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**CHRISTIANITY AND
MODERN
THOUGHT**

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Christianity and Modern Thought

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Christianity and Modern Thought:*

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Christianity and Modern Thought

INTRODUCTION

The following discourses were delivered in Boston, at Hollis-Street Church, on successive Sunday evenings, and repeated at King's Chapel on Monday afternoons, during the winter of 1871-72, in response to an invitation of the Executive Committee of the American Unitarian Association, whose purpose was thus declared in the letter of invitation: —

"It is not proposed that the course shall be a merely popular one, to awaken the indifferent and interest them in familiar religious truths; but rather to meet the need of thoughtful people perplexed amid materialistic and sceptical tendencies of the time. Nor is it desired simply to retrace in controversial method the beaten paths of sectarian or theological debate; but rather, in the interest of a free and enlightened Christianity, to present freshly the positive affirmations of faith."

The several discourses were prepared independently, without conference or concerted plan; and for their statements and opinions the responsibility rests solely with their respective

authors.

THE BREAK BETWEEN MODERN THOUGHT AND ANCIENT FAITH AND WORSHIP

By **HENRY W. BELLOWS**

There is evidently a growing disrelish, in an important portion of the people of our time, for professional religion, technical piety, and theological faith. These were always unpopular with youth, and people in the flush of life and spirits; but this was because they called attention to grave and serious things; and youth, as a rule, does not like even the shadow of truth and duty to fall too early or too steadily upon it. Restraint, care, thoughtfulness, it resists as long as it can; and none who recall their own eager love of pleasure and gayety, in the spring-time of life, can find much difficulty in understanding or excusing it. Of course, too, careless, self-indulgent, sensual, and frivolous people have always disliked the gravity, and the faith and customs, of people professing religion, and exhibiting special seriousness. They were a reproach and a painful reminder to them, and must be partially stripped of their reproofing sanctity, by ridicule, charges of hypocrisy, and hints of contempt. But, all the while

this was going on, the youth and frivolity of previous generations expected the time to come when they must surrender their carelessness, and be converted; and even the worldly and scoffing shook in their secret hearts at the very doctrines and the very piety they caricatured. The old relations of master and pupil describe almost exactly the feeling which youth and levity held toward instituted faith and piety, a generation or two since. The schoolboy, indeed, still thinks himself at liberty to call his master nick-names, to play tricks upon him, and to treat with great levity, among his fellow-pupils, all the teaching and all the rules of the school. But he nevertheless sincerely respects his teacher; believes in him and in his teachings, and expects to derive an indispensable benefit from them, in preparing himself for his coming career. So it was with the religion and piety of our fathers. The people profoundly respected the creed, the elders in piety, and the eminent saints in profession and practice, although the young had their jibes and jests, their resistance to church-going, their laugh at sanctimony; and the majority of people then, as now, were not fond of the restraints of piety, or the exercises of devotion.

But the alienation to which I wish to draw your attention now is something quite different from the natural opposition of the young to serious thoughts; or the gay, to grave matters; or those absorbed in the present, to what belongs to the future; or of those charmed with the use of their lower or more superficial faculties and feelings, to the suggestions and demands of their

deeper and nobler nature. That the body should not readily and without a struggle submit to the mind; that thoughtlessness should not easily be turned into thoughtfulness; that youth should not readily consent to wear the moral costume of maturity, or the feelings and habits of riper years; that the active, fresh, curious creature, who has just got this world with its gay colors in his eye, should not be much attracted by spiritual visions, and should find his earthly loves and companions more fascinating than the communion of saints or the sacred intercourse of prayer, – all this, to say the least of it, is very explicable, and belongs to all generations, and hardly discourages the experienced mind, more than the faults and follies of the nursery the wise mother who has successfully carried many older children through them all.

It is quite another kind of antipathy and disrelish which marks our time. It is not confined to youth, nor traceable to levity and thoughtlessness. The Church and its creed on one side, the world and its practical faith on the other, seem now no longer to stand in the relation of revered teachers and dull or reluctant pupils; of seriousness, avoided by levity; of authoritative truth, questioned by bold error; of established and instituted faith, provoking the criticisms of impatience, caprice, ignorance, or folly. An antagonism has arisen between them as of oil and water, – a separation which is neither due to period of life, nor stage of intelligence, nor even to worth of character; which does not separate youth from maturity, the thoughtless from the thinking, the bad from the good, but divides the creeds,

observances, and professions of Christians, from a large body of people who insist that after a certain fashion they are Christians too, and yet will have little or nothing to do with professions of faith, or pious pretensions, or religious ways of feeling, talking, or acting.

Clearly, it would not do any longer to say that the worth and virtue and influence of society, in this country, could be estimated by the number of communicants in the churches, by the degree of credit still given to any of the long-believed theological dogmas, deemed in the last generation the sheet-anchors of the State. We all know hundreds of people, who could sign no creed, and give no theological account of their faith, whom we do not count as necessarily less worthy in the sight of God or man than many who have no difficulty in saying the whole Athanasian Creed. Nay, there are some millions of people in this country, not the least intelligent or useful citizens in all cases, who never enter a church-door. A generation or two back, you would safely have pronounced all these absentees to be worldly, careless people, infidels, atheists, scoffers. Do you expect to find them so now? Some, of course, but not the majority. Indeed, you would find a great many of these people supporting churches, to which their families go, and not themselves; or to which others go, for whom they are glad to provide the opportunity. They would tell you, if they could discriminate their own thoughts, something like this: "Public worship and church organizations, and creeds and catechisms, and sermons and ceremonies, and public prayers

and praises, are doubtless very good things, and very useful up to a certain stage of intelligence, and for a certain kind of character. But we have discovered that the real truth and the real virtue of what people have been misnaming religion is a much larger, freer, and more interesting thing than churches, creeds, ministers, and saints seem to think it. Here is this present life, full of occupations and earnest struggles and great instructions. Here is this planet, not a thousandth part known, and yet intensely provoking to intelligent curiosity; and science is now every day taking a fresh and an ever bolder look into it; and we want our Sundays to follow these things up. That is our idea of worship. Then, again, the greatest philosophers are now writing out their freest, finest thoughts about our nature; and, if we go to church, we are likely to find some fanatical and narrow-minded minister warning us against reading or heeding what these great men say; and it is a thousand times fresher and grander and more credible than what he says himself! Why, the very newspapers, the earnest and well-edited ones, contain more instruction, more warning, more to interest the thoughtful mind, than the best sermons; and why should a thinking man, who needs to keep up with the times, and means to have his own thoughts free, go where duty or custom makes it common to frown upon inquiry, doubt, and speculation, – to shut out knowledge and testimony, and stamp a man with a special type of thinking or professing?"

For there are, you observe, – in justice to these thoughts, – these two instructors to choose between in our generation.

Here is the Church, with its ecclesiastical usages and its pious exhortations; its Sunday school for the children; its devotional meeting in the week, and its Sunday teaching and worship, – all acknowledged as good for those that like them, and are willing to accept what people thought or believed was true a hundred or five hundred years ago; and here is the modern press, with the wonderful profusion of earnest and able books, cheap and attractive, and treating boldly all subjects of immediate and of permanent interest; and here are the reviews, quarterly and monthly, that now compress into themselves and popularize all that these books contain, and furnish critical notices of them; and then, again, here are the newspapers, wonderful in variety and ability, that hint at, suggest, and bring home all the new and fresh thoughts of the time. And the marvel is, that most of these books, reviews, papers, are in the interest of, and seem inspired by, something larger, freer, fresher, truer, than what the churches and the creeds are urging. Thus church religion and general culture do not play any longer into each other's hands. If you believe what the men of science, the philosophers, the poets and critics, believe, you cannot believe, except in a very general way, in what the creeds and churches commonly profess. Accordingly, the professors in college, the physicians, the teachers, the scientists, the reformers, the politicians, the newspaper men, the reviewers, the authors, are seldom professing Christians, or even church-goers; and if they do go to church from motives of interest or example, they are free enough to confess in private that they do

not much believe what they hear.

Assuming that this is a tolerably correct account – although doubtless exaggerated for pictorial effect – of the existing state of things among the reading and thinking class of this country, what is the real significance of it? Is it as new as it seems? Is it as threatening to the cause of religious faith as it seems? Reduced to its most general terms, is it any thing more or other than this? The faith and worship of this generation, and the experience and culture of a portion of this generation, have temporarily fallen out; and, as in all similar quarrels, there is, for the time, helpless misunderstanding, mutual jealousy and misrepresentation. The faith and piety of the time pronounce the culture, the science, the progressive philanthropy, the politics, the higher education and advanced literature, to be godless and Christless; and the culture of the age retaliates, perhaps, with still greater sincerity, in pronouncing the faith and worship of the time to be superstitious, antiquated, sentimental, and specially fitted only to people willing to be led by priests and hireling ministers.

Now, if this were a quarrel between experience and inexperience, between good and bad, between truth and falsehood, it would be easy to take sides. But faith and knowledge have both equal rights in humanity. People who are sincerely in love with knowledge and science and philosophy are not thereby made enemies of God or man; certainly are not to be discouraged and abused for their devotion to practical and scientific truth,

their search for facts, their interest in the works of the Creator, even if they are not possessed of what the church properly calls faith and piety. And, on the other hand, however shocked established faith and piety may naturally be by the handling which religion and its creeds and worship receive from modern inquisitors, ought the deeper believers to be seriously alarmed for the safety of its root or its healing leaves, on account of the shaking which the tree of life is now receiving? However slow science and culture may often show themselves to be in recognizing the fact, can any reasonable and impartial mind, acquainted with history or human nature, believe that faith itself is an inconstant or perishable factor in our nature? prayer a childish impulse, which clear-seeing manhood must put away? the conscience, not the representative of a holiness enthroned over the moral universe, but an artificial organ, which social convenience has developed, much like the overgrown liver in the Strasburg goose? In short, who that considers the part that faith and worship have played in the history of the race, can doubt their essential and permanent place in human fortunes? The question of *some* religion, of *some* worship, for the people, does not seem debatable. The only alternative among nations has been a religion in which mystery, awe, and fear prevailed, clothing themselves in dread and bloody sacrifices, or else a religion in which more knowledge, more reason, more love, embodied themselves in a simpler and gentler ritual. The nations have had only a choice – not always a wholly voluntary one – between terrific superstitions

and more or less reasonable religions. Christianity has prevailed in civilized nations, since Constantine, by accommodating its theological dogmas and external ritual to the needs of successive eras; beginning with coarser and more heathenish symbols, and running itself clearer and more clear, as the mind and taste and experience of the race have developed "sweetness and light." But does this make Christianity only a human growth, and so predict a coming decay, which many seem to think has already begun? On the contrary, the decisive fact about Christianity is, that, while its intellectual history is changing, its early records are in form fixed and permanent, and that its real progress has been uniformly a return towards its original simplicity. Other faiths develop. It is we who develop under Christianity, and are slowly changed unto the original likeness of Christ. Christ's statements, Christ's character, Christ's words, do not become antiquated. We are not called upon to explain away, as superstitions of the time, any of the *certain* words he said, or thoughts he had, or commandments he left. True, there are critical embarrassments about the record, and room enough to question how it was made up; and we cannot always trust the reporters of that age, or our own. But when we get, as we certainly do get in hundreds of cases, at Christ's own words; or when we really see – as by a hundred vistas, through all the *débris* and rubbish of the age, we may see – the true person and bearing and spirit of Jesus, we behold, we recognize, we know, a Being who, transferred to this age, and placed in the centre of the choicest circle of saints and

