

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CHRISTIANITY AND PROGRESS.

MR. GLADSTONE may not be a grand old man, but he is certainly a wonderful old man. Here he is, at the close of a long and arduous life, working off his exuberant energy in all sorts of magazine articles, to say nothing of his letters to correspondents and his speeches in parliament. Nor does there appear any particular falling off in the quality of his writing. He never was, in the proper sense of the word, a thinker, though he has a very active mind; and his literary style always smacked of the platform rhetorician rather than the scholar. But such as his thought and style were, they seem unimpaired; his last article in the *Nineteenth Century* being as good as anything he ever published.

The article in question is a review of Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsmere*, one of those novels with a purpose with which our age is so familiar. Mrs. Ward's novel is intended to preach a new gospel, namely that of Christ without Christianity. All miracles, dogmas and rituals are to be abolished, and the personality of Christ is to be the sole object of adoration. This impossible religion is considerably kicked and cuffed by Mr. Gladstone. He rightly says that the Redemption, which involves the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, is the very essence of Christianity; and if you discard it, it is idle to call yourself a Christian.

Mr. Gladstone's pounding of Mrs. Ward will be entertaining to the orthodox. Our concern is rather with his own utterances on Christianity. Mr. Gladstone seems, in his old age, desirous to be the defender of the faith. Not only does he defend Genesis against Huxley, and Christianity against Mrs. Ward; he is even bent on defending religion in general against Ingersoll.

Mr. Gladstone's first words on the miraculous show that he is hopelessly behind the age and out of the fight. "The impossibility of miracle," he writes, "is a doctrine which appears to claim for its basis the results of physical inquiry." But who talks about the *impossibility* of miracle? Not

Hume, not Mill, not Huxley. Every alleged miracle stands or falls on its own evidence. Mr. Gladstone should have written "the *improbability* of miracle." When these terms are confused the writer has no real grasp of the question at issue.

Similarly, Mr. Gladstone fails to grasp the situation when he says that "the miracle of the Resurrection to-day gives serious trouble to fastidious intellects." There is nothing fastidious in demanding proof. A rational man is prepared to believe anything on production of the proper evidence. Freethinkers do not deny the possibility of the Resurrection; they merely assert that it rests on evidence which is so inadequate, that it would be laughed at in any court of law, if adduced to support the most probable statement.

Christianity's triumph over Paganism is considered by Mr. Gladstone as itself a miracle. He cannot otherwise understand "the victory of the world's babes and striplings over its philosophers and scholars, and the serried array of emperors, aristocracies, and statesmen." Well, look at Mormonism, look at the Salvation Army. These systems have grown faster than Christianity did. But they have arisen in a period of vital and progressive civilisation, and consequently their spread is limited. Christianity spread while the Roman empire was decaying, and the ancient civilisation was slowly breaking up for reconstruction. Paganism itself had broken up also. The old national religions had perished, because the Empire had annihilated the national barriers. But the instinct and the material of superstition were still left. There was a splendid opportunity for a new universal religion. Christianity arose and occupied the field, and had it not done so another system would have taken its place. It was victorious by adjustment. Its ecclesiastics altered and improved it judiciously, adding here and lopping there, until it fitted the superstition of every race in the Empire. Christianity incorporated from all preceding creeds, and its triumph is a striking illustration of the Darwinian law of natural selection.

We do not, however, allow the truth of Mr. Gladstone's statement without reservation. Christianity did not triumph over "emperors"; it triumphed at last *by* emperors. Constantine made it the state religion, while its adherents

only numbered one in twenty of his subjects; and though it took three centuries to convert that fraction, the residue were brought over in less than a century by the persuasive eloquence of fine, imprisonment, torture and death.

Mr. Gladstone denies that there was a general preconception in favor of miracles in the Pagan world when Christianity arose; though he afterwards argues that the Roman religion was systematically miraculous. "In Philosophy," he says, "the Epicurean school was atheistic, the Stoic school was ambiguously theistic, and doubt nestled in the Academy." True, but the philosophic schools had no direct influence on the masses, who were left to the priests of the popular religion. Printing was required to make knowledge and reflection democratic. No doubt great names exerted an indirect influence over the people, but all the great names had vanished before Christianity was victorious. Science, art, philosophy, and literature died out with the Empire, and Christianity arose in almost universal darkness.¹ This is another proof of Schopenhauer's accuracy in saying that "Religions are like glow-worms; they require darkness to shine in."

