THE BEARING OF MORALS ON RELIGION.

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BY

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THE BEARING OF MORALS ON RELIGION.

THE word *religion* is used in many different meanings, and there have been not a few controversies in which the main difference between the contending parties was only this, that they understood by *religion* two different things. I will therefore begin by setting forth as clearly as I can one or two of the meanings which the word appears to have in popular speech.

First, then, it may mean a body of doctrines, as in the common phrase, "The truth of the Christian religion;" or in this sentence, "The religion of Buddha teaches that the soul is not a distinct substance." Opinions differ upon the question what doctrines may properly be called religious; some people holding that there can be no religion without belief in a god and in a future life, so that in their judgment the body of doctrines must necessarily include these two; while others would insist upon other special dogmas being included, before they could consent to call the system by this name. But the number of such people is daily diminishing, by reason of the spread and the increase of our knowledge about distant countries and races. To me, indeed, it would seem rash to assert of any doctrine or its contrary that it might not form part of a religion. But, fortunately, it is not necessary to any part of the discussion on which I propose to enter, that this question should be settled.

Secondly, religion may mean a *ceremonial* or *cult*, involving an organized priesthood and a machinery of

sacred things and places. In this sense we speak of the clergy as ministers of religion, or of a state as tolerating the practice of certain religions. There is a somewhat wider meaning which it will be convenient to consider together with this one, and as a mere extension of it, namely, that in which religion stands for the influence of a certain priesthood. A religion is sometimes said to have been successful when it has got its priests into power; thus some writers speak of the wonderfully rapid success of Christianity. A nation is said to have embraced a religion when the authorities of that nation have granted privileges to the clergy, have made them as far as possible the leaders of society, and have given them a considerable share in the management of public affairs. So the northern nations of Europe are said to have embraced the Catholic religion at an early date. The reason why it seems to me convenient to take these two meanings together is, that they are both related to the priesthood. Although the priesthood itself is not called religion, so far as I know, yet the word is used for the general influence and professional acts of the priesthood.

Thirdly, religion may mean a body of precepts or code of rules, intended to guide human conduct, as in this sentence of the authorised version of the New Testament: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James i. 27). It is sometimes difficult to draw the line between this meaning and the last, for it is a mark of the great majority of religions that they confound ceremonial observances with duties having real moral obligation. Thus in the Jewish decalogue the command to do no work on Saturdays is found side by side with the prohibition of murder and theft. It might seem to be the more correct as well as the more philosophical course to follow in this matter the distinction made by Butler between *moral* and *positive* commands, and to class all those

precepts which are not of universal moral obligation under the head of ceremonial. And, in fact, when we come to examine the matter from the point of view of morality, the distinction is of course of the utmost importance. But from the point of view of religion there are difficulties in making it. In the first place, the distinction is not made, or is not understood, by religious folk in general. Innumerable tracts and pretty stories impress upon us that Sabbath-breaking is rather worse than stealing, and leads naturally on to materialism and murder. Less than a hundred years ago sacrilege was punishable by burning in France, and murder by simple decapitation. In the next place, if we pick out a religion at haphazard, we shall find that it is not at all easy to divide its precepts into those which are really of moral obligation and those which are indifferent and of a ceremonial character. We may find precepts unconnected with any ceremonial, and yet positively immoral; and ceremonials may be immoral in themselves, or constructively immoral, on account of their known symbolism. On the whole, it seems to me most convenient to draw the plain and obvious distinction between those actions which a religion prescribes to *all* its followers, whether the actions are ceremonial or not, and those which are prescribed only as professional actions of a sacerdotal class. The latter will come under what I have called the second meaning of religion, the professional acts and the influence of a priesthood. In the third meaning will be included all that practically guides the life of a layman, in so far as this guidance is supplied to him by his religion.

Fourthly, and lastly, there is a meaning of the word *religion* which has been coming more and more prominently forward of late years, till it has even threatened to supersede all the others. Religion has been defined as *morality touched with emotion.* I will not here adopt this definition, because I wish to deal with the concrete in the first place, and only to pass on to the abstract in

so far as that previous study appears to lead to it. I wish to consider the facts of religion as we find them, and not ideal possibilities. "Yes, but," every one will say, "if you mean my own religion, it is already, as a matter of fact, morality touched with emotion. It is the highest morality touched with the purest emotion, an emotion directed towards the most worthy of objects." Unfortunately we do not mean your religion alone, but all manner of heresies and heathenisms along with it: the religions of the Thug, of the Jesuit, of the South Sea cannibal, of Confucius, of the poor Indian with his untutored mind, of the Peculiar People, of the Mormons, and of the old cat-worshipping Egyptian. It must be clear that we shall restrict ourselves to a very narrow circle of what are commonly called religious facts, unless we include in our considerations not only morality touched with emotion, but also immorality touched with emotion. In fact, what is really touched with emotion in any case is that body of precepts for the guidance of a layman's life which we have taken to be the third meaning of religion. In that collection of precepts there may be some agreeable to morality, and some repugnant to it, and some indifferent, but being all enjoined by the religion they will all be touched by the same religious emotion. Shall we then say that religion means a feeling, an emotion, an habitual attitude of mind towards some object or objects, or towards life in general, which has a bearing upon the way in which men regard the rules of conduct? I think the last phrase should be left out. An habitual attitude of mind, of a religious character, does always have some bearing upon the way in which men regard the rules of conduct; but it seems sometimes as if this were an accident, and not the essence of the religious feeling. Some devout people prefer to have their devotion pure and simple, without admixture of any such application—they do not want to listen to "cauld morality." And it seems as if the religious feeling of the Greeks, and partly also of our own ancestors, was so far

