

FELIX ADLER

CREED AND DEED: A
SERIES OF DISCOURSES

Felix Adler

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Series of Discourses**

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Creed and Deed: A Series of Discourses

PREFATORY NOTICE

The lectures contained in the following pages are published by request of the society before which they were delivered. Those on Immortality and Religion have been considerably abridged and condensed. The remainder have been allowed to retain their original form without any serious modification. The First Anniversary Discourse reviews the work of the year, and gives a brief account of the motives which impelled the society to organize and of the general animus by which its labors are directed. The Lecture entitled The Form of the Ideal foreshadows the constructive purpose of the movement. The articles on The Evolution of Hebrew Religion and Reformed Judaism from the *Popular Science Monthly* (September, 1876) and the *North American Review* (July-August and September-October) contain in the substance of several of the lectures of last winter's course, and are reprinted in the appendix with the kind consent of the editors. Rigid adherence to the requirements of systematic exposition is neither possible nor desirable in addresses of the kind and has not therefore been attempted.

In giving this volume to the public I gladly embrace the opportunity of expressing my sincere gratitude to those faithful and self-sacrificing friends whose indefatigable labors have gone so far to win for a hazardous venture the promise of assured permanence and satisfactory development.

Felix Adler.

New York, September, 1877.

CREED AND DEED

I. IMMORTALITY

"not by the Creed but by the Deed."

The Society which I have the privilege of addressing, has been organized with the above for its motto. Some of my hearers have entirely abandoned the tenets of the positive religions; others continue to hold them true, but, are discouraged by the lack of spiritual force, the prominence given to mere externals, the barren formalism in the churches and synagogues. We agree in believing that theology is flourishing at the expense of religion. It seems to us that differences in creed are constantly increasing, and will continue to multiply with the growth and differentiation of the human intellect. We perceive that every attempt to settle problems of faith has thus far signally failed, nor can we hope for better results in the future. Certainty even with regard to the essential dogmas appears to us impossible. We do not therefore deny dogma, but prefer to remit it to the sphere of individual conviction with which public associations should have no concern. Far from believing that the doctrines of religion as commonly taught are essential to the well being of society, we apprehend that the disputes concerning the "author of the law" have diverted the attention of men from the law itself, and that the so-called duties toward God too often interfere with the proper performance of our duties toward one another. It were better to insist less upon a right belief, and more upon right action.

In order to find a common basis whereon good men, whether believers or unbelievers can unite, we look to the moral law itself, whose certainty rests in the universal experience of civilized Humanity. We shall hold questions of faith in abeyance, shall endeavor to stimulate the conscience and to this end shall seek to awaken an interest in the grave social problems of our day, which need nothing so much as a vigorous exertion of our moral energies, in order to arrive at a peaceable solution. To broaden and deepen the ethical sentiment in ourselves, and to hold up to the sad realities of the times, the mirror of the ideal life, is the object with which we set out. We do not therefore delude ourselves with the hope that the ideal will ever be fully realized, but are convinced that in aspiring to noble ends the soul will take on something of the grandeur of what it truly admires. Starting with the assumption that the doctrines of religion are incapable of proof, it behooves us to show in one or more instances the fallacy of the arguments upon which they are commonly founded, and we shall begin with the doctrine of IMMORTALITY.

In approaching our subject we are first confronted by the argument from the common consent of mankind. Like the belief in God, the hope of immortality is said to be implanted in every human heart, and the experience of travellers is cited to show that even the most barbarous races have given it expression in some form, however crude. Aside from the fact that the statement, as it stands, is somewhat exaggerated, we will admit that the belief in a future state is widely current among savage tribes. But the value of this testimony becomes extremely doubtful on closer inspection. A brief account of the origin of the conception of soul among our primitive ancestors, will make this plain.

If we observe a child in its sleep, some half articulate word, some cry or gesture occasionally reveals to us the vividness of the dreams with which the little brain is teeming. It is hardly doubtful that the child mistakes the visions of its dream for actual occurrences, and attaches the same reality to these miasmas of the stagnant night as to the clear prospects of daylight reason. Even the adult sometimes finds it difficult to clear his brain of the fancies which occupied it in the hours of sleep. And the test of large experience can alone enable him to distinguish between fact and phantom. I call attention to these facts, because the phenomena of sleep and dreams seem to offer a satisfactory clue to the naive theories of the lower races concerning death and the after life. The savage indeed is the

veritable child-man. His ardent emotions, his crude logic, the eagerness with which he questions the how and wherefore of nature, and the comparative ease with which his simple understanding accepts the most fanciful solutions, all combine to place him on the level of the child.

Aware that the body in sleep is at rest, while at the same time the sleeper is conscious of acting and suffering, visiting distant regions perhaps, conversing with friends, engaging in battle with enemies, the savage reasoned that there must be a man within the man, as it were, – an airy counterfeit of man which leaves its grosser tenement in the night, and in the course of its wanderings experiences whatever the fortunes of the dream may chance to be. Instances are related where the body was prematurely disturbed, the inner man was prevented from returning to his envelope, and death resulted. The shadow cast by the human figure, an attenuated image of man, connected with the body and yet distinct from it, afforded a curious confirmation of this artless theory. The Basutos* affirm that a person having on one occasion incautiously approached the bank of a river, his shadow was seized by a crocodile, and he died in consequence. The story of shadowless or soulless men has been made familiar to modern literature by Chamisso's well known tale. The spectral man who severs his connection with the body during sleep, remains concealed within it during the hours of waking, and in this manner, the idea of a human soul as distinct from the body, takes its rise.** It is easy to see how by extending the analogy, what we call death must have appeared as only another form of sleep, and how the theory of dreams gave rise to a belief in the continuance of life beyond the grave. That sleep and death are twin brothers, was to the primitive man more than mere metaphor. As in sleep, so in death, the body is at rest, but as in sleep, so also in death, a shade was supposed to go forth capable of acting and suffering, and yearning to return to its former condition. The apparitions of the deceased seen at night by the friends they had left behind, were taken to be real visitations, and corroborated the assumption of the continued existence of the departed. The ghosts of the dead were dreaming phantoms, debarred from permanently returning to their abandoned bodies.

* The dream theory seems to be the one generally adopted by writers on primitive culture. For an extended account of this subject vide the works of Tylor, Lubbock and Bastian, from which the illustrations given in the text are taken.

** Peter Schlemihl.

*** The soul was believed to be corporeal in nature, only more vague and shadowy than the framework of the body, and distinguished by greater swiftness of locomotion.

The view we have taken of the origin of the conception of soul is greatly strengthened when we consider the thoroughly material character of the ghost's life after death. The ghost continues to be liable to hunger, pain, cold, as before. But the living have shut it out from their communion; in consequence it hates its former companions, persecutes them where it can, and wreaks its vengeance upon them when they are least prepared to resist it. In a certain district of Germany it was believed that the dead person, when troubled by the pangs of hunger, begins by gnawing its shroud until that is completely devoured, then rising from the grave, it stalks through the village and in the shape of a vampire, sits upon the children in their cradles, and sucks their blood. When sated with the hideous feast, it returns to the churchyard to renew its visits on the succeeding nights. In order to hinder them from using their jaws, it was customary to place stones or coins into the mouths of the dead before burial and the most grotesque devices were resorted to, to prevent the much dreaded return of the denizens of the tomb. In the middle ages the corpse was often spiked down to hinder its rising. Among the Hottentots a hole was broken into the wall, through which the corpse was carried from the house, and then carefully covered up, it being the prevailing superstition, that the dead can only reenter by the same way in which they have previously made their exit. Among a certain negro tribe of Africa, the path from the house to the grave was strewn with thorns, in the hope that the ghost would find the path too painful, and desist. As late as 1861, it occurred in a village in Galicia, that the ghost of

a dead peasant was found to pursue the living, and the inhabitants rushing out to the grave fearfully mutilated the body, to prevent it from committing further injury.

