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# RELIGION:

ITS PLACE IN HUMAN CULTURE.

A LECTURE,

Delivered in the Freemasons' Hall, Edinburgh,  
On Sunday, May 18, 1873.

BY

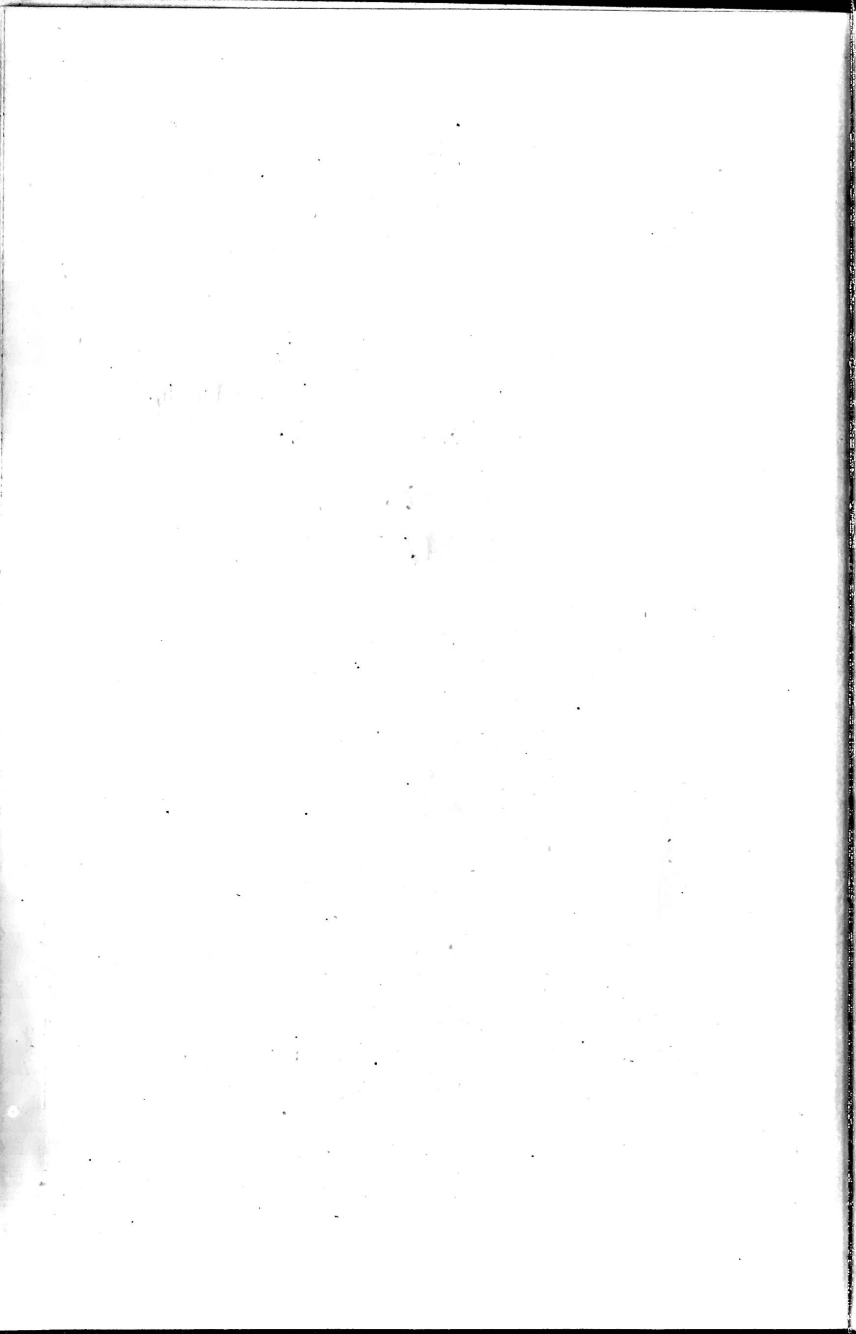
JOHN MACLEOD.



