

Benjamin CONSTANT

No. 4.—TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.

ON THE HUMAN CAUSES

WHICH HAVE CONCURRED TOWARD THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT,

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LONG before our era Polytheism had arrived at its highest point of relative perfection. But relative perfection is transitory, like everything which belongs to our nature. Imperfect in Æschylus, perfect in Sophocles, Polytheism declined the moment it attained that perfection, since germs of its decay are preceptible in Euripides. Those germs were numerous.

First, the gods had been multiplied to excess by personifications and allegories. Hence a strange confusion in doctrines, in fables, and in ceremonies.

Secondly, a disproportion, always increasing between the dogmas of Polytheism and the state of knowledge, had arisen.

Thirdly, the physical sciences by unfolding to mankind the natural causes of events which they had formerly considered miraculous, had given a deadly blow to religious traditions.

Fourthly, the inevitable struggle between religious power and political power had produced a disastrous effect on the opinion of the multitude.

Fifthly, philosophy, after having long marched by the side of Polytheism, had turned against it, because Polytheism had wished to oppress philosophy.

Sixthly, the most discordant opinions had been crowded together in the occult portion of religion, and the depositories of this mysterious portion, proud, as is usually the case, of possessing secrets, had allowed the people to divine them.

From all these causes had resulted, for the enlightened class, an attachment to one or other of many philosophical opinions which all were opposed to Polytheism; and, for the people, a brutal infidelity, as mad as the maddest superstition, since like superstition it was founded on no examination.

Yet, in the midst of all these things, the religious sentiment yearned for food. Raillery in undermining belief, does not destroy the need of believing; it merely makes the need ashamed to show itself. But the need is thus only rendered the more irritable, and the more ardent, because in giving ourselves up to it in secret, we can only satisfy it incompletely, in haste, and with much vexation. And then, when we are found out, we pretend to laugh at ourselves, to get rid of the ridicule of others.

At such an epoch as that described, the state of the hum in race is one of the strangest, and that estate becomes soon one of the saddest of all states. Scepticism has destroyed all conviction in the very roots. Morality is overthrown less by the direct effect of infidelity, than by the recollection of the religious traditions which survive that infidelity. Those traditions in credulous times, served as a prop to moral ideas: the prop breaking,

those ideas fall into ruin. It is not always certain that such or such a religion does good, while people believe in it; but it is very certain that every religion does harm when it is no longer believed.

The world, at the time when Christianity appeared, was exactly in that position. Tired of the infidelity of which, for a moment, it had been so proud, a portion of the human race tried to fill the gap caused through a lost faith, by the adoption of foreign religions; another portion substituted for that faith the extravagances of magic; and a third portion tried to cling to the fallen religion.

This last attempt is that alone which interests us, because it was the cause of the struggle which Christianity had to sustain, and of the obstacles which it had to combat. It is, therefore, with that attempt that we have exclusively to occupy ourselves.

When an endeavour is made to restore a religion which has fallen into discredit, those who desire to clothe it once more with authority or favour are never agreed as to what parts of it, it is useful or possible to conserve or to re-establish.

Consequently, immediately before the fall of Polytheism, we see its partisans dividing themselves into two very different paths, though both the paths promised to conduct to the same goal. The first wished that a return should be made to Polytheism, such as it had been professed in the times of a simple and submissive piety, and previously to philosophical doubts and objections. Transmitted, they said, from generation to generation, anterior to all abstract speculations, which end in nothing but vague conjectures, has it not, during a long succession of ages, assured the purity of morals, the tranquillity of states, the happiness of nations. Instead of following the gropings of pretended sages, who contradict each other, and give each other the lie, would it not be better, they said, that man should adopt, as rule of truth, the teachings of his fathers; and that he should take for guide those favoured men, the illustrious ancestors of the human race, and the disciples of the gods in the grey dawn of the world.

None of the works which contained this system of orthodoxy in Polytheism has come down to us; but Plutarch shows us, by an example, what was the logic of its defenders. The infidels of that time had drawn objections against the divinity of oracles, from the barbarous style often employed by the priestess of the Delphic Oracle, nearly in the same way as the infidels of the eighteenth century had sought for arguments against the Bible in certain expressions which appeared rude and singular. The orthodox Polytheists, far from admitting that the style of the Delphic priestess was barbarous, replied that it only seemed such to a generation unworthy of feeling its simple and primitive beauties, and that it was not the language of the gods which it was necessary to change, but men whom it was necessary to render capable anew of appreciating its sublimity.

Thus, far from acknowledging the truth of the charges which infidelity brought against the imperfections and supposed rudeness of preceding notions, they affirmed that these accusations were only dictated by the presumption of man—always such a lover of novelty. Let us not crush down religion, they insist, under arbitrary modifications; let us, on the contrary, crush down, under the yoke of religion, those rebellious minds whom the habit of rash inquiry hath corrupted, and who aspire to sacrifice holy traditions to their vain and false scrupulosities.

This party wished the books of Cicero to be burned. It rejected the interpretations of philosophers; it proved, by incontrovertible facts, that the morals of the community had been much more strict and pure in the degree that men had adopted, with a more literal faith, the fables, which a presumptuous reason affected to despise—it repeated that which the great men of past ages had affirmed; and it had this advantage, that it presented something fixed, while those who diverged from the rigour of orthodoxy offered nothing but what was vague and undecided.

These efforts, however, could obtain no success. Man does not resume his respect for that which has ceased to seem to him respectable. Below the surface of apparent enthusiasm for the ancient Polytheism there was nothing but calculation. At this epoch of its decline, men desired to believe in it, because the misery of doubt made the joys of a sincere faith be regretted; just as, at an anterior epoch, they had tried to maintain Polytheism, because they considered it useful that others should believe therein. But its feebleness was too clearly exhibited. When beliefs have fallen, ancient associations hover round the altars which men wish to surround with a majesty which has been eclipsed. If infidelity is no longer a proof of knowledge, or subject of glory, it has, at least, become a habit; and in the same way that in its commencements religious reminiscences assail the unbelievers, infidel reminiscences assail the men who would wish to make themselves religious.

The orthodox defenders of Polytheism, therefore, could obtain no success. But another party arose whose hopes appeared plausible, and whose concessions to the spirit of the

age necessarily rendered the resistance of opinion less violent, by throwing over the adversaries of the religion which they defended all the odium of obstinacy and hostility.

This party tried to explain, allegorically or metaphysically, the fables which shocked contemporary convictions; it justified them by a mysterious sense. Poetry, on the one hand, and philosophy on the other, furnished it with the means of apology and explanation, and nothing is more curious than to observe the efforts of the most ingenious men of the second and third centuries of our era, to combine two incompatible things—the most exalted enthusiasm of which they felt the need in the reconstruction of a faith, and the most arid abstractions of which their philosophy made for them a not less imperious necessity. We cannot give examples here, for these would throw us away from our subject; but all those who have read the *Enneades* of Plotinus, must have remarked that he sets out with the supposition of a first principle destitute of intelligence, of all physical or moral quality, to arrive at a system through means of which he blends himself by ecstasy, four times a day with the Divinity.

These innovators, Polytheists more in appearance than in reality, could not, therefore, succeed better than the orthodox Polytheists. They composed a religion of unintelligible distinctions, and of incompatible notions; and that religion was susceptible of acquiring neither the favour of popularity, like the ancient Polytheism, when in all its force; nor the strength of reasoning, like the philosophical doctrines. The state of opinions remained, therefore, necessarily the same, and continued to float between infidelity as theory, and superstition as practice.

A new religion was, therefore, necessary; a younger and stronger religion, whose standard had not yet been profaned, and which filling men's souls with a real exultation, should smother doubts instead of discussing them, and triumph over objections by not permitting them to spring up.