The same conception, from a more charitable point of view, led to the institution of regular meals for the ghosts at stated intervals. In North-eastern India, after the body has been consigned to its final resting-place, a friend of the deceased steps forward, and holding food and drink in his hand, speaks the following suggestive words, "Take and eat; heretofore you have eaten and drunk with us, you can do so no more; you were one of us, you can be so no longer; we come no more to you; come you not to us." In Eastern Africa, the Wanicas are accustomed to fill a cocoa-nut shell with rice and tembo, and place it near the grave. In the Congo district, a channel is dug into the grave leading to the mouth of the corpse, by which means food and drink are duly conveyed. The sense of decorum impels certain Turanian tribes to place not only food, but even napkins, on the graves of their relatives. We cannot resist the temptation of quoting the following passage from Mr. Tylor's graphic account of the manner in which the Chinese feast their ghostly visitors. "Some victuals are left over for any blind or feeble spirit who may be late, and a pail of gruel is provided for headless souls, with spoons for them to put it down their throats with. Such proceedings culminate in the so-called Universal Rescue, now and then celebrated, when a little house is built for the expected visitors, with separate accommodations, and bath rooms for male and female ghosts." * In the Alpach Valley of Tyrol, ghosts released from purgatory on the night of All Souls, return to the houses of the peasantry. A light is left burning in the dining room, and a certain cake, prepared for the occasion, is placed upon the table for their delectation, also a pot of grease for the poor souls to anoint their wounds with.

* Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, ii, p. 34.

Occasionally, to obviate the necessity of continued attendance upon the dead, a single sumptuous feast is provided immediately after their demise, and this is believed to cancel their claims once for all. In this manner arose the custom of funeral banquets. In England, in the fifteenth century, a noisy revel of three days' duration attended the obsequies of Sir John Paston. The so-called Irish wake originated in the same way. After the first outbreaks of grief have subsided, meat and drink are brought in, chiefly the latter, and what was at first intended for a parting entertainment to the dead, often ends in the boisterous excesses of the living.

It is here proper to remark that the savage tribes who believe in an after existence, do not in many instances claim this privilege for themselves alone, but share it willingly with the lower animals and even with inanimate objects. Weapons, utensils, and even victuals – have their ghostly representatives like men. When a great chief dies, his widow is often forced by public opinion to follow him to the grave, in order that the departed brave may not be wifeless in the hereafter. But besides the widow, his horse, his war-club, his girdle, his favorite trinkets are buried or burned with him to serve his use or vanity in spectre-land.

From what has preceded, it must be clear that the savage's conception of a ghost bears but a faint and distant resemblance to the idea of soul, as it became current in the schools of philosophy; nor can the latter derive support from the ignorant reasonings, the hasty inductions of primitive man. On the lower levels of culture the idea of immortality indeed is quite unknown. If the ghost continues its shadowy existence after death, it is none the less liable to come to an abrupt end, and then nothing whatever of its former substance remains; it is a pale, filmy thing, exposed to the inroads of the hostile elements, surrounded by numerous dangers, to which it may at any moment succumb. In the Tonga Islands only the souls of the well-born are supposed to survive at all. The common people have no souls worth speaking of, and when they die, are completely extinguished. The ghosts of Guinea negroes are compelled to approach the bank of the terrible river of death. Some of them are thereupon wafted across to lead pleasant lives on the opposite side, others are drowned in the stream, or beaten to atoms with a club. With the Fijians it is always a matter of doubt whether a soul will succeed at all in maintaining its feeble existence after it has left its protecting house of sinew and

bone. But they open a peculiarly dismal prospect to wifeless souls. Nanananga, a fierce demoniac being, watches for them on the shore as they approach, and dashes them to pieces upon the rocks. The Greenlanders affirm that after death the soul enters upon a long, lone journey over a mountain full of precipitous descents, covered with ice and snow. The storms howl about its path, and every step is fraught with pain and danger. If any harm happens to the poor wanderer here, then it dies "the other death" from which there is no re-awakening.

In the theories of a future state, as devised by the lower races, we are at a loss to detect the germs of any more spiritual longings. Far from looking forward with pleased anticipation or confidence to the world to come, the barbarian shuddered as he thought of his approaching end, and was loath to exchange the white and sunny world for the dreary companionship of luckless shades. The life that awaited him was not in the majority of instances a better or a higher life than this; not free from the limitations of sense; no larger perfecting of what is here dwarfed and crippled; it was lower, poorer, meaner; it was to the present, what the pressed flower is to the full-blown rose; the same in substance, indeed, but with its beauty perished, and its joyous fragrance evanesced.

The argument from the common consent of mankind in truth deserves no serious attention.*

* The doctrine of spiritual immortality is not common to the human race. The material life of the ghost bears no analogy to what we mean by the soul's continuance. The continuance of the ghost's existence is not an immortal continuance.

The argument cannot be substantiated, it would prove nothing, if it could. The general concurrence of the whole human race in any form of error would not make that error less erroneous, and the testimony of united millions against a solitary thinker might kick the beam when balanced in the scales of truth.

When we behold an ignorant knave squandering his ill-gotten gains on superfluities, while honest people are famishing for want of the necessaries; when we see the unscrupulous politician outstripping the deserving statesman, in the race for fame and station; when modest merit shrinks in corners, and the native royalty of talent plays courtier to the kings of lucre, we are reminded of the complaint of Job, that the bad prosper, and the righteous are down-trodden, yet that they sleep together in the dust and the worm covers them alike.

This evident disparity between virtue and happiness has led men to take refuge in the thought of compensation hereafter, and the necessity of a future state in which the good shall be rewarded, and the evil punished, according to the verdict of a just judge, has been deduced even from the apparent injustice of the present. Thus the very imperfections of our own life on earth, afford a pretext for the most ambitious conceptions of human destiny.

The argument from the necessity of reward and punishment is extremely popular among the uneducated, since it appeals ostensibly to their sense of justice and assures them that by the aid of Divine omnipotence, a full correspondence between worthiness and happiness, though vainly expected here, will be established in another sphere. It behooves us to enquire whether there is anything in the nature of virtue, that demands a correspondence of this kind.

The philosopher Epicurus was perhaps the first among the ancients to take strong ground in favor of the utilitarian view of virtue. Pleasure, he holds, is the purpose of existence, and virtue is thus reduced to enlightened self-interest. There are different kinds of pleasure; pleasures of the senses and of the soul. Epicurus points out that the former cannot be considered true pleasures, since they defeat their own end, blunting the capacity of enjoyment in proportion as they are indulged, and incapable of affording permanent satisfaction. Himself a man of refined tastes and fastidious habits, he shrank from the very coarseness of the passions, and counselled moderation, friendship and benevolence. But he refused to recognize in these virtues any intrinsic value of their own, and lauded them only because in contrast to the lower appetites, the enjoyment they afford is lasting and constantly increases

with their exercise. It is easy to perceive that when the moral law is thus stripped of its authority to command, the choice between duty and inclination will be governed by fortuitous preferences, and not by principle. It then remains for each individual to decide what form of pleasure may be most congenial to his temper and desires. The philosopher will value the delights of contemplative ease, and of kindly communion with his fellow-men; the passionate youth may hold that a single deep draught from the chalice of sensual pleasure is worth more than a whole lifetime of neutral self-restraint; "eat and drink" will be his motto; "remote consequences – who knows? To-morrow we may die." Moreover the doctrine of enlightened self-interest has this fatal objection to it, that if consistently applied, at least among the powerful of the earth, it would lead to consequences the very reverse of moral. It is but too true that honesty is not always the best policy; that fraud and violence, when perpetrated on a scale of sufficient magnitude, (instance the division of unfortunate Poland,) are not always punished as they deserve to be. Far from teaching the tyrant to subdue his baser instincts, enlightened self-interest might rather lead him to stifle the accusing voice of conscience, and to root out the scruples that interfere with his ambition. Unless we concede that the moral law has a claim upon us which the constitution of our nature does not permit us to deny with impunity, and that its pleasures differ, not only in degree, but in kind, from all others, virtue, while a necessity to the weak, becomes folly in the strong; and Napoleon, that gigantic egotist, was correct, when he called love a silly infatuation, and sentiment a thing for women.

The principles of Epicurus not only adulterate the motives of goodness with the desire of reward, but they make the reward of desire the very sanction of all virtue, and thus deprive human nature of its best title to nobility.

Truly disinterestedness is the distinguishing mark of every high endeavor. The pursuit of the artist is unselfish, the beauty he creates is his reward. The toil of the scientist in the pursuit of abstract truth is unselfish, the truth he sees is his reward. Why should we hesitate to acknowledge in the domain of ethics, what we concede in the realm of art and science? To say that unselfishness itself is only the more refined expression of a selfish instinct, is to use the term selfish with a double meaning, is a mere empty play on words. We have the innate need of harmony in the moral relations; this is our glory, and the stamp of the Divine upon our nature. We cannot demonstrate the existence of disinterested motives, any more than we can demonstrate that there is joy in the sunlight and freedom in the mountain breeze. The fact that we *demand unselfishness* in action alone assures us that the standard of enlightened self-interest is false.