That Christianity "reconstituted in life and vigor a society found in decadence" is one of the wildest assertions. What renovation took place after the age of Justinian, when Christianity had everything at its feet? The decadence continued as before. Not until the Northern barbarians carved out fresh kingdoms from the old ruins, and poured new life into the veins of Europe, was there any sign of improvement. It was not religion that wrought the change, but the savage strength of virgin races. From the German forests and the Scandinavian ice-fields poured down the living tide that fertilised the barren fields of a decrepit civilisation. Christianity had reviled nature, and nature avenged the insult. She flung her barbaric brood upon the effeminate religionists; the healthy blood and brawn triumphed, and Europe was reborn.

Mr. Gladstone's historical eulogy of Christianity is but an echo of the stale platitudes of its professional apologists.

"It both produced a type of character wholly new to the Roman

¹ See a fine statement of the case in J. C. Morison's *The Service of Man*, pp. 174-177.

world, and it fundamentally altered the laws and institutions, the tone, temper, and tradition of that world. For example, it changed profoundly the relation of the poor to the rich, and the almost forgotten obligations of the rich to the poor. It abolished slavery, abolished human sacrifice, abolished gladiatorial shows, and a multitude of other horrors. It restored the position of woman in society. It proscribed polygamy; and put down divorce, absolutely in the West, though not absolutely in the East. It made peace, instead of war, the normal and presumed relation between human societies. It exhibited life as a discipline everywhere and in all its parts, and changed essentially the place and function of suffering in human experience. Accepting the ancient morality as far as it went, it not only enlarged but transfigured its teaching, by the laws of humility and forgiveness, and by a law of purity perhaps even more new and strange than these."

There is the Christian side of the picture. But the other side must also be painted for the sake of contrast, and Mr. Gladstone paints it hideously in the darkest colors. He does the trick dexterously, but it is more worthy of a party orator than an historical student.

"What civilisation could do without Christianity for the greatest races of mankind, we know already. Philosophy and art, creative genius and practical energy, had their turn before the Advent; and we can register the results. I do not say that the great Greek and Roman ages lost—perhaps even they improved—the ethics of *meum* and *tuum*, in the interests of the leisured and favored classes of society, as compared with what those ethics had been in archaic times. But they lost the hold which some earlier races within their sphere had had of the future life. They degraded, and that immeasurably, the position of woman. They effaced from the world the law of purity. They even carried indulgence to a worse than bestial type: and they glorified in the achievement."

Anything cruder, more one-sided or distorted, is hard to conceive. Mr. Gladstone, with little regard to truth, says the best he can of Christianity; with as little regard to truth, he says the worst he can of Paganism; and he fancies it a fair comparison.

Let us examine Mr. Gladstone's two pictures. His Pagan picture is simply ludicrous. Philosophy and art are treated as mere trifles, and not a word is said about the ancient science which modern Europe could not parallel before the days of Galileo. Nor is there an allusion to the daily life of the people; the people who loved, married, reared children, and were buried in tombs, on which we may still read touching inscriptions. Mr. Gladstone rushes to Rome in its worst days, when a luxuriant aristocracy, fed on the spoils of a hundred provinces, committed the

worst excesses. But even there he sees no light and shade. The indignant satire of Juvenal is regarded as true of all Roman society. What if an historian should take the satire of Dryden as true of all English society? Would it not be the grossest blunder? Charles the Second, and his Rochesters and Nell Gwynnes, were as bad as any Roman profligates; but there was still a good deal of sound morality in the nation, as there doubtless was in the worst days of Nero or Caligula.

Mr. Gladstone treads on dangerous ground when he talks of the profligacy and bestiality of Greeks and Romans. Can he name a vice that has not been amply illustrated by Christian practitioners? Can he name a crime in which Christians have not equalled Pagans? Was not Rome, under some of the Popes, worse than Rome under any of the Emperors? Was there not more general debauchery in the Middle Ages than at any other period in history? Did not the rapid spread of syphilis in Christendom, as soon as it was imported, testify to the promiscuous license of the believers in Jesus? Are the Christian chapters in the history of prostitution less foul than the Pagan? Cannot Christendom show a hundred filthy books for everyone that Greece and Rome have bequeathed us? Do not portions of our Christian capitals reek with as much moral pestilence as ever befouled Athens or Rome? And was not the state of things far worse a century or two ago? How long is it since the most stupid debauchee in England was called the first gentleman in Europe? Mr. Gladstone is a man of blameless life, but he must know there is bitter truth in Thackeray's remark that our mouths may be cleaner than our ancestors' without our lives being purer.

