

CHRISTIANITY:

Its Origin, Nature, and Influence.

By CHARLES WATTS

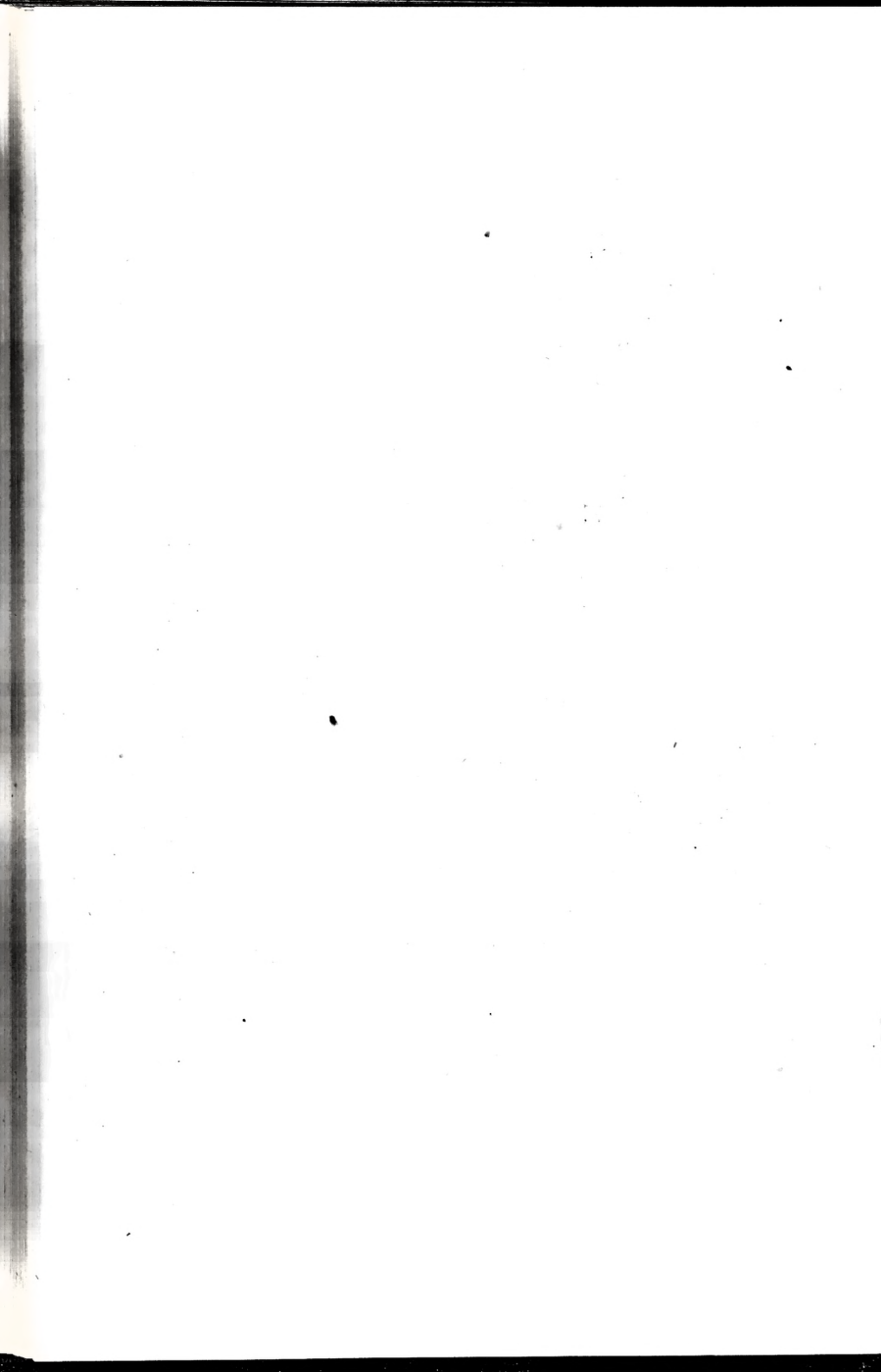
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Christianity of Human Origin—Not Original—Indefinite. Impracticable and Contradictory in its Nature—Its Influence Tested by History and the Admissions of Christian Writers.

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CHRISTIANITY:

ITS ORIGIN, NATURE, AND INFLUENCE.

“ To believe without evidence and demonstration is an act of ignorance and folly.”—*Volney*.

INTRODUCTION.

THE object of this pamphlet is to ascertain as far as possible what evidence and demonstration, if any, can be reasonably adduced in favour of the general orthodox claims relative to the Origin, Nature, and Influence of the Christian religion. In these days of avowed mental freedom and intellectual research, no apology should be needed for entering upon such an investigation. Systems or principles unable to withstand the test of fair examination are destitute of what should be one of their highest recommendations. Belief without critical examination has too often perpetuated error and fostered credulity. If Christianity be fallacious, why should not its fallacy be made known? If, however, it be true, its truth will be the more apparent as its claims are investigated and examined. Dr. Collyer observes, in his lectures on miracles, that “he who forbids you to reason on religious subjects, or to apply your understanding to the investigation of revealed truth, is insulting the character of God, as though his acts shrunk from scrutiny—is degrading his own powers, which are best employed when they are in pursuit of such sublime and interesting subjects.

There are three principal modes of criticising the modern Orthodox pretensions set forth on behalf of popular Christianity. First, it is alleged that such pretensions are entirely destitute of truth, and that they have been of no service whatever to mankind. This view I cannot thoroughly endorse. Many of the superstitions of the world have been allied with some fact, and have in their exercise upon the minds of a portion of their devotees served, for a time no doubt, a useful purpose. In the second place, certain opponents of Christianity regard it as being deserving of immediate extinction. This, in my opinion, is

unjust to its adherents, who have as much right to possess what they hold to be true as we have to entertain views which we believe to be correct. Theological faiths should be supplanted by intellectual growth, not crushed by dogmatic force. The third and, to my mind, the most sensible and fair mode of dealing with Christianity is to regard it as not being the only system of truth; as not being of any special origin; as being not suited to all minds; as having fulfilled its original purpose, and as having no claim of absolute domination. This appears to me to be the true position of Secularism towards popular orthodoxy. Such a position is based upon the voice of history, the law of mental science, and the philosophy of true liberty of thought. We should in all our endeavours seek to gain as far as possible that which is useful unaccompanied with that which has become useless.

To the impartial student of history and to the keen observer of the development of the human mind, it is apparent that systems are frequently deprived of much of their real value through the injudicious conduct of their expounders and defenders. Such persons are not contented to allow their theories to stand upon their own legitimate merits, but they deem it necessary to add thereto claims which are most extravagant, and which have no necessary connection with the systems advocated. The result of such a policy is that fictitious surroundings frequently obscure the real nature and scope of the principles advocated. This is particularly the case with subjects of a theological character. The religious enthusiast, whose emotion too frequently gets the better of his reason, is apt to indulge in certain delusions until, in time, they appear to him realities. The Rev. James Cranbrook no doubt recognised this when, referring to Jesus in the preface of his work, "The Founders of Christianity," (page v.) he observed: "Our idealizations have invested him [Christ] with a halo of spiritual glory that, by the intensity of its brightness, conceals from us the real figure presented in the Gospels. We see him, not as he is described, but as the ideally perfect man our fancies have conceived."