And indeed if we consult the opinions of men, where they are least likely to be warped by sophistry, we shall find that disinterestedness is the universal criterion by which moral worth is measured. If we suspect the motive we condemn the act. If a person gives largely for some object of public usefulness or charity, we do not permit the munificence of the gift to deceive our judgment. Perhaps he is merely desirous of vaunting his wealth, perhaps it is social standing he aims at, perhaps he is covetous of fame. If these suspicions prove well founded, the very men who accept his bounty will in their secret hearts despise him, and by a certain revulsion of feeling we shall resent his action all the more, because, not only is he destitute of honorable purpose, but he has filched the fair front of virtue, and defiled the laurel even in the wearing of it.

We do not even accord the name of goodness to that easy, amiable sympathy which leads us to alleviate the sufferings of others, unless it be guided by wise regard for their permanent welfare.

The tattered clothes, the haggard looks, the piteous pleading voice of the pauper on the public highway may awaken our pity, but the system of indiscriminate alms-giving is justly condemned as a weakness rather than a virtue.

On the other hand obedience to duty, when it involves pain and self-abnegation, seems to rise in the general estimation. Clearly because in this instance even the suspicion of interested motives is removed, since hardship, injury in estate and happiness, and even the possible loss of life, are among the foreseen consequences of the act. It is for this reason that the Book of Martyrs has become the

golden book of mankind, and that the story of their lives never fails to fill us with mingled sorrow, and admiration, and pride. They are monuments on the field of history, milestones on the path of human progress. We regard them and gain new courage and confidence in our better selves. The blazing pyre on the Campo Fiore, whereon Giordano Bruno breathes his last, becomes a beacon-light for the truth-seeker; the dying Socrates still pours benignant peace over many a sufferer's couch; the Man of sorrows, on Calvary, comforts the hearts of the Christian millions. In the presence of these high examples the inadequacy of the selfish standard becomes clearly apparent. We recognize what a sublime quality that is in man which enables him, not only to triumph over torment and suffering, but to devote his very self to destruction for the sake of honor and truth. Freely must virtue be wooed, not for the dowry she may bring; by loyal devotion to her for her own sake only, can she be won!

If thus it appears that not only is there nothing in the nature of virtue to warrant a claim to reward, but that it is her very nature to disclaim any reward, it will become plain that the problem, as stated in the beginning, rests upon an entirely false foundation. That the unrighteous and unprincipled should enjoy temporal happiness, does not offend the law of justice. That you, my good sir, honest in all your dealings, truthful in all your acts, should be unhappy, is greatly to be deplored. Why evil and unhappiness should have been allowed at all to enter a world created by an all good and all powerful Being may fairly be asked. Why those who possess the treasure of a clear conscience should not also possess the lesser goods of earth, is a question with which morality is in no wise concerned.

Virtue can have no recompense, save as it is its own recompense, and vice can receive no real punishment save as it is its own avenger. The hope of immortality, in so far as it is based upon the supposed necessity of righting in a future state what is here wrong, is therefore untenable, for it is based upon the assumption of a wrong which exists in the imagination merely. *And he who claims a reward because of his virtue, has thereby forfeited his right to maintain the claim, since that is not virtue, which looks for reward.*

Having endeavored to show that the joys of earth cannot be claimed as the recompense of a moral life, we must yet admit that the desire of happiness is altogether too strong and deep-seated in human nature to be thus summarily dismissed. We seek happiness on its own account quite apart from any title which virtue may give us to its enjoyment. Were we created for misery? Does not the poverty and general unsatisfactoriness of our present condition warrant us in expecting ampler fulfilment, permanent bliss in an after life? I think we shall derive some assistance in discussing this question, by attempting to resolve the conception of happiness into its constituent elements.

Pleasure has been defined to consist in the satisfaction of any of man's natural wants. The variety of our pleasures corresponds to the diversity of our wants.

Food to the hungry, rest to the weary, are sources of pleasure. To feel on some cold wintry day the genial warmth of true hearth fire creeping into our blood, and the frozen limbs relaxing their stiffness, is pleasure. All men admire the beautiful and delight in adornment. Even the rude savage seeks to gratify his aesthetic tastes, so far as the means which nature places at his command permit. The custom of tattooing the skin is widely practiced among the lower races, and stars and circles, trees and plants, and other ingenious devices are impressed with laborious patience upon the different members of the body. The chiefs of the Fiji Islanders, a nude and cannibal race, are represented as wearing an elaborate head-dress of three and even five feet in dimensions, and were accustomed to spend several hours each day, under the care of the royal hair-dresser. Among civilized men the desire for adornment finds vent chiefly in external objects, while every coarse solicitation of attention to the person is shunned. Tastily decorated houses, flowers, paintings, music, gratify our sense of symmetry, and spread an atmosphere of culture and refinement in the vicinity of our daily occupations. But there are deeper and purer joys in reserve. Man is eminently a social being; he has the need of sympathy and depends upon the affections of his fellows. The presence of cherished companions and friends becomes a necessity to him; in absence he yearns for it, and the lack of it is one of the most serious afflictions of human life. "Woe unto him who, far from parents and loved kinsmen, a lonely life must

lead. His present joys devouring grief doth snatch. His thoughts are ever straying in the distance back to his father's hall, where the sun of life first rose upon him, and where children of the common home, playfully, with gentle bonds, close and closer drew their hearts together."* The tranquil delight which we derive from the enlargement of intellect, and the exquisite inward satisfaction that results from high fidelity to duty, may be mentioned as the last to crown the scale of pleasures.

* Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, Act I.

Now, it is evident that all these elements of happiness, these diverse rays that nowhere melt into the perfect light, are dependent upon the physical organization of man, such as it is, even for their partial attainment; of the lower pleasures, this is at once evident. But a little reflection will show the same to be the case with the higher. If we consider the aesthetic faculty, we find its gratification conditioned by a physical basis. What were music without the ear; what the symmetry of form, without the eye and touch? The intellect, in its turn, fashions the rough timber of experience, which an ever flowing stream of sensation carries into the workshop of the brain. Can the mind feed upon itself? Can the laws of thought act otherwise than upon the material afforded by the senses? The same is also true with respect to our moral qualities, and the exercise of the virtues is inconceivable beyond the pale of human society. All virtue presupposes a tendency to err; the failings and limitations of our mortal condition. Justice is the adjustment of limitations common to all men in such manner that their stress shall not bear more heavily upon one than upon the other. Love is the expansion of one limited nature in another and their mutual enrichment by such union. Charity, fortitude, continence, whatever we applaud in human conduct, is but an indirect testimony to the natural imperfections inherent in the human heart, and is accounted admirable only in so far as it tends to ensure the best interests of the race on earth. When therefore this body is corrupted, when we depart from out the fellowship of men, the gratification of the appetites, the enjoyment of beauty, the exercise of reason, and the practice of virtue become alike unthinkable.

We desire larger happiness than we can here achieve; but because we desire a thing, are we therefore at all warranted in believing that we shall obtain it? Is the course of the world's affairs such as to encourage so flattering an hypothesis? Is not the fatality that so often attends our best efforts in this life, an argument against, rather than in favor of increasing felicity in another? We should assume a wiser attitude as against fate. There are those who fret under disappointment, and murmur and rebel as if they had been defrauded of a right; as if they had entered into a compact with destiny to their advantage, as if the myriad worlds moved through space for their especial good. This is an insane spirit. We need something of the vim of stoicism to grapple with the difficulties of life; we need to cultivate a larger patience; an humble spirit prepared for every loss, and welcoming every hour of joy as an unlooked for gain. There are a thousand pleasures too in little things which we, with the petulance of children, daily spurn, because we cannot have all we ask for. In every stone there is instruction, in every varying aspect of the sky there is beauty, wherever men congregate and commune, lessons of wisdom are revealed to the observer. The movement of everlasting laws quivers in the meanest trifles, and the eternities, thinly veiled, look out upon us with their solemn gaze from every passing mask of time. These let us study; art will help us; science will open to us a wondrous chain of workings which the mind cannot exhaust, and active exertions for the common weal will give a generous glow to our lives, and still the unquiet yearnings which we may never entirely set at rest. You have seen how the flowers grow, how that many seeds are scattered and but few take root; how the germ slowly and with difficulty develops. The rain waters it, the warm sunbeam fosters it; storms sweeping over the earth, may crush it while it is still a young and tender shoot. At last, sometimes after years of preparation, it buds and opens and blooms and becomes a delight and a glory, a fount of fragrance, a crown of beauty. A few days pass and it droops; what the long process of time has slowly created, a single moment may suffice to destroy; and yet though its time was brief, the flower

fulfilled its nature only in that passing bloom; all the previous stages of its existence had a meaning only as they led up to this, the final revelation of its purpose.