That Pagan civilisation degraded woman "immeasurably" is the reverse of truth. Does Mr. Gladstone mean that socially or politically, woman occupied a superior position in some remote era, when piety and justice were supreme? No, he cannot mean this, for it is simply absurd. What then *does* he mean? His words would imply that as Greek and Roman civilisation advanced woman sank lower and lower. But nothing could be falser than this. With regard to Rome, in especial, it is a singular fact that the corrupt period of the Empire was precisely the time when the legal rights of

women were firmly established. "That very immorality," says Thulié,² "that gangrened civilisation, served to ameliorate her social condition." Every step taken in our own day to emancipate woman from political and social bondage is a return to the laws passed under Roman emperors, before Christianity had made any sensible progress. The property of married women was secured, and its misappropriation by the husband was punishable as theft. Divorce was granted to both on the same conditions,³ and in every respect the legal equality of the sexes was admitted. The Justinian code, compiled in the sixth century, made marriage a Christian sacrament; but the Bible was not appealed to for its social regulations. "The emperor," as Gibbon remarks, "consulted the unbelieving civilians of antiquity."

Mr. Gladstone may be reluctant to accept the authority of an infidel like Gibbon, but he cannot repudiate the authority of Sir Henry Maine. This profound and accomplished writer deals with the history of woman's condition, from a legal point of view, in the fifth chapter of his *Ancient Law*. After referring to the expedients which the later Roman lawyers devised for enabling women to defeat the slavery of the ancient rules, and the gradual falling into disuse of the three ancient forms of marriage, which rendered the wife completely subject to her husband, and even to his will after his death, this eminent jurist goes on to say:

"The consequence was that the situation of the Roman female whether married or unmarried, became one of great personal and proprietary independence, for the tendency of the later law, as I have already hinted, was to reduce the power of the guardian to nullity, while the form of marriage in fashion conferred on the husband no compensating superiority. But *Christianity tended somewhat from the first to narrow this remarkable liberty*. Led at first by justifiable disrelish for the loose practices of the decaying heathen world, but afterwards hurried on by a passion of asceticism, the professors of the new faith looked with disfavor on a marital tie which was in fact the laxest the Western world has seen. The latest Roman law, so far as it is touched by the Constitutions of the Christian Emperors, bears some marks of a reaction against the liberal doctrines of the great Antonine juriconsults. And the prevalent state of religious sentiment may explain why it is that modern jurisprudence, forged in the furnace of barbarian conquest, and formed by the fusion of Roman jurisprudence with patriarchal

² *La Femme*, p. 45.

³ Gibbon, chap. xlv.

usage, has absorbed, among its rudiments, much more than usual of these rules concerning the position of women which belong peculiarly to an imperfect civilisation."⁴

Roman jurisprudence, in the modern law of Southern and Western Europe, was the influence which gave comparative freedom to spinsters and widows; while the Canon Law, which chiefly controlled the marriage relations, was the influence which imposed disabilities on married women. "This was in part inevitable," says Sir Henry Maine, "since no society which preserves any tincture of Christian institution is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the middle Roman law."⁵

When Mr. Gladstone says that the Pagan civilisations "effaced from the world the law of purity," it is difficult to regard him as serious. That gross immorality existed among the idle and wealthy, and often, though certainly not always, at the imperial court, we frankly allow. But may not the same be alleged of every age and every country? Catherine de Medici was extremely pious, but this did not prevent her giving a banquet to her royal son, at which her handsomest maids of honor officiated naked to the waist. Brantôme utters pious ejaculations amid his incredible filth. The court he paints was horrified at the thought of heresy, and rejoiced at the burning of Free-thinkers; yet, as Mr. Morison says, "one fails to see how it differed, except for the worse, from the court of Caligula or Commodus."⁶ Centuries earlier, before the Renaissance, when the Church was supreme and Christianity unquestioned, Europe sent army after army to wrest the Holy Land from the Mohammedans. Those enterprises were religious. The Christian warriors were soldiers of the Cross. They carried the "sacred emblem" on their shoulders. Yet history attests that they were the vilest savages that ever disgraced the earth. They were cannibals, and their bestiality is beyond description. Might not a Mohammedan have said that "Christianity had effaced from the world the law of purity"?

