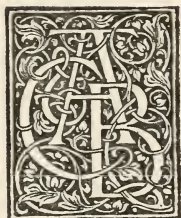


Religions of the Past
and
The Religion of the Future

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GENERAL

Preface

THE aim of Buckle's great work, *The Introduction to the History of Civilisation in England*, was to get rid of empiricism, and to place the study of History on a scientific basis.

The aim of the present little work is precisely similar in regard to Religion, viz. : to urge that its study should henceforth be conducted by the method usually employed for the ascertainment of Truth in every department of systematic and orderly investigation of phenomena.

It will be noticed that in this attempt to advocate a new departure in the prosecution of the study of Religion, details have been carefully eschewed, and the attention concentrated on broad general views and the inferences therefrom arising.

Easily grasped generalisations seem best fitted to persuade, and form indeed the actual groundwork on which is based most of the knowledge possessed by the public at large.

If people believe that the Earth is a spherical

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body rotating on its axis and moving round the sun, they hold that conviction not in virtue of abstruse calculations appealing to the astronomer, but by reason of logical deductions from comparatively simple facts and observations which are readily comprehended and remembered by all.

Accordingly, in this brief work, the conflicting theories and common failure of the various Religions are noted, and it is argued that a new attempt to arrive at truth is needed, and that this fresh endeavour should be based on that sound foundation of painstaking accumulation of information and logical inference of general principles from the study of empirical observations which has led to success in other fields of enquiry.

If this aim could be achieved, and the Baconian method be made to supersede the dogmatism characteristic of the Religions of the Past, there seems no reason to doubt that a new era in Religion would commence, and eventually progress be made no less astounding than that which has marked the many different branches of scientific research.

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Part I
Religions of the Past



CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION

RELIGION is the greatest problem of humanity. The mind of man has been engaged upon it from the earliest times until the present, and we have now to ascertain as far as possible with what measure of success the enquiry has been attended and the best method for the further prosecution of it.

In all religions the great underlying principles of the faith are ever associated with and obscured by a mass of sacerdotal forms and ceremonies, and substantial practical idolatry.

In the earlier types of religion and among uncivilised and ignorant races there is but little trace of any underlying principles at all; the idolatry is gross and stolid.

Among such races the sole origin of religion is fear bred of ignorance.

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The lightning that flashes from the heaven above, the thunder that crashes in the sky and reverberates through space, the hot sun that scorches, the water that may engulf, all are strange, unaccountable manifestations of some unseen, mysterious, and awful power. That power can neither be understood nor withstood, but they must endeavour to conciliate and appease it, if possible by prayers or gifts, by charms or incantations.

Now it is instructive to observe that in the case of these primitive religions, as they are the offspring of ignorance, so they are dissipated and destroyed by increasing knowledge.

The lightning and thunder that terrified our remote ancestors and brought them upon their knees are regarded with philosophic calm by the man of science of to-day.

And this process is constant and progressive. The unknown is awful and is worshipped; the known is interesting and is studied.

To the observer of old nothing appeared more lawless and incomprehensible than the wind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." But the observer of to-day is convinced that

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the wind even is amenable to the reign of law, and blows not where it listeth but where it needs must blow, and where we could easily prophesy that it would blow if only the necessary data for the calculation were in our possession. This is not yet the case in detail, but the origin and controlling forces of the great movements of air round our globe are in possession of all.

Movements of matter on a far vaster scale, eclipses due to the varying position of the heavenly spheres, the periodicity of such erratic bodies as comets, which astounded and terrified the ignorant, are now so well understood that they may be safely and accurately predicted.

Thus with the increase of knowledge Fear abates and Superstition dies.

But all this is an account of religion in its ruder and more elementary condition. Man in his primitive state, a hunter and a warrior, has but few and vague ideas outside the practical area of his own pursuits. Theoretical considerations do not appeal to him.

But as great nations arise and a leisured,

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contemplative class becomes possible, thinkers turn with disdain from the fetichism and idolatry of primitive religion, to gaze intently at the real problem and strive earnestly, though it may be ineffectually, to investigate it and to come to some conclusion upon it.