The bloom of human life is morality; whatever else we may possess, health, and wealth, power, grace, knowledge, have a value only as they lead up to this; have a meaning only as they make this possible. Nor should we complain that the blight of death so quickly withers what the course of threescore years has scarce sufficed to produce. In the hour of our destruction, we will lift up our hearts in triumph – we have blossomed! We have blossomed!

But it will be said, that the flower when it is wilted and withered here, may be transplanted to fairer regions; that the soul may take on new organs, when it has abandoned its earthly habitation, and in a series of transformations of which, it is true, we can form no definite conception, may enter afresh upon its struggles for worthiness in other spheres. This is, indeed, the loftiest expression which the hope of immortality has found. Unlike the arguments previously considered, it is unalloyed by any selfish motive, is founded upon a really exalted sentiment, and it is Love and Virtue themselves that here take up the strain, and sing us their animating song of ceaseless progress toward the good. The argument in this shape, involves the further question whether the existence of an independent and indestructible soul is assured, and upon this point the whole problem of immortality finally hinges.

The question whether what we are accustomed to call the soul is a distinct and indivisible entity, or merely the result of material processes, has divided mankind for more than two thousand years, and some of the ablest thinkers have ranged themselves on either side. As early as the fifth century B. C. the philosopher Democritus propounded materialistic doctrines among the Greeks. According to him, the soul is a combination of smooth, round, polished and moving atoms, and to the motions of these atoms the phenomena of life are to be ascribed.

Among the Romans, Lucretius advanced similar views. He took particular pains to combat the "vulgar fear of death," protesting that the prospect of dissolution would lose its terrors, did we not foolishly imagine ourselves conscious of being dead, forgetting that death implies the entire cessation of consciousness. The followers of materialistic opinions among the ancients, were not a few. But during the ascendancy of the Christian Church, these opinions retired into the background, until in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were revived by such men as Gassendi and La Mettrie, and others. In modern times they have been widely spread.

The list of names on the opposite side is headed by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and embraces the great majority of writers and public teachers, down to the present day.

It may appear strange that when the belief in immortality had once become current, men should have been tempted to forego its pleasing prospects, and even, with a certain vehemence, to urge their sceptical views upon others. Let us consider for a moment, what it was that induced the materialists to assume their position. The observed correspondence between mental and physical phenomena doubtless led them in the first instance to adopt their peculiar views.

We see in the tiny body of the new born babe, barely more than the faint stirrings of animal life; months pass by before it is able to form any clear conception of the persons and things in its vicinity, the simpler mental processes appearing simultaneously with the growth of the bodily organs. The intellect reaches its highest development in the age of manhood and womanhood, when we stand in the maturity of our physical powers. In that middle age of life lies, with rare exceptions, the best work we are destined to accomplish. Having entered upon the downward slope, our faculties gradually lose their vigor, until we sink into the final stage of drivelling old age, and become feeble in mind, as we are helpless in body. In this manner the close connection between our spiritual and material parts, is brought home forcibly, even to the unreflecting; as the one enlarges so does the other: as the one diminishes so does the other: together they increase, together they are weakened; the inference is drawn, shall it not be, that together they will perish?

The phenomena of sleep and of coma seem to convey the same lesson. A haze steals over our consciousness; sometimes settling into impenetrable night; as the body for a time wears the semblance

of death, so also is the mind stupefied or completely paralyzed. Hours pass by; in the interval, the business of the world has gone on as before, but to us there has been only a void and utter blank. And thus it is said shall there be a void and a blank in the tomb; time will pass by, and we shall not know it; men will move and act and we shall be none the wiser for it; it will be all like sleep, only that there will be no dreams.

And again when some malignant fever seizes upon the body and corrupts the currents of the blood, how do the poor disordered thoughts dance about wildly, driven by the lash of the distemper; how does the use of stimulants besot the intellect, so that every higher power is deadened; how in the wild ravings of the diseased brain, do we behold the hideous mockery of mind.

And does not the grave itself testify loudly that the end is an end indeed; the body falls to pieces, the dust commingles with the dust, and nothing remains, nothing at least of which we can ever have experience. Right or wrong, these facts impress the mind, and their leaden weight serves to drag down our aspirations.

It is true, the considerations I have enumerated are based upon a mere surface view of things, but the more accurate methods of science seem, at first sight, to confirm the general conclusions to which they lead. On this point, it would be well to dwell for a moment. John Stuart Mill acknowledges that "the evidence is well-nigh complete that all thought and feeling has some action of the bodily organism for its immediate coincident and accompaniment, and that the specific variations, and especially the different degrees of complication of the nervous and cerebral organism, correspond to differences in the development of our mental faculties."

The prodigious difficulties in the way of the study of the brain may long retard the progress of the investigator, but for the purposes of our argument we are at liberty to assume whatever is within the limits of possible achievement. We may suppose that physiology will succeed so far that the brain will be accurately and completely mapped out, and that the motions of the atoms upon which the thousand varying modes of thought and feeling depend, will be known and measured. In anticipating such results, we have reached the utmost tenable position of materialism.

But now to our surprise we discover that all this being allowed, the ultimate question, what is soul, remains still unsolved and as insoluble as ever. The unvarying coincidence of certain modes of soul with certain material processes may be within the range of proof, but what cannot be proven is, that these material processes explain the psychic phenomena.

If it is urged that the same difficulty presents itself in the explanation of the most ordinary occurrences, this objection is based upon a misapprehension of the point at issue.

The scientist cannot show why heat should be convertible into motion, but how it is thus transformed is easy to demonstrate, and the exact mechanical equivalent of heat has been calculated. But how certain motions of atoms in the brain should generate, not heat, but consciousness, but thought and love, is past all conception. There are here two different orders of facts, having no common principle to which they could both be reduced. There is an impassable gulf between them which can in no wise be bridged over.

Nor would it avail us to endow the atom itself with the promise and potency of intellect; we should thereby throw back the issue a step further, and disguise the problem whose existence it were better to plainly acknowledge. The broad fact of consciousness therefore remains unexplained and inexplicable as before. Arrived at this limit, science itself pauses and refuses to pass further.

Some of the leading naturalists of our day have lately expressed themselves clearly and tersely in this sense. The eminent physiologist Dubois Rey-mond denies that the connection between certain motions of certain atoms in the brain, and what he calls, the primal, undefinable and undeniable facts of consciousness, is at all conceivable. Professor Tyndall in his address on "The scope and limits of Scientific Materialism," explains his views with similar precision.

Were our minds so expanded, strengthened and illuminated as to enable us to see and feel the very molecules of the brain; were we capable of following all their motions, all their groupings, all their

electric discharges, if such there be; and were we intimately acquainted with the corresponding states of thought and feeling, we should be as far as ever from the solution of the problem. How are these physical processes connected by and with the facts of consciousness? I do not think the materialist is entitled to say that his molecular groupings and his molecular motions explain everything, in reality they explain nothing... The problem of body and soul is as insoluble in its modern form as it was in the pre-scientific ages.

Now since it is impossible to demonstrate that the powers of mind are a product of matter, the possibility undoubtedly remains that these powers may continue to exist even after their connection with the physical organism has been dissolved. If all the arguments that are commonly adduced in support of the doctrine of a future life fall short of their object, it is but just to add that every argument to the contrary is equally devoid of foundation. The doctrine of immortality cannot be disproved. Of the nature of soul we are in absolute ignorance we know nothing; what is more, we can know nothing. At this point we touch the utmost boundary of human reason, and must be content to write mystery of mysteries.

In the state of settled uncertainty to which we are thus reduced, the shape of our opinions will be determined by the bias of our natures or the influence of education. The sceptic will remind us of the points in which we resemble all the perishable forms of nature and hold it improbable that we alone should escape the universal law of dissolution. Others will cling to the hope of continued life, even on the brink of the grave, and the strong instinct of self preservation will give tone and color to their religious beliefs. Deep philosophical speculations are possible as to that ultimate source of being, that hidden light of which both matter and mind are diverse reflections. And here too poetry assumes its legitimate office. On the mists that cover the infinite abyss, we may project whatever images, foul or fair, we list. Science you may be sure will never disturb us. Dogmatic assertion however, on either side is totally unwarranted: and the question of immortality (I think we must sooner or later make up our minds to that) will remain an open one. Certain, only, is the fact of our uncertainty.