sages whom culture and science and wisdom could collect, would bear just the same exalted relation of superiority to them that he did to the fishermen and publicans and kings and high-priests and noble women and learned rabbis of his own day. We should not hesitate, any more than they did, to call him Master and Lord; to say, "To whom else shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Those, then, who fear that true culture, that science or philosophy boldly pushed, that learning and logic impartially applied, – whether in studying God's method in creation, or his method in revelation, – can injure permanently faith and piety, or endanger Christianity, as a whole, must either think the religious wants of man very shallow or very artificial, or the providence of God very easily baffled, and the harmony of his word and works very badly matched. If there be in nature or in man, in earth or in our dust, in chemistry, astronomy, anthropology; in geology, the language of dead eras; or in language, the geology of buried races, any thing that disproves the existence and providence of a living God, the holiness and goodness and trustworthiness of his character; the moral and religious nature of man, his accountableness, his immortality; the divine beauty and sinless superiority of Jesus Christ, and the essential truth of his religion, – by all means let us know it! Why should we allow ourselves to be beguiled by fables and false hopes and make-believes? But the faith of religious experience, the confidence of those who know and love and have become spiritually intimate

with the gospel of Jesus Christ, is usually such that they would sooner mistrust their senses than their souls. They have found a moral and spiritual guidance, a food and medicine in their Christian faith, which enables them calmly to say to criticism, to science, to culture, "We do not hold our faith, or practise our worship, by your leave, or at your mercy." Faith leans first on the spiritual nature of man, and not on demonstrable science. It would not be faith, if it were only a sharper sight. It is insight, not sight. It springs from its own root, not primarily from the intellect. As we love our wives and children with something besides the judgment, or the logical faculty, so we love God with the heart, and not with the understanding. We stand erect, with open eyes, when we are seeking truth; we fall on our knees with closed eyelids, when we are seeking God! Religion is not the rule of three, but the golden rule; it is not the major and minor premises and copula of logic, but the sacred instinct of the soul, which Jesus Christ has satisfied, and guided, and owned, and directed, in an inestimable way.

But when faith and worship have taken this true and independent tone, let them not join the foolish bigots, who think that because faith rests on other foundations than science, therefore it owes nothing to science and culture, and can wholly separate its fortunes and future from them. True, *faith* and *culture*, religion and science, in spite of their general and permanent agreement and connection, when they cannot get on honestly together, had better for the time separate; for they

embarrass each other, and it is in their insulation that they sometimes ripen and prepare in separate crucible elements that are ultimately to blend in a finer compound than either ever knew before. Thus faith, driving science and culture out of her cell, and closing the doors on fact and observation, wrapt in devotion, has sometimes caught visions of God through her purely spiritual atmosphere, which sages in their laboratories have never seen. The great religious inspirations have not come from scholars, but from seers; from men of soul, not men of sense. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" said his contemporaries of Christ. Well, he knew no letters, but he had what letters never teach, – divine wisdom! He knew God, that end of knowledge; he knew man, that last of philosophy. Faith therefore often recruits itself in a temporary divorce from science, just as Romanism profitably drives her priests into periodical retreats for prayer and exclusive meditations on God and Christ. It is beautiful to study even those humble and uninstructed Christian sects, whose simple and implicit faith is protected, yes, and exalted, by their providential indifference to science or unacquaintance with speculative difficulties. It is not their ignorance that kindles their devotion, but it is faith's vitality, which in certain exceptional natures and times beams and glows most purely, fed only on its own sacred substance. When you have reached the inner kernel of a true Moravian, or even a true Catholic heart, and found a solid core of faith, unsupported by any other evidence than that which the Scripture described in the words, "Faith

is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," you have gone far towards fathoming the holiest secret in our nature, the well of living water. And, on the other hand, how much better, both for faith and science, that science should, at a time like this, go without religious ends into physical or metaphysical pursuits, investigate, inquire, test, question, in absolute independence of theological or spiritual results. It is only when thus free and bold and uncommitted that her testimony is worth any thing. Think of Newton, meditating and exploring the solar system, in the simple love of truth, without let or hindrance from ecclesiastical intermeddlers, and compare him with Galileo, lifting his telescope under the malediction of the priesthood of Rome.

No: let science be as free as light, as brave as sunbeams, as honest as photography! Encourage her to chronicle her conclusions with fearless and unreproached fidelity. She will doubtless make many things which have been long associated with religion look foolish and incredible. But it is only so religion can shed some husks, and get rid of some embarrassments. It is, in short, only just such assaults and criticisms from science and experience that ever induces religion to strain out the flies from her honey; to dissociate what is accidental in faith from what is essential and permanent. And, when science and culture have gathered in the full harvest of this wonderful season of discovery and speculation, we may expect to find faith stripped of many garments, now worshipped, which ignorance and fear

put upon her for protection and defence; but really strengthened in substance, by the free movements allowed her lungs, and the dropping of the useless load upon her back. Then, too, science and philosophy will again resume their places at the feet of the master-principle in our nature, until again driven away, by new disagreements, to return again by the discovery of a finer harmony.

Self-culture will never supersede worship, more than golden lamps burning fragrant oils will ever supersede the sun; more than digging and hoeing and planting will supersede sunshine and rain from heaven. Self-culture? Yes: by all means, and in any amount, but not as an end. When people look to ornamental gardening for the crops that are to feed the famine-smitten world, and not to the pastures and prairies, as they lie in the light of the common sun, they will look to self-culture for the characters, the hearts, the souls that glorify God and lift and bless the world. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." That is the irrevocable law of growth. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you." Worship, faith, duty, devotion to God, Christ, humanity, to justice, freedom, truth, – these, and not self-culture, have lifted the race and the world. Learn, acquire, cultivate, improve, develop yourselves, by art, music, reading, languages, study, science, experience, but do it all in seeking to know and love and serve God and man. Seek to know Christ, and you will learn more, indirectly, than

though you sought all knowledge without this thirst. Seek to know God, and you shall find all science and culture healthful, sacred, harmonious, satisfying, and devout.

The break between modern thought and ancient creeds and worship, thus considered, though serious, and worth the utmost pains to heal, by all arts that do not conceal or salve over, without curing the wound, is not permanently discouraging to earnest and well-considered Christian faith. Nor are all the signs of the times one way. For – after all that has been said about the restless and dissatisfied condition of the critical and conscious thought of the time, and the scepticism of the learned, or the speculative class, or of the new thinkers born of the physical progress of the age, and the decay of worship in the literary and artistic, the editorial and poetical circles – it remains to be said, that, leaving this important and valuable body of people aside, – not badly employed, and not without personal warrant for their doubts and withdrawal from positive institutions, – there remains a mighty majority, on whom the Christian religion and historical faith and the external church have a vigorous and unyielding hold; whose practical instincts and grand common-sense and hereditary experience anchor them safely in positive faith, while the scepticism raves without and blows itself clear, and passes over. Christianity first addressed itself to common people, not to avoid criticism, but to secure the attention of the moral affections and the spiritual powers, instead of the meaner understanding. It has lived on the heart and conscience and needs

and yearnings of the masses, from and to whom practical wisdom and fixed institutions and simple faith always come and always return. Common sense is not the sense that is common, but the sense that is *in* common. And popular faith is not the faith of private ignorance massed, but of that wisdom which alone enables ignorant people to find a basis for feelings and actions that all feel to be beyond and above their private ignorance or self-will. The common people were the first to hear Christ gladly: they will be the last to hear any who deny him.

It is easy to exaggerate the decline of modern faith, and to misread the tendencies of the time on which we have been dwelling. Thus, paradox though it seem, it were just as true to say that more people are deliberately interested in Christian faith and worship to-day than at any previous era in the history of our religion, as to asseverate that more people doubt and regret it than ever before. Both statements are true; and they are reconciled only by the fact that it is only in this century that the claims of faith and worship have been popularly debated, or that the people were expected or allowed to have any independent opinion about them. The general soil of our humanity is for the first time surveyed and sown; and it is found that, with more *wheat* than ever, there are also more *tares*. With more intelligent and convinced worshippers, there are more wilful or logical neglecters of worship; with more genuine believers, more sceptics; with more religious activity, more worldliness. Without an army in the field, there will be no deserters; without a common

currency of genuine coin, no counterfeits; without a formidable body of affirmers, few deniers.

The positive institutions of Christianity decline in one form, to spring into new life in other and better forms. Doubtless, fourfold more money is expended to-day upon temples of worship than in what have been falsely called the ages of faith, – rather the ages of acquiescence. Religion does not decline as a costly interest of humanity with the progress of doubt, freedom, intelligence, science, and economic development. It is a permanent and eternal want of man, and is always present, either as a vast, overshadowing superstition, or as a more or less intelligent faith. Nowhere has it a stronger hold on society than in free America, which false prophets, with their faces to the past, muttered was about to become its grave. This busy, delving, utilitarian country, without a past, denied the influence of ruins and the memory of mythic founders, a land without mystery or poetry, – how could so tender and venerable a sentiment as reverence live in its garish day? how so sweet a nymph as Piety kneel in its muddy marts of trade, or chant her prayers in its monotonous wilderness, ringing with the woodman's axe or the screeching saw? But now delegates of all the great religious bodies in the Old World are visiting America, for religious instruction and inspiration. Nowhere, it is confessed, is there to be found a people so generally interested in religion, ready to make so great sacrifices for it, or so deeply convinced that its principles and inspirations are at the root of all national

prosperity. Nowhere do churches and chapels spring up with such rapidity, and in such numbers; nowhere is the ministry as well supported, or its ministers as influential members of society; nowhere do plain men of business and intelligence, I do not say of science and philosophy, participate so freely in religious worship. And since all political compulsion has been taken off from the support of religion, and it has been made purely voluntary, its interests have received even more care. There is little doubt that the decline of religious establishments, the decay of priestly authority, the complete withdrawal of governmental patronage, the discrediting of the principle of irrational fear, the dispersion of false dogmas, the clearing up of superstition, the growth of toleration and charity, instead of weakening true faith or lessening public worship, will greatly increase and strengthen both. For it is not man's ignorance, weakness, and fears, that lead him most certainly to Christian worship and faith. There is a worship and a faith of blindness and dread; but they have no tendency to develop a moral and spiritual sense of the character of God, or the character becoming man, or to survive the spread of general intelligence and mental courage. If thought, if courage of mind, if inquiry and investigation, if experience and learning and comprehensive grasp, if light and sound reason, and acquaintance with human nature, tended to abolish a living God from the heart and faith of man, to disprove the essential truths of Christianity, or to make life and the human soul less sacred, aspiring, and religious, the world would be on its rapid

