

CT 89.

# CHRISTIANITY.

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I.

THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY FROM A STRICTLY  
HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW,

BEING

*A Lecture*

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SUNDAY LECTURE SOCIETY,

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How to obtain a clear and intelligible notion of the Origin of Christianity.

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Universalism pervading Christianity

The Finite and the Infinite in the East and West.

The Jews and their Sects. The Pharisees, Zaducees, Essenes, Ebionites, Therapeutics and Samaritans, Hebraism and Hellenism.

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# CHRISTIANITY.

## I.

*The Origin of Christianity from a strictly Historical Point of View.*

HISTORIANS may be divided into *three* distinct classes—

- (1.) The Obstructives,
- (2.) The Destructives, and
- (3.) The Constructives.

Until recently almost all theological historians were, by their very nature, *Obstructives*—that is, they were compelled to abide by facts as transmitted to them by tradition, or in sacred records, and were therefore necessarily stationary. To inquire was in itself a dangerous action—*undermining the very foundations of faith*. To this class of historians belong the Brahmans, Bonzes, Rabbis, Priests of the Romish Church, Ulemas, Clergymen of the Anglican Church, or other Protestant sects, and their disciples, educated in the same stationary way; forced to regard certain assertions concerning events, or certain calculations concerning the time in which these events happened as *facts*—though they may have been anything but facts. We may best classify these writers as *Orientalists*. The *past*, in the received form of some Sacred Book, was everything with them. The very word *History* signified to them a sacrilegious attempt to unsettle the assumed truth of their particular facts,—which alone could be true; whilst they asserted with admirable self-reliance and conceit that the records of all other nations were nothing but falsehoods.

Next we have the *Destructives*, in whom doubt and scepticism work supreme; who do not see how *one* and the same fact could have happened in two different ways; why one witness should be credited more than another; or how *two* witnesses could have seen one and the same fact happening in different places, under entirely different circumstances, and with altogether different results.

The Destructives began timidly to pull down, they shook the foundation of credulity, they suddenly saw the whole past tumble into ruins. Horrified at the havoc which they had brought about, they stopped half-way, and the past became nothing but a heap of dust, lumber, and fact-rubbish. We may best classify these people as *Gallicans*. They are a necessary element in the progressive development of Humanity, for unless the old tottering building of assumed facts, cemented together with dogmatic lime and sand were first destroyed, no new building could be erected.

And last we have the *Constructives*—those who re-arrange facts on the principles of probability and possibility; who consult the ancient documents of different nations, not with a mind filled with hatred and contempt for everything not contained in their own sacred records, which they were made to choose by mere chance of birth, education, and established custom, but with an equal veneration for those periods in which each tribe, race, and nation, had their own sacred book—sacred because transmitted to them from father to son; and what is more sacred to a son than that which a kind and loving father has left him? That the ancient nations throughout the world, in the fulness of their grateful hearts, should have assumed that the *first* father who spoke to them was God Himself, proves only the *Sameness* and *Oneness* of Humanity, artificially divided into innumerable quarrelling sects, tribes, and peoples. The Constructives, therefore, compare, draw analogies, separate the separables, dissect myths, explain symbols, connect equals, inquire, sift, and finally build up their historical edifice on the firm basis of causation with facts that are facts, and cement them with common sense—discarding all arbitrariness, all exceptional providential interference in favour of Brahmans, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Egyptians, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Scotch or Irish—anxious to discover what we have in common as human beings—never fostering dissent, animosity, contempt or hatred, but sympathy, forbearance, kindness, and love. We may best classify the Constructive Historians as the *Hellenic-Teuton* element in Humanity.

The spirit of these three groups of historians may be

studied in three works recently published on the "Life of Jesus," by an anonymous English Professor of one of our Universities, by Renan, the Frenchman, and by Dr. Strauss, the German.

The Englishman is obstructive, the Frenchman destructive, and the German constructive.

Dr. Strauss is learned, conscientious, and systematic. He is full of veneration, and yet unflinchingly truthful without predilection, bias, or prejudice, and gives us the true history of the foundation of Christianity. His great merit lies in his having drawn a distinction between the historical and mythical Jesus of Nazareth. Historically he describes the birth of Jesus, His relation to John the Baptist, the laws of Moses, the Gentiles, and the belief in His being the expected Messiah. The mythical account is divided into three chapters and twelve subdivisions concerning the pre-historic myths of Jesus, the mythical account of the life of Jesus, and the mythical record of His suffering, death, and resurrection. Dr. Strauss wrote his work with the view of furthering Protestantism on the firm basis of historical continuity, and eliminating from the glorious teachings of Jesus of Nazareth whatever was merely accidental, secondary, symbolic, and allegorical, borrowed from more ancient creeds, which at the time of Christ were in a state of spontaneous and natural dissolution. For whoever wishes to have a clear and unbiassed notion of the historical Christ, must free Him and His doctrine from the *obscuring veil of dogmatism*.