If the conclusions to which we have thus been led, seem purely negative in their bearings, they are none the less capable of certain positive applications, which deserve our serious attention. The longing for immortality has been developed into a morbid craving under the influence of the current religious teachings, and has become a disturbing element in human society. On more than one occasion it has imperilled the peace of nations, and the doctrines of salvation became the watchwords of contending armies. The doubtful chances of eternal felicity or damnation became the one absorbing topic on which men's minds dwelt, and the wild horrors of the Christian Hell have cast a gloom over many an innocent life, and curtailed the scant measure of its earthly happiness. It were something gained, if by a cool and dispassionate judgment the influence of these dismal fantasies could be lessened, and men be freed from their slavish subjection to phantoms born of their own distempered imaginations.

Furthermore, it follows from what we have said that the belief in immortality should not be inculcated as a dogma in our schools of religion, and above all that the dictates of the moral law should in no wise be made to depend upon it for their sanction. The moral law is the common ground upon which all religious and in fact all true men may meet. It is the one basis of union that remains to us amid the clashing antagonisms of the sects. While dogma is by its nature, open to attack, and its acceptance at all times a matter of choice, the principles of morality have a right to demand implicit obedience, and should rest as everlasting verities in the human heart. Let us reflect well before we imperil the latter by the undue prominence which we give the former. It is not needful to impart to a child the whole truth, but what it learns should be wholly true, and nothing should be taught it as a fundamental fact which it can ever in after years be led to call in question. How often has it occurred that when the riper reason of the man has rejected the tenets of the church in which he was educated, he has been tempted to cast aside all the religious teachings of his youth, the moral with the rest, as idle fable and deceit.

And lastly, friends, as we do not, cannot know, it is presumably wise that we should not know. The vanity of all our efforts to grasp the infinite, should teach us that on this island of time whereon we live, lies our work. In its joys we may freely take delight; for its woes we should reserve our sympathies, and in laboring to advance the progress of the good we must find our satisfaction.

Before closing this subject however let us recall vividly to our minds that the desire for continuance after death is capable of the most noble expression, and of supplying us with wholesome consolation and inspiriting motives to action. The individual passes, but the race lives! There is a law in nature that no force is ever lost. The thousand varying forms that ebb and flow around us are various only to our feeble vision. At the core they are one, transmuted, yet the same, changing yet changeless, perishing to rise anew. The law of the conservation of energy holds good throughout the entire domain of matter. And such a law too obtains in our spiritual life. The law of the conservation of moral energy is no less an abiding truth; we are not dust merely, that returns to dust; we are not summer flies that bask in the sunshine of the passing day; we are not bounded in our influence by the narrow tenure of our years. Say not when the sod has closed above those who have been dear to you that all is gone. Say not that the grace and loveliness, and wisdom that once dwelt within the pallid form is breathed away like a hollow wind. Nor yet stand idly gazing upon the cloud-land of the future, watching if you can trace perchance their shadowy lineaments fading into the dimness of untried worlds. The dead are not dead if we have loved them truly. In our own lives we give them immortality. Let us arise and take up the work they have left unfinished, and preserve the treasures they have won, and round out the circuit of their being to the fullness of an ampler orbit in our own.

All the good that was in them lives in you, the germ and nucleus of the better that shall be. All the evil that inhered in them shall be cleansed away in you and your virtues shall be the atonement for their sins. Thus shall the fathers live in the children, and from generation to generation the bond that connects the past with the future remains unbroken. They that have left you are not afar; their presence is near and real, a silent and august companionship. In the still hours of meditation; under the starlit night, in the stress of action, in trials and temptations, you will hear their voices whispering words of cheer or warning, and your deeds are their deeds and your lives are their lives.

So does the light of other days still shine in the bright hued flowers that clothe our fields; so do they who are long since gathered into the silent city of the dead still move about our houses, distributing kindness and nobleness among our lives. So does the toll of the funeral bell become an alarum to rouse us to more active effort and to the nobler service of mankind.

II. RELIGION

The question, Have we still a religion, propounded by David Friedrich Strauss some few years ago, will long engage the attention of radical thinkers. It is clear that to answer it satisfactorily we must determine, in the first instance, what meaning ought rightly to be attached to the term religion. In common parlance, it is often used with reference to mere externals, a religious person being one who conforms to the rites and usages of some particular church. On the other hand, every innovation in the sphere of doctrine is branded as irreligious. Thus Luther was deemed irreligious by the Catholics; St. Boniface by the heathen Germans, Jesus by the Jews, Elijah by the servants of Baal. There is not any single form, nor even a single fundamental principle common to all religions. Religion is not identical with theology. It is indeed often maintained that the belief in a personal God should be regarded as the foundation and criterion of religion; but upon this assumption, two facts remain inexplicable, the existence of religion before ever the idea of a deity had arisen among men, and the existence of what may be termed an atheistical religion, in conscious antagonism to the doctrine of a personal God. Among the lower races we find men worshipping, sacrificing and uttering their invocations to mountains, fountains, rivers, rocks and stones: they know not a deity – sometimes they have not even idols, and yet they certainly have, after a fashion of their own, a religion. Again, Buddhism, while possessing a subtle system of philosophy and an admirable code of ethics, starts with the proposition that there never was a creation, and in consequence, never a creator, and yet more than four hundred millions of the earth's inhabitants call it their religion!

The question returns to us, What is religion? It is not creed; it is not sacrifice; it is not prayer; it is not covered by the dogmas of any special form of belief; it has acted as a controlling force in all ages, in every zone, among all manner of men. Are we devoid of it? Of it? Of what?

The feeling which the presence of the Infinite in the thoughts of man awakens within him, is called, the feeling of the sublime. *The feeling of the sublime is the root of the religious sentiment.* It assumes various phases, and to these correspond the various religions. Let us endeavor to enumerate some of the most prominent.

The feeling of the sublime is awakened by the mysterious. The indefinite gives us our earliest presentiment of the infinite; the religion of mystery is fetishism. The feeling of the sublime is awakened by exhibitions of superhuman power. The religion of power is paganism. The feeling of the sublime is evoked by vastness; the religions of vastness are Brahminism and Buddhism. The loftiest type of sublimity is to be found in the morally infinite. Judaism, Christianity and Islam have sought to give it expression.*

* We do not pretend that the above schedule is at all exhaustive. Various elements of the sublime, not mentioned in the text, have entered into the composition of each of the great religions. We have merely attempted to seize the more salient feature of a few leading types.

Let us discuss in the first place the origin of Fetishism. There are certain natural phenomena that fill us with alarm, without our being able to attribute the effect to any definite cause. The darkness of night, the rustling of leaves, the moaning of the wind through the forest, the wailing cry of certain birds, and the peculiar effects of a gathering fog, are of this kind. I have had occasion to observe a little child suddenly starting from its play with every sign of fear depicted upon its countenance; the spasm passed away as quickly as it had come, but was repeated at various intervals, until at last the child ran up to me in uncontrollable alarm, and threw up its arms for protection: it was a raw wintry day, a gusty wind blew fitfully against the windows; and the dreary sound of the rattling panes could be distinctly heard in the stillness of the room; on closer observation I noticed that the signs of alarm in the child recurred with great regularity, as often as this sound was repeated. In a similar way we

may imagine our earliest ancestors to have been affected by whatever was vague and mysterious in nature. The sense of uncertainty occasioned in this manner, gave rise in the primitive man to the first conceptions of mysterious powers beyond him.

The invention, or rather the discovery, of fire tended still further in the same direction. To us it is barely possible to imagine life without this most useful of the elements. The wild beast flees fire and fears it, man uses it, and it becomes the chief instrument of civilization. But if we strive to picture to ourselves the state of the savage's mind on his first acquaintance with fire and its properties we shall find him utterly at a loss to account for. How will he regard this nimble, playful being, so bright and yet so fearful in its ravages. Of the laws of chemical action he has of course no conception, but he has sometimes seen the lightning strike into the wood of the tree, and now from the same wood he evokes the semblance of the lightning. He is twirling two dry sticks between his hands; of a sudden, a lambent flame shoots forth, seizes the wood, makes away with it, and leaves nothing but blackened cinders behind. Whence did it come, whither has it vanished? Here was a new mystery; a spiritual presence, latent in trees and stones; kindly and beneficent at times, then again hostile and fiercely destructive.

The mystery of the preparation of fire is celebrated in the ancient hymns of the Vedah. We there find its birth from the friction of the double sticks described, and its properties rehearsed in reverent language. It is invoked like any superior spirit to bless its votaries, and to protect them from harm. The important role ascribed to fire in the sacred usages of the ancients, is well-known, and the origin of fire worship apparent.