This religion could be nothing but Theism. There is in the religious sentiment a tendency toward unity; if man arrives at unity only after many successive revolutions, the reason is, that the circumstances in which he finds himself, disturb his sentiment, and give to his ideas a different direction. Ignorance assigns to every effect of detail a cause apart; selfishness divides the divine power to bring it more within its reach; reasoning finds its syllogisms on the deceitful evidences of external appearances. But ignorance is dispersed, selfishness becomes enlightened, and reasoning is perfected by experience. The more the regularity of effects is evident, the more the unity of causes grows probable. The view of disorders, of catastrophes, of exceptions, in short to the general rule, had procured for polytheism its superiority. It becomes known now that those exceptions are only apparent, and polytheism thus loses its principal bulwark.

At the same time, the need of theism makes itself more strongly felt in the heart of man than ever; he has arrived at the last term of civilisation; his soul satiated, fatigued, exhausted, inflicts on itself sufferings of its own, more bitter than those which come to him from without. What can he do against those sufferings, with those gross low gods, whose protection, exclusively material, sufficed for his ignorant ancestors? What can he do with the fetiche which procured for the savage nothing but success and abundance in hunting or in fishing? What can he do with those divinities of Olympus who, doing nothing but punish crimes, preserve human families from external woes only? He needs other gods—gods who may understand and re-animate him, restore to him a force which he has lost, save him from himself, probe his most secret wounds, and know how to pour into them with a succouring hand, the blessings of an indulgent pity. Such are the gods—or rather, such is the god that he needs; for numerous divinities, limited in their faculties, divided in their interests, imperfect by those very limits, and by that very division cannot fulfil those delicate functions.

Also immediately before the establishment of Christianity, unity had become the dominant idea of all systems, as well religious as philosophical. It was celebrated by the poets; it was claimed by the learned as the forgotten discovery of the remotest antiquity; it was taught by the moralist; it stole into the works of writers without any distinct consciousness on their part, and reproduced itself under the pen of simple compilers.

When this doctrine of unity did not compose the principal and avowed part of a system, it was yet announced as its result. When it was not on the foreground of the picture, it was yet visible in perspective: here, combined with the popular belief; there, presented as the explanation of that belief; even the people created for themselves sensuous images of the abstract notion. Everywhere were placed on the domestic altars statues, where were united and confounded the attributes of all the divinities.

In this state of things, the human mind seemed arrived at the extremest frontier of Polytheism; and it might have been thought that only one step remained for it to make to proclaim the unity of God, and to erect into a practical religion that sublime theory.

But the same civilisation which had rendered the duration of Polytheism impossible had deprived man of that youthfulness of feeling, of that interior energy, of that power of conviction, of that faculty of enthusiasm, which are conditions so indispensable for the establishment of a new religion, and which must exist if the hesitations of philosophers, the complicated and confused secrets of priests, the aspirations and the fugitive regrets of souls suffering, but enfeebled and discouraged, are all to blend into a body, and to compose a faith—public, national, and revered as sacred.

Theism thus existed everywhere, as a principle; but nowhere was it found in organic application.

It was not, in the nature of things, for authority to give Theism a helping hand. Authority saw in Theism scarcely anything else than a doctrine, the foe of established order, and saw it under a distinct form only among philosophers, whom it believed to be dangerous.

The priests in their revelations to the initiated sometimes thrust it aside altogether. They forced it always into unnatural alliance with the ancient traditions; and where it would not bind itself to the artificial connection, it was to these traditions mysteriously interpreted that the priesthood gave the preference.

Many philosophers adopted Theism; but it was unceasingly discussed, submitted every day to a new examination, cited before the tribunal of those who commenced to frequent the schools of the philosophers, and understood by each in a different manner. A numerous portion of its partisans rejected the influence of ceremonies, the efficacy of prayer, the hope of supernatural succours, and made thus of Theism an abstract opinion, which could not serve as the basis of a religion.

In the upper ranks of society the tendency to Theism existed no doubt, but the pressing and continual interests of the earth easily smothered that inner voice. Among nations exceedingly civilised, men of information are very ardent for their interests, and very moderate in their opinions; now moderate parties conserve what exists, but anything like creation is greatly above their strength.

The people would not admit as religious an opinion which had no wholeness, no consistency; they repeated some formulas which implied the unity of God, but rather by imitation than from conviction. Whilst the habits of infidelity rendered for the upper class the revival of a religious form almost impossible, magic rendered for the multitude that revival almost superfluous, because it offered to the imagination more powerful allurements, and to hope, promises of a nearer execution.

To gather the human race round Theism, a banner would have been enough; but no arm was strong enough to raise the banner, which remained useless on the ground.

Nevertheless this memorable revolution was effected. An extraordinary circumstance restored all at once to men's souls sufficient energy, to men's minds sufficient authority to give a positive form to human desires, human needs, and human hopes. We treat here of this circumstance under its human relations; but we must confess it would afford us no pleasure to combat the opinion which assigns divine causes to this important revolution.

Certainly when we contemplate man, such as he is, when he has rejected all religious faith; when we behold the religious sentiment powerless and vague, precipitating itself sometimes into magic, and sometimes into ecstasy and delirium; enthusiasm practising extravagancies so much the more incurable that they start from reasoning to arrive methodically at madness; reasoning offering, as the result of eight centuries of labours, at first only nothingness, then chimerical and contradictory hypotheses; the intelligence successful in destroying everything, but incompetent to re-establish anything; dare we say that, at such an epoch, celestial pity hath not come to the succour of the world; that a lightning flash hath not rent the cloud to show the right path to our wandering race; that a divine hand hath not aided men to leap over the barrier against which they were dashing themselves to pieces?

All would then resume its customary order. Man, abandoned anew to himself, would recommence his labour; his mind would struggle, in accordance with its nature, round this great discovery; he would give it imperfect forms; he would lower its sublimity. Calculation, egoism, monopoly, would strive for its possession; but man would still preserve the ineffaceable remembrance of it; an immense step would be taken, and, by degrees, purer forms, juster conceptions, would permit him to enjoy this incalculable blessing in all its fullness and purity.

At the epoch which forms the subject of our researches, the religion of the Hebrews was the only one whose adherents had possessed not only a mechanical attachment to religious forms, but a profound conviction. At the same time, the fundamental dogma of their religion was conformable to the universal need of the human race. It was at that torch that the religious sentiment was rekindled.

But if the fundamental dogma of the Jewish religion responded to the demand of every soul, there were terrible things in that religion.

Assuredly, we do not place ourselves among the detractors of the Mosaic law; we, by no means, forget the superiority of its doctrine, both taken as a whole, and in many of its parts, over all contemporary religions. But, its very sublimity had contributed to stamp on it an excessive severity—a severity necessitated by its disproportion with the ideas of the people who professed it, and likewise with those of the neighbours of that people—neighbours who, simply by being so, had become its enemies.

Add to this, the spirit of all the Jewish priesthood, similar in many respects to that of all the sacerdotal corporations of antiquity, and which the very obstacles it had been compelled to vanquish had rendered more stern and suspicious.

It seems to us that the doctrine of Moses has not been sufficiently distinguished from the spirit of the priesthood, which was the organ and the defender of that doctrine. Nevertheless, in this distinction may be found the solution of all the difficulties which have appeared to give so many advantages to the enemies of religious ideas, and of Christianity.

However, our object is not to judge here the Jewish religion. It is sufficient for our purpose, that at the moment when Polytheism was approaching its downfall, and when all faiths were shaken, the Jewish religion alone, still living and rooted in the soul of a people, offered Theism as a rallying point to the rest of the human race.