The Frenchman, Renan, is learned, but his learning is too much tainted with emotional outbursts of refined phrases; his imagination outruns his criticism, and his criticism loses itself in romantic dreams and visions. He is far more bent on destroying an idol of the Romish Church, than on discovering to what extent it had become in time an entity, to dissolve which will need more than the superficial pen-strokes of a witty Frenchman.

The English professor is grave—very grave. He published his work under the title of "Ecce Homo," but he has neither the learning nor the courage of Dr. Strauss, nor the sprightliness and imagination of Renan. He has, however, his inherited predilections, which are apparently

shaken by his studies and the intellectual atmosphere of the nineteenth century. He has heard of Strauss with conventional horror; he has heard of Renan with inherited contempt, and he wishes to free his soul from all doubts by arguing himself out of doubt; and yet, of the three books, this one, written with apparent obstructive faith, is the most destructive. It must necessarily lead to a despairing scepticism, because the positive assertions are made so timidly, that one sees the trembling writer afraid to touch his subject, lest his dogmatic Christ might crumble into dust under his own hands, and turn into a true "Ecce Homo,"—"Behold a Man!"

To be able to give a clear and intelligible picture of the origin and spread of Christianity from a strictly historical point of view, we must make ourselves acquainted with the moral, political, religious, and intellectual elements that pervaded Humanity at the advent of Christ. To detach Christianity from the influences of the different creeds that preceded its foundation, is to know nothing of Christianity. The essence of the teachings of all law-givers and founders of religious systems was the redemption of man from the bondage of his *animal* nature, and the development and culture of his higher intellectual and *spiritual* nature. To separate Christianity from the causes of which its origin and working were a necessary effect or sequence, is to transport it into the realm of miracles. But in assuming Christianity to have been a miracle, we raise terrible phantoms of doubt, or rather of piety and veneration for the Diety, in the shape of grave questions which necessarily present themselves to the thinking mind:

Why was the advent of this miracle so long delayed?

Why were millions and millions of creatures left without salvation, and, as some pious divines will have it, predestined to eternal damnation?

Why should the sanguinary miracle of a self-sacrificing God have had so *partial and slow an effect*?

Why was the miracle not made *universally* known?

Why had Christianity to be established in torrents of blood, amidst the horrible shrieks of tortured and martyred human sacrifices?

Why was the efficacy of the miracle quite imperceptible,

save in such progress as was natural to any creed, supported by fire and sword, by money, and state authority?

Why should the early Christian authorities have deliberately destroyed all writings bearing on the origin, growth, and development of Christianity, if it was a miracle ordained by God?

Why should the Emperor Theodosius have felt himself compelled to issue the following proclamation?—

“We decree, therefore, that all writings whatever which Porphyry, or any one else, has written against the Christian religion, in the possession of whomsoever they shall be found, should be committed to the fire; for we would not suffer any of these things so much as to come to men’s ears, which tend to provoke God and so offend the minds of the pious.”

In a spirit of *true tolerance*, the same Emperor ordered, “that all those who should object to the dogma of the Trinity, besides the condemnation of Divine justice, would have to expect to suffer the severe penalties which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom, may think proper to inflict upon them.”

Why should it have been an axiom of the Church “that it was an act of virtue to deceive and to lie, when by that means the interest of the Church might be promoted?”

Why all these threatening laws, these anxious jealousies, the falsifications of documents, the oppression of learning, the abhorrence of our reasoning power, if this was a miraculously ordained divine act, performed for the salvation of Humanity?

In historically analysing the elements which compose Christianity, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that it has become the universal storehouse of all the different creeds that have swayed the human mind from the first dawn of its arising consciousness. We find in Christianity the strictest Monotheism mixed with the Trinitarian mysteries of the Brahmans, Buddhists, and Egyptians; the Incarnation and Atonement theories of the Indians and Egyptians; the dualistic principle of the Avesta; the Jewish and Persian assumptions of angels and devils; the lofty moral enactments of Confucius and Sokratès; the dreamy idealism of Plato, and the more practical realism of Aristotle.

Mystics and Rationalists, Believers and Free-thinkers, Fanatics and Latitudinarians, Spirit-rappers and Philosophers, rich and poor, mighty and weak, learned and ignorant, may find in the tenets of Christianity some congenial and sympathetic, some suggestive and comforting elements.

The most important fact with regard to the "new faith" was that Christianity became but another name for those universal principles and eternal laws which, if recognised, and put in motion, stimulate the innate dormant moral and intellectual forces of our human nature into activity. This fact must explain the superior vitality of Christianity, which has led Humanity in the West and North-West of the world slowly, gradually, yet uninterruptedly on the path of progress in arts, discoveries, inventions, and sciences to the very highest achievements.