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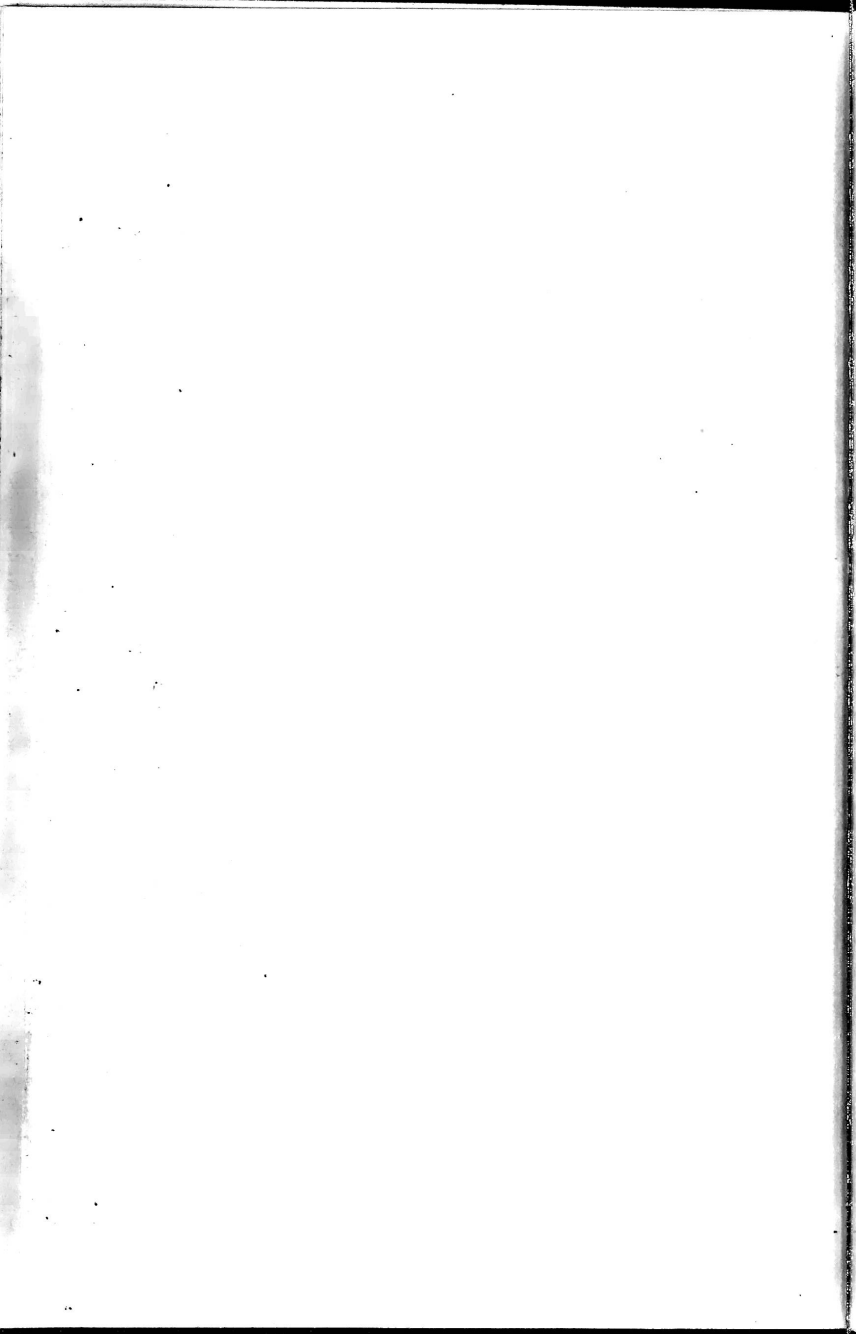


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IT is now well-nigh two years since first I stood on this platform, and although I did not feel then so hopeful of the immediate success of our undertaking, yet I felt convinced that our movement contained in itself all the elements on which true and permanent success depends. I knew it was not an arbitrary movement propped up by artificial aids, and appealing for support to low and vulgar motives, but a free and spontaneous outcome of the intellectual vigour of our time—the masculine birth, as it were, of the nineteenth century. It says very much for the intelligence and manliness of Edinburgh citizens, that some years ago there could be found among them several men and not a few women who broke away from the enervating influence of orthodox Christianity; scorned that soft sentiment which languishes and sickens at its ancient altars, and in spite of the obloquy which invariably awaits the revelation of great truths, asserted the divine right of their manhood and womanhood—the freedom of the human soul. Although only a few years have elapsed since you left that worse than Egyptian bondage, yet the influence which your conduct, and that of your noble-minded leader, Mr Cranbrook, has had on society is incalculable. Ten years ago, few men would believe that society could so rapidly advance in intelligence as it has done; that the tone of our daily press could rise from faint and scarcely audible mutterings against spiritual tyranny to a tone of rolling thunder, loud, heavy, and crushing, against everything that is hypocritical and false; and fewer still could believe that nearly every clergyman who has any pretension to a highly-cultivated intellect and refined taste in every Christian sect or denomina-