way to atheism. But I maintain that science itself, philosophy and free inquiry, however divorced from religious institutions and dogmas, were never so humble, reverential, and Christian as since they partly emancipated themselves from theological or ecclesiastical censure and suspicion. For ages science knelt to religion as she went to her crucible or laboratory, like the sexton passing the altar in a Catholic cathedral, and with as little thought or feeling as he, simply to avert censure, while she pursued inquiries she knew would banish the superstition she pretended to honor. Faith and knowledge were at opposite poles; religious truth and scientific truth, finally and permanently amenable to different standards. How dishonoring to religion was this distrust of light and knowledge! how faithless in God, this faith in him which could not bear investigation! how compromising to Christianity, the sort of trust which refuses as blasphemous the application of all the tests and proofs which are required in the certification of every other important conviction! Religious faith rests on the spiritual nature; but its basis is not less real for being undemonstrable, like the axioms of mathematics. That is not real faith which dares not investigate the grounds of its own being. It is irreverent to God, to affirm that he does not allow us to try his ways; to demand proofs of his existence and righteous government; to ask for the credentials of his alleged messengers; to doubt until we are rationally convinced. If the artificial feeling that faith is opposed to reason; religious truth to universal truth; that belief in unseen things is less rational or less

capable of verification than the radical beliefs of the senses, – if these prejudices were sound, or not the reverse of true, the world would be on its inevitable way to universal infidelity and godless materialism. But is that the tendency of things? Is it that religion is growing *less* mystic? or only science more so? Have not real and affecting mysteries been very much transferred for the time from theology to philosophy, from the priest to the professor? I doubt very much whether men of science are not more truly on their knees than men of superstition, in our days. Never did such candor, such confessions of baffled insight, such a sense of inscrutable wisdom and power, such a feeling of awe and dependence, seem to prevail in science as now, when so many theologians are raising the eyebrow, and seeking to alarm the world at what they call the atheism of the most truth-loving, earnest, and noble men. I would sooner have the scepticism – reverent and honest and fearless – of these solemn and awed inquisitors in the inner shrines of nature, than the faith of self-bandaged priests, who are thinking to light the way to heaven with candles on the mid-day altar, or to keep faith in God alive only by processions in vestments of purple and gold.

Nor has Christianity any thing permanently to fear from the disposition which now so largely prevails, to separate it from its accidents, its accretions, and its misrepresentations. The days have not long gone by when men were counted as entitled to little respect, if they did not wear side-swords and bag-wigs. You recollect how our Benjamin Franklin surprised, shocked, and

then delighted all Europe, by appearing at the court of France in plain citizen's clothes? Religion, too, has had her court-dress, and her sounding court-titles, and official robes, and circuitous ceremonies. The world has felt horror-stricken whenever any brave and more believing spirit has ventured to ask the meaning of one of these theological tags and titles. But how much less wholesome is living water, if drunk out of a leaf, or the palm of one's hand, than if presented on a salver, in a curiously jewelled flagon, by a priest in livery? How much has theological ingenuity of statement and systematic divinity, which it takes the study of a life to understand, added to the power of the simplicity of Christ as he unfolds himself in the Sermon on the Mount? Yet, if any one has dared to be as simple as Christ himself was in his own faith, he has been said to deny the Lord that bought him. It has been called infidelity, to think Christ meant only just what he said, and was understood to say, in his simple parables. You must believe something not less incredible and abstruse than the church Trinity; something not less contrary to natural justice and common sense than the church vicarious atonement; something not less cruel and vindictive than the eternal misery of all who through ignorance, birth, or accident, or even perversity and pride, do not hear of, or do not accept, the blood of Christ as their only hope of God's mercy and forgiveness, or you are no Christian. Now I hold these dogmas themselves to be unchristian in origin and influence, although held by many excellent Christian men. I believe that they are the

main obstacles with many honest, brave, and enlightened men in our day, to their interest in public worship; and that millions repudiate the Church, and Christianity, which is a different thing, simply because they suppose her to be responsible for these barnacles upon the sacred ship. It would be just as reasonable to hold the Hudson River responsible for the filth the sewers of the city empty into it; or to hold the sun answerable for the changes in its beams, caused by the colored glass in church-windows.

Christianity, the Christianity of Christ, is simple, rational, intelligible, independent of, yet in perfect harmony, – if it be often an unknown harmony, – with philosophy, ethics, science; true, because from God, the God of nature as well as grace; true, because the transcript of self-evident and self-proving principles; true, because guaranteed by our nature; true, because of universal application, unimpeached by time or experience. It affirms the being and authority of a righteous, holy, and all-loving God, whom man can serve and love and worship because he is made in his image; can know, by studying himself; and to whom man is directly related by reason, conscience, and affections. It affirms divine science and worship to consist in obedience to God's laws, written on man's heart, and for ever urged by God's Spirit. It affirms the present and persistent penalty, the inevitable consequences, of all moral and spiritual wrong-doing and disobedience; the present and future blessedness of well-doing and holiness. It sets forth Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Son of Man, – appellations that, deeply

considered, really mean the same thing, – the direct messenger, representative, and plenipotentiary of God, – his perfect moral image. It insists upon men's putting themselves to school to Christ, honoring, loving, and following him; forming themselves into classes, – another name for churches, – and by prayer, meditation, and study of his life, informing their minds and hearts, and shaping their wills in his likeness, which is the ideal of humanity. Its clear object is to dignify and ennoble man, by presenting God as his father; to show him what his nature is capable of, by exhibiting Christ in the loveliness, sanctity, and power of his awful yet winning beauty; to make him ashamed of his own sins, and afraid of sin, by arousing moral sensibility in his heart; safely to fence in his path by beautiful and sacred customs, – the tender, simple rites of baptism and communion; the duty of daily prayer, the use of the Scriptures, and respect for the Lord's Day.

Here is a Christianity without dogmatic entanglement; plain, direct, earnest, simple, defensible, intelligible to a child, yet deep enough to exhaust a life's study. For it is the simplicities of religion that are the permanent and glorious mysteries that never tire. They draw our childhood's wonder, our manly reverence, and age's unquenched curiosity and awe. Do we ever tire of the stars, or the horizon, or the blue sky, or the dawn, or the sunset, or running water, or natural gems? Do we ever tire of the thought of a holy, all-wise, all-good Spirit of spirits, our God and our Father, or of hearing of the reverence and trust, the obedience and the

love, due to him? Do we ever tire of Jesus Christ, considered as the sinless image, within human limitations, of God's love and truth and mercy and purity? Do we ever tire of hearing the wondrous story of his obedient, disinterested, and exalted life and sacrifice? or of the call to follow his graces and copy his perfections into our own hearts and lives? Are we ever weary of hearing of the blessed hope of immortality, with the comfortable expectation of throwing off the burden of our flesh, and winging our way in spiritual freedom nearer to God and the light of our Master's face? Who can exhaust, who can add to, the real force and attraction and fulness of those truths and promises? Truly received, they grow with every day's contemplation and use; they fill the soul with an increasing awe and joy; they prove only less common-place as they are more nearly approached, more copious as they are more drawn upon, and more sacred as they are more familiar.

It is the common, simple, universal truths that are the great, inexhaustible, powerful, and never-wearying truths. But doubtless it requires courage, personal conviction, and self-watchfulness, to maintain personal piety or religious institutions under free and enlightened conditions, when they are just beginning. When sacramental mysteries are exploded, when the official sanctity of the ministry is disowned, when the technical and dogmatic conditions of acceptance with God are abandoned, when every man's right of private judgment is confessed, when common sense is invited into the inner court of faith, when every

man is confessed to be a king and a priest in that temple of God which he finds in his own body and soul, when real, genuine goodness is owned as the equivalent of religion, then it is evident that the support of religious institutions, of public worship, of the church and the ordinances, must appeal to something besides the ignorance, the fears, the superstitions, the traditions of the Christian world. They must fall back on the practical convictions men entertain of their intrinsic importance. They must commend themselves to the sober, plain, and rational judgment of men of courage, reflection, and observation. They fall into the same category with a government based not on the divine right of kings, or the usages of past generations, the artificial distinctions of ranks and classes, owing fealty each to that which is socially above itself, but resting on the consent of the governed, and deriving its authority and its support from the sense of its usefulness and necessity. We have not yet achieved fully, in this country, the passage of the people over from the Old World status of *subjects* to the New World status of *citizens*. We are in the midst of the glorious struggle for a State, a national government, which rests securely on the love and service of hearts that have created it, and maintain and defend it on purely rational and intelligible grounds. It is so new, so advanced, so sublime an undertaking, that we often falter and faint, as if man were not good enough, nor reasonable enough, to be entitled to such a government. We often doubt if we can bear the dilution which the public virtue and good sense in our native community suffers

from the flood of ignorance and political superstition coming with emigrants from other and coarser states of society and civil organizations. We are not half alive to the glory and grandeur of the experiment of free political institutions, and do not press with the zeal we ought the general education, the political training, the moral discipline, which can alone save the State, when it has no foundation but the good-will, the respect, and the practical valuation of the people. But is the State or the nation ever so truly divine as when it is owned as the voice of God, calling all the people to maintain equal justice, to recognize universal interests, to embody Christian ethics in public law? And despite our local mortifications and occasional misgivings, what nation is now so strong and firm, what government so confident and so promising, as our own? What but freedom, fidelity to rational principles and ideal justice, give it this strength? What is it, on the other hand, but traditions that represent the ignorance and accidents and injustice of former ages, – what is it but authority usurped and then consecrated, social superstitions hardened into political creeds, – that is now proving the weakness and peril of European nationalities, and imperial or monarchical governments? Knowledge, science, literature, progress, truth, liberty, become sooner or later the enemies of all governments, and all social institutions, not founded in abstract justice and equal rights. Yet how fearful the transition! Who can contemplate the downfall of the French empire, and then look at the architects of the new republic, working in the crude material of a priest-

ridden or unschooled populace, without dismay? Yet the process is inevitable. Democratic ideas are abroad: they are in the air. They corrode all the base metal they touch; and thrones and titles, and legalized classes, and exceptional prerogatives, are predestined to a rapid disintegration. How blessed the nation that has transferred its political homage from traditions to principles; from men or families, to rights and duties; from a compromise with ancient inequality and wrong, to an affirmation of universal justice and right! Yet never had a people so grave and so constant and so serious duties as we have. And there is nothing in our principles or government that *must* save our country, in spite of the failure of political virtue, intelligence, and devotion, in our private citizens. God has buried many republics, because the people were unworthy of them. Their failure was no disproof of the principle involved, but only an evidence that the people fell wholly below their privileges and ideas. America may add another to this list of failures, but can do nothing to discredit the truth and glory and final triumph of the democratic idea. I do not believe we shall fail; on the contrary, I have an increasing faith in the sense and virtue and ability of the people of this country. But the success of American political institutions depends very much on the success of the Christian and religious institutions that match them, and are alone adapted to them. We cannot long guarantee religious institutions, in a country of free schools, public lyceums, unlicensed newspapers, unimpeded inquiry, and absolute religious equality, if they do not rest on grounds of