The theory of dreams, to which we have referred on a previous occasion, contributed in like manner, to extend the boundaries of the world of mystery. Convinced that he bore within himself an airy counterfeit of self, the savage attributed the same species of possession to things animate and inanimate alike. Why should not beasts and rivers and stones have their ghosts like man? Moreover, as to the ghosts of the human dead, no one could tell where they might take up their abode. They might be anywhere and everywhere. Their countless legions surrounded the living in all places. They were heard shouting in the echo among the hills; they were seen to ride past on the midnight gale. Often they assumed the shape of birds and reptiles and beasts of prey. Those creatures were singled out with a preference, whose movements and habits suggested the idea of mystery. Thus the owl was supposed to harbor an evil spirit, and the serpent was worshipped because of its stealthy, gliding motion, its venomous bite, and the fascination in its eye. Serpent worship existed the world over. Traces of it are preserved in the literature of the Greeks and Romans, and it was practised even among the Hebrews, as the Books of Kings attest. Among certain African tribes it is still customary to keep huge serpents in temples, and priests are dedicated to their service. Powerful animals also, such as the bear, the lion and the tiger, were sometimes supposed to contain the ghosts of departed chieftains, and were revered accordingly.

If we remember the unfriendly relations supposed to subsist between the living and the dead, we may conceive the state of alarm in which our primitive ancestors must have passed their lives on beholding themselves thus beset on every side, with ghosts or demons in disguise. A thousand fabulous terrors haunted their imagination. Wherever they turned they suspected lurking foes; spirits were in the earth, in the air, in birds, in animals, in reptiles, in trees. They could not move a step without infringing on the boundaries of the spirit realm. Every object the least extraordinary in size, or shape, or color, appeared to them the token of some demon's presence, and was worshipped in consequence, not on its own account, but because of the mystery which it suggested.

In this manner Fetishism arose. The fetish worshipper leaves his hut in the morning, sees some bright pebble glistening on his path, lifts it from the ground and says, this shall be my fetish. If he succeeds in the business of the day, he places the little object in a shrine, gilds it, brings it food, addresses his prayers to it; if it fails, it is cast aside. Again, if after a little time the fetish ceases to fulfil his wishes, he breaks it and drags it in the mire by way of punishment.

Such are a few of the gross and grotesque conceptions to which the religion of mystery has given birth. It is true, to the educated mind of the present day they will appear the very reverse of sublime. But greatness is relative, and our own loftier conceptions of the sublime are but the slow result of a long process of growth and development.

THE RELIGION OF POWER

It has often been said that fear is the beginning of religion; a statement of this kind however, cannot be accepted, without serious qualification. There is a sense of kinship with the great, in whatever form it may appear, of which even the meanest are susceptible. A nation worships the hero who ruins it; and slaves will take a certain pride in the superiority of their masters. It is not fear so much as admiration of might which makes men servants of the mighty. The first tyrants on earth were, in all likelihood, strong, agile, and brave men, possessing in an extraordinary degree, the qualities which all others coveted. They won applause, they were looked up to as natural leaders, and the arm of force maintained what the esteem of their fellows had accorded in the first instance. There is a touch of the sublime even in the rudest adoration of force.

In the second stage of religious development, which we are now approaching, the theory of possession discussed in the above, was extended to the heavenly bodies, and the sun, moon and stars were endowed with the attributes of personal beings. Hence the origin of the great gods. As the sun is the most conspicuous body in the heavens, the sun god figures as the central deity in every pantheon. The various phases through which the luminary passes are represented in distinct personalities. We find gods of the rising sun and of the setting sun; gods of the sun of spring, summer and winter, gods also of the cloud-enshrouded sun, that battles with the storm giants.

Since the hosts of heaven were supposed to be beings allied in nature to ourselves, the action and interaction of the meteoric phenomena was ascribed to personal motives, and the ingenuity of the primitive philosophers was exhausted in finding plausible pretexts to explain their attractions and repulsions, their seeming friendships and hostilities. Thus arose the quaint and fanciful myths with which the traditions of antiquity abound. Those problems which the modern mind seeks to settle with the help of scientific investigation, the limited experience of an earlier age was barely competent to attack, and it covered with some pretty fiction, the difficulties which it could not solve. The genealogy and biography of the sun-god formed the main theme of all mythologies.

The daily progress of the sun through the heavens, is described as follows: Each morning the golden crowned god leaves his golden palace in the East, deep down below the ocean's waves; he mounts his golden chariot, drawn by fiery steeds. A rosy fingered maiden opens the purple gate of day, upward rush the steeds through blinding mist along the steep ascent of heaven, down they plunge at evening into the cooling waters of the sea; the naiads await the deity and bear him backward to his orient home.

Again the fair youth Adonis is said to come out of the forest, where nymphs had nurtured him. Venus and he hunt in joyous company through wood and dale. One day Adonis is slain; the blood that trickled from his wounds has turned the roses red, and the tender anemones have sprung from the tears that love wept when she beheld his fall. The young god who comes out of the forest is Spring; for a time he disports joyously on earth, with love for his companion, but his term of life is quickly ended. Spring dies, but ever returns anew. Among the Syrian women it was customary for a long period to observe the festival of the Adoneiah; with every sign of grief they first bemoaned the god's untimely death; they beat their breasts, cut off the rich luxuriance of their hair; showed upon his effigy the marks of the wounds he had received; bound him with linen bands, anointed him with costly oil and spices, and then buried him. On the seventh day the cry was heard, Adonis lives, Adonis is resurrected from the grave. The story of a young god typical of the Spring who suffers a premature death, and after a time resurrects from the grave is well known in the mythologies of other nations.

The progress of the sun through the seasons is thus personified. The rays of the sun are described as the locks of the sun-god's hair. When the sun's heat waxes, these locks increase in

abundance, when it wanes they diminish, until in mid-winter the head of the sun-god is entirely bald. At this season the god is supposed to be exceedingly weak, and his eye, bright in the summer, is now become blind. He is far from his home, and subject to the power of his enemies, the wintry storms. These traits recur in the familiar Hebrew myth of Samson. The word Samson means sun; he is bound with ropes, as is also the sun-god among the Polynesians. The secret of his strength is in his hair. Shorn of this the giant becomes feeble as a child, and is blinded by his foes.

But it is the sun in its conflict with the demons of the storm, the sun as a warrior and a hero, that chiefly attracts the *religious* reverence of the heroic age. In nature there is no more striking exhibition of power than is revealed in the phenomena of the thunder-storm. Even to us it has not lost its sublimity, and a sense of awe overcomes us whenever the mighty spectacle is enacted in the heavens. Primitive man had a far deeper interest in the issue of the tempest than we are now capable of appreciating. To him the clouds appeared to be ferocious monsters, and when they crowded about the central luminary, he feared that they might quench its light in everlasting darkness. The very existence of the universe seemed to be threatened. The sun-god, the true friend of man, however arises to wage war against the demons: a terrific uproar follows and the contending forces meet. Do you hear Thor's far-sounding hammer, Jove's bolt falling in the thunder clap: do you see Indra's lightning-spear flashing across the sky, and piercing the sides of the storm dragon? The light triumphs; the tempest rolls away, but presently returns to be again defeated. In this way arose the transparent stories of Jupiter's conflict with Typhon, his precipitate flight, and his final victory; the story of Indra's warfare against the writhing serpent, Vritra, and numerous others that might be mentioned. It is the sun-god who flashes the lightning and hurls the thunder. To him men owe the maintenance of the order of existence. He is the mightiest of the gods. Fighting their battles on high, he is invoked by the warriors to aid them in their earthly-conflicts; he takes precedence of all the other deities; he the strongest god is raised to the throne of the celestial state.

Now if we study the history of these deities, their intercourse among themselves and with men, we find them to be no more than colossal images of ourselves cast on the mists of the unknown. It is our face and form that Jupiter wears; the echo of our wishes comes back to us in his oracles. "If horses and cows could draw their gods," an ancient philosopher has pointedly said, "as horses and cows would they draw them." The gods share our passions, the good and the evil, distinguished only in this, that what we feebly attempt, they can execute on a scale of gigantic magnitude. They love and bless and shower a thousand gifts upon their worshippers; but they can hate also; are vain, vindictive, cruel.

The gods demand tribute. Like the kings of earth, they received the best share of the spoils of war and of the chase; and gold and silver also was deposited in their sanctuaries. Perfumed incense and dainty cakes were placed upon their altars. The gods are hungry, they must be fed. The gods are thirsty, and certain strong narcotic beverages were brewed especially for their benefit. For this among the Hindoos the juice of the soma plant was mixed with pure milk.