The followers of any other creed must endeavour to answer the following questions in their turn: Why did empires and communities professing other beliefs remain *stationary* in their development, in spite of their undoubted priority in many useful arts and inventions? and why should the Christians have succeeded, by degrees, in working out wise and beneficial laws, in producing poetical works of unsurpassed excellence, and in raising sciences to a climax never attained before? Suns and planets are measured by Christians; the rays of light analysed; the gradual formation of the earth's crust is recognised; the different chemical elements, in apparently indivisible atoms, are traced; Christians speak by means of electricity at distances of thousands of miles, reducing *space* in its dimensions; and travel by means of fire and water at an unheard-of speed, reducing *time* in its duration.

The Universalism pervading true Christianity alone can serve as an explanation of this phenomenon. As we may trace in nature *positive* and *negative* electricity, so we can see the working of *positive* and *negative* intellectual currents in humanity.

The currents in the East were generally *negative*. To look backwards, to hope, as it were, everything from the past, was the characteristic of Oriental nations. The intellectual currents in the West were *positive*; to look to and to trust in the future, whether worldly or spiritual,



was and is the distinguishing feature of the Western World. Man in the East shuns new spheres of thought, and is content to move round and round in the ever unchangeable circle of fixed notions, ceremonies, and customs. Man in the West strives for freedom and an eternal activity; he must have some goal to long for, which presents itself in the form of religious enthusiasm, chivalrous daring, a thirst for inquiry and learning, a contempt for all danger, and a struggle with real or imaginary monsters.

The finite submitted in humble acquiescence to the infinite in the East. In the West the finite strove to grasp the infinite, and to bring harmony into the discordant elements of good and evil, light and darkness, mind and matter, God and nature. These contradictory phenomena led the East very early to endeavour to cast a light upon the mysterious nature of self-conscious man, the mystic phenomena of nature, and to attempt the solution of the riddle of life by means of allegories, symbols, wild fictions, incredible fables, and inspired guesses.

The nation that felt the double nature of humanity most keenly, and first proclaimed a more spiritual conception of a God, was the Jewish. In the mystic schools of the priests of Egypt, their leaders were made acquainted with the universal "Monothêos," but the Jews deprived Him of his universality, and transformed Him into a *national* Deity, who was only a merciful God to His chosen people, under certain outward ceremonial conditions, and a God of wrath and merciless persecution to all those who had not the good fortune to belong by mere chance of birth to that chosen people. The Chinese taught Humanity filial love, and social order; the Indians unravelled the beauties of the universe in the eternal Trinitarian process of Creation, Preservation, and Transformation; the Egyptians established the "I am I" mystery; the Persians endeavoured to practice purity in thoughts, purity in words, and purity in deeds; the Greeks fostered taste and refinement in arts, exalted *humane* feelings in their poetry, and manifested a deep critical discernment in philosophy; the Romans organised, regulated, conquered, and developed an unsurpassed patriotism; and the Jews?—they taught humanity reli-

gious exclusiveness, proud and fanatical intolerance, and have had themselves to suffer under these curses for more than 2,900 years.

Even at this very moment we see them harassed and persecuted in Germany, a country which boasts of the highest civilization, a country which produced a Lessing, the Apostle of true Christian Tolerance, and a Herder, the founder of "Humanism." To the honour of that country, it may be said that every distinguished German, every learned Historian, and every true Christian abhors the anachronistic movement of the Ultramontanes, which is worthy of the dark middle ages of superstition and gross ignorance. The Jews, as ever in the past, are still at war with the *Gentiles* all over the world; they use up the *Gentiles* for their special purposes, but never look upon them as their equals. The Jews hoping against hope, sublimely singing and prophesying in their despair, loudly proclaiming their thirst after God, their fervid longing for righteousness and holiness, formed with their theological sentiments a terrible sanguinary leaven of a new faith, which was a possibility only after Persian ethics, Brahmanic tenets, Egyptian mysteries and rituals, Buddhistic miracles and dogmas, Jewish prophesies, Greek philosophical researches, and Roman disciplinary organisations, had been pounded together by the pestle of time in the mortar of History.

The Jews became the most important element in the historical development of Humanity. They inherited the dualistic theory of God and Devil from the Egyptians and Persians, and worked it out theologically through their deeply-learned prophets, who saw the terrible conflict manifested in virtue and sin, of which they became conscious at an earlier period and in a higher sense. By means of this consciousness they approached a state of reconciliation; for self-conscious virtue must be based on a self-conscious knowledge of evil, bringing harmony into man's animal and spiritual nature, developing to the utmost his moral and intellectual faculties. In spite of this higher moral state, they found themselves cruelly oppressed. They prayed, sighed, and mourned at Babylon, and mingled their scalding tears with the waves of the Euphrates; they were driven from state to state; they

waited and watched; they fought like despairing lions; they clung to their God, who had so few blessings, and so many sufferings for them on earth. They were still convinced "that the sceptre should not depart from Judah; and unto him should the gathering of the people be;" and yet they were trampled under foot by Roman Tetrarchs and Prætors, had no political or social freedom, and were themselves divided by religious sects and factions.