reason and experience and sober truth. Mere authority, mere ecclesiasticism, mere sacred usages, mere mystery, or mere dogmatism, will not long protect the creeds and formularies of the church. They are undergoing a species of dry-rot, like to that which the rafters of my own church lately suffered from the confinement and unventilated bondage in iron boxes in which their ends had been placed for greater security. They wanted air and light, and more confidence in their inherent soundness; and, if they had been permitted it, they would have lasted a hundred years. It is precisely so with the Christian religion, boxed up in creeds. It grows musty, worm-eaten, and finally loses its life and hold. A certain timid and constitutionally religious portion of the community will cherish any creed or usage which is time-honored; and the less robust and decisive minds of the time will rally about what is established and venerable, however out of date, incredible, or irrational. But it is what is going on in the independent and free mind of the common people, that should have our most serious regard. What is the faith of the fairly educated young men and women who are now springing up in America? Certainly, it is not, in the more gifted or the most thoughtful part of it, in sympathy with any form of sacramental or dogmatic Christianity. It is not Trinitarian; it is not biblical; it is not technical. It is hardly Christian! It is bold, independent, inquisitive, questioning every thing, and resolute in its rights of opinion. It is alienated from church and worship to a great degree. It suspects the importance of religious institutions, and reads

and thinks and worships in books of poetry and philosophy. A timid heart might easily grow alarmed at the symptoms, and think that irreligion, and decay of worship and fellowship in the Christian Church, were upon us. But sad and discouraging as the present symptoms are to many, I see more to hope than fear in these tendencies. They are a rebuke to formal and technical theology, – to mere ecclesiasticism, to outworn ways. They are bringing a violent assault upon the hard crust of a stifling belief, of which the world must get rid before the gospel of Christ can emerge, and be received in its primitive simplicity. It is the only way in which faith is ever purified, – by doubt and denial. The gospel requires a new statement. It must come out of its ecclesiastical bulwarks. It must abandon its claim to any other kind of judgment than all other truth claims and allows. It must place itself by the side of science, experience, and philosophy, and defy their tests. It must invite the most rigid investigation. It must claim its foundations in eternal truth. It must prove its efficiency, not with the weak, but the strong; not with the ignorant, but the learned; not with the bound, but the free. And then it will recover its lost ground, and take a stronger and diviner position than it ever had before.

This is the work that Liberal Christianity has in hand; a difficult, slow, and often discouraging work, but one that is intensely patriotic, intensely practical, intensely necessary. That which was the mere fortress into which the enlightened and free-minded people of Massachusetts fled for refuge from

ecclesiastical tyranny, a half-century ago, – Unitarianism, – is now become a recognized crusade for religious liberty for the American people. The liberty is coming fast enough, and surely enough; but will the worship, will the Christian seriousness, will the fellowship of faith, will the piety that gives aromatic beauty as well as health to the soul, come with it? If it were not to come, liberty would be only license and secularity and worldliness. Every firm, well-ordered, earnest and religious congregation of the liberal faith; exhibiting stableness, order, solemnity; doing religious work among the poor, and cultivating piety in its own youth; making sacrifices to its own ideas, and upholding its own worship, – is an argument of the most solid kind, an example of contagious power, an encouragement of priceless cheer, for those who think that Christian liberty necessarily leads to license and decay of worship; or that Christ is less revered and loved and trusted when he is accepted in the derived and dependent character he claimed, – the only tenable, rational, possible character in which a century hence he can be received by any unsuperstitious persons. We have a sacred privilege, a glorious opportunity. We only need to show ourselves warm, earnest, united, attached to worship, fruitful in piety, devoted to good works, zealous for God's glory and man's redemption, sincere, humble, yet rational and free followers of Christ, to win an immense victory for the gospel in this inquiring and doubting age. I have no great *immediate* hopes, but hopes beyond expression in the gracious development of another generation. I

bate not a jot of heart or hope that absolute liberty in religion will favor the growth of piety, as much as political freedom has favored the growth of order and peace and prosperity. Oh! not a thousandth part the power of Christian truth and righteousness has yet been shown in the world. The love of God, the love of man, have only begun their glorious mission. Christ yet waits for his true throne. Humanity is just come of age, and, with some wild festivity, is claiming its heritage. But God is with and over it; and Jesus Christ is its inspirer and guide. He will not lose his headship. He will be more followed when less worshipped; more truly loved when less idolized; more triumphant when more clearly understood! Darkness, wrath, threats, enchantments, sacraments, prostrations, humiliations of reason, emotional transports, affectations of belief, belief for its own sake, – none of these things are truly favorable to Christ's kingdom or the glory of his gospel. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Christ is the Sun of righteousness. When reason, conscience, affection, rule the world; when love and justice, and mild and tender views of life and humanity, of God and Christ, displace the cruel terrors and superstitions that have survived the social and political meliorations of the age, we shall begin to see that love is the fulfilling of the law, and liberty of thought the greatest friend of worship, the finest result of Christ's coming, and the throne from which he commands the whole human heart and history.

A TRUE THEOLOGY THE BASIS OF HUMAN PROGRESS

By **JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE**

The subject of the present lecture is "A True Theology the Basis of Human Progress." And, in order to strike the key-note, and to indicate the object at which I aim, I will read four or five passages from the New Testament, which describe such a Theology in its spirit and root.

The Apostle Paul says:¹ "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark." So he declares himself a Progressive Christian.

Again he says:² "We know in part, and we prophesy [or teach] in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." So he declares that all intellectual statements, his own included, are relative and provisional. He is here speaking, doubtless, not of rational insights, but of the insight when elaborated by the intellect into a statement; not

¹ Phil. iii. 13.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10.

of intuitional knowledge, but that which comes from reflection. In regard to all such propositions, he would accept the modern doctrine of the Relativity of Knowledge; thus cutting up by the roots the poisonous weed of Bigotry.

Again: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."³ He thus requires and authorizes a manly, intelligent Theology.

Again: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."⁴ He here rejects the Theology of the letter, including the doctrine of Literal Inspiration.

Again: "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."⁵

My Thesis to-night is not a truism; my argument is not unnecessary or uncalled for. Nothing is more common than to undervalue the importance of Theology; to regard it as having no bearing on life, no influence on human progress, no causative power in regard to civilization. Mr. Buckle, one of the most recent English philosophical historians, contends that Theology is the result rather than the cause of national character; that it is merely symptomatic of the condition of a people. If they are in a good condition, they have a good Theology; if in a bad condition, a bad one. He even thinks it owing to a mistaken zeal

³ 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

⁴ 2 Cor. iii. 6.

⁵ 2 Tim. i. 7.

that Christians try to propagate their religion, because he believes that savages cannot become Christians. Civilization, Mr. Buckle supposes, depends greatly upon soil, upon climate, upon food, upon the trade-winds; but not much upon religious ideas. He says that, in England, "theological interests have long ceased to be supreme." "The time for these things has passed by." And this is also a very common opinion among ourselves. Many reformers have a notion that we have done with Theology, that we can do without it. Some men of science tell us that Theology has nothing to do with the advance of civilization, but that this comes from discovery in the sphere of physical science. But I believe that the one thing which retards the progress of reform is a false philosophy concerning God and man, a false view of God's ideas concerning this world; and that the one thing needful for Human Progress is a deeper, higher, broader view of God and his ways. And I hope to be able to show some grounds for this opinion.

The religious instinct in man is universal. Some individuals and some races possess more of it, and others less; but the history of mankind shows that religion in some form is one of the most indestructible elements of human nature. But whether this religious instinct shall appear as faith or as fanaticism; whether it shall be a blind enthusiasm or an intelligent conviction; whether it shall be a tormenting superstition or a consoling peace; whether it shall lead to cruel persecutions or to heavenly benevolence; all this, and more, depends on Theology. Religion is a blind instinct: the ideas of God, man, duty, destiny, which determine

its development, constitute Theology.

The same law holds concerning Conscience and Ethics. Conscience in the form of a moral instinct is universal in man. In every human breast there is a conviction that something is right and something wrong; but what that right and wrong is depends on Ethics. In every language of man, there are words which imply ought and ought not, duty, responsibility, merit, and guilt. But what men believe they ought to do, or ought not to do, – that depends on the education of their conscience; that is, on their Ethics.

Conscience, like religion, is man's strength, and his weakness. Conscience makes cowards of us all; but it is the strong-siding champion which makes heroes of us all. Savages are cruel, pirates are cruel; but they cannot be as cruel as a good man, with a misguided conscience. The most savage heart has some touch of human kindness left in it, which nothing can quite conquer, – nothing but conscience. That can make man as hard as Alpine rock, as cold as Greenland ice. The torture-rooms and *autos da fe* of the Inquisition surpass the cruelties of the North American Indian. The cruelties of instinct are faint compared with the cruelties of conscience. Now what guides conscience to good or to evil? Theology, in the form of Ethics, is the guide of conscience. For, as soon as man believes in a God, he believes in the authority of his God to direct and control his actions. Whatever his God tells him to do must be right for him to do. Therefore religion in its inward form is either a debasing and

tormenting superstition or a glad faith, according to the Theology with which it is associated. And religion, in its outward form, is either an impure and cruel despotism or an elevating morality, according to the idea of God and Duty which guide it; that is, according to its associated Theology.

Some persons, like Lucretius, seeing the evils of Superstition, Bigotry, and Fanaticism, and perceiving that these have their root in religion, have endeavored to uproot religion itself. But could this be effected, which is impossible, it would be like wishing to get rid of the atmosphere, because it is sometimes subject to tempests, and sometimes infected with malaria. Religion is the atmosphere of the soul, necessary to the healthful action of its life, to be purified, but not renounced.

Every one has a Theology, who has even a vague idea of a God; and every one has this who has an idea of something higher and better than himself, higher and better than any of his fellow-men. The Atheist therefore may have a God, though he does not call him so. For God is not a word, not a sound: he is the Infinite Reality which we see, more or less dimly, more or less truly, rising above us, and above all our race. The nature of this ideal determines for each of us what we believe to be right or wrong; and so it is that our Theology rules our conscience, and that our conscience determines with more or less supremacy the tendency and stress of our life.

No one can look at the History of the Human Race without seeing what an immense influence religion has had in human

affairs. Every race or nation which has left its mark on Human Progress has itself been under the commanding control of some great religion. The ancient civilization of India was penetrated to the core by the institutions of Brahmanism; the grand development of Egyptian knowledge was guided by its priesthood; the culture of China has been the meek disciple of Confucius for two thousand years. Whenever any nation emerges out of darkness into light, – Assyria, Persia, Greece, or Rome, – it comes guided and inspired by some mighty religion. The testimony of History is that religion is the most potent of all the powers which move and govern human action.

Such is the story of the past. How is it at the present time? Has mankind outgrown the influence of religion to-day? Has the spread of knowledge, the advance of science, the development of literature, art, culture, weakened its power in Christendom? Never was there so much of time, thought, effort, wealth, consecrated to the Christian Church as there is now. Both branches of that Church, the Catholic and Protestant, are probably stronger to-day than they ever were before. Some few persons can live apart from religious institutions; but mankind cannot dispense with religion, and they need it organized into a Church or Churches.

