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How I Became a Rationalist, by M. M. Mangasarian**

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# **THE STORY OF MY MIND**

**How I Became a Rationalist**

**By M. M. Mangasarian**

1909

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## **DEDICATION**

To My Children

My Dear Children:—

**Y**ou have often requested me to tell you how, having been brought up by my parents as a Calvinist, I came to be a Rationalist. I propose now to answer that question in a more connected and comprehensive way than I have ever done before. One reason for waiting until now was, that you were not old enough before, to appreciate fully the mental struggle which culminated in my resignation from the Spring Garden Presbyterian church of Philadelphia, in which, my dear Zabelle, you received your baptism at the time I was its pastor. Your brother, Armand, and your sister, Christine, were born after I had withdrawn from the Presbyterian church, and they have therefore not been baptised. But you are, all three of you, now sufficiently advanced in years, and in training, to be interested in, and I trust also, to be benefited by, the story of my religious evolution. I am going to put the story in writing that you may have it with you when I am gone, to remind you of the aims and interests for which I lived, as well as to acquaint you with the most earnest and intimate period in my career as a teacher of men. If you should ever become parents yourselves, and your children should feel inclined to lend their support to dogma, I hope you will prevail upon them, first to read the story of their grand-father, who fought his way out of the camp of orthodoxy by grappling with each dogma, hand to hand and breast to breast.

I have no fear that you yourselves will ever be drawn into the meshes of orthodoxy, which cost me my youth and the best years of my life to break through, or that you will permit motives of self-interest to estrange you from the Cause of Rationalism with which my life has been so closely identified. My assurance of your loyalty to freedom of thought in religion is not based, nor do I desire it to be based, on considerations of respect or affection which you may entertain for me as your father, but on your ability and willingness to verify a proposition before assenting to it. Do not believe me because I am your parent, but believe what you have yourselves, by conscientious and earnest endeavor, found to be worthy of belief. It will never be said of you, that you have inherited your opinions from me, or borrowed them from your neighbors, if you can give a reason for the faith that is in you.

I wish you also to know that during those years of storm and stress, when everything seemed so discouraging, and when my resignation from the church had left us exposed to many privations,—without money and without help, your mother's sympathy with me in my combat with the church—a lone man, and a mere youth, battling with the most powerfully entrenched institution in all the world, was more than my daily bread to me during the pain and travail of my second birth. My spirits, often depressed from sheer weariness, were nursed to new life and ardor by her patience and sympathy.

One word more: Nothing will give your parents greater satisfaction than to see in you, increasing with the increase of years, a love for those ideals which instead of dragging the world backward, or arresting its progress, urge man's search to nobler issues. Co-operate with the light. Be on the side of the dawn. It is not enough to profess Rationalism—make it your religion. Devotedly,

M. M. Mangasarian.

## CHAPTER I. In the Cradle of Christianity

**I** was a Christian because I was born one. My parents were Christians for the same reason. It had never occurred to me, any more than it had to my parents, to ask for any other reason for professing the Christian religion. Never in the least did I entertain even the most remote suspicion that being born in a religion was not enough, either to make the religion true, or to justify my adherence to it.

My parents were members of the Congregational church, and when I was only a few weeks old, they brought me, as I have often been told by those who witnessed the ceremony, to the Rev. Mr. Richardson, to be baptized and presented to the Lord. It was the vow of my mother, if she ever had a son, to dedicate him to the service of God. As I advanced in years, the one thought constantly instilled into my mind was that I did not belong to myself but to God. Every attempt was made to wean me from the world, and to suppress in me those hopes and ambitions which might lead me to choose some other career than that of the ministry.

This constant surveillance over me, and the artificial sanctity associated with the life of one set apart for God, was injurious to me in many ways. Among other things it robbed me of my childhood. Instead of playing, I began very early to pray. God, Christ, Bible, and the dogmas of the faith monopolized my attention, and left me neither the leisure nor the desire for the things that make childhood joyous. At the age of eight years I was invited to lead the congregation in prayer, in church, and could recite many parts of the New Testament by heart. One of my favorite pastimes was "to play church." I would arrange the chairs as I had seen them arranged at church, then mounting on one of the chairs, I would improvise a sermon and follow it with an unctuous prayer. All this pleased my mother very much, and led her to believe that God had condescended to accept her offering.

My dear mother is still living, and is still a devout member of the Congregational church. I have not concealed my Rationalism from her, nor have I tried to make light of the change which has separated us radically in the matter of religion. Needless to say that my withdrawal from the Christian ministry, and the Christian religion, was a painful disappointment to her. But like all loving mothers, she hopes and prays that I may return to the faith she still holds, and in which I was baptized. It is only natural that she should do so. At her age of life, beliefs have become so crystallized that they can not yield to new impressions. When my mother had convictions I was but a child, and therefore I was like clay in her hands, but now that I can think for myself my mother is too advanced in years for me to try to influence her. She was more successful with me than I shall ever be with her.

That my mother had a great influence upon me, all my early life attests. As soon as I was old enough I was sent to college with a view of preparing myself for the ministry. Having finished college I went to the

Princeton Theological Seminary, where I received instruction from such eminent theologians as Drs. A. A. Hodge, William H. Green, and Prof. Francis L. Patton. At the age of twenty-three, I became pastor of the Spring Garden Presbyterian church of Philadelphia.

It was the reading of Emerson and Theodore Parker which gave me my first glimpse of things beyond the creed I was educated in. I was at this time obstinately orthodox, and, hence, to free my mind from the Calvinistic teaching which I had imbibed with my mother's milk, was a most painful operation. Again and again, during the period of doubt, I returned to the bosom of my early faith, just as the legendary dove, scared by the waste of waters, returned to the ark. To dislodge the shot fired into a wall is not nearly so difficult an operation as to tear one's self forever from the early beliefs which cling closer to the soul than the skin does to the bones.

While it was the reading of a new set of books which first opened my eyes, these would have left no impression upon my mind had not certain events in my own life, which I was unable to reconcile with the belief in a "Heavenly Father", created in me a predisposition to inquire into the foundations of my Faith.

An event, which happened when I was only a boy, gave me many anxious thoughts about the truth of the beliefs my dear mother had so eloquently instilled into me. The one thought I was imbued with from my youth was that "the tender mercies of God are over all his children," I believed myself to be a child of God, and counted confidently upon his special providence. But when the opportunity came for providence to show his interest in me, I was forsaken, and had to look elsewhere for help. My first disappointment was a severe shock. I got over it at the time, but when I came to read Rationalistic books, the full meaning of that early experience, which I will now briefly relate, dawned upon me, and helped to make my mind good soil for the new ideas.

In 1877 I was traveling in Asia Minor, going from the Euphrates to the Bosphorus, accompanied by the driver of my horses, one of which I rode, the other carrying my luggage. We had not proceeded very far when we were overtaken by a young traveler on foot, who, for reasons of safety, begged to join our little party. He was a Mohammedan, while my driver and I professed the Christian religion.

For three days we traveled together, going at a rapid pace in order to overtake the caravan. It need hardly be said that in that part of the world it is considered unsafe to travel even with a caravan, but, to go on a long journey, as we were doing, all by ourselves, was certainly taking a great risk.

We were armed with only a rifle—one of those flint fire-arms which frequently refused to go off. I forgot to say that my driver had also hanging from his girdle a long and crooked knife sheathed in a black canvas scabbard. Both the driver, who was a Christian, and the Mohammedan, who had placed himself under our protection, were, I am sorry to say, much given to boasting. They would tell how, on various occasions, they had, single-handed, driven away the Kurdish brigands, who outnumbered them, ten to one; how that rusty knife had disemboweled one of the most renowned Kurdish chiefs, and how the silent and meek-looking flint-gun had held at bay a pack of those "curs" who go about scenting for human flesh. All this was reassuring to me—a lad of seventeen, and I began to think that I was indebted to Providence for my brave escort.

On the morning of the 18th of February, 1877, we reached the valley said to be a veritable den of thieves, where many a traveler had lost his life as well as his goods. A great fear fell upon us when we saw on the wooden bridge which spanned the river at the base of the hills, two Kurds riding in our direction. I was at once disillusioned as to the boasted bravery of my comrades, and felt that it was all braggadocio with which they had been regaling me. As I was the one supposed to have money, I would naturally be the chief object of attack, which made my position the more perilous. But this sudden fear which seemed to paralyze me at first, was followed by a bracing resolve to cope with these "devils" mentally.

As I look back now upon the events of that day, I am puzzled to know how I got through it all without any serious harm to my person. I was surprised also that I, who had been brought up to pray and to trust in divine help, forgot in the hour of real peril, all about "other help" and bent all my energies upon helping myself.

But why did I not pray? Why did I not fall upon my knees to commit myself to God's keeping? Perhaps it was because I was too much pre-occupied—too much in earnest to take the time to pray. Perhaps my better instincts would not let me take refuge in words when something stronger was wanted. We may ask the good Lord not to burn our house, but when the house is actually on fire, water is better than prayer. Perhaps, again, I did not pray because of an instinctive feeling that this was a case of self-help or no help at all. Perhaps, again, there was a feeling in me, that if all the prayers my mother and I had offered did not save me from falling into the hands of thieves neither would any new prayer that I might offer be of any help. But the fact is that in the hour of positive and imminent peril—when face to face with death—I was too busy to pray.

My mother, before I started on this journey, had made a bag for my valuables—watch and chain, etc.—and sewed it on my underflannels, next to my body. But my money (all in gold coins) was in a snuff-box, and that again in a long silk purse. I was, of course, the better dressed of the three—with long boots which reached higher than my knees, a warm English broadcloth cloak reaching down to my ankles, and an Angora collarette, soft and snow white, about my neck.

I rode ahead, and the others, with the baggage horse, followed me. When the two Kurdish riders who were advancing in our direction reached me, they saluted me very politely, saying, according to the custom of the country, "God be with you," to which I timidly returned the customary answer, "We are all in his keeping." At the time it did not occur to me how absurd it was for both travelers and robbers to recommend each other to God while carrying fire-arms—the ones for attack, the others for defense.

Of course now I can see, though I could not at the time I am speaking of, that God never interfered to save an *unarmed* traveler from brigands—I say never, for if he ever did, and could, he would do it always. But as we know, alas, too well, that hundreds and thousands have been robbed and cut to pieces by these Kurds, it would be reasonable to infer that God is indifferent. Of course, the strongly-armed travelers, as a rule, escape, thanks to their own courage and firearms. For, we ask again, if the Lord can save one, why not all? And if he can save all, but will not, does he not become as dangerous as the robbers? But really if God could do anything in the matter, He would reform the Kurds out of the land, or—out of the thieving business. If God is the unflinching police force in Christian lands, he is not that in Mohammedan countries, at any rate.

As the two mounted Kurds passed by me, they scanned me very closely—my costume, boots, furs, cap and so on. Then I heard them making inquiries of my driver about me—who I was, where I was going, and why I was going at all.

My driver answered these, inquiries as honestly as the circumstances permitted. Wishing us all again the protection of Allah, the Kurds spurred their horses and galloped away.

For a moment we began to breathe freely—but only for a moment, for as our horses reached the bridge we saw that the Kurds had turned around and were now following us. And before we reached the middle of the bridge over the river, one of the Kurds galloping up close to me laid his hand on my shoulders and, unceremoniously, pulled me out of my saddle. At the same time he dismounted himself, while his partner remained on horseback with his gun pointed squarely in my-face, and threatening to kill me if I did not give him my money immediately.

I can never forget his savage grin when at last he found my purse, and grabbing it, with another oath, pulled it out of its hiding place. I have already described that my coins were all in a little box hid away in my purse, hence, as soon as the robber had loosened the strings he took out the box, held it in his left hand, while with his right he kept searching in the inner folds of my long purse. While he was running his fingers through the tortuous purse, I slipped mine into his left hand, and, taking hold of the box, I emptied its contents into my pocket in the twinkling of an eye and handed it back to the robber. The Kurd incensed at finding nothing in the purse which he kept shaking and fingering, snatched the box from my hand, opened it, and finding it as empty as the purse, flung it away with an oath.

"Are you Moslems or Christians?" inquired one of the Kurds, to my companions.

"We are all Moslems, by Allah," they answered.

In Turkey you are not supposed to speak the truth unless you say, "by Allah," which means "*by God*."

Of course it was not true that I was a Mohammedan. My companions told the Kurds a falsehood about me, to save my life. There was no doubt the Kurds would have killed me, but for the lie *which I did not correct*. When I reached my destination many of my co-religionists declared that I had denied Christ by allowing the Kurds to think that I was a Moslem.

As I feel now, my conscience does not trouble me for helping, by my silence, to deceive the Kurds about my religion. In withholding the truth from these would-be assassins I was doing them no evil, but protecting the most sacred rights of man, the Kurd's included. Here was an instance in which silence was golden. But I would not hesitate, any moment, to mislead a thief or a murderer, by speech, as well as by silence. If it is right to kill the murderer in self-defense, it is right to deny him also the truth.

But young as I was, what alarmed me at the time was that we should have been led into the temptation of lying to save our lives. Why did a "Heavenly Father" deliver us to the brigands? And of what help was God to us, if, in real peril, we had to resort to fighting or falsehood for self-protection? In what way would the world have been worse off without a "Heavenly Father?"

About a month after I arrived at my destination, I received a letter from my mother, to whom the driver, upon his return, had related my adventure with the Kurds. Without paying the least thought to the fact that we had to lie to save our lives, my mother claimed that it was her prayers which had saved *me* from the brigands. *Sancta Simplicitas!*

But my hospitality to new tendencies did not in the least diminish the anguish and pain of the separation from the religion of my mother. Even after I began to seriously doubt many of the beliefs I had once accepted as divine, it seemed impossible to abandon them. Ten thousand obstacles blocked my way, and as many voices seemed to caution me against sailing forth upon an unknown sea. In a modest way, I was like Columbus, separated from the new world I was seeking, by the dark and tempestuous waste of waters. How often my heart sank within me! I was almost sure of a better and larger world beyond Calvin, or Christ even, but the huge sea rolled between and struck terror upon my mind.

But if there are difficulties, there is a way out of them. I am glad that the difficulties, great and insurmountable as they seemed at the time, did not succeed in holding me back. Between Calvinism and Rationalism flowed the deep, dark sea of fear. I have crossed that sea. Behind me is theology with its mysteries and dogmas; before me are the sunny fields of science. Born in the world of John Calvin, baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, and set apart for the Christian ministry,—I have become a Rationalist. The meaning of both these words, Calvinist and Rationalist, will, I hope, become clear to all the readers of this book. The difference between the Calvinist and the Rationalist is not that the one uses his reason, while the other does not. Both use their reason. It is by using his reason that the Calvinist is not a Catholic, for instance, or a Mohammedan. In the same way the Catholic reasons for his church and against Calvinism. To say that Christianity, or Judaism, should be accepted on faith, without first subjecting its claims to the strain of reason, is also reasoning. Such is the constitution of the mind, that even when men seek to suppress reason, they are compelled to offer reasons for doing so.