divorced from morality that it affected it only, as it were, by a side-wind, through the influence of the character and example of the gods. So that it seems only likely to create confusion if we mix up morality with this fourth meaning of religion. Sometimes religion means a code of precepts, and sometimes it means a devotional habit of mind; the two things are sometimes connected, but also they are sometimes quite distinct. But that the connection of these two things is more and more insisted on, that it is the key-note of the apparent revival of religion which has taken place in this century, is a very significant fact, about which there is more to be said.

As to the nature of this devotional habit of mind, there are no doubt many who would like a closer definition. But I am not at all prepared to say what attitude of mind may properly be called religious, and what may not. Some will hold that religion must have a person for its object; but Buddha was filled with religious feeling, and yet he had no personal object. Spinoza, the god-intoxicated man, had no personal object for his devotion. It might be possible to frame a definition which would fairly include all cases, but it would require the expenditure of vast ingenuity and research, and would not, I am inclined to think, be of much use when it was obtained.

Nor is the difficulty to be got over by taking any definite and well-organized sect, whose principles are settled in black and white; for example, the Roman Catholic Church, whose seamless unity has just been exhibited and protected by an Œcumenical Council. Shall we listen to Mr. Mivart, who "execrates without reserve Marian persecutions, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and all similar acts?" or to the editor of the *Dublin Review*, who thinks that a teacher of false doctrines "should be visited by the law with just that amount of severity which the public sentiment will bear?" For assuredly common-sense morality will pass very different judgments on these two distinct religions, although it

appears that experts have found room for both of them within the limits of the Vatican definitions.

Moreover, there is very great good to be got by widening our view of what may be contained in religion. If we go to a man and propose to test his own religion by the canons of common-sense morality, he will be, most likely, offended, for he will say that his religion is far too sublime and exalted to be affected by considerations of that sort. But he will have no such objection in the case of other people's religion. And when he has found that in the name of religion other people, in other circumstances, have believed in doctrines that were false, have supported priesthoods that were social evils, have taken wrong for right, and have even poisoned the very sources of morality, he may be tempted to ask himself, "Is there no trace of any of these evils in my own religion, or at least in my own conception and practice of it?" And that is just what we want him to do. Bring your doctrines, your priesthoods, your precepts, yea, even the inner devotion of your soul, before the tribunal of conscience; she is no man's and no god's vicar, but the supreme judge of men and gods.

Let us inquire, then, what morality has to say in regard to religious doctrines. It deals with the *manner* of religious belief directly, and with the *matter* indirectly. Religious beliefs must be founded on evidence; if they are not so founded, it is wrong to hold them. The rule of right conduct in this matter is exactly the opposite of that implied in the two famous texts: "He that believeth not shall be damned," and "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." For a man who clearly felt and recognised the duty of intellectual honesty, of carefully testing every belief before he received it, and especially before he recommended it to others, it would be impossible to ascribe the profoundly immoral teaching of these texts to a true prophet or worthy leader of humanity. It will comfort those who wish to preserve their reverence for the character of a great teacher to

remember that one of these sayings is in the well-known forged passage at the end of the second gospel, and that the other occurs only in the late and legendary fourth gospel; both being described as spoken under utterly impossible circumstances. These precepts belong to the Church and not to the Gospel. But whoever wrote either of them down as a deliverance of one whom he supposed to be a divine teacher, has thereby written down himself as a man void of intellectual honesty, as a man whose word cannot be trusted, as a man who would accept and spread about any kind of baseless fiction for fear of believing too little.

So far as to the manner of religious belief. Let us now inquire what bearing morality has upon its matter. We may see at once that this can only be indirect; for the rightness or wrongness of belief in a doctrine depends only upon the nature of the evidence for it, and not upon what the doctrine is. But there is a very important way in which religious doctrine may lead to morality or immorality, and in which, therefore, morality has a bearing upon doctrine. It is when that doctrine declares the character and actions of the gods who are regarded as objects of reverence and worship. If a god is represented as doing that which is clearly wrong, and is still held up to the reverence of men, they will be tempted to think that in doing this wrong thing they are not so very wrong after all, but are only following an example which all men respect. So says Plato:*—

"We must not tell a youthful listener that he will be doing nothing extraordinary if he commit the foulest crimes, nor yet if he chastise the crimes of a father in the most unscrupulous manner, but will simply be doing what the first and greatest of the gods have done before him. . . .