Religion is a great power, and will remain so. But what is to determine the character of this power? It may impede progress or advance it; it may encourage thought or repress it; it may diffuse knowledge or limit it; it may make men free or hold them

as slaves; it may be a generous, manly, free, and moral religion or a narrow, bigoted, intolerant, fanatical, sectarian, persecuting superstition. It has been both: it is both to-day. What is to decide which it shall be? I answer, its Theology; the views it holds concerning God, man, duty, immortality, the way and the means of salvation. Religion is an immense power: how that power is to be directed depends on Theology.

Proceeding then with my theme, I shall endeavor to show how false ideas in Theology tend to check the progress of humanity, and afterward how true ideas always carry mankind onward along an ascending path of improvement.

But first let me say that my criticism is of ideas, not of sects, churches, nor individuals. By a true Theology, I mean neither a Unitarian nor a Trinitarian Theology, neither a Catholic nor a Protestant Theology. I do not mean Calvinism nor Arminianism. I have nothing to say concerning these distinctions, however important they may be; and I, for one, consider them important. But I refer to a distinction more important still, lying back of these distinctions, lying beneath them; a difference not of opinions so much as of ideas and spirit.

By a true Theology, I mean a manly Theology, as opposed to a childish one; a free, as opposed to a servile one; a generous, as opposed to a selfish one; a reasonable and intelligent Theology, as opposed to a superstitious one.

By a true Theology, I mean one which regards God as a father, and man as a brother; which looks upon this life as a preparation

for a higher; which believes that God gives us freedom, inspires our reason, and is the author of whatever is generous, self-forgetting, and noble. I find something of this Theology in all sects and churches; from the Roman Catholic at one extreme, to the Universalists and Unitarians, the Spiritualists and Comeouters, at the other. And the opposite, the false Theology, dishonorable to God, degrading to man, I find in all sects, and accompanying all creeds. And if I shall show, as truth compels me to show, that certain parties and persons are specially exposed to danger in one or another direction, I wish distinctly to state my belief that sincere and earnest men continually rise above the contagion of their position, and live untainted in an atmosphere which may have in it some special tendency to disease.

One false idea in Theology, which opposes human progress, is that Pantheistic view of the Deity, which loses sight of his personality, and conceives of him as a blind, infinite force, pervading all Nature, and carrying on the universe, but without intelligence and without love.

I know indeed that many views have been accused of being Pantheism which are not. I do not believe in a God outside of the universe. I believe that he is one "in whom we live, and move, and have our being," one "from whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things," – a perpetual Creator, immanent in his world. But this view is quite consistent with a belief in his personal being, in his intelligent, conscious, loving purpose. Without such a belief, hope dies out of the heart; and without

hope mankind loses the energy which creates progress. Unless we have an intelligent Friend who governs the universe, it will seem to be moving blindly on toward no divine end; and this thought eats out the courage of the soul.

In some poetical natures, as in the case of Shelley, this Pantheism takes the form of faith in a spirit of beauty, or love, or intellectual power, pervading all things. In more prosaic minds it becomes a belief in law, divorced from love. It turns the universe into a machine, worked by forces whose mutual action unfolds and carries on the magnificent Cosmos. Often this view comes, by way of a reaction, against an excessive Personality of Will. When the Christian Church speaks of the Deity as an Infinite Power outside of the world, who creates it and carries it on according to some contrivance, of which his own glory is the end, it is perhaps natural that men should go to the other extreme and omit person, will, and design from their conception of Deity. But thus they encounter other and opposite dangers.

A gospel of mere law is no sufficient gospel. It teaches prudence, but omits Providence. This utilitarian doctrine, which reduces every thing to law, – which makes the Deity only a Great Order, not a Father or Friend, – would soon put a stop to the deepest spring of human progress. It takes faith and hope out of our life, and substitutes observation, calculation, and prudence. But the case of Ecclesiastes and of Faust teaches us what comes from knowledge emptied of faith. He who increases such knowledge increases sorrow. The unknown, wonderful Father;

the divine, mysterious Infinite; the great supernatural power and beauty above Nature, and above all, – these alone make life tolerable. Without this brooding sense of a Divine love, of a Heaven beyond this world, of a Providence guiding human affairs, men would not long have the heart to study, because all things would seem to be going nowhere. Without such a Heavenly Friend to trust, such an immortal progress to hope, all things would seem to revolve in a circle. Not to believe in something more than a God of Law is to be without God in the world, is to be without hope. And hope is the spring of all progress, intellectual progress as well as all other. Intellect, divorced from faith, at last kills intellect itself, by destroying its inner motive. It ends in a doctrine of despair, which cries continually, "What is the use?" and finds no answer. And so the soul dies the only death the soul can die, – the death of torpor and inaction.

Another false idea in Theology, which interferes with human progress, is that of ecclesiastical authority in matters of faith and practice. When the Church comes between the soul and God, and seeks to be its master rather than its servant, it takes from it that direct responsibility to God, which is one of the strongest motives for human effort. I know that this has always been done from a sincere desire, at any rate in the beginning, to save men from apparent dangers. The Church has assumed authority, in order to do good with it. It has commanded men not to think for themselves, lest they should err. But God has meant that we should be liable to error, in order that we should learn to avoid

it by increased strength. Therefore Christ said, "Be not called Rabbi; be not called Masters, and call no man father on earth." His church, and his apostles, and he himself are here, not to be masters of the soul, but to be its servants.

The Roman Catholic Church is a great organization, which has gradually grown up, during a thousand years, the object of which has been to educate men in Christian faith and Christian conduct. It has sincerely endeavored to do this. But, unfortunately, it took a narrow view of Christian education; supposing that it meant instruction and guidance, restraint and tuition, but not development. It has magnified its own authority, in order to produce docility in its pupils. It has not allowed them freedom of inquiry nor liberty of conscience. It has not said, like Paul, "Be not children in understanding;" on the contrary, it has preferred to keep them children, so as to guide them more easily. It has not said, with Paul, "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free;" for it has come to hate the very name of liberty. What is the result? You may read it to-day in France, where, as Mr. Coquerel tells us, that Church has prevented the steady development of free institutions. It has always supported the principle of authority in the State, as the natural ally of authority in the Church. There are so few republicans in France to-day, because the people have been educated by the Church to blind submission. The priests are not to blame, the people are not: it is the Roman Catholic Theology which is to blame. That Theology teaches that the soul is saved by the reception of

external sacraments, and not by vital, independent convictions of truth.⁶

Or, if you wish another illustration of the same thing, look at New York. Why have republican institutions in New York almost proved a failure? Why were a few robbers able to take possession of the city, and plunder the citizens? Because they could control the votes of the Irish Catholics in a mass; because this vast body of voters were unable to vote independently, or to understand the first duties of a free citizen. And why was this? Not because the Irish are naturally less intelligent than the New-Englanders, the English, the Germans. No; but the Roman Catholic Church, which has had the supreme control over the Irish conscience and intellect for a thousand years, has chosen to leave them uneducated. Of course, the Roman Church, if it had pleased to do so, might long ago have made the Irish nation as enlightened as any in Europe. But its Theology taught that education might lead them into heresy, and so take them out of the true Church, and that ignorance *in* the Church was infinitely better than any amount of intellectual and moral culture *out* of

⁶ The proof of this may be amply found in the famous Encyclical and Syllabus of Pius IX., Dec. 8th, 1864. In the Syllabus he denounces as errors such propositions as the following: —That "every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which guided by the light of reason, he holds to be true." § 15. That "one may well hope, at least, for the eternal salvation of those who are in no wise in the true Church of Christ." § 17. That "the Church has no power to employ force." § 24. That "men emigrating to Catholic countries should be permitted the public exercise of their own several forms of worship." § 78. That "the Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile and harmonize himself with progress, with liberalism, and with modern civilization." § 80.

it. The fatal principle of Roman Catholic Theology – "Out of the true Church there is no salvation" – has been the ruin of the Irish nation for hundreds of years, and has very nearly entailed ruin on our own.

Do you wonder that the priests oppose our school system? If I were a Roman Catholic priest, I should oppose it too. Should I run the risk of poisoning my child's body by accepting as a gift a little better food than that I am able to buy? And shall I risk the vastly greater evil of poisoning its soul, by allowing it to be tainted with heretical books and teachers in free schools? The Roman Catholic priest is consistent: it is the Theology which teaches salvation by sacraments that is to blame. It is a theology which naturally, logically, necessarily, stands opposed to human progress. It says, "In order to be children in malice, you must also be children in understanding."

When the Protestant Reformation came, it brought with it a manly Theology. It put the Bible into all men's hands, and asserted for each the right of private judgment and liberty of conscience. Therefore the Reformation was the cause of a great forward movement in human affairs. It awakened the intellect of mankind. Science, literature, invention, – all were stimulated by it. It ran well, but something hindered. Its reverence for the Bible was its life; but, unfortunately, it soon fell into a worship of *the letter*. It taught a doctrine of verbal inspiration. It forgot the great saying of Paul, "not of the letter, but the spirit; for the letter killeth." Very soon that saying was fulfilled. Reverence for the

letter of the Bible killed the spirit of the Bible. That spirit is as free as air. It teaches no creed, it demands no blind acceptance of any dogma. It declares that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But the letter-theology has opposed nearly all the discoveries of science and all moral reforms with the words of the Bible. It has set Genesis against geology, and the book of Psalms against the Copernican system. Because the Book of Genesis says the heavens and earth were made in six days, the letter-theology declared that the fossil shells were made in the rocks just as they are, or were dropped by pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. Because the book of Psalms said that "God hath established the earth so that it shall not be moved for ever," the letter-theology denied its daily and yearly revolution. Because Noah said, "Cursed be Canaan," the letter-theology defended the slavery of the negro. Because Noah also said, "He who sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," the letter-theology has defended capital punishment as a religious duty. Because the Jews were commanded to rest on the seventh day, the letter-theology forbids the Boston Public Library to be open on the first. Becoming ever more timid and more narrow, it clings to the letter of the common English translation, and the received text. It even shrinks from alterations which would give us the true letter of the Bible, instead of the false one.

Some years ago the American Bible Society appointed a committee of the most learned scholars, from all Orthodox denominations, to correct the text and the translation of our

common English Bible, so as to make it conform to the true Hebrew and Greek text. They were not to make a new translation, but merely to correct palpable, undoubted errors in the old one. They did their work; printed their corrected Bible; laid it before the Bible Society, —*and that Society refused to adopt it.* They had not the slightest doubt of its superior correctness; but they feared to make any change, lest others might be called for, and lest the faith of the community might be disturbed in the integrity of the Scriptures. Jesus had promised them the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, to take of his truth and show it to them; but they did not believe him. They preferred to anchor themselves to the words chosen by King James's translators than to be led by the Spirit into any new truth. So it is that "the letter killeth." It stands in the way of progress. It keeps us from trusting in that ever-present Spirit which is ready to inspire us all to-day, as it inspired prophets and apostles of old. It is an evidence not of faith, but of unbelief.

Thus, this false idea in Theology, that inspiration rests in the letter of a book or a creed rather than in its spirit, is seen to be opposed to human progress.