For there is on the horizon of religion a great problem ever looming before the mind of man. And the problem is this: What is the nature of God, and how should man regard Him?

That is the problem which has occupied the mind of man through countless centuries. (The religion of every great people is the answer given by that people to the problem.) The deepest thinkers of each race have addressed themselves to the task of finding a satisfactory solution to the problem. And the conclusions they arrived at are undoubtedly tinged with the idiosyncrasies of the race they belong to, and bounded by the limits of the knowledge in their possession.

It is evident, therefore, that a student of religion has first to pass in review these great religions, and thus to ascertain what answers

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the human race has hitherto contrived to give to the problem before us. Thus only shall we be enabled to perceive how much or how little has already been done, and what remains to be accomplished.

But before we proceed to the observation and examination of the way in which this problem has been dealt with, it will be convenient to consider what is the chief difficulty attending its solution.

That difficulty is found of course in the origin and existence of evil.

If we assume the Creator and Upholder of all things to be a good and beneficent being, we have to explain the evil, the misery, pain and unhappiness that unquestionably exist and have existed throughout every period of history. If, on the contrary, He were assumed to be evil, cruel, and vindictive, we should only cover part of the ground and should be confronted with the difficulty of accounting for the nobleness, large-heartedness, and loving-kindness which are facts within our common knowledge equally with the darker and more repulsive features.

CHAPTER II

THE RELIGIONS OF THE PAST

THE past is that period of time which is separated by the present from the future.

The Religions of the Past comprise, therefore, all religions that have ever existed.

Now, religions very naturally share the characteristics and fortunes of the peoples that beget them. The great majority have but a comparatively brief existence and pass into complete oblivion. A few only of the races of mankind attain to a conspicuous position, and exert a widely extended and more enduring dominion. And among religions the greater part are but mere fetichism or simple idolatry, and only a few have, underlying the superstitions and the forms and ceremonies of the Priesthood, some theory or fundamental principle of theological philosophy.

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Nature worship and Ancestor worship appear to have been the two primal sources whence the stream of Deities proceeded. But few races attained to any philosophical conception of a Supreme First Cause, the originator and upholder of all things. Even nations which reached a high standard of mental culture and proficiency in the arts often remained to the end backward in religion: the worshippers of gods many and lords many.

Among the greatest of the ancient peoples of the East, we find two only rising to any philosophical conception of a primal Source and Controller of all things.

From the polytheism and crudities of original Brahminism there was finally evolved by the thinkers of India the conception of the Deity which we style Pantheistic. The Universe they believed to be the visible manifestation of the Deity, that primary essence or force which has evolved and which pervades and sustains all things. From this theory of the identity of God and the Universe it necessarily follows that, since whatever exists is but an embodiment or manifestation of the Divinity, there-



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fore everything, whether good or bad, must be worthy and entitled to be worshipped.

Buddhism, which is a reformed and, as its professors believe, an improved form of Brahminism, is also Pantheistic. It conceives the Deity to be a supreme and inscrutable essence. And even as the ocean is the source from which the moisture of the atmosphere is derived, and the bourne to which it inevitably returns, so is the Divine Essence the source from which all inferior existences spring, and the mighty and ever-open bosom which they must needs re-enter.

But there was one very obvious difficulty in accepting this Pantheistic theory of the Divine, whether Brahminical or Buddhist. Even the simplest and least critical intelligence might well find it hard to believe that the soul of the vicious or criminal had proceeded immediately from the Divine Essence, and would at Death straightway return to it. This difficulty was, however, met and obviated by the adoption of the hypothesis of the transmigration of souls. Every soul, though primarily proceeding from the Divine Essence,

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had to pass through an indefinite series of changes and transmigrations before it should be purified and fitted to be re-absorbed into its original source.

