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# THE RELIGIOUS FACULTY:

ITS RELATION TO THE OTHER FACULTIES,  
AND ITS PERILS.

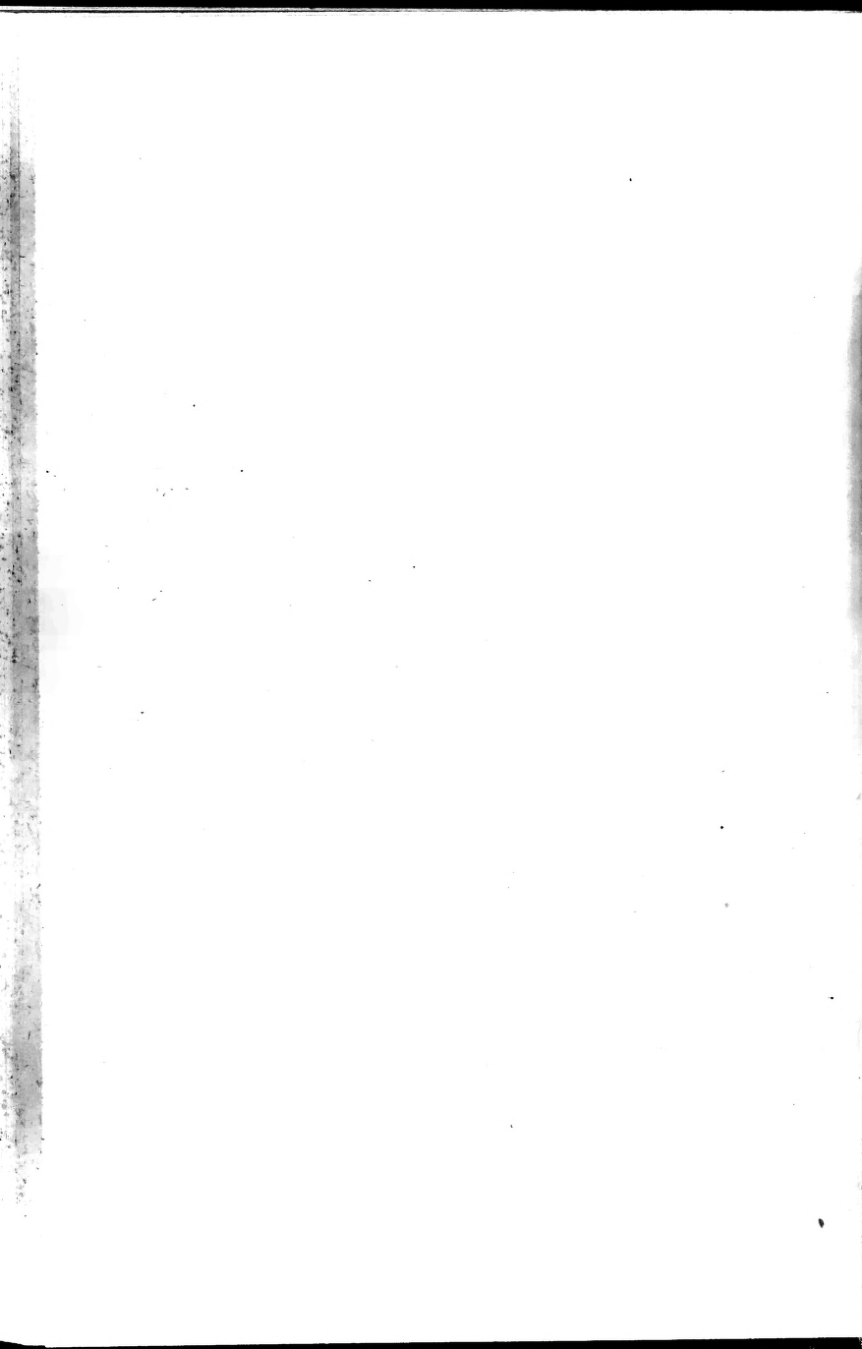
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## THE RELIGIOUS FACULTY :