As with Christ so with Orthodox Christianity. The most wild, absurd and fallacious pretensions are put forth on its behalf. Instead of regarding the Christian faith as an outgrowth of the human mind, a combination of truth and error, born amidst limited knowledge and unlimited superstition, the majority of Orthodox Christians allege that their system emanated direct from what is termed a divine source; that it is unique in its nature, unequalled in its influence for

good and that it really ushered into the world the greatest civilization ever known to the human race. These theological extremists not only ignore all in society that is evil and defective as belonging to their system, but they credit Christianity with all improvements which have taken place in modern times. It matters not whether it be a steam engine, an electric telegraph, a printing press, the telephone, the extension of political rights, the existence of benevolent and health restoring institutions, the marked improvement of the physical condition of the people, the increased facilities for the education of the young, the elevating and improved status of women, the promotion of sobriety and even the lessening of persecution for the rejection of creeds and dogmas; all these indications of modern progress are credited to the Christian faith. Moreover, it is said with a grave absence of modesty and an utter disregard of accuracy, that high-toned morality, a correct sense of duty, a clear perception of truth and the cultivation of the loftiest aspirations, are all the result of the advent of Jesus of Nazareth.

In vain do we remind these reckless claimants that the principal factors that operated in the establishment of the reforms that now surround us, were science, education, an extended freedom of the press, international and commercial intercourse, and the exercise of mechanical genius, allied with mental liberty. These agencies of individual and national progress did not exist in the palmy days of Church supremacy, and they have been secured in spite of the unprincipled and persistent opposition of the ecclesiastical party. Why is it, if orthodoxy is so potent for good in these directions, that during centuries of its absolute reign it failed to give the world those measures of reform, which have since been won through secular effort? Is it not a fact that, after a long and fair trial, with everything in its favour, the Church has proved incapable of securing the correct remedy for such evils as drunkenness, social injustice and the withholding from woman her proper position in the body politic? Organizations of a secular character have now to be formed to accomplish that which theology, with all its power, proved itself impotent to achieve. The Christian is also reminded that truth, benevolence, justice, a noble sense of right and all the higher virtues that adorn mankind, have been found, at least, as highly developed among those who are termed the men of the world as among those who profess the Christian faith.

That this is so is plainly admitted even by high dignitaries of the Church. Archbishop Whateley, in his "Lectures on Political Economy," remarks: "I have said that the object of the Scriptures is to reveal to us religious and moral truths; but even this, as far as regards the latter, must be admitted with considerable modification. God has *not* revealed to us a system of morality such as would have been needed for beings who had *no other means* of distinguishing right and wrong. On the contrary, the inculcation of virtue, and reprobation of vice in Scripture, are in such a tone as seems to pre-suppose a *natural* power or a capacity for acquiring the power to distinguish them." And Dr. Chalmers, in concluding his sermon on Morality, states: "We are put upon a cool exercise of the understanding, and we cannot close it against the fact that all these feelings [those of charity and virtue] may exist apart from the love of God, and apart from the religious principle—that the idea of a God may be expunged from the heart of man, and yet that heart be still the seat of the same constitutional impulse as ever—that in reference to the realities of the unseen, the mind may be a blank, and at the same time there may be room for the play of kindly emotions."

It is conceded frankly by the present writer, that what is supposed to be understood by the very latitudinarian term Christianity is not entirely destitute of truth, and that many of its professors are honest and sincere workers for the common good. All systems being the outcome of human aspirations, contain features good and commendable, for human nature is not totally depraved. The good and useful work, however, performed by professing Christians is not the result of their faith, but rather the necessary consequence of their well-trained and well-developed organizations. Some natures are too pure to be influenced in their general conduct by any theology. As it was with the Romans so it is with the Christians of to-day, their Christianity rests but slightly upon them.

In all our investigations, the desire to arrive at truth should be paramount. No apprehension should be entertained that the result of our enquiries may be unfavourable to the claims of any particular faith, but the one desire and determination should be to accept the verdict of facts. Feeling ought to yield to argument, and traditional belief to the force of historical and general accuracy. Suppose, in the examination of the origin, nature, and influence of Christianity, it

should be demonstrated that it is not divine, unique and pre-eminently useful to man, would that deprive it of its intrinsic worth? Certainly not. Truth is valuable regardless of its source. That which is based upon verities and adapted to meet the requirements of human nature should be recognized, whether it emanate from Pagan or Christian, Jew or Gentile, the devout Believer or the honest Sceptic.

ITS ORIGIN.

Professing Christians not only allege that their faith is of divine origin, but they contend that those who question the correctness of such an allegation are logically compelled to show how it could have been produced by human means. It will not be difficult to demonstrate that the allegation is utterly groundless, and that the contention is evidently unreasonable.

From experience we learn that systems emanate from the human mind, but the same monitor does not teach us that systems arise from what is termed a "divine" source. Besides, what does this word "divine" really mean? Has it ever been adequately defined? Is it not simply an expression used to represent a notion acquired through orthodox training? What knowledge do we possess to enable us to distinguish the "divine," supposing it to exist, from the human? Being ignorant of anything beyond the natural, is it not presumptuous to ascribe a system or a principle to that of which we know nothing? Christians agree in regarding other religions than their own as being of human origin; why, then, should their faith be an exception? Has Christianity anything to recommend it that the many other religious theories do not claim? Miraculous power, sublime teachings, supernatural doctrines, progressive aspirations, are claimed on behalf of systems distant from Christianity.

Supposing, however, that the human origin of the Christian faith could not be satisfactorily established, would it necessarily follow that its origin was supernatural? Certainly not. If we question its "divine" claims, we are not, therefore, bound to account for its existence. To doubt the validity of one theory does not make it a logical necessity that we should assume the responsibility of inventing another. This is particularly so in reference to Christianity. So uncertain is the period when it first appeared in the world, so doubtful are the records said to obtain in its early history, so corrupted have been the channels through which that history has been traced, and so imperfect and contradictory are its credentials that we now have, that

it is impossible to judge with sufficient accuracy the precise mode of its introduction. Hence the presumption of those who profess to have that knowledge. When Christians ascribe their faith to one cause, and that cause supernatural, upon them devolves the duty of proving their position. Secularists regard Christianity as being the outgrowth of the human mind, and consider there is nothing more marvellous in its origin and progress than pertains to other religions. The divine origin of Buddhism and Mohammedanism is denied by Christians: are they prepared to give a satisfactory account of the introduction and growth of those religions? Why should Christians demand in regard to their faith what they are unable to perform in connection with theological systems to which they are opposed? The claim of the followers of Christ on behalf of the origin of their religion is opposed to analogy, reason and experience. "It is surely therefore," observes the Rev. James Cranbrook, "an absurdity to say that until we can account for the origin of Christianity by some other means, seeing it is established, we are bound to accept it as true, and its advocates are not bound to adduce any positive evidence in its support. I venture to lay it down as a canon of both logic and rhetoric, in opposition to the authority of Archbishop Whately, that every one who makes a positive affirmation is bound to furnish the reasons for such an affirmation before he demands the belief of others."

