and loveable. In like manner the merest touch of science chills the warmth of sentiment—the spiritual life. The mechanical drawing is spoilt by being made artistic, and the work of the artist by becoming mechanical. The aim of the one is to teach men how to construct; of the other, how to feel. We ought not, therefore, to have expected scientific accuracy from the gospel records. Much less should we be required to believe that such accuracy exists." The finest picture, approached close enough, becomes but blotches and daubs of paint, each one of which, taken by itself, is absolutely untrue, yet, at proper distance, forms an impression which is quite truthful. "No combination of minute truths in a picture will give so faithful a representation of nature as a wisely-arranged tissue of untruths." Again, "all ideals gain by vagueness and lose by definition, inasmuch as more scope is left for the imagination of the beholder, who can thus fill in the missing detail according to his own spiritual needs. This is how it comes that nothing which is recent, whether animate or inanimate, can serve as an ideal unless it is adorned by more than common mystery and uncertainty. A new cathedral is necessarily very ugly. There is too much found and too little lost. Much less would an absolutely perfect Being be of the highest value as an ideal as long as he could be clearly seen, for it is impossible that he could be known as perfect by imperfect men, and his very perfections must perforce appear as blemishes to any but perfect critics. To give, therefore, an impression of perfection, to create an absolutely unsurpassable ideal, it became essential that the actual image of the original should become blurred and lost, whereon the beholder now supplies from his own imagination that which is,

to him, more perfect than the original, though objectively it must be infinitely less so.

“It is probably to this cause that the incredulity of the Apostles during our Lord’s lifetime must be assigned. The ideal was too near them, and too far above their comprehension; for it must always be remembered that the convincing power of miracles in the days of the Apostles must have been greatly weakened by the current belief in their being events of no very unusual occurrence, and in the existence both of good and evil spirits who could take possession of men and compel them to do their bidding.

“A beneficent and truly marvellous provision for the greater complexity of man’s spiritual needs was thus provided by a gradual loss of detail and gain of breadth. Enough evidence was given in the first instance to secure authoritative sanction for the ideal. During the first thirty or forty years after the death of our Lord, no one could be in want of evidence, and the guilt of unbelief is, therefore, brought prominently forward. Then came the loss of detail which was necessary in order to secure the universal acceptability of the ideal. . . . But there would, of course, be limits to the gain caused by decay. Time came when there would be danger of too much vagueness in the ideal, and too little distinctness in the evidences. It became necessary, therefore, to provide against this danger.

“*Precisely at that epoch the gospels made their appearance.*” Not simultaneously, and not in perfect harmony with each other, but with such divergence of aim and difference of authorship as would secure the necessary breadth of effect when the accounts were viewed together. “As the roundness of the stereoscopic image can only be attained by the combination of two distinct pictures, neither of them in perfect harmony with the other, so the highest possible conception of

Christ cannot otherwise be produced than through the discrepancies of the gospels."

Now, however, "when there is a numerous and increasing class of persons whose habits of mind unfit them for appreciating the value of vagueness, but who have each of them a soul which may be lost or saved, the evidences should be restored to something like their former sharpness." To do this it demands only "the recognition of the fact that time has made incrustations upon some parts of the evidences, and has destroyed others." Nevertheless, as "*it is not belief in the facts which constitutes the essence of Christianity, but rather the being so impregnated with love at the contemplation of Christ that imitation becomes almost instinctive,*" we may probably suppose "that certain kinds of unbelief have become less hateful in the sight of God, inasmuch as they are less dangerous to the universal acceptance of our Lord as the one model for the imitation of all men."

To advocate conduct instead of belief, experience instead of tradition, and intuition instead of conventionality, and to exhibit a model for the imitation of all men, married as well as single, is at least one purpose manifest in the series of novels of which 'By and By' is announced to be the completion:—novels differing from the ordinary kind in that, while others treat of man only in relation to man, and are, therefore, merely moral, these bear reference to man in relation to the Infinite, and are, therefore, essentially religious.