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THE religious instinct in man, and the function it performs, as a constituent of human nature, has been variously defined. The Theist would represent the religious sentiment within us as implanted expressly to excite aspirations which can only be satisfied with high conceptions of the Infinite. Religion, according to him, consists in adoring some one Almighty Cause—a being clothed with the attributes of what we are accustomed to term a *Person*, very wise, just, and kind ; a sort of high order of man indefinitely magnified, to whose control we should at all times cheerfully submit. Religion, as conceived by the Positivist, on the other hand, and in many instances by the Pantheist, ought not to be connected with the worship of an alleged Infinite Intelligence, or an alleged almighty *Person* at all ; because, as the holders of these opinions aver, the existence of a personal God is not capable of proof. All so-called evidences of the existence of such a God, they remind us, are a *petitio principii*—the major and the minor premises in the argument, ever and anon changing places, the subject relating to something foreign to all known analogies,—quite outside the possibilities of our grasp and the bounds of our experience. Religion, as understood by the disciples of these two latter schools, is simply perverted when manifested in the conventional

forms of praise and prayer, addressed to an Entity we choose to call God ; and to adore as a great and good Father, such a personage, it is insisted, is but the projection in the mind of the most exalted ideal of human Fatherhood. They tell us that the end of our constitution and the interests of humanity can only be effectually served by *the real* and *the knowable* in this business, engaging our attention to the exclusion of *the indefinable* and *the unknowable*. There is sense and nobleness, say the Positivist and the Pantheist, in the attitude of a mind inspired by the high intellectual and moral qualities found in "the illustrious living and the mighty dead ;" there is something beautiful and becoming in the passionate and self-sacrificing love of a brave man, cherishing and adoring a chaste, lovely, unselfish, and sweetly-cultured woman ; it is a rational and proper vent for the religious sentiment to pour itself forth in tender and devout reverence for higher humanity as the one comprehensible organ of great achievements in the realms of thought and deed in the universe ; true religion consists in opening up by word and example, to our less enlightened fellow creatures, the power and glory of obedience to law in every department of being, as the cure for the world's manifold evils ; and in unfolding this revelation of law in all its rich beneficence in a genuine sympathetic spirit, and thus contributing to the general improvement of the race ; so our friends of Comtism and philosophic Pantheism would inculcate. They are not so dogmatic as positively to deny, *a priori*, the possibility of a personal God. They confess themselves ever open to conviction on the subject ; they simply say that in the present state of our existence the subject is evidently unsuited to our faculties, and that we are at present incapable of solving the problem. But, howsoever the religious sentiment arose, and whatever be the proper and rational objects on which it ought to expend itself, one thing is certain, that there *is* an element in



humanity, known by the name of *Religion*, though unanimity in the definition of it seems to be unattainable. Now, what I wish more particularly to assert, is that the religious faculty, tendency, principle, or whatever one may please to call it, bears an analogy in its origin, growth, and development, to the other powers of the mind. Like any other mental force, the religious principle is governed and trained by fixed laws and knowable conditions. Its place in our constitution is just as natural as that of the other powers, and it has no more contact with the supernatural than any other attribute of the mind. If the other powers are under supernatural influence, so is this one; if it is under such an influence, so are they. In this respect, there is no difference between them.

It is found—this tendency to worship—in different degrees of strength and forms of manifestation in different individual organizations. In some minds the sense of music is naturally strong, and where this is the case, contact with melodies and harmonies instinctively thrills the soul, wakes up to consciousness the born affinity for the beautiful in sound, where that affinity exists, and lifts up the nature in joyous emotion. The nice discrimination of chords rises in such persons to the height of a divine passion; and where the musical faculty towers above the other powers it usually prompts to effort in mastering the science of music or the use of some musical instrument. But while this is true, the appreciation of music is not confined to men of great musical tastes. There is no sane mind without the capacity, more or less, of receiving pleasant impressions from musical compositions, performed or sung. But there is always this marked difference between the average man and the one who is a musician by nature, that the possessor of the born gift has a specific genius that places him in rapt sympathy with the object to which that genius irresistibly tends, whereas the ordinary mind has only so vague and unimpassioned a

sense of the thing as to be unable clearly to distinguish the strains of a Mendelsohn from the drawl of some village Puritan meeting-house.