It is a fallacy to suppose that Christianity was an entirely new system, introduced into the world at one particular date. Great changes—either of a theological, social, or political character—are not the sudden product of any one period, but rather the gradual growth of time. The religious phases that came to the front during the time Christ is supposed to have lived, were but a further development of a law that had been manifesting itself in previous ages, and that has continued to still further unfold itself down to the present time. Prior to the advent of the Jewish Reformer, a mighty struggle had been going on between philosophy and superstition, and between polytheism and monotheism. The polytheistic form of supernaturalism was losing its hold upon the human mind. Its decay, however, was not in consequence of the adoption of Christianity, inasmuch as its decline had commenced before the new faith had dawned. Lewes, in his "History of Philosophy," says that "the progress of Polytheism to Monotheism was a continuous development" This is true. And that

development was exceedingly rapid during the struggles of the Greek philosophy. It was, intimates the above writer, "Greek philosophy that opened men's eyes to human duty." We have no right, therefore, to infer that, if Christ had not appeared, Paganism would have remained the prevailing theology. Instead of Christianity causing its downfall, as frequently asserted, the Galilean religion really retained many of the Pagan follies, some of which are to this day practised in the Christian Church. "It may with reason be doubted, if the fact is as often remembered as it should be, that Christianity arose amid the corruption and decay of the greatest civilization which the human race had seen amid the death-throes of the ancient world. . . . It is often assumed that this proud heathenism and pagan glory were overthrown by the meek and unlearned disciples of the Galilean prophet of God. Nothing can be less true than this assumption . . . The fall of the Empire, including the loss and ruin of the old philosophy and knowledge, was an indispensable condition of the spread of Christianity. . . . The birth of Christianity being on this wise, *viz.*: having taken place in an era of decay and death of art and philosophy, of knowledge, of wealth, of population, of progress, in every form; and the absence of these things having been one of the chief negative conditions of its growth and prosperity, we must look for the sources of its nourishment in another direction than these; *not* in knowledge or the eager questioning spirit which leads to knowledge, *but* in the humble spirit which believes and accepts on trust the word of authority; *not* in regulated industry, which aims at constant increase and accumulation of wealth; *but* in the resigned poverty, which, scorning this world, lays up riches in heaven; *not* in political freedom and popular government which aims at the progressive well-being of all, *but* in the stern rigour of arbitrary power, which coerces the vicious and refractory into a little order during their brief sojourn on earth. In the decline and fall of Rome, or as it would be better to say, in the final ruin of ancient civilization, the conditions favourable to this order of beliefs or doctrines, spontaneously emerged." (Morrisson's "Service of Man," pp. 174-5, 178-9). The fact is "Christianity was only a slight modification of systems already existing—a modification determined by the combined action and concentration of all the divergent lines of thought and feeling. Only ignorance can look upon it as a something so original, so unique, so different from all that was,

or ever had been, that nothing but the supposition of supernatural interference could explain it. Christianity is accounted for by the tendencies of thought in the age in which it was born."

No one who has carefully and impartially read the histories of the ancient religions and ethical systems, will contend that the principal doctrines and moral teachings of the New Testament were known for the first time in their connection with Christianity. The able American writer, Charles B. Waite, M.A., in his "History of the Christian Religion," says, "Many of the more prominent doctrines of the Christian Religion prevailed among nations of antiquity, hundreds—and in some instances, thousands of years before Christ." Judge Strange, in his great work, "The Sources and Development of Christianity," shows that nearly all the Christian doctrines—the Atonement, Trinity, Incarnation, Judgment of the Dead, Immortality, Sacrifice—were of Egyptian origin, and, therefore, existed long before the time of Christ. The sameable writer, on page 100 of the work mentioned, says : "Christianity, it is thus apparent, was not the result of a special revelation from above, but the growth of circumstances, and developed out of the materials, working in a natural manner in the human mind, in the place and at the time that the movement occurred."

In reference to the moral teachings of the New Testament, those of them capable of being practically carried out were borrowed from men who lived long anterior to the Christian Era, and who wrote without the aid of Christian inspiration. "To the truths already uttered in the Athenian prison," says Mackay, "Christianity added little or nothing, except a few symbols which, though well calculated for popular acceptance, are more likely to perplex than to instruct, and offer the best opportunity for priestly mystification." Sir William Jones, in his tenth discourse before the Asiatic Society, says "Christianity has no need of such aids as many are willing to give it, by asserting that the wisest men of the world were ignorant of the great maxim, that we should act in respect to others as we would wish them to act in respect of ourselves, as the rule is implied in a speech of Lysias, expressed in distinct phrases by Thales and Pittacus, and I have seen it word for word in the original of Confucius." And the Rev. Dr. George Matheson, in his lecture on "The Religions of China," page 84, observes : "The glory of Christian morality is that it is not original." Thus it is that Christianity is composed of materials born of the human

mind at different periods, and in various countries in the ancient and modern world.

While it may be difficult to name the exact *when* and *how* Christianity was ushered into the world, it is not difficult to indicate circumstances of a human character that in all probability favoured its introduction.

Orthodox Christianity essentially appeals to the "poor in spirit;" for the self-reliant it has but little charm. At the time when Christ is supposed to have lived, the people were longing for the appearance of some one, either to console them in their misfortunes, or to deliver them from their state of submission; at a time when one of the most splendid, though imperfect civilizations the world had ever beheld had reached its climax. The majority of the subject races under the Roman Empire were slaves. Many of them who had been brave in their freedom had become, as the result of their captivity, enervated and degenerate. The Jews, to whom Christ is said first to have appeared, had their national spirit nearly crushed out. They had been for a century under the Roman yoke, and previous to that subjection, the unfortunate subjects of equally as cruel conquerors. In Christ's time the descendants of Abraham had lost all prospect of earthly success. Embittered by disappointment and wearied by persecution, they were prepared to accept any change which they thought would remove them from their unfortunate condition. The Jews were a people who had been robbed of their independence; whose manhood was gone, reduced to a state of physical dependency and mental poverty, they were taught by Christ that this world is not the place of God's final government. While on earth God's people are persecuted by way of trial and purification. But consolation is given in the hope that the "light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This was virtually the language of Christ to a ruined nation and a forlorn people. The alleged founder of Christianity also urged upon his credulous hearers that the end of the world was at hand; that their existence on earth was nearly over, and, if they accepted his faith, they should not only have houses and lands during their brief stay here, but happiness and immortality hereafter. So impressed were the early Christians with the idea of the speedy destruction of the world, that they disregarded the duties of this life. "They were dead," says Gibbon, "to the business and pleasures of the world." It must be remembered, moreover,

that the primitive Christians were composed of the ignorant, superstitious and servile classes of society; persons whom the above teachings were just calculated to captivate. Mosheim writes that "among the first professors of Christianity there were but few men of learning, few who had capacity enough to insinuate into the minds of a gross and ignorant multitude the knowledge of divine things." It appears that the early teachers of Christianity were as uneducated as the "ignorant multitude" to whom they preached. "We may here remark," says the historian just mentioned, "in general that these Apostolic Fathers and the other writers, who in the infancy of the Church employed their pens in the cause of Christianity, were neither remarkable for their learning nor for their eloquence. On the contrary, they express the most pious and admirable sentiments in the plainest and most illiterate style." The author of "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" records that "the new sect of Christians was almost entirely composed of the dregs of the populace, of peasants and mechanics, of boys and women, of beggars and slaves." Again, noticing the reproach that "the Christians allured into their party the most atrocious criminals," Gibbon quaintly observes, "the friends of Christianity may acknowledge without a blush, that many of the most eminent saints had been before their baptism the most abandoned sinners."

Thus it will be seen that the natural conditions of society two thousand years ago were such as to render possible the reception of Christianity without the intervention of any alleged supernatural power. This will appear the more apparent when it is remembered that at that period Rome was remarkably tolerant to all new religions. Chambers, in his "History of Rome," states, "One good quality they (the Romans) pre-eminently exhibited; namely, the toleration of other forms and rituals than their own, no matter whether exhibited at home or in the countries they conquered." "Each nation," says Mosheim, "suffered its neighbours to follow their own method of worship, to adore their own Gods, to enjoy their own rites and ceremonies, and discovered no sort of displeasure at their diversity of sentiments in religious matters. . . . The Romans exercised this toleration in the amplest manner." Gibbon also states, "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, and by the magistrate as equally useful." That the Christians were persecuted by

the Romans cannot be denied, but the cause of that persecution was not the mere profession of their faith so much as the fact of their meeting in secret, and, as it was thought, conspiring against the State. Renan, in his "Hilbert Lectures," says, "Before Constantine, we search in vain in Roman law for any enactment against Freethought."