And then there is another Theology which is opposed to human progress. It is the Theology of Fear. It speaks of hell rather than of heaven; it seeks to terrify rather than to encourage; it drives men by dread of danger rather than leads them by hope. Its ruling idea is of stern, implacable justice; its God is a God of vengeance, who cannot pardon unless the full penalty of sin has

been borne by some victim; whose mercy ceases at death; who can only forgive sin during our short human life, not after we have passed into the other world. To assuage his anger, or appease his justice, there must be devised some scheme of salvation, or plan of redemption. He cannot forgive of pure, free grace, and out of his boundless love.

Now those who hold such a Theology as this will apply its spirit in human affairs. It will go into penal legislation, into the treatment of criminals. It will make punishment the chief idea, not reformation. Jesus taught a boundless compassion, an infinite tenderness toward the sinful, the weak, the forlorn people of the world. He taught that the strong are to bear the burdens of the weak, the righteous to help the wicked, and that we are to overcome evil with good. When this principle is applied in human affairs, the great plague spots of society will disappear: intemperance, licentiousness, pauperism, crime, will be cured radically. Society, purified from these poisons, will go forward to nobler achievements than have ever yet been dreamed of. But this principle will not be applied while the fear-theology prevails, and is thought more of than that of love. The progress of human society depends on the radical cure of these social evils, not their mere restraint. And they can only be cured by such a view of the divine holiness and the divine compassion as is taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and the Parable of the Prodigal Son; showing the root of crime in sin, and inspiring a profound faith in God's saving love.

It may seem to some persons that I go too far in asserting that a true Theology is at the basis of human progress. They may ascribe human progress to other causes, – to the advance of knowledge, to scientific discovery, to such inventions as printing, the steam-engine, the railroad, and the like. But I believe that spiritual ideas are at the root of all others. That which one thinks of God, duty, and immortality, – in short, his Theology, – quickens or deadens his interest in every thing else. Whatever arouses conscience, faith, and love, also awakens intellect, invention, science, and art. If there is nothing above this world or beyond this life; if we came from nothing and are going nowhere, what interest is there in the world? "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But if the world is full of God, – if we come from him and are going to him, – then it becomes everywhere intensely interesting, and we wish to know all about it. Science has followed always in the steps of religion, and not the reverse. The Vedas went before Hindoo civilization; the Zend-Avesta led the way to that of Persia; the oldest monuments of Egypt attest the presence of religious ideas; the Laws of Moses preceded the reign of Solomon; and that civilization which joined Greeks, Romans, Goths, Vandals, Franks, and Saxons in a common civilization, derived its cohesive power from the life of Him whose idea was that love to man was another form of love to God. "The very word *humanity*," says Max Müller, "dates from Christianity." No such idea, and therefore no such term, was found among men before Christ came.

But it may be said that these instances are from such obscure epochs that it is uncertain how far it was religion which acted on civilization. Let us, then, take one or two instances, concerning which there is less uncertainty.

In the deserts, and among the vast plains of the Arabian Peninsula, a race had slumbered inactive for twenty centuries. Those nomad-Semitic tribes had wandered to and fro, engaged in perpetual internecine warfare, fulfilling the prediction concerning Ishmael, "He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him." No history, no civilization, no progress, no nationality, no unity, could be said to exist during that long period among these tribes. At length a man comes with a religious idea, a living, powerful conviction. He utters it, whether man will bear or forbear. He proclaims the unity and spirituality of God in spite of all opposition and persecution. At last his idea takes hold of the soul of this people. What is the result? They flame up into a mighty power; they are united into an irresistible force; they sweep over the world in a few decades of years; they develop a civilization superior to any other then extant. Suddenly there springs up in their midst a new art, literature, and science. Christendom, emasculated by an ecclesiastical and monastic Theology, went to Islam for freedom of thought, and found its best culture in the Mohammedan universities of Spain. Bagdad, Cairo, Damascus, Seville, Cordova, became centres of light to the world. The German conquerors darkened the

regions they overran: the Mohammedans enlightened them. The caliphs and viziers patronized learning and endowed colleges, and some of their donations amounted to millions of dollars. Libraries were collected. That of a single doctor was a load for four hundred camels. That of Cairo contained a hundred thousand manuscripts, which were lent as freely as those in the Boston Public Library. The College Library of Cordova had four hundred thousand. In these places grammar, logic, jurisprudence, the natural sciences, the philosophy of Aristotle, were taught to students who flocked to them from all parts of Christendom. Many of the professors taught from memory: one man is reported to have been able to repeat three thousand poems. The Saracens wrote treatises on geography, numismatics, medicine, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics. Some, like Avicenna, went through the whole circle of the sciences. The Saracens invented pharmacy, surgery, chemistry. Geber, in the eighth century, could prepare alcohol, sulphuric acid, nitric acid, corrosive sublimate, potash, and soda. Their astronomers measured a degree of the earth's meridian near Bagdad, and determined its circumference as twenty-four thousand miles. They found the length of the year, and calculated the obliquity of the ecliptic. Roger Bacon quotes their treatises on optics. Trigonometry retains the form given it by the Arabs, and they greatly improved Algebra. We received from them our numerical characters. We all know the beauty and permanence of their architecture, and much of our musical knowledge is derived from

them. They also made great progress in scientific agriculture and horticulture, in mining and the working of metals, in tanning and dyeing leather. Damascus blades, morocco, enamelled steel, the manufacture and use of paper, the use of the pendulum, the manufacture of cotton, public libraries, a national police, rhyme in verse, and our arithmetic, all came to us from the Arabs.

All this fruitful intellectual life must be traced directly back to the theological impulse given by Mohammed to the Arab mind; for it can be derived from no other source.

It is not quite so easy to define the precise influence on human progress given by the doctrines of the Reformation; for, before Luther, these were in the air. But no one can reasonably doubt that the demand for freedom of conscience and the right of private judgment in religion has led to liberty of thought, speech, action, in all other directions. To the war against papal and ecclesiastical authority in concerns of the soul we owe, how much no one can say, of civil freedom, popular sovereignty, the emancipation of man, the progress of the human mind. The theses of Luther were the source of the Declaration of Independence. And modern science, with the great names of Bacon and Newton, Descartes and Leibnitz, Goethe and Humboldt, is the legitimate child of Protestant Theology.

It is true that printing and maritime discoveries preceded Luther. But these inventions came from the same ideas which took form in the Lutheran Reformation. The discovery of printing was a result, no less than a cause. It came because it

was wanted; because men were wishing to communicate their thoughts more freely and widely than could be done by writing. If it had been discovered five hundred years before, it would have fallen dead, a sterile invention, leading to nothing. And so the steam-engine and the railroad did not come before, because they were not wanted: as soon as they were wanted they came. That which lies at the root of all these inventions is the wish of man to communicate easily and rapidly and widely with his brother-man; in other words, the sense of human brotherhood. Material civilization, in all its parts and in all times, grows out of a spiritual root; and only faith leads to sight, only the things unseen and eternal create those which are seen and temporal.

The two Theologies at the present time which stand opposed to each other here are not Calvinism and Armenianism, not Trinitarianism and Unitarianism, not Naturalism and Supernaturalism. But they are the Theology of discouragement and fear on one side, that of courage and hope on the other. The one thinks men must be driven to God by terror: the other seeks to attract them by love. The one has no faith in man, believes him wholly evil, believes sin to be the essential part of him. The other believes reason a divine light in the soul, and encourages it to act freely; trusts in his conscience enlightened by truth, and appeals to it confidently; relies on his heart, and seeks to inspire it with generous affections and disinterested love. That this Theology of faith is to triumph over that of fear who can doubt? All the best thought, the deepest religion, the noblest

aspiration of the age, flows in this direction. Whether our handful of Unitarian Churches is ever to become a great multitude or not, I do not know; but I am sure that the spirit which inspired the soul of Channing is to lead the future age, and make the churches which are to be. It is not now a question of Unity or Trinity, but something far deeper and much more important. While endeavoring to settle the logical terms of Christ's divinity and humanity, we have been led up higher to the sight of the Divine Father and the Human Brotherhood. Like Saul, the son of Kish, we went out to seek our father's asses, and have found a kingdom.

We have recently been told about a Boston Theology. If there is any thing which deserves to be called a Boston Theology it is this doctrine of courage and hope. For it is shared by all the leading minds of all Protestant denominations in this city. Whatever eminent man comes here, no matter what he was when he came, finds himself, ere long, moving in this direction. The shackles of tradition and formality fall from his limbs, his eyes open to a new light; and he also becomes the happy herald of a new and better day.

But a better word still, if one is wanted by which to localize these ideas, would be "The New England Theology." For in every part of New England, from the beginning; in every one of the multiform sects, whose little spires and baby-house churches have spotted our barren and rocky hills, there have never failed men of this true Apostolic succession; men believing in truth,

and brave to utter it; believing that God loves truth better than falsehood; that he desires no one to tell a lie for his glory, or to speak words of wind in his behalf. With all our narrowness, our bigotry, our controversial bitterness, our persecuting zeal, – of which, God knows, we have had enough in New England, – the heart of New England has been always free, manly, and rational. Yes: all the way from Moses Stuart to William Ellery Channing, all along the road from the lecture-rooms on the hills of Andover to the tribune of Theodore Parker standing silent in the Music Hall, we have had this same brave element of a manly Theology. This has been the handful of salt which has saved New England. Hence it is that from the days of the early Puritans, men and women, of Harry Vane, Mrs. Hutchinson, and Roger Williams, who stood up for the rights of the human soul against priestly tyranny, down through the ministers of the Revolution who went with their people to the camp of Washington at Cambridge; down to the days of the Beechers, – there has never failed a man in the New England pulpit to stand up for justice, freedom, and humanity. From our bare hill-tops New England men and women have looked up to the sky and seen it not always nor wholly black with superstitious clouds, but its infinite depths of blue interpenetrated evermore with the warm living light of a God of Love. And therefore has New England been the fountain of Progress, the fruitful parent of Reforms, "the lovely mother of yet more lovely children."

I have quoted several striking passages from the Apostle Paul.

One expresses his longing for greater excellence, and declares that he forgets every thing already attained, and is reaching out for better things, for more truth and more love. Another passage calls on his disciples to think for themselves, and be rational Christians, not children in understanding. A third asserts that he is the minister of the spirit of the gospel, not its letter; a fourth that his religion is not one of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind; a fifth says, Stand fast in freedom, and be liberal Christians; and in other places he exhorts his brethren not to be narrow, nor bigoted; but to look at every thing beautiful, lovely, true, and good, no matter where they find it. But a little while before he said these things Paul himself was one of the most narrow, and intolerant of men, opposed to progress wholly. What made this great change in his soul? It was that he had found a true Theology. He learned from Christ to trust simply in the divine love for pardon and salvation. He learned that God was the God of Heathen and Pagans as well as of Jews. He learned that no ritual, ceremony, sacraments nor forms, but only the sight of God as a Father and Friend, can really save the soul from its diseases, and fill it with immortal life. A true Theology was the secret of Paul's immense progress, and of his wonderful power to awaken and convert others. There are many who suppose his Theology obscure and severe. But when we penetrate the veil of Jewish language, we find it one of Freedom, of Reason, of Love, manly and tender, generous and intelligent. And this same Theology passing in its essence from Paul to Augustine, to

Luther, to Wesley, has always been the motive power of human civilization and human development. It has been the friend of free thought, liberty of conscience, and universal progress.