It does not come within our design to treat of the surface aspect of Mr Edward Maitland's 'Historical Romance of the Future,' which represents the world as it may be when a few more centuries have passed over it, and the problems, social, political, and religious, which now trouble it, shall have found their solution, and people may, without detriment or reproach, regulate their lives in accordance with their

own preferences. It is with the deeper design of the book that we have now to do, the design which reveals itself in the entire series to which, with 'The Pilgrim and the Shrine' and 'Higher Law,' it belongs. This design is *the rehabilitation of nature*, by showing its capacity for producing of itself, if only its best be allowed fair play, the highest results in religion and morals. Seeing that to rehabilitate nature is in effect to rehabilitate the author of nature, and replace both worker and work in the high place from which they have been deposed by theologians, such a design can be no other than an eminently religious one.

In the first of the series, 'The Pilgrim and the Shrine,' the wanderer in search of a faith that will stand the test and fulfil the requirements of a developed mind and conscience emerges from the wilderness of doubt, through which he has been painfully toiling, to find that the best that we can comprehend must ever be the Divine for us, and this by the very constitution of our nature, inasmuch as we can only interpret that which is without by that which is within. And he bears testimony to the value of the Bible as an agent in the development of the religious faculty by noting the subjective character of all that really appertains to religion in both the Old and New Testaments. "Constantly," he says, "is the inner ideal dwelt upon without any reference to corresponding external objects. Think you it was the law as written in the books of Moses that was a delight to the mind and a guide to the feet of the Psalmist? No, it was something that appealed much more nearly to his inmost soul, even 'the law of God in his heart.' And what else was meant by 'Christ in you the hope of glory?' The *idea* of a perfect standard is all that can be in us. The question whether it has any external personal existence in history does not affect the efficacy of the idea in raising us up towards itself. God, the Absolute, is

altogether past finding out. Wherefore we elevate the best we can imagine into the Divine, and worship that:—the perfect man or perfect woman. Surely it is no matter which, since it is the character and not the person that is adored. . . . Christianity is a worship of the divinest character, as exemplified in a human form. . . . The very ascription to Jesus of supernatural attributes shows the incapacity of his disciples to appreciate the grandeur and simplicity of his character. . . . Here, then, is my answer to the question, 'What was the exact work of Christ?' It was to give men a law for their government, transcending any previously generally recognised. Ignoring the military ruler, the priest, and the civil magistrate, he virtually denounced physical force, spiritual terror, and legal penalties as the compelling motive for virtue. The system whereby he would make men perfect, even as their Father in heaven is perfect, was by developing the higher moral law implanted in every man's breast, and so cultivating the idea of God in the soul. The 'law of God in the heart' was no original conception of his. It had been recognised by many long before, and had raised them to the dignity of prophets, saints, and martyrs. Its sway, though incapable of gaining in intensity, is wider now than ever, till the poet of our day must be one who is deeply imbued with it; no mere surface painter like his predecessors, however renowned, but having a spiritual insight which makes him at once poet and prophet. The founding of an organised society, having various grades of ecclesiastical rank, and definite rules of faith, does not seem to me to have formed any part of Christ's idea. His plan was rather to scatter broadcast the beauty of his thought, and let it take root and spring up where it could. Recognising intensely, as he did, the all-winning loveliness of his idea, he felt that it would never lack ardent disciples to propagate it, and he left it to each



age to devise such means as the varying character of the times might suggest. The 'Christian Church,' therefore, for me, consists of all who follow a Christian ideal of character, no matter whether, or in whom, they believe that ideal to have been personified."

Such is the teaching of a book that is, to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, foolishness, and to Mudie's a stumbling-block and an abomination; yet which, in spite of clerical denunciation and the expurgatorial indexes of Protestant Nonconformist circulating-librarians, has in a short space travelled to all lands where the English tongue is spoken, and perceptibly influenced the course that religious thought must henceforth take. We shall have a proof of this when we come to the last book on our list. In the meantime it seemed to us well to digress for a moment in order to denounce the obstacles which still are thrown in the way of genuine religious thought by ecclesiastic and layman, Churchman and Dissenter, alike in this "Christian" land of ours.

As the 'Pilgrim and the Shrine' exhibited the process of thinking and feeling out a religion, so its successor, 'Higher Law,' represented the natural growth of a morality. Repudiating all conventional methods, as the other repudiated theological and traditional ones, the design here is to represent the action of persons under the sole guidance of their own perceptions and feelings under circumstances of supreme temptation and difficulty.