Amongst these were the PHARISEES, who clung to the dead letter of the law.

The GAULONITES or GALILEANS, a still more fanatical branch of the Pharisees, who professed "that no one must obey any mortal in authority, for God alone is our Lord." (This sentence enables us to understand those pharisaical survivals who, under the pretence of obeying the self-constituted authority of their God, defy the law of the land, and turn true religion into mockery.) These fanatics hoped everything from the internal dissolution of the Roman Empire. The Pharisees brought into religion the most contemptible spirit of trading; they always tried to make a profitable bargain with their God. Plenty on earth was the reward of godliness. Their piety had to manifest itself in eating and drinking. "At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread, and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God," was the foundation of the egotistical creed of the Pharisees. To eat and drink was, with the Jews, the most solemn initiation and termination of all their religious ceremonies. The Greeks cultivated man's higher artistic and philosophical aspirations; the Persians ruled, the Romans legislated; the Egyptians built imperishable monuments; the Indians worked out mystic problems—the Jews did eat and drink. When the seventy (properly seventy-two) elders accompanied Moses on Mount Sinai and saw the God of Israel, they did eat and drink. If we do not correctly study the principles of the different Jewish sects of this period, we can never properly understand the peculiar fanatics, intolerant bigots, eating and drinking pious hypocrites, who still grace our own social organisation, as so many survivals in the flesh of a pre-Christian world.

The SADDUCEES (the just) were next in importance

to the Pharisees; they were the broad-minded followers of Zadak. They rejected all artificial explanations of the Scriptures, and studied the prophets most diligently; they had a supreme contempt for all those who continually occupied their minds with mysterious benedictions, sanctifications, days of atonement, fasting and feasting, leavened or unleavened bread, palm branches, trumpets, sacred vessels, offerings, defiled or undefiled gifts, trespasses, red cows, the blood of calves and goats, scarlet wool, hyssop, and dead bodies; and despised all those who neglected doing good to their fellow creatures. The Sadducees believed neither in the immortality of the soul, nor in punishment or reward after death. They denied the existence of angels and devils—although they thoroughly believed in the Scriptures. They were notorious for their virtue, honesty, tolerance, learning, and, above all, for their justice and humanity.

The *ESSENES*, so called from the Hebrew “*asâ*” or the Chaldæan “*asâyâ*,” meaning “to heal”—or according to others “the retired”—were still more important. They lived a solitary life; they devoted themselves to the study of medicine, to the art of working miracles, and to predicting the future. They practised baptism. In conformity with the ancient Indians and Egyptians, water was with them the mysterious life-giving element. Water had been the essence of life when the earth was still barren and uninhabited. They considered water to be the fountain of regeneration, the symbol of life; man to be good and free from sin was to be born anew of water. Water mystically washed away the sins of the world. Water made the Essenes, like the Indians, *twice born*. John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth were both Essenes, and were both baptized. The opinions advanced by Matthew Tyndal in a work, published 150 years ago, entitled “Christianity as old as the Creation,” are borne out by *Eusebius*, who has a whole chapter under the title, “The Religion published by Jesus Christ is neither new nor strange;” and this author also states, in the most unqualified manner, in the 17th Chapter of his 2nd Book that the ancient Therapeutics were Christians, and that their ancient writings were our Gospels and Epistles. The Therapeutics, Ebionites or Essenes were “Chres-

tianæ," from "Chrestos," good. They were Eclectics; they held Plato in the highest esteem, though they scrupled not to add to his doctrines whatever they thought conformable to reason in the tenets and opinions of other philosophers. According to Thomas Burnet, the Essenes were offshoots of the Brahmans and Buddhists, devoting themselves to the contemplation of the transitoriness of human life.