To the Buddhist the Divine Essence represents the standard of normal existence, and all other existences are but aberrations. Therefore, the abnormal must revert once more to the standard of the normal, before the long cycle of change can cease and the separate existence be ended. And the wisdom of the wise and the enlightened consisted in hastening this result so much to be desired, and abbreviating the series of grievous and painful transformations which should lead to it.

The other religion of the ancient Eastern world which formulated a philosophical theory of the primal originating and controlling forces of the Universe was the Mazdaism of ancient Persia. To thinkers of that religion, the contemplation of the Universe suggested an altogether different theory of the Divine. They observed both in Nature and in Man a ceaseless conflict of contending and apparently equal forces. Light and darkness, cold and

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heat, day and night, summer and winter, strive for the mastery, and each is alternately the victor and the vanquished. And in like manner in the spiritual or ethical domain, joy and sorrow, love and hate, good and evil, wage a war which is endless and indecisive. And from these observations they drew the conclusion that the originating supernatural forces are twofold, one good and the other evil, personified in God and Devil. And these two powers being equal in might, and diametrically the opposites of each other, are victorious and suffer defeat alternately through endless eons of vicissitude and change.

This early conception of the equality of the rival powers was subsequently modified in accordance with the natural desire of the human mind to escape from the indefinite and to anticipate the final triumph of light and happiness over darkness and misery. And, in order to bring the apparently unending strife to a satisfactory conclusion, it was assumed that the good power was really the superior and the evil the inferior : the one the Master and the other the slave. But this modification of the original

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theory involved a logical difficulty of the gravest nature. If the evil power be really not the equal but the servant of the good power, unquestionably the good power must be responsible for the evil wrought by the rival that by hypothesis he could, but does not, restrain. But so little control has logic over the Eastern intellect and imagination that we find this fatal and illogical hypothesis enshrined in all the so-called monotheistic religions.

The theory concerning the duality of the supernatural powers is, of course, no peculiar possession of the Persian race. Man, confronted everywhere by the same phenomena, naturally tends everywhere to arrive at the same conclusions. In the mythology of Egypt, for instance, the relative positions and diverse nature of Osiris and Seth do not differ greatly from those of Ormuzd and Ahriman. It is even probable that originally their equality was assumed, although later Osiris, the good power, was held to be the greater and therefore ultimately destined to defeat and vanquish the evil and malevolent Seth. This was a change of opinion due to, and to be expected from, the

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natural wishes and aspirations of humanity, as we have already observed in the case of the Persians.

Much, however, of the mythology of ancient peoples is plainly due to the observations of men ignorant of the actual magnitude and position of the natural objects surrounding them. What should lead primitive man to guess that the morning sun rising in the Eastern horizon was the same orb which had sunk on the previous day into the Western sea? Was it not much more easy to suppose that the rising sun was a new and younger member of the same family, and that the younger Horus, the son or brother of the elder one, had come to continue the work of his predecessor? These erroneous deductions from the observed phenomena of Nature swarm in every mythology, but they need not detain us, who are seeking only to ascertain the more general and philosophical notions of the Creator evolved by later thinkers of the great religions of humanity.

Thus we have seen that the contemplation of the Indian sages led them to Pantheism, the

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observations and reflections of ancient Persians to the conception of two equal, but opposite and conflicting, powers or principles.

But from the vast and intricate sacerdotal system of ancient Egypt, with its innumerable Deities, no single and widely accepted cosmogony emerged. Many particulars, such as the legend and worship of Osiris, the slain and risen justifier; the habit of the Priesthood to formulate as religious dogmas or Articles of Belief, statements or definitions at once definite and incomprehensible, such as: "The Son proceeds from the Father, and the Father proceeds from his Son"; and their fondness for grouping their chief gods into triads or trinities, cannot fail to be of interest to Christians. Nevertheless, the ancient religions of Egypt, whether of Ra or of Osiris, so full an account of which has been preserved for us, yielded no philosophical theory of the nature of the Deity and the creation of the Universe, worthy of being placed side by side with the philosophical theories of the Indian and the Persian.