It is by the steadfast adherence to the simple rule of unselfishness, which forbids the commission of aught that can injure or pain those whom we are bound to respect, that the sufficiency of the intuitions to constitute the higher, or rather highest, law of morality is demonstrated.

It is not necessary to the perfection of nature that all germs should reach the highest stages of growth, whether in the vegetable or in the spiritual kingdom.

The capacity to produce a single perfect result is sufficient to redeem nature from the old reproach cast upon it by theologians, "just as one magnificent blossom suffices to redeem the plant, that lives a hundred years and flowers but once, from the charge of having wasted its existence." Nay, more. "Even if the experience of all past ages of apparent aimlessness and sterility affords no plea in justification of existence, the one fact that there is room for hope in the future may well suffice to avert the sentence men are too apt to pronounce,—that all is vanity and vexation, and that the tree of humanity is fit only to be cut down, that it cumber the ground no longer."

From this point of view it is evident that at least one object of the creation of the leading character in 'By and By' is to show how an ideally perfect disposition may be produced from purely natural circumstances, and if in the present or future, why not in the past? The "Christmas Carol" of 'By and By' thus becomes for us a parallel to the "Joshua Davidson" of the book already noticed; for it is an attempt to transfer the Jesus of the gospels from Judæa to our own country, only a Jesus wealthy instead of poor, educated instead of untaught, married instead of single, having all the advantages of a civilisation more advanced than any yet attained, and with his intense religious enthusiasm kept from surpassing the limits of the practical, by science, wedlock, and work. In his liability to personify the products of his own vivid and spiritual imagination, and out of his idealisations of things terrestrial to people the skies with "angels," we see but a reproduction of one of the characteristics by which all the enthusiasts of old, to which the world owes its religions, have been distinguished. By placing such a character in his picture of the future, we understand the author to indicate his conviction that man will always, no matter how rigidly scientific his

training, have a religious side to his nature, a side whereby he can rise on the wings of emotion far beyond the regions of mere Sense. Of course such an one must at some moment of his life feel himself impelled to use his wealth and freedom for his own selfish gratification (he would not otherwise be human), but resisting such promptings of his own lower nature, will fix himself upon some great and useful work. It is almost as much of course that he will in his earliest love be attracted by the character that most nearly resembles pure unsophisticated nature. But the love that is of the sexes will not contain half his nature. He will be the friend and servant of all men, and so provoke to jealousy the small, intense disposition of her to whom he has allied himself. Striving to inoculate her with a sense of the ideal, their relations will aptly typify the world-old conflict of Soul and Sense. He may suffer greatly, but if she be true and genuine, and loves him her best, so far as is in her, he will be tender and kind and endure to the end. Losing her, and after long interval wedding again, more for his child's sake than his own, he will naturally be tempted to make trial of one less unsophisticated and untrained. But mere conventionality will disgust him. Its hollow artifices and insincerity will be odious, and the ideal man will find a moral jar a fitting plea for repudiation. Should his child—his daughter—err, he will be tender and forgiving, provided her fault be prompted by love. It will ever be in his *conduct* that we shall find his faith. Recognising himself as an individualised portion of the divine whole, his intuitions are to him as the voice of God in his soul, and to fail to live up to his best would be to fall short of the duty due to his divine ancestry.

So confident is he of the divinity of his own intuitions, and so inexorable in his requirements of



perfection in conduct up to the highest point of individual ability, that he fails to be at ease until he has established the character of God himself for perfect righteousness in his dealings, even with the meanest thing in his creation. We do not know whether or not the argument is new. It certainly has not been suggested by any of the theologians who have busied themselves in seeking solutions for the problem of the origin of evil. It is that all things are the product of their conditions, and that all conditions have a right to exist, so that the products have a right to exist also; and the maker of the conditions cannot in justice refuse to be satisfied with the products of conditions which he has permitted. "The poor soil and the arid sky are as much a part of the universal order as the rich garden, soft rain, and warm sunshine. It is just that one should yield a crop which the other would despise. It would be unjust were both to yield alike." Man's highest function is to amend the conditions of his own existence. Finding himself launched into the universe, he must till it and keep it and fit it to produce better and better men and women. It is by labouring in this direction that he works out his own salvation. They are poor teachers who inculcate but the patience of resignation, or look to another life to compensate the evils of this. The ideal man of the future appeals to the intuitive perceptions as the divine guides of conduct while here, and to the physical laws of nature for the means of subduing the world to man's highest needs. To his intensely sympathetic nature "good" is necessarily that which assimilates and harmonises to the greatest extent its surrounding conditions—not the *immediately* surrounding merely—that which works in truest sympathy with the rest. While that is evil which by its very selfishness arraigns the rest against it, good needs no power working from without to make it triumphant. It