Remembering these general existing conditions, the means employed to introduce Christianity must not be overlooked in considering its origin. Among such means were those of the promises of earthly rewards, heavenly joys, and the practising of fraud and deceit. To a poor and dependent people Jesus said: "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." (Mark x. 29, 30.) In fact, "Peter said unto him [Christ], Behold we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel". (Matt. xix. 27, 28.) The first Christian emperor, according to Gibbon, offered bribes of garments and gold to those who would embrace the Christian faith. ("Decline and Fall," vol. 11, pp. 472, 473.) With such inducements as these, it would not be difficult, even in "this enlightened age," to secure converts to the most absurd faith. To these allurements must be added the powerful factors, in a period of credulity and unsurpassed ignorance and fear, of fraud and deceit. Mosheim says it was "held as a maxim that it was not only lawful, but praiseworthy to *deceive* and even to use the expedient of a *lie*, in order to advance the cause of truth and piety . . . it cannot be affirmed that even true Christians were entirely innocent and irreproachable in this matter . . . they who were desirous of surpassing all others in piety, looked upon it as lawful, and even laudable, to advance the cause of piety by artifice and fraud." ("Ecclesiastical History," vol. 1, pp. 55-77). In the fourth century, Lactantius exclaimed, "Among those who seek power and gain there will never be wanting an inclination to forge a lie for it." (Middleton's "Letters from Rome.") Gregory says, "A little jargon is all that is necessary to impose upon the people. The less they comprehend, the more they admire."

Another circumstance attending the introduction of Christianity is, that its early adherents retained many of the principal features of the Buddhists and the Essenes. Max Muller remarks, "Between the language of Buddha and his disciples, and the language of Christ and his apostles there are strange coincidences. Even some of the Buddhist legends and parables sound as if taken from the New Testament, though we know that many of them existed before the beginning of the Christian era." ("Science of Religion," p. 113.) Professor Beal observes, "The points of agreement between the two are remarkable. All the evidence we have goes to prove that the teachings of Buddha were known in the East centuries before Christ." ("History of Buddhism.") It is worthy of note that the claims now set up on behalf of Christ are very similar to those which were urged in the interest of Buddha. Self-assertion, "I am the light of the world;" self-assumption, "unequaled in perfection," being "without sin;" the possession of purity and great personal influence are features ascribed to Buddha as well as to Christ. Thus, as an eminent writer observes, "the history of Jesus of Nazareth as related in the books of the New Testament, is simply a copy of that of Buddha, with a mixture of mythology borrowed from other nations."

If possible, a more striking resemblance exists between the teachings of the Essenes and those of the four gospels. In fact, Dr. Ginsburg considers there is no doubt that Christ belonged to the sect of the Essenes. The reader is referred to Bunsen's "Angel Messiah," and to Judge Strange's "Sources and Development of Christianity" for detailed proof in favour of Dr. Ginsburg's position. We give the following from Mrs. Besant, as showing how the teachings of Christianity correspond with those of the Essenes: "It is to Josephus that we must turn for an account of the Essenes; a brief sketch of them is given in 'Antiquities of the Jews,' bk. xviii., chap. 1. He says: 'The doctrine of the Essenes is this: That all things are best ascribed to God. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves; yet is their course of life better than that of other men; and they entirely addict themselves to

husbandry.' They had all things in common, did not marry and kept no servants, thus none called any master (Matt. xxiii. 8, 10). In the 'Wars of the Jews,' bk. ii., chap. viii., Josephus gives us a fuller account. 'There are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of whom are the Pharisees; of the second the Sadduces; and the third sect, who pretend to a severer discipline, are called Essenes. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects [John xiii. 35]. The Essenes reject pleasure as an evil [Matt. xvi. 24], but esteem continence and the conquest over our passions to be virtue. They neglect wedlock. . . . They do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage [Matt. xix. 12, last clause of verse. 1 Cor. vii. 27, 28, 32-35, 37, 38, 40]. . . . These men are despisers of riches [Matt. xix. 21, 53, 24] . . . it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order [Acts iv. 32-37, v. 1-11]. . . . They also have stewards appointed to take care of their common affairs [Acts vi. 1-6]. . . . If any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own [Matt. x. 11]. . . . For which reason they carry nothing with them when they travel into remote parts [Matt. x. 9, 10]. . . . As for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary; for before sunrising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which they have received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising [the Essenes were then sun worshippers]. . . . A priest says grace before meat; and it is unlawful for anyone to taste of the food before grace be said. The same priest, when he hath dined, says grace again after meat; and when they begin, and when they end, they praise God, as he that bestows their food upon them [Eph. v. 18-20, 1 Cor. x. 30, 31, 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5]. . . . They dispense their anger after a just manner, and restrain their passion [Eph. iv. 26]. . . . Whatsoever they say also is firmer than an oath; but swearing is avoided by them, and they esteem it worse than perjury; for they say, that he who cannot be believed without swearing by God, is already condemned [Matt. v. 34-37].'" ("Freethinker's Text Book," part 2, pp. 387-8).

It is a common error existing among orthodox professors, that what is termed Christianity originated with Christ, eighteen hundred years ago, in Palestine. The fact is, no date or country can be definitely

fixed as being the time and place of the birth of what is now called the Christian faith. The elements of which the doctrines and general teachings of the orthodox Church are composed can be found in works written long anterior to the Christian era. Even Eusebius, the "father of ecclesiastical history," admits that the Christian religion was not new. He says: "Its principles have not been recently invented, but were established, we may say, by the Deity, from the very origin of our race. . . . It is evident that the religion delivered to us is not a new or strange doctrine; but, if the truth must be spoken, it is the first and only true religion." The most, therefore, that can be said with any degree of accuracy is, that a man, named Jesus, and his followers perpetuated portions of pre-existing systems under another name. But even this allegation is, according to some writers, open to grave doubts. Still, as there is nothing remarkable in the event, if true, it may be taken, in the present writer's opinion, as granted, because it in no way makes the assumption of the "divine" origin of Christianity a necessity.

If the above circumstances fail to satisfy the orthodox believer as to the human origin of his faith, let him ask himself the question, what are the difficulties attending his assumption of its "divine" origin? If this divinity involves all-wisdom, all-power and all-goodness, then the objections to the assumption that Christianity came from such a source are strong indeed. (1) Why was its advent so long delayed? If it were superior to anything previously existing, and God knowing this, and yet withholding it from the world until about two thousand years ago, while having the power to give it at any moment, must not this delay militate against his all-goodness? (2) When Christianity did appear, how did its slow progress at first harmonise with the theory of the infinite power of its reputed author? And further, why, when it did advance, was it dependent upon acknowledged human conditions for its success or otherwise? (3) Why, if its author were so good, pure, and spotless, was its advent associated with fraud, deception, and falsehood? (4) Why, if the Christian system were supremely true, were heretical writings of the early centuries destroyed by the special mandate of the Church? (5) Why, when Christ introduced his system, was it silent upon the three great evils of his time, namely, poverty, slavery, and mental submission? Moreover, how is it that, instead of correcting the errors of his day

—such as belief in the possession of devils, and in the then immediate end of the world—Christ made the mistake of sharing that belief himself? (6) Finally, is it not remarkable, upon the supposition that Christianity had for its origin an Infinite Being, that after nearly two thousand years, it has only been heard of by one third of the human race? If God is all-wise, he must know of this limited knowledge; if he be all-powerful, he could make the knowledge universal; if he were all-good, it is only reasonable to suppose that he would have done so. But he has not; we, therefore, arrive at the conclusion that Christianity, like other religions, was simply the outcome of the human mind, at a period when ignorance was the rule and knowledge the exception. Our duty, therefore, should be to value it for whatever intrinsic value it has, and not to accept it merely on account of an imaginary supernatural origin.