With regard to other ancient religions, such as those of Babylonia and Assyria, a similar

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remark may be made. Gods jostled gods ; some were indeed regarded as greater than the others, but no single monotheistic theory of the Universe dawned there in the mind of man. It is true that in these religions may be discovered instances of Henotheism, or the ascribing to one of the gods the position and attributes of the one god ; but these instances are exceptional and isolated, due to individual feeling and caprice, and afford no foundation for the organised and enduring superstructure of a philosophical religious system.

There is one great ancient religion to which we have not yet alluded. What of Confucianism, the religion of hundreds of millions of Chinese? It is a religion apart. The Indian religions embody one theory of the Divine ; the Persian another theory ; but the religion of Confucius embodies no theory of the Divine, it concerns itself only with the human. Man is the proper study of man ; it treats not of the nature of God, but of the duties of man. It is, properly speaking, not a religion, but an ethical system of negative morality. And if

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we would ascertain how far a system of negative morality suffices to meet the needs of humanity, we cannot do better than study the results of twenty-five centuries of Confucianism.

We have next to consider the religions with which we of the Western world in modern times are chiefly interested : the two Semitic religions, Judaism and Christianity, which are essentially one religion ; and the Arabian faith of Islam. These religions are held by their votaries to be revealed religions—due, that is, not to the normal operations of human intelligence, but to supernatural and exceptional communication on the part of the Deity with the mind of man. Yet in their fundamental ideas and broad outlines they exhibit no signs of novelty. Nominally monotheistic, they are, while perhaps not wholly free from phrases and ideas savouring of Pantheism, mainly dominated by the dualistic theory of the later and illogical Mazdaism.

In the Semitic religions may be observed, as might be expected, a very natural evolution of the idea of God from the primitive Javeh, the

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tribal God of the Hebrews, to the conception of the Universal Father of mankind of later days; but in spite of this change of view, the fundamental idea concerning the supernatural, that of a dualistic conflict between good and evil, or God and Devil, has not been abandoned nor altered. Among the Pauline Christians who outgrew and displaced the elder sect of the Nazarenes, the conception of the Good Spirit as a Triad or Trinity was evolved. But this added complexity in the nature of the Good Spirit did not alter or diminish the belief in a Devil or Evil Spirit. The Christian equivalent of Osiris the vindicator still confronted the Christian equivalent of Seth the destroyer. Neither the Semitic nor Arabian religions throw any new light on the ancient view of Mazdaism concerning the Creator of the Universe.

Now we have seen that the first point to be noted concerning these great religions of the past is that they supply two answers only to that primary question of religion as to the nature of the Deity.

The second point to be noted about them is

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that, however much they may in detail differ from one another, they all have a common origin. They all emanate from the Eastern intellect; they all have the same strongly marked, distinctive features bearing unmistakably the impress of ideas which are purely and absolutely Eastern.

The common characteristic of all Eastern communities is an Absolutist form of government. The ruler is all-powerful and above criticism; his will is law. And, unhappily, the experience of countless generations who have lived under despotic rule indelibly impressed on the minds of men the conviction that the decrees of the ruler were not only irresistible, but capricious, and that therefore man must not expect or attempt to comprehend them, but must simply learn to obey. These being the conditions under which society has existed in the East from immemorial antiquity, one might readily conjecture that the idea of a Deity conceived by such races must be expected to reproduce in an exaggerated form the idea they had naturally come to entertain of their earthly ruler. And when we examine the religions of

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the past we find that such is precisely the idea of the Supreme Being which they present to us. He is despotic. His actions are uncertain and capricious. His motives are inscrutable, and the duty of man towards his Maker, like the duty of the subject to his sovereign, is to render a slavish and unquestioning obedience. No man is to dare to ask Him, that is, either the earthly or the heavenly ruler: What doest thou? Criticism had not yet been born, and doubt was impious.