triumphs by winning the sympathies of all to work with it.

What Mr Maitland has done in the form of fiction Mr Matthew Arnold has done in the form of a treatise. We look upon his 'Literature and Dogma' as clinching the blow struck at the whole fabric of dogmatic theology, and crowning the effort to restore the intuitions as the sole court of appeal, not only between man and man, but between man and God. In his view the glory of the Bible consists in its exhibition of Israel as a people with a special faculty for righteousness, at least in conception. As other races have their special faculties, the Greek for sculpture, the Italian for painting, the German for abstract thought, the French for sensuous art, &c., so the genius of Israel was for the righteousness which consists in *morality touched by emotion towards something that is not ourselves, but which makes for righteousness*. And it was in Christ that the national genius of his race culminated, as genius for painting in Raphael, for science in Newton, for the drama in Shakespeare.

It was to God, not as "an intelligent First Cause and Moral Governor of the Universe," but as the *influence* from whence proceed the intuitions which constitute the basis of conscience, that the higher writers of the Old Testament appealed. And it was in Jesus, not as the "Eternal Son" of a personal father, but as the restorer of the intuitions that the disciples believed. No doubt they had *extra beliefs*, and what we should term not so much superstition as the poetry of religion, and it is very difficult to separate the husks of this from the grain of the other; but it is always the appeal to the intuitive perceptions of right that excites their enthusiasm, and thus they preach as the sole efficient cause of man's regeneration.

Entitling his work 'An Essay towards a Better

Apprehension of the Bible,' Mr Arnold maintains that it is through the lack of literary culture that the Bible has been utterly misunderstood, and that it is through such misunderstanding that difficulties and dogmas have arisen, and that conduct has come to be ranked below belief as the effective agent of all good. Of the Bible itself he says that, while it cannot possibly die, and its religion is all-important, nevertheless to restore religion as the clergy understand it, and re-inthroned the Bible as explained by our current theology, whether learned or popular, is absolutely and for ever impossible. Whatever is to stand must rest upon something which is verifiable, not unverifiable; and the assumption with which all churches and sects set out, that there is "a great Personal First Cause, the moral and intelligent Governor of the Universe, and that from him the Bible derives its authority, can never be verified."

There is, however, something that can be verified; something that, after the deposition of the magnified and non-natural man ordinarily set up by people as their God, will for ever remain as the basis and object of religious thought. This something is to be found in the Bible, not there alone, but there in a greater degree than in any other literature. It is the influence wholly divine which is not ourselves, and makes for righteousness. The instant we get beyond this in our definitions of Deity we fall into anthropomorphism and its attendant train of dogmas, Apostolic, Nicene, or Athanasian, all of which are but human metaphysics, and the product of minds untrained to distinguish between things and ideas. "Learned religion" is the pseudo-science of dogmatic theology; a separable accretion which never had any business to be attached to Christianity, never did it any good, and now does it great harm. In the Apostles' Creed we have the popular science of that day. In the Nicene Creed, the learned science. In the Athanasian Creed,

the learned science, with a strong dash of violent and vindictive temper. And these three creeds, and with them the whole of our so-called orthodox theology, are founded upon words which Jesus, in all probability, never uttered, inasmuch as they are inconsistent with the essential spirit of his teaching, and are ascribed to him as spoken after his death.