ITS NATURE.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY is thoroughly indefinite, impracticable and contradictory in its nature. No system was ever less rigid and more plastic. It has certainly come up to the intimation of St. Paul, "to be all things to all men." Persons of the most contrary dispositions and the most opposite natures have been its great illustrators, expounders, and living representatives. It has found room for all temperaments and for the most diversified classes of believers: the ascetic and the luxurious enjoyer of life; the man of action and the man of contemplation; the monk and the king; the philanthropist and the destroyer of his race; the iconoclastic hater of all ceremonies, and the superstitious devotee; Cromwell and Cowper; Lyell and Wesley; Luther and Dr. Pusey; John Milton and C. H. Spurgeon; Talmage and Beecher; Catholics and Protestants; Quakers and Salvationists; Trinitarians and Unitarians; believers in Free Grace and devotees of Predestination. All these and many other similar opposites have found refuge within the pale of Christianity. But it should be distinctly understood that this heterogeneous family is by no means the result of any all-embracing comprehensiveness in the system of Christ, but rather the effects of a Theology characterised alike by its indefinite, impracticable, incomplete, and undecisive principles.

It is these peculiar features in Christianity that have deprived it of a consistent and uniform history, and that have made its influence on

the human mind so conflicting and so destitute of the power of producing uniformity of action or belief. Hence, the varied and contradictory phases through which Christianity has passed since its inception. Those who are acquainted with its early history will know that the faith of Jesus as he preached it, and the faith of the Christians to-day, are two entirely different things. Even if we accept the alleged dates of Christian chronology to be historically correct, Christianity was altered and modified immediately after the death of Christ. The Christianity of Paul was widely different from that of his Master. The character of Christ was submissive and servile; Paul's was defiant and pugnacious. We could no more conceive Christ fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus, than we could suppose Paul submitting, without protest or resistance, to those insults and indignities which are alleged to have been heaped upon Christ. Neither could we for one moment imagine Paul advising his disciples when anyone smote them on one cheek, to offer them the other. Paul introduced, by his personal character, a certain amount of boldness and energy into the Christian propaganda, and, by the character of his mind, he largely modified the Christian system. In fact, each successive age has left its mark and impress upon Christianity. We have had the age of asceticism and the ceremonial age, when the nightmare of theology cursed the world with its indifference, its neglect, its mental darkness, and its immoral corruptions. This unfortunate period was followed by Protestantism and subsequently by Rationalism, which ushered in the age of reason and mental activity. This new birth, or rather resuscitation of a force that had been rendered for a time dormant by the Church, deprived the faith of its original character, leaving but a little more than the name to represent the Cross. "Real Christianity has not ruled the nations. It is disregarded in law, in equity, in the social adjustments, in commercial systems, in regulations concerning land, in the rules of peace and brotherhood, and, alas, in much of the life of the churches. . . . English hypocrisy is a tremendous reality; but English Christianity is very largely a myth, if judged by the standard of the New Testament." ("Christian Commonwealth," May 1, 1884.)

A similar diversity of character and influence is apparent in what are termed Christian nations. There is no country existing that can truly be called Christian, that is, where the teachings of the New Testament are practically and consistently carried out. In all alleged

“Christian nations” the faith differs in its manifestations, presenting not the emblems of the religion ascribed to Christ, but the impress of the national customs and characteristics of the people who profess it. Thus, in Rome, Christianity assumes the form of priestly dominion, in Spain a blind and stationary faith, in Russia a political engine of heartless oppression and revolting despotism, in Scotland a gloomy nightmare, in England an emotional pastime, in America a commercial commodity, and in Canada a hypocritical, puritanical pretension. In most of these countries the Christian religion is only a profession of a shallow garb of respectability, which is composed of custom and a desire to gain popular favour. The shadow is there, but the substance is nowhere to be found. True, these professors attend church on Sundays, and, to outward appearances, assume an air of solemnity, seeking to convey the impression that they are devout worshippers of the “Heavenly Father,” and that they have absolute confidence in his “Son, as the Saviour of the world.” But what is the conduct of such devotees in their daily lives, and in their commercial pursuits? Do they even attempt to embody in their conduct during the week the requirements which they endorse as belonging to their faith? Certainly not. In their business transactions, practically, money is their God, and the Almighty dollar is their Redeemer.

The utter impracticability of orthodox Christianity is not only proved by the indefinite nature of its teachings and the inconsistent conduct of its professors, but it is clearly demonstrated by the character of its leading injunctions. Among the more prominent principles taught in the New Testament are: Asceticism, Disregard of the world, Non-resistance, Reliance on alleged Supernaturalism, Belief in the efficacy of prayer, and Glorification of poverty. Moreover, many of the more emphatically expressed injunctions of this book are the very incarnation and inculcation of humiliating forbearance and abject suffering. They teach submission to physical evil, tyranny and oppression. They inculcate an unprogressive and a retarding spirit; they draw the energies and desires of men from the duties of this life, fixing them on an uncertain, and, to us, an unknown future. The primary object of Christ evidently was to teach his followers how to die, rather than to instruct them how to live. He regarded man as an alien in this world. Anything like a triumph of moral good over evil by human means; anything like an escape from the pangs of poverty; anything like a

successful insurrection of right which should produce the dethronement of might, as being possible on earth, appears not to have crossed the horizon of the mental vision of Christ. He contemplated suffering, oppression, and submission in this life, as pre-ordained and inevitable; and taught those who were persecuted and reviled, that great would be their reward in heaven. The philosophy of Jesus was contentment with whatsoever state of life you may be in; for "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark viii. 36.) "My kingdom," said Christ, "is not of this world." (John xviii. 36.) In vain, therefore, do we look to his teachings for any practical guidance and support in the stern battle of life. His advice to those struggling for mere human existence, was "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [food, clothes, etc.] shall be added unto you." (Matt. vi. 33.) What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark xi. 24.) "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done." (Matt. xviii. 19.) This faith in another life was with him the "one thing needful," and to it every plan of secular reform, however necessary, judicious, and effectual, had to give way. It is clear from the very nature of these New Testament precepts that all the improvements, social and political, scientific and artistic, commercial and mechanical, which have been made in the world since the birth of Christianity, must have been obtained in spite of it, not because of it; they have been wrought by the spirit of Secularism ever struggling, and in recent times with ever-growing success, against the spirit of dogmatic religion.

With Christ, this life and this world were comparatively of little importance; their enjoyments and treasures were, to him, baits and snares of the Devil. Therefore we read, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." (John xii. 25.) And again, "I pray not for the world; but for them which thou hast given me; for they are mine. . . . They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John xvii. 9, 16.) Therefore he said, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . . Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." (Matt. 6: 25, 34.)