Notwithstanding if the Theism of the Hebrews had presented itself to the nations who had revolted from Heathenism under the forms which it had assumed at its origin among the people who professed it, it is doubtful whether it would have obtained the success which has made of the adoration of one God only the universal belief of all civilised countries.

Minds accustomed to the subtleties of a philosophy which had refined on every combination of ideas and every form of dialectics, would probably have rejected a doctrine whose dogmatical simplicity imposed articles of faith, instead of presenting a series of reasonings.

The almost total absence of notions on the nature of the soul and its immortality would have offended these same minds, prepared by Platonism, to deliver themselves to hopes and to rush into hypotheses on the future existence of man.

The character of the God of the Jews, represented as despotic, fierce, and jealous, could not have accorded with the milder and more abstract conceptions of the sages of Greece. The multitude of rites, of ceremonies, and of superstitious observances, would have fatigued men, the most religious of whom thought that internal worship constituted the most acceptable homage that could be offered to the Supreme Being. Finally, the very morality of Judaism, which made of the assent to certain propositions the principal and indispensable virtue, would have contrasted too strongly with the universally adopted principles of tolerance.

But the Jews, who had for a long time been initiated, and especially since their sojourn at Alexandria, in all the discussions of philosophy, had made in this career progress almost equal to that of the Pagan philosophers. They had shown themselves not less subtle than these in metaphysical researches; and toward the epoch when Christianity appeared, Judaism had undergone modifications sufficient to cause whatever doctrine might spring from its bosom to attract curiosity, to fix attention, and soon to captivate the suffrages of a great number of enlightened men. It was, therefore, leaning on the one hand on Judaism, and gathering the fruits of all the labours of preceding centuries, among nations more advanced than the most of the Jews, that Christianity appeared in the world.

It has often been asserted that Christianity was adopted at the time of its appearance, only by the vilest and most ignorant classes; nothing is falser, and nothing would have been more inexplicable.

It was by the progress of knowledge that the human race had been driven from Polytheism to Theism. Christianity was the purest of the forms of Theism, and yet we are to believe the absurdity that it was only embraced by the populace, in whom, of course, the progress of knowledge must have had least power to produce any effect.

It was, on the contrary, in the nature of things, that men of all classes should adopt Christianity. The religion which, at such a moment, was most suitable, or rather which alone was suitable, was one which should elevate man above all visible objects, binding him again to none of the religious institutions which had fallen into discredit; to none of the political institutions which had grown oppressive; the only religion possible, was one which, at a time when nations were nothing but gangs of slaves, in whom patriotism could not exist, should gather together all nations round the same faith, and transform those into brothers who had ceased to be fellow-citizens.

The Christian religion combined all these advantages. By proscribing sensuality, the love of riches, all ignoble passions, by announcing, beyond the grave, a life more important by its eternal duration, than all the felicities of earth, it attracted all those who had preserved the sentiment of human dignity. By proclaiming an immediate revelation, a direct communication with the Divinity, and a succession of inspirations, obtained by faith and prayer, and accompanied by supernatural forces, it pleased those whom Neo-Platonism, and the thirst of the marvellous had accustomed to desire a habitual commune with superhuman natures. By substituting ceremonies, simple, modest, and few in number, for rites, some of which were revolting, and others of which had fallen into discredit, it satisfied reason. It offered to the poor freedom, to the oppressed justice, to the slaves liberty, as a right. Finally, and this, at such a moment, was not one of its smallest advantages, it refrained from all philosophical and metaphysical researches, researches for which, if there was a prevalent taste, there was a no less prevalent dislike, it refrained from all questions on the nature and substance of God, all hypotheses on the laws and forces of nature, and the action of the invisible world, all discussions on destiny in opposition to Providence. It disclosed but one fact, and offered only one hope. Now, man had need of a stone to repose his head upon; he had need of a fact, a miraculous fact, in order that, delivered from the torment of doubt, he might breathe freely, gather up his energies again, and begin once more the great intellectual labour.

Also, the faith in Jesus Christ was embraced even at its first proclamation, by a multitude of persons, who were strangers neither to opulence nor instruction. Pliny attests, that already, under the reign of Trajan, persons of every condition met at the foot of the cross. Men of consular dignity, senators, matrons of the noblest extraction, had devoted themselves to this worship. Christians, as they said themselves, abounded at the court, in the camps, in the Forum. Nevertheless, when the standard was once raised, a struggle could not fail to ensue; and in that struggle Christianity encountered among its enemies, authority, the priests, a portion of the philosophers, and the populace. Authority never examines, it judges by appearances. It saw a society of men who rejected all external worship; it declared them atheists.

In its relation with human existence, Christianity was diametrically opposed to the idea which statesmen, in an infidel age especially, form of the utility of religion. In their eyes it must be intimately connected with the interests of society. This life is the end, religion a means. The Christians, on the contrary, considered life as a means to another end. Their enthusiasm for a future world delivered them from all cares relating to this world, and from every occupation mixed up with a transitory and perishable present. The love of country, of which governments always speak the more, the less a fatherland exists, was menaced by the contempt of the Christians for earthly things. This was ascribed to them as a crime; and the accusation brought against them then has been raised by the pens of their modern detractors. But what fatherland were they accused of deserting? Was that a fatherland, that chaotic assemblage of a thousand nations who were gagged and fettered, instead of being united, and who had nothing in common but the same misery, under the same yoke?

The means of authority against opinion are the same in all countries, and in all ages—the hateful spy, the informer as hateful, persecutions, punishments. The effects of these means are also always the same; the oppressed obtain the sympathy of every soul of true valour, and of true worth; they give, in the midst of adversity, in the presence of death, sublime examples of fortitude and of sacrifice. What matters that the frequency of the persecutions and the number of the martyrs have been somewhat exaggerated? Was the courage of the martyrs the less admirable on that account? That is a miserable impartiality which places itself between the instruments of persecution and their victims.

The cruelties which authority expended against Christianity undoubtedly accelerated its progress. There is something contagious in the spectacle of disinterestedness, of integrity, and of hope, in the midst of a corrupt and degenerate race.

Persecution has this peculiarity, that when not revolting it is proved thereby not to have been necessary: the people who suffer it had nothing formidable. But when it is necessary, it becomes revolting, and thereby it becomes useless.

To this consideration, applicable to Christianity as to all opinions which are proscribed or threatened, add a circumstance characteristic of the epoch—we mean the contradictions into which authority rushed, from its consciousness of not being supported by any moral force. Galerius, one of the most ferocious enemies of Christianity, stopping suddenly in his career of blood and tyranny, terminates an edict, in which he accords to Christians a momentary tolerance, by inviting them to implore for him the Divinity whom they adore—a singular proof of the feeble conviction of the Polytheists, of even those of them who were the most violent in their efforts to restore the vanquished religion,

and of the secret instinct which drew them toward that faith which was the object of their fury.

The priesthood could not have more success than authority had against the new religion. In vain, the priesthood collected their scattered forces and formed monstrous alliances against the common enemy. In vain, it made an appeal to all the doctrines, which, it mattered not at what epoch had crept into the religion which it wished to defend—doctrines which, for a long time, the priesthood had rejected. By a mistake sufficiently natural, the priests thought to fortify themselves by the number and diversity of their troops, whilst that very number and the motleyneſs of its discordant auxiliaries, brought the priesthood still more into discredit.