Of the capacity of people at that time to compose a form of belief for us, we may judge by their ideas on cosmogony, geography, history, and physiology. We know what those ideas were, and their faculty for Bible criticism was on a par with their other faculties. To be worth anything, literary and scientific criticism require the finest heads and the most sure tact. They require, besides, that the world and the world's experience shall have come some considerable way. There must be great and wide acquaintance with the history of the human mind, knowledge of the manner in which men have thought, their way of using words and what they mean by them, delicacy of perception and quick tact, and besides all these, an appreciation of the spirit of the time. What is called orthodox theology is, then, no other than an immense misunderstanding of the Bible, due to the junction of a talent for abstruse reasoning with much literary inexperience. The Athanasian Creed is a notion-work based on a chimæra. It is the application of forms of Greek logic to a chimæra, its own notion of the Trinity, a notion un-established, not resting on observation and experience, but assumed to be given in Scripture, yet not really given there. Indeed, the very expression, *the Trinity*, jars with the whole idea and character of Bible-religion, just as does the Socinian expression, *a great personal first cause*.

What, then, is Christian faith and religion, and how are we to get at them? Jesus was above the heads of his reporters, and to distinguish what Jesus said and meant, it is necessary to investigate the spirit

which prompted and is involved in the words attributed to him. This spirit is identical with that which made Israel (as expressing himself through his most highly spiritual writers) the most religious of peoples. The utterance of Malachi, *Righteousness tendeth to life*, life being salvation from moral death, was identical with the assertion of Jesus that he was *the way, the truth, and the life*, inasmuch as the Messiah's function was to *bring in everlasting righteousness*, by exhibiting it in perfection in his own conduct. Thus, the religion he taught was personal religion, which consists in the inward feeling and disposition of the individual himself, rather than in the performance of outward acts towards religion or society. The great means whereby he renewed righteousness and religion were self-examination, self-renouncement, and mildness. He succeeded in his mission by virtue of the *sweet reasonableness* which every one could recognise, particularly those unsophisticated by the metaphysics of dogmatic theology. He was thus in advance of the Old Testament, for while that and its Law said, *attend to conduct*, he said, *attend to the feelings and dispositions whence conduct proceeds*. It was thus that man came under a new dispensation, and made a new covenant with God, or *the something not ourselves which makes for righteousness*.

Thus the idea of God, as it is given in the Bible, rests, not on a metaphysical conception of the necessity of certain deductions from our ideas of cause, existence, identity, and the like; but on a moral perception of a rule of conduct, not of our own making, into which we are born, and which exists, whether we will or no; of awe at its grandeur and necessity, and of gratitude at its beneficence. This is the great original revelation made to Israel, this is his "Eternal." The whole mistake comes from regarding the language of the Bible as scientific instead of literary, that is, the language of poetry and



emotion, approximative language thrown out at certain great objects of consciousness which it does not pretend to define fully.

As the Old Testament speaks about the Eternal and bears an invaluable witness to him, without ever yet adequately in words defining and expressing him, so, and even yet more, do the New Testament writers speak about Jesus and give a priceless record of him, without adequately and accurately comprehending him. They are altogether on another plane, and their mistakes are not his. It is not Jesus himself who relates his own miracles to us; who tells us of his own apparitions after death; who alleges his crucifixion and sufferings as a fulfilment of prophecy. It is that his reporters were intellectually men of their nation and time, and of its current beliefs; and the more they were so, the more certain they were to impute miracles to a wonderful and half-understood person. As is remarked in 'The Pilgrim and the Shrine,' the real miracle would have been if there were no miracles in the New Testament. The book contains all we know of a wonderful spirit, far above the heads of his reporters, still farther above the head of our popular theology, which has added its own misunderstandings of the reporters to their misunderstanding of Jesus.

The word *spirit*, made so mechanical by popular religion that it has come to mean *a person without a body*, is used by Jesus to signify *influence*. "Except a man be born of a *new influence* he cannot see the kingdom of God." Instead of proclaiming what ecclesiastics of a metaphysical turn call "the blessed truth that the God of the universe is a PERSON," Jesus uttered a warning for all time against this unprofitable jargon, by saying: "God is an *influence*, and those who would serve him must serve him not by any form of words or rites, but by inward motive and in reality."

