

We are under  
kindest regards,

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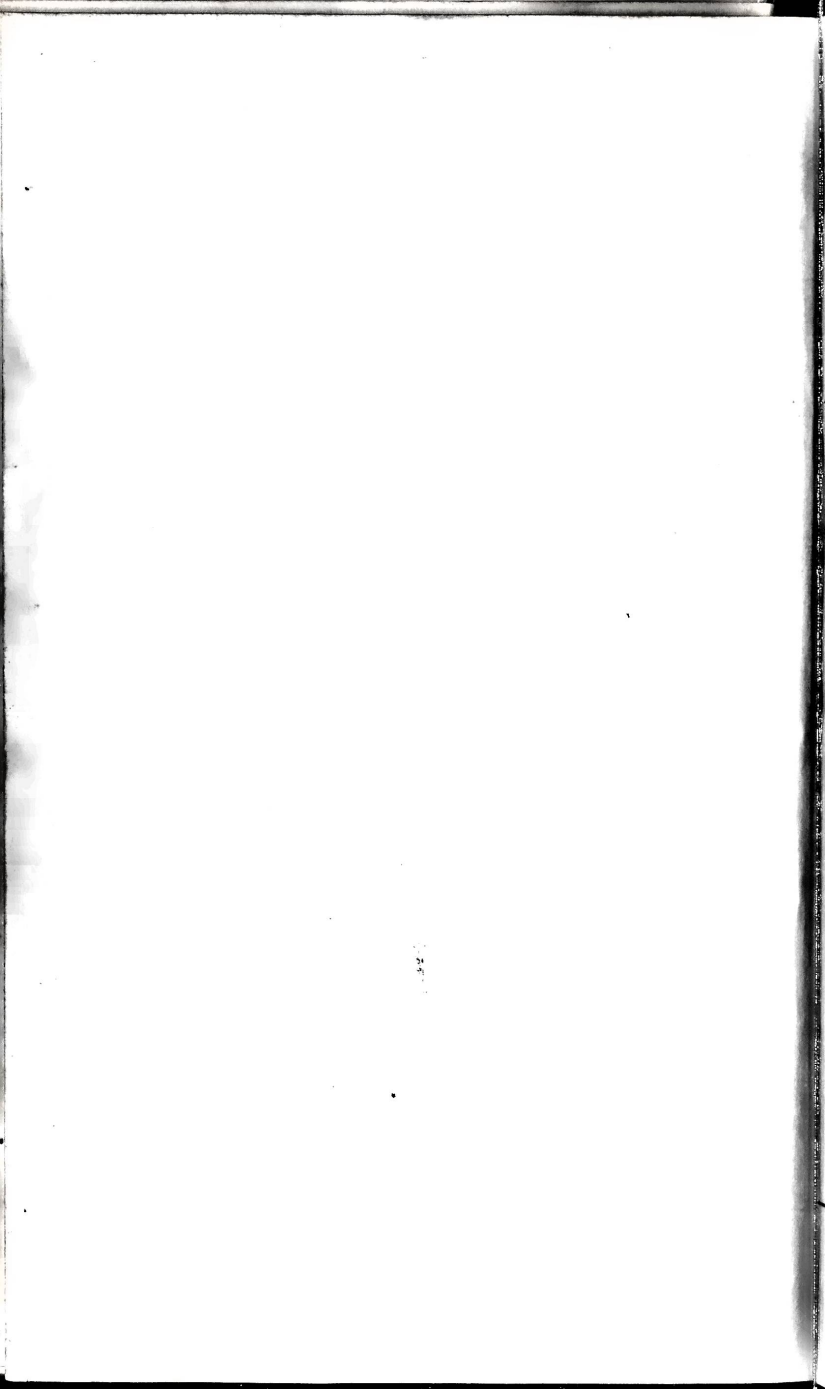
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# MODERN FREE THOUGHT :

Its bearing and influence on others.