The very same difference comes before us every day in reference to all the arts and sciences. In numbers, physics, painting, philosophy, poetry, philanthropy, commerce, and morals, it is clear that men are not constituted alike, with the same power to enjoy these kinds of human culture, and excel in them. Everybody knows something of arithmetic; it is only intellectual giants that ever soar to the sublimer knowledge and applications of Mathematics. We all understand something of the rocks; few have the geological instinct of a Murchison. We can all handle a pencil; few deserve to be called artists. Most can appreciate the practical results of logic; it is rare to meet men whose keen penetration can see through the fallacies of reasoning, and who can build up systems of immortal wisdom. All can make rhyme; few can utter "thoughts that breathe and words that burn." Not many are entirely destitute of pity for suffering, want, and ignorance; yet the world has known few Howards, whose devotion to the cause of easing the burdens of suffering was a supreme delight to them. Anybody can be an obscure trader; but that peculiar grasp and enterprise are seldom met with which place men in the rank of large-minded merchants. There is no man absolutely without a conscience; it is only in a small minority that the moral faculty is delicately sensitive, shrinking from equivocal speech and unfair dealing, as the open eye would shrink from the prick of a needle.

In human beings, then, the spiritual capacity or religious organ is analogous to other powers of the mind, and is naturally of very varied grades. I suppose there is no nation or individual without some sense—latent or developed, crude or cultured—of religious veneration. Among the common order of Chinese this veneration takes the form of the worship of ancestors; among the

lowest Africans, the worship of a *fetish*; among the followers of Comte, the worship of woman in the domestic circle and the worship of Humanity in its highest aspects, in public religious observances. Most Christians worship an Almighty One, whom tradition has taught them to regard and address as an Infinite PERSON. But have we not known people—some of them of high moral principles and refined tastes—who seemed almost incapable of entering into popular religious ideas, so constitutionally faint was their power of realising the Infinite with awe, love, or devotion? While others, differently constituted, have been stirred to deep feeling by hymn, prayer, or theological discourse, this class of minds have remained stoical phenomena to themselves quite as much as they have appeared to be to others. Of course I only refer here to persons who act from principle, and not to the unthinking, sensual multitude. If this stoical but enlightened class join in the ritual of any Church, it is simply in deference to some ancestral practice, or for the sake of example; if they refrain from uniting with assemblies of worshippers, it is because what interests and invigorates the minds of others seems to persons of *their* ideas unreal, if not unnecessary. They frankly own that they do not feel the least dependence on public or private devotional services for stimulus in the expansion of their intellect or the discipline of their character.

The most superficial observation shows it therefore to be an unjust and an unsafe test of character to judge men by, whether or not they take an intense and a continuous interest in popular religious devotions and sermons. There can be no doubt that large numbers of most thoughtful, high-minded, and earnest men and women believe that they derive considerable moral strength and direction from the habit of observing the ritual of some Church or other; and what they feel to be true to their religious wants and tastes they ought

not to be discouraged from following. At the same time it must be confessed that it is possible for a man to be irresistibly drawn within this charmed and hallowed atmosphere of conventional worship, and yet be very imperfectly cultured and developed in reasoning, æsthetic, social and moral qualities—elements of the first importance in a complete human development. The mind is a dwelling of many chambers. In some instances, one or two rooms are spacious and well-furnished, and signs of special life and activity are visible in them; while the other rooms are very small and mean, and a stillness reigns in *them* that would almost lead one to think they were untenanted; and to make matters worse, there are in such minds no doors or windows communicating between chamber and chamber, but these are separated from each other by blank walls. Such is a rough illustration of a mind badly constructed, ill-balanced, misgoverned. But in the dwelling rightly built, the rooms, though of various size, are all well-kept and occupied by living and active tenants, and there is a free, wholesome, and pleasant communication between chamber and chamber—the judgment, the imagination, the memory, the will, the affections, the conscience, the religious organ, all active, all living harmoniously under the same roof, all aiding each other's mutual concord, vigour, and elevation. But to say that the man fondest of theological ways of looking at things, and habituated to what are technically known as "religious services"—to say that he in whom the tendency to worship is strongest has necessarily the noblest type of mind, is a fallacy which a wider view of the science of mind, of life, and of religion must sooner or later dispel. We are, as to the master-bias of the mind, very much creatures of organisation, and we ought not to attach a superstitious and an undue value to that part of us, right and useful as it is in its place, which it has been the interest of priest-craft in all ages to rate above all the other powers. It