But there is reasoning and reasoning. The Bushman has his reason for trusting in his amulets; the civilized man, his, for trusting in self-help. Just as the eyes must have light before they can see, Reason must have knowledge before it can reason truly. But it is possible to possess knowledge and still reason badly, just as a man may be in the light, and still not see—by keeping his eyes shut.

Nor does it follow that if a man opens his eyes he *will* see. The eyes obey the will; if we do not wish to see, we will not see even with our eyes open. There are many educated people who allow motives of self-interest, if not to blind, at least to blur their vision.

Finally, it is not enough to see for ourselves. We must show to others what we see: My object for telling the story of my mind—how it passed from Calvinism to Rationalism,—is to help others see what I see.



## CHAPTER II. Early Struggles

As I look back upon the period of mental conflict and uncertainty which marked the closing years of my pastorate in the Presbyterian church, I am comforted by the thought that I did not wait until I was accused of heresy, tried by an ecclesiastical court and dismissed from the church before I severed my connection with the Presbyterian denomination. On the contrary, as soon as I had fully persuaded myself that I was no longer a Presbyterian, I, of my own accord, offered my resignation, after stating publicly the reasons which had led me to renounce Calvinism. It was not the church that expelled me; it was I that renounced the church.

Of course, even then there were those, who demanded a public trial and my formal deposition from the ministry. The Philadelphia Presbytery met to discuss whether I should not be summoned to appear before them, to receive their censure. But wiser counsel prevailed, and a sensational public trial was avoided. The district attorney of the city of Philadelphia, Mr. George Graham, himself a staunch Presbyterian, explained to the ministers that my resignation had deprived them of all ecclesiastical jurisdiction over me. I had, he explained, unlocked the door and walked out into the open, and it was too late now to talk of expelling me. On the other hand, although my complete severance from Calvinism had been fully announced, still for many days and nights my house was filled with members of my church urging me to remain with them as their pastor, and to hold on to the church building. I am very happy to think that I was able to resist this temptation too. Had I yielded to their entreaties, or allowed myself to be swayed by their arguments, I would have been placed in a position where I could neither be a Rationalist nor a Calvinist, but a preacher of ambiguities, contradicting in one breath what I had said in another. From such a career of duplicity and arrested growth, I was saved by a fortunate decision on my part to give up Presbyterian property as well as the Presbyterian creed.

The first Sunday after my resignation, I spoke in a hall on Broad street, in Philadelphia. It was quite a change from a handsome church edifice to a secular hall. I could see that those who followed me out of the Presbyterian denomination felt ill at ease, on a Sunday morning in a public hall. But that was not the worst shock in store for them.

When I reached the hall on Broad street it was so densely packed that it seemed impossible for me to reach the platform. In the meantime, my trustees were getting anxious about my failure to appear in the pulpit. The audience too was showing signs of discomfort in the crowded auditorium. It was only by announcing my name, and begging those who stood up in rows at the entrance,—all the seats being occupied—to help me reach the stage, that I could make any progress through the crowd. When at last I faced the audience to deliver my first address from a free platform, I thought of the advice given me by my trustees, that, as much depended upon the impression of my first talk, which would in all probability be extensively reported in the papers, I should take care not to go "too far." What they meant by not going "too far," was that I should let the public know that in the essentials I was as Christian as ever. I do not blame my friends for this advice. They trembled for me and for the organization which was to be launched for the first time on that day. Besides, they were themselves, Presbyterians still, at heart, and had no clear understanding of the meaning of my renunciation of Calvinism. Sentimentally they were with me, but by training and conviction they were still for the creed of their ancestors.

Speaking frankly, I had myself agreed to the wisdom of being careful and conservative in my opening address, believing that radical utterances at this time would make me more enemies than friends. But when I began to speak, in the enthusiasm of the moment, joyous over the first taste of freedom of speech, I forgot my caution, and gave my thoughts as they welled up within me, full scope. "To the winds with policy and calculation! Whether I win followers, or lose the last man, I must not stammer,—I must speak!" Under the spell of this thought, which seemed to seize me without at all consulting me, I said many things which changed the color on the faces of my Presbyterian supporters.

Unused to freedom of speech, and brought up to believe certain beliefs as sacred, the attempt on my part to subject these to the strain of reason was in the nature of a painful disappointment to them. Thus many of my followers lost heart and quickly returned to the cradle from which, in a moment of excitement, they had leaped forth. But new friends took the place of those who deserted the young movement, and in a very short time, a larger hall was secured. This was St. George's hall, on Arch street, one of the largest halls in Philadelphia. But up to this time we, including myself, believed ourselves to be still Christians, though no longer Presbyterians. As long as we held on to the name of Christian we continued to sail in comparatively smooth waters. We made the word "Christian," of course, to mean what we wanted it to mean.

But very soon new perplexities arose. The people who came to hear me, and who paid the expenses of the new organization, as well as directed its policy, while they progressed sufficiently to renounce Presbyterianism, they were very reluctant to part with Christianity altogether. I could criticise Calvin to my heart's content, but I must not, Christ. The church, or churchianity, certainly deserved to be investigated, and its errors exposed, but Christ and Christianity were too sacred to be handled with equal freedom. My trustees felt that as a liberal *Christian* organization, there was a great future before us; we would soon become one of the largest and most prosperous religious bodies in the city; but if we "attacked" Christ—they called examining the teachings and character of Christ freely "attacking" Christ—we would be disowned by all respectable members, and lose our standing in the esteem of a hitherto friendly public.

And the public was indeed friendly at this stage of our evolution. The press of Philadelphia, as well as of New York City, reported daily, for some time, the doings of the new organization. The majority of the editorials in the daily papers commended the course I had taken in avoiding a "heresy trial," and in resisting the great temptation to resort to shifts and subterfuges to enable me to remain at a lucrative post. In these days \* departures from Orthodoxy were rare, and naturally, my case created a great stir. But as I have intimated, the preponderance of criticism and comment was favorable. Encouraging letters from Henry Ward

Beecher, Lyman Abbott, Prof. David Swing, and other prominent leaders gave the new society an enviable prestige. But my trustees protested that this "good will" of the public, which constituted our best asset, would be lost, and its sympathy turned into antagonism, if I spoke as freely of Christ as I did of Calvin, and subjected the Bible to the same strain of reason that I did the Westminster Catechism. In other words, I was politely made to feel that while it was respectable enough to part with Presbyterianism, it would spell ruin to part also with Christianity.

\* 1880.

In justice to my supporters I must state that when I resigned from the Presbyterian church I had no idea that the step would eventually carry me beyond Christianity itself. "A purer Christianity" was my plea at that time, and I sincerely believed that with Calvinism out of the way there would be left no serious obstacle for reason to stumble over. I was not prepared at that stage of my evolution to perceive the impossibility of separating Calvinism from Christianity without destroying both. Calvinism was a symptom and not the disease itself. The disease was supernaturalism, of which the different sects are the manifestations. It is the disease and not its manifestation that required suppression. I was unable to see the relationship between an infinite God, sovereign of all, and Calvinism, and fancied in my mind that I could keep God and let Calvin go. But faith in a God who knows everything and is absolutely sovereign, spells Calvinism.

The step out of Christianity was infinitely more difficult than the step out of Presbyterianism. Had my followers been trained to think rationally, they would have seen that since I did not resign from the Presbyterian church, for a different form of baptism, or communion, but because of its failure to recognize Reason as the highest authority in religion, I was bound, by the very stress and logic of my premises, to drop Christianity as I had been led to drop Calvinism.

My trustees were quite unconscious of giving me dangerous advice, or of trying to make of me an example of arrested development. They were my friends, and the friends of the cause, but they could not think logically, and that is why they could not appreciate my reply that we are not free to command the truth,—we must obey the truth.

Matters came to a crisis when I delivered a lecture on "Was Jesus God?" I can still see the painful expression on the faces of many of my hearers on that Sunday morning. Did I bring them out of the Presbyterian church to make "infidels" and "blasphemers" of them? A number of my hearers rose and left the hall. The strain upon me was severe. When I sat down I was in a profuse perspiration. When all was over, I must have looked ashen pale. I had hardly any strength left to announce the closing hymn. But my audience suffered perhaps even more than did I. To part with Jesus is not the same thing as parting with Calvin, and that morning I had told them that if Calvin goes, Jesus must go too.

*C'est le premier pas qui coûte.* "It is the first step that costs." But I found my second step even more costly. Voltaire speaks of the inevitableness of the second step if the first is taken. They told him how St. Denis had picked up his own head after it had been chopped off by the executioner, and walked a hundred steps with it in his hands. He replied, "I can believe in the ninety-nine steps, it is the first step I find difficulty in believing." Granted the first step, the ninety-nine, or nine million steps are very easy. Would it not be wasteful to argue that St. Denis took the first step, but no more? Is it not equally superfluous to accept one miracle in the Bible, and deny the rest? If one miracle, why not a million? But the aim of the training we had received in the church was not to help us to think logically but how not to think logically. The state of the Christian church, divided, sub-divided, and voicing doctrines diametrically opposed the one to the other, while they all claim to be and are, equally scriptural is a proof of this. I do not blame therefore, the members of my society for taking offense or for withdrawing, as many of them did after the "Jesus" lecture, their support from my work. They could not see the incongruity of accepting one part and rejecting another of a "divine" revelation. If the texts upon which Calvin based his theology were doubtful, what assurance could we have of the genuineness of the more liberal texts. The obscurity or ambiguity of Jesus was really the cause of the contradictions and divisions of his followers. The obscurity and contradictory nature of the text accounts for the crowd of religious sects, each claiming to be the only church of Christ, or, at least, more scriptural than its competitors. It was both a moral as well as a mental relief to escape the bewildering confusion of such a situation. And it was after I had commanded the babel of clashing voices to hush that I could hear the still, small voice of Reason.

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## CHAPTER III. New Temptations

**N**otwithstanding our many heresies we still believed in Christianity—in its moral excellence, as we expressed it. Jesus was not God; Calvin was all wrong; but still there was that in Christianity which could not be found elsewhere. While I myself did not linger long in this indecisive mood, still it was very trying while it lasted. To soften a little the pain of losing Jesus the God, the temptation to exalt him as a perfect moral teacher beyond all others the world had ever seen very nearly swamped me. But there were also financial considerations which made my position at this stage a very critical one. I was, besides, so much in need of companionship and sympathy that I wonder now why I did not rush into the open arms of the first liberal Christian sect that offered to fellowship with me.

And there were religious fellowships ready to receive us. Let me first speak of the Unitarians, who very kindly offered to help us, both morally and financially. We were not told that we had to join the denomination before we could receive financial assistance. They offered to help us without any conditions. The Unitarians

have a fund to help all "liberal" religious movements, and as a "liberal" religious movement, we could, if we wished, draw upon that fund. We did not accept the financial help, but we were happy to receive such moral support as men like James Freeman Clarke, Edward Everett Hale, Minot J. Savage and other equally distinguished preachers of Unitarianism could give us. The venerable Dr. Furness, more than once, occupied my pulpit, as also the Rev. Gordon Ames, whose church also proposed my name for a life membership in the American Unitarian Association. I can never be too grateful to the Unitarians for their hospitality to me in those trying times. Both Dr. Clarke and Dr. Hale had received me in their homes and given me such counsel as a young man at the threshold of a new career stands in need of. It was thus that Unitarianism, with its gracious hospitality, its tolerance and liberality, came very near persuading me that having gone as far as Unitarianism, it was not necessary to go farther. Thus you see, Moses and Calvin came back to me dressed as Unitarians; but, fortunately for me, I recognized the disguise.

If I could "settle down" in Unitarianism, why did I leave the Presbyterian church? The difference between them is after all a difference of quantity. The Presbyterians believe more than the Unitarians, and while the Bible is inspired from cover to cover for the former, the latter believe only in the authority of certain portions of the book. Ernest Renan told the Protestants that they did not have sufficient reason for leaving the Catholic church. "But we could not believe in the mass," replied the Protestants. "If you believe in the virgin birth and the resurrection of the flesh, what but a whim could prevent you from believing also in transubstantiation," argued Renan. We can say the same of Unitarianism. If it can believe in parts of the Bible, as "inspired" or if it can accept, the unity of God, or "the Lordship of Jesus," why not believe a little more? If it drops one dogma on grounds of reason, it must drop all, and if it can accept one dogma, the "Lordship of Jesus," for example, on faith, why not also the Trinity? If God exists, he could be in three or more parts quite as easily as in one.

Unwittingly the Unitarian church has helped to strengthen the cause of Orthodoxy. It speaks of Christ as the most perfect being or teacher who has ever visited this planet—a being possessing all the virtues, and none of the defects of human nature,—a being worthy to be called in a special sense, "the Son of God."

"Very well," answers the Orthodox believer, "If Jesus was all that, he was God." The difference between Unitarianism and Orthodoxy is that, while the latter calls Christ a God, the former holds that he was more than man. The point is not worth fighting for. Moreover, "If Christ was the type of perfection, as you Unitarians seem to believe," argues the Calvinist, "he could not have claimed to be God, as he certainly does, unless he was God. If he was not God, he was an impostor, and not the most perfect type of character the world has ever seen, as you claim." The answer is decisive. If Jesus believed himself to be only a mortal like ourselves, how explain his language of authority, his forgiving of sins, his miracles, his claim to be equal with the Father, and to have existed from all time? The weapons which Unitarianism uses against Orthodoxy, the latter can easily ignore. Nay, Unitarians are often quoted by the Orthodox to prove that even those who deny the divinity of Jesus, are compelled to admit "that there never was another like unto Him." The point I am endeavoring to make is that I could not accept Unitarianism because its claim about the moral perfection of Jesus was as much an unreasoned dogma, as the belief in his divinity. If I could subscribe to one dogma, why not to all? If there is no evidence that Jesus was God, neither is there any that he was morally perfect.

I am aware that there are Unitarians who do not accept even the moral perfection of Jesus. But that only helps to confuse us as to what Unitarianism really stands for. If Jesus was not morally perfect, or the wisest and best teacher, why does he monopolize the Unitarian pulpit? In conclusion, as already intimated, Unitarianism with its God-idea differs from Calvinism, not in kind, but in degree only. Its baggage of the supernatural is not quite so heavy, but what there is of it is every whit as supernatural.

But my inexperienced bark had hardly weathered the Unitarian storm which, as I confessed, came very near driving me under shelter, before another danger confronted me and my struggling society. The financial problem was, of course, a pressing one with us. Hall rent had to be paid, which was considerable, and the lecturer and his family had to be supported. The independent course I was following was not adding to the revenues of the society. The moneyed people, and the people accustomed to making generous contributions for church purposes, did not approve of my Rational tendencies. It was at this time that Spiritualism crossed my path, and endeavored, if I may use so trite a phrase, "to flirt with me."

"I could have many new supporters, and some moneyed men and women, if I could see the truth of Spiritualism," was whispered in my ears by my own fears and hopes. And then hardly a Sunday passed when at the conclusion of the lecture I was not met by some believer in Spiritualism, who told me how he or she had seen Darwin, or Emerson, or Goethe, or Voltaire at my side on the platform, while I was delivering my address, and how one or the other had smiled upon me with approval. I received messages purporting to come from the world of Spirits, commending my course, and bidding me to go forward unafraid. Opportunities were given me to see tables tip, to hear "celestial" voices, and to be surprised by flashes of light in perfectly dark rooms.