In vain do we look among any of the professed Christians for any serious attempt to reduce these teachings into practice. They regulate neither their public nor their private lives by the injunctions here set forth. The sayings ascribed to Christ are modified and divested of their legitimate meaning, in order that they may be made to harmonise with human feelings. Who could obey that unnatural command given by Jesus in reply to one who solicited permission to bury his father?—"Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." Were a person to adopt this advice to day, he would justly be condemned as being destitute of all true natural feeling, and as lacking a due regard for the tenderest and most sublime affection of human nature. Supposing we were to adopt the counsel given by Christ, and take no thought for the morrow, what would become of the advantages of all modern scientific discoveries? Clearly it was not by Christian principles that the reformers of the world were prompted to introduce those useful movements, which to-day are so extensively appreciated. Had they loved not the world, and had they been careful of nothing pertaining thereto, as advised in Scripture, civilization would have received but little assistance from them. "Take no thought for your life!" If we obeyed this command, medical science and physiological discoveries would be utterly useless. In counselling this indifference, Christ showed that he had much to learn as to the real nature, wants, and duties of man. Can a consistent Christian rebel against even the most atrocious tyranny, or fight in even the most righteous cause? If he be true to his principles, he must obey the commands, "Resist not evil," and "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Were it possible to induce men to carry out what is here advised, a weapon would thereby be placed in the hands of the tyrant, which doubtless he would use to a terrible extent upon his victims. It is only necessary to send forth the priests to teach the commands of Christ to the unfortunate dupes and slaves of any despot, and if the teachings are accepted as true and acted upon, they will prove a potent agency in prolonging despotism, serfdom, and physical coercion. None are more ready than tyrants to perceive that faith is a stronger prison than a fortress, and that the Bible is a more effectual assistance than an

army, in subjugating and enslaving the minds and bodies of their people. But even if it were practicable to obey these precepts of non-resistance, the obedience would, in many cases, be most unmanly and immoral. Resistance is not revenge; to allow, therefore, all evil to exist with impunity, is to offer a premium for the greatest wrongs that ever afflicted mankind. Had George Washington, Hampden, Mazzini, Kosuth, Garibaldi and other brave reformers been content as the Bible teaches, to obey the powers that be, and to "resist not evil," they would never have rebelled against oppression, and fought, as they did, for social rights and political emancipation. Had they been consistent orthodox Christians, they would not have produced those glorious revolutions, which have dethroned corrupt kings, and secured individual and national liberty.

Progressive nations have always, in fact if not in theory, based their political and social policy on principles the very antitheses to those of the New Testament. Post office savings' banks, divorce courts, armies of defence, are opposed to "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth." "What therefore God has joined together let no man put asunder," and, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away," does not harmonise with our present law, which authorises the policeman to take under his special care those who are affording an opportunity for this precept to be put into practice. Besides, such conduct is only fostering that reckless and mendicant spirit so often recommended by the churches, but which should be judiciously discountenanced by all noble-minded men and women.

Among the general teachings of Christianity which cannot be relied upon, are those which encourage and crown with special sanctity suffering and sorrow. Not only are those who mourn blessed, but we are told that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain," that "those light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Christians profess to believe that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in the future." Hence the exclamation, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan ear-

nestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." Who can rely upon this gloomy estimate of the world and human life? To do so would be to blaspheme humanity, and to reject the happiness and joy which nature bestows upon her honest and dutiful children. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" is a sad sentiment. If there be a heaven, it should be the appropriate possession of the rich in spirit. Abundance, enthusiasm, and heroism of spirit are the highest conditions of man. Poverty of spirit is not by any means celestial or to be admired. A man in such a state is either contemptible or pitiable, and in either case, relief from it is a consummation devoutly to be wished. To assure people that at the last day they will have to give an account of every idle word spoken through life, is not to enhance their pleasure. Need we wonder that some Christians confess to be "miserable sinners," if they honestly believe that their final doom may depend upon words spoken in the jubilant moments of life.

Until orthodox Christians can prove to us that their principles are capable of producing uniformity of character; until it is satisfactorily explained that the precepts, as propounded by Christ, contain the elements of that greatness which has invariably characterised the lives of eminent statesmen, philosophers, and poets of all ages; until it can be shown that the principles as taught in the New Testament are compatible with progress and human advancement; until the course pursued by Christ, when he was on earth, is adopted by his professed followers of to-day; until poverty is preferred to riches by the members of the various churches; until humility has taken the place of pride; and self-sacrifice to that of personal gain; until sincerity and consistency supplant that hypocrisy and cant, which are now so prominent in the domain of theology; until peace, love, and harmony shall reign in "Christian nations" instead of war, hatred, and discord; until prayer, as a means of help, is in reality preferred to reliance on secular effort; until the poor are treated as being genuine brothers of the "one fold;" until, in commercial activity and domestic arrangements, the affairs of this world are considered as being of secondary importance to the preparation for some other state of existence; until all these things are realities and not mere pretences, orthodox Christianity must be deemed thoroughly impracticable in its nature, and incapable of furnishing a code of morals by which all succeeding

generations should be governed, and to which the great intellects of the world should succumb.

The contradictory nature of orthodox teaching is another of its striking features. The New Testament does not present one definite system, but fragmentary records of conflicting theological views, which were numerous during the early Christian era. Not to notice the self-contradictory teachings of the first three Evangelists, the gospel ascribed to St. John is quite antagonistic in its doctrines and precepts to the synoptic gospels. Hence it is that among different people in different ages various Christian sects opposed to each other have arisen with systems of their own, for which they each claim Christian authority. The belief that Christ was a real existence, was born of a virgin, was crucified, that he rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, is at the present day considered by the orthodox church as being necessary to the Christian profession ; but during the first and second centuries each of these teachings was rejected by sections of the church. Many of the fundamental doctrines of the Christianity of the present age, such as the Trinity, fall of man, original sin, atonement, mediation and intercession of Christ, are alleged by some theological writers not to be Christian doctrines at all, having no sanction in the New Testament ; while the orthodox party allege that to believe them is essential to secure happiness hereafter. So conflicting are the leading principles of the Christian faith, that they are rendered almost valueless as rules to regulate general conduct. For instance, it is of no avail to urge that Christianity is a religion of love, while Christ affirms that no man can become a disciple unless he hates his own flesh and blood. Even admitting, as it is sometimes contended, that the word "hate" here means "love less," the statement is still objectionable. Can we really love one of whom we know nothing (whatever we may believe) more than we love our nearest relatives and dearest friends? Man's highest and purest love should be for his wife and children ; he is not justified in neglecting them for the gratification of any religious enthusiasm, be it what it may. A religion that exacts the best of our affections, wars with the noblest aspirations of our nature. In fact, so difficult is it to comply with Christ's request upon this point, that good Christian husbands frequently forego the commands of their master to gratify the wishes of their wives. Paul judged that this would be the case ; hence he advised Christians to remain single, because " he that

is married careth for the things of this world, how he may please his wife." And it is quite right that he should do so. Christ's love, like that of most of his followers, was confined to those who agreed with his theology. His injunction to his disciples was to despise those who would not receive them. "Those," he said, "mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me." Even the woman of Canaan, who asked him for help, was at first denied, and told, "it was not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." And it was not till the woman indirectly acknowledged her faith that Christ granted her request. Belief, not humanity, called forth his love. His forgiveness, too, was only for the faithful. "He that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God," Luke 12 : 9. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered ; and men gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned." Are these the sentiments of true love and forgiveness ? Paul emulated his master in this particular ; and accordingly we read : "Of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. . . . What part hath he that believeth with an infidel ?" Here we have an incentive to that intolerance which has so frequently prevented men holding different opinions on theological subjects from associating together.