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“ IN MUCH WISDOM IS MUCH GRIEF, AND  
HE THAT INCREASETH KNOWLEDGE INCREASETH  
SORROW.”—*The Preacher.*



## INTRODUCTION.

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In having committed the few following remarks in the form of a pamphlet to the printer, I have been actuated solely by feelings of sorrow and regret for certain of my friends, whose peace of mind I know to have been disturbed by the unguarded expressions of others and their condemnatory and cavilling modes of discussion on Scriptural points and matters of belief in everyday life. I do not add my name, lest I be thought as intruding into the sacred precincts of the clerical world and arrogating to myself the duties of the Priestcraft; but I would say one word of kindly counsel to my readers: "Discountenance all religious arguments as emanating from no good and leading to no result." Let such reasonings be conducted by those whose duty

it be to teach in properly appointed places,  
and, I hope, to a discriminating audience, in  
the cases of some teaching.

If I may stay the hand of any such an one  
I am repaid.

J. E. C.

LONDON, Dec. 1874.





I am a Layman, possessing little qualification to goodness or greatness, and, permit me to tell you at starting, that I lay no further claim to your attention than the all-absorbing nature of my subject should command ; but of late, each and every day as I live—spreading widely and furiously as some raging element have I seen with alarm the rapid growth of freedom of thought and expression on matters of religion.

Possibly some of you will maintain that one has a perfect right to ventilate opinions on any subject whatsoever in this free land of ours. On things mundane—yes,—on matters religious, I protest against it, positively and absolutely ; and simply because in arguing on matters of the world and everyday life, as a

rule, men are honest. With greater or less verbiage, as the case may be, they discuss this and that, and if no end be answered, at any rate no harm is done; no conclusion being arrived at, the mind is free to wander on to some new channel and find vent there.

But the Free Thinker in religion—how fares it with him and his audience? He is not content to reflect, but must give utterance, and being probably a disappointed and dissatisfied man, or for the reputation of originality of thought, or even again, jealous of some harmless spirit that seems to be supremely content to live and move in the simple faith of its Fathers, boldly attacks and openly avows his utter disbelief in certain tenets, and is pleased to take exception to technicalities, classes the miracles as charming fairy tales, would not insult his common sense, he tells you, by accepting this or that as an absolute fact, and so on.

And this because the fashion of the age

is so, and it is convenient, and his audience is left to ponder, and perhaps to utter damnation hereafter, upon words uttered at random and vainly spoken. A cowardly line this, and productive of so little good. If unable to be, or feel, orthodox, why unsettle the minds of those who are content to believe in things as they are? You may depend upon it there is no more cruel act that one can be guilty of than this. It is taking away the very ground from under a man's feet, and giving him nothing else to stand upon. And it is so doubly hard on the comparatively uneducated mind. To the philosopher of any nation whatsoever, whether his mind be stored with the trite sayings and stern moralities of Mencius or Confucius, or versed in the doctrines of Buddah or Mahommed, or if a deep thinker and skilled in the wisdom and inventions of more modern times, to him the case is not so hard. His mind and thought are occupied, and the void, in some part, filled; but to the uncontrolled, weak, ignorant

mind, or to the poor dejected spirit, suffering from disease, or deadly ill, a nature to whom the entire future is a blank ; what is there left to such an one but religion ? Besides, from time immemorial, the mind of man has required something wherein to repose, and it seems to me that everything in its turn has worn itself threadbare, and been found vain, but that highest order of faith and unbounded trust justly termed the Christianity of the soul. Mind you, I am not attempting a treatise on theology, or dealing with matters religious from a theologian's point of view, I am merely attempting, as a man of the world, and one who has seen and visited nearly every known quarter of the globe, and held converse with my fellow creatures everywhere, and tried to learn something of their belief, to assure you that, from my experience, only where there is a simple faith and worship is there real happiness. And what I therefore inveigh against is the attempted overthrow and subversion of this simple faith. Shew me a leveller and



revolutionist—a man who is seeking some new whim and bone of contention in matters religious—and I will shew you, as a rule, an unsatisfactory man, a doubtful friend, an unsafe companion, and an unhappy mind.