I mean then by a true Theology what Paul meant when he said that God "has not given to us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." I mean what he said when he declared that God had made him a minister of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

I mean the Theology which places the substance above the form; the thing before the name; which looks at the fact, not at the label.

Let us then, brethren, who call ourselves Unitarians, be glad and grateful for the gospel of faith and hope which we enjoy. And let us give to others what we have ourselves received. If it be true, as we have tried to show, that human progress depends largely on a true Theology we cannot help mankind more than by diffusing widely that which God has given us of his truth. Freely you have received, freely give. You who have always lived in this community, surrounded by this mellow warm light of peace and freedom, do not know, cannot tell, what those suffer who have been taught from early childhood to fear God, and to distrust his light in their soul. Do your part in spreading abroad the beams of a better day. Give to the world that religion which is not a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE ROMISH CHURCH

By ATHANASE COQUEREL, Fils

We live in a time of great and manifold changes. There is one church that for centuries has had her principal glory in asserting that she never has changed, – that she has at all times been exactly the same; but now she can hardly deny that either in accordance with her own will, or by the force of circumstances, very great changes have been wrought in her during the last few years. This, if it is true, must change also the nature, the system, the course of our controversy with her. The controversy between the two churches has not always, perhaps, been quite fair; and I should not like to be unfair to any adversary, whoever he may be. I should not be at ease in my conscience if I thought I had been unfair to any thing, especially to any thing religious, of whatever kind that religion may be; because in any religion, even the most imperfect, there is some aspiration from this earth to the sky; at least, from human souls to what they hope or believe to be God. And especially I could not pardon myself for being in any way unjust to that great church which has for centuries comforted and sustained a multitude of souls, and made them better and

happier by her teachings. It is a Christian church; and though I think that Romish Christianity has been in a very great degree alloyed, and mixed with grave errors, – and that is exactly what I wish to show, – yet, even under that veil of human errors, I recognize, I acknowledge, religion, Christianity; and therefore I bow before it.

I think, however, the changes that have taken place have not altered the essential character of the Roman Church. I think the changes that have happened are in conformity with the nature of that church; really were to be expected, and have nothing absolutely new in them. We might, perhaps, for a long time have seen them coming; and, if we had had foresight enough, we might have seen them from the very first times of that church. Let us try to understand exactly what she is, what she means; let us try to see what there is under that name, "Roman Catholic Church." She calls herself *catholic*, which means *universal*, and at the same time she has a local name. She is for the whole world; but at the same time she belongs to one city, and she bears the name of that city. Why? This is the question; and though it seems only a question of name, I think we shall find by other ways that it is a question of facts. A second advance requires a change in our polemics with Roman authority. A new science has been created in our time, which gives us better means of judging and studying other churches than our own; that science is called the comparative history of religions. In England Max Müller, in France Burnouf, and in this country James Freeman Clarke,

have compared the history of several religions. According to that comparative history, there are rules to be understood, to be acknowledged, in the development of religion. One of the rules which I think we can deduce from any comparative history of religion may be a startling one; and I will use a very homely comparison, to make myself perfectly understood. Have you ever seen over a shop door a sign-board, where the name of the old shop-keeper was painted; and, when his successor came in, he had the same board covered with a new color, and his own name painted over the old one? But in time the new paint wore off, so that the old name reappeared under the new, in such a way that it became perhaps difficult to distinguish clearly which letters or lines belonged to the old, and which to the new. If this image appears somewhat too familiar, let me ask you if you remember what scholars call a palimpsest. Sometimes in the Middle Ages it was difficult to find well-prepared parchment on which to write, and there were a great many monks who had nothing else to do – and it was the best use they could make of their time – but write or copy the Bible or other religious books. When they found parchments where were copied the comedies and tragedies or other works of the heathen, they thought those were of very little use, and they could very easily have the writing on those parchments washed out, or covered over with white paint, in such a way that what had been written there was no more visible. Then on those parchments they would write the Bible, or sermons, or any document they thought useful. But the same

thing happened then that happened with the sign-board, – the old writing reappeared after a time; the white covering spread over the page disappeared. And thus it happens that scholars are sometimes pondering for a long time over a page from a sermon of Saint Augustine, or John Chrysostom, in which they find a verse from some comedy of Terence or Aristophanes; then they have perhaps some trouble in making out which is comedy and which is sermon, in distinguishing exactly what of the writing is old and what is new; and they have not always perfectly succeeded in that effort.

Now what we see in the sign-board we see also in the religion of the different churches, when a whole multitude, at one time, pass from one worship to another. Then, against their will, and perhaps without their knowing it, they never come into the pale of their new church empty-handed: they carry with them a number of ideas, and habits, and turns of thought, which they had found in their old worship. And thus, after a time, when the fervor of the early days is over, you find in the new religion, or new worship, a real palimpsest: the old one is reappearing under the new. That makes itself manifest in a good many ways; sometimes in ways the most strange and unexpected.

If you ask me, now, remembering this rule, what means the name, "Roman Catholic Church," I answer: Christianity absorbed into itself the Roman empire; the Roman empire became Christian in a very few years, with a most rapid, with a most admirable sway; souls became conquered in large numbers;

they became Christian. But afterwards it appeared that they were not so perfectly unheathenized as they were thought to be, or as they thought themselves: many of their heathenish habits of life, thoughts, and customs remained even in their very worship. Thus, after Christianity had absorbed the Roman world, it appeared that the Roman world had penetrated and impregnated the whole of Christianity; and this is the Roman Catholic Church. She is Christian, but she is full of the errors and superstitions that belonged to the old Roman heathenish world.

To understand what this means we must now try to comprehend what the old Roman genius was. Here I ask you not to confound it with the Greek genius, which was in many respects highly superior, but which had, at that time, passed away in a large measure, and been replaced everywhere by the Roman genius. What were the especial traits of character of the Romans? The first, and a very striking one to those who have travelled and studied in those countries, is a most vivacious love for tradition. In Rome, at the present day, you find things that are done, that are said, that are believed, that are liked, because they were two thousand years ago, without the people themselves having a very clear notion of it. Their custom – and it is born in their flesh, and in their blood – is to look backwards, and to see in the past the motives and the precedents for their acts and for their belief. Of this I could quote to you a number of instances. I will choose but one. The first time I was in Rome I stopped, as every traveller does, on the *Piazza del Popolo*. In

the midst of that square is an obelisk, and on one side of the pedestal of that obelisk is written: "This monument was brought to Rome by the High Pontiff, Cæsar Augustus." I went round the monument, and on the other face of the same pedestal I read: "This monument, brought to Rome by the High Pontiff, Cæsar Augustus, was placed in this square by the High Pontiff, Sextus V." And then I remembered that one of those High Pontiffs was a Roman heathen, an Emperor; and that the other was a Christian, was a priest, was a pope; and I was astonished, at first sight, to find on two faces of the same stone the same title given to those two representatives of very different religions. Afterwards, I observed that this was no extraordinary case, but that in many other places in Rome instances of the same kind were to be found. I inquired a little more deeply, perhaps, than some other travellers, into the meaning of those words. I asked myself why this pope, Sextus V., and this Emperor Augustus, should each be called "pontiff." What is the meaning of "pontiff"? "Pontiff" means bridge-maker, bridge-builder. Why are they called in that way? Here is the explanation of that fact. In the very first years of the existence of Rome, at a time of which we have a very fabulous history, and but few existing monuments, – the little town of Rome, not built on seven hills as is generally supposed; there are eleven of them now; then there were within the town less than seven even, – that little town had a great deal to fear from any enemy which should take one of the hills that were out of town, the Janiculum, because the Janiculum is higher than the others,

and from that hill an enemy could very easily throw stones, fire, or any means of destruction, into the town. The Janiculum was separated from the town by the Tiber. Then the first necessity for the defence of that little town of Rome was to have a bridge. They had built a wooden bridge over the Tiber, and a great point of interest to the town was that this bridge should be kept always in good order, so that at any moment troops could pass over it. Then, with the special genius of the Romans, of which we have other instances, they ordained, curiously enough, that the men who were a corporation to take care of that bridge should be sacred; that their function, necessary to the defence of the town, should be considered holy; that they should be priests, and the highest of them was called "the high bridge-maker." So it happened that there was in Rome a corporation of bridge-makers, *pontifices*, of whom the head was the most sacred of all Romans, because in those days his life, and the life of his companions, was deemed necessary to the safety of the town. Things changed; very soon Rome was large enough not to care about the Janiculum; very soon Rome conquered a part of Italy, then the whole of Italy, and finally almost the whole of the world. But when once something is done in Rome, it remains done; when once a thing is said, it remains said, and is repeated; and thus it happened that the privilege of the bridge-makers' corporation, as beings sacred and holy, remained; and that privilege made everybody respect them; gave them a sort of moral power. Then kings wanted to be made High Bridge-makers; after kings, consuls; later, dictators;

and, later, emperors themselves made themselves High Bridge-makers, which meant the most sacred persons in the town.

When Constantine, who is generally called the first Christian emperor, – but who was very far from being a real Christian, – when Constantine became nominally a Christian, he did not leave off being the high bridge-maker of the heathen. He remained high priest of the heathen at the same time he was a Christian emperor; and he found means, as well as his son after him, to keep the two functions. He acted on some occasions as high pontiff of the heathen; on other occasions, he called councils, presided over them, and sent them away when he had had enough of their presence; declared to the bishops that he was in some sense one of them, and acted to all intents and purposes as popes have acted after him. Thus that title remained the type of whatever was most sacred in Rome; and the bishop of Rome, when an opportunity came, – when the title had been lost in Rome by emperors, – took it up again. And thus we see on the same stone, at the present time in Rome, the name of a high bridge-maker who is a heathen emperor, and the name of a high bridge-maker who is a pope, who is the head of the Christian Catholic Church. Thus you see an old superstition, an old local superstition, established with a political meaning, has survived itself, has survived centuries, has survived the downfall of heathenism, and is at the present time flourishing. You all know that the present pope is called *Pontifex Maximus*; it is his title; and everywhere you see, even on the pieces of money, that

Pio Nono is *Pontifex Maximus*, – the great bridge-maker, which means the highest of all priests, of all sacred beings. Thus has tradition, on that special spot, and in connection with the history and with the antiquities of that spot, established an authority unequalled anywhere else.