At last we must mention the SAMARITANS, who were the independent among the Jews. They considered Jews and Heathens equal, if good and kind, and because of this very cosmopolitan sentiment were held in abomination by all the other Jewish sects, who most furiously quarrelled both with the outer world and amongst themselves.—When the Jewish Scriptures became more generally known through the Greek translation, the "*Septuagint*" there suddenly sprang into unparalleled activity—*Hebraism* as the static, and *Hellenism* as the dynamic force, working in Humanity, in History, and Religion. Dogmatism and morals were so closely interwoven in these Scriptures that the study of history became a religious duty. The past was to be taken on *faith*; the assertions of the Hebrew writers were not to be doubted; everything was to be declared credible or incredible by reference to some scriptural passage and inquiry, and Scepticism was to be banished from the world. This banishment aroused a mighty spirit of controversy; the classic writers were looked upon as perverse liars, destitute of light, since they had not known the True God who had revealed Himself exclusively to the Jews. An infinite number of lying spirits were assumed to have deluded Humanity. The glorious works of art, sculpture, architecture, poetry and philosophy of the numerous nations of the Earth were suddenly decried as the outgrowths of sin, inherited from Adam. The Greeks had been taught by Satan; the Persians, Assyrians, and Babylonians had been annihilated by the God of Israel for their idolatry; the Indians were children of Beelzebub; the Buddhists horrible Atheists. All the monuments of antiquity became objectionable works, conceived in pride by the fallen angels; all the historical writings and records of all nations were considered false and untrue,

and the Jewish records placed above them as the only true revealed Word of God who had forsaken and abandoned all His other creatures, and held communication exclusively with the Jews.

From that moment up to our own times, there has been something wonderfully majestic in this terrible conflict between Hebraism and Hellenism, keeping humanity in a continuous exertion of its moral and intellectual forces; now devoting every thought to theology, then again promoting the loftiest inquiries of science, leading us to a state in which morals and knowledge will no more be considered as antagonistic, but *completing* elements of man's progressive development.

We have to deal with the beginning of the new historical phase of a spiritual life that took its origin in the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.

False prophets and philosophical teachers abounded everywhere. Greek mock philosophers discussed the most abstruse spiritual problems in the market-places. Egyptian priests of Osiris, Isis and Horus, divulged the unintelligible symbolisms of their ancient creed; and the Persian worship of Mithras (meaning the Redeemer or Intermediator) was revived with all its deep mysticism. Numbers of Roman legal casuists engaged in searching for lawsuits, discussed everything, whilst knowing very little of anything. The Jewish sects, in spite of their dissensions and mutual hatred, were all equally oppressed and plundered by Herod the Great; superstition, ignorance, despair and credulity were the distinguishing features of the Roman world.

The East was crowded with dreamers, visionaries, traders in charms, augurs, horoscopists, miracle-workers (Thaumaturgi), soothsayers, cabalists and priests of an infinite variety of gods and goddesses. All was spiritual chaos, like that at the dawn of the Creation of the material world, WHEN JESUS OF NAZARETH WAS BORN.

We have very little reliable historical information concerning the life of "Christ," meaning the Anointed. So much we do know, that we may make of Christ what we please; we may comment upon His recorded teachings exegetically or in any other form. We may altogether deny the whole later *Ecclesiastical* structure, built upon

His utterances. We may demonstrate that all that was asserted of Him, was also believed of Melchisedech, Krishna, Osiris, Buddha, Apollo or Mithras. We may trace in Him and to Him all the legends of divine incarnations through which man, having become conscious, wished to find an explanation of his own low animal desires, and the lofty intellectual longings of his mind, thus working out divine models of human beings, or gods in human form.

We may study the Gospels and their contradictory views, and critically wade through the still more contradictory writings of the Fathers. We may show how dogma after dogma was attributed to Christ, which He neither enunciated nor ever could have thought of, because, whatever contradictions may be recorded of Him, there was no contradiction between His teachings, and His own self-sacrificing life. We may prove how the Councils of the Church changed the true doctrine of Christ, misunderstanding it altogether; we may reject the dictates of certain synods and accept others. We may be Papists, Episcopalians or Methodists, Presbyterians or Ritualists, Lutherans or Quakers, Dissenters or Shakers, Idealists or Realists, Believers or Free-thinkers; we may quarrel and hate one another with the same fervour as did the Jewish sects, and curse every one who does not hold our own opinions as to the sensations of the beatitude, the length of the wings of the angels in heaven, or the horns of the devils in hell.

We may laugh at our petty controversialists who talk of vestments and postures, candlesticks, crosses, rubrics, grace, conscience, transubstantiation, real and unreal presence, and the thousand and one unintelligible, analogical, parabolical, allegorical and symbolic niceties and difficulties, which may all be easily settled, if no one asks questions, and if all men have faith, and do not use their thinking and reasoning faculty, the brightest gift of the Creator, under whatever name He be worshipped.

But we cannot deny the immense influence which Christ's teachings have exercised on the Western mind. Let all the circumstances and details have been what they may, historians must deal with Christ's Spirit, as it presents itself, as one of the greatest of historical phenomena.