The gods demand blood. The wide prevalence of human sacrifice is the saddest fact that stains the annals of religious history. Among the Fijians the new boat of the chieftain was not permitted to venture upon the waves until it had been washed with human blood, in order to secure it against shipwreck. Among the Khonds of India, we learn that the body of a human victim was literally torn in pieces and his blood mixed with the new turned clod, in order to insure a plentiful harvest. It is estimated that at least twenty-five hundred human beings were annually sacrificed in the temples of Mexico. Human sacrifice was known among the Greeks, and its practice among the Hebrews is recorded in the Hebrew Bible.

When the manners of men ameliorated, and gentler customs began to supplant the barbarous usages of an earlier day, the tyranny of the gods was still feared, but various modes of substitution were adopted to appease their jealousy of human happiness. In India we are told, that the god of light being displeased with the constant effusion of blood, commanded a buffalo to appear from out the jungle, and a voice was heard saying, sacrifice the buffalo and liberate the man.

Another mode of substitution was to give a part for the whole. Some one member of the body was mutilated or curtailed in order to indicate that the person's life was in reality forfeit to the god. Among certain of the aboriginal tribes of America, the youth, on reaching the years of maturity, was forced to place his hand upon a buffalo's skull, and one or more joints of the finger were then cut off and dedicated to the great spirit. There were other modes of mutilation of which I dare not speak, but I will briefly add that the so-called rite of the covenant, which is practised among the Jews even at the present day, rose in exactly the same manner. Of course the original signification of the custom has been forgotten and a purely symbolical meaning has been attached to it. Nevertheless, its continuance is a disgrace to religion. The grounds of sanity on which it is urged, are not in themselves tenable, and if they were, religion would have no concern with them. It is but a fresh instance of the stubborn vitality which seems to inhere in the hoary superstitions of the past.

Occasionally, when a whole people was threatened with destruction, some prominent and beloved individual was selected for sacrifice, in order that by his death he might save the rest. The same feature was also introduced into the legends of the gods. Philo tells us that the great God El whom the Hebrews and Phoenicians worshiped, once descended to earth, and became a king. This El was the supreme deity. He had an only son whom he loved. One day when great dangers threatened his people, the god determined to sacrifice his only begotten (– Greek –) son and to redeem his people: and year by year thereafter a solemn festival was celebrated in Phoenicia in honor of that great sacrifice.

The religion of force has left its dark traces in the history of mankind. Even the higher religions accepted, while they spiritualized, its degrading conceptions into their systems. Slowly only and with the general spread of intelligence and morality, can we hope that its last vestiges will be purged from the minds of men.

Vastness is an element of the sublime. In the religious conceptions of the Hindoos we find it illustrated. It entered alike into the system of the Brahmin and of the Buddhist, and determined their tone and quality. A certain fondness for the gigantic, is peculiar to Hindoo character. Witness the almost boundless periods of their ancient chronology; the colossal forms with which the remains of their monuments and architecture abound. A great Aryan nation having advanced from the waters of the Indus to the shores of the sacred Ganges and having subdued the natives by the force of superior numbers or bravery, had learned to forget the active pursuits of war, and yielded to the lassitude engendered by the climate of their new settlements. Around them they beheld a rich and luxuriant vegetation; birds of rare and many colored plumage, stately trees rising from interminable jungles. Ravishing perfumes lulled their senses as they reposed in the shade of these fairy-like forests. It was a land suited to dreamy contemplation. Here the philosophic priests might dwell upon the vastness of the Universal, and the imagination bewildered by the ever shifting phenomena of the scene might well seek some principle of unity which could connect and explain the whole. Brahma was the name they gave to the pervading Spirit of All things. From Brahma the entire order of existence has emanated; the elements of material things, plants, birds, beasts and men. The lower castes came forth first and are nearest the brutes; the castes of free-born workmen, and of warriors next, the priests and saints last, in whom the world's soul found its loftiest expression.

To Brahma all things must return. Passing through an endless series of transformations, and paying in the long and painful interval the penalty of every crime it has committed, the migrating spirit of man is led back at last to its primal source, and is resolved in the Brahma whence it arose. The connection between individual and universal life was thus kept constantly in view. The soul in the course of its wanderings might pass through every conceivable mode of existence; might assume the shape of creeping plants and worms, and wild animals; might rise to the possession of miraculous powers in the heavens of the Rishis, while its final destiny was to be reunited with the One and All.

The Buddhist Nirvana resembles the Brahma in being accounted the ultimate principle of the world. When in the sixth century B. C. the royal Hermit of the Cakyas revolted against the cruel

despotism of the priesthood, the legend relates that the sight of suffering in the forms of sickness, old age and death, roused him from a life of indolent pleasure, and impelled him to seek a remedy for the ills of human life. His counsels were sweet and kindly; he taught self-control and wise moderation in the indulgence of the passions, and brotherly help and sympathy to lessen the evils which foresight cannot avert. He lifted the degraded masses of the Indian land from out their dull despair; he warred against the distinctions of caste, he took women and slaves for his companions, he was a prophet of the people, whom the people loved. But even to him the ills of this mortal condition seemed little when compared with the endless possibilities of future ill that awaited the soul in the course of its ceaseless transmigrations. He yearned to shorten its weary path to the goal; and the mystic methods by which he sought to enter Nirvana were a means adapted to this end. Nirvana is the beginning and the end of things. Nirvana in which there is neither action nor feeling; in which intelligence and consciousness are submerged, appeared to this pessimist preacher the last, the only reality. Life is a delusion, real only in its pains: the entire cessation of conscious existence, is the solution he offers to human suffering.

Nirvana is the universal – its conception is vast and dim; it hovers in the distance before the pilgrim of the earth; there will he find rest.

Unlike the Western nations, the Hindoos regarded the idea of immortality with dread and terror, rather than pleased anticipation. The highest promises of their religion, were intended to assure them that they would cease to continue as individual beings or cease to continue altogether. Peace in the tomb when this present toil is over seemed to them the most desirable of goods, and a dreamless sleep from which no angel trump should ever wake the sleeper.

"Two things," says Kant, "fill the soul with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence; the star-lit heavens above me, and the moral law within me."*

* Kant's Works (Rosenkranz edition) vol. viii. p. 312.

The Hebrews were the first to lend to the moral ideas a controlling influence in the sphere of religion. Let me attempt to briefly sketch the origin of Monotheism amongst them, as numerous considerations elsewhere recited in detail, have led me to conceive of it. The religions of the Semitic nations who surrounded ancient Israel were intensely emotional in character, and their gods were gods of pleasure and pain. In the temples unbounded license alternated with self sacrificing asceticism. The lewd rites of the goddess of love must be regarded as typical of the one; the slaughter of sons in honor of Moloch, of the other. Now the Hebrews have been distinguished for the purity of their home life from a very early period of their history. The high value which they set on male offspring, the jealous vigilance with which they guarded the virtue of their women are alike illustrated in the narratives of the Bible. The more gifted and noble minded among them, beholding their domestic feelings outraged by the prevailing religions, rebelled against the gross conceptions of idolatry. How could they offer up their beloved sons for sacrifice, how could they give over their wives and daughters to shame? The controlling force of their character determined the doctrines of their creed. Judaism became, so to speak, a family religion. Jehovah is conceived of as the husband of the people. Israel shall be his true and loyal spouse, the children of Israel are His children. The image of Jehovah is that of the ideal patriarch. Like the patriarch, he is the head of the spiritual family of man. Like the patriarch in ancient times, he is the lawgiver and the judge; He is the guardian of domestic purity. The word for false religion in Hebrew signifies fornication. "Contend against your mother," says Jehovah, "for I am not her spouse, nor she my wife." "My people lust after false gods, for the spirit of impurity has seduced them." And the day of the triumph of the true religion is thus predicted: "On that day thou shalt not call me any more my Baal, (paramour) but thou shalt call me my husband, and I shall wed thee in justice, etc." Thus the idea of Jehovah sprang from the soil of the family, and the conception of a divine father in heaven was derived from the analogy of the noblest of moral institutions on earth. The spiritual God of the Hebrews was the personification of the moral Ideal.

