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THE NEW FAITH.

From 'THE INDEX.'

IF you and I, good reader, had been born in Rome during the latter part of the third century, when Christianity, although not yet the established religion, had gained a multitude of adherents, and was destined to replace the rapidly-declining religion of Greece and Rome; if our parents and friends had chanced to be devoted worshippers of Jupiter and Apollo, Minerva and Ceres, and had therefore entertained an

intense antipathy to the new faith which threatened to destroy the old *cultus* which was so dear to them; and if (to add one more to these suppositions) you and I had become persuaded of the mythical character of all the old legends of our pagan religion, and had embraced the purer faith of Jesus as modified by the liberal Paul and the philosophy of Greece, I fancy we should have been subjected to very much the same sort of remark, expostulation, and entreaty with which we are so well acquainted to-day. There would have been the same outcry made against destroying a long-established faith which had been handed down the ages from revered ancestors; distinguished, grey-headed believers in the old religion would have been pointed out, and we should have been asked if we dared to set up our inexperienced minds in opposition to their wisdom; the same arguments would have been adduced in favour of the genuineness of the old myths; the same expostulations would have been addressed to us to spare the peace of mind of all who were reposing in the old faith.

Finally, when all this had failed to convince us that we were in error, some deeper thinker would have taken us aside, and said significantly: "You are right. These priests are half of them feigning to believe what they do not, and the rest are bigoted and deceived. You are right. The old legendary stories of the gods are untenable. I agree with you. The new faith is more rational, is purer, and may, at some future time, prevail. But be sensible. Here is our old faith still held by millions who love it devotedly and who believe in it fully. All over the civilized world are the beautiful temples reared for the worship of our gods. The whole wealth of our unrivalled art is dedicated to the production in life-like marble of the ideal forms of the deities of our fathers. Now, if you Christians succeed, you will overthrow a vast

system of worship; you will make our gorgeous temples with their splendid rituals worthless; you will take the significance out of our beautiful sculptures and paintings; you will rob the groves, the rivers, and the fields of their presiding divinities; and you will thus distress the minds of thousands who cling tenderly to the old faith." And then some shrewd business man would have taken us aside, and said with a cunning smile: "Will it *pay*, now, for you to speak out boldly against the errors of our old religion? Will it prove any advantage to you to urge the adoption of this new faith? Look at your business, which will be wholly ruined if you come out openly as a Christian! Your old friends will desert you. Just be content to hold your peace. Entertain what views you will in secret, but for policy's sake *keep silent!*"

Now these words, which might have been with perfect propriety addressed to the convert to Christianity in the third century, are precisely similar to those which the majority of radicals, in the nineteenth century, hear daily from their friends in the old faith. At the present day, Christianity, as a *religious system*, is on the wane just as surely as the pagan religion was sixteen hundred years ago. Its many positive excellences, its moral purity, its teachings of brotherhood, charity, and forgiveness, remain, and will ever remain, as permanent blessings to mankind. But its deification of Jesus, its claim to be the prophesied faith of faiths, its supernatural stories, its more recently manufactured creeds with their revolting dogmas and inconsistencies, and its worship of an infallible Church by the Catholic wing, and its worship of an infallible Bible by the Protestant wing,—all these are surely and steadily crumbling away. The two great weapons, Scientific Discovery and Historical Criticism, are rapidly dispersing the clouds of error and superstition, as certainly as the sun scatters the

mists of the morning. In fact, the amount which has already been accomplished in this respect, during the last fifty years, is simply amazing. The real change which, unperceived by the Orthodox, has actually taken place in their own ranks, is also most surprising. We stand, then, in very much the same attitude as the world did during the gradual breaking up of the errors of the old pagan religion.

Now, as then, the question comes home to every man who sees that he cannot honestly hold the old faith: "What shall be my course of action? Shall it be open, or shall I hold my opinions in silence?" The temptation is great to adopt the latter course. The "New Faith" is not yet sufficiently pronounced, nor so generally received, as to make the open adoption of it and the rejection of the old an easy matter to most Liberals. It is true they are not exposed to the terrible persecutions to which early Christians were subjected, and which the Christians themselves repaid with interest on coming into power; the age has gone by for that. Still, in England and in this country, the radical labours under great disadvantages. There are being enacted every day scenes of heroic adherence to truth, which are none the less noble for being little known. Let me cite two examples out of many for whose authenticity I can vouch:—

A young man, who had lately worked his way painfully through college and seminary, with the hope of preaching the gospel, who had made repeated and severe sacrifices for this purpose, and who had actually entered successfully upon his work in an Orthodox church, saw, after some years of closest study and agonizing doubt, that he could not conscientiously continue in the old faith, preaching the Orthodox dogmas. It was a terrible trial for him. Relatives were dependent upon him for support. He had just reached that for which he had given the best years and all the enthusiasm of his life. But he saw that,

if he would be *honest*, he must relinquish it. What could he do to earn his livelihood? He had now no knowledge of commercial pursuits. He had admirably and laboriously fitted himself for a profession which he found he *could* not conscientiously occupy. Some pursuit was found by him in which he could, with strict economy, maintain himself. Accordingly he resigned his pastorate, gave up his handsome salary, and went quietly to the humble place which he had chosen, a true disciple of honesty and truth.