For though we may divest Christ of all the miracles, rightly or falsely attributed to Him, we cannot divest Him of one grand immortal fact, "That he died for Love, murdered by those whom He taught with a heart full of universal love—that the whole of humanity was *one great brotherhood*; that every human being was to love his neighbour as himself; that every human being was the cherished child of one Father, who loved all His children equally, and who was in heaven!" Had but this simple doctrine of mutual and universal love been taught for the last 1880 years with the same fervour as the mystic dogmas with which Christ's teachings were perverted, and which were each and all borrowed from Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Indian and Roman religious systems, the world would undoubtedly be more Christian, and humanity would have saved millions of precious lives which have been wasted on the propagation, not of Christianity, but "of prejudiced credulity, and priestly tyranny." We have, unfortunately, failed to learn to look upon Christ as He is characterised in the following ancient Arab legend:—"A dog had stolen some meat from a Jewish butcher's shop; the dog was stoned, then hanged, then thrown into the street, and the angry Jews formed a circle round the dog, spat on him and cursed him; all at once a mild and gentle voice was heard asking the enraged crowd, whether they could find nothing worthy of admiration in the poor dead animal; there was suddenly a deep silence, and the speaker pointed to the beautiful pearly-white teeth of the dog. The people grumbled, and it was whispered among them that the speaker must be Jesus of Nazareth, for He alone was capable of finding something good even in a dead dog!"

#### THIS IS CHRISTIANITY.

The Deity of the Jews was a stern, and revengeful *Despot*; Christ's God was a loving *Father*. The beginning of wisdom with the Jews was *fear*; with Christ, the beginning of wisdom was *love*. With the Jews, God was a God of wrath, persecution and slaughter; with Christ, a God of mercy, forgiveness, and boundless love.

The God of the Jews, who, like the inexorable Fate of the Greeks, or the sanguinary monsters enthroned in the Imperial purple of Rome, punished the sins of the



fathers unto the third and fourth generation, and demanded holocausts of murdered sacrifices, was changed by Christ into a God of infinite kindness, rejoicing over one repentant sinner more than over ninety and nine just persons. Christ's doctrine in its primitive purity was the ever true Law of Peace, Love and Tolerance, satisfying Reason, leading to Science, and to the Search for Truth. These are the fundamental elements of Christianity, towards which, freed of all dogmatic unintelligibilities, humanity is striving consciously or unconsciously, in spite of the thousands of sects, and the numberless commentators who have done their uttermost to destroy the simplicity and universality of Christ's teachings. But Reason cannot be stifled by persecution; Science cannot be annihilated by superstition; and Truth cannot be silenced by blind fanaticism. Christianity checked Hebraism, fostered Hellenism, brought life into the Ancient World, and established Humanism, the last possible phase in the development of Humanity.

If we look for the principal historical causes of the sudden spread of Christianity, we have :

1st. The extent of the Roman Empire, with two principal languages—Greek and Latin.

2nd. The scattering of the Jews and the Jewish Christians.

3rd. The general tendency to mysticism, fanaticism, and symbolism, and the total absence of a correct knowledge of the Laws of Nature.

4th. The immense number of freed men, slaves, and beggars. To such people equality was preached; equality before a God in whose eyes the living visible God on earth—the Emperor was no more than the lowest beggar. The poor grew proud, and condescended to admit the rich into their now blessed community; and the rich, terrified by the hungry and haggard looks of the people, enervated by profligacy and licentiousness, were glad to be made partakers of a future kingdom of bliss, since they did not feel very safe on earth, and trembled equally before the covetousness of the tyrants in power, and the daily increasing number of homeless slaves.

5th. The decline of faith in the old gods of the classical world, who were now proved to have been mere idols of stone, or brass, as otherwise they could

not have permitted humanity to sink to such a depth of immorality as was reached under the Emperors, for men's lives had no value, justice was nowhere to be found.

6th. The sanguinary political and religious persecution which the Emperors repeatedly ordered against the ever-increasing Christians.

The Greeks and Romans were in general extremely *tolerant* in religious matters. They had either a personal or a political interest in persecuting some single individual, and used the religious fanaticism of the mob as the means to attain their special political or worldly object. They never had priests in our sense of the word. The early Christians began slowly to find favour at Court in consequence of their universalism. They proved that they did not hold all the exclusive, national opinions of the Jews, who would not recognise any other authority but that of Javeh—they honestly referred to Christ's command: "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's"—and the new Religion was at last introduced at Court under the Emperor Alexander Severus, whose mother, Mammæa, was said to have been a true Christian. Decius tried in vain to stamp out the Christians. Under Gallienus they enjoyed peace; and the last vain attempts to abolish Christianity by means of sanguinary persecutions were made under the Emperor Diocletian. As is invariably the case, cruelty only served the more to develop the whole vitality of Christianity. At this period certain causes were at work, which altogether changed, if not the essence, at least the form of Christianity. Some sudden disturbances occurred in the provinces, situated between China and the Caspian Sea, which had been conquered about the first Century of the Christian Era. "It appears that, in consequence of these convulsions, the Samanæans, disciples of Buddha, (who probably lived about the time of the Israelitish Kingdom of the Ten Tribes,) departed from their former seat, the ancient Aria, and took refuge in the mountains of Cashmere and Thibet." Some of these disciples must have also settled in the more western parts of Asia, and must have come into contact with the then more and more spreading Christians, who endeavoured with all the