The priests tried to preserve or to re-establish their domination over the minds of the people, by increasing ceremonies and traditions, to which they endeavoured to give an air of antiquity. Far from reforming what was indecent in the mysteries which had become all but public, they rather relied upon their indecency, as being likely to be agreeable to the corruption of the age. They introduced into those mysteries every kind of privation by the side of every kind of obscenity. They introduced into those sanguinary ceremonies, mutilations, voluntary tortures, which they imposed as a duty on the initiated.

And at the same time, playing the part of half-philosophic jugglers, the priests of the ancient religion proposed their doctrine rather than imposed it: their rites were frightful, but their language was timid. They carried hesitation even into anathema, and lifting one hand to hurl the thunder of a curse, with the other they made a sign that they were ready to enter into a compromise, but no compromise was possible. They offered to place the new god among the ancient divinities. The followers of Christ indignant at such a thought, forced to the combat adversaries who would have preferred negotiations.

In our days an attempt has been made to praise polytheism for this tolerance, for this mildness, for these conciliatory intentions; in effect, disarmed as it was at this epoch, or rather annihilated, its appearances were less vehement, its style more courteous than those of nascent Christianity; but the fact is, that Christianity existed, whilst polytheism was a vain shadow. Its forbearance, its complaisances, all the qualities which we admire in it were only the virtues of the dead. Men began once more to struggle because they began once more to live, and far from seeking in this energetic struggle a subject of accusation against Christianity, we ought to thank it for having re-animated the life of the soul, for having awakened the dust of the graves.

Whilst the Christians marched, surrounded by incontestable miracles, because they were filled by an indestructible conviction, their rivals opposed to them fictitious and puerile prodigies, easily called in doubt, and the pale copies of those which they imitated; for they imitated Christianity to resist it, thinking to combat it with its own arms. One of the blunders and one of the misfortunes of the vanquished, is to conclude from the victories of their adversaries the power of their means, and to make use of the same means, without inquiring whether it is not the purpose for which the means are employed which gives them their force.

The Christians had on their side reasoning and force. When directing reasoning against their adversaries, they had no fear of compromising their own cause, which had its protector in Heaven, and could not be compromised. The Pagans also tried reasoning and enthusiasm; but their enthusiasm was feeble and forced; their reasoning reacted against themselves, and were more injurious to what they affirmed, than to what it was their intention to contest.

We have already spoken of that fraction of philosophers who tried to prop up the ruined edifice of polytheism, and we have indicated the course which struck their efforts with an incurable impotence.

As to the populace, it cried—the Christians to the lions! just as soon after it cried—the Pagans to the stake! It tore in pieces, or saw with joy torn in pieces men, in the name of Jupiter; as soon after it saw them, with the same delight, turn in pieces in the name of the Homousia, or of the Homoousia. It showed itself that which it is always—drunk with rage, in favour of force, wherever it perceives force to be, and displaying the same fury, and passing into the same intoxication in the opposite direction when force passes from one party to another.

Clear and coherent, simple and precise, calming the earthly passions which the human race had in satiety, delivering it from the atmosphere of corruption when it breathed with agony and with a profound disgust at itself, and having a root in all primordial memories;—in philosophy, by doctrines which it possessed pure, while rendering them less subtle—in history, by the traditions of a people whose ancient splendour it consecrated, without proposing them as objects of imitation—in ancient usages, whilst retrenching what of minute, of severe, and of hostile they had; freeing Reason from the interminable

difficulties of dialectics—speaking to the soul the language which it had need to hear—Christianity could not fail to triumph over a host of enemies not agreed among themselves, without fixed systems, having at their disposal nothing but brutal force, and foreseeing their defeat at the very moment when they were employing atrocious means to retard it.

Christianity, therefore, of necessity triumphed. A new order of things commenced for man, and that order of things sent from the height of Heaven by an omnipotent hand, after having regenerated corrupt nations, softened and civilised barbarous tribes.

No doubt, whatever was imperfect in the nature of man mixed almost from the birth of the Gospel a fatal alloy with this universal amelioration.

The intolerance which under the reign of Polytheism seemed an exception to its fundamental principles, appeared to become during a long time the permanent spirit of Christianity. The Christian priesthood arrogated to itself an authority similar to that which had bound down under its yoke the great number of the ancient nations; it extended this terrible authority over nations which till then had escaped its despotism. Morality, falsified and perverted, fell soon into dependence on subtle interpretations and arbitrary principles. The human faculties were struck with immobility, and succeeded in reconquering, I do not say their legitimate liberty, which has always been disputed to them, but the right to exist, only by passing through a persecution which fell heaviest on the most enlightened and courageous men.

Nevertheless, let us consider more closely these great inconveniences. Will they not equally be found in the Polytheism of nations subject to sacerdotal corporations? Transport the belief and the priests of Egypt to Madrid, or to Goa, you will have—in the name of Isis and of Horus—inquisitors, not inferior in ferocity or in hypocrisy to any of their modern colleagues; and you will have, in addition, human sacrifices, licentious orgies, revolting ceremonies, which have never stained the most corrupt Christianity.

Besides the philosophers who have praised the tolerance of Polytheism, have fallen, perhaps involuntarily, into a singular error. The tolerance which they have boasted of in this faith did not repose on the respect which society owes to the opinions of individuals. The nations tolerant toward each other in their national capacity, were nevertheless ignorant of that eternal principle, the only basis of all enlightened tolerance, that each and every one has the right of adoring his God in the manner which seems to him the best. The citizens were, on the contrary, bound to conform to the worship of the city. They had not the liberty to adopt a foreign worship, though that worship might be authorised for the strangers who were its followers. The independence of thought, the independence of the religious sentiment gained, therefore, nothing by this tolerance of Polytheism.

Certainly the zeal of Chosroes, who was not willing to enter into treaty with his enemies, unless they rendered homage to his gods; the reciprocal furies of the Teutyrites and the Ombrites; the fierce wars which the inhabitants of Oxyrinchus and Cynopolis carried on till the Romans forced them to be at peace; the hatred which divides in India the adorers of Schiva and of Vishnu; the proscriptions to which the Brahmins and the Buddhists have been alternately exposed, sufficiently refute the eulogies lavished, in hatred of Christianity, on the religions which it supplanted.

Let me frankly state that wherever the power of the priests is not restrained by just limits, there has been intolerance; and if we consider the substance of all faiths, real tolerance has existed hitherto, only in Christianity, when uninfluenced by all foreign power. It is there alone that the supreme God, the father of all men, of all love, of all goodness, does not reproach his creatures with the efforts which they make to serve him with greater zeal. Their errors can excite only his pity; all adoration is equally agreeable to him when the intentions are equally pure.

Is the other accusation better founded? If the axiom, that it is better to obey God than men has conducted fanatical Christians to the greatest crimes—if it has been maintained, under this pretext, that cruelty, that refinement in torture, that forgetfulness of the bonds of blood and of affection, perjury towards the partisans of another faith, were the duties of true Christians, open the *Schastabade*, the *Bhagvat-Gita*, the *Zendavesta*, you will find those disastrous precepts inculcated in a manner much more positive and much more fervent; and there is this difference, that among the Persians and the Hindoos their abominable morality is found in their sacred books themselves, whilst among Christians it is only found in those miserable commentators who falsify the texts of scripture to serve the interest of their corporation and caste.

Finally, if an insolent tyranny has sometimes, in the name of Christ, who disarmed it, chained the march of the human faculties, that noblest gift of Providence, were those faculties freer among Polytheistic nations, to whom the slightest alteration of their faith

in the figure, in the attributes of the gods, the smallest knowledge of writing, the slightest participation in the services were interdicted?

Thus, under whatever point of view we look at Christianity—even when it was corrupted by men—it was a great deal superior to the Polytheism of the majority of nations; and, freed from that corruption, which is foreign to it, it has advantages which the most perfect Polytheism could not possess.