For many of the friends who tried to lead my steps toward Spiritualism, I still cherish the tenderest thoughts. They befriended me and my wife, they helped to render those desolate days of anxiety and hardship a little less of a strain upon our resources. But I could become a Spiritualist only with my eyes shut, and I had opened them when I parted with Calvinism. Was I now going to shut my eyes again?

My neighbor and colleague, Dr. John E. Roberts, who left the Baptist church to join the Unitarians, and later, became minister of the Church of this World, has recently expressed his interest in Spiritualism. He thinks the Spiritualists have the most comforting doctrine, because of their hope of immortality. Dr. Roberts thinks that we need the spiritual glow of faith in immortality to keep us from withering. But is not immortality as inconceivable as the Trinity? Why should a man object to the Baptist or the Unitarian immortality, if he can accept the immortality of the Spiritualists? Is the evidence furnished by modern mediums more convincing than that furnished by the mediums in the Bible? Are the spirits who manifest themselves in the Old and New Testaments, impostors, while those who appear to Mrs. Piper in Brooklyn are genuine? And is the immortality promised by Mrs. Piper's ghosts different, or better, than the immortality promised by those who communed with Jesus, Peter and Paul? But let us hear Dr. Roberts' reasons for preferring the Spiritualist's certain hope of another life to the silence of Rationalism on the question of the hereafter:

"And then I think there is need of a revival along the line of cherishing the old-fashioned hopes. You can see in current literature a strong tendency towards the belief that this world is the end of it. It is surprising to one that will bear in mind how often he finds that strain of pessimism. Men and women in very great numbers are beginning to think that after all maybe eternal sleep is better than eternal life. For, in the grave there can come no pain, no sorrow, no tears. 'On the shore of that vast sea of oblivion no wave of sorrow breaks.' But, to my mind, life is too sweet ever to be given up, and I can't help liking the old-fashioned hope that there is something beyond; that we shall remember and find each other and make reparations for wrongs we have done and explain some things that were misunderstood here. In other words, that we shall live again. For one, without knowing a thing about it, I cling to the old-fashioned hope of immortality."

But is it correct to identify "the old-fashioned hope" with optimism, and "the belief that eternal sleep is better than eternal life," or that "in the grave there can come no pain, no sorrow, no tears,"—with pessimism? "The old-fashioned hope" was no hope at all, because it was a private and exclusive hope. It reserved a place in heaven for the few, the elect,—whether Jewish, Mohammedan or Christian,—and condemned the multitude to the pains of hell. Can such a hope make for optimism? Can such a prospect brace up humanity at large? Moreover, the "old-fashioned hope's" picture of eternal life is so prosaic, so savorless, that it has fallen into "innocuous desuetude" even among the elect. Men have expressed their hesitation to decide which they would prefer, the heaven or the hell of the "old-fashioned hope." The grave is more optimistic than the old-fashioned future.

*Ah, within our Mother's breast,  
From toil and tumult, sin and sorrow free,  
Sphered beyond hope and dread, divinely calm,  
They lie, all gathered into perfect rest.  
And o'er the trance of their Eternity.  
The cypress waves more holy than the palm.*

But Dr. Roberts likes "eternal life" of some kind. Eternal life! We fear our good friend has stooped to a sonorous phrase. Pliny, one of the illustrious philosophers of the reign of Trajan, thought that man was more fortunate than the gods, because, while "the gods cannot die, man can." We are not in a position to tell whether or not "eternal life" is desirable, for we do not know what it is. How can we desire, or despise the inconceivable? No one can tell whether it is an evil or a blessing to live forever and ever, and ever, and ever,—and ever—unless he has experienced it. Nor can anyone affirm "eternal life" (we think Dr. Roberts means conscious, personal immortality) until he has lived through an eternity. To live a million, million years, is not eternal life. Hence, no one who has not so lived, can speak intelligently of "eternal life." We cannot even say that the gods are immortal. Because they have lived until now, so to speak, is no argument that they will live forever. We have to wait until they prove their ability to live forever, and ever, and ever, before we can pronounce them immortal. No being can be called immortal until he has lived to the end of time. We do not affirm, nor do we deny, the inconceivable. The question of the hereafter is still an open one. There is no reason why people should not speculate about it. We may even hope that tomorrow's science will throw more light upon this interesting problem, but today, all we know about eternal life is that we do not know anything about it.

*I gazed (as oft I've gazed the same)  
To try if I could wrench aught out of death,  
Which could confirm, or shake, or make a faith,  
But it was all a mystery. Here we are.*

Yes, "Here we are,"—that is the great reality. There is cheer and hope and love even in the thought that the present hour is big with possibilities and sweet with memories. We need not think of the grave while our hearts pulse, and our blood is warm. It is queer how all believers in eternal life fear the grave and deepen its gloom. The thought of another life often impoverishes the life we now possess. Pining for the far away tomorrow, we lose the joy at our doors. Schiller describes a recluse at the bar of heaven, arguing that he must have great rewards because he has practiced great privations in life. He received a chilling answer. He is told that if he was foolish enough to let the real life slip through his fingers for a distant reward, there is no power that can make good his losses.

Real optimism springs from the thought that the present life may be made dearer and nobler, richer, and happier, and that we may so live as to leave behind us a long and fragrant memory:

*The ripe products of a fertile brain  
Will live and reproduce fair fruit again.*

Even at its worst, death is an obligation we owe posterity, and the discharge of it should make no one a pessimist. At any rate, with Grant Allen, we can sing when we feel life's evening gathering about us:

*Perchance a little light will come with morning;  
Perchance I shall but sleep.*

Dr. Roberts admits, I believe, that he has no evidence to offer, except what he calls "the innate desire for another life." But if the desire for immortality proves another and an endless life, the desire for God, or Christ, or an infallible Revelation, ought to be sufficient to prove their existence. The Spiritualists, like the Orthodox, reason logically enough against beliefs not their own, but when it comes to their own dogmas they do not consult reason at all. I had left Calvinism because it failed to furnish the evidence for its claims, how then could I join the Spiritualists with no more evidence to substantiate their claims than that it was pleasant to desire another life? But there is the testimony of the mediums; yes, and there is the testimony of the



apostles. If the latter is not enough to make Christianity true, the former is not enough to prove Spiritualism.

The comparatively few lines in which I have tried to tell my early experience as a Rationalist give but an imperfect idea of the effort required under circumstances of stress and anxiety, to keep my ship steady on the troublous waters to which the winds outside the harbor of Calvinism had driven me. In the words of Shelley, I had unfurled my sails to the tempest, and fear and alarm were to be my portion, until I became more accustomed to the swing of the sea, and could command the stars to point the way. The open sea is not like the sheltered harbor. It is easy to go out to sea, but not so easy to find one's way there.

During this period of mental struggle to work out a philosophy of life which should fill the vacuum created by the collapse of theology, I was frequently approached by well-meaning, but over-confident, teachers who, in their own opinion, at any rate, had completely and satisfactorily reconciled religion with Reason. Nearly every mail brought me letters recommending some publication which would answer all my difficulties as it had theirs. Not a few of my would-be helpers went to the trouble of calling on me with the same object in view. I shall only speak here of one of the books which was supposed to have untied all the knots, divine and human, which have ever perplexed the brain of man. The book came to me highly recommended. Even President Eliot of Harvard had publicly endorsed it. While it was many years after the period I am now writing of, that my attention was called to this book, nevertheless, it is because the book is typical of the efforts to make Reason approve of the fundamentals of the popular faith, that I reproduce here what I said of it at the time: *Balance* is the name of a little book with a great aim. Its author, Mr. Orlando Smith, sets out as a new Columbus to discover not another earth, but another truth, which shall give to all known truths new meaning and worth. This truth, he believes, he has discovered, and christens it, "The Fundamental Verity." Lucid illustrations are massed together with telling effect, to show that Nature is equipped with a self-curative genius which makes discord an impossibility. That which is overdone in one direction is underdone equally in an opposite direction. This rhythm, this equivalence which pulls the pendulum in one direction as far as it pushes it in another is the *Fundamental Verity*, which, if grasped as universal and infallible, will remove from our shoulders what Shakespeare calls "the weary weight of all this unintelligible world," and bring Religion and Science, the two gladiatorial contestants in the modern arena, to replace their quarrelous weapons, with which they have given and received gashes deep and bloody, with the olive branch of peace and concord.

Having undertaken to demonstrate that the physical world is in the embrace of laws which forever evolve order out of confusion, and that *Balance* is supreme in every detail of life, from the most momentous to the most minute, that throughout the length and breadth of the universe the account balances perfectly; and that Nature has no failures, and bad debts; that *Balance* forbids wrong, such for instance as the victory of one force over another, the author believes he has found in this law the unanswerable demonstration for the existence of a Supreme Being who is the author of *Balance* in the universe and of the immortality of the soul. Thus, having given to these two ambitious propositions a new front, he concludes he has reconciled Religion with Science.

It is quite easy to reconcile enemies if they let you interpret their differences to suit yourself. Mr. Smith defines both Religion and Science with a view to reconciliation, and it is no wonder that they stop quarreling immediately.

Even in Mr. Orlando Smith's religion, there is an element of the supernatural, a *deus ex machina*—who from the eternities rules the world and is pledged to see that in the end right shall prevail. This is theology and not science.

Mr. Smith starts by trying to prove that Nature is just, orderly, and its accounts are always perfect, and then, unfortunately enough, he drags forth once more the obsolete theological argument which science has already rent into tatters, that another life is inevitable since this life is unsatisfactory. Having shown that there are no failures in Nature, he now says, "We must admit, however, that justice is incomplete in this life." That, however, destroys the position that Nature is at present governed by a Supreme Being who makes failure impossible, and the proposition that this Supreme Being must be given more time to work in—an eternity—is theology, not science.

If for millions of years this earth could roll under the eye of a Supreme Being and still be imperfect, what reason have we to conclude that the Being who has failed hitherto is going to do better in the unknown future? And what about the animals? Will they have to look forward to another world for justice? Must not their lives be "balanced" in some way too? Or will Mr. Orlando Smith answer with St. Paul, "Does God care for the oxen"?

Toward the end, Mr. Smith develops into a full-fledged pulpiteer, claiming that no hospitals, charities, or institutions of learning,—songs hymns, poems, noble thoughts or sentiments are possible, without the doctrine of a Supreme Being, and of another life. Thus the science with which Mr. Smith began is swallowed up in theology—it is the lamb and the lion lying down together,—but one inside the other.

I had renounced Calvinism, not because it would not let me use my reason at all, but because it would not let me use it consistently. I could use it here, but not there, or only so far and no further. The men who offered me substitutes for Calvinism placed restrictions upon reason too, differing only in appearance from those imposed by the church. I had not yet found an organization that respected consistency, and consistency is another word for sincerity.

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## CHAPTER IV. The Critical Period

In 1888 I became acquainted with the work of the Ethical Movement, which was then establishing a branch in Philadelphia. The platform of the movement appealed to me strongly, because it was completely divorced from the supernatural. It emphasized the deed, and ignored the creed; or rather, it believed in the creed of the deed. I invited the leaders of this movement to address my society, and to explain to us in detail the philosophy of Ethical Culture. All five of the lecturers of the Ethical Societies in America successively occupied my platform in St. George's hall, and I in return occupied their platforms in New York, Chicago, St. Louis and Philadelphia. This interchange of platforms resulted in my accepting a call from the New York Society for Ethical Culture, and three years later from the Chicago Society, which latter I served as its lecturer for five years.

The founder of the Ethical Societies was Dr. Felix Adler, the son of a Jewish Rabbi, who was expected to succeed his father as the spiritual head of the fashionable and wealthy Fifth Avenue synagogue in New York City. But all the other members of the fraternity of lecturers were either ex-ministers of the Christian church, like myself, or had, at one time, studied for the Christian ministry. In the beginning, the movement was consistently and fearlessly Rationalistic. Adler had a lecture on Atheism in which he boldly exposed the weakness of the theistic position. This lecture was printed and widely circulated. The other lecturers also openly antagonized the God idea as robbing the idea of the Good of the attention and love of man. The churches feared the Ethical Movement in those days, and denounced it as an irreligious institution.

But soon there appeared a change in the leader and founder of the movement, and gradually also in the majority of his colleagues. The lecture on Atheism was withdrawn from circulation, and Dr. Adler began delivering addresses on immortality, and exalting the character of Christ in the fashion of Unitarianism. All lectures in criticism of the fundamentals of Orthodoxy were as much as prohibited. Orthodox leaders were invited to preach from the platform of the Ethical Societies, and it became the ambition of an Ethical lecturer to deliver only such lectures as no church-goer would object to hear. I do not mean that Orthodox doctrines were promulgated by the Ethical lecturers, but nothing was to be said against them, if nothing could be said in their favor. The aim of the Movement was now defined to be solely the improvement of the morals of its members and of the public, and therefore, like the church, it began to fight "sin," studiously ignoring the debasing superstitions and the bondage of dogma which not only had bankrupted, both mentally and morally, whole nations, but which had also withered the greatest civilization the world had ever seen, and surrendered humanity to the keeping of "the dark ages" for a thousand years. This change in the program of the Ethical Societies greatly pleased the Orthodox world, and all fear of menace or danger to its theological interests from that direction was dissipated. Catholic and Protestant clergymen vied with each other in expressions of admiration for the work of the Ethical Societies, and all praised the tact which the leaders of the movement displayed in refraining from criticisms of the churches and their doctrines, to protest against the degrading effects of which, was the very object for which the Ethical Societies were organized in the first place. Thus it will be seen how completely the Movement came to abandon its original program. The Sunday lectures of the leaders of the Movement became, in time, so "harmless" that preachers recommended them to their flock, while the Ethical lecturers in return publicly declared that it was not necessary for a Trinitarian, a Papist or a Jew to leave his church before he could be admitted to membership in an Ethical Society. The Ethical Societies, in fact, did not encourage people to break away from their ecclesiastical connections, but indirectly, at least, advised them to support the new movement without withdrawing their support from the churches to which they belonged.

I cannot imagine that any one seriously believed that a devout Christian, or an Orthodox Jew, would join an Ethical Society for purposes of edification in morals. To do so would be equivalent to an admission that one's divinely appointed church was not satisfying one's highest needs, and to feel that way toward one's own church is to cease to believe in it. Only those then who had parted with the past, with its crushing and hampering freight of dogmas, would think of joining an organization that started as an "Atheistic," or at least, a non-religious society. But the invitation to join the Ethical Societies without leaving their own churches had the effect of drawing the new movement into closer relations with the religious bodies, which in our opinion has greatly handicapped the Ethical lecturers, and impaired their leadership in the world of thought. It is not my intention to bring a charge of deliberate surrender to the churches against the leaders of the Ethical Movement. It will be difficult to find anywhere a finer body of men than the lecturers of the different Ethical Societies in America. But they swerved from the path they had started to follow, and sacrificed a magnificent career to become an annex to the church. Not only the history of the Movement, but also the literature which it now puts forth, lends confirmatory evidence to the criticism I have made against a cause to which I once gave my heart.