tion would, in eighteen hundred and seventy-three, be following in the lead of Bishop Colenso. I cannot say that I admire the conduct of a man who signs a document such as the *Confession of Faith*, or the *Thirty-nine Articles*, and pledges himself by a solemn oath to maintain every proposition therein contained against all criticism, if, on finding that some of those propositions do not harmonise with his better judgment and more enlightened reason, he seeks to force his own meaning into them, and then to interpret them, not according to the obvious meaning of the text, but in accordance with the subjectivity of his own mind, and the false poetic gloss with which he can invest them. I say I cannot admire the conduct of these men; it lacks in manhood and fearless honesty. Christian dogmas have been dead these many years, and they cannot now be galvanised into life; it is against the analogy of nature, of science, of history. Christian dogmas are interesting to us only as the fossilized remains of ancient life; of life which may or may not have been bright and useful, but which was certainly inferior to our own in comprehensiveness and breadth of human sympathy. I know several men in the churches who believe no more than I do in the literal interpretation of their own creeds, or indeed in the Biblical authority which is supposed to establish these creeds; and yet these men are contented to remain within their respective churches as the paid representatives of orthodox Christianity, satisfying their conscience with the old but miserable subterfuge, which was once the glory of the Jewish philosophers of Alexandria, and of the early Christian fathers — namely this, that every passage and even word in Holy Writ contained two meanings, a primary and a secondary one; in other words, a literal and a mystical meaning. It has been said that a coach and six can be driven through any Act of Parliament; but ecclesiastical acts are still more elastic, in the opinion of not a few, for they can

be expanded into dimensions which look anything but orthodox; and immediately on the pressure being withdrawn, they contract within limits which, from their narrowness and convenience of manipulation, might satisfy the most expert advocate for "particular redemption," or "eternal reprobation."

We say, then, that when a man ceases to believe, not only in the distinctive dogmas of his Church, but even in the so-called "external evidences" of Christianity itself—prophecies, miracles, &c., that man does violence to his own nature, to his entire moral and intellectual powers, if he still remains a *professed* believer in orthodox Christianity, and a paid advocate of it. Let such a man scorn to sell his birthright for a little comfort and ease; let him scorn to sacrifice those gifts with which God endowed him at the gloomy shrines of a vulgar superstition; let him stand forth as the champion of truth, of the light of reason and the law of conscience; and howsoever the hysterical screams of weak women and sentimental clergymen may annoy him, he will find higher sympathy and a more serene intellectual repose in that unclouded atmosphere which is breathed by the loftiest spirits of our age. Nay more, posterity will bless him, and call him noble-hearted and brave; and he will shine as a benignant star on the path of many a weary pilgrim to the shrine of truth. I have no doubt that many remain in the Churches from higher motives than those of mere ease and comfort. They hope, perhaps, or fancy they can "reform" the Church *from within*, and render it, if not attractive, at least as little offensive as possible to the scientific intellect of the day. Such motives might be ably defended by those who are honestly influenced by them; but, in my opinion, that man places himself in a false position—and all false positions are weak and untenable—who professes friendship to the Church and secretly undermines its foundations. The world cannot much admire a traitor, even if he should betray a false cause; men cannot make him a hero who is a spy in

his own camp, who reveals to the enemy all the best modes of attack on a citadel which he pledged himself to defend. He may do useful work for the world, but the world will not give him credit for it; his work lacks all the elements which go to constitute heroism. Place the grand figure of Luther or of John Knox beside that of Origen or Pelagius, and say which would you most admire, that of the dreamy spiritual Reformer, or that of the terrible Iconoclast and matter-of-fact denunciator? Surely the latter, for it stands alone, picturesque, bold, and transfigured by the divine radiancy of truth, seeking no protection from a Church which he abhors, uttering no "uncertain sounds" for battle, but a peal which was responded to by thousands of bewildered and benighted souls, who yearned after a brighter, freer, and happier life.

We want such men now. There never was a time in which society would more gladly welcome a true hero than at the present; never a time in which such a hero would be more worshipped or adored. We feel so much oppressed by the conventionalities and unrealities of modern life—by its gross materialism on the one hand, and its downright spiritual charlatanism on the other, that we should hail with unbounded enthusiasm any great Thunderer whose flashes of genius would clarify our social atmosphere, and purge it of that fulsome incense which daily rises from the altars of our little gods. In commercial and political development we are no doubt daily advancing, and far be it from us to indulge in the cant phraseology of the pulpit against material wealth and prosperity; on the contrary, we regard all these as among the noblest triumphs and achievements of modern science in its application to the industrial arts. But the miserable state of our religious institutions, the effeminacy and debilitating effect of the instruction there obtained on the one hand, and the absurd, antiquated nature of their dogmas on the other, have well-nigh killed all spirituality out of us.