Mr. Gladstone would reply that the law of purity was not *effaced*; it was taught though not practised. But this

⁴ Sir Henry Maine, *Ancient Law*, p. 156. The italics are ours.

⁵ P. 158.

⁶ *The Service of Man*, p. 152.

argument can be used against himself. Purity was equally taught (and practised) by Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus, to say nothing of minor moralists. The wise emperor wrote: "Such as are thy habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of thy mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts."⁷ Does not this carry the law of purity into the very citadel of man's nature? Epictetus said: "For since the Gods by their nature are pure and free from corruption, so far as men approach them by reason, so far do they cling to purity and to a love of purity."⁸ Seneca wrote: "If sensuality were happiness, beasts were happier than men; but human felicity is lodged in the soul, not in the flesh."⁹ Such was the effacement of the law of purity in the Pagan world!

Mr. Gladstone's panegyric on Christianity is as false as his censure on Paganism. Some parts of it are too vague to be answered, but where he is definite an answer is easy. First, he says Christianity abolished slavery. It did nothing of the kind. Before Christianity influenced the Roman empire, the evils of slavery were mitigated, and the institution was thus tending to extinction. Slaves were protected by the laws, and if they were ill-treated they obtained their freedom or a less cruel master. Manumission became so frequent that the law had to impose some restraint, lest the free citizens should be overwhelmed by the multitude of new comers.¹ Learned and artistic slaves sat at their masters' tables and educated their children. Slavery was, in fact, a caste and not a traffic, though slaves were bought and sold. They were the offspring of captives of war, and not kidnapped like negroes. It was reserved for Christianity to steal men from distant countries for the express purpose of making them slaves. No such infamy as the African slave-trade, carried on by Christians under the protection of Christian laws, ever disgraced the nations of antiquity.

Constantine was the first Christian emperor. Did he abolish slavery? No. He liberated the slaves owned by Jews, if they embraced Christianity, but the slaves of Christian masters enjoyed no such advantage. According

⁷ *Thoughts of M. Aurelius Antoninus.* Translated by G. Long. P. 112.

⁸ *Discourses of Epictetus.* G. Long. P. 366.

⁹ *The Morals of Seneca.* Edited by Walter Clode. P. 68.

¹ Gibbon, chap. ii.

to the old law, a free-woman who had intercourse with a slave was reduced to servitude; but Constantine humanely decreed that the free-woman should be executed and the slave burnt to death.

Stoicism branded slavery as immoral, but where does the New Testament say a word against that institution? Jesus never once whispered it was wrong. He could vigorously denounce what he disapproved. His objurgation of the Scribes and Pharisees is almost without a parallel. Those who rejected his teaching and opposed his claims were overwhelmed with vituperation, but never did he censure those who held millions in cruel bondage.

Saint Paul also never said a word against slavery, but many words that lent it a sanction. He tells slaves (*servants* in our Authorised Version) to count their owners worthy of all honor (1 Tim. vi., 1); to be obedient unto them, with fear and trembling, as unto Christ (Ephesians vi., 5); and to please them in all things. Mr. Gladstone is a Greek scholar, and is aware that the word which Paul uses signifies *slave*, and not servant. The great Apostle was thus brought face to face with slavery, yet he uttered no word of condemnation. There is a certain pathetic tenderness in his letter to Philemon, if we suppose he took the institution of slavery for granted, but it vanishes if we suppose he felt the institution to be unjust. Professor Newman justly remarks that "Onesimus, in the very act of taking to flight, showed that he had been submitting to servitude against his will." Nor is there any escape from this writer's conclusion that, although Paul besought Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother, "this very recommendation, full of affection as it is, virtually recognises the moral rights of Philemon to the services of his slave." "Paul and Peter," he adds, "deliver excellent charges to masters in regard to the treatment of slaves, but without any hint to them that there is an injustice in claiming them as slaves at all. That slavery, as a system, is essentially immoral, no Christian of those days seems to have suspected."²

Century followed century, and the Church never once raised its voice against slavery as an institution. It ex-

² Prof. F. W. Newman, *Phases of Faith*, p. 105.

communicated heretics, but not slaveholders. Christian divines invariably justified slavery from Scripture. Ignatius (who is said to have seen Jesus), Saint Cyprian, Saint Basil, Tertullian, Saint Augustine, Gregory the Great, Saint Isidore, Saint Bernard, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Bossuet, all taught that slavery is a divine institution. Christian jurists, even in the eighteenth century, defended negro slavery, which it was reserved for the sceptical Montesquieu and the arch-heretic Voltaire to condemn.