"Nor yet is it proper to say in any case—what is indeed untrue—that gods wage war against gods, and intrigue and fight among themselves; that is, if the future guardians of our state are to deem it a most disgraceful thing to quarrel lightly with one another: far less ought we to select as subjects for fiction and

* Rep. ii. 378. Tr. Davies and Vaughan.

embroidery, the battles of the giants, and numerous other feuds of all sorts, in which gods and heroes fight against their own kith and kin. But if there is any possibility of persuading them, that to quarrel with one's fellow is a sin of which no member of a state was ever guilty, such ought rather to be the language held to our children from the first, by old men and old women, and all elderly persons; and such is the strain in which our poets must be compelled to write. But stories like the chaining of Here by her son, and the flinging of Hephaistos out of heaven for trying to take his mother's part when his father was beating her, and all those battles of the gods which are to be found in Homer, must be refused admittance into our state, whether they be allegorical or not. For a child cannot discriminate between what is allegory and what is not; and whatever at that age is adopted as a matter of belief, has a tendency to become fixed and indelible, and therefore, perhaps, we ought to esteem it of the greatest importance that the fictions which children first hear should be adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue."

And Seneca says the same thing, with still more reason in his day and country: "What else is this appeal to the precedent of the gods for, but to inflame our lusts, and to furnish licence and excuse for the corrupt act under the divine protection?" And again, of the character of Jupiter as described in the popular legends: "This has led to no other result than to deprive sin of its shame in man's eyes, by showing him the god no better than himself." In Imperial Rome, the sink of all nations, it was not uncommon to find "the intending sinner addressing to the deified vice which he contemplated a prayer for the success of his design; the adulteress imploring of Venus the favours of her paramour; . . . the thief praying to Hermes Dolios for aid in his enterprise, or offering up to him the first-fruits of his plunder; . . . youths entreating Hercules to expedite the death of a rich uncle."*

When we reflect that criminal deities were worshipped all over the empire, we cannot but wonder that any good people were left; that man could still be holy, although every god was vile. Yet this was undoubtedly the case;

* *North British Review*, 1867, p. 284.

the social forces worked steadily on wherever there was peace and a settled government and municipal freedom; and the wicked stories of theologians were somehow explained away and disregarded. If men were no better than their religions, the world would be a hell indeed.

It is very important, however, to consider what really ought to be done in the case of stories like these. When the poet sings that Zeus kicked Hephaistos out of heaven for trying to help his mother, Plato says that this fiction must be suppressed by law. We cannot follow him there, for since his time we have had too much of trying to suppress false doctrines by law. Plato thinks it quite obviously clear that God cannot produce evil, and he would stop everybody's mouth who ventured to say that he can. But in regard to the doctrine itself, we can only ask, "Is it true?" And that is a question to be settled by evidence. Did Zeus commit this crime, or did he not? We must ask the apologists, the reconcilers of religion and science, what evidence they can produce to prove that Zeus kicked Hephaistos out of heaven. That a doctrine may lead to immoral consequences is no reason for disbelieving it. But whether the doctrine were true or false, one thing does clearly follow from its moral character: namely this, that if Zeus behaved as he is said to have behaved he ought not to be worshipped. To those who complain of his violence and injustice, it is no answer to say that the divine attributes are far above human comprehension, that the ways of Zeus are not our ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts. If he is to be worshipped, he must do something vaster and nobler and greater than good men do, but it must be like what they do in its goodness. His actions must not be merely a magnified copy of what bad men do. So soon as they are thus represented, morality has something to say. Not indeed about the fact; for it is not conscience, but reason, that has to judge matters of fact; but about the worship of a character so represented. If there really is good evidence that Zeus kicked

Hephaistos out of heaven, and seduced Alkmene by a mean trick, say so by all means; but say also that it is wrong to salute his priests or to make offerings in his temple.

When men do their duty in this respect, morality has a very curious indirect effect on the religious doctrine itself. As soon as the offerings become less frequent, the evidence for the doctrine begins to fade away; the process of theological interpretation gradually brings out the true inner meaning of it, that Zeus did not kick Hephaistos out of heaven, and did not seduce Alkmene.

Is this a merely theoretical discussion about far-away things? Let us come back for a moment to our own time and country, and think whether there can be any lesson for us in this refusal of common-sense morality to worship a deity whose actions are a magnified copy of what bad men do. There are three doctrines which find very wide acceptance among our countrymen at the present day: the doctrines of original sin, of a vicarious sacrifice, and of eternal punishments. We are not concerned with any refined evaporations of these doctrines which are exhaled by courtly theologians, but with the naked statements which are put into the minds of children and of ignorant people, which are taught broadcast and without shame in denominational schools. Father Faber, good soul, persuaded himself that after all only a very few people would be really damned, and Father Oxenham gives one the impression that it will not hurt even them very much. But one learns the practical teaching of the Church from such books as "A Glimpse of Hell," where a child is described as thrown between the bars upon the burning coals, there to writhe for ever. The masses do not get the elegant emasculations of Father Faber and Father Oxenham; they get "a Glimpse of Hell."