Example has had much to do with all this, and I take it as sincerely to be regretted that, as men's minds have become stored with learning, and their powers of argument increased by deep study, so do their great abilities seem to have been diverted from channels which might have led them on to be greater men and far more useful to the State, in a variety of ways, and taught them instead to set afloat some startling theories in Religion. And in many instances this is the case with men who hold high position and dignity in the ecclesiastical world. To say the least, it is not loyal, not honest. An officer composed of such material may rest assured he finds no sympathy with his men in the time of real need and trial; yet these are content to remain in the orthodox ranks in which they

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have nominally enrolled themselves, and to which they have subscribed, though their own conscience must tell them their place is not there, and they are daily and hourly violating their charter.

Is it a wonder, then, that while such men seem doubtful as to the standard into which their metal should be thrown, that the balance once set a wavering should be kept in motion by the so-called disciples of "society," who must need a salve to their conscience and a loophole out of their difficulty to lead the comparatively free and easy life of the present day.

I do not raise the hue and cry of the Pharisee, and bewail that "Woe is me that am constrained to dwell in such tents," for I know of no pleasanter dwelling than this modern Kedar, and cannot see why, if one be right minded, enjoyment may not be had and good done, side by side. For amongst those so termed disciples of Society whose friendship it

is my privilege to possess, certainly, in several instances, there could not exist truer spirits. I would stake my salvation on their integrity and uprightness; they could not do a mean or ungenerous act, and up to a certain time of life their course bid fair to be a prosperous one, and they were happy.

But—and that terribly significant little preposition—*tout s'est passé*, they have had to take their position in the world, and from that moment their peace of mind was jeopardised by the surroundings and adjuncts of the circles in which they moved. At starting, so to speak, they were handicapped, because they came into existence with great license of society and freedom of thought in matters of religion, and the very atmosphere they breathed was tainted with an under current of it, and their future, without careful watching, may now be open to doubt, which, remember, may speedily ripen into despair, and Phaëton once hurled fell rapidly. May I not live to witness so unhappy a descent!

Most probably the original failing was weakness of disposition; be that as it may, the other component parts of example and circumstance have much to do with the ripening of the disease. The "*mens conscia recti*" is a grand institution, and nature asserting her best qualities for man's guidance sweet to a degree, but as it is difficult to touch pitch and not be defiled, and as even to the well-regulated mind and iron will the research into the veins of thought opened up by a Renan or Ramèe is fraught with extreme danger, I say avoid it, and all such premium to license of thought as double-distilled poison. We live in an educational age and one of enquiry, and the mind, anxious to have its voids filled, will ever exercise itself on abstruse points, and as argues the ardent disciple of to-day's school, nothing is so all-absorbing and important as the one great question of future existence, why may it not be lawfully sought out by me, and why may not vital points and questions which have hitherto in other matters seemed insurmount-

able, be assailed with equal success in the religious world? My answer is, because the beginning and the future are and shall be unrevealed to all practical purposes. Read as you may and ponder as you please, but the "*cogito ergo sum*" is the only comprehensive limit, so to speak, I can arrive at, and the further one strays from this simple text the more mystified and hopeless does the task become I feel convinced.

Then why indulge in vain inquiries which lead to nought else save heart-burnings, doubt, and misery? That conscience which renders man superior to the perishable beast, if rightly consulted, will as clearly tell you your duty as it can possibly be defined, the rest we must leave to time, avoiding, meanwhile, if weak, all possible contact with those who may destroy the even current of thought within us. And it is here that education comes to the rescue, and why we should in bounden duty bestow it on our fellows.

But if education is to lead by its over-  
working to scepticism, and thus to the drying  
up, as it were, of the Fountain springs of hope,  
then it becomes a curse, and we live in an  
accursed age.