The whole centre of gravity of the Christian religion, in the popular as well as in the so-called orthodox notion of it, is placed in Christ's having, by his death in satisfaction for man's sins, performed the contract originally passed in the council of the Trinity, and having thus enabled the magnified and non-natural man in heaven, who is the God of theology and of the multitude alike, to consider his justice satisfied, and to allow his mercy to go forth on all who heartily believe that Christ has paid their debt for them. But the whole structure of materialising theology, in which this conception of *the Atonement* holds the central place, drops away and disappears as the Bible comes to be better known. The true centre of gravity of the Christian religion is in the *method* and *secret* of Jesus, approximating, in their application, even closer to the "sweet reasonableness" and unerring sureness of Jesus himself. And as the method of Jesus led up to his secret, and his secret was dying to "the life in this world," and living to "the eternal life," both his method and his secret, therefore, culminated in his "perfecting on the cross."

A century has passed since it was said by Lessing, "Christianity has failed. Let us try Christ;" and the interval has not proved the utterance a fallacy. Though there never was so much so-called Christian teaching and preaching in school and church as now, the progress of civilisation has been little else than another name for progress in immorality, whether in the form of trade dishonesty, social selfishness, or any other. The reason is plain. It is not God as righteousness and Jesus as the way thereto that is inculcated, but systems of impossible metaphysics and rituals that profit nothing. The spread of intelligence is leading the masses daily more and more to reject what is good in religion, because their intelligence does not go far enough, and because their teachers

insist on substituting human inventions for eternal truth. Alike within the Established Church and without, it is the teaching vain and foolish. Even politics are degraded by its influence. For, as Mr Arnold asks, "What is to be said for men, aspiring to deal with the cause of religion, who either cannot see that what the people now require is a religion of the Bible quite different from that which *any* of the churches or sects supply; or who, seeing this, spend their energies in fiercely battling as to whether the church shall be connected with the nation in its collective and corporate character, or no? The thing is to recast religion. If this is done, the new religion will be the national one. If it is not done, separating the nation in its collective and corporate character from religion will not do it. It is as if men's minds were much unsettled about mineralogy, and the teachers of it were at variance, and no teacher was convincing, and many people, therefore, were disposed to throw the study of mineralogy overboard altogether. What would naturally be the first business for every friend of the study? Surely to establish on sure grounds the value of the study, and to put its claims in a new light, where they could no longer be denied. But if he acted as our Dissenters act in religion, what would he do? Give himself heart and soul to a furious crusade against keeping the Government School of Mines!"

This brings us to another aspect of the allegorical romance already referred to. Mr Maitland represents the church of the 'By and By' as a church at once national and undogmatic. That is, it is not only the crowning division of the educational department of the State; but it is untrammelled by any dogma that can exclude any citizen from a share in its conduct and advantages. For none can own himself a dissenter in regard to a church whose teaching is restricted to the inculcation of righteousness, and



follows Christ in the work of restoring the intuitions to their proper supremacy over convention and tradition, and maintaining them there.

Archdeacon Denison has already uttered a lament over even the remote prospect of such a "creedless and sacramentless church" finding a footing in this country. But what may not the man who can reconcile the pursuit of righteousness with reason, say of the prospect afforded now? We take the answer from 'The Fair Haven.'

"Let a man travel over England, north, south, east, and west, and in his whole journey he will hardly find a single spot from which he cannot see one or several churches. There is hardly a hamlet which is not also the centre for the celebration of our Redemption by the death and resurrection of Christ. Not one of these churches, not one of the clergy who minister therein, not one single village school in all England, but must be regarded as a fountain of error, if not of deliberate falsehood. Look where they may, they cannot escape from the signs of a vital belief in the resurrection. All these signs are signs of superstition only; it is superstition which they celebrate and would confirm; they are founded upon sheer fanaticism, or at the best upon sheer delusion; they poison the fountain-heads of moral and intellectual well-being, by teaching men to set human experience on the one side, and to refer their conduct to the supposed will of a personal anthropomorphic God who was actually once a baby—who was born of one of his own creatures—and who is now locally and corporeally in heaven, "of reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting." Such an one as we are supposing cannot even see a clergyman without saying to himself, "There goes one whose whole trade is the promotion of error; whose whole life is devoted to the upholding of the untrue."

How different it will be when the teaching in church

and school alike are built upon the axiom ascribed to them in 'By and By,' that "As in the region of Morals, the Divine Will can never conflict with the Moral law; so, in the region of Physics, the Divine Will can never conflict with the Natural law."