Now to condemn all mankind for the sin of Adam and Eve; to let the innocent suffer for the guilty; to keep

any one alive in torture for ever and ever: these actions are simply magnified copies of what bad men do. No juggling with "divine justice and mercy" can make them anything else. This must be said to all kinds and conditions of men: that if God holds all mankind guilty for the sin of Adam, if he has visited upon the innocent the punishment of the guilty, if he is to torture any single soul for ever, then it is wrong to worship him.

But there is something to be said also to those who think that religious beliefs are not indeed true, but are useful for the masses; who deprecate any open and public argument against them, and think that all sceptical books should be published at a high price; who go to church, not because they approve of it themselves, but to set an example to the servants. Let us ask them to ponder the words of Plato, who, like them, thought that all these tales of the gods were fables, but still fables which might be useful to amuse children with: "*We ought to esteem it of the greatest importance that the fictions which children first hear should be adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue.*" If we grant to you that it is good for poor people and children to believe some of these fictions, is it not better, at least, that they should believe those which are adapted to the promotion of virtue? Now the stories which you send your servants and children to hear are adapted to the promotion of vice. So far as the remedy is in your own hands, you are bound to apply it; stop your voluntary subscriptions and the moral support of your presence from any place where the criminal doctrines are taught. You will find more men and better men to preach that which is agreeable to their conscience, than to thunder out doctrines under which their minds are always uneasy, and which only a continual self-deception can keep them from feeling to be wicked.

Let us now go on to inquire what morality has to say in the matter of religious *ministrations*, the official acts and the general influence of a priesthood. This question

seems to me a more difficult one than the former; at any rate it is not so easy to find general principles which are at once simple in their nature and clear to the conscience of any man who honestly considers them. One such principle, indeed, there is, which can hardly be stated in a Protestant country without meeting with a cordial response; being indeed that characteristic of our race which made the Reformation a necessity, and became the soul of the Protestant movement. I mean the principle which forbids the priest to come between a man and his conscience. If it be true, as our daily experience teaches us, that the moral sense gains in clearness and power by exercise, by the constant endeavour to find out and to see for ourselves what is right and what is wrong, it must be nothing short of a moral suicide to delegate our conscience to another man. It is true that when we are in difficulties, and do not altogether see our way, we quite rightly seek counsel and advice of some friend who has more experience, more wisdom begot by it, more devotion to the right than ourselves, and who, not being involved in the difficulties which encompass us, may more easily see the way out of them. But such counsel does not and ought not to take the place of our private judgment; on the contrary, among wise men it is asked and given for the purpose of helping and supporting private judgment. I should go to my friend, not that he may tell me what to do, but that he may help me to see what is right.

Now, as we all know, there is a priesthood whose influence is not to be made light of, even in our own land, which claims to do two things: to declare with infallible authority what is right and what is wrong, and to take away the guilt of the sinner after confession has been made to it. The second of these claims we shall come back upon in connection with another part of the subject. But that claim is one which, as it seems to me, ought to condemn the priesthood making it in the eyes of every conscientious man. We must take care to keep

this question to itself, and not to let it be confused with quite different ones. The priesthood in question, as we all know, has taught that as right which is not right, and has condemned as wrong some of the holiest duties of mankind. But this is not what we are here concerned with. Let us put an ideal case of a priesthood which, as a matter of fact, taught a morality agreeing with the healthy conscience of all men at a given time; but which, nevertheless, taught this as an infallible revelation. The tendency of such teaching, if really accepted, would be to destroy morality altogether, for it is of the very essence of the moral sense that it is a common perception by men of what is good for man. It arises, not in one man's mind by a flash of genius or a transport of ecstasy, but in all men's minds, as the fruit of their necessary intercourse and united labour for a common object. When an infallible authority is set up, the voice of this natural human conscience must be hushed and schooled, and made to speak the words of a formula. Obedience becomes the whole duty of man; and the notion of right is attached to a lifeless code of rules, instead of being the informing character of a nation. The natural consequence is that it fades gradually out and ends by disappearing altogether. I am not describing a purely conjectural state of things, but an effect which has actually been produced at various times and in considerable populations by the influence of the Catholic Church. It is true that we cannot find an actually crucial instance of a pure morality taught as an infallible revelation, and so in time ceasing to be morality for that reason alone. There are two circumstances which prevent this. One is that the Catholic priesthood has always practically taught an imperfect morality, and that it is difficult to distinguish between the effects of precepts which are wrong in themselves and precepts which are only wrong because of the manner in which they are enforced. The other circumstance is that the priesthood has very rarely found a population willing to place itself completely and

absolutely under priestly control. Men must live together and work for common objects even in priest-ridden countries; and those conditions, which in the course of ages have been able to create the moral sense, cannot fail in some degree to recall it to men's minds and gradually to reinforce it. Thus it comes about that a great and increasing portion of life breaks free from priestly influences, and is governed upon right and rational grounds. The goodness of men shows itself in time more powerful than the wickedness of some of their religions.