Church Councils rivetted the slave's fetters. The Council of Laodicea actually interdicted slaves from Church communion without the consent of their masters. The Council of Orleans (541) ordered that the descendants of slave parents might be captured and replaced in the servile condition of their ancestors. The Council of Toledo (633) forbade bishops to liberate slaves belonging to the Church. Jews having made fortunes by slave-dealing, the Councils of Rheims and Toledo both prohibited the selling of Christian slaves except to Christians. Slavery laws were also passed by the Council of Pavia (1082) and the Lateran Council (1179). During all those ages, priests, abbots and bishops held slaves. The Abbey of St. Germain de Prés owned 80,000 slaves, the Abbey of St. Martin de Tours 20,000.³

Negro slavery was likewise defended by the pulpit and the divinity chair in America. Mrs. Beecher Stowe said the Church was so familiarly quoted as being on the side of slavery, that "Statesmen on both sides of the question have laid that down as a settled fact."⁴ Theodore Parker said that if the whole American Church had "dropped through the continent and disappeared altogether, the anti-Slavery cause would have been further on."⁵ He pointed out that no Church ever issued a single tract among all its thousands, against property in human flesh and blood; and that 80,000 slaves were owned by Presbyterians, 225,000 by Baptists, and 250,000 by Methodists. Wilberforce himself declared that the American Episcopal Church "raises no voice against the predominant evil;

³ See Tourmagne's *Histoire de l'Esclavage Ancien et Moderne.*

⁴ Key to "Uncle Tom's Cabin," p. 533.

⁵ Theo. Parker, Works, vol. vi., p. 233.

she palliates it in theory, and in practice she shares in it. The mildest and most conscientious of the bishops of the South are slaveholders themselves." ⁶ The Harmony Presbytery of South Carolina deliberately resolved that slavery was justified by Holy Writ. The college church of the Union Theological Seminary, Prince Edward County, was endowed with slaves, who were hired out to the highest bidder for the pastor's salary. Lastly, Professor Moses Stuart, of Andover, who is accounted the greatest American theologian since Jonathan Edwards, declared that "The precepts of the New Testament respecting the demeanor of slaves and their masters beyond all question recognise the existence of slavery."

The Northern States were even more bigoted to slavery than the Southern States. Boston, the classic home of American orthodoxy, closed all its churches and chapels to William Lloyd Garrison, who delivered his first anti-slavery lecture in that city in Julian Hall, which was offered him by Abner Kneeland, an infidel who had been prosecuted for blasphemy.

American slavery was not terminated by the vote of the Churches; it was abolished by Lincoln as a strategic act in the midst of a civil war. England abolished slavery in the West Indies, and honorably or quixotically paid for it; but she was not the first nation to move in this matter. Professor Newman rightly observes that "the first public act against slavery came from republican France, in the madness of atheistic enthusiasm." But it is a memorable fact that Bonaparte, who set up the Catholic Church again, gave a fresh lease of life to slavery.

Foreign slavery is an artificial thing, and may be abolished by the stroke of a pen. But domestic slavery, which was the basis of ancient civilisations as well as the barbarism of the Middle Ages, had to die a natural death. The progress of education and refinement, and the growth of the sentiment of justice, helped to extinguish it; but behind this there was an economical law no less potent. Slave labor is only consistent with a low industrial life; and thus, as civilisation expanded, slavery faded into serfdom, and serfdom into wage-service, as naturally as

⁶ Wilberforce, *History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America*, p. 421.

the darkness of night melts into the morning twilight, and the twilight into day.

To assert that Christianity abolished slavery is therefore obviously false. Mr. Gladstone makes the statement, but furnishes no proof, nor can he do so until history is rewritten. The Bible never condemns or censures slavery; Christianity tolerated it without reproach for a period as long as the whole history of ancient Rome; Church Councils regulated it, and Church dignitaries reckoned slaves among their possessions. When slavery died a natural death in Europe, Christian nations continued it in America, with no hereditary excuse, but animated by the most brutal spirit of avarice; nor were divines wanting to prove that negroes might be fitly oppressed, as they were not included in the descendants of Adam. Mr. Gladstone can himself remember when slavery was legal in our West Indian colonies. Men under thirty may remember its abolition in the United States. This very week it has been abolished in Brazil. To declare these things the tardy results of a religion which was established by a divine personage nearly two thousand years ago, is to invite ridicule and laughter.