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To a calm outsider—that is, to a man who is not accustomed to feel intensely on any of the great problems which concern human happiness—it may appear very strange that we should make any attacks on the Church, or charge it with any of the social vices of our age. But a little reflection can hardly fail to satisfy even the most unimpassioned intellect that we have good reasons for the attitude which we bear towards that venerable institution. The religious emotion or sentiment which arises from reverence, love, and fear are at once the weakest and the strongest, as well as the noblest, elements of our nature. When a man's religion is made for him—not made to order, as we say, but ready-made before he was born—it arrests the growth of all his mental powers. If he is an ordinary man he remains a stunted and timorous soul all his life; it is only when he has that vitality in him, the development of which into the highest spirituality cannot be forecast by theology, it is only when he has snapped the cords which bound down his growing energies, that he can realize the intense joy of being *free to develop himself religiously*. If, then, pure theological training is so fatal to the growth and development of the individual mind, it is clear that it must be so to society at large. Every branch of human knowledge has certainly advanced more rapidly in proportion as it disengaged itself from the influence of theology. All the physical sciences are now *free*, and no man of any note mixes them up with crude theological arguments: and mark the result. More advance has been made in these sciences during the last fifteen years than during all the centuries which preceded them. Political economy is also *free*, although in the practical application of it in our legislative assemblies it is still encumbered by religious notions, and trammelled by theological prepossessions. Nevertheless, we may say that political science is virtually free; and the result is that we have advanced rapidly in liberal reform during the last ten or fifteen years.



Now, observe the vast difference between the present state of these departments of human knowledge which I have just mentioned, and those which are still claimed by the Church, and conceded to it as its legitimate sphere of operation. I mean the general education of the country, at least in its more elementary aspect, with which I may couple all those *social* questions which bear on the comfort and happiness of the poorest part of our population, of those miserable outcasts which crowd together in the east ends of our large cities, deprived not only of the light of reason and conscience, but even of the light of the sun. What has become of the boasted influence of that Christianity which has been so often eulogised as the great civilizer of mankind, when thus we behold its territories lying waste, stricken with plague and famine, with all kinds of physical and moral disease? O mockery! tell me not that we are to stand idly by, and see, without a murmur, our fellowmen perish for want of truth and light, while white-robed hypocrisy builds its temples and synagogues, fares sumptuously, languishes for want of work, and preaches to the poor the Sermon on the Mount, or threatens them with phials of the Apocalypse. Is this not enough to stir you up to mutiny and rage, not against our social laws, but against those who have, or who profess to have, the direction of them?

But it may be asked, if the progress of intellect is so great in our age, and the advancement of civilization so rapid as you represent them to be—in other words, if men of science are the benefactors of mankind, and the Church a mere stumbling-block in their way, why do not scientific men ameliorate the worst aspects of our social life? I answer, so they have; and so they are still doing for all those who have the wisdom to listen to them. They have purified and ennobled everything they have yet touched, and when that light they have shed on man's nature, and on his relation to the external universe, shall stream down into the lowest

stratum of society, then we shall see a state of things for which few men venture to hope. We shall see wretchedness and crime banished out of the world, and even war itself slain by the mightiness of its own weapons; for if men of science have not yet been able to extinguish the unruly passions of mankind, they have at least been able to bring the implements of war to such a degree of perfection that they can only henceforth be used in defence of the most sacred cause, and can only be taken up when every other means will have failed for the maintenance of our freedom, and the preservation of truth and justice. We shall see also that great enemy of human progress and liberty, the Church, branded with shame, and vanishing like a spectral shadow into eternal silence; we shall see, in short, all the civilized nations of our earth living in peace and human brotherhood.

We often hear it asserted, and nowhere more frequently than in the pulpit, that pure intellect is not a safe guide, that we must not confide too implicitly in its cool judgments. "Intellect," it has been said, "can destroy, but cannot restore life." Now these statements, and many such as these, are absolutely without meaning. They are simply the wise aphorisms—should we not rather say sophistries?—of men who have been trained in scholastic theology, and who have received their knowledge of the human mind through the logic of the schoolmen. Yet these neat epigrammatic assertions take hold of the popular mind, and pass as current coin, stamped with the authority of some "great" man, who could not in the least explain his own meaning, till half uneducated people begin to think that there is something wicked in "pure" intellect. So strongly has this feeling taken hold of the popular mind that many timorous hearts, even in this enlightened age, tremble with alarm at the least manifestation of intellect, either in their own heads or in those of their neighbours. Hence also the suspicion with which semi-theological writers, and indeed all