The practical inference is, then, that we ought to do all in our power to restrain and diminish the influence of any priesthood which claims to rule consciences. But when we attempt to go beyond this plain Protestant principle, we find that the question is one of history and politics. The question which we want to ask ourselves —"Is it right to support this or that priesthood?"—can only be answered by this other question, "What has it done or got done?"

In asking this question, we must bear in mind that the word *priesthood*, as we have used it hitherto, has a very wide meaning—namely, it means any body of men who perform special ceremonies in the name of religion; a *ceremony* being an act which is prescribed by religion to that body of men, but not on account of its intrinsic rightness or wrongness. It includes, therefore, not only the priests of Catholicism, or of the Obi rites, who lay claim to a magical character and powers, but the more familiar clergymen or ministers of Protestant denominations, and the members of monastic orders. But there is a considerable difference, pointed out by Hume, between a priest, who lays claim to a magical character and powers, and a clergyman, in the English sense, as it was understood in Hume's day, whose office was to remind people of their duties every Sunday, and to represent a certain standard of culture in remote country districts. It will, perhaps, conduce to clear-

ness if we use the word *priest* exclusively in the first sense.

There is another confusion which we must endeavour to avoid, if we would really get at the truth of this matter. When one ventures to doubt whether the Catholic clergy has really been an unmixed blessing to Europe, one is generally met by the reply, "You cannot find any fault with the Sermon on the Mount." Now, it would be too much to say that this has nothing to do with the question we were proposing to ask, for there is a sense in which the Sermon on the Mount and the Catholic clergy have something to do with each other. The Sermon on the Mount is admitted on all hands to be the best and most precious thing that Christianity has offered to the world; and it cannot be doubted that the Catholic clergy of East and West were the only spokesmen of Christianity until the Reformation, and are the spokesmen of the vast majority of Christians at this moment. But it must surely be unnecessary to say, in a Protestant country, that the Catholic Church and the Gospel are two very different things. The moral teaching of Christ, as partly preserved in the three first gospels, or—which is the same thing—the moral teaching of the great Rabbi Hillel, as partly preserved in the Pirkè Aboth, is the expression of the conscience of a people who had fought long and heroically for their national existence. In that terrible conflict they had learned the supreme and overwhelming importance of conduct, the necessity for those who would survive, of fighting manfully for their lives and making a stand against the hostile powers around; the weakness and uselessness of solitary and selfish efforts, the necessity for a man who would be a man to lose his poor single personality in the being of a greater and nobler combatant—the nation. And they said all this, after their fashion of short and potent sayings, perhaps better than any other men have said it before or since. "If I am not for myself," said the great Hillel, "who is for me?

And if I am only for myself, where is the use of me? *And if not now, when?*" It would be hard to find a more striking contrast than exists between the sturdy unselfish independence of this saying, and the abject and selfish servility of the priest-ridden claimant of the skies. It was this heroic people that produced the morality of the Sermon on the Mount. But it was not they who produced the priests and the dogmas of Catholicism. Shaven crowns, linen vestments, and the claim to priestly rule over consciences, these were dwellers on the banks of the Nile. The gospel indeed came out of Judæa, but the Church and her dogmas came out of Egypt. Not, as it is written, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," but, "Out of Egypt have I called my daughter." St. Gregory of Nazianzum remarks with wonder that Egypt, having so lately worshipped bulls, goats, and crocodiles, was now teaching the world the worship of the Trinity in its truest form."* Poor, simple St. Gregory! it was not that Egypt had risen higher, but that the world had sunk lower. The empire, which in the time of Augustus had dreaded, and with reason, the corrupting influence of Egyptian superstitions, was now eaten up by them, and rapidly rotting away.

Then, when we ask what has been the influence of the Catholic clergy upon European nations, we are not inquiring about the results of accepting the morality of the Sermon on the Mount; we are inquiring into the effect of attaching an Egyptian priesthood, which teaches Egyptian dogmas, to the life and sayings of a Jewish prophet.

In this inquiry, which requires the knowledge of facts beyond our own immediate experience, we must make use of the great principle of authority, which enables us to profit by the experience of other men. The great civilised countries on the continent of Europe at the present day—France, Germany, Austria, and Italy—

* See Sharpe, 'Egyptian Mythology and Egyptian Christianity,' p. 114.

have had an extensive experience of the Catholic clergy for a great number of centuries, and they are forced by strong practical reasons to form a judgment upon the character and tendencies of an institution which is sufficiently powerful to command the attention of all who are interested in public affairs. We might add the experience of our forefathers three centuries ago, and of Ireland at this moment; but home politics are apt to be looked upon with other eyes than those of reason. Let us hear, then, the judgment of the civilised people of Europe on this question.