That the publications of the Ethical Society as well as the Sunday lectures of the leaders, show decidedly reactionary tendencies, it will not be difficult to prove. They do this, first, by maintaining a significant silence on questions the free discussion of which would offend the churches, and in the second place, by indirectly endeavoring to bolster up, by new interpretations, the discredited dogmas of the popular religions. Either of these charges, if true, will be enough to prove that the Ethical Movement has not remained faithful to its original intentions.

It is not a secret that the lecturers of the Ethical Societies no longer publicly condemn the false teaching of the churches. These false teachings, in our opinion, form an essential part of both Christianity and Judaism, which have to be exposed and attacked vigorously and without compromise, if morality is ever to make any permanent progress in the world. It should be as impossible to reconcile Ethical Culture with the churches, as it is to reconcile theology with science, and yet, that is precisely what the Ethical lecturers think they have accomplished. I have only to quote from authoritative Christian sources to show how prejudicial to the interests of morality is the teaching of the churches. For an Ethical Movement systematically to ignore the evil which the churches do by sacrificing reason to dogma is in the nature of treason to its own principles. The whole trend of Christian teaching is that Ethics is secondary. How can the Ethical Societies afford to ignore so fundamental an untruth? Both the established and the non-conformist churches explicitly and officially declare and teach that, "They also are to be accursed that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the Law, or the sect that he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law,

and the Light of Nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the name of Jesus Christ whereby men must be saved." \* Clearly, then, for the churches it is not ethics, but faith in Jesus, a disputed personage at the very best, which represents the highest interests of the race.

\* *Eighteenth Article of the Church of England.*

That the same unethical doctrine forms the basis of the Reformed churches will be seen from the following:

"Much less can men not professing the Christian religion be saved, *be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature*; and to ascertain and maintain that they can is very *pernicious and to be detested.*" \*

The same indifference, if not contempt for morality is shown by the leading exponents of Christianity. When I was a lad of about fifteen, one of the books placed in my hand, and which I was made to regard almost as inspired as the Bible, was, *Paleys Evidences of Christianity*. Speaking on the scope of the Christian religion, in the second part of his book, he writes: "Moral precepts or examples, or illustrations of moral precepts, may be *occasionally* given, and be highly valuable, yet still they do not form the original purpose of the mission." The meaning is clear: Christ did not come to make men moral, he came to save those who shall believe in him. And this is also the teaching of leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon and General Booth. The burden of Luther's message was that "Christ had come to abolish the Moral Law." The liberty which Luther proclaimed assured the believer that even the decalogue shall not be brought into account against him, "nor its violation be allowed to disturb the conscience of the Christian." \*\* In the same spirit, Spurgeon cried in his London Tabernacle, Sunday after Sunday, for nearly half a century: "Thirty years of sin shall be forgiven, and it shall not take thirty minutes to do it in." And this doctrine that faith in Christ can in one instant make a man who has led a life of crime and corruption, one of God's saints, Spurgeon and his fellow-clergymen learned from Christ himself, who opened the gates of paradise to the malefactor on the cross, and in one minute wiped out all his past. This example from the gospels shows that, the preachers and the creeds in giving to morality a secondary place, are not misrepresenting the teachings of Christ. What need has a religion which can change men miraculously,—and which makes faith the sole condition of salvation,—for Ethical Culture?

\* *Westminster Catechism.*

\*\* *Moehler's Works, quoted by Cotter Morison, Service of Man, page 51.*

What is true of Christianity is equally true of its parent, Judaism. The full stress of the Old Testament is on the necessity of the Ceremonial and not the Moral Law. While the Jews were not only permitted, but were ordered to break every Ethical commandment in the decalogue, to commit theft, murder, massacre, and acts of oppression and brigandage,—every departure from the ritual of Israel was visited by immediate and clamorous punishment. Both Judaism and Christianity make their special objective, not character, but the creed. How, then, can a movement the motto of which is "The deed, not the creed," maintain so profound a silence, or refrain even from calling attention to the positive hurt which the old religions do to the cause of righteousness? What is the defense of Ethical Culture against this charge?

If it be answered that, the churches no longer take their creeds or bibles, seriously, notwithstanding their official professions, then the Ethical lecturers should, instead of silently endorsing the hypocrisy which professes one thing and believes another, thunder against it with all their might. This should be done not from motives of hatred or combativeness, but in the spirit of faithfulness to the best interests of man. It is error, and not its victims, against which the Rationalist directs his straight and sounding blows. It was Paine's kindly advice in the French convention to kill the king and spare the man. It is the desire of Reason to destroy false teachings and to help enlighten the teacher.

The effect upon the prosperity of the Ethical Societies, both in America and Europe, of this policy of silence, has been really disastrous. Like Unitarianism, the Ethical Movement has drifted into the sheltered harbor where it hugs the wharves made fast by posts and ropes. Both these movements started out for the sea, but not a vessel flying their flags can now be encountered at any distance from the coast. Thirty years ago there were four Ethical Societies in America; there are now these same four and no more, and three of them are without any lecturers.

But not only by their silence on the injurious teachings of both Judaism and Christianity, which strike at the very foundations of moral health, but also by their attempts, incredible as it may seem, to discredit science and to seek in metaphysics, or in a sort of attenuated theology, the origins and sanctions of Ethics, the Ethical lecturers have given to decaying dogmas the support they owed to Rationalism.

In a contribution by Dr. Adler, head of the fellowship, on one of the fundamentals of the Movement, we see full traces of this deplorable effort to divorce Ethics from science, and wed her to theology.

In discussing "The Religion of Duty," the professor, instead of explaining duty in the terms of science, tries to make of it a deeper mystery even than the thrice veiled dogmas of the churches. "Duty," he says, "becomes religion when we recognize that it is not a law or a command that has a merely sensible origin, or can be explained in terms of sensible experience, that we can get to the bottom of it and thoroughly penetrate it with our understanding, or see fully the use of it. \* \* \* It is then that we come to realize that in the moral command there is something awful." The language is not very clear—perhaps because the thought is not very clear—but we believe its meaning is that, a moral command is awful because we cannot understand it. Prof. Adler seems to make of duty a new kind of a god. The qualities and attributes of the deity he bodily transfers to his successor—*Duty*. Accordingly, Duty becomes just as mysterious and awful as God, and we can no more get at the "bottom" of Duty than we can understand the Deity. Duty no more than the Deity can be "expressed in terms of sensible experience," hence it is inexplicable; and the only way we can feel "the majesty and inexplicable augustness of it," says the professor, "is to draw back the curtains and see," and then "we shall find that out of this relation we suddenly get religion." I fear we get it a little too suddenly. Such rapid transformations suggest a *deus ex machina*.



There is serious danger of making a fetish out of the word duty. The thinking world has abandoned theism because of the impossibility of explaining in terms of sensible experience, the existence of a personal infinite; but now Prof. Adler wishes to surround his new deity, Duty, with the same "clouds and darkness" which have so long hung about the ancient divinities.

In what sense is it a compliment to the moral law to say that it cannot be "explained in terms of sensible experience"? What is gained by putting a dead wall or "curtains" between the intelligence of man and his conscience? Why sneer at the scientific explanation of the origin and growth of the moral sense by calling it "narrow, secular, materialistic and paltry," as Prof. Adler does in this lecture—when no better explanation is offered than a mere rhetorical recommendation "to draw back the curtains and see the majesty and inexplicable augustness of it"? What are these curtains? Who put them there to hide such "augustness"? If the scientific explanation of the origin of the moral sense is a "flat failure," quoting from the professor again, what is *his* explanation? We are really grieved to see so influential a public leader taking sides against science, the only dependable teacher we have, notwithstanding its many limitations.

Again, in his criticism of the evolutionary view, the professor says: "As against the scientific evolutionary view, I plead for what I would call the moral evolutionary view, which asserts that the moral law is a law of our nature, and in so far, the universal nature. \* \* \* We leave the issues to work themselves out; we leave them to mightier powers than we, whose ways we wot not of." Here surely is theology—cap, cassock and all.

But what is the difference between the scientific evolutionary view and the moral evolutionary view? If the scientific view is not in accord with the known facts, then it is not scientific. But if it is in harmony with the facts, what do we gain by rejecting it in preference to the "moral evolutionary view"? If on the other hand the "moral evolutionary view" is not scientific, what is its value?

According to the generally admitted scientific explanation, morality is just as much the result of evolution as is music or language. Morality is the slow product of the accumulated experience of humanity. But that does not seem to be Prof. Adler's theory. "There is," he says, "a voice that speaks in us out of the ultimate reality of things." But if this voice is not the inherited instincts of the race, what is it? If it is a ready-made, or made to order voice, or a voice not made at all—but, well, an unfathomable something commanding us in tones of the categorical imperative—who placed it there? God, or chance? If conscience, in straight words, is a natural product in the same sense that the brain or the human hand is, then there is no good reason for throwing a mystic veil over this one faculty or sense, or in decorating it with fallacy trimmings and jingling bells in order to make it look exceptionally awful and august. Just as the foolish overpraise of Jesus has nearly ruined him as a living force in the life of the world today, so there is danger of making an idol or a mummy out of morality by taking away all its beautiful naturalness.

"I simply think of the moral law within us," says Dr. Adler, "as a hand laid on us. \* \* \* I like to think of the moral law \* \* \* as of a hand; the face we do not see, but the hand we feel." Is not this an attempt to make ethics as mystifying as theology? If this "hand," of which the professor speaks, is endowed with unerring intelligence, how shall we account for the missteps, disastrous in their consequences, which man has taken with this "hand" laid on him?

However, this "hand" which we are told "is heavy upon our shoulders as Atlas," is not infallible, what is its worth? Is it necessary to perplex an audience with visions of a "hand," and "a face that belongs to the hand which we do not see," in order to impress it with the beauty and duty of obedience to the dictates of the enlightened and emancipated conscience?

But this confusion is the result of the commerce of Ethical Culture with Churchianity and Judaism, in other words, with the supernatural. A teacher who is trying to convince both Christian and Jew that without discarding their obsolete and obstructive dogmas they can join the Ethical Movement, is compelled by the very exigencies of the *mesalliance* to tarry in the region of fog and obscurity. And this confusion in thought, this lack of decision and clarity in one's concepts, this metaphysical vagueness and bewildering rhetoric is the price Orthodoxy exacts before it will bestow its smile upon a prodigal teacher seeking to return to the fold.

We could not agree with the head of the Ethical Movement that it was worth our while to try to win the favor of the churches, or to seek their co-operation. In our opinion such a *rapprochement* would only redound to the glory of an institution that has proven itself not only incapable of saving the world, but of positively hindering its salvation. This indictment is not voiced in haste, or in malice, but because it is based upon careful observation and study.

The church can never become a great moral power until it is rationalized. In this age of enlightenment the church can not be honest and Orthodox at the same time. We recommend this thought to the consideration of the Ethical lecturers. And no institution can make others honest, if it is dishonest itself. Is the church honest with science? Is it honest with history? Is it honest with the Bible? Mark these brave words of Huxley:

"When Sunday after Sunday, men who profess to be our instructors in righteousness, read out the statement that 'In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is,' in innumerable churches, they are either propagating what they may honestly know, and, therefore, are bound to know, to be falsities; or if they use the words in some non-natural sense, they fall below the moral standard of the much-abused Jesuit."

How refreshing!

To the average thinker the inconsistency of advocating Ethics as the supreme good, on the one hand, and on the other, of maintaining a deliberate silence on the demonstrably false teaching of the church which makes belief the greatest of all virtues, has only to be pointed out to be comprehended. And it is Kant, the patron-saint of the American Ethical lecturers, who set them the example of inconsistency. With a rigour which even in a dogmatist of the theological schools would be considered excessive, Emanuel Kant argued that so imperative was the duty to tell the truth that, even to save one's self or another from murder, there must be no departure from it. If you saw an assassin with a drawn dagger running after a man or a woman, and he asked you, "which way the fugitive ran," if you answer him at all, insists Kant, you must tell him the truth. And yet this same philosopher encouraged openly the Lutheran clergy of his day to go on deceiving the people with beliefs which they themselves had discarded, on the score that *populus vult decipi*, and that the



clergy are excused by their profession for playing a false part.

Is it then from policy or from principle that the Ethical lecturers, starting as they did, by denouncing the supernatural as the destroyer of character, later on came to ignore altogether the existence even of degrading superstitions, and were content to be a moral improvement association merely, somewhat after the pattern, as Marie-Jean Guyau states, of a Christian Temperance Society? \*

\* *L'Irréligion de L'Avenir.*

The battle of progress is to be fought in the mind. An intellectual awakening must precede all real and permanent moral improvement of the world. On the tree of enlightenment alone can ripen the fruit of righteousness and peace. And there can be no enlightenment under the church. Even as the light of the sun can not enter a dungeon, the light of knowledge can not penetrate the mind which it has been the aim of the church to keep shut. The condition of the spread of knowledge as of the sunlight is the same—freedom. Yet freedom is anathema where there is a Revelation. A thousand Ethical Societies could not help Russia unless she began by striking, without sparing or wavering, at the teachings of the Greek church.

The new edifice cannot rise side by side with the old—it must rise on the ruins of the old.

Can there be any real moral advance in a community in which the following is accepted and taught as a divinely revealed truth: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works and deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort." \*

\* *No. XI. of the Articles of the Church of England. All the other Christian churches teach to young and old the same doctrine.*

Only by self-stultification can an Ethical Society refrain from combating so injurious a teaching with all the earnestness and courage at their command.

Nothing would please the priests and rabbis more than to be assured that the efforts of the new teachers will be confined strictly to giving moral exhortations, and that they will leave church and dogma respectfully alone.

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## CHAPTER V. Anchored at Last

After nearly ten years of service in the Ethical field, I felt constrained to withdraw from the fraternity of lecturers, because I realized that under the guise of a new name we were all slowly slipping back into the net of theology, from which we had escaped after years of struggle and suffering. When I look over my own lectures delivered during my connection with the Ethical Movement, I find in them clearly the traces of the same reactionary bias. The atmosphere of theology is perceptible on nearly every page. Passages about the moral supremacy of Jesus, His uniqueness, and the indebtedness of the ages to Him, will be found in the publications which will not only show that I had swerved from the path into which I had entered when I left Calvinism, and in which I had persevered against numerous temptations to leave it, but also, what a powerful influence my new environment exerted upon me. In a lecture delivered before the Chicago Ethical Society, I try to prove the spiritual resurrection of Jesus, and His incomparable greatness. In another, delivered before the New York Society, in Carnegie Music Hall, I fail to appreciate the services of such intellectual Titans as Voltaire and Thomas Paine—who flung themselves against a thousand abuses, and by opposing, succeeded in putting an end to them. I make these confessions to show that there was in my course from Calvinism to Rationalism, a break, after all. I missed the straight path, despite all my vigilance, and cannot, therefore, claim the happiness, nor the distinction which belongs to those who have been more consistent than I have been.