writers who have not attained to a scientific habit of thought, regard what they call the "destructive school," by which they mean those men who expose the fallacies which permeate all the great religions of the world. What, "destroy life?" Pure intellect cannot destroy, it rather creates. As well might you say that Kepler and Newton destroyed the mechanism of the heavens when they flung back the astrological and superstitious veil which hid their grandeur for ages from the intellectual vision of mankind; as well might you say that these master minds destroyed the life of the soul when they only purified its vision, and revealed to its awakened consciousness the majesty of those laws which embrace in one grand universal sweep the whole of infinite space, as say that the results of modern science (which are certainly the achievements of pure intellect), when brought to bear on the creeds of former ages, will be more detrimental than beneficial, more degrading than ennobling, to the free spirit of man. No. Intellect does not destroy, but constructs; and in proportion as the intellect is pure and unprejudiced, its work is more enduring, because more free from error. "Dry light," says Bacon, "is always the best." Dry light, or light unclouded by the passions and emotions of the man, or by the prejudices of early training; that is, pure light, fed by the warmth of a large human heart. I do not say that the intellectual powers ought to receive exclusive attention from us, and be cultivated at the expense of other elements of our being, such as the moral and religious sentiments; but I do say that unless the intellectual or rational part of our nature is supreme, unless it is free to exercise itself without prejudice on all human problems, we never can be safe guides to others, for we are ever liable to be carried away, either by the impulse of excited emotion or by the whims of an undisciplined imagination. Need I remind you that it was not pure intellect, but intellect perverted by the undue cultivation of the religious sentiment, which caused all those frightful



ecclesiastical persecutions and massacres which deluged Europe with human blood during the Middle Ages? Need I remind you of the fact that religion, when not subordinated to the light of reason, destroys every vestige of natural love and affection in the heart of man; that, to use the language of Christianity, it "sets a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law," and that it makes a man's enemies those of his own household? This one sentiment, morbidly cultivated, has caused more blood to be shed in Europe since the establishment of Christianity than all other passions put together. It nursed the madness and fury of the Crusaders, it kindled those dismal funeral piles which consumed the wretched bodies of thousands of poor women who went by the name of "witches," it was at the root of the French Revolution, and bore its full purple blossom in the massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

It is clear, therefore, from the experience of the past, that we need not trust to the power of religion for the improvement of the individual or the elevation of the human race. Everything that has hitherto been done in that direction has been effected, not by means of religion, but in spite of it—not by the aid of the Church, but by repudiating her pretensions and ignoring her authority. Do we then say that all religions should be abolished? By no means. The religious sentiment is a radical part of our nature, and it is as natural for a good man to be religious and pious as it is for a flower to blossom. If great crimes and most lamentable human sufferings have too frequently followed in the wake of *religious organizations*, we must also admit that there is a kind of inspiring power in religion which gives moral force and character not only to individuals, but to nations. In the absence of that mental and moral culture which the higher education confers, the religious sentiment is the strongest motive that can influence a man to deeds of self-sacrifice and

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noble heroism. Uneducated men cannot appreciate philosophical arguments, they cannot follow out a train of thought which involves a logical and analytical power of reasoning; but they can easily understand figures and metaphors, and all those personifications of natural phenomena which assume a bodied form in the imagination. A child can understand the meaning of a Sinai in flames, and of a God delivering his laws to a rebellious world amid thunder and lightning; he can understand and realise with intense vividness the undying torment of those lost souls which are supposed to burn for ever in fires unquenchable; for the imagination, which is nothing more or less than the image of the external world reflected in the mind, is vivid and in full play long before the reasoning faculty is called into active exercise. Every uneducated man, every man who not only has not mastered the elements of physical science, but who has not the mental capacity and culture necessary for the appreciation of the results of philosophical and historical criticism, I say every such man is, all his life, precisely in the position of a child. Early impressions, whether he has received them direct from external nature or from early training, are to him a part, indeed *the whole*, of his being. They are incorporated in his very organization, and sooner than surrender them he would surrender his life. If you reflect for a moment how much pain and suffering are endured by the best minds before they can emancipate themselves from the errors of imagination, and from the bondage of superstition; if you consider how frequently it happens that the superstitions of early childhood return in old age when the mind shows symptoms of decay, you can then appreciate the enormous difficulties which men of science had to encounter; you can understand the strength of the motive-power which opposed them; and you will wonder rather that they should succeed at all, than that their success should be so slow. We know that when the errors of imagination are regarded, not as mere "airy nothings"

which have no foundation in fact, but as the veritable revelations of Divine truth ; when there is no longer doubt in the religious mind, but faith and profound conviction, then these errors, or delusions—as we call them—become so powerful, that their authority over the reasoning faculty is absolute, and from which there is no appeal. Now, observe, that it is on faith and absolute conviction of their Divine authority all religions are founded. Every religion under the sun claims a “Divine Authority.” “God spake these words and said” is the fundamental doctrine of them all ; and “their motive-power over humanity has been in proportion to the absoluteness of the belief they commanded,” or in proportion to the conviction and certainty they inspired. But though we know that this high claim which is common to them all is itself a mere delusion, yet such a claim is always necessary to ensure their success—to unite men together in *one Faith*, and to inspire them with enthusiasm for one great work ; for in the unity of one Faith all minor differences merge and are lost sight of.