activity of their intellectual power to bring Christianity into a system—a dogmatic system. In many of their details, the tenets of Buddha bear the greatest resemblance to certain superadded Christian dogmas; “For the chief doctrine of the Samanæan Bonzes was, that Buddha was of Royal descent, born of the Virgin Maja, worthy of adoration as next in dignity to God whose ninth incarnation he was, and that he would assume at the end of all earthly things his tenth incarnation as Kali, and appear on a white horse to judge the quick and the dead.” The Samanæan priesthood taught men to prepare for this event, to lead a retired contemplative life, to suffer persecution but never to persecute, humbly to submit to any lay power, since this world was a mere fleeting, transitory abode of misery and decay, preparatory to a higher spiritual life to be enjoyed in Eternity in Nirvânâ, the unceasing contemplation of the Deity in His eternal peace and glory. Christianity absorbed all these elements, but with the Christians, the endeavour to spread this belief in the bliss of redemption became a sacred duty, which they thought themselves justified in performing by means of violence, inexorable cruelty, crucifixions, boilings and burnings, by fire and sword “Ad majorem Dei gloriam.”

Here the striking difference between Buddhism and Christianity becomes apparent. Buddhism is *passive* contemplation; Christianity is *positive* activity. The one remained stationary, the other progressively developed and is still developing. The one acquiesced in any form so long as the worship of Buddha was the aim; the other devoted itself to an unparalleled spiritual activity, endowing Christianity with mystic meanings, allegorical beauties, dressed in the shreds of myths and fables, collected from all the religious systems of the ancient world, adorned with Platonic dreams and visions, and Aristotelian sophistries and dialectics. Intolerance and fanaticism spread more and more; and delusion and ignorance served to build up that glorious spiritual Revolution which brought new life into the world.

Scarcely had Christ expired on the Cross when a host of pious preachers and teachers inundated the world with descriptions of the details of His private and public life.

St. Luke informs us "that many have taken in hand to set forth those things which are most surely believed among us." There were about 146 independent sacred writings, among which were 34 Gospels, 20 Epistles, 22 Acts, 5 Revelations, and 22 miscellaneous works; several books published under the name of James, and books under the name of Peter. That these works existed, is undeniable, for the various diverging and quarrelling sects of early Christianity were founded on the very possession of these different sacred books. Letters were forged, interpolations fabricated, omissions resorted to, fictions invented, exaggerations propounded, miracles proclaimed, and interpretations given, so that it is exceedingly difficult to gather any reliable facts. To prove how far such deceptions went, we may point out that Gregory, of Tours, in the sixth Century A.D., firmly believed that he possessed the authenticated account of the miracles at the death and resurrection of Christ in the very document which Pilate had sent to the Emperor Tiberius.

Lucian, in the latter half of the second Century after the birth of Christ, bitterly complained that the Christians were so reserved respecting their mysteries.

Tacitus, Pliny, and others could not understand why morals and truth should be proclaimed by miracle-workers, magicians and necromancers, who began to drive a very profitable trade. At first, Jewish and Pagan priests had heaped opprobrious calumnies upon the Christians on account of the simplicity of their worship, esteeming them little better than Atheists, because they had no temples, altars, sacrifices, priests nor any of that external pomp in which the vulgar are so prone to place the essence of religion. The rulers of the Christians now adopted external, mystic ceremonies, and suddenly the primitive simplicity which had characterised the first followers of Christ was gone, and a multitude of half-Jewish and half-Pagan enthusiasts, visionaries, theosophists, snake-charmers, and adepts abounded in the Christian communities, and proclaimed themselves to be Ascetic, self-denying, miracle-working Christians. Mysticism and symbolism became the leading elements in Christianity. The mysteries engendered sects, in accordance with the various explanations given to the meaning of the different

symbols, allegories, types, propheties, gospels, epistles, or any vague traditions. Sects persecuted sects, each stigmatising their opponents as heretics. Every one of these sects pretended to have received certain traditions from the founder of Christianity Himself, or at least from prophets, apostles, or pious men who had stood near to Christ; yet subsequently, all their dogmas were declared to have been heresies by later councils and synods.