But it was not very long before I began to see whither I was drifting. I discovered that I was using two sets of weights and measures—one set for Calvinistic Christianity, and another set for *my* Christianity, and it was only necessary to submit my own interpretations to the same tests which had shown the untenability of Calvinism to discover my self-deception. I had rejected Calvinism because it offered no evidence in support of its dogmas, but what evidence did I offer to prove the moral superiority of *my* Jesus which I claimed to find in the gospels? Why is not Calvin's word as good as mine, if an assertion may pass for an argument? I began to see, even more clearly than ever before, perhaps, because of my temporary backsliding or *egarement*, as the French would it is as impossible to construct a character of Jesus as it is to write a life of Jesus out of the data in hand. No less an authority than Prof. Conybeare, of Oxford, Fellow of the British Academy and Doctor of Theology, admits that "We cannot, then, aspire to write a life of Jesus. Even Renan failed, and from the hands of a Farrar we merely get under this rubric a farago of falsehood, absurdity, and charlatanry." \* This is strong language, but there is no exaggeration in it. If, however, a life of Jesus cannot be written, it follows that, under the circumstances a character of Jesus can not be constructed. How can the character of a man be known whose life is unknown to us? Are a few floating aphorisms ascribed to Jesus enough to justify his beatification? And yet, the other Ethical lecturers, as well as myself, were speaking of Jesus not only as the religious genius of the ages, but also as the one being in whom humanity's hopes and dreams came true. I have quoted elsewhere \*\* Adler's description of Christ as "a personality of such superlative excellence, so radiant, so incomparably lofty in mien and port and speech and intercourse." But this rhetorical praise is as untrue of Jesus as it would be of Moses or Mohammed.

In the fall of 1899 there was presented to me the opportunity of either going to Philadelphia, the scene of my earlier intellectual struggles, as the lecturer of an Independent Society, or of returning to Chicago, after an absence of four years from that city, to be the lecturer of a society which promised to help support a platform pledged to an uncompromising Rationalism. Considerable objection was made by members and lecturers of the Ethical Societies to my trying to organize an Independent Society in Chicago. Was not one liberal society enough in Chicago? it was asked. Did not the Ethical platform answer the purposes which the proposed society wished to serve? Would I not be dividing and thereby weakening the cause by engaging a new lecture hall? My critics did not object to my going to cities where there were no Ethical Societies, but in cities where there was one, I was not needed, was their argument. But time has shown that the society of which I have been the lecturer for the past ten years, does not in the least conflict with, or duplicate the work of the Ethical Societies. There is a radical difference between Ethical Culture and Rationalism, which may be brought out by the help of an illustration: A certain king had many slaves. This king had been a slave-holder for a long, long time. And his slaves had lived in slavery ever since they could remember. There were among the slaves of the king, young and old, men and women, rich and poor.

Now there came to the slave-holder, one day, men from a strange country, who demanded that the slaves be given their freedom. The king put them to death, and continued to hold his slaves. From time to time others came demanding freedom for the slaves, but they met a similar fate. Some of the preachers of freedom were burned at the stake, others were tortured to death in dungeons, and others again were put to the sword. But this did not stop the coming of new preachers of liberty.

When the number of people believing in freedom for the slave increased sufficiently to command respect, the slave-holder changed his policy. He received the messengers of liberty with great courtesy and hospitality, and expressed the hope that he and they might arrive at a satisfactory arrangement.

"Why do you demand the freedom of the slaves?" he asked, very politely. "It is their right, and it alone can develop the best possibilities in them," they answered.

"I am perfectly willing,—indeed, I shall cooperate with you toward that laudible end, but on one condition: they shall continue to remain in my care and obey me as their guide and protector."

"No," said some of the apostles of liberty, "as slaves they can never be helped to the fuller and better life. Before everything else, they must conquer freedom to obey not you, but their own unfettered and enlightened consciences. Besides, you have been an evil Master, and can no longer be entrusted with the care of others. With the fall of slavery falls all your pretended rights to the allegiance of these men and women. And the slaves can not become free until your real character is exposed and your pretensions to authority divine exploded."

But, on the other hand, there were those among the preachers of freedom who were inclined to accept the slave-owner's proposition: "We will come in and do what we can to educate and reform the people. We will say nothing to them about their slavery, or against your authority over them. All we wish is to make good men and women out of them," they said.

Behold the difference between "liberal" Christian and Ethical movements, and a thoroughgoing and uncompromising Rationalism. The former think that the intellectual bondage of the church is not an obstacle to the moral and mental development of man, the latter hold, and to my mind, justly, that the first condition of salvation for a slave is that he be free—free from gods, christs, bibles and churches, as well as kings.

But the Rationalist Societies of Europe and America need no justification for their existence. They do a work which neither Unitarianism nor Ethical Culture attempt even to do. The work of the Rationalists of Chicago has been singularly successful, both in building up a self-supporting Society with a large membership and a much larger audience which regularly fills Orchestra Hall—the largest and finest on Michigan Avenue, but it has also, together with the other progressive forces at play in the modern world, profoundly influenced the life and thought of the community. Superstition is more ashamed to show her face in Chicago, than perhaps in any other city of its size in America. There are no doubt, Rationalists in many of our other cities, and in large numbers, but in Chicago, Rationalists are organized. They maintain a regular platform, and disseminate Rationalistic publications by the thousands.

The ten years in which I have been engaged in this work of constructive Rationalism have been the most fruitful years of my life. They have been years of conscious development in the knowledge and grasp of truths which enrich as well as interpret life. The sense of freedom from inconsistency, which is a kind of insincerity, is a great source, both of power and happiness. Then, the militant note to which the soul of the Rationalist vibrates,—for he is a soldier sworn to free men from the fear of the gods and their priests—a soldier to help man break his holy chains—gives him all the alertness, watchfulness, and courage of a sentinel at his vigil. There have been those who have helped man to political liberty, and others who are nobly endeavoring to help him conquer industrial liberty: but not until man has thrown off the yoke of the gods can he be free indeed. The last king to be dethroned is the heavenly king. If he stays, Tzar and Kaiser, tyrant and despot, pope and priest, in some form or other, will remain with us. Here and there men may succeed in banishing or overthrowing the tyrant,—king or priest, but these will come back again and again, perhaps disguised, but ever really the same, until God from whom they derive their power is unseated, and man becomes forever free. Honor to those who taught us not to kneel before Caesar, but greater honor to him who shall teach us not to kneel at all, and to accept nothing that is given to us for kneeling.

## CHAPTER VI. Some Objections to Rationalism.

Rationalism is cold," is a frequent criticism advanced by theological people. Without God and the hope of immortality, the Rationalist, according to church-goers, ought to be very miserable. Even if he should manage to escape the consequences of his unbelief while living, he is sure to suffer horrors when he comes to die. Life and death are so awful that only faith in God and the hope of a future life can enable us to endure the one and resign ourselves to the other. Such is the reasoning of Orthodoxy.

Strictly speaking, the question of the existence of a God is not a human question. The bare fact that for these thousands of years, and throughout the world, the existence of God has remained an unsolved question, suggests that in all probability it will never be decided by mortals. Certainty about the future is equally impossible. Of course, we do not know what light science may throw upon these problems to-morrow, but speaking modestly, and without dogmatizing, every honest soul must admit, with Shakespeare, that the future is still an "undiscovered country."

The essential thing is not that we should believe in a God or in the hereafter, but that we should grow. Whenever, during my ten years of complete severance from the supernatural, I have been called to say a few words in the house of mourning, or at the open grave, I have never pretended to find comfort for the bereaved in the belief in a non-resident God or in a life hereafter.

The priest knows, or says he does, where the departed has gone, what kind of a life he leads there, what will be his lot in eternity, and whether we shall meet again. He speaks of these things with the assurance of a schoolboy reciting a page which he has learned by heart. But he is only pretending to possess information which, as a matter of fact, no one possesses. He knows no more of a personal God, or of another life, than anybody else. If we cannot predict what will happen in the next hour, how can we talk with assurance of the secrets of the unending future? If we do not quite understand ourselves, or the world which we daily see, how can we boast of any certain knowledge of a Being who is said to be infinitely and absolutely and incomprehensibly different from us? Silence is more religious than the gossip one hears about such a Being. Modesty is more reverent than dogmatism, and the agnostic is more honest and more eloquent than the garrulous preacher. If men wish to know where the Eternal is, who he is, what he does, what his intentions are, how he should be praised, what humors or provokes him, how many manifestations or persons there are in his godhead, and when he first began his operations, etc., they must not come to a Rationalist for such information. To acquaint man with himself, to show him the way to develop and use his own resources, and in time of sorrow and bereavement, to depend upon the thoughts of the wise and the brave, which heal and sooth and bless, is the consolation Rationalism offers. It is modest, but it is real. Rationalists cannot count on the creeds for consolation. A doll may amuse a baby, but is a grown-up man miserable because he cannot play with a toy? The Rationalist is willing to see Nature in its true light. He prefers reality to illusions, and would rather be awake than dreaming the most seductive dreams which "poppy or mandragora, or all the drowsy syrups of the world" can medicine the mind into.

But the greatest consolation of the Rationalist is in this, that he is not under obligation to distort his intellect and twist his affections out of joint in order to justify God's way to man. No sooner a disaster is announced than the clergy begin to concoct excuses for this seeming neglect of Providence. God meant to punish human carelessness; he was angry with the present generation for its unbelief; he wished to speak in tones loud enough to be heard the world over, he was trying to make us more careful in the future, he wished to demonstrate that all human devices and inventions are futile unless "the Lord protect" the ship, the house or the city; and finally, that we do not understand God, for "he moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform," though we know he does everything for the best. Is it not a welcome relief that the Rationalist can bear his great sorrow without resorting to commonplace sophistries of this nature? Not taxed with the burden of vindicating Providence, the Rationalist devotes his energies to the fruitful work of developing his resources against the fortuitous elements at play about him.

Only a moment's reflection will prove the futility of all attempts to establish a relation of some kind between God and the world's life.

*God's in His Heaven,  
All's right with the World!*

is Browning's creed in his *Pippa Passes*.

The verse in which the lines occur is, no doubt, excellent poetry, but what about its philosophy?

*"The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn;  
God's in His Heaven-  
All's right with the world!"*

We have seen and heard the lovely lark winging through the crystal air; and a thousand thousand eyes have discovered the snail on the thorn. Is it Browning's idea to intimate that by the same material or tangible proofs we may be sure "God's in His Heaven," and be reassured that "All's right with the world?" The two propositions belong altogether to radically different categories, and to infer from the presence of the lark in the air, or the snail on the thorn, that "All's right with the world," may be good rhyme, but that is all it is. Granting that "God's in His Heaven,"—a question toward which we maintain the modest and honest agnostic position,—it is within the sphere of man to discuss whether "All's right with the world." The world is made up of many countries full of people, and it has had a long history. Certainly "all's not right" in all the countries of the world, nor has it been so during all the periods of time. Is it, for example, true of Russia to-day that "all's

right" there? Is it true of Poland, bleeding from a thousand wounds? Has it ever been all right in Turkey? In Browning's opinion, was there a country in Europe—the Europe of his day—of which he could truthfully say that *all* was right there? But perhaps the poet merely meant to say that since "God's in His Heaven," all is bound to be right, sooner or later,—if not in this world, then, surely, in some other. But is not that begging the question? The mere fact that the best human effort is directed toward making the world better, shows that the world needs mending, and is far from being all right. We fear that Browning used his oft-quoted expression after a very enjoyable breakfast, while looking out upon his green and carefully trimmed lawns, shaded with the overspreading branches of gorgeous trees, and imagined that his cheerful yard was the world. The poet appears to correct his own hasty generalization when a little later he puts in Pippa's mouth the lines:

*"In the morning of the world,  
When earth was nigher Heaven than now."*

If it is true that the older the world grows, the farther it falls from heaven, then, it can not be all right with the world, even if "God's in His Heaven." And what is Browning's authority that the earth was nearer Heaven once than it is now? Does he believe that the state of barbarism is nearer heaven than that of civilization? Or does he believe that man began life as an angel, and later became a man—a fallen man? It seems as if the former of the two suppositions represents Browning's thought, for in the following lines he shows decided preference for the animal, the primitive, life of the world:

*"For what are the voices of birds,  
Aye! and of beasts—but words, our words?  
Only so much more sweet?"*

This is reason swallowed up in rhyme, or sense lost in sentiment. Why is the incoherent, instinctive exclamations of childhood, of bird and beast, sweeter than the ripened, rational, progressive, word of man? Surely a bird is more innocent than a man, but a stone is even more innocent than a bird. The beast tears its victims to death, the tree feeds the worms; is not a tree, therefore, purer than a beast? In all nature, there is nothing holier than man, for he alone can be holy. Browning seems to think that we were all so much better off when we were nearer the bird and beast, but evolution is our destiny, and only faint hearts cast wistful glances at the ages left behind.

Finally, the great English poet seems to develop further the Asiatic fatalism of "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world" idea, when in Scene VI., Pippa, in her chamber, exclaims:

*"All service ranks the same with God—  
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,  
Are we; there is no last, nor first."*

Indeed! Are we, then, but his puppets? Is God a puppet showman? And is this a puppet world which he rules? What is the educational value to God of presiding over a race of puppets? Is there any glory for God, as Omar Khayyam suggests, in pushing back and forth, on a checkerboard, mere puppets, and then shutting them up in a closet after he has finished with the game? If we are all his puppets, we cannot much care whether "God's in His Heaven", or somewhere else, and whether or not "All's right with the world." The truth is, Browning, instead of portraying truth, betrays it. He sacrifices reason to imagination, and the result is failure.

The attempts of the clergy to reconcile the god-idea with human suffering and wrong have proved equally worthless. Shortly after the disastrous Iroquois fire, in which nearly six hundred lives were lost, the Chicago clergy met, strange to say, to thank God for his tender mercies. Theology cuts strange capers with Reason after it has put out its eyes. It was of course appropriate that, not only the mourners, but the public in general, should observe with sober reflections the anniversary of a holocaust which left a great city in mourning. It is regrettable, however, that the ceremonies at the commemoration service assumed altogether a theological character, excluding thereby from participation many who would have derived great benefit from a purely human expression of sorrow and sympathy. The exercises opened by the ringing of the well known Hymn, *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, which was touchingly rendered by the soloist and quartet to the accompaniment of the piano. All music, softly and feelingly rendered, is sure to be impressive as well as soothing on occasions of this kind. But was it not a pity that some poet's words, free from the theological implication, were not selected in place of this church hymn which is, after all, nothing but the ecstatic outpouring of a superlatively mystical soul? What does it mean, for instance, to be "Nearer and still nearer, to God"? Did the six hundred people who murmured the words of the hymn have any clear idea of what they were asking for when they sang "*Nearer, My God, to Thee?*" No doubt they were comforted by the hymn, but how did it differ from the help which the Asiatic thinks he derives as often as he exclaims *Om Mani Padme Houn*—"O the glorious jewel of the lotus,—amen"? Imagine the effect upon an American audience, had one of the speakers suggested that the audience should sing the Hindoo prayer to the lotus instead of the Christian hymn. But why is not *O the glorious jewel of the lotus* as intelligible as *Nearer, My God, to Thee?* Would the millions of Orientals who in sorrow and darkness find light in drawing nearer to the lotus, be in the least moved by the Christian hymn which moistened the eyes of so many in Willard Hall?