Like his relations to the chosen people and to mankind in general, the relations of the Deity to the external world were described in accordance with the demands of the Ethical Law. Two things morality insists upon; first, that the natural in its coarser acceptation shall be subordinate to the moral. Secondly, that in the scale of values itself shall occupy the highest rank, and that the purpose human life on earth can only be a moral purpose. As the mechanism of nature is not of itself calculated to harmonize with the purposes of spirit, it behooves that the spiritual God shall possess a power over matter adequate to enforce the claims of the moral ideal, such power as only the creator can exert over his creatures. Hence the doctrine of the creation. And again the state of perfection to which the human heart aspires can only be attained through the instrumentality of supreme wisdom, power and love, in a millennial age when the scheme of the universe will be perfected in the reign of absolute justice and peace. Hence the doctrine of the Messiah. Both doctrines are the typical expression of a moral need.

In the opening of Genesis we read a description of the making of the world. All was wild vast chaos, and darkness brooded over the abyss, when the Spirit of Jehovah breathed on the waters; a single word of command and light penetrated the gloom, the waters divided, the great luminaries started forth on their course; the earth clothed herself in verdure, and the forms of living beings sprang into existence. The words "God saw everything he had made and behold it was very good," contain the gist of the narrative. In Zephaniah and Isaiah we read: "On that day I will turn to the people a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent." "No one shall then do evil, no one hurt in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."

These visions are not true in the sense of historical occurrences past or future. That the world was ever created out of nothing, what human understanding can conceive of it? That a time will come when society shall be so transformed that the pure language of love alone shall be spoken, who that is instructed in the failings of our finite nature can credit it? They are true in the sense of ideals; true, with the truth of poetry, bodying forth in concrete shape the universal yearnings of mankind.

There is also another element of belief associated with the doctrine of the Messiah, which still more plainly illustrates the typical value of religious tenets. In the coming week the churches throughout Christendom will rehearse the story of the passion and the death of their founder. Mournful chants and lamentations will recall every circumstance of the dark drama that closed on Calvary. That tale of harrowing agony still moves the hearts of millions as though it were a tale of yesterday. It is the symbol of the suffering and the crucifixion of the whole human race. "Ah, but our griefs he has borne, our sorrows he has carried, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, the author of these lines transcribed in them the sad experience of the reformers of his day. He does not refer to any one Messiah; he speaks of that legacy of sacrifice which is the heritage of the great and good, the world over. For who can help us when we are plunged in deepest anguish, when it seems as though we must sink under the load of trouble, but one who has endured like trials, endured and triumphed over them? It is the martyrdom of the pure that has redeemed mankind from guilt and sin? There is this constant atonement of the strong for the weak, of the good for the evil. As old Paul Gerhard has it in his seventeenth century hymn:

"When utmost dread shall seize me,
That human heart can know,
Do thou from pain release me,
By thy great pain and woe."

The teachings of religion then have their source in the aspirations of the human heart; are the echoes of our wishes and our hopes. Not valueless on that account, but valuable only in so far as they

express in noble types, noble aspirations of our souls. It were sad indeed if morality depended upon the certainty of dogma. On the contrary it is true that all that is best and grandest in dogma, is due to the inspiration of the moral law in man. The time will come when the tenets of faith will no longer be narrowly understood as now; and while their influence will still be great, they will cease to be harmful and confining. They will be used as rare imagery, to deck the sublime meanings which they symbolize; not as vessels that contain the absolute truth, but as choice and beautiful vases, fit to hold the ever fresh and ever blooming flowers of the ideal.

The dogmatic assertion of religious teachings we hold to be a serious evil, and dogma as such we cannot accept. Its influence in the past has been pernicious, and is so at the present day no less. It has inflamed the hatred of man against his brother man, it has led to the fatal error of duties toward a personal Creator, distinct from our duties toward our fellows: it has perverted the moral sense, by giving to the concern of future salvation, a degree of prominence before which the interests of the present life sink into comparative insignificance; it does not afford us a common basis whereon we could unite, for it is by nature uncertain and calculated to provoke dissensions. On the other hand we behold in conscience the root of whatever good religion has achieved, and the law of conscience must suffice to guide and elevate our lives. To refresh the moral sentiment is the one thing needful in our time, and indeed presents a task on whose accomplishment the highest interests of society depend. Time will show that a simple appeal to duty will surely suffice to lead men to more earnest exertions toward the good. Time will show that those who know no other mode of salvation than the salvation which is attained by works of love, will be at least as active in the pursuit of virtue as those who put their trust in faith.

The gold of morality has been variously coined in the world's religious systems. Various have been the symbols that were stamped thereon, and various the images of the King in whose name it was issued, but their value so far as they had value was in the moral gold that they contained, and in naught else. Let Liberalism stamp its coin with the Eagle of Liberty only, in its ethical teachings it will still retain the substance of all religion.

Dogma we will keep in abeyance, – this is our point of departure, and the deed superior to the creed. Be it ours to hold high the moral ideal, whether we clothe it with personality or not. Be it ours to act divine things, no matter how we regard divine mysteries. Be it ours to help in lifting up the fallen, to lend free utterance to the complaints of the oppressed, to brand the social iniquities of our time, to give our hearts warmth and the labor of our hands to the cause of their redress, and to push on with whatever power we may, the progress of our race toward those high and holy goals of which the dreamers dream, the prophets prophesy.

III. THE NEW IDEAL

The old religions and science are at war. With pitiless consistency science directs its attack upon their vulnerable positions. The conception of inexorable law subverts the testimony of miracles; the fond belief in truths divinely revealed fails to withstand the searching analysis of historical criticism; the battle of science is yet far from being won, but from our standpoint the issue cannot appear doubtful. It behooves us therefore to inquire into the moral bearings of the general result thus far achieved and to review what we have lost and won. Shall we succeed thereby in allaying the sense of alarm that is wont to agitate the timid heart when it beholds so much that it confidently believed a part of the everlasting verities of life, sink back into the gulf of uncertainty and doubt?

We are standing at the portals of a new age, and new conceptions have arisen of the purpose which we are here to accomplish and of the means of help we can command in the attempt to realize our destiny. These new conceptions we call The New Ideal. It is the purpose of our present discourse to compare some salient features of the old and new.

The old and new Ideals agree in looking to an Infinite beyond the borders of experience, for it is in the nature of the ideal to lift us above the merely real. They differ in the direction in which they seek their object, and the bias which they consequently give to men's thoughts and actions. Theology, perceiving the inability of reason to solve the problems of the beginning and the end, yet unable to restrain a desire to know what is really unknowable, has impressed the imagination into its service, and drawn a picture of the transcendental world, conforming indeed to the analogies of man's terrestrial existence, but on this account all the more adapted to answer the wishes of the masses of mankind. Enough for them that they feel the need of believing the picture true. We of the New School are, if possible, even more profoundly convinced of the limitations of human reason. We cheerfully accord to the religious conceptions of the past a poetic value; they are poetry, often of the sublimest kind; but we cannot deceive ourselves as to the noble weakness of the heart to which they owe their origin; we cannot forget that in their case alas the wish has been father to the thought. To us the mystery is still mystery – the veiled arcana are not revealed, the riddle is unread. But we are not therefore filled with terror or dismay. In the moral nature of man we discover a divine element. In the voice of conscience we hear the voice of the present divinity within us, and we learn to regard this mortal state of ours as a channel through which the currents of Eternity ebb and flow ceaselessly. The divine nature is not far off, nor beyond the sea; in our own hearts on our own lips!

But let us seek to scrutinize the distinctive features of the old and new more closely. The old ideal was supernatural in character, it taught man to regard his life on earth as a brief, temporary transit, himself an exile from the Kingdom on high. The concerns of the present world were in consequence deemed of secondary importance, and the eye dwelt with anxious preference on the dim chances of the hereafter. Where the hope of immortality has been prominently put forward by any religion, the effect has thus but too often proved disastrous to the progress and security of society. It is well-known by what painful penances the monks of the Middle Ages sought release from the trammels of the flesh, how they affected to despise the ties of domestic affection, how they retarded the advancement of knowledge, how the passions which they sought in vain to suppress often recoiled upon them with fearful retribution, and gave rise to disorders which seriously undermined public virtue.

But not only has supernaturalism tended indirectly to weaken the springs of virtue, it has called into being an order of men whose very existence is a standing menace to the freedom of intellect and the rights of conscience. The distance between the Creator and his creatures is so great, that the intervention of some third party is deemed necessary to mediate between the finite and the Infinite. The priest steps in to perform this office, and his influence is great in proportion to the value of the services which he is supposed to render. Furthermore it is believed that the personal deity requires

the performance of certain actions in his honor, and what these actions are is again left to the priest to determine. In this manner the ceremonial part of religion grows up, and acquires a degree of importance fatal to the moral life. The duties toward God transcend the duties toward man, and but too often usurp their place.

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