Thus it came to pass that on the assumption that the heavenly is like unto the earthly ruler, each race built, according to the state of its knowledge and the peculiarities of its own idiosyncrasies, the diversified and ornate fabric of its religious faith. In every system the Creator must be fawned upon, lauded with unmeasured and unstinted praise, cajoled and bribed if possible in order to win his favour; and the creature must abase himself with the most abject and slavish humbleness and prostration in order if possible to propitiate the mysterious and arbitrary ruler and avert his wrath. Supplications and sacrifices must con-

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tinually be presented before the throne of majesty, and in case the daily offering of prayer, praise, and sacrifice by the ordinary worker should be deemed insufficient, a class set apart for the special performance of these duties must be provided to represent, and act in the interest of, the whole people.

These are the striking, strongly marked, and distinctive features of every one of the great religious systems.

Such are the Religions of the Past. They stand rooted in Eastern ideas, they picture God as a despot, and man as a slave, and every detail of the systems has been evolved by the deductive method of reasoning from those primary conceptions.

Thus we find that the commanding influence of Eastern ideas may be observed, not only in the cosmogony, but in the practical injunctions regarding human attitude and conduct.

Volumes might be written in proof of that statement. In this short treatise we will consider three points only. Man is enjoined to be contented with his lot; resigned to the heavenly will; and freely to give alms. Con-

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tentment, resignation, and lavish and indiscriminate almsgiving have been, and are throughout the whole Eastern world, recognised as virtues. But can we accept them as virtues in the light of Western experience and modern thought? To what does contentment lead but to apathy and stagnation? As doubt provokes enquiry and leads to knowledge, so a noble discontent with things as they are is the condition precedent to energetic striving after improvement, and the root and stem of all human progress. But resignation, Islam, that surely is to be commended? Resignation, but to what? To the Will of God. But what is the Will of God? Some have supposed that since disease abounds, such is the Will of God, and we must not oppose it. The lightning strikes the structure, the waves erode the shore, Heaven has so ordained it, and shall we not submit with resignation? No, against all these things we fight and hold that we do right. A strenuous endeavour with all our powers to withstand or ward off the dangers that threaten us, seems to us wiser and better than the fatalistic resignation of the Eastern. And

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lastly, almsgiving. It is recognised as a commendable act in every Eastern country. And in no religion, probably, is it so plainly and unreservedly enjoined as in Christianity. "Give unto everyone that asketh." That is the command; could any injunction be simpler or more explicit? But how many obey the injunction? How long could anyone who did obey it remain in a position to fulfil it? And, even if it were possible, is it not by this time a matter of common knowledge and common agreement that indiscriminate almsgiving is pernicious — blameworthy, and not praiseworthy?

Thus do we traverse the conclusions and reject the teachings of Eastern sages.



CHAPTER III

HAVE ANY OF THE RELIGIONS OF THE PAST
SUCCEEDED IN SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF
RELIGION ?

WE have seen that all the great religions of the world are divisible into two groups : the one the Pantheistic, and the other the so-called Monotheistic. And we have noted that the fundamental idea of the latter group is really dualistic. There is assumed to be a great Good Spirit, the author and upholder of all that is good, and there is also a great Evil Spirit, of vast, but ill-defined proportions and power, who is the contriver and defender of all that is evil, and who is engaged in constant opposition to and warfare with the Good Spirit, apparently obtaining no slight measure of success.

Let us now consider how far either of these

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theories of the Deity is capable of meeting and affording a solution of that great problem of religion—presented to us by the co-existence and activity of the forces of good and evil, which observation presents to our view throughout the world.

The identification by Pantheism of the Creator with creation appears to be a wholly unjustifiable assumption. A savage observing for the first time a going watch might infer either (1) that the watch had always existed, and was actuated by some inherent force compelling it to execute certain operations continuously; or (2) that it was the creation of some being whose spirit inhabited and informed it, and maintained that regularity of movement which characterises it. These would be natural guesses, but both would be erroneous. In like manner the Brahminical hypothesis that the Universe is the manifestation and embodiment of the Deity is merely hypothetical, and affords no acceptable solution of the problem of Religion.