But why not let the Hindoo have his lotus prayer and the Christian his hymn? We have no objection: if they cannot do without them, they are welcome to them. In our opinion there has never been a religion, however crude or primitive, but has helped some struggling soul; there has not been an idol, however wooden, but has answered some prayers; not a fetish, however cheap, but has inspired some believer. It is with religions as it is with houses: The poorest hut or shanty protects some little ones from the cold, the most rickety roof shields from the storm some shivering child of want—even the hole in the ground into which the savage creeps to escape the ravages of the elements is a refuge. But true as all this is, it still remains as the most religions



duty of man to try to replace these primitive shelters by building, as Oliver Wendell Holmes suggests, "more stately mansions" for his soul. Even as liberty with little is better than slavery with prosperity, and as justice is more precious than peace, truth is better than all the consolations which such financial exclamations as *O the glorious jewel of the lotus, or Nearer, My God, to Thee*, can afford.

"We thank Thee, O God, for the gift of tears; we thank Thee for the ministrations of pain," prayed the reverend comforter. Pain and tears are certainly among man's teachers, but they have not been an unmixed good. Pain has crushed, perhaps, as many souls as it has educated. How many have come and gone to whom pain was simply pain, and who derived no benefit from it whatever? A dispatch from Port Arthur states that "the inmates of the hospitals complain bitterly of the heartlessness of the doctors and sisters of charity, who have become so accustomed to human suffering during the long siege that they have lost all sympathy with their patients." Pain, then, can make people callous as well as sensitive; it can break the spring of the heart as well as sting the will into action.

But it is not our purpose, at present, to question the wisdom of being specially and officially "grateful for the ministrations of pain"; our object is to inquire what the officiating clergyman meant when he said, "We thank Thee, O Father, etc." Did he mean it was good of the Deity to visit us, now and then, with such catastrophes as the Iroquois theatre fire? or, did he mean that it was quite considerate of him to make us feel the horror of that event sufficiently as to bring tears from our eyes? In thanking the Lord for pain as a gift, are we to understand that we owe it solely to his loving kindness that we can suffer, and not to any merit on our part? To thank anybody for anything implies the receiving of a favor, and is it this clergyman's idea that in sending pain and suffering—earthquakes and floods and terrible fires which in one black hour destroys the lives of dearest children with their helpless parents or guardians—the Deity is doing us a favor?

Let us reflect a moment: "We thank Thee, O Father, etc.," Does this mean that there was "a possibility of the Lord withholding from us the ministrations of pain," and that, therefore, we must be thankful to him for not doing so—for not letting us be like the angels who live in a world free from evil and error? We cannot understand what the reverend doctor means when he publicly thanks the Deity for the "ministrations of pain." And will our good neighbor \* tell us who he meant by "O Father," and how he connects this "Father" with the unutterable calamity, the shadow of which still darkens our human hearts? Ah, let us be truthful. We are soldiers, and illusions can only spoil us. "We had sinned together," continued the Reverend, "at least someone had sinned, and 'let him without sin cast the first stone,' I have not the heart to recriminate now, as I had not then, because in my own conscience I stand convicted before God of the common negligence. We are common sinners." What do these words mean? Is the good doctor trying to exonerate God by laying the entire blame upon us "common sinners"?

\* Reverend Lloyd Jones.

The theatre fire was in all probability started by an accident which, in the absence of efficient management on the stage and in the auditorium, spread rapidly, converting the building in a few moments into a charnel-house. Why bring the Deity into the affair? What part, according to the doctor, did the Deity play in the Iroquois fire? Did he try to save anybody? Did he try to prevent anybody from being rescued? Did he cause the accident? Did he put it into someone's mind to be careless? Did he confuse the people and throw them into a panic purposely? Did he fold his hands and stand aside to see the burning? Did he wish to help but could not for any moral reasons? Did he regret his inability to prevent the horror? or was he glad it happened because it would teach us a lesson? Did he choose that special way of teaching us a lesson? Had he inevitable reasons for selecting a Wednesday matinee, when more children would be present, to punish "us common sinners, who stand convicted before God." If we cannot answer any of these questions, why do we connect God with the affair? If we cannot say just what God did or did not do in the theatre fire, why talk about it? If this calamity came upon us because of our sins, then, according to the missionary the Martinique earthquake came because the islanders rejected the Protestant religion. And whose sins was God punishing by the Galveston disaster or the Armenian massacres? Has it come to this that a man cannot take a sorrowing, weeping, heart-mangled brother or sister by the hand with sincere and sweet pity, without speculating about the Deity and his mysterious moves?

Rationalism saves us from all these contradictions, and gives us the consolation of being sane, even when we cannot have our heart's desire.

But to abstain from the worship of unknown beings, does not mean to go through life without an ideal. The feeling of longing, which the poet tells us is "of all the moods of mind, the dearest," is present in every earnest man and woman. To develop our faculties, to accomplish our tasks, to realize our hopes, to reach after our best thoughts—to labor for the beautiful yet-to-be—it is this hope which gives atmosphere to life, and makes our prattle eloquent. The pursuit of the ideal, the vision of a world void of wrong, of a humanity free and strong, of a world sweetened by the harmony of happy lives, of honest loves, of great worth, of innocent joys,—will ever draw us like a loving kiss.

Another objection marshalled against Rationalism is that it is too critical, and that it is not "nice" to criticise. "Criticism," it is argued, "dwells upon the things which separate, more than upon those which bring together races and creeds."

It certainly is more pleasant to talk of the unities and the fraternities, instead of the differences between men or their views and ideals.

Unity is a fine thing, but when it is used as a *shibboleth*, or as a check upon the freedom of thought and speech, it ceases to be desirable. When agreement is the product of unhampered and generous research, it is good; but when it is desired as an excuse for the fear to investigate, then it becomes a cover for error, or a plea for peace and harmony at the cost of truth and growth. The teacher who provokes thought through criticism is a greater helper than he who by repeating set phrases never awakens a new interest in us. To sacrifice everything for the sake of peace and fraternity would be a loss rather than a gain. In Russia, for instance, one has all the freedom in the world, provided, he will speak only well of the government. There would, indeed, be harmony under these conditions, in any camp, but what would it be worth? "Look at my charities," says the Catholic church—"my art, my music—the magnificent cathedrals I have built, which are

like beautiful galleries. Is it right to criticise or condemn the evil practices of a church that has done so much good for civilization? Speak, then, of the good the church has done, and say nothing of her persecutions and superstitions, and we will all be of one accord and of one mind." But would such a compromise, though baptised with the high-sounding name of unity, help the cause of progress? Is not progress a dearer word than unity? Is not freedom more precious than peace? Let us have unity if we can, but we must grow, and we must be free. Shall we sell the truth that we may have money to be charitable with? Is it right to sacrifice speech to silence, for the sake of harmony?

But is it nice to criticise? Is it not more generous and aesthetic to be on good terms with everybody? What is there more desirable, they say, than to see the ministers of the various cults—the Catholic priest, the Protestant divine, the Jewish rabbi, the Unitarian minister, the Ethicist and Revivalist, arm in arm, and on the same platform, exchanging courtesies and praising one another's work? We are told that when we see such a gathering on one platform, we can be sure that the millenium has arrived. But it will be a millenium for the priest and the rabbi, the healer and the shouter—they are the only ones who will be benefited by such a Pentecostal assemblage. Such fellowship will no doubt throw its mantle of silence over a great many evils which fear the light, and encourage their authors to be defiant and indifferent to the truth. Where there is silence truth has no advantage over error. Is it worth while to sacrifice the most sacred privileges of men in order to bring priest and rabbi together?

A great cause is often lost from the desire of its sponsors to be "nice." The teacher who wants to be "nice" may manage not to tell any lies, but he never succeeds in telling any truths, either. He cannot afford to tell the truth, for it may hurt, and he is not "nice" if he hurts. When he cannot tell anything pleasant, he must hold his tongue. Such a teacher is like an acrobat dancing on a tight rope, all he can do is to save himself from falling. There is no more room in modern society for a teacher who is afraid to hurt than there is for the physician who would rather humor the patient than do his duty. And, yet, there are not a few who trim their thoughts so as to make only friends. If the whole truth should at any time escape them by accident, they hasten forthwith to qualify it, or to take back a part of it—just to be obliging and nice. There has never been a reformer in the world who could not have become the idol of the people by following such a method; but idols die and turn to dust, while the heroism of the martyred soul is a perennial benediction.

To be "nice" was never the policy of a really earnest man. If Jesus was a historical personage, it does not appear on the records that he ever tried to be "nice"—to pat the priests on the back, or to tell them what good fellows they were, and that when he and they met they should be careful to speak only of the things they agreed upon. Of course the inability, to be "nice" cost Jesus his life. His independence nailed him to the cross, but evidently he prized something else more than he did unity. Luther was not very "nice" when he tore the pope's bull in pieces, and nailed his challenge to Rome on the church doors where everybody could see it. How impolite! That, surely, was a poor way to make friends. "Let us have masculine men," cries Emerson, who was himself thrown out of his pulpit and his church, because he preferred independence to popularity.

Another thing which the independent teacher does which is not "nice" is that he takes away the religion of our mothers. What about taking away the religion of heathen mothers? Why is it right to take away the religion of a Chinaman—a religion handed down to him by his mother—and wrong to disturb the religion of an American because it was his mother's religion? Did not Protestantism take away from the Catholics the religion of their mothers? Did not Catholics take away from the pagan Romans the religion of their mothers? Is it only taking away the religion of *our* mothers that is not "nice"?

But the Rationalist is also charged with being negative and not positive. We are told in sonorous language that man cannot live on negations. But it is Orthodoxy that is negative, not Rationalism. The first commandment in the Bible God ever gave man was a negative one: "Thou shalt not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil." It denied man freedom, and science. It denied him the right to progress. And ever since the one aim of the church has been to keep man "poor in spirit". Rationalism, on the contrary, removes the angel with the flaming sword at the gates of Eden, and invites everyone who hungers for knowledge to enter and eat of the tree of life.

To know that a thing is not true, is also truth. The mind, like the ground, must be plowed and cleared before it can receive the truth. There can be no truth without the destruction of error.

"Your doctrine is well enough for the strong, but the weak must have crutches to walk at all, and you take away from them their crutches," is another criticism often advanced against the Rationalist. It is related that Mr. Ingersoll, when he called one day to see his friend, Mr.

———, who was an invalid, was confronted with an argument he was unable to meet. "As I was sitting in my invalid's chair," began his friend, "and was looking out of the window, I saw a feeble, old man, struggling up the hill yonder, upon his crutches. Evidently, he was in pain, for he moved with extreme care and leaned heavily upon his crutches. I could tell that his crutches were all that sustained him from utter collapse. Then I saw a young man run after him, and when he came up to where the old man was, he kicked off his crutches, and the poor fellow rolled down the hill, a perfect wreck."

"That was an outrage," Ingersoll exclaimed, jumping to his feet and walking toward the window. "Where is he?" he asked, impatient with indignation.

"You are that man," returned his friend. "I was once a believer; my beliefs comforted me. You came into my life, kicked off my crutches, and now I sit here in this chair, a desolate and hopeless soul, waiting for the flame to blow out."

There is no more comparison between a tottering man leaning upon his wooden crutches, and a religion claiming to appeal to the intellect of man, than there is between a watch and a universe, to quote Paley's famous argument for the existence of a God. But, at any rate, is it not cruel to knock an old man's crutches from under him? Let us see. If the old man with the crutches represents the feeble-minded believers, the question to be answered is, how did they come to depend upon the use of crutches in the first place? Was it not more cruel to teach them to depend upon crutches? Are not those who prevent the healthy development of the limbs to enhance the sale of crutches even more cruel than those who despise their use? To bring a man to a state of dependence; to terrorize him into fear; to fetter his faculties so that he cannot train them

into service; to arrest his evolution; to keep him a dwarf, clinging like a scared child to the apron strings of his lords; to place in his hands an icon or a crucifix as his only hope—and then to denounce the teachers who rob these poor people of their crutches, is an argument which is bound to recoil with fearful force upon the venders of such artificial helps. It is like depriving a man of house and goods, and then providing a tattered tent for his shelter, and then saying to us: Would you be so cruel as to pull down the only thing that protects his poor head from the elements? Yes! in order that we may awaken in him a sense of the wrong and the oppression and the deprivation of which he is the unconscious victim. Sir Henry Main, in his *Popular Government*, says, that, if it had been put to a vote whether machinery, when it was first invented, should be introduced into the factories, there would have been recorded an overwhelming vote against its use. It was taking away from the poor man his crutches to compel him to compete with the iron and steel. And, actually, laborers of the time, suffered much and were driven to the wall, by the invention of machinery. But the temporary mischief caused by the introduction of machinery has been fully compensated by its lasting benefits to all classes. Likewise, this or that believer may fall and hurt himself when his theological crutches have been taken away from him, but if thereby his children and the future race can be taught to dispense with the use of so clumsy a contrivance, altogether—who would hesitate to knock them off? Was man meant to be an invalid all his life? Must all the generations of the future limp and hobble, to support the crutch industry?

Moreover, if any invalid can be made to give up his crutches, that very fact shows that he did not need them. Grandma, or grandpa, must not be disturbed in their beliefs, we hear people argue. We cannot disturb them, however hard we may try, unless they are intellectually virile enough to keep themselves together without crutches. The very fact that we can shake a man, shows he is strong enough to stand the strain. We cannot induce an invalid to give up his crutches; when we can, then, he is not an invalid. And what do we give in place of the crutches?—the ability to do without them.

I have often been asked "Why do we not as a Rationalist Society do works of charity, such as establishing neighborhood guilds, sewing and bathing clubs for the poor, free dispensaries, and hospitals?" There are many who are already doing this kind of work whatever its value may be, but very few who are even attempting to do the work which we have set out to do, namely, to help men to use freely and wisely the noblest of all their gifts—Reason. Is that a work that can be dispensed with? And can public baths, and evening classes do more for a man than they will for an animal if his Reason is still fettered. The emigrant from Russia, or Italy, or Ireland, may join all the guilds and frequent all the night schools, and still remain a mental slave. But he can not take a course in Rationalism, and continue to cling to his chains. Of course, to make men free and enlightened is not enough. They must also be helped to develop the humanities which are the salt of life, but we must first wake him up, for he can not be saved in his sleep.

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## CHAPTER VII. Rationalism and the World's Great Religions.

Rationalism does not attack the religions of the world, it tries to explain them. But religions do not wish to be explained, and consequently they denounce the investigator as an enemy of morals as well as of religion. Reason, the theologians contend, is incapable of understanding the divine mysteries, and forgets, of course, that faith alone can discover the hidden things of God. But they do not stop to think that they are reasoning even when they are giving reasons why we should not reason.