Mr. Gladstone's next assertion is that Christianity "abolished human sacrifice." When and where? Does he suppose that human sacrifice was tolerated in the Roman empire? Or does he imagine that the stories of Abraham and Jephthah had any special tendency to discredit human sacrifice?

The "multitude of other horrors" abolished by Christianity are too vague for refutation. Reply is impossible until Mr. Gladstone condescends to be explicit. But it must be allowed, as an historical fact, that the gladiatorial shows were suppressed by Honorius.⁷ Let Christianity receive the credit of that, if you will; but set against it the frightful severity which Christianity imported into the laws. Burning alive was first inserted into the Roman penal code by Constantine. "He appointed this punishment," says Jortin, "for various offences. To burn men

⁷ The "fact," however, seems somewhat doubtful. We allow it on the authority of Gibbon; but Dr. Smith, in a footnote to his edition of the *Decline and Fall* (vol. iv., p. 41), asserts that "the gladiatorial shows continued even at a later period."

alive became thenceforward a very common punishment, to the disgrace of Christianity.”⁸

Christianity does not appear to have extinguished cruelty with the gladiatorial shows. Fourteen centuries have rolled by since then, but cock-fighting has only just died out, and bull-fights are still popular in Spain. What moral difference is there between such a sport and the old Roman shows? The lust of cruelty is gratified in both; the arena is reddened with blood; and what matter whether it flows from animal or human veins?

Mr. Gladstone may also recollect that prize-fighting is scarcely extinct. An American bruiser—a coarse, low, vulgar animal—was recently the idol of English society. Crowds flocked to see and acclaim him, who would not have crossed the street to see a Darwin or a Tennyson. Even the Prince of Wales sought the honor of an interview with this gladiator. Such is human nature after eighteen centuries of Christian regeneration.

But all this is trivial in comparison with the positive cruelty which Christianity inflicted in the name of God. The bloodshed of the gladiatorial shows sinks into insignificance beside the bloodshed of Christian persecution. When Rome was Pagan thought was free. Gladiatorial shows satisfied the bestial craving in vulgar breasts, but the philosophers and the poets were unfettered, and the intellect of the few was gradually achieving the redemption of the many. When Rome was Christian she introduced a new slavery. Thought was chained and scourged, while the cruel instincts of the multitude were gratified with exhibitions of suffering, compared with which the bloodiest arena was tame and insipid. No longer gladiators, but heretics, were “butchered to make a Roman holiday.” What hypocrisy, to denounce the bloody sports of Paganism, and call the mob to see men burnt alive! Eleven centuries after Honorius, John Calvin was burning Servetus with *green* wood to prolong his torment.⁹ Alva was perpetrating atrocities which Tacitus would have deemed incredible. Here is a Christian picture from Lisbon, so late as 1706, beheld by Bishop Wilcox. A woman and a man were burnt for heresy.

⁸ Archdeacon Jortin, *Remarks on Ecclesiastical History*, vol. ii., p. 137.

⁹ R. Willis, *Servetus and Calvin*, p. 487.

"The woman was alive in the flames half an hour, and the man above an hour...Though the favor he begged was only a few more faggots, yet he was not able to obtain it. The wind being a little fresh, the man's hinder parts were perfectly wasted; and as he turned himself *his ribs opened.*"¹

Amongst the "multitude of horrors" which Christianity "abolished," was there one to equal this? Physician heal thyself! Cease denouncing others while your own hand is red enough to incarnadine the multitudinous seas.

Christianity "restored the position of women in society." We have already seen what was the position of woman under the best Roman law. In what respect did Christianity improve it? As a matter of fact, Christianity degraded woman by two methods; first, by adopting the Jewish story of the Fall; secondly, by preaching up virginity. Paul's view of woman's position is contemptible; she is as inferior to man as man is to God. Saint Jerome called her "the demon's door, the road of iniquity, the scorpion's sting." Saint Chrysostom called her "a sovereign pest." "When you see a woman," said Saint Anthony, "be sure you have before you not a human being, not even a wild beast, but the Devil in person." Saint Augustine's insults were nearly as extravagant. Saint John of Damascus styled her "a child of lying, the advanced sentinel of the Devil," and "a malignant she-ass." Gregory the Great denied her "any moral sense."² That is how Christianity "restored the position of woman in society."