It is a matter of notoriety that an aider and abettor of clerical pretensions is regarded in France as an enemy of France and of Frenchmen; in Germany as an enemy of Germany and of Germans; in Austria as an enemy of Austria and Hungary, of both Austrians and Magyars; and in Italy as an enemy of Italy and the Italians. He is so regarded, not by a few wild and revolutionary enthusiasts who have cast away all the beliefs of their childhood and all bonds connecting them with the past, but by a great and increasing majority of sober and conscientious men of all creeds and persuasions, who are filled with a love for their country, and whose hopes and aims for the future are animated and guided by the examples of those who have gone before them, and by a sense of the continuity of national life. The profound conviction and determination of the people in all these countries, that the clergy must be restricted to a purely ceremonial province, and must not be allowed to interfere, as clergy, in public affairs—this conviction and determination, I say, are not the effect of a rejection of the Catholic dogmas. Such rejection has not in fact been made in Catholic countries by the great majority. It involves many difficult speculative questions, the profound disturbance of old habits of thought, and the toilsome consideration of abstract ideas. But such is the happy inconsistency of human nature, that men who would be shocked and pained by a doubt about the cen-

tral doctrines of their religions, are far more really and practically shocked and pained by the moral consequences of clerical ascendancy. About the dogmas they do not know; they were taught them in childhood, and have not inquired into them since, and therefore they are not competent witnesses to the truth of them. But about the priesthood they do know, by daily and hourly experience; and to its character they are competent witnesses. No man can express his convictions more forcibly than by acting upon them in a great and solemn matter of national importance. In all these countries the conviction of the serious and sober majority of the people is embodied, and is being daily embodied, in special legislation, openly and avowedly intended to guard against clerical aggression. The more closely the legislature of these countries reflects the popular will, the more clear and pronounced does this tendency become. It may be thwarted or evaded for the moment by constitutional devices and parliamentary tricks, but sooner or later the nation will be thoroughly represented in all of them; and as to what is then to be expected let the panic of the clerical parties make answer.

This is a state of opinion and of feeling which we in our own country find it hard to understand, although it is one of the most persistent characters of our nation in past times. We have spoken so plainly and struck so hard in the past, that we seem to have won the right to let this matter alone. We think our enemies are dead, and we forget that our neighbour's enemies are plainly alive: and then we wonder that he does not sit down, and be quiet as we are. We are not much accustomed to be afraid, and we never know when we are beaten. But those who are nearer to the danger feel a very real and, it seems to me, well-grounded fear. The whole structure of modern society, the fruit of long and painful efforts, the hopes of further improvement, the triumphs of justice, of freedom, and of light, the bonds of patriotism which make each nation one, the bonds of humanity

which bring different nations together—all these they see to be menaced with a great and real and even pressing danger. For myself, I confess that I cannot help feeling as they feel. It seems to me quite possible that the moral and intellectual culture of Europe, the light and the right, what makes life worth having and men worthy to have it, may be clean swept away by a revival of superstition. We are, perhaps, ourselves not free from such a domestic danger; but no one can doubt that the danger would speedily arise if all Europe at our side should become again barbaric, not with the weakness and docility of a barbarism which has never known better, but with the strength of a past civilisation perverted to the service of evil.

Those who know best, then, about the Catholic priesthood at present, regard it as a standing menace to the state and to the moral fabric of society.

Some would have us believe that this condition of things is quite new, and has in fact been created by the Vatican Council. In the Middle Ages, they say, the Church did incalculable service; or even if you do not allow that, yet the ancient Egyptian priesthood invented many useful arts; or if you have read anything which is not to their credit, there were the Babylonians and Assyrians who had priests, thousands of years ago; and in fact, the more you go back into prehistoric ages, and the further you go away into distant countries, the less you can find to say against the priesthoods of those times and places. This statement, for which there is certainly much foundation, may be put into another form: the more you come forward into modern times and neighbouring countries, where the facts can actually be got at, the more complete is the evidence against the priesthoods of these times and places. But the whole argument is founded upon what is at least a doubtful view of human nature and of society. Just as an early school of geologists were accustomed to explain the present state of the earth's surface by supposing that in

primitive ages the processes of geologic change were far more violent and rapid than they are now—so catastrophic, indeed, as to constitute a thoroughly different state of things—so there is a school of historians who think that the intimate structure of human nature, its capabilities of learning and of adapting itself to society, have so far altered within the historic period as to make the present processes of social change totally different in character from those even of the moderately distant past. They think that institutions and conditions which are plainly harmful to us now have at other times and places done good and serviceable work. War, pestilence, priest-craft, and slavery have been represented as positive boons to an early state of society. They are not blessings to us, it is true; but then times have altered very much.