Beginning with the belief in God, which is the basic belief in nearly all religions, Rationalism endeavors to show the unreasonableness of all the dogmas which deal with the supernatural. It is impossible to talk about an infinite person without making one's self utterly unintelligible, not to say, absurd. There is not a single statement made about a god, which can be harmonized with sense. It is because the beliefs about the supernatural cannot be reconciled with reason,—it is because of the apparent absurdity of the dogmas of religion, that the clergy have had to resort to fire and blood,—the scourge, the dungeon, the rack, the gallows, and hell-fire to force people to believe in them.

There is no reliable record of God ever being seen by man. His voice has never been heard. His form and expression or whereabouts remain a mystery to this day. We have nothing but guesses as to the kind of worship he prefers, or why he should be praised. And yet, entire countries have been plundered, pillaged, and laid waste for no other reason than that they held different views from ours on the form or nature of a God whom no man has ever seen, heard or comprehended. Such is the extraordinary folly of man!

All religions are absolutely human in origin. There is not, and there has never been, and in the nature of things there never can be a divine or superhuman religion—that is to say, a religion invented by a god.

Let us imagine for the sake of argument, however, that a god wished to reveal himself to us. What would be the probable course he would pursue? Would he reveal himself to us as he is, or only as much of himself as we needed to know or could comprehend? To reveal himself to us as he is in all the fulness of his nature would be a moral impossibility, for the reason that only a god could fully comprehend a god.

But if he revealed to men only as much of himself as they could grasp, then their knowledge of him must necessarily be imperfect. We are revealing ourselves to the animals, for instance, every day of our life, but still the animals, owing to their limitations, can never know us as we are, but only as they think we are. Likewise our knowledge of supernatural beings must be as incomplete as is the knowledge of animals concerning man. We see objects as the structure of our eyes permits us to see them, or as our minds grasp



them. The reflection of the sky in a drop of dew is limited to the capacity of the dew. Owing to this adaptation of objects to the powers of the observer before they can be observed at all, it may be said that objects are seen not as they really are but as they appear to the observer. Since, then, a divine revelation cannot overcome the limitations of the finite mind, God could be no more to us than what *we* think he is, or in other words, what we make him to be.

Another proof that man is the maker of his own gods is that his gods are neither better nor worse than he is himself. The barbarian can never conceive of a civilized deity; on the contrary, the Great Spirit he worships is a projection of his own passions and aspirations—his own vices and virtues. As he advances in refinement and humanity, his God advances too. If he sinks into deeper ignorance and brutality, he drags his God down with him. The God of the Quaker is peaceful; that of the Hebrew was a "man of war." The God of the Negro, who has never seen white folks, is necessarily black. The God of children is a child-god; and in a society where man, not woman, is the ruler, God is a "he." Not only is man the maker of his gods, but he also keeps them in repair—constantly remodeling or retouching them in order to preserve some sort of correspondence between himself and his gods.

And why is the god of the Negro black? Because he not only is ignorant of any other color, but because black is for him the color of preference or aristocracy. When he becomes acquainted with white people he associates their color with everything that he fears and despises. He therefore, as a later evolution, makes his devils white. The idea I wish to present is that just as man determines the color of his gods and devils he determines also their characters. He can only invest them with such virtues and vices as he is acquainted with. He can not attribute to them powers which he does not covet for himself. In short he is the maker of the gods he worships and the devils he fears.

The pathetic part of all this, however, is that though man makes his own gods, he imagines that the gods have made him. He manufactures an image or an idol, invests it with certain attributes and powers, and then, like a slave, falls down to bite the dust before his own handiwork. Reflect upon this for a moment: The Pope, for instance, owes every one of his prerogatives to the very people who bend before him; they make him infallible, they seat him on a throne, and place the Keys of Heaven and Hell in his hands; yet before this creature of their own vanity or fear they behave like a race of bondsmen. Who created the Sultan or the Czar? Their own subjects! And yet see how these Turks and Russians creep and crawl before the work of their own hands. Is it not absurd for a potter to worship his own pot? In view, therefore, of the undeniable fact that man makes the gods he worships, how pitiable to observe the servility and stupidity with which he plays the sycophant before the images of his own hand or head!

Notwithstanding this self-evident truth that all religions are human in origin, every one of them has claimed to be from above. Like puffed-up or ungrateful children, the religions of the world have denied their real, though humble parentage, and have laid claim to a celestial birth. But the fact that each of the great religions, while claiming a supernatural origin for itself, vehemently denies it to all others, renders all such claims exceedingly suspicious. It would be easier for me, for instance, to believe that God has also spoken to you, if he has really spoken to me. But if he has not spoken to me, I am apt to consider the claim that he has spoken to you, as an impertinence. The reason one "inspired" teacher calls another "an imposter" is that he is not sure of his own inspiration. He judges others' pretensions to a divine origin by his own. \* The refusal of the different religions to believe in one another is a strong proof that they are all equally unworthy of belief, as far as their supernatural claims are concerned.

*\* Oato used to say that he was surprised one soothsayer could keep his countenance when he saw another manipulating, knowing as he did the imposture he was practicing.*

*Jesus is reported by John the evangelist to have denounced all who preceded him as "thieves and robbers."—Gospel according to John.*

*There is a Hindoo legend that Krishna, the son of God, once showed himself to a group of young ladies who were so charmed with his handsome face and figure that not only did each of the young ladies wish to dance with him, but each insisted that no one else should enjoy the same privilege, whereupon Krishna found himself in an embarrassing position. He was willing enough to dance with the girls, but did not wish to inflame their jealousy, so calling upon his resources, he immediately multiplied himself into as many Krishnas as there were maidens, and danced with each and every one of them, taking pains however to leave the impression with each young woman that she alone had danced with the god. So each religious prophet imagines that the Lord has not danced with anybody but himself.*

The reluctance of the prophets to believe in one another shows how difficult it is for us to ascertain to which of them the revelation has been made. The only way a special revelation could be given would be through an individual—a Moses, a Mohammed, a Jesus, etc. But if we ourselves are not inspired, how are we to tell which teacher is telling the truth? If we are to use our own reason to decide this momentous question, why, then, do we need a revelation? Tell me, I pray you, was it fair in God to have expressed himself privately to some individual, and then to have left it to us to decide whether said individual was or was not inspired?

And a revelation, the truth or untruth of which has to be ascertained by the exercise of human reason can claim no superiority to human reason. It follows then unmistakably that a revelation is impossible since it is we who have to decide whether or not it is a revelation. Even as we create the gods, we create also the bibles of the world.

Besides the ostensible purpose of a revelation is to make things clear, or to change our ignorance into knowledge. Have the different revelations of the world done this? Have they not, on the contrary, added to the perplexities of the mind? A god who reveals himself to an individual privately and then leaves it to us to decide whether said individual has or has not received a revelation instead of relieving, increases our



embarrassment.

If it be argued that we should have faith, I answer in which one of the prophets? Shall we have faith in the one our parents believed, in the one of the country we were born in, in the one who agrees with us, or in the one who can force us to accept him?

Moreover, if faith can make one prophet inspired, why not another? If faith can make Jesus divine, why not Mohammed?

It is our purpose to show that neither gods nor revealed religions can be a proper subject of study, and what cannot be a subject of study cannot be an object of faith. We do not deny the gods, for we know nothing about them to be able to make any reasonable statement concerning them; we simply dismiss them from our thought.

But while the supernatural has no interest for the Rationalist, he is very much interested in the interpretations which men have given of it, and the manner in which they have built up a system of morals and a philosophy of life upon it. The great teachers and founders of religions are proper subjects both for criticism and commendation. Being men they cannot claim immunity from a free and fearless examination of their teachings. The more honest a teacher is, the more willing he is to be investigated, and nothing prejudices us more against a teacher than his refusal to be questioned. "He who will have no judge but himself, condemns himself," says the proverb.

But to regard these teachers as men, only, is to divest them also of all the magical powers which a fond credulity has ascribed to them. A teacher who seeks converts to his religion by curing a horse, as Zoroaster is supposed to have done, or by changing a stick into a serpent, as Moses claims he did, or water into wine, as Jesus is believed to have done, instead of saving the world, degrades it. We insult our teachers when we ascribe to them miraculous powers such as walking on the water, multiplying loaves and raising the dead. All the wonders of the world cannot make what is bad, good, or what is false, true. A teacher who has a falsehood which he wishes to pass for the truth may resort to a miracle; but why should an honest soul undertake to win converts by unintelligible performances? If physical and mathematical truth can, unaided, command universal assent, why should there be "signs and wonders" to maintain moral or intellectual truths? Moreover, if a teacher has power to stop the sun, has he not the power to make people see the truth without a miracle? If he can raise the dead, can he not lift the human mind out of error without the aid of extraordinary phenomena? Resorting to miracles to convert people, proves, not the power, but the despair of the teacher. He who can command followers relying solely upon the truth of his teaching is, and remains forever, a greater moral and intellectual force than he who is driven to surprise and bewilder his hearers before he can convert them. \*

\* *To aim to convert a man by miracle is a profanation.*  
—Emerson

And now before we can make an estimate of the world's leading religions, we must try to arrive at some sort of an agreement as to what we would consider the greatest virtue, and what the greatest vice in religion.

There will be no objection, on the part of my readers, to the statement that the most heinous of all vices in any religion is *cruelty*. There is not a crime or an error which is not made worse by cruelty—or softened by the absence of it. Cruelty is the most inexcusable, the most inhuman, the most unreasonable, the most degrading, and the most deadly of the vices that human nature is heir to. Cruelty is consummate wickedness. It is the passion of the bad because it is bad. It is doing evil from pleasure. Think, then, what a serious thing it is for a religion purporting to be "divine" to recommend the halter, the fire-brand and the sword, for instance, against all who do not subscribe to its dogmas. With such a religion in force, it will not be necessary to invent a devil, for man, himself, under its influence, must develop into a fiend of hate and cruelty, withering all he comes in contact with, as the frost blackens all it bites.

It is admitted that there is an element of cruelty in almost all the religions of the world;—though of Buddhism it has been claimed that during its nearly twenty-five centuries of existence, it has not killed, much less tortured a single human being in the name of religion. That is certainly an enviable record. It should compel the hot flush of shame to the cheek of those persecuting Faiths which have shed enough human blood "to incardine the multitudinous seas." As Buddhism is one of the numerically stronger religions of the world, and as it has helped to shape the beliefs and practices recommended by the more recent creeds, a brief examination of its fundamental doctrine would assist us in making an estimate of its moral worth and may be useful to this discussion. What is the teaching which makes of Buddhism a distinctive religion? *Life is an evil*, taught the Hindu reformer. To desire life is the acme of immorality according to this doctrine for it is to desire that which is evil. Desire is the soil in which spring up all the noxious weeds which choke to death the flower of happiness. To cease to desire is to conquer freedom from suffering. Salvation according to Buddhism consists in winding up and sealing forever the book of life, leaving not the remotest possibility for any fresh life to spring up again. This pessimism, which while it has attractions for the speculative and supine Oriental, is justly abhorred by the creative and ever-youthful European. The important question is not, "Is life worth living?" but "How can life be made worth living, since live we must?" While therefore Buddha taught a scrupulous morality, while his own character stands out as one of the noblest, and while his teachings have made countless millions gentle and peaceful, nevertheless, there is in this mildest of religions, much that is positively harmful. The Buddhist conception of life with its blighting pessimism which recommends non-resistance to evil, has emptied a continent of its vigor and converted it into a desert. The teaching of orthodox Buddhism may be likened to the advice which a sea captain, driven by despair, might give to his men on deck—to sink the ship in order to escape the storm. Then again the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation as an endless chain of nightmares, dragging man through unending births to "the vast void night," has caused untold agony of mind and body. This gloomy view has made life, for millions of people, a misfortune, love a crime, and the earth, a hell!

The believers in transmigration or reincarnation forget that the scientific view of man leaves no room for anything to migrate. What science understands by soul is the word which expresses the functions, including brain activity and the circulation of the blood. When these cease there is no soul to go anywhere. Neither

could reincarnation produce the moral discipline claimed by its advocates. It is no punishment to return to the world in a lower form of life, since there is no memory, clear and ringing, of a former and higher existence. Moreover, the lower forms of life are more callous and not at all conscious of deflection from a better standard. If a cruel man becomes a tiger, it would be giving him a better chance to be more cruel. Unless the animal can remember his humanity, he can not be disciplined by a descent into a lower stage of being..

But the Buddhist hell, fearful though it is, is, fortunately, not everlasting. Over its gaping mouth is spread the rainbow arch of Nirvana, that is to say, deliverance for all from every form of suffering, in sleep—*eternal sleep*, which will, some day, according to this religion, fold an aching world on its cool and calm bosom.

The vice of Buddhism then is its exaggeration of the troubles of life—its deprecation of the opportunities for the pursuit of truth and goodness which life offers. By dwelling too long and too often upon the thorns, Buddhism becomes blind to the rose which is as real as the thorns. And again this Oriental teacher set up an unattainable ideal when he demanded the eradication of all desire from the human soul. Man can only change his desires; he cannot cease to desire. Not to desire is also a desire—a desire to be free from desire.

The virtue which we admire most in Buddha's doctrine is gentleness. Buddha is said to have been of all great leaders the most compassionate. He trembled to cause pain to the least of sentient things. The birds, the fishes, the crawling worms, as well as man, he looked upon as his brothers. Buddhism might be called the Religion of Pity. There is little doubt but that wherever Buddhism triumphed there war and persecution, two of the most abominable institutions of all time, practically disappeared.

It is with feelings of undivided admiration that I now come to speak of Confucius—the only Rationalist among the immortals of ancient times. If the other founders of Faiths owe their reign over the minds of men, in part at least, to the wonderful miracles attributed to them, Confucius, on the contrary, owes his increasing reputation to the complete absence of the supernatural from his life and doctrines. He has conquered the ages by his common sense. And his sanity assures for him a future which we can not safely predict for the others.

Omitting a historical sketch of the great Chinese teacher, and confining ourselves briefly to an exposition of his philosophy or religion, we notice at once that Confucianism devotes itself exclusively to this world—to the now and here. This is very remarkable when we remember how all the other teachers made the world to come, that is to say, some invisible and undiscovered world the principal theme of their preaching. To lose this world that we may win the next was the burden of the teaching of both Buddha and Jesus. But the great Chinaman completely ignored the so-called next world, and directed all his efforts toward the enlightenment of man concerning the world that now is. It will readily be seen what a radical difference there is between Confucius and his colleagues. When they spoke of gods, Confucius spoke of man; when they asked for faith, Confucius recommended knowledge; when they delivered mysteries, Confucius presented facts. With perfect propriety we may call Confucius the first apostle of secularism. Now secularism is the very opposite of supernaturalism, and as the world is becoming more and more secular, that is to say, practical and humanitarian, Confucius is the only one among the great sages who is as much modern as he is ancient.