And with regard to the conception of the Deity as the Author of both good and evil, and

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as being in either case equally deserving of worship, it will be useful at this point to observe how completely the peculiar idiosyncrasies, and the environment of the enquirers, control the result of their religious speculations.

And it is all the more necessary that we should bear this in mind, seeing that hitherto every great religion has proceeded from Oriental peoples.

We see in the case of races, no less than in the case of individuals, that either imagination or reason, either feeling or logic, must be the controlling power. And whether among individuals or races, the period when imagination and the feelings bear sway precedes that of the domination of the logical intelligence.

Among Eastern peoples the imagination is but little hampered by the demands of strict accuracy of observation or the limitations and soberness of logical processes.

Moreover, among Eastern nations autocratic rule was in ancient times accepted as a matter of course, and no criticism or blame was aroused by any act of the ruler, no matter how capricious, unjust, or cruel it might be.

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But the chief points of difference between the Eastern and Western intellect are these :

(1) The Eastern refers all things to caprice and haphazard ; the Western believes all things to be ordered in accordance with fixed principles and invariable laws. The Eastern believes the Creator and Ruler of all things to be a despot whose ways are inscrutable and who needs to be propitiated. The Western, in so far as he can free himself from these Eastern superstitions, must needs picture the Creator as the author of that majestic and unimpeded reign of law which his own studies have disclosed to him as extending throughout the whole visible Universe. (2) The Eastern, who was ready and accustomed to submit himself to the most unjust and cruel treatment from his sovereign without a murmur, was apt to credit the Deity with pronouncing judgment and inflicting punishment with an equal disregard to the dictates of equity or any reasonable proportion between the crime and the chastisement inflicted. The Western finds it difficult to realise the abasement of spirit with which the Eastern was wont tamely to submit to the

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most tyrannical acts and decisions on the part of his ruler.

At any rate the knowledge and remembrance of the extent to which the subservience of Eastern peoples to the cruellest whims of their rulers will carry them serves to make comprehensible to us how it comes to pass that millions of Orientals in all ages have accepted a philosophy of religion which proclaims that God is the author of all things good and evil, and hence that in all things good and evil His might and presence is to be recognised and worshipped.

If Brahminism or ordinary Pantheism be imaginative, Oriental, and illogical, what shall we say of the variant termed Buddhism? In this faith all created and visible things are regarded as false and illusive, life as a heavy curse, and the object of all ambition is the cessation of being : annihilation or what so far as we are concerned would be practically the same thing, the blotting out of all separate personal existence and some mysterious and incomprehensible re-absorption into the vague and unsubstantial entity termed the Divine Essence.

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Why this incomprehensible Divine Essence should have evolved, as we must suppose that it did, this illusive Universe and these suffering creatures is beyond surmise. Yet here again millions have embraced and held the faith, all incomprehensible as it is.

Leaving these two early religions, we have next to consider Confucianism. But this is, properly viewed, a truncated and incomplete religion. Religion is concerned with God and Man, with the rule and benevolence or otherwise of the one, and the condition and conduct of the other. But Confucianism deals with the latter half only of the subject. Confucius says, in effect, that it is useless and hopeless to seek to know God : know yourself, do your duty to one another. In this case, therefore, not only is no attempt made to solve the problem of religion, but the problem is pronounced to be unsolvable.

We have next to consider the ancient and original theory of Mazdaism, that the world is dominated by two hostile forces of equal power : the one the Source and Upholder of good, and the other the Source and Upholder of evil.

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At first sight this hypothesis seems to cover the whole ground and to offer the most probable solution of the problem which has ever been advanced by the human intellect. Unfortunately, it will not bear examination. In the first place, it is an hypothesis which was evolved by a primitive, unscientific, and erroneous perception of the phenomena of Nature. To the ancient observer everything seemed to be pervaded by a hostile dualism. Light strove with darkness, heat with cold, and so forth. And each of these was a separate and characteristic entity, so unlike the other as to be in constant conflict with it. And this view endured for many ages and survived, in part at least, until very recent times. It is found in the Phlogiston theory of heat held and taught by Priestley. But in the light of our present knowledge this dualistic theory perishes. We see unity where they of old saw dualism. Heat and cold are relative terms and denote only different phases or stages in an identical condition of matter: even absolute cold and absolute heat, if they could be arrived at, would be simply the opposite ends of a single scale.