A great mistake has been made as to the sense of an assertion which serves as basis to the author's work on religion. Because the author has distinguished the forms of religion from the religious sentiment, it has been supposed that he professed an equal indifference for all those forms. But, on the contrary, he believes these forms to be progressive—some being always better than others, and those which are better always arising at the time when they are most needed.

And this system is not that of a modern writer; it is that of Saint Paul, who says, in express terms, that when man was yet a child, he was under obedience to the first and rudest instructions which God had given him, and that the state of ignorance having passed away, God sent Christ on the earth to abolish the ancient law. Thus, according to the doctrine of the first Christians themselves, God proportions his instructions to the state of man; his first instructions which Saint Paul speaks of as not of an elevated kind, were what was necessary to nations in their early stages. Those instructions became useless, when the infancy of nations ceased. Is it irreligion to recognise this progression in the Divine goodness? The Pharisees said so to the apostles, and the Roman Emperors said it to the Christian martyrs.

[Benjamin Constant, the author of the preceding essay, was born at Lausanne, in Switzerland, on the 25th October, 1767. He died on the 8th December, 1830. He was a voluminous author, an eloquent orator, and a distinguished and disinterested patriot; in the great struggles for liberty in France from 1815, he occupied a foremost place. He wrote a work on religion, in five volumes, which, if not the profoundest, is one of the clearest, most ingenious, and most instructive on the subject. His essay, just given, easily accounts for the origin and growth of Christianity, without the introduction of any supernatural and miraculous machinery; for when Constant speaks of the supernatural and the miraculous, it is not in the English sense of those words, that is, as indicating arbitrary interferences with the immutable laws of the universe. The essay is valuable for another reason, for are not the tricks which the Christian priesthoods at present are employing to support their exhausted systems and institutions, exactly similar to those so distinctly and forcibly indicated by Constant, as having been employed by the Polytheistic priesthood for a kindred purpose.]

THEOLOGY AND RELIGION.

THEOLOGY is the science of Religion. It treats of man, God, and the relation between man and God, with the duties which grow out of that relation. It is both queen and mother of all science; the loftiest and most ennobling of all the speculative pursuits of man. But the popular theology of this day is no science at all, but a system of incoherent notions, woven together by scholastic logic, and resting on baseless assumptions. The pursuit thereof in the popular method does not elevate;—there is in it somewhat not holy. It is not studied as science, with no concern except for the truth of the conclusion. We wish to find the result as we conceived it to be; as Bishop Butler has said, "People habituate themselves to let things pass through their minds, rather than to think of them. Thus by use they become satisfied merely with seeing what is said, without going any further." Our theology has two great Idols, the BIBLE and CHRIST: by worshipping these, and not God only, we lose much of the truth they both offer us. Our theology relies on assumptions, not ultimate facts; so it comes to no certain conclusions—weaves cobwebs, but no cloth.

The popular Theology rests on these main assumptions—**THE DIVINITY OF THE CHURCH, AND THE DIVINITY OF THE BIBLE.** What is the value of each? It has been found convenient to assume both. Then it has several important aphorisms, which it makes use of as if they were established truths, to be employed as the maxims of Geometry, and no more to be called in question. Amongst these are the following: Man under the light of nature is not capable of discovering the moral and religious truth needed for his moral and religious welfare; there must be a personal and miraculous mediator between each man and God; a life of blameless obedience to the law of man's nature will not render us

acceptable to God, and ensure our well-being in the next life; we need a superhuman being to bear our sins, through whom alone we are saved; Jesus of Nazareth is that superhuman, and miraculous, and sin-reconciling mediator; the doctrine he taught is revealed Religion, which differs essentially from natural Religion; an external and contingent miracle is the only proof of an eternal and necessary truth in morals or religion; God now and then transcends the laws of nature, and makes a miraculous revelation of some truth; he does not now inspire men as formerly. Each of these aphorisms is a gratuitous assumption, which has never been proved, and of course all the theological deductions made from the aphorisms, or resting on these two main assumptions, are without any real foundation. Theologians have assumed their facts; and then reasoned as if the facts were established;—but the conclusion was an inference from a baseless assumption; thus it accounts for nothing. “We only become certain of the immortality of the soul from the fact of Christ’s resurrection,” says Theology. Here are two assumptions: first, the fact of that resurrection; second, that it proves our immortality. If we ask proof of the first point, it is not easy to come by it; of the second, it is not shown. The theological method is false; for it does not prove its facts historically, or verify its conclusions philosophically. The Hindoo theory says, the earth rests on the back of an Elephant, the Elephant on a Tortoise. But what does the Tortoise rest upon? The great Turtle of popular theology rests on—an assumption. Who taught us the infallible divinity of the Bible, or the Churches? “Why, we always thought so; we inherited the opinion, as land, from our fathers, to have and to hold, for our use and behoof, for ourselves and our heirs, for ever.” Would you have a better title? We are regularly “seized” of the doctrine; it came, with the divine right of kings, from our fathers, who, by the grace of God, burnt men for doubting the truth of their theology.” This is the defence of the popular theology. We have freedom in civil affairs; can revise our statutes, change the administration, or amend the constitution: have we no freedom in theological affairs, to revise, change, amend a vicious theology? We have always been doing it, but only by halves, not looking at the foundation of the matter. We have applied good sense to many things,—Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures,—and with distinguished success; not yet to Theology. We make improvements in science and art every year: men survey the clouds, note the variations of the magnetic needle, analyze rocks, waters, soils, and do not fear that truth shall hurt them, though it make Hipparchus and Cardan unreadable. Our method of theology is false, no less than its assumptions. What must we expect of the conclusion? What we find. †

If a school was founded to teach Geology, and the professors of that science were required to subscribe the geological creed of Aristotle or Paracelsus, and swear solemnly to interpret facts by that obsolete creed, and maintain and inculcate the geological faith as expressed in that creed, in opposition to Wernerians, Bucklandians, Lyellians, and all other geological heresies, ancient or modern; if the professors were required to subscribe this every five years, and no pupil was allowed the name of Geologist, or permitted peacefully to examine a rock, unless he professed that creed;—what would men say to the matter? No one thinks such a course strange in Theology; our fathers did so before us. In plain English, we are afraid of the truth. “God forbid,” said a man, famous in his day, “that our love of truth should be so cold as to tolerate any erroneous opinion”—but our own. Any change is looked on with suspicion. If the drift-weed of the ocean be hauled upon the land, men fear the ocean will be drank up, or blown dry; if the pine-tree rock, they exclaim, the mountain falling cometh to naught. How superstitiously men look on the miracle question, as if the world could not stand if the miracles of the New Testament were not real.

The popular Theology does not aim to prove absolute Religion, but a *system of doctrines*. Now the problem of theology is continually changing. In the time of Moses it was this: To separate Religion from the Fetichism of the Canaanites and the Polytheism of the Egyptians, and connect it with the doctrine of one God. No doubt Jannes and Jambres exclaimed with pious horror, “What! give up the garlic and the cats which our fathers prayed to and swore by! We shall never be guilty of that infidelity.” But the Priesthood of Garlic came to an end, and the world still continued, though the Cats were not worshipped. In the time of Christ, the problem was: To separate Religion from the obsolete ritual of Moses. We know the result. The Scribes and Pharisees were shocked at the thought of abandoning the ritual of Moses! But the ritual went its way. In the time of Luther, a new problem arose: To separate Religion from the forms of the Catholic Church. The issue is well known. In our times, the problem is: To separate Religion from whatever is finite,—church, book, person,—and let it rest on its absolute truth. Numerous questions come up for discussion: Is Christianity absolute Religion? What relation does Jesus bear to the human race? What relation does the Bible sustain to it? We have nothing to fear from truth, or for truth, but every thing to hope. It is about Theology that men quarrel, not about Religion; that is but one.