On the other hand, a later school of geologists have seen reason to think that the processes of change have never, since the earth finally solidified, been very different from what they are now. More rapid, indeed, they must have been in early times, for many reasons; but not so very much more rapid as to constitute an entirely different state of things. And it does seem to me in like manner that a wider and more rational view of history will recognise more and more of the permanent and less and less of the changeable element in human nature. No doubt our ancestors of a thousand generations back were very different beings from ourselves; perhaps fifty thousand generations back they were not men at all. But the historic period is hardly to be stretched beyond two hundred generations; and it seems unreasonable to expect that in such a tiny page of our biography we can trace with clearness the growth and progress of a long life. Compare Egypt in the time of King Menes, say six thousand years ago, with Spain in this present century, before Englishmen made any railways there: I suppose the main difference is that the Egyptians washed themselves. It seems more analogous to what we find

in other fields of inquiry, to suppose that there are certain great broad principles of human life which have been true all along; that certain conditions have always been favourable to the health of society, and certain other conditions always hurtful.

Now, although I have many times asked for it, from those who said that somewhere and at some time mankind had derived benefits from a priesthood laying claim to a magical character and powers, I have never been able to get any evidence for this statement. Nobody will give me a date, and a latitude and longitude, that I may examine into the matter. "In the Middle Ages the priests and monks were the sole depositories of learning." Quite so; a man burns your house to the ground, builds a wretched hovel on the ruins, and then takes credit for whatever shelter there is about the place. In the Middle Ages nearly all learned men were obliged to become priests and monks. "Then again, the bishops have sometimes acted as tribunes of the people, to protect them against the tyranny of kings." No doubt, when Pope and Cæsar fall out, honest men may come by their own. If two men rob you in a dark lane, and then quarrel over the plunder, so that you get a chance to escape with your life, you will of course be very grateful to each of them for having prevented the other from killing you; but you would be much more grateful to a policeman who locked them both up. Two powers have sought to enslave the people, and have quarrelled with each other; certainly we are very much obliged to them for quarrelling, but a condition of still greater happiness and security would be the non-existence of both.

I can find no evidence that seriously militates against the rule that the priest is at all times and in all places the enemy of all men—*Sacerdos semper, ubique, et omnibus inimicus.* I do not deny that the priest is very often a most earnest and conscientious man, doing the very best that he knows of as well as he can do it. Lord Amberley is quite right in saying that the blame rests more

with the laity than with the priesthood; that it has insisted on magic and mysteries, and has forced the priesthood to produce them. But then, how dreadful is the system that puts good men to such uses!

And although it is true that in its origin a priesthood is the effect of an evil already existing, a symptom of social disease rather than a cause of it, yet, once being created and made powerful, it tends in many ways to prolong and increase the disease which gave it birth. One of these ways is so marked and of such practical importance that we are bound to consider it here; I mean the education of children. If there is one lesson which history forces upon us in every page, it is this: *keep your children away from the priest, or he will make them the enemies of mankind.* It is not the Catholic clergy and those like them who are alone to be dreaded in this matter; even the representatives of apparently harmless religions may do incalculable mischief if they get education into their hands. To the early Mohammedans the mosque was the one public building in every place where public business could be transacted; and so it was naturally the place of primary education, which they held to be a matter of supreme importance. By-and-bye, as the clergy grew up, the mosque was gradually usurped by them, and primary education fell into their hands. Then ensued a "revival of religion;" religion became a fanaticism: books were burnt and universities were closed; the empire rotted away in East and West, until it was conquered by Turkish savages in Asia and by Christian savages in Spain.

The labours of students of the early history of institutions—notably Sir Henry Maine and M. Laveleye—have disclosed to us an element of society which appears to have existed in all times and places, and which is the basis of our own social structure. The village community, or commune, or township, found in tribes of the most varied race and time, has so modified itself as to get adapted in one place or another to all the different

conditions of human existence. This union of men to work for a common object has transformed them from wild animals into tame ones. Century by century the educating process of the social life has been working at human nature; it has built itself into our inmost soul. Such as we are—moral and rational beings—thinking and talking in general conceptions about the facts that make up our life, feeling a necessity to act, not for ourselves, but for Ourself, for the larger life of Man in which we are elements; such moral and rational beings, I say, Man has made us. By Man I mean men organized into a society, which fights for its life, not only as a mere collection of men who must separately be kept alive, but as a society. It must fight, not only against external enemies, but against treason and disruption within it. Hence comes the unity of interest of all its members; each of them has to feel that he is not himself only but a part of all the rest. Conscience—the sense of right and wrong—springs out of the habit of judging things from the point of view of all and not of one. It is Ourself, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness.

The codes of morality, then, which are adopted into various religions, and afterwards taught as parts of religious systems, are derived from secular sources. The most ancient version of the Ten Commandments, whatever the investigations of scholars may make it out to be, originates, not in the thunders of Sinai, but in the peaceful life of men on the plains of Chaldæa. Conscience is the voice of Man ingrained into our hearts, commanding us to work for Man.