has been the fashion to think that if a man be only what is termed "a religious character," he must be good in the best and broadest sense all round. But this statement is not to be *implicitly* accepted. I see no reason to grieve if strong religious tendencies, such as manifest themselves in pious but vague emotionalism, have not been born in our constitution. We are only responsible for the talents we inherit; and different preponderating faculties in different men are all equally needful, like the variegated hues in nature, to give beautiful and harmonious diversity to intellectual, moral, and religious life. It is an absurd superstition to think that because a man has not a natural capacity for intense religious impulse, but only possesses a cool reasoning mind, artistic skill, or fine moral intuitions, he is therefore inferior to the person who is susceptible of rhapsodical fervours. There is an impression, none the less real though not often openly declared, that the religious fanatic, even if he almost graze the line between the sane and the insane, possesses a gift intrinsically more precious than those gifts, in minds of the inductive order, which have been chiefly instrumental in unlocking the wonders of science, and setting forth the multiplying harmonies of the universe. The lips that indulge most eloquently in unprovable and often far-fetched conceptions of spirit life in that state from which no traveller has ever returned to describe; the lips that pour forth in most bold, burning allegorical diction, penitent laments and earnest petitions to the Almighty PERSON, are held to be touched with a more god-like inspiration than are the lips that only utter the varied wisdom pertaining to visible things and every-day life. The notion, not so much preached as acted in orthodox circles, is that the Almighty is chiefly an ecclesiastical potentate, a punisher of theological heresy, a sort of Pope or "Holy Father," who is rather disposed to look askance at the strivings of mere philosophic, scientific, and literary minds after the

ideals of perfection that lure them on respectively in their different spheres of thought and struggle towards perfection. He is mainly conceived of by Christendom as seated in a high chair of state, surrounded with angels and pensive saints, very much as Pio Nono is by his cardinals, with his hand stretched out to bless his elect, or to deal out damnation to the reprobate. The position which the devoutly orthodox deem most becoming and most divinely approved, is one of incessant humiliation, self-crucifixion, and supplication. What is the natural and, in general, the actual result of this sentimentalism, which nine-tenths of the frequented churches and chapels tend to foster? *One-sided* as contrasted with *many-sided* culture, which latter is the happy, rational, and healthful distinction of the man proportionately developed—excess and unshapeliness in one direction, and defect and contraction in another direction. The strength that should have been harmoniously diffused over the whole man has been caught up and monopolized by some morbid, over-grown part. The consistent evangelical devotee is taught to wander so habitually in the imagined scenes of a life at present unrevealed, that the pith required to enable us to grapple with the difficulties, and to give effect to the enterprises of this world, is thereby greatly impaired. Hence we look in vain, as a rule, to this lop-sided class of minds, *for the most part*, to aid powerfully in the wise conduct of public affairs in the nation or in the borough, or in extending the domain of science. Their celestial musings give to them a contorted and lack-a-daisical air, which in a great measure unfits them for a thoroughly *human*, unbiassed interest in the *universal* progress of society.

By a few artistic touches, Mr Matthew Arnold hits off the portrait I would fain sketch, with more truth than may to some be palatable. With special reference to Evangelical non-conformists (though the description quite as aptly applies to Evangelical churchmen), he