But, you may ask, if all religions have hitherto been founded on false premises, to which of them would you give the preference—to which of them would you adhere ? I answer in the words of Schiller —“To none that thou mightest name. And wherefore to none ? For Religion’s sake.” Religion in itself, as it is commonly understood, is useless, and worse than useless, unless it is founded on a sound *moral basis*. If the ethical part of religion is false, and, as it is in many cases, revolting to our moral sentiment, then we ought to abhor it with our whole heart, and to listen to no fine disquisitions concerning its “External and Internal Evidences.” But is not Christianity founded on a sound moral basis ? By no means. Paul makes Faith the standard of human virtue, a position which directly leads to the monstrous principle, that “Whatever is of Faith is no sin.” How many noble hearts that single dogma has crushed ! How many has it in-

spired with ignorant zeal to perform deeds of violence and pitiless inhumanity ; and how many, on the other hand, has it reduced either to absolute despair or to blasphemous rebellion against everything which humanity holds sacred ! I am well aware that, in the mind of Paul, Faith meant something purer and infinitely more exalted than it does in the mind of either an ignorant man who has received but little moral training, or of a superstitious man who has but mean and vulgar ideas of God. Faith was to Paul religiously what pure *intellectual contemplation* was to Aristotle philosophically—it was to him the unity and harmony of all thought, where the mind rests in undisturbed repose, and enjoys the purest mental pleasure attainable by man. It was to him, in short, the gravitating force which unites in everlasting harmony the entire spirituality of the universe, without distinction of age or sex, of Greek or Roman, of Jew or Gentile. But what is Faith in the mouth of the ordinary theologian ? It is—“Believe this formula, believe that dogma ; believe *our* interpretation of all the religions and philosophies under the sun ; or, without doubt, thou shalt perish everlastingly !” I need not say, that to make Faith, in this peculiar acceptation, the standard of moral virtue, is simply to banish all virtue and intellect out of the world. We know that Faith inspired the sublimest virtues, such as in the case of Paul himself ; but alas, we also know how often it has inspired the most terrible crimes. Indeed if we make Faith the standard of human virtue (observe that I use the term in its strict theological sense), if we make it the fundamental doctrine of religion, we shall find the purest specimens of religious men among the inmates of a lunatic asylum. We shall find there men who believe absolutely and without doubt in all the dogmas of that religion in which they were originally trained—men who see visions and hear voices confirmatory of their belief, and who would willingly go to the stake as martyrs to their faith. It is indeed a most remark-

able fact that either religious enthusiasm or religious despondency is characteristic of almost all forms of insanity. I cannot afford space to enter upon the *rationale* of this singular phenomenon, but I may state generally that if parents and teachers were more careful in not filling up the minds of children with "vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations, as one would say, and the like;" if they could avoid the teaching of fable, and took more pains to store the youthful mind with a knowledge of facts, and to inspire it with a love for Nature and for Art, I firmly believe that the number of our asylum patients would soon diminish. What was the cause of so much insanity in Europe during the earlier part of the Middle Ages, when nearly all the religious world was dancing mad with paralysis, epilepsy, St Vitus' dance, and other nervous diseases which are generally characteristic of the insane? Was it not owing to the unnatural mode of living peculiar to those times; to the morbid and vicious habit of dwelling exclusively on the emotional part of human nature, and to the utter ignoring of facts, and the profound contempt for physical nature which such a habit cherishes? Indeed all nature was then regarded as a thing accursed, and the first men who ventured to study her secrets, and to explain her laws, were either imprisoned for heresy or burnt for witchcraft. This battle between school divinity and physical science has not yet ceased; it is still carried on with a good deal of the old spirit in some corners of the world. The iniquitous barrier, however, which the imaginations of men had set up between God and Nature, between the natural and the supernatural, has been broken down; the outworks of Christianity itself—its so-called external evidences—have been levelled to the ground, and although a few obscure individuals may be seen here and there endeavouring to rebuild their Zion out of the debris of the old ruins, yet their labour is in vain. Men of science look on with infinite pity for such a waste of intellect,