The doctrines of "pardon for sin," of the Trinity, and of "falling from grace," are couched in language obscure and contradictory. No man can believe all, and few men can understand, any portion of what is taught upon these subjects in the New Testament. A professed holder of one of the above tenets usually receives a particular impression as to its meaning, according to the school in which he is trained. Such impressions made on the youthful mind are so deep and enduring, that it is extremely difficult, and in many instances impossible, to erase them in maturity. Hence, it is nearly useless to point out to one who has been taught that all sin shall be forgiven, that Christ says that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven. Luke 12 : 10. The Trinitarian is unable to see the objection to his views in such passages as, "My Father is greater than I," and that there is "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The Calvinist who,

relying on St. John 10 : 28 and Romans 8 : 38, 39, believes that when man is once "converted," he can never relapse, fails to see that his opinion is proved to be fallacious by the following : "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." 2 Peter 2 : 20, 21.

If it were necessary that any one part of Christian teachings should be clear, it is that, we presume, which professes to refer to the salvation of the human race, but here we find the greatest perplexity. We read : "There is no other name but that of Christ's whereby men can be saved," Acts 4 : 12 ; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," Acts 16 : 31 ; "He that believeth not shall be damned," Mark 16 : 16. Here the necessity of belief in Christ is positively enjoined, and in 1 Tim. 2 : 4 it is stated as Christ's wish that "all men" should be saved. In the same book, however, we also read : "For there are certain men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation," Jude 4 ; "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie : that they all might be damned who believed not the truth," 2 Thess. 2 : 11, 12. But the new Testament admits that belief does not depend upon ourselves, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Phil. 2 : 13 ; "For by grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God," Ephes. 2 : 8 ; "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is of God," 2 Cor. 3 : 5. In John 14 : 6 it is said : "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," and in chapter 6, verse 44 of the same book Christ exclaims : "No man can come to me except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." It is manifest, moreover, if the Scriptures be correct, that while God predestinated some persons to be saved, he adopted means whereby others should be lost. In replying to certain inquirers, Christ is reported to have said : "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God ; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables : That seeing they may see, and not perceive ; and hearing they may hear, and not understand ; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." Mark 4 : 11, 12.

Equally uncertain are the means prescribed by this faith whereby salvation is to be obtained. In one place, the New Testament says that works are necessary (James 2 : 20-25), while it is also recorded : "For by grace are ye saved, through faith : . . . not of works, lest any man should boast," Ephes. 2 : 8, 9 ; "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith," Gal. 2 : 16 ; "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified," Rom. 3 : 20 ; "Where is boasting, then ? It is excluded. By what law ? Of works ? Nay ; but by the law of faith. Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law," Romans 3 : 27, 28 ; "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost," Titus 3 : 5.

Even what is to be understood by the term "believe in Christ" is not by any means clear. Are we to acknowledge Christ as a man or as a God ? Are we to suppose that the object of his mission was accomplished in his life, or through his death ? Must we regard his teachings or his blood as the medium of salvation ? To these questions neither the New Testament nor Christians have given a definite and uniform answer. For, while Unitarians allege that the command in the above passages is sufficiently obeyed by believing in the manhood, life, and teachings of Christ, the orthodox Christians state that, to avoid damnation, mankind must have faith in the divinity, the vicarious death, and the atoning efficacy of the blood of Christ. The character of Christ, as given in the New Testament, is thoroughly contradictory. He could teach men to be merciful, and he could command that those who would not accept him as the Christ, should be slain before him. He could advise husbands to love and cleave to their wives, and he could offer an inducement to break up the ties of domestic affection. He could advise children to honour their father and mother, while to others he could say that, unless they hate their parents, they could not become his disciples. At one time his advice is to "resist not evil," while at another he authorizes shaking off the dust from the feet as a testimony against unbelievers. He announces that "they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," and he as emphatically says, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garments and buy one." No sooner does he state that "blessed are the peacemakers," than he as earnestly asserts that he came not to send peace, that his mission was to set a

man against his father, and a daughter against her mother. Here are characters thoroughly antagonistic—which are we to regard as a reliable representation of the “person of Christ?” Was not the Rev. Dr. Giles correct in saying, “The history of Christ is contained in records which exhibit contradictions that cannot be reconciled, imperfections that would greatly detract from even admitted human compositions, and erroneous principles of morality that would hardly have found a place in the most incomplete systems of the philosophers of Greece and Rome?”—(“Christian Records,” preface 7.)

ITS INFLUENCE.

The influence of Christianity upon the world should be estimated from its special effects upon individual character, as well as from its general results upon national conduct. Of course, it is not always right to condemn principles in consequence of the shortcomings of those who profess to endorse them. The justice of such condemnation will very much depend upon the nature of the principles themselves and the claims set up on their behalf. The peculiar feature in connection with Christianity is, that its professed believers have persistently urged that its influence for good is so unmistakeable, that wherever its power has been felt beneficial results have necessarily followed. Now; this claim is not borne out either by the New Testament or by the facts of history and of personal experience. Of course, it may be frankly admitted that in the ranks of Christianity there are good men and women; it does not, however, follow that their goodness is the result of their faith. Some persons are so well organized, and their moral training is so complete, that it is next to impossible to induce them to depart from the paths of rectitude; while, on the other hand, there are individuals whose organizations are so imperfect, and whose ethical discipline has been so neglected, that no amount of theology will make them good and useful members of society. Doubtless instances can be cited where characters have been improved through acting in obedience to the secular portions of the New Testament. But the same can be said, with truth, of the adherents to other religions besides that of Christianity, and also of those who have been consistent believers in the great ethical systems of the world. This, however, does not justify the orthodox claim—that where the Christian faith has obtained, a panacea has always been found for the weaknesses, the vices, the crimes and the wrongs that have robbed the world of much of its virtue, its

purity and its honour. Instead of controlling the actions and regulating the conduct of its professors, Christianity itself has been moulded and modified by the individual temperaments, the habits, and the national aspirations of those who were supposed to endorse it. Hence, as it has already been shown, in various countries, all termed Christian, we find the profession of various and conflicting phases of the same faith. The fact is, the reforming agencies that have operated in the elevation of personal character and general actions belong exclusively to no religious system: they are the result of human conditions when under the control of human reason and intellectual culture.

That Christian teachings have not always had the effect ascribed to them by orthodox professors is evident, both from the New Testament and the admissions of Christian historians. From the Gospels and Epistles we learn that among the earliest recipients of the Faith were those upon whom its influence was impotent either to enable them to subjugate their evil passions or to inspire within them the love and practice of truth. "Contentions," "strife," "indignation," and "fraud," we are informed by the "inspired word," characterised their actions towards each other. [See Acts 15 : 39 ; Luke 22 : 24 ; Matt. 20 : 24 ; 1 Cor. 6 : 8 ; 1 Cor. 5 : 1.] St. Peter, the "beloved disciple," was so little impressed with the teachings of Christ that, it is said, he denied his own master (Matt. 26 : 70 & 72), and thereby manifested an utter disregard for truth and fidelity. St. Paul also, despite his Christian proclivities, could boast, "Being crafty, I caught you with guile," (2 Cor. 12 : 16). "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them to do you service," (2 Cor. 11 : 8). Were the Secularists to emulate such conduct as this to-day, their principles would not be credited with having a highly beneficial influence upon human conduct.