asks, "What can be the reason of this undeniable provincialism, which has two main types, a bitter type and a smug type, but which in both its types is vulgarising, and thwarts the full perfection of our humanity? . . . It is the tendency in us to *Hebraise*, as we call it; that is to sacrifice all other sides of our being to the religious side. This tendency has its cause in the divine beauty and grandeur of religion; *but we have seen that it leads to a narrow and twisted growth of our religious side itself, and to a failure in perfection.* If we tend to Hebraise even in an Establishment, with the main current of national life flowing round us, and reminding us in all ways of the variety and fulness of human existence, . . . how much more must we tend to Hebraise when we lack such preventives. . . . The sectary's *Eigene grosse Erfindungen*, as Goethe calls them,—the precious discoveries of himself and his friends for expressing the inexpressible, and defining the indefinable in peculiar forms of their own, cannot but fill his whole mind. He is zealous to do battle for them and affirm them, for in affirming them he affirms himself, and that is what we all like. Other sides of his being are thus neglected, because the religious side, always tending in every serious mind to predominance over our other spiritual sides, is in him made quite absorbing and tyrannous by the condition of self-assertion and challenge which he has chosen for himself. And just, what is not essential in religion, he comes to mistake for essential, and a thousand times the more readily because he has chosen it of himself, and religious activity he fancies to consist in battling for it. All this leaves him little leisure or inclination for culture. . . . His first crude notions of the one thing needful do not get purged, and they invade the whole spiritual man in him, and then *making a solitude, he calls it heavenly peace.* The more prominent the religious side the greater the danger of this side swelling and spreading till it swallows all other spiritual sides

up, intercepts and absorbs all nutriment which should have gone to them, and leaves Hebraism rampant in us, and Hellenism stamped out. Culture and the harmonious perfection of our whole being, and what we call totality, then become secondary matters ; and the institutions which should develop these take the same narrow and partial view of humanity and its wants as the free religious communities take."

"But men of culture and poetry, it will be said, are again and again failing, and failing conspicuously, in the necessary first stage to perfection, in the subduing of the great faults of our animality, which it is the glory of these religious institutions to have helped us to subdue. True, they do often so fail ; they have often been without the virtues as well as the faults of the Puritan ; it has been one of their dangers that they so felt the Puritan's faults that they too much neglected the practice of his virtues. I will not, however, exculpate them at the Puritan's expense ; they have often failed in morality, and morality is indispensable ; they have been punished for their failure as the Puritan has been rewarded for his performance. They have been punished wherein they erred ; but their ideal of beauty and sweetness and light, and *a human nature complete* on all sides remains the true ideal of perfection still, just as the Puritan's ideal of perfection remains narrow and inadequate, although for what he did well, he has been richly rewarded."\*

The chief peril, then, to which persons of the religious temperament are prone consists in supposing—as much of the evangelical teaching of the country has led many to do—that intense fondness for the forms, ceremonies, and theological speculations of orthodoxy is necessarily a mark of great superiority of character, great breadth of view, strength of moral purpose, and general elevation of mind. But we do not usually find

\* "Culture and Anarchy," pp. xxii., xxiii., xxiv., xxxii., xxxiv., 27, 28.



the two classes of qualities to be quite compatible. The organisation may be ill-adjusted. The religious sentiment may predominate just as an inordinate tendency towards music, poetry, mathematics, or any other engrossing pursuit may predominate, and make the character one-sided. The love of acts of worship and of devout themes may be so fervent as to tempt the religious enthusiast to look upon the sober realities and duties of the work-a-day world as stale in comparison with the former. He may be so blinded by his ruling passion as not to see the close bearing which that ruling passion should have upon the rough work of ordinary life. Misguided constitutional religiousness may isolate him from *humanity*, and may become content to find a channel for itself in a mere round of little church activities. I should be far from disputing the sunshine shed upon scenes of ignorance and trouble by zeal and benevolence of the ecclesiastical type, narrow though its range may be. But this extreme susceptibility to impression from mystic symbols, and pious ceremonials, and celestial contemplations, those high-toned emotions of reverence, and imagined affection for the Infinite; that resistless impulse to adore God—sometimes in language too familiar to befit our very dim and partial knowledge of Him—may, after all, be but a refined form of luxuriousness, which often, like a huge upas-tree, casts its deadly shade upon the virtues of moral courage, self-restraint, transparent honesty, candour, charity, and open-hearted kindness. It by no means follows that because a man has strong affinities naturally for worship—"the dim religious light," the prostration of soul, the poetry of religious sentiment, and the associations of a church, that he should therefore necessarily have a vigorous moral faculty, or a fuller and clearer sense of right and duty than other men have. Just as there is no necessity in one being a poet because he is an eminent mechanical inventor, or in another having a *penchant* for languages because he revels in the art of