and of misguided ingenuity; literary men smile at them for the small amount of culture and taste which their works display; and even our intelligent working men stand idly by, amused as they would be by the labours of little children when they build their sand castles in the face of a returning tide, while every wave from the great deep, in its own majestic, irresistible manner, overwhelms and sweeps them away for ever. Nature is once more restored to her proper place; if we build anything likely to endure, it must have its foundation in her—if we wish to be enlightened intellectually and morally we must live and act according to her eternal laws. But “a mixture of a lie,” says Bacon, “doth ever add pleasure;” and it is quite true that men must live, and cannot help living, on the mere shadows of thought till they have learned to begin with first principles. “A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure.” Now, eliminate the *lie* from our theologies, apply the scientific method to our orthodox religion, and the whole thing will shrivel up and vanish like vapour before the sun. Religions are built on what Bacon calls a “lie.” Certain things are assumed as axiomatic truths which not only cannot be proved, but which are most repugnant to our enlightened reason, and on these barbarous assumptions our expert metaphysical theologians rear a superstructure of syllogisms which makes one feel sad to look at. We will not waste our time in exploding these superstructures, whether they be Catholicism, Protestantism, Calvinism, Mahometanism, or Christian Unitarianism. We will not even turn aside to discuss such childish problems as these—“Whether the Bible is the Word of God?” “Are miracles possible?” “Can prayer alter the course of nature?” We need not answer these—Science has answered them long ago. When men are bewildered by the conflicting voices of so many churches, when they see the old mythologies dying out, and every religion one after another strangled in the grasp of science, they do not ask, “what are miracles?” or

“what prophecies are yet to be fulfilled?” but they fall back on first principles, and in a kind of half-despairing, half-defiant spirit, they ask if there is a God at all, and if Religion is not altogether a great imposture. They see the intellectual force of the age overwhelming everything that goes by the name of “God” and “Religion,” and they wonder why any men should be so foolish as ever to have believed in such a God or in such a religion. All other questions, except the great fundamental ones, “What is God—what is Religion,” are idle and impertinent. It is my duty, as your teacher here, to work out these two problems from week to week to the best of my power. It is my duty, and it will be my infinite pleasure, to reconcile so far as I am able the conflicting aspects of human thought, to explain to you the significance and end of human life, to throw some light on its dark enigmas, and to make you feel the happiness and exquisite joy which are the certain heritage of every man who lives righteously—true to himself and true to his fellowmen.

I have thus far spoken of religion as a formulated creed, or as a “Body of Divinity,” which can be learned out of books. Religion in this sense is what we commonly understand by *Systematic Theology*; it is the logical arrangement of metaphysical notions which men have formed of God and of the universe. I say the *logical* arrangement, for if we grant the soundness of the premises which are assumed by theologians, we have, logically, no fault to find with their “systems.” But a more liberal education, and a more intimate acquaintance with the physical laws of nature—in other words, both culture and science have long since convinced us of the futility of all conclusions which are based on mere metaphysical speculations. Now it is clear to every man who is in the least acquainted with the inductive mode of reasoning, that all religions hitherto given to the world are based on false premises. Let us take Christianity as that form of religion with which most

of us are best acquainted. First of all, the existence of a personal God is assumed as an unquestionable fact, and although we make no objection to this position, we have no reason whatever to accept as final and ultimate the psychological analysis which theologians have given us of His nature and character. In other words, we have no reason to believe in their *Science of God*, for it is really not science but metaphysics. It is again assumed that God has once and for all given to mankind a Revelation of Himself, which contains, in the words of the *Catechism*, all "that man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." But we find that this "Revelation," contained in the Bible, contains many things which no intelligent man *can* believe concerning God, and that it inculcates duties which are either impracticable in modern society, or simply barbarous. To make the matter worse, and render it still more bewildering, this so-called Revelation contradicts itself on so many important points that theologians have always found it necessary to write large folios on the best method of "reconciling" and "harmonising" the more glaringly contradictory passages. And finally, we are gravely asked to believe all this on the strength of prophecies which were never meant by their writers to be prophecies at all, and on the strength of miracles which, if they had taken place, could only prove that the government of the world is a mere blunder.

Now all this is theology, that is, the Science of God, which ecclesiastics have evolved out of their own imaginations; and we shall have frequent occasions to see that it is to theology, and not to religion properly so-called, physical science is opposed. Nor is science opposed to the Bible as a religious, any more than it is opposed to Homer as a poetical, book.

Our position, which I may state in one sentence, is this:—True culture has outgrown the barbarous character which theologians ascribe to God. But



theologians say that this character of Him is revealed in the Bible; therefore true culture has outgrown the belief in Revelation. Science has also revealed to us the majesty and immutability of natural laws. But theologians say that in some dark periods of human history, in certain rude ages when men had no conception of the grandeur of the universe, or of the method of its creation and evolution, these laws were capriciously interfered with by some supernatural power; therefore scientific men refuse to believe in a God who would "palter with them in a double sense," and reveal himself by what are called "miracles."

The question, then, is not between science and religion, but between science and theology; not between science and the Bible, but between science and so-called Revelation.

What, then, is religion?