The Gnostics, Ebionites, Marcionites, Alogians, Manichæans, Novitians, Sabellians, Patripassians, and Arians, &c., may be adduced to prove that Christianity was at first broad-hearted and broad-minded, so long as it was not yet fettered by the inexorable power of the State. Dogmatists were permitted to put forward new dogmas and mysteries, but unfortunately Constantine, in the fourth century A.D., adopted Christianity as a state religion, and employed learned converted Talmudists and Sophists to shape the simple tenets of Christ, and from that time down to the Reformation everything received a theological basis, and was looked upon from a one-sided religious point of view. Gregory of Nazianzen says of this period; "the learned diatribes of Stoics, Platonists, Aristotelians, and even the teachings of the most important Fathers were silenced, and every "shop-boy" preached and talked on the Trinity in Unity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or on the "Hypostasis," meaning the subordinate substances of the Trinity. The City of Constantinople was full of working men and slaves who were profound theologians, and preached in their workshops and in the streets. If you wanted of anyone change for a silver coin, he informed you of the distinction between Father and Son; if you asked for the price of a loaf of bread, you were lectured on the inferiority of the Son to the Father; and if you asked whether the bread were baked, the rejoinder was that the Son had been created out of nothing."

It was in vain that Justin Martyr, one of the most zealous defenders of Christianity, proved with trenchant conviction that Christ was the Logos, or "Universal Reason," of which mankind were all partakers: and, therefore, those who lived according to the Logos or Reason, were Christians, notwithstanding that they

might pass for Atheists. Such among the Greeks were Sokratês and Herakleitos, and the like; and such among the Barbarians were Abraham and Ananias, and many others. So on the other hand, those who had lived in former times in defiance of the Logos or Reason were evil, and enemies to Christ, and murderers of such as lived according to the Logos or Reason; but those who made or make the Logos or Reason the rule of their actions, were and are "Christians, and men without fear and trembling."

It is deeply to be regretted that Christ's teachings were deprived of their charming simplicity. But it could not be otherwise. By the daily increasing number of theological Sophists, Greek and Roman Dialecticians, converted Talmudists and Cabalists, who made it their duty to obscure every intelligible passage in the Old and New Testaments; to find types where there were none; to take allegories and metaphors to the letter; and to transform into deep symbols what had been the literal record of some every-day occurrence. Man was to be forced into the narrow Procrustean bed of Dogmatism, and to know nothing but incomprehensible mysteries.

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy raised their spiteful and venomous heads, and spread like dragons the fire of destructive disunion throughout the world. Councils and Synods denounced and persecuted, excommunicated and succeeded in bringing about a dead silence in the realm of thought, or submissive professions of the prescribed religious formulæ.

In the sixth century after Christ the Church, with the aid of the lay power, at last was enabled to stamp out by fire and sword all the so-called Heretics, and the Fathers, Apologists, and the Church dignitaries began to rule supreme. The writings of the Fathers are the only important literary products of these times which throw a considerable light on the gradual development of Christianity from the second to the twelfth century A.D.

The Fathers, like the ancient Patricians of Pagan Rome, were divided into two classes. Those from the second to the sixth century A.D. were the "*Patres majorum gentium*;" whilst those from the seventh to the twelfth century A.D. were the "*Patres minorum gentium*."

During the mediæval period of history the priests of the Romish Church, occupying themselves with writing on or discussing theology, were called "*Scholastics*," and only since the Reformation the Clergy treating religious matters philosophically or ethically, assumed the title of "*Theologians*" (Scientists of God). We cannot fail to perceive that the struggle between faith or religion, and reason or science was the vital force that made it possible for Christians to progress, morally as well as intellectually.

The principal tendency of the most learned and most honest theologians of our day (like Dean Stanley, Principals Tulloch and Caird,—Stopford Brooke and many others) is to restore to Christianity that universal spirit of tolerance which will make culture and true civilisation a common good, not dependent on rubrics, eastern postures, vestments, or articles, but on a correct understanding of our nature, humanising even the bigoted middle classes; purifying society and making it a general philanthropic brotherhood, turning capital into a blessing instead of a curse; and endowing our dogmatic and arbitrary educational institutions with one analogous system, fitted to bring out all our higher reasoning faculties. Thus the pure spirit of true Christianity will once more sway our hearts and vivify our lifeless and cold, yet eternally quarrelling, denominational sects. Science and art will work together, spiritualising our higher nature, fostering Hellenic-Teuton culture instead of Romano-Hebrew narrow-mindedness, leading us to a universal bodily and mental happiness, and establishing a *practical*—not *clerical*—"MILLENNIUM."

We shall endeavour in future lectures to trace how the historical development of Christianity commenced in a controversial thunderstorm, fierce, terrible and *destructive* at first; followed by a gloomy calm, silent, deadening and *obstructive*; and at last arousing science, purifying our moral and intellectual atmosphere, spreading the broad daylight of culture in union with morals, enabling humanity to be free, good, and truly *constructive*.



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