painting. So a man is not necessarily distinguished for unselfishness because he has acquired the habit of devout exercises. Yet this last is the illusion that enchains and lowers morally many of the religious sects of the land. It is the working of this jaundiced idea of religion as a thing fed by pious books, theological dogmas, and acts of church devotion, that at the present moment is stopping the way of such a sound secular education as the nation urgently requires. While the clergy of different churches are squabbling as to what form of grace should be said before meat, the poor children gathered to the meal are starving. The orthodox tell us that where something technically called "grace" enters the heart it supernaturally leavens the whole being, and inevitably moulds the mind into enlightenment and obedience.\* But do we see it to be so in fact? On the contrary, many who think they have received the so-called principle of "grace" are often the greatest sinners against the laws of reason, the laws of physiology, and the laws of family and social life; and no wonder, for the whole *tendency* of popular religious teaching is to foster the notion that the surest outward sign of godliness lies in a quickened inclination to attend to the religious duties prescribed by ministers and churches. If there be any remissness in this matter, the worshippers are soon reminded that their spiritual life is on the wane, that "the Holy Ghost" is forsaking them, and that to recover their enthusiasm they must come together, pray for "the outpouring of the Holy Ghost," and be revived. General culture of intellect, disposition, and character goes for little with them, or is only treated by the

\* Henry Ward Beecher cannot help sometimes letting the latent force of the strong common sense within him burst through the stratum of dogmatic theology that overlays it. In a frank mood of this kind, he is reported to have said, and said justly: "*A man born right the first time is very superior to the man who has been converted under the influence of religion.*"

preacher as a "self-righteous delusion" as long as an unctuous sort of interest in prayings and preachings is absent. While this constant forcing of the religious organ is kept supreme in the evangelical mind, it is not to be expected that the enforcement of moral virtues from the pulpit would have much effect. How rarely do we find the *true* end of life have its proper place in sermons; I mean *the discipline and culture of the whole nature* as the highest matter. Every part getting its due, so that the building shall grow up "fitly framed together." In well arranged minds, all the powers—animal, intellectual, moral, and religious—are duly proportioned. A suitable education is brought to bear for the right and harmonious unfolding of these powers; and in that case, religion is like the summer air, which plays over the whole bright landscape, and diffuses health and fragrance around. But when, either from a mis-shapen mind or a defective training, the religious organ has come to be a monstrous growth, when it overshadows the other powers, and draws up into itself the strength needed for the support of the other powers, and fritters its power away in whining or hysterical excitement; then this very supremacy of the religious element offers temptation to neglect of moral, and intellectual self-training;—offers temptation to omit proper care for the plain homely virtues that shed radiance in the family and in general society. According to the doleful system of thought and life, accepted as *religion* in orthodox christendom, the supreme aim is to get to Heaven, and the supreme method of giving effect to that aim, is to resemble on earth, as much as possible, the ideal life of Heaven as conceived by evangelicism; and what does the orthodox world mean by *Heaven*? The words of Andrew Jackson Davis come forcibly to my mind: "Almost every one's educational memory will answer that by 'Heaven' is meant a place far off, the residence of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; a solemn celestial abode where mirthfulness is not per-

mitted ; where persons appear as monks and nuns, beautifully arrayed in white, but always with a meditative, abstract poetic appearance, and on their faces, an indescribable expression of unsmiling, cadaverous piety . . . all engaged in the same rapt devotions to the august family of gods ; a cold and dreary place ; a place of unbroken circumspection and interiority. It makes us feel as though we were on the verge of an everlasting graveyard, to think of it." \* Where such religious conceptions prevail, I do not hesitate to say that the man of naturally strong devotional fervour cannot yield to them without mental injury. Excessive, absorbing acts of worship, offered in this spirit, tend to drain off the strength that ought to sustain the other powers, and that it should be so, is according to natural law. What is strong in us grows stronger by use, and what is weak grows weaker by disuse. Let there be an inordinately active brain by nature, and correspondingly feeble limbs. Of course the more the passion for study is gratified, where there is such a constitution, the more quickly does the vigour of the feeble member decline. It is not otherwise with the faculties of mind, as experience and history abundantly prove.