Another example: A young man recently occupied a very prominent and responsible position in a business house. He had long cherished the desire to be a preacher, and to address to men from the pulpit words which should incite them to a purer life. So soon as he had gained a sufficient sum of money to support for some time those dependent upon him, he left the flattering prospects which a continuance in business offered him, and began his theological studies. It is the old story. He found it impossible for him, as he ascertained the truth, to subscribe to orthodox tenets, and with noble honesty, despite the agony which came from the rude awakening from life-long, cherished dreams, he gave up the profession for which he had sacrificed so much.

A score of similar cases might be cited, and such acts are doubtless repeated in one way or another constantly. There are heroes and heroines in every walk of life, who are making sacrifices daily, because they are faithful to the truth which is in them. They are unwilling to adopt the too prevalent custom of repeating words in which they have no belief, and, moreover, they are earnestly desirous of helping onward the day of freedom from the narrow, bigoted dogmas which enslave so many minds. The question with them is not, *Will it pay me* in dollars and cents., or in social position and popularity, to be thus true to my convictions? That question must, for the

present, certainly be answered in the negative. But there is a higher motive, that of devotion and loyalty to the truth, and hatred of error and superstition, which impels them not only to reject dogmas no longer tenable, but to aid in ascertaining and disseminating truth and light.

There is, however, one very weighty reason which deters many Radicals from proclaiming openly their views. It is that these views are so largely *negative*. It is that they dislike to pull down, without putting anything in the place of, the destroyed faith. It is their want of a *positive* system of truth to promulgate. But, in considering this objection to outspoken Radicalism, let us remember that the farther we go in philosophy or religion, the less dogmatic and positive we can be. If we see but one point, one side of truth, we are apt to assert most vehemently that we are right and we alone. But if our vision is extended, if we see more than one side, we grow less positive. Our belief is less narrow and intolerant. In one sense it is undoubtedly true that the more light we have the more we doubt. We see this exemplified everywhere. The quack, acquainted with but one set of symptoms and with no knowledge of all the complicated influences which may affect the disease of his patient, is the most positive of men. The broad, cultured physician is much less certain. Now the "New Faith," being the result of the deepest thinking and the most critical study of the past half-century, and arising from a necessary elimination of old dogmas and effete superstitions incorporated in the Old Faith, must naturally seem, when compared with Christianity, to be *negative* rather than *positive*. So great always is the mental distress consequent upon the loss of intense and positive beliefs, however narrow they may be, that the mind thus bereft of them is at first much more keenly alive to its loss than to its gain. To the believer in the highly poetical polytheism of the

Greeks, the rude dispelling of his illusions must have been attended with great mental pain. So, also, to one who held the crude conceptions of the universe which prevailed before Copernicus, the great change effected by telescopic discovery must have brought with it a kind of terror. The sudden expansion of his notions of the distance and nature of the celestial bodies, and the consequent insignificance of this earth, thus shown to be one of the smallest objects in the stellar universe, must have at first produced despondency and sorrow. Lecky cites a touching story of an old monk who considered God as altogether human, and whom he was wont to address in most familiar language. When he was convinced by a brother monk that he was wrong in holding such anthropomorphic views of the Deity, he clasped his hands in agony, and said, while the tears streamed down his cheeks, "You have taken away my God! You have taken away my God!"

It is true that the "New Faith" seems largely negative, *as compared with Christianity*, for the very reason that, while taking much from that religious system which is good, it also rejects much with which it can have nothing in common, and this is so distressing to the holder of the Old Faith that at first it seems to him as if everything good in his religion were denied by us. Let us look first at the most prominent features of the old system which have been discarded by the "New Faith."

With the discovery of the immense age of our earth, and the enormous length of time (compared with our historical accounts) during which man has been an inhabitant of the globe, and with the knowledge that man's origin is almost without doubt to be derived from a lower order of the animal kingdom, and *certainly* from very primitive and savage ancestors,—the old account of the first pair, the fall, the curse of the race, the "scheme of salvation" as indicated in the