Though the Roman Catholic Church is special to that place, and inherits the local habits and traditions, it pretends also to universality. This is, again, perfectly Roman. The heathen Romans had thought for centuries that the world was made to be conquered by them; that unity was represented by Rome; that Rome was all in all; and at the present time the Pope, on Thursday of every Easter week, gives his solemn blessing, as you know, to the town first, and the world afterwards, —*urbi et orbi*. All countries, both hemispheres, all nations, all languages, are lost in that great unity. One town and one world, of which that town is the capital, – that was the wish, the hope of the heathenish Romans for centuries; and that has been the aim, the assumption of papal Rome for centuries also. When the present Pope said, on a celebrated day, after enumerating the great acts of his pontificate, that he had created more bishoprics than any other pope, he was right. He has created, on his own authority, bishoprics in Holland, in England, and in other countries; cut out bishoprics on the map of those countries. And he did that because, as pope, he is the spiritual sovereign of the world; because England and Holland belong to him; because Rome is the capital of the world; and he cuts off a part of any country,

in America as well as in Europe, in order to make of it the see or dominion of a bishop. The old Roman idea was that nobody knew how to govern except Romans. They assumed – and often, if an unscrupulous government was the best of all, if a tyrannical government was the best of all, they were right – to govern better, more wisely, and with more acute politics, than any other nation. They said, "Other sciences, other arts, may be the share of other nations; but our share in the great things of this world is *government*." I hardly dare to speak Latin in an English country, because I cannot pronounce Latin as you do; but though I pronounce it as a Frenchman, which is, perhaps, a shade less bad than to pronounce it as you do in England and America, you may guess what I mean when I recall to the memory of some of you the famous lines of Virgil, where he says what must be, in this world, the function of the Romans: —

"Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento;
Hæ tibi erunt artes."

That is to say, "You Romans! remember that you are made to govern the nations; that must be your office; all the arts come after this; this is the special Roman art." I declare to you that at this present moment the clergy, the cardinals, the bishops, the prelates, the court of Rome, think, and have never ceased to think, that they are the people to govern better than any other political body; and that the government of the world has

been providentially reserved to that town; first, in a temporal way, for the heathen; and, secondly, in a spiritual way, for the Christians, for the Catholic countries of the world. And as they believe spiritual things are a great deal more important than temporal things, they think their government is a great deal more important, and greatly superior to any government of any kind.

Let us now turn back a little again, and try more fully to understand what the old Roman genius was in its way of government. They governed by laws. You all have heard about Roman law, about Roman jurisprudence. It has been said for centuries that they were men who, better than any other, understood the art of making laws, – very precise, full of foresight, forgetting nothing, or few things, and giving in the most exact terms the decisions to be enforced in all possible cases, at least in all the cases with which they had occasion to deal. It is said also, it has always been said, that their laws were hard; but they accepted them, though hard: "*dura lex, sed lex.*" And certainly there was something noble and good in this respect for law, whatever the law was: there was something just, really in the interest of nations, in this love of law. But at that time this love of law was accompanied by the fact that the law was exceedingly hard in a great number of cases. Yet that hardness was in conformity with the general temperament of the nation at that time: the Romans were hard.

I have no time to stop to show you how different they were from the Greeks; but you remember that when the Greeks

assembled in one of their great annual festivals, they heard music, they listened to poetry, they listened to the works of the historian; or they saw men run races, or engage in one of those contests that were not cruel, that were only displays of strength, agility, or training. That was the pleasure of the Greeks in their annual festival. What did the Romans do? You all know. They had immense amphitheatres where they assembled to see men kill one another. Their pleasure was to see people die, to see people suffer, to see people maimed, and weltering in their blood: that was their favorite amusement. And ambitious men in that day secured votes by bringing lions, hyenas, and tigers, in large numbers, to Rome, and by giving the people the diversion of seeing those animals killing men, devouring living men, women, and children, living Christians, often. That was the punishment in fashion at that time: Christian men, women, and children were killed, were devoured, were mangled before the eyes of the people, and for their pleasure. In their hardness they had a taste for the formal, precise execution of their law, whatever it might be. Christianity came and swept away their abominable pleasures, – this cruelty, which was contrary to every human feeling; but the habit of a sort of hardness, in the infliction of the penalties of law, remained in Rome more than it did in any other place. And this was allied to another feeling of a different nature, but which very well connected itself with it. I mean the Roman love for the literal in every thing. They did not like to understand any thing as metaphorical, as poetry: they liked to take every

thing literally; and it was in consequence of this characteristic of the Roman mind that they were able to enforce their law. Even if the result of what the law demanded was absurd, they maintained, for the honor of the law, that it must be literally understood, and literally executed; and they permitted none of those different ways of alleviating the hardships of the law that have been in other places not only allowed, but ordered, by those in command. This is of extreme importance. Perhaps at first sight it does not strike you so, but it is. Remember from what country Christianity came. Christianity came from the East, came from Asia, came from the Jews. The Apostles, the first propagators of Christianity, were Oriental men, were Jews. I have seen part of the Levant, I have seen those very countries, and I can speak of it as a fact known for centuries, that the people of the Orient never speak otherwise than by images. They do not like the shortest way from one point to another; they make the way long. They use flowers, and rays of light, and moonshine, or any thing else that gives an image and color to their speech. They bring these things in continually, whatever may be the subject they speak of.

Perhaps I may give here an illustration that will make you understand me. I was in a house made of branches of trees, where lived a sheik. He told me that every thing in that house, his own person, his own family, were mine; and he said this with the greatest protestations. This is exactly the same as if you should say to a foreigner, coming into your house, "You are welcome." Nothing more. If, on going away, I had taken any thing from

that house, the man would immediately have shot me; though he had given me every thing, even to his own person and his own family; because he would have had this idea: "This man is a thief; I have a thief in my house." If I had said, "But you gave me every thing in the house," he would have answered me, "You come from a country where people have no politeness. I gave you these things: that means *welcome*, and nothing more." Thus a man of the Orient never says any thing in the simple short way that Western nations do: they always want some poetry, some rhetoric, some image about it. And you must remember that many of the most admirable teachings of the Bible are in images, are in poetry, and are extremely beautiful and eloquent by their poetry. We are accustomed to this, so that we know that it is poetry; and we understand it. But the Romans, accustomed to their principle, that the law may be hard, but that law is law, and must be understood literally, and executed literally, understood every thing literally, and in that way they spoiled many of the great Christian truths. I will not here quote many instances, though it would be exceedingly easy to bring them in large numbers before you. I will take the most striking and best known of all. When our Lord, a few hours before being separated from his disciples, to die on the cross, gave them of the bread that was on the table, and said, "Eat, this is my body," it was absolutely impossible for Eastern people to misunderstand him; it was impossible for them not to understand that he meant, "This represents my body." The idea that what he held in the hands

of his own body was his own body again; that he gave them his own body to eat, and that he ate some of it himself with them, – that idea could not for a moment have entered the head of one of those who were there. And if a multitude had been there, instead of the twelve Apostles, it would have been exactly the same. Nobody would have understood, when the Lord said, "I am the way," or when he said, "I am the door," that he was really, in fact, a path or a gate; everybody knew that he meant, "I am the leader; you must come with me; I show you the way." Everybody in the Orient understood that. But here comes the Roman genius, taking every thing literally; and they repeat, "He said, 'This is my body,' and this *is* his body." They repeat: "You Protestants do not accept the truth coming from the lips of your Master. He says, 'This is my body,' but you Protestants say, 'No, it is not his body, it represents his body.'" Thus it seems we are convicted of crime; it seems we will not accept the teachings of our Lord; yet we are perfectly true to his own meaning, to his real meaning, that could not be misunderstood in the East, but that was misunderstood when it was carried to Rome, a country where people gloried in taking every thing in a literal sense. So they did with many other most beautiful and delicate things in the Bible. The Roman genius – I cannot help saying it – had something clumsy in it. They were like giants, having very strong arms, and enormous hands, to take every thing, and to dominate over every thing. But any thing very delicate, very poetic, like flowers from the East, they could not touch without the flowers being broken and faded,

losing their charm and their color. That was their way of treating many of the most beautiful things of the Bible, which they did not understand; which they made absurd or repulsive, by taking in a literal sense what was said, and ought to be taken, in a spiritual sense. They acted exactly as we should, if we received an Oriental letter and understood as literal every thing contained in it.

I will give another instance to make this clear. I remember having seen two letters, written one by a French General, and another by Abd-el-Kader, the chief of the enemies of the French in Algeria. These letters were intended to convey identically the same thing; that is to say, that some prisoners on one side were to be exchanged for the same number of prisoners on the other side. It had been decided that the French General and the Arab chief should say the same thing. I have seen both. The French General writes two lines; very clear, distinct, and polite, with nothing but the exact meaning he wanted to convey. But Abd-el-Kader, meaning to write the same thing, writes a whole page, about flowers, and jewels, and roses, and moonshine, and every thing of the kind. His intention was to say exactly the same thing, to convey identically the same meaning; but these things, translated from one language to another, pass, as a celebrated German scholar says, "from the Shemitic to the Japhetic; from the poetic language of the sons of Shem, to the precise language of the sons of Japhet." This has been the fault of the Roman Catholic Church in many dogmas, in many points of very high importance: the sons of Japhet could not understand what the

sons of Shem meant. They thought they understood it, when they were entirely in error, and gave to it a meaning altogether different from what was intended.

I must add, that what helped them along in this belief of things, taken in a literal sense, was Roman superstition. In that town, and in Italy, have always prevailed the strangest superstitions. The most celebrated Romans, men whose wisdom and whose glory have filled the world, if they met, when they went out of their house in the morning, a hare in the way, re-entered their house on the instant, and renounced any thing they had to do, because meeting a hare was ominous of misfortune, and any thing they should undertake that day would result in their confusion or misfortune. When they put their foot in the wrong way, the left before the right, or the right before the left, on the stone at the entrance of a house, they stopped there and returned to their house, because every thing they should do in that house would prove unfortunate, since they had made a mistake in putting the wrong foot foremost when they entered the house.

So there were a multitude of superstitions. You know when they were to decide the greatest questions of peace or war, they consulted their sacred chickens. They gave them grains of wheat, and if the chickens ate it, or if they refused to eat it, or if they ate it too fast, or if the chickens let fall a grain of wheat from their mouths, – these signs meant that war would be successful, or that it would not be, and they decided according to these whether there should be a war or not. And those great magistrates, who

were sometimes men of the greatest eminence, like Cicero, were augurs. You know what Cicero says, "Two of us cannot meet without laughing;" because they knew that their auguries were utterly worthless, but the multitude thought they were true. So the Romans were superstitious to the highest degree, and they have never ceased to be so. There is superstition in the marrow of their bones. Many Romans are ready to believe any thing to-day, at the present moment. I shall allude to a single fact. They all believe devoutly in the evil eye; that there are people who, if they look at you, will bring upon you some horrible misfortune, disease, or death. They believe this so fully, that they have a gesture, representing with their fingers a pair of horns; and, when they meet any one who is supposed to have the evil eye, they endeavor, in a secret way, to make that sign, to prevent misfortune from coming upon them. It is believed, in Rome, that the present pope, who is to them God on earth, who is to them the successor and vicar of Jesus Christ, that he, as a man, has the evil eye. And when he passes through the streets of Rome, a great many women, devoutly kneeling before him, with their heads almost in the dust, craving to receive his blessing, as he passes in his carriage, will, under their aprons, make this sign, to preserve themselves from the effects of the evil eye. This is no disparagement to his person; they think that the poor man cannot help it; that there is no ill will in it; that it is fate; he has the evil eye.

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