Coming away from the Theology of our time, and looking at the public Virtue, as revealed in our life, political, commercial, and social, and seeing things as they are, we must come to this conclusion: Either Christianity—absolute Religion—is false and utterly detestable,—or else modern Society, in its basis and details, is wrong, all wrong: there is no third conclusion possible. Christianity demands a divine life; Society, one mean and earthly. Christianity says—its great practical maxim—“We that are strong ought to bear the burdens of the weak;” Society—“We that are strong must make the weak bear our burthens;” and it does this daily. The Strong do not compel the Weak as heretofore, mainly with a sword, nor bind them exclusively in fetters of iron: they compel with an idea, and chain with manacles unseen, but felt. Who does the world’s work?—he that receives most largely the world’s good? It needs not that truisms be repeated. Now it is a high word of Christianity—“He that is greatest shall be [your servant.” What is the corresponding word of Society? Everybody knows it. Do we estimate *greatness* in this way, by the man’s achievements for the public welfare? Oh no! we have no such vulgar standard! Men of “superior talents and cultivation,”—do we expect them to be great by serving mankind? Nay, by serving themselves!

Religion is love of God and man. Is that the basis of action with us? A young man setting out in life, and choosing his calling, says this to himself: “How can I get the most ease and honours out of the world, returning the least of toil and self-denial?” That is the philosophy of many a life; the very end of even what is called the “better class” of society. Who says, “This will I do; I will be a man, a whole complete man, as God made me; take care of myself, but serve my brother, counting my strength HIS, not his MINE; I will take nothing from the world which is not honestly, truly, manfully earned?” Who puts his feet forward in such a life? We call such a man a fool. Yes, Jesus of Nazareth is a fool, tried by the penny wisdom of this generation. We honour him in our Sunday talk; hearing his words, say solemnly, as the parasites of Herod, “It is the voice of God, not of a man!” and smite a man on both cheeks who does not cry, Amen! But all the week long we blaspheme that great soul, who speaks though dead, and call his word a fool’s talk. This is the popular Christianity. We can pray as well as the old Pharisee—“Lord, we thank thee we are not as other men; as the Heathen Socrates, who knew nothing; and as the ‘Infidel,’ who cannot believe contradictions and absurdities. We say grace before meat; attend to all the church ordinances; can repeat the creed, and we believe every word of both thy Testaments, Oh Lord! What wouldst thou more? We have fulfilled all Righteousness.”

Alas for us! we have taken the name of Jesus in our church, and psalm-singing. We can say “Lord! Lord! no man ever spake as thou.” But our Christianity is talk; it is not in the heart, nor the hand, nor the head, but only in the tongue. Could that Great Man, whose soul bestrides the world to bless it, come back again, and speak in bold words, to our condition, follies, sins, his denunciation and his blest beatitudes, rooting up with his “Woe-unto-you, hypocrites!” what was not of God’s planting, and calling things by right names—how should we honour him? As Annas and Caiaphas and their fellows honoured that “Galilean and no prophet”—with spitting and a cross. But it costs little to talk and to pray.

A divine manliness is the despair of our churches. No man is reckoned good who does not believe in sin, and human inability. We seem to have said—“Alas for us! we defile our week days by selfish and unclean living; we dishonour our homes by low aims and lack of love, by sensuality and sin. We debase the sterling word of God in our soul; we cannot discern between good and evil, nor read nature aright, nor come at first-hand to God; therefore let us set one day apart from our work; let us build us an house which we will enter only on that day trade does not tempt us; let us take the wisest of books, and make it our oracle; let it save us from thought, and be to us as a God; let us take our brother to explain to us this book, to stand between us and God; let him be holy for us, pray for us, represent a divine life. We know these things cannot be, but let us make believe.” The work is accomplished, and we have the Sabbath, the Church, the Bible, and the Ministry; each beautiful in itself, but our ruin when made the substitutes for holiness of heart and a divine life.

In Christianity we have a religion wide as the East and the West; deep and high as the Nadir and Zenith; certain as Truth, and everlasting as God. But in our life we are heathens. He that fears God becomes a prey. To be a Christian, with us, in speech and action, a man must take his life in his hand, and be a lamb among the wolves. Does Christianity enter the counting-room, the senate-house, the jail? Does it look on ignorance and poverty, seeking to root them out of the land? The Christian doctrine of work and wages is a plain thing: he that wins the staple from the maternal earth; who expends strength, skill, taste, on that staple, making it more valuable; who aids men to be

healthier, wiser, better, more holy—he does a service to the race—does the world's work. To get commodities won by others' sweat, by violence and the long arm, is ROBBERY—the ancient Roman way; to get them by cunning and the long head, is TRADE—the modern Christian way. What say Reason and Jesus to that? No doubt the Christianity of the Pulpit is a poor thing: words cannot utter its poverty; it is neither meat nor drink; the text saves the sermon. But the Christianity of daily life, of the street—that is still worse: the whole Bible could not save it. The history of Society is summed up in a word—CAIN KILLED ABEL; that of real Christianity also in a word—CHRIST DIED FOR HIS BROTHER.

From ancient times we have received two priceless treasures: the Sunday, as a day of rest, social meeting, and religious instruction; and the institution of Preaching, whereby a living man is to speak on the deepest of subjects. But what have we made of them? Our Sabbath—what a weariness is it! what superstition defiles its sunny hours! And Preaching—what has it to do with life? Men graceless and ungifted make it handiwork; a sermon is the Hercules-pillar and *ultima Thule* of dullness. The popular religion is unmanly and sneaking; it dares not look Reason in the face, but creeps behind tradition, and only quotes—it has nothing new and living to say. To hear its talk, one would think God was dead, or at best asleep. We have enough of church-going, a remnant of our father's veneration, which might lead to great good; reverence still for the Sabbath, the best institution the stream of time has brought us; we have still admiration for the name of Jesus—a soul so great and pure could not have lived in vain. But to call ourselves Christians!—may God forgive that mockery! Are men to serve God by lengthening the creed and shortening the commandments? making long prayers, and devouring the weak? by turning Reason out of doors, and condemning such as will not believe our Theology, nor accept a priest's falsehood in God's name?

Religion is Life. Is our Life Religion? No man pretends it. No doubt there are good men in all churches, and out of all churches; there have been such in the holds of pirate ships and in robbers' dens. I know there are good men and pious women, and I would go leagues long to sit down at their blessed feet, and kiss their garments' hem. But what are the mass of us? Disciples of absolute Religion? Christians after the fashion of Jesus of Nazareth? No: only Christians in tongue. It is an *imputed* righteousness that we honour; not ours, but borrowed of Tradition; an "historical Christianity," that was, but is no more. A man is a Christian if he goes to church, pays his pew-tax, bows to the parson, believes with his sect, is as good as other people. That is our religion; what is lived, which is preached: "like people, like priest," was never more true.

It is not that we need new forms and symbols, or even the rejection of the old. Baptism and the Supper are still beautiful and comforting to many a soul. A spiritual man can put spirit upon these. To many they are still powerful auxiliaries. They commune with God now and then—through bread and wine, as others converse with Him forever through the symbols of nature, the winds that wake the "soft and soul-like sound" of the pine-tree; through the earliest violets of spring and the last leaf of autumn; through calm and storm, and stars and blooming trees, and winter's snows and summer's sunshine. A religious soul never lacks symbols of its own—elements of communion with God. What we want is the SOUL of Religion—Religion that thinks and works: its SIGN will take care of itself.