Religion has been defined as a "self-surrender of the soul to God." This is quite a theological definition, and a very feeble and sentimental one it is. It proceeds, of course, on a knowledge of the Science of God which theologians have developed in a cloud of metaphysics. Matthew Arnold defines religion as simply "morality enkindled, or lit up by emotion." If this is not the whole truth, it is the nearest to the truth that has ever been given, and it coincides exactly with all that I have ever thought on the subject. Morality is the groundwork of religion, the very life and soul of religion, and without morality all religion is a false glare. It is for this reason that I admire Aristotle more than Plato, because he is more definite and clear in his rules of conduct. Religion is to morality as poetry is to prose; and it is curious that as Aristotle defined poetry to be *imitation*, so Thomas à Kempis calls his religious meditations, *Imitations*. Poetry has, like all the ideal arts, intellectual beauty for its object; religion has moral beauty or holiness for its object. And both are *imitations*, that is, imitations of ideal excellence. If, therefore,

religion—I mean true personal religion—be morality lit up or enkindled by emotion, it is very clear that the purity of religion must necessarily depend on the moral enlightenment of society, or, in other words, that religious development depends on moral development. This explains again how men are often a great deal better than their theology; for as theology is simply the religious experiences of past generations fossilized in dogma, it is quite inadequate to the expression of the religious experiences of succeeding generations, which have far surpassed them in moral and physical science. Hence it is that the life and conduct of modern Christians are so very different from what one would expect to result from their theology. But the truth is, they have outgrown Christianity, and they are not aware of it.

Again, we might say that religion, or the religious sentiment, is one aspect of mental development, or one phase of the collective thought of mankind. This aspect is presented to us in bolder relief during a short period in Jewish history, just as the ideal and fine-art aspect is presented to us during a short period in Greek history, and as the positive, and legal or political, aspect is presented to us in Roman history. The Semitic race gave to humanity the religious impulse and aspiration; the Greek and Latin races gave to it respectively the sense of ideal beauty and the method of government. Since the revival of learning, all these elements have been tumultuously struggling to blend and coalesce in the mind of the great Indo-European races, and although the effervescence caused by the contact of these elements is gradually settling down, although, in other words, these various aspects are beginning to look more approvingly on each other, the gloomy aspect of Judaism through Christianity still frowns on science, and its attitude would seem to indicate that many hard blows will be exchanged between them before science and so-called religion can understand each

others temperament, and embrace as friends. It will be part of our duty to reconcile, not science and theology, for they are irreconcilable, but the scientific and the religious aspects of thought. It will be our duty also to show how the religious mind can be scientific, and the scientific mind religious; and how the perfection and completeness of our nature depend, not on religion alone nor on science alone, nor on morality alone, but on the completeness by which we are able to absorb into our very being the spirit of all the three. It is then only we can be said to live nobly, and in the front rank of our age, when we open our souls freely for the reception of all light and truth, whencesoever they come; it is then only we can be said to think and act religiously, when we can radiate that light and truth around us to bless and to cheer our fellowmen, and to make them feel that life, when lived *truly*, is indeed a joyous thing. Already we see the collective wisdom of mankind rounding itself into a perfect orb, and we can infer from the light which it already sheds what shall be the brilliancy of its full shining. What the destiny of our race shall be—to what unknown shores the tide of history rolls—are questions which we reserve for the last lecture of our course on history. It is enough for us at present to know that it does roll on, gathering strength in its course; that it has come down to us laden with all the wealth of human thought to which all the nations have been tributaries; that it has overwhelmed, and buried for ever, everything that has resisted its progress, and that even now it roars at the walls of our temples and at the gates of our palaces; and that we see it pass by us bearing on its bosom all that we have of real knowledge, of truth and holiness, to scatter them as seeds for future harvests in some happier climes, and under purer heavens.

The first of these is the fact that the United States is a young nation, and that its history is a history of growth and expansion. It is a history of a people who have been able to adapt themselves to a new and changing world, and who have been able to maintain their principles and ideals in the face of adversity.

The second of these is the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants, and that its history is a history of the struggle for a better life. It is a history of a people who have come from all over the world, and who have brought with them their own customs and traditions.

The third of these is the fact that the United States is a nation of pioneers, and that its history is a history of the search for a better life. It is a history of a people who have been able to overcome the hardships of a new and uncharted world, and who have been able to build a new and better life for themselves.

The fourth of these is the fact that the United States is a nation of freedom, and that its history is a history of the struggle for a better life. It is a history of a people who have been able to maintain their principles and ideals in the face of adversity, and who have been able to build a new and better life for themselves.

The fifth of these is the fact that the United States is a nation of progress, and that its history is a history of the search for a better life. It is a history of a people who have been able to overcome the hardships of a new and uncharted world, and who have been able to build a new and better life for themselves.