Religions differ in the treatment which they give to this most sacred heirloom of our past history. Sometimes they invert its precepts—telling men to be submissive under oppression because the powers that be are ordained of God; telling them to believe where they have not seen, and to play with falsehood in order that a particular doctrine may prevail, instead of seeking for truth whatever it may be; telling them to betray their country

for the sake of their church. But there is one great distinction to which I wish, in conclusion, to call special attention—a distinction between two kinds of religious emotion which bear upon the conduct of men.

We said that conscience is the voice of Man within us, commanding us to work for Man. We do not know this immediately by our own experience; we only know that something within us commands us to work for Man. This fact men have tried to explain; and they have thought, for the most part, that this voice was the voice of a god. But the explanation takes two different forms: the god may speak in us for Man's sake, or for his own sake. If he speaks for his own sake—and this is what generally happens when he has priests who lay claim to a magical character and powers—our allegiance is apt to be taken away from Man, and transferred to the god. When we love our brother for the sake of our brother we help all men to grow in the right; but when we love our brother for the sake of somebody else, who is very likely to damn our brother, it very soon comes to burning him alive for his soul's health. When men respect human life for the sake of Man, tranquillity, order, and progress go hand in hand; but those who only respected human life because God had forbidden murder, have set their mark upon Europe in fifteen centuries of blood and fire.

These are only two examples of a general rule. Wherever the allegiance of men has been diverted from Man to some divinity who speaks to men for his own sake and seeks his own glory, one thing has happened. The right precepts might be enforced, but they were enforced upon wrong grounds, and they were not obeyed. But right precepts are not always enforced; the fact that the fountains of morality have been poisoned makes it easy to substitute wrong precepts for right ones.

To this same treason against humanity belongs the claim of the priesthood to take away the guilt of a sinner after confession has been made to it. The Catholic priest

professes to act as an ambassador for his God, and to absolve the guilty man by conveying to him the forgiveness of heaven. If his credentials were ever so sure, if he were indeed the ambassador of a superhuman power, the claim would be treasonable. Can the favour of the Czar make guiltless the murderer of old men and women and children in Circassian valleys? Can the pardon of the Sultan make clean the bloody hands of a Pasha? As little can any God forgive sins committed against man. When men think he can, they compound for old sins which the god did not like by committing new ones which he does like. Many a remorseful despot has atoned for the levities of his youth by the persecution of heretics in his old age. That frightful crime, the adulteration of food, could not possibly be so common amongst us if men were not taught to regard it as merely objectionable because it is remotely connected with stealing, of which God has expressed his disapproval in the Decalogue; and therefore, as quite naturally set right by a punctual attendance at church on Sundays. When a Ritualist breaks his fast before celebrating the Holy Communion, his deity can forgive him, if he likes, for the matter concerns nobody else; but no deity can forgive him for preventing his parishioners from setting up a public library and reading room for fear they should read Mr. Darwin's works in it. That sin is committed against the people, and a god cannot take it away.

I call those religions which undermine the supreme allegiance of the conscience to Man *ultramontane* religions, because they seek their springs of action *ultra montes,* outside of the common experience and daily life of man. And I remark about them that they are especially apt to teach wrong precepts, and that even when they command men to do the right things they put the command upon wrong motives, and do not get the things done.

But there are forms of religious emotion which do not thus undermine the conscience. Far be it from me to

undervalue the help and strength which many of the bravest of our brethren have drawn from the thought of an unseen helper of men. He who, wearied or stricken in the fight with the powers of darkness, asks himself in a solitary place, "Is it all for nothing? shall we indeed be overthrown?" He does find something which may justify that thought. In such a moment of utter sincerity, when a man has bared his own soul before the immensities and the eternities, a presence, in which his own poor personality is shrivelled into nothingness, arises within him, and says, as plainly as words can say, "I am with thee, and I am greater than thou." Many names of gods, of many shapes, have men given to this presence; seeking by names and pictures to know more clearly and to remember more continually the guide and the helper of men. No such comradeship with the Great Companion shall have anything but reverence from me, who have known the divine gentleness of Denison Maurice, the strong and healthy practical instinct of Charles Kingsley, and who now revere with all my heart the teaching of James Martineau. They seem to me, one and all, to be reaching forward with loving anticipation to a clearer vision which is yet to come—*tendentesque manus ripæ ulterioris amore.* For, after all, such a helper of men, outside of humanity, the truth will not allow us to see. The dim and shadowy outlines of the superhuman deity fade slowly away from before us; and as the mist of his presence floats aside, we perceive with greater and greater clearness the shape of a yet grander and nobler figure—of Him who made all gods and shall unmake them. From the dim dawn of history, and from the inmost depth of every soul, the face of our father Man looks out upon us with the fire of eternal youth in his eyes, and says, "Before Jehovah was, I am!"

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