The records of history agree with the testimony of the New Testament in reference to the non-effect of Christianity in the inspiration of correct conduct. Mosheim frankly admits that for many centuries the Christians were guilty of "lying, deceit, artifice, fraud," and many other vices. The same Christian writer remarks: "The interests of virtue and true religion suffered yet more grievously by two monstrous errors which were almost universally adopted in this century [cent. 4], and became a source of innumerable calamities and mischiefs in the succeeding ages. The first of these maxims was, that it was an act of virtue to deceive and lie, when by that means the interest of the Church might be promoted. . . . The Church was contaminated

with shoals of profligate Christians. . . . It cannot be affirmed that even true Christians were entirely innocent and irreproachable in this matter." (See Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History," vol. I., pp. 55, 77, 102, 193.) Salvian, an eminent pious clergyman of the fifth century, writes: "With the exception of a very few who flee from vice, what is almost every Christian congregation but a sink of vices? For you will find in the Church scarcely one who is not either a drunkard, a glutton, or an adulterer . . . or a robber, or a man-slayer, and what is worse than all, almost all these without limit." (Miall's "Memorials of early Christianity," p. 366.) Dr. Cave, in his "Primitive Christianity," (p. 2), observes: "If a modest and honest heathen were to estimate Christianity by the lives of its professors, he would certainly proscribe it as the vilest religion in the world." Dr. Dicks, in his "Philosophy of Religion," (pp. 366-7), also states: "There is nothing which so strikingly marks the character of the Christian world in general as the want of candour, [and the existence of] the spirit of jealousy. . . . Slander, dishonesty, falsehood and cheating are far from being uncommon among those who profess to be united in the bonds of a common Christianity." Wesley once gave a picture of Christian society, which indicates the "high morality" produced where "gospel truths" are disseminated. After stating that "Bible reading England" was guilty of every species of vice, even those that nature itself abhors, this Christian author thus concludes: "Such a complication of villainies of every kind considered with all their aggravations, such a scorn of whatever bears the face of virtue; such injustice, fraud and falsehood; above all, such perjury and such a method of law, we may defy the whole world to produce." (Sermons, Vol. 12, p. 223.) Surely, such Christian testimony as this should be damaging evidence against the theory of the Church, that the "light of the Gospel" has invariably been effectual in securing personal purity and individual honour.

Neither did the Galilean faith remove the blots that dimmed the glory of the ancient world. Slavery, infanticide, and brutal, inhuman sports remained for centuries after the erection of the symbol of the Cross. It is true, Rome, like every other country, had its vices, but Christianity failed to remove them. As Lecky observes, "the golden age of Roman law was not Christian, but Pagan." ["History of European Morals," Vol. II., 44.] The gladiatorial shows of Rome had a religious origin; and while some of the grandest pagan writers condemned them,

they were not abolished till four hundred years after the commencement of the Christian era. And, be it observed, that the immediate cause of their ultimately being stopped was, that at one of the exhibitions, in A.D. 404, a monk was killed. "His death," says Lecky, "led to the final abolition of the games." (*Ibid.* 40.) It is a noteworthy fact that, while the passion for these games existed in Rome, its love for religious liberty was equally as strong; and it was this very liberty that was first destroyed in the Christian Empire. (*Ibid.* 38.)

Every nation has had its national drawbacks, and Christian countries are no exception to the general rule. Under the very shadow of the Cross cruelties of the deepest dye have been practised. Bull-fights, bear and badger hunting, cock fighting, and pigeon-shooting have all been favourite amusements in Christian lands. Granted that immorality stained the history of ancient Rome and classic Greece, so it did Christian England at the very time when the Church had absolute authority. What was the state of morals in England during the age of Henry VIII., Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, and George IV.? Was there ever a period of greater moral depravity and intellectual poverty than when the Christian Church was paramount and supreme, when the saints, the bishops, and the priests were guilty of the worst of crimes, including incest, adultery and concubinage, when "sacred institutions," filled with pious nuns, were converted into brothels and hotbeds of infanticide? (*Ibid.* 351.) Greece and Rome, with all their immorality, will bear comparison with the early ages of Christianity. If history may be relied upon, Christian England is indebted to Pagan Rome and classic Greece for the incentive to much of that morality, culture, and heroism which give the prestige to modern society. Upon this point, Dr. Temple, in his "Essay on the Education of the World," is very clear. "To Rome," says the Doctor, "we owe the forms of local government which in England have saved liberty and elsewhere have mitigated despotism." . . . "It is in the history of Rome rather than in the Bible that we find our models of precepts of political duty, and especially of the duty of patriotism." . . . "To the Greeks we owe the corrective which conscience needs to borrow from nature." Take Rome to-day. That country was once the recognized mistress of the world, renowned alike for its valour, its learning, and its taste; from whose forums emanated that eloquence which still shines forth as the production of a noble and heroic people—Rome, once the depository of poetry and the cultivator of art, whose grandeur and dignity could

command the admiration of the world—such *was* Rome, but, alas! how has she fallen! “Christianity floated into the Roman Empire on the wave of credulity that brought with it this long train of oriental superstitions and legends.” (Lecky, Vol. I. 397.) The result was, she became a miserable, down-trodden, priest-ridden country. Her former glory, dignity and valour departed, and were replaced by a mean and cowardly terrorism, born of a degrading priestcraft and a cruel theology.

For one thousand years Christianity had its trial, with everything in its favour. The Middle Ages were the brightest era of Christianity. Then she had no rival. Assisted by kingcraft, she ruled the civilized world through a thousand years, without one ray of light, without any great addition to the arts and sciences, and then bequeathed to mankind a heritage of cruelty, bloodshed and persecution. At this period of her history there was a great impetus given towards science and philosophy. Some of the most splendid intellects that ever appeared in the world, and that might, under more favourable conditions, have adorned humanity, enlightened society, and helped on progress, appeared in those days. But their intellects were stifled and rendered comparatively useless by the influence of Christianity. Those were the times when theology was paramount, unrestrained, and untrammelled; when the blood, the genius, and the chivalry of Europe were all wasted in the mad and useless crusades, when in one expedition alone, instigated by fanatical priests, no less than 560,000 persons were sacrificed to the superstition of the Cross. Do we require a proof of the legitimate effects of orthodox Christianity? Behold the history of the seven crusades, which will for ever remain as a lasting monument of a mind-destroying faith. For nearly two hundred years did the followers of Christ lay desolate one of the finest and most romantic portions of the known world, and laid prostrate thousands of human beings. Do we wish to know the influence of the orthodox religion? Read the history of the Emperor Constantine, who with the sword in one hand and the Cross in the other, pursued his slaughtering and relentless career. Go to the streets of Paris, when in the fifteenth century they flowed with the blood of defenceless Protestants, and when 10,000 innocent persons were massacred by the professed believers in a meek and lowly Jesus. Visit the valleys of Piedmont, which were the scene of a most inhuman butchery, when women were suffocated by hundreds in confined caves by the bearers of the Cross. Study the

history of the Inquisition, to whose power three millions of lives were sacrificed in one century. Peruse the records of the actions of King Henry VIII., Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth, in whose Christian reigns hundreds were condemned either to die at the stake or to endure revolting cruelties in loathsome dungeons, because they differed from the prevailing faith of those times. These were the effects of Christianity when it had absolute power. Fortunately, in this age of progressive thought, a change has come over the dream of man, and practical work has taken the place of theoretical faith. In business, in science, in politics, in philosophy, and partially in education, belief in theology is not allowed to stand in the way of help for humanity. The Church has lost the power it once had, and priests no longer command undisputed sway over the intellect of the human race. Many of the greatest minds of the nineteenth century have thrown overboard the orthodox Christian faith, and the enlightened sons of earth will, ere long, follow the example. The sun has arisen on the tops of the mountains, heralding the advent of that glorious day when it may be triumphantly said with Shelley :—

“ Fear not the tyrants will rule for ever,
Or the priests of the evil faith ;
They stand on the brink of that raging river
Whose waves they have tainted with death ;
It is fed from the depth of a thousand dells ;
Around them it foams, and rages, and swells ;
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,
Like wrecks, on the surge of eternity.”