With us, Religion is a nun. She sits, of week-days, behind her black veil, in the church; her hands on her knees; making her creed more unreadable; damning "infidels" and "carnal Reason:" she only comes out in the streets of a Sunday, when the shops are shut, and temptation out of sight, and the din of business is still as a baby's sleep. All the week, nobody thinks of that joyless vestal. Meantime strong-handed Cupidity, with his legion of devils, goes up and down the earth, and presses Weakness, Ignorance, and Want into his service; sends Bibles to Africa, on the deck of his ship, and Rum and Gunpowder in the hold, knowing that the church will pray for "the outward bound." He brings home—most Christian Cupidity!—images of himself which God has carved in ebony—to Christianize and bless the sable son of Ethiopia! Verily we are a Christian people! zealous of good works! drawing nigh unto God—with our lips! Lives there a savage tribe our sons have visited, that has not cause to curse and hate the name of Christians, who have plundered, polluted, slain, enslaved their children? Not one, the wide world round, from the Mandans to the Malays. If there were but half the Religion in all Christendom, that there is talk of it during a "Revival" in a village—at the baseness—political, commercial, social baseness daily done in the world, such a shout of indignation would go up from the four corners of the earth, as would make the ears of Cupidity tingle again, and hustle the oppressor out of creation.

The Poor, the Ignorant, the Weak, have we always with us: inasmuch as we do good

unto *them*, we serve God; inasmuch as we do it not unto the least of them, we blaspheme God, and cumber the ground we tread on. Was there no meaning in that old word—"He that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes?" They are already laid upon us. Religion meant something with Paul; something with Jesus: what does it mean with us? A divine life from infancy to age? Divine all through? Oh no! a cheaper thing than that: it means talk, creed-making, and creed-believing, and creed-defending. We, Christians of the "nineteenth century," have many "inventions to save labour;" a process by which "a man is made as good a Christian in five minutes as in fifty years." Behold Christianity made easy! Do men love Religion and its Divine Life, as Gain and Trade? Is it the great moving principle with us? something loved for itself—something to live by? Oh no! Nobody pretends it.

No wonder young men, and young women too, of the most spiritual stamp, lose their reverence for the Church, or come into it only for a slumber—irresistible, profound, and strangely similar to death. What concord hath freedom with slavery? Talent goes to the world, not to the churches. No wonder Unbelief scoffs in the public print, "beside what that grim wolf, with privy paw, daily devours apace, and nothing said." There is an unbelief, worse than the public scoffing, though more secret, which needs not be spoken of. No wonder the old cry is raised, **THE CHURCH IN DANGER**, as its crazy timbers sway to and fro, if a strong man tread its floors. But what then? What is true never fails. Religion is permanent in the race—Christianity everlasting as God. These can never perish, through the treachery of their defenders, or the violence of their foes. We look round us, and all seems to change: what was solid last night, is fluid and passed off to-day; the theology of our fathers is unreadable; the doctrines of the middle-age "divines" are deceased like them. Shall our mountain stand? "Everywhere is instability and insecurity." It is only men's heads that swim; not the stars that run round. The soul of man remains the same: Absolute Religion does not change; God still speaks in Reason, Conscience, Faith—is still immanent in his children. We need no new forms: the old, Baptism and the Supper, are still beautiful to many a soul, and speak blessed words of religious significance. Let them continue for such as need them. We want real Christianity, the Absolute Religion, preached with faith, and applied to life,—**BEING GOOD, AND DOING GOOD**. There is but one real Religion; we need only open our eyes to see that; only live it, in love to God, and love to man, and we are blessed of Him that liveth forever and ever!—*Theodore Parker*.

CALVINISM.

It makes God an awful king. The universe shudders at his presence; the thunder and earthquake are but faint whispers of his wrath, as the magnificence of earth and sky is but one ray out from the heaven of his glory. He sits in awful state. Human flesh quails at the thought of Him;—it is terrible to fall into His hands, as fall we must. Man was made not to be peaceful and blessed, but to serve the selfishness of the All-King, to glorify God, and to praise him. Originally, man was made pure and upright; but to tempt beyond his strength the frail creature He had made, God forbade him the exercise of a natural inclination, not evil in itself. Man disobeyed the arbitrary command;—he fell. His first sin brought on him the eternal vengeance of the all-powerful King; hurled him at once from his happiness; took from him the majesty of his nature; left him poor, and impotent, and blind, and naked; transmitting to each of his children all the guilt of the primeval sin. Adam was the "federal head of the human race:" "By Adam's fall we sinned all." Man has now no power of himself to discern good from evil, and follow the good; his best efforts are but filthy rags in God's sight; his prayer an abomination. Man is born totally depraved; sin is native in his bones; hell is his birthright. To be anything acceptable to God, he must renounce his nature, violate the law of the soul. He is a worm of the dust, and turns this way and that, and up and down, but finds nothing in nature to cling by and climb.

God is painted in the most awful colours in the Old Testament. The flesh quivers while we read, and the soul recoils upon itself with suppressed breath, and ghastly face, and sickening heart. The very Heavens are not clean in his sight. The grim, awful King of the world, "a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," "angry with the wicked every day," and "keeping anger forever," "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,"—He hates sin, though he created it, and man, though he made him to fall, "with a perfect hatred." Vengeance is His, and He will repay. He must, therefore, punish man with all the exquisite torture which infinite Thought can devise, and

Omnipotence apply; a Creditor, He exacts the uttermost farthing; a King, "upheld by his jury," the smallest offence is high-treason—the greatest of crimes. His code is Draconian: he that offends in one point is guilty of all. Good were it for man that he had never been born—extremest vengeance awaits him;—the jealous God will come upon him in an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him asunder. Hence comes the doctrine of "eternal damnation," a dogma which Epicurus and Strato would have called it blasphemy to teach.

But God, though called personal is yet infinite. Mercy, therefore, must be a part of His nature. He desires to save man from the horrors of hell. Shall he change the nature of things? That is impossible. Shall he forgive all mankind outright? The Infinite King forgive high treason! It is not consistent with divine dignity to forgive the smallest violation of his perfect law. A sin, however small, is an infinite evil: He must have an infinite "satisfaction." All the human race are sinners, by being born of woman; the damning sin of Adam vests in all their bones;—they must all suffer eternal damnation, to atone for their inherited sin, unless some "substitute" take their place.

Now it has long been a maxim in the courts of law,—whence many forensic terms have been taken and applied to theology, especially since the time of Anselm,—that a man's property may suffer in place of his person; and since his friends may transfer their property to him, they may suffer in his place "vicarious punishment." Thus before Almighty God, there may be a substitute for the sinner. This doctrine is a theological fiction; it is of the same family with what are called "legal fictions" in the courts, and "practical fictions" in the street—a large and ancient family, it must be confessed, that has produced great names. But no man can be a substitute for another; for sin is infinite, and he finite. Though all the liquid fires of hell be poured from eternity on the penitent head of the whole race, not a single sin, committed even in sleep, by one man, could be atoned for. An infinite "ransom" must be paid to save a single soul. God's "Mercy" overcomes his "Justice;" for man deserves nothing but "damnation:—" He will provide the ransom. So He sent down His Son, to fulfil all the law—which man could not fulfil,—realising infinite goodness, and thus merit the infinite reward, and then suffer all the tortures of infinite sin as if he had not fulfilled it, and thus prepare a ransom for all; "purchasing" their "salvation." Thus men are saved from hell by the "vicarious suffering" of the Son. But this would leave them in a negative state—not bad enough for hell—not good enough for heaven. The "merits" of the Son, as well as his sufferings, must be set down to their account; and thus man is elevated to Heaven by the "imputed righteousness" of the Son.