It must be so some day. "It is not for man to live for ever in the nursery. As in the history of an individual, so in that of a people, there is a period when larger views must prevail and greater freedom of action be accorded; when life will have many sides, and hold relations with a vast range of facts and interests, of which none can be left out of the account without detriment to all concerned. Formerly, it may be, men were able, or content, to recognise their relations with the infinite on but a single side of their nature. When a strongly marked line divided the object of their religious emotions from all other objects, when that alone was deemed divine, and all else constituted the profane or secular, there may have been excuse for their accordance of supremacy to the one class of emotions, and of inferior respect, or even contempt, to the other. But we have passed out of that stage; we know no such distinction in kind between the various classes of our emotions. They all are human, and therefore all divine. They all serve to connect us with the universe of which we are a portion, the whole of which universe must be equally divine for us, though we may rank some of its uses above others in reference to our own nature. Thus, if there is nothing that is specially sacred for us, it is because there is nothing that is really profane; but all is sacred, from the least to the greatest. And this is the lesson that the churches have yet to learn. Let us complete the Reformation by freeing our own church from its ancient limitations, which are of the nursery. Let us release our teachers from the corner in which they have so long

been cramped, and they will soon learn to take greater delight in exploring the many mansions which compose the whole glorious house of the universe, and unfolding in turn to their hearers whatever they can best tell, whether of science, philosophy, religion, art, or morality, not necessarily neglecting those spiritual metaphysics to which they have in great measure hitherto been restricted, and the consequence of which restriction has been but to distort them and all else from their due proportion. In the church thus reformed, all subjects that tend to edification will be fitting ones for the preacher. But whatever the subject, the method will have to be but one, always the scientific, never the dogmatic method. The appeal will be to the intellects, the hearts, and the consciences of the living, never to mere authority, living or dead. There will be no heresy, because no orthodoxy; or rather, the question of heresy as against orthodoxy will be a question of method, not of conclusions. From the pulpits of such a church no genuine student or thinker will be excluded, but will find welcome everywhere from congregations composed, not of the women only and the weaker brethren, but of men, men with brains and culture! Who knows what edifices of knowledge may be reared, what reaches of spiritual perception may be attained, upon a basis from which all the rubbish of ages has been cleared away, and where all that is useful and true in the past is built into the foundations of the future! Who can tell how nearly we may attain to the perfections of the blessed when, no longer straitened in heart and mind and spirit by a narrow sectarianism, but with the scientific and the *verifiable* everywhere substituted for the dogmatic and the incomprehensible, the veil which has so long shrouded the universe as with a thick mist shall be altogether withdrawn, when the All is revealed without stint to our gaze in such degree as each is able to bear, and

Theology no longer serves but to paint and darken the windows through which man gazes out into the infinite!

Thus reformed, amended, and enlarged, the established churches of Great Britain will be no exclusive corporations, watched with jealous eyes of less favoured sects. Nonconformity will disappear, for there will be nothing to nonconform to: Fanaticism, for there will be no Dogma; Intolerance and Bigotry, for there will be no Infallibility. Comprehensive, as all that claims to be national and human ought to be, no conditions of membership will be imposed to entitle any to a share of its benefits: but every variety of opinion will find expression and a home precisely in the degree to which it may commend itself to the general intelligence.

The bitterness of sectarian animosity thus extinguished, and no place found for dogmatic assertion or theological hatred, it will seem as if the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and a new heaven and new earth had come, in which there was no more sea of troubles or aught to set men against each other and keep them from uniting in aid of their common welfare. Lit by the clear light of the cultivated intellect, and watered by the pure river of the developed moral sense, the State will be free to grow into a veritable city of God, where there shall be no more curse of poverty or crime, no night of intolerant stupidity, but all shall know that which is good for all, from the least to the greatest.\*

“What, then, becomes of the Revelation?” asks one of the heroes in ‘By and By.’ “My friend,” is the reply, “so long as there exist God and a Soul, there will be a revelation; *but the soul must be a free one.*”

\* ‘How to Complete the Reformation.’ By Edward Maitland. Thomas Scott.