In the teaching of Confucius we do not find the least suggestion of even so much as a Buddhist hell. The religion taught by Confucius is the least theological of any Oriental cult. Confucius was a teacher, not a priest. He worked no miracles, delivered no inspired oracles, dealt in no mysteries, claimed no supernatural powers, did not think that the less sense there was in a religion the more divine it would be, and made no attempt to allure with future promises, or to frighten with hell-fire his hearers. In the long annals of a past musty with age and choking with superstitions innumerable, the page on which is inscribed the name of this sanest of all Asiatics is the fairest and freest from cant and rant.

The name of Zoroaster takes us back to a very remote period in the history of our humanity. It has been conjectured that when he began his career as a religious teacher he found his people, the Persians, worshiping the principle of Evil, or Ahriman, the Persian name for Devil. While Zoroaster was unable to wean his people from Ahriman, he did succeed in supplementing the fear of the devil with the love of God or Ormuzd, the principle of goodness. The dualism is the distinguishing characteristic of the religion founded by Zoroaster, and is also its contribution to nearly all the other religions; for we find in Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism the same fundamental belief in the existence of a God invariably accompanied by his rival—the Devil. What the one creates, the other destroys; what the one mends, the other mars; God makes the light, the Devil the darkness; God kindles the flame, the Devil tries to turn it into smoke; God is omnipotent in wisdom, the Devil is equally resourceful in mischief. Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism, then, is the parent of dualism, namely, of the eternal struggle between these two archpowers for the possession of man.

Without denying to Zoroaster the name of reformer, and also of empire-builder,—for doubtless his services contributed to the political expansion of Persia, making her on land and sea, one of the great powers of ancient times, and duly acknowledging the beginnings of a high morality in the collected scriptures called the *Avestas*, attributed to his pen,—we are compelled by the evidence to charge the religion of Zoroaster, that is to say, the religion of dualism, of a God plus a Devil, with having invented, so to speak, the awful doctrine of hell, and therefore of religious persecution. It was a natural consequence of the belief in a God opposed by a Devil to make war upon all who were not on the side of God. And as the prophet is himself invariably the vicar or the apostle of God, it followed that all those who refused obedience to his will were in opposition to the Deity and should be suppressed, even as God is trying to suppress the Devil, his antagonist.

When we approach the Jewish-Christian faith, we find the dark stream of religious persecution, which had its source in Zoroastrianism, grown into a raging sea. The three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism, bear to one another the relation of parent and children. Christianity is the elder, and Mohammedanism the younger daughter of Judaism. The predominant trait, which is common to them all, is exclusiveness. It is impossible to be humanitarian or universal and exclusive at the same time, which is another way of saying that, where the spirit of exclusiveness holds sway, there religious toleration will be considered a crime, both against God and the State. Of course in all three of these faiths are to be found passages which seem to possess an accent of universality. But it is a universality conditioned on the conversion of the whole world to the faith in question. "My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations,"

writes the Jewish prophet, but observe it says,—“My house,”—which means that the whole world will come to worship in a Jewish temple. It does not mean that Pagan and Christian, without embracing the Jewish faith, may each worship his own “Christ” in a Jewish synagogue. It is in this same spirit that the Mohammedan throws open his mosque, and the Christian his cathedral to the whole world. Brotherhood in these religions is limited to those of the true faith. The misbeliever is an alien to whom it is a sin even to say “God speed.” Intermarriage is forbidden with a view to emphasize the fact that only through conversion can a stranger become a friend or a brother. Such exclusiveness was bound to breed hatred and persecution.

And as men make their gods, an exclusive people will have an exclusive god. The Bible conception of God is one of the most repellant in religious literature. We may say it is the least successful attempt at god-making on record. The three religions we have named have all one and the same God, with only unimportant variations. The authors of the Bible seem to have labored under the impression that to make their God acceptable they had only to make him intensely partisan. One who loves his own only. But they have made him, necessarily, as terrible as he is exclusive. He is not only called a jealous God, but also a consuming fire, a man of war. It is expressly stated that “He is angry every day.” The English translators have interpolated the words—“with the wicked,”—but the original as rendered into Latin, German, French and other languages, shows plainly that the editors of King James’ Version took undue liberties with the text. The Revised Version has dropped the words *with the wicked*, and the text now conveys the same meaning in the English Bible as in the German, which reads: “Und ein Gott, der taglich dirauet,” and in the French, “La colere the Dieu est toujours prete a eclater.”

“Irascitur per singulos dies,” are the words in the Vulgate.

To please his makers the God of the Jew, the Christian and the Mohammedan orders the extermination of all who object to be converted: “And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee: thine eye shall have no pity upon them.” Each of the three religions, unfortunately, has been too willing to obey to the letter this unfraternal injunction introduced into the mouth of the Deity by the priesthood. As the authors of the above text claimed to be inspired the priests of these three religions have shed more blood than all the tyrants put together. This is a fearful but absolutely just indictment against the Jewish-Christian-Mohammedan religion.

But confining for a moment our remarks to Christianity alone, it must be admitted that in spite of its doctrine of hell, it has certain redeeming features about it which are of undoubted pagan origin and which we do not find in Judaism. The advantage of Christianity over Judaism consists in the former’s generous efforts to save the whole world, irrespective of race or color, from the doom of hell. This is the contribution of the Gentile to Christianity. The words of Jesus, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” were in all probability put in his mouth by a Gentile. What Jesus really said, if, indeed, we can be sure of anything that he said, was, “Go not into the cities of the Gentiles,” assuring them at the same time that the world would come to an end before they had even finished preaching to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus as a Jew shared the belief of his people that “none are beloved before God but Israel.” It was the Greek and Latin genius that made of Christianity more than merely another. Jewish sect, by breathing into it as much of its universalism as a dogmatic religion would admit. Of course, the best service which paganism rendered Christianity was to introduce into it a new God—the *man* God as against the all-God Jehovah—who, by personal sacrifices, conquered for the whole world an opportunity to be saved. Christ, as a secondary God—or a junior God—was the revolt of the Gentile world against the Jewish Deity. Whatever good Christianity has done is due to this rebellion which culminated in compelling the dread Jehovah to admit the man-God into full and equal partnership with him. The Jews call this blasphemy; but Christianity, inspired by the Hellenic and Latin genius, weakened the divinity by dividing it into three—later into four, by the addition of a woman to the number. In this alone, namely, in making a new God, and thus taking from the old solitary deity many of his ancient and Semitic prerogatives, Christianity has proved its greater sympathy with paganism than with Judaism.

Another leading trait of these three religions is their fear and hatred of freedom of thought. To perpetuate their own power the priests of this family of religions found it necessary to suppress, at first by threats of divine punishments, and when these failed, by force of arms, all inquiry. Faith, which meant unquestioning acquiescence, was of God; Science, which meant investigation, was of the Devil. The agents of this group of religions which between them have held Europe, America and a great part of Asia and Africa captive for many centuries, prompted their God to solemnly declare in infallible documents, that a father should not hesitate to kill his own son, or a son his own father; that a mother should destroy her child, and the child its mother,—to prevent them from professing or following another religion. It is impossible to bring a more horrible accusation against a set of men. The worst thing that we can say against the profession of the law or of medicine, pales into insignificance when compared with this specimen of the inhumanity of the priesthood. The day of judgment is here, and the founders of these three religions are summoned to answer at the bar of humanity, awakened from sleep, for the wholesale massacres which have dipped the world in blood, for the Spanish and Scottish inquisitions, and for the sectarianism and hatred which converted men of the same race and country into implacable enemies and persecutors of one another.

The religious commentators defend the respective scriptures of these religions by saying that their teachings were limited to the mental level of the times and the peoples. But if God had to descend to the plane of man and become brutal and bigoted like him, how was man benefited by his intercourse with the divine? Furthermore, if the mental and moral limitations of a people determine the character of revelation, what advantage is there in having a revelation? Moreover, because a child cannot comprehend algebra, is it right to teach him that one and one make three? Is the inability of the primitive man to appreciate the higher virtues of generosity, justice and fellowship with aliens, an excuse to command him to exterminate his neighbors, \* to bear false witness, \*\* to practice immorality, to plunder, to be cruel and credulous? \*\*\* If a revelation cannot civilize a barbarian, what is its value?

\* Deut. 7: 16, etc.

\*\* Jer. 4: 10; I. Kings 22: 23; Ezek. 14: 9, etc.



But while denouncing intolerance we must not become intolerant ourselves. With all their faults these three religions have been, in their day, of considerable service to the world. We may justly say of them that having done all the bad and all the good of which they were capable it is time for them to step aside and leave the field to science. Am I asked what good these religions have done? I answer: They have taught man science by forbidding it. It may sound strange, but religion aroused human curiosity, which again discovered science. The time came when man was not satisfied with information only about the next world, about spirits and demons, about mysteries and divine attributes; he asked also information about this world, about man, the past history of the earth and so forth. Just as by seeking the philosopher's stone men discovered chemistry, and by the way of astrology they came to the science of astronomy, and by the way of sorcery and magic to the knowledge of medicine,—so did theology develop into philosophy.

Religion also must be credited with having been the first to give man a system of thought. Now a system, however crude, is a work of art. It is a creation. It is a putting together of ideas and beliefs for the purpose of arriving at a conclusion. Thus religion taught man to think connectedly, to see the relation of things, and to think for a purpose, that is to say, to reason. The savage has ideas too, but he can not put them together, he can not classify or systematize them. There has been iron in the bowels of the earth, and lying on the surface in many places for long ages, but only when man could give shape and form to it did he enter the path of civilization. In the same sense, not until man could forge, fuse and combine his ideas into a system of some kind, did he begin his intellectual evolution. Religion started civilization by enabling man to put his ideas together. Even as the worm was the prophecy of the coming man, the creed was the beginning of science.

Let us see if we cannot make this idea a little clearer: All religions represent the effort of the human mind to understand itself and its environment. At the core of every religion, however crude, there is a philosophy,—that is to say, every belief, be it ever so foolish, has a meaning, and at one time was a help to man.

The savage carries a fetish on his person to secure himself against evil. The civilized man crosses himself in the presence of danger. Both practices embody a truth, and it is the province of criticism to define that truth.

When the turbaned Oriental, standing in his mosque, pronounces the name of *Allah* with such awe and joy, what is it he means? In his groping way he is aiming to be scientific; he is trying his hand at philosophy; he wishes to put his finger upon the nerve of the universe; he is trying to bring the multifarious forces of nature about him into a focus; he is trying to evolve harmony out of chaos,—music out of the discord and babel of life; and he thinks he has succeeded, when he has pronounced the word *Allah!* Of course, his philosophy is that of a beginner, but it is a philosophy, nevertheless. He is an embryo scientist, taking his first lesson in logical reasoning. That is the truth at the heart of all religions which we must recognize. They represent the desire of man to make things clear to his intelligence, and to wrest life's secret from the universe. Man seeks knowledge because in the consciousness of knowledge there is happiness and power. The strain of ignorance is intolerable to him. Darkness embarrasses his mind and he seeks the light by instinct.

The primitive man, for instance, alarmed by the things he did not understand, proposed explanation after explanation, in his effort to throw off the darkness from his mind. When the sky frowned upon him and the winds wailed in his ears, he did not know what to make of them, and felt insecure until he could satisfy himself that he understood how and why the dark clouds swept over the face of the skies and the winds moaned about his dwelling. He felt relieved when he believed that he had grasped the situation. His explanation that the sun and the wind were free agents, like himself, acting from choice, as he thought he did, was a very crude one, but it was an explanation, all the same, and for the time being proved helpful to him. From the very beginning, man has shown a hunger for knowledge, which has put his mind in action. Religion, then, is man's first attempt at scientific and philosophical thinking. Religion is, in a sense, the primer of science and philosophy. The mistake we make is to declare this primer infallible. We take the first composition of the child, so to speak—his first prattle in the presence of the universe—and pronounce it inspired. When Moses, or whoever wrote the first chapters of the book of Genesis, described how man and woman were fashioned, he was trying to be scientific, in his modest way. But the best explanation that his mentality could produce was that God took some clay from the ground and kneaded it into the form of man, and from one of the ribs of this man he formed woman. It is not his science we commend; it is his desire to explain man's origin that honors him, for out of that desire, philosophy, science,—progress—are born.

But there is another truth hidden in the bosom of all religions which it is the mission of philosophy to disclose. The first truth I called your attention to was that the primitive beliefs of man represented his effort to understand the world and himself; the second truth is that all the religious rites and ceremonies, the most superstitious of them, embody likewise a truth;—they represent the effort of man to get the control of the universe into his own hands. If today we possess any power over the resources and forces of nature, if we can utilize them, command them to do our errands, to wait upon us, to serve us,—this power is the fruition of that primitive desire of our barbarian ancestors to get the gods under control by presents and compliments.

The scientist masters the laws of nature,—the movements of the atmosphere, the currents of the ocean, the lightning's secret, for the purpose of putting a bit into their mouths to control them for human service; but the priest when he offered his bloody sacrifices, when he performed his incantations, and repeated magical formulas, had the same aim in view,—the control of the universe. As soon as primitive man concluded that the sun, for example, or the river, was a god, he set to work to learn the habits, tastes, pleasure of his gods, that he might prevent them from hurting him and encourage them to gratify his needs. In other words, he wished to replace them in the government of the world. He did not feel safe until he could get the reins in his own hands. When I was in one of the churches of Florence, and stood looking at a figure of the pope with the keys of heaven and hell in his hand, it dawned upon me that man, from time immemorial, has coveted the ownership of the universe, and even in his feebleness gave himself the satisfaction of holding the keys in his own hands.

But it would be unreasonable to continue to preserve and propagate these religions at great cost to the people, and also at the detriment of more important interests—on the ground that at one time, when man was but a child, they were of service to him. Our ancestors before the age of iron used tools made of stone. Shall



these still be given the preference despite the better and more useful implements of modern times—because, forsooth, they started our race in its career of progress? Shall the candle light be permitted to prejudice us against electricity; the stagecoach against the locomotive; the cave of the savage against the sanitary dwellings of modern cities; or the primitive forms of communication against the wonderful wireless? Why, then, should Moses or Mohammed or Jesus stand in the way of the science of the twentieth century? If we may discard our mother's hut or the rag she clothed herself with at one time, why not also her religion? True enough both hut and rag served a purpose and marked a stage in the evolution of man, but the purpose they served was to fit us for something better, that is to say, to make us discontented with and rebellious against the hut and the rag forever.

The day of faiths is over. They belong to the furniture of the past. The glorious reign of Science has begun. Thought like a fruit on the tree of evolution has at last ripened. The glow of the sun, and the tints of the sky are upon her. The countries which were the first to replace faith by knowledge have invariably been the first also in civilization. While Palestine remained a desert, Greece became the garden of the world. Whatever of beauty there is in our lives today, we owe it to the immortal Greeks. Truth and goodness flourish in all their glory only among a free and intelligent people. Where there is an infallible faith there can be no liberty of thought, and without liberty of thought there is no mind, and without mind man is not different from the brute.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE STORY OF MY MIND; OR, HOW I BECAME A RATIONALIST \*\*\*

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