Individuals, societies, and even nations supply sad and striking examples of the danger of falling into subtle temptation, to lift the religion of sentiment above the religion of high morals, to lose sight of the claims of the one in the sensuous fascinations of the other. This forgetting of a sense of practical goodness in holy raptures and visions, this blending of contradictions in the same character, appears at a very early period. The life of the patriarch Jacob—if we may rely on the Old Testament story—was poisoned by this error. "Like those tissues of the loom, which, seen from one point of view, are all bright with colours and radiant with gold, while, if you change your position, they appear dark and sombre, the life of Jacob comes before us as a strange paradox, shot with the most marvellous diversi-

\* Morning Lectures, American Edition, p. 107.



ties. He is the hero of faith, and the quick, sharp-witted schemer. To him the heavens are opened, and his wisdom passes into the cunning which is of the earth, earthy. One may see in him, lying close together, the beginning of all we reverence in St John, and of all that we tremble at in Judas." \*

This marvellous compound of the precious and the vile in the Psalmist King is familiar to all thoughtful readers of the Bible. While wafted in his poetic soarings to super-mundane spheres, and delighting in the Tabernacle as the divinest spot on earth, there was a plot going forward in his spirit of one of the foulest deeds that ever stained humanity. The characteristics of the Pharisees point in the same direction. During a considerable period in Jewish history public opinion put so high a value on ceremonial strictness, that a man who prayed and fasted plentifully more readily got credit for being a saint than if he had applied the same zeal in keeping the natural and moral law, and, as might be expected, candidates for the honour of saintship were not wanting where the terms were so freely open to the competition of fanaticism, cant, and hypocrisy. Not that all the Pharisees were victims of these failings, though the tendency of their religious system was to make them so. Religious observance was viewed by orthodoxy then as now, as higher than moral duty. The unwholesome air of their affected sanctities repressed the healthy workings of the natural conscience within them, and, as will always beneficently happen in such circumstances, the violated laws of nature had their revenge. In being untrue to the higher instincts of their being, the Pharisees, as a sect, fell a prey to self-deception and hollowness, the natural penalty of all religious unreality. The punctilious tithing of "the mint, the anise, and the cummin," came to be regarded by them as a weightier concern than the claims of "judgment, mercy, and faith," and thus the

\* "Theology and Life," Plumtre, pp. 299.

religious element actually proved a barrier to their proper moral development. There grew up in their minds side by side, a sort of dreamy reverence for the minute details of the Temple and Synagogue service on the one hand, and an insensibility to the moral import of religion on the other.

I wish I could believe that the perils and temptations to which the religious faculty is exposed in persons of a pre-eminently religious temperament, were things only of the past. I fear these perils and temptations are none the less insidious in worshipping communities now. The life of great towns and the habits of civilization, though they do not exclude the recklessness of Esau, tend more directly to produce the ungenerous craft and mean subtlety of Jacob. I am not indifferent to the painful fact that the mass of human beings in the present very primitive stage of their rational development, are found living mere animal lives, recklessly disregarding ennobling influences, which lack of culture, or lack of the opportunity for culture, incapacitates them from appreciating. But we cannot forget that there are faults of another kind,—prudential vices, such as narrow bigotry, bitter spleen, gnawing envy, brutal uncharitableness, pious superciliousness, unworthy bland trickiness, and the like, unfortunately compatible with orderly and reputable lives. And the formidable aspect of the case is that these are largely the besetting perils of men constitutionally inclined to religion; and perhaps there is no class of men more prone to these peculiar dangers and temptations than those whom popular superstition still more or less invests with the halo of sacred separation as professional religious teachers. On no class of men is outward success in their calling more morally deteriorating, none are so tempted to court the breath of popular applause, and none are more prone to professional envy and jealousy. Such dangers and temptations do not usually connect themselves with a formal and deliberate hypocrisy, but

with characters trained to some form of Theistic worship and the sincerity of whose religion, as far as it goes, there is no reason to doubt.