But how can the Son achieve these *infinite* merits, and endure this *infinite* "torment," and "redeem" and "save" the race? He must be infinite, and then it follows; for all the actions of the Infinite are also infinite, in this logic. But two Infinities there cannot be. The Son, therefore, is the Father, and the Father the Son. God's justice is appeased by God's mercy;—God "sacrifices" God, for the sake of man. Thus the infinite "satisfaction" is accomplished; God has paid God the infinite ransom for the infinite sin; the "sacrifice" has been offered; the "atonement" completed; "we are bought with a price." As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Now, in the very teeth of logic, this system under consideration maintains that God did not thus purchase the redemption of *all*; for such "forgiveness" would ill comport with his dignity. Therefore certain "conditions" are to be complied with, before man is entitled to this salvation. God knew from all eternity who would be saved, and they are said to be "elected from before the foundation of the world" to eternal happiness. God is the cause of their compliance—for man has no free will,—hence foreordination; they are not saved by their own merit, but by Christ's,—hence "particular redemption;" having no will, they must be "called" and moved by God, and if elected, must come to him,—hence "effectual calling;" if to be saved, they must continue in "grace,"—hence the "perseverance of the saints." The salvation of the "elect," the damnation of the non-elect, is all effected by the "decrees of God," the "agency of the Holy Spirit," the "satisfaction of Christ;"—all is a work of "divine grace."

The doctrine of the "Trinity" has always been connected with this system. It does not embrace three Gods, as it has often been alleged, but one God in three persons,—as the Hindoos have one God in thirty millions of persons, and the Pantheists one God in all persons and all things. The Father sits on the throne of his glory; the Son, at his right hand, "intercedes" for man; the Holy Spirit "proceeds" from the Father and the Son, "calls" the saints, and makes them "persevere." This doctrine of the Trinity covers a truth, though it often conceals it. Its religious significance—the same with that of Polytheism—seems to be this: God does not limit himself within the unity of his essence, but incarnates himself in man,—hence the Son; diffuses himself in space and in spirit, works with men both to will and to do,—hence the Holy Ghost.—*Theodore Parker.*

THE SPIRITUALISTS.

"CHANGES are coming fast upon the world. In the violent struggles of opposite interests, the decaying prejudices that have bound men together in the old forms of society are snapping asunder, one after another. Must we look forward to a hopeless succession of evils, in which exasperated parties will be alternately victors and victims, till all sink under some one power, whose interest it is to preserve a quiet despotism? Who can hope for a better result, unless the great lesson be learnt, that there can be no essential improvement in the condition of society, without the improvement of men as moral and religious beings; and that this can be effected only by religious TRUTH? To expect this improvement from any form of false religion, because it is called religion, is as if, administering to one in a fever, we were to take some drug from an apothecary's shelves, satisfied with its being called medicine."—ANDREW NORTON: *Statement of Reasons, &c.*, Preface, p. xxii. xxxiii.

THIS party has an Idea wider and deeper than that of the Catholic or Protestant—namely, that "God still inspires men as much as ever; that He is immanent in spirit as in space." This relies on no church, tradition, or scripture, as the last ground and infallible rule; it counts these things teachers, if they teach, not masters—helps, if they help us, not authorities. It relies on the divine presence in the soul of man; the eternal Word of God, which is TRUTH, as it speaks through the faculties he has given. It believes that God is near the soul, as matter to the sense; thinks the canon of revelation not yet closed, nor God exhausted. It sees Him in Nature's perfect work; hears Him in all true scripture, Jewish or Phœnician; feels Him in the inspiration of the heart; stoops at the same fountain with Moses and Jesus, and is filled with living water. It calls God Father, not King; Christ brother, not Redeemer; heaven home; Religion nature. It loves and trusts, but does not fear. It sees, in Jesus, a man living manlike, highly gifted, and living with blameless and beautiful fidelity to God, stepping thousands of years before the race of man; the profoundest religious genius God has raised up; whose words and works help us to form and develop the native idea of a complete religious man. But he lived for himself; died for himself; worked out his own salvation—and we must do the same, for one man cannot live for another, more than he can eat or sleep for him. It is no personal Christ, but the Spirit of Wisdom, Holiness, Love, that creates the well-being of man; a life at one with God. The divine incarnation is in all mankind.

The aim it proposes is a complete union of man with God, till every action, thought, wish, feeling, is in perfect harmony with the Divine will. It makes Christianity not the point man goes through in his progress, as the Rationalist—not the point God goes through in his development, as the Supernaturalist; but ABSOLUTE RELIGION, the point where man's will and God's will are one and the same. Its SOURCE is absolute, its AIM absolute, its METHOD absolute. It lays down no creed, asks no symbol; reverences exclusively no time nor place, and therefore can use all time and every place. It reckons forms useful to such as they help; one man may commune with God through the bread and the wine, emblems of the body that was broke, and the blood that was shed in the cause of truth; another may hold communion through the moss and the violet, the mountain, the ocean, or the scripture of suns which God has writ in the sky—it does not make the means the end; it prizes the signification more than the sign. It knows nothing of that puerile distinction between Reason and Revelation; never finds the alleged contradiction between good sense and Religion. Its Temple is all space; its Shrine the good heart; its Creed all truth; its Ritual, works of love and utility; its Profession of faith a divine life—works without, faith within, love of God and man. It bids man do duty, and take what comes of it—grief or gladness. In every desert it opens fountains of living water; gives balm for every wound, a pillow in all tempests, tranquillity in each distress. It does good for goodness' sake; asks no pardon for its sins, but gladly serves out the time. It is meek and reverent of truth, but scorns all falsehood, though upheld by the ancient and honourable of the earth. It bows to no idols of wood or flesh, of gold or parchment, or spoken wind; neither Mammon, neither the Church, nor the Bible, nor yet Jesus, but God only. It takes all helps it can get; counts no good word profane, though a heathen spoke—no lie sacred, though the greatest prophet had said the word. Its redeemer is within—its salvation within, its heaven and its oracle of God. It falls back on perfect Religion; asks no more—is satisfied with no less. The personal Christ is its encouragement, for he reveals the possible of man. Its watchword is, BE PERFECT AS GOD. With its eye on the Infinite, it goes through the striving and the sleep of life; equal to duty, not above; fearing not whether the ephemeral wind blow east or west. It has the strength of the Hero, the tranquil sweetness of the Saint. It makes each man his own priest, but accepts gladly him that speaks a holy word. Its prayer in words, in works, in feeling, in thought, is this—**THEY WILL BE DONE!**—its Church that of all holy souls, the Church of the first-born, called by whatever name.

Let others judge the merits and defects of this scheme. It has never organized a church; yet in all ages, from the earliest, men have more or less freely set forth its doctrines. We find these men among the despised and forsaken; the world was not ready to receive them. They have been stoned and spat upon in all the streets of the world. The "pious" have burned them as haters of God and man; the "wicked" called them bad names and let them go. They have served to flesh the swords of the Catholic church, and feed the fires of the Protestant. But flame and steel will not consume them; the seed they have sown is quick in many a heart; their memory blessed by such as live divine. These were the men at whom the world opens wide the mouth, and draws out the tongue, and utters its impotent laugh; but they received the fire of God on their altar, and kept living its sacred flame. They go on the forlorn hope of the race; but Truth puts a wall of fire about them, and holds the shield over their head in the day of trouble. The battle of Truth seems often lost, but is always won. Her enemies but erect the bloody scaffolding where the workmen of God go up and down, and with divine hands build wiser than they know. When the scaffolding falls, the temple will appear.—
Theodore Parker.

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