prophesied "seed of the woman" that should "bruise the serpent's head,"—all this, upon which is built up the lofty structure of "justification by faith" and "redemption through the blood of the Lamb," crumbles away, and the vast system falls to the ground. By careful investigation into the origin of the biblical canon, and by the results of historical criticism, the Bible is shown to be a book of human composition, and, with all its many excellences, *not* a divinely-inspired and infallible authority. By a careful comparison of religions—by the clear light of science, and by the *Zeit Geist*, which does not favour anything miraculous,—we are led to disbelieve the legendary stories in the Old Testament, and the miracles and myths of the New. By similar studies the deified Jesus becomes a pure teacher, of exalted moral character, born of Joseph and Mary, around whom, when dead, the magnified stories inseparable from such an age and people gradually clustered, gathered credence by repetition, and strength by transmission from one generation to another. By the study of the rise and development of many Church doctrines, as affected by the influence of the pagan religion and the prevailing philosophy, we are convinced of their decidedly human origin, as well as of their unsoundness. We are compelled, likewise, to modify greatly the anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity which are inherent in Christianity, since Jesus, being in reality the God of the Christians, gives to them as an object of worship little more than a magnified man, to whom they address petitions for rain, success in business, victory in war, and the like.

Finally, in view of the origin and present low condition of the majority of the human family, and the insignificant part which an individual life plays in this boundless universe, the "New Faith" cannot pronounce certainly and dogmatically upon a future existence, but leaves it in solemn hope.

Thus far is the "New Faith" surely negative; but it does not stop there. Although it cannot affirm on the ground of ignorant traditions and ill-supported authority many things which the Christian creed so unhesitatingly proclaims as truth, yet it is not wanting in positive faith.

The spirit of love to our fellow-men and kindness even to our enemies, which it has been the peculiar glory of the religion of Jesus to inculcate (however imperfectly its adherents may have carried it out), is the key-note of the anthem of the "New Faith." Emphatically it calls itself the "Religion of Humanity." The place which the spirit of asceticism occupied in the early centuries, and which the enthusiasm of the Crusades claimed in the Middle Ages, is in our day held by the wide-spread spirit of philanthropy and universal benevolence, of which we may say:—

"Nor bounds, nor clime, nor creed thou knowest;
Wide as our need thy favours fall!"

The "New Faith" holds that man is progressing steadily and surely towards that perfection of society unto which it is our aim to attain. From low beginning the race has thus painfully worked itself upward on its way; not grovelling *downwards* from a primitive state of purity and excellence, to be rescued only by a partial system of salvation, but steadily advancing, learning by bitter experience, throwing up about its way safeguards of law and morality, and ever progressing in civilization, enlightenment, and general culture. No good word was ever uttered by ancient bard or prophet, no noble maxim was ever enunciated by sage or priest, no moral precept was ever spoken by the lips of Jesus, that is not cherished as part of the inheritance of the "New Faith," which thus draws to itself the treasures of the ages. The "New Faith" entertains, it is true, no limited and anthropomorphic ideas of the Deity, but for that very

reason it inculcates greater awe and reverence for that unknown and unknowable Power in whose all-quickening presence we have our being.

Above all, it upholds and teaches the necessity of RIGHT LIVING! To the soul weakly resting in effeminate security on the merits of a victim who once paid the penalty of his sins, and who will forgive him as often as he does wrong and cries, "I repent," the "New Faith" says: "*Live* a true, pure, noble life! Lurk behind no covering of other men's virtues. Show yourself what you are! *Be* pure, *be* unselfish, *be* upright! Do not be content to be *reckoned* so on the heavenly register by virtue of the blood of a man crucified nineteen hundred years ago"! To the man basely acting from expectation of reward in a future life, the "New Faith" exclaims: "Scorn to act from such low motives! Cease meanly to balance your visionary heavenly gains by your earthly losses, and to chuckle over a credit-mark on the recording angel's book, when you have performed a good action here! Act rightly, because it is *noble* to act so; because it benefits your fellow-men and purifies and strengthens your own soul! The "New Faith" pleads also for the prompt and efficient administration of *justice* here on this earth,—knowing nothing of a "judgment to come." By this means and not by threatenings of unknown tortures would it restrain those men from crime, who are insensible to higher appeals to right action. This, then, is the aim of the "New Faith:" to promote the welfare and to aid the progress of the race; to inculcate purity and honesty of life; to diffuse everywhere the spirit of charity and love; to stimulate in every way, by music, sculpture, painting, literature, and poetry, the growing culture of the race; to place before men constantly higher models of excellence; and to cheer and comfort drooping, saddened hearts. For the time when these blessings shall be widely diffused must all disciples of the "New Faith"

toil. The time has come to emerge from politic concealment and to declare our views. Already the air is full of the tremor of a hastening change. The mists are lifting. The ugly forms of once potent superstitions are growing fainter and fainter, and are fading steadily from view. The promise of a brighter day is dawning on the race. We may not see its glory. But we can help its advance. In the noble words of the poet—

“ Hail to the coming singers!
Hail to the brave light-bringers!
Forward I reach, and share
All that they do and dare!

“ What matter, I or they,
Mine or another's day,
So the right word be said
And life the sweeter made?

“ I feel the light move sunward,
I join the great march onward,
And take by faith, while living,
My freehold of thanksgiving!”

BOSTON.

J. L. S.