I despair of civilized nations ever reaching a very high type of character as long as there are in the institutions of popular religion such narrow tests of piety and moral excellence as I have been describing, for these tests cannot fail to divert the common mind from those great moral principles and obligations to which even religion itself was meant to be subservient. What more calculated to distort the nature, nurse pernicious conceit, and render a man indifferent alike to the necessity and glory of moral advancement than the theological fancies pandered to by Evangelical preaching and writing? The "communicant" is taught to believe that he has been the subject of a miraculous change from which the common herd of mankind is excluded, that he has "passed from death unto life," that he has been favoured with manifestations of some fond attachment on the part of Deity denied to ordinary mortals. This "object of eternally electing love," this "subject of supernatural grace," may be mean-spirited, may be ignorant of the laws written upon his constitution, and essential to be understood and obeyed as a condition of rational happiness and intelligence; he may have been the victim of some habitual vice all through life, up to the period at which he was "converted." No matter; let him only pass through the conventional process of evangelical "regeneration," and the very flower of intellectual and moral culture in the world, reverent seekers after truth like Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Huxley, Matthew Arnold, and Lecky, who are conscientiously opposed to orthodoxy, are held to be "children of wrath," and "under the curse," while this ignorant, fanatical, conceited boor—as he may nevertheless be,—is looked upon in his church as "born of God," "redeemed," "a saint," furnished with a passport to heaven! Am I rash, then, in asserting that the factitious

importance attached to *conversion* and *church-membership* offers a strong temptation, especially to the weak and crude natures, which are usually carried away by such influences, to look down with a quiet, self-satisfied arrogance upon those who have no sympathy with ecclesiastical ways of doing things as if they were, religiously, plebeians. Albeit many of those frowned upon by the churches have often a keener sense of honour and kindness and unselfishness, and a more instinctive aversion to what is false and mean than many who are reputed to live in the odour of sanctity.

There is one question that, with me, determines in a moment the value of all creeds and churches. Do the forms and dogmas of churches tend most effectually to quicken and shape in us the development of the true, the beautiful, and the good? Are the characters which are the *logical outcome* of creeds and rituals—conforming or nonconforming—really nobler and more enlightened than those planted in the virgin soil of natural thought and natural morals? Are the orthodox more apt in the use of their understanding, more tender and pure in their affections, more harmonious in the unfolding of their powers, more useful to mankind, more forgiving, more patient, more free from the enslavement of passion or appetite, more faithful in the discharge of social and relative duties? I am not convinced by any means that the legitimate product of evangelicism has the advantage in this comparison.

I wish only to add that the business of religion simply has to do with our being true to the higher principles of humanity which are latent or developed in the mind of every sane person, and with our obeying these principles after the fashion of our separate individuality. Types of being vary *even in the same species* through the realms of animal and vegetable life. If the lily had the power to envy the rose, or the lichen to covet the majesty of the oak, it would be a silly waste of temper in that case to shew the envious or the



covetous disposition, for each flower and tree has a nature of its own so worthy of being cultivated that it can afford to be above desiring to be not itself but something else. So with man. Let any one but set himself to make the most of himself, unsparing of his imperfections, exercising a fostering care over his strong and good qualities, and he will have no cause for regret that he did not happen to have a different name and a different nature. Churches and creeds cast all their votaries into the same mould. Genuine religion makes each one who understands and lives up to it, true to his own higher individuality, while it causes his pulse to beat in unison with the great common sentiments of civilized humanity. I see no cause to mourn if my religious faculty be not so vigorous as St Paul's, if my piety be not formed on the pattern of John Bunyan's, or if I cannot take kindly to the leadership of Simeon, Pusey, or Maurice. So far as I find these men striving after those principles of eternal morality which underlie all theologies and ecclesiasticisms; and respecting the type of their separate individualities, I feel bound to honour them as heartily as I may differ from them conscientiously. So far as I find reason to believe their motives pure and earnest, I am profited by their example. But the principle which is to determine the precise shape my mind and character shall take is the natural cast of my being, the peculiar inborn structure of my faculties and powers. The building up of myself, according to the better idiosyncracies of my constitution, is to me a sacred work. If I lose sight of the claims my individuality imposes on me and set up some model to copy and work by outside myself, I at once pervert the divine plan in my individual life, ignore the dictates of my nature, desecrate what in me is holiest, and sink into a wretched plagiarist and mimic—my guilt being none the less heinous because I am affecting to be like some great saint or philosopher, attempting, in short, to be something I was not intended to be.