Christianity sought to destroy the family. "No religion," says Thulié, "has combated marriage with such ardor as Christianity." The Christian doctors despised it. Saint Jerome cried "Let us take the axe, and cut up by the roots the sterile tree of marriage. God permitted marriage at the beginning of the world, but Jesus Christ and Mary have consecrated virginity." Saint Chrysostom railed at woman for having brought about the Fall, and the propagation of mankind by sexual intercourse, which he called a pollution. Tertullian told her she should wear mourning or rags, for she was the cause of the death of Christ. The triumph of Christianity meant the degrada-

¹ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, p. 287.

² Thulié, pp. 201-206.

tion of motherhood, and the subjection of the wife as a tolerated concession to the weakness of man's flesh. Marriage sank into gratified lust, and women fell back into the abject position they occupied in barbarous ages.

Polygamy was not proscribed by Christianity, because it did not exist in the Pagan civilisation which Christianity supplanted. Monogamy was legal in Greece and Rome, and had been so for centuries. When Christianity opposed polygamy among the barbarians it simply carried forward the morality of Pagan civilisation. The Bible itself never censures polygamy or enjoins monogamy.

That Christianity "put down divorce" is undoubtedly true, but the result was of questionable value. The Church still brands divorce with its anathema, but the secular law, even in the most Catholic countries, has been constrained to permit it under certain conditions.

Christianity certainly did not put down war, nor did it make "peace, instead of war, the normal relation between human societies." The *Pax Romanus* was a reality, which Christendom has never equalled. At no time did the Roman armies number four hundred thousand men; yet now, after eighteen centuries of the gospel of peace, Europe is armed to the teeth, six million soldiers are grasping arms, and every Christian nation is anxiously discussing its defences. During the last thirty years, seven Christian wars have cost nearly *three thousand million pounds*. Europe spends nearly two hundred millions every year on armies and navies, and another two hundred millions are required to pay the interest on debts incurred over past wars. New rifles, new artillery, new explosives, crowd upon us every few years. Surely, in face of these facts, Mr. Gladstone's eulogy of his creed is the idlest verbiage.

Mr. Gladstone is right, however, in saying that Christianity "changed essentially the place and function of suffering." Suffering was always regarded as an evil before Christianity preached it as a blessing. Fortunately the modern world is returning to the old opinion, and the party of progress is everywhere warring against the evils of this life, without waiting for the rectifications of another world.

Charity itself has been narrowed by Christianity into mere almsgiving. Paul's great panegyric on this virtue

is perhaps the finest thing in the New Testament, but the very word he uses (*caritas*) was borrowed from Pagan moralists. Cicero anticipated him before the birth of Christ in his *caritas generis humani*.

"Humility and forgiveness" are fine phrases, but they are seldom more. Generally they are little else than cheap devices for popular oppression. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," is a sweet text; but, as a matter of fact, the soil of England is chiefly owned by the House of Lords. The clergy, also, have taught humility by enjoining the "lower orders" to remain contented in that state of life to which Providence has called them, and to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters. As for "forgiveness," we have simply to point out that, until recently, the criminal jurisprudence of Christendom was a ghastly scandal. Even in England, in the early part of the present century, men and women were hung in batches for small felonies; and when Romilly tried to terminate this infamy, he was vigorously opposed by the bench of Bishops.

Mr. Gladstone denies that "the improvements which we witness are the offspring of civilisation." But is he able to show that they spring from any other cause? Why was there so little civilisation in Europe when Christianity was supreme? Why did Europe wait so long for the advent of what we call "progress"? Why was every new idea baptised in blood? Why was every reform opposed by the Church of Christ? Why have scepticism and civilisation moved forward with an equal pace? Why does Christianity fade as men become wiser and happier? Why is this age of progress the age of unbelief?

Let Mr. Gladstone pluck out the heart of this mystery; a mystery indeed on his principles, though sun-clear to the Freethinker, who sees in the history of Christianity and civilisation the perpetual strife of irreconcilable opposites.