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The same may be said of light and darkness. They are not, as was formerly supposed, two separate, different, and opposing entities, but simply two varying degrees of a particular condition of matter. Hence we find that the very observations of physical phenomena which suggested the dualistic theory, and upon which that theory was founded, were vitiated by error, by natural but none the less fatal misapprehension of the nature of the phenomena observed. And once this is perceived it will be the less surprising to find that the dualistic theory of the Universe fails to harmonise with the ethical, no less than with the physical conditions of existence.

It is doubtless more difficult to speak positively when the region of physics is left for the region of ethics. Yet I think it will be unanimously admitted that man has advanced morally and has attained to a higher standard than that obtaining among his remote ancestors. The civilised man of to-day appears less debased, less cruel, as he is more intelligent and enlightened than the primitive savage. Man's idea of goodness especially has greatly

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advanced, and the spirit of chivalry, of kindness, forbearance, and consideration for others stands in great contrast, not simply with original barbarism, but even with the cramped and harsh characteristics of, say, the spirit of Judaism. The truth is that a constant evolutionary change has been taking place in man's ethical condition ; and as the centuries pass the standard alters, and ever in the direction of goodness, kindness, and self-restraint.

But this change which over long periods may be observed in the moral atmosphere, is evidently incompatible with the ancient hypothesis of the equality of the dual powers of Good and Evil. Thus the theory which was, as we have seen, based upon misconceptions concerning physical phenomena, is found on examination not to be in accord with ascertainable movements in the region of ethics.

We have to conclude, therefore, that the ancient faith of Mazdaism fails to furnish us with any trustworthy solution of the problem of Religion.

With regard to the later phase of Mazdaism, in which the Good Power is the greater and

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the stronger, we have already noted its logical impotence and its failure to afford us the light we are seeking.

We pass to the consideration of the three other great religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islamism. There is, they say, one great God who is good, loving, and beneficent; and there is besides a great dark power of wickedness, evil, and cruelty, which has warred, and still strives against Him.

This explanation is, of course, identical with that of the later phase of Mazdaism, and therefore open to the same objection. The explanation offered, though it may have satisfied the uncritical spirit of imaginative and ancient races, fails more and more to satisfy the intellect of modern thinkers who have become accustomed to probe and examine all subjects freely and fearlessly. They see that what is morally wrong in the individual must be wrong in an even greater degree in the case of an absolute and all-powerful Ruler. They may not themselves see an answer at present to the enigma of life and religion, but they reject an answer that explains nothing, and is in itself



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contradictory. They perceive that if the Creator be omnipotent, He must be no less responsible for evil, on the hypothesis of the Devil, than He would be without that hypothesis. If He be omnipotent, nothing, no creature, no alien power can exist without His consent and permission. In an argument touching human beings, it would be without hesitation admitted that he who allows a thing to be done, which he can easily and at will prevent, must be held responsible for the doing of it. This is only the old legal maxim concerning employers: "Qui fecit per alium fecit per se." And if that maxim holds good in the case of those who are far from being omnipotent, how should it fail to hold good in the case of Him who is omnipotent? And let no man judge that this plain speaking is lacking in respect to Him of whom we are speaking. Even a great and wise ruler among men loves plain speaking rather than sycophancy; how much more then must He who is greater than the greatest and wiser than the wisest. Not until we abandon for ever the grovelling attitude of the Eastern shall we be able to look up with hope of

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enlightenment to the great Author of truth and life.

From our brief review of the great Religions of the World, we discover that only two answers have been given to the great problem of Religion.

Pantheism points to God as the immediate source and originator of all things, both good and evil, the great being by whom and in whom are all things, from whom all things emanate, to whom all things return, and bids us recognise in all things the visible and manifold manifestations of the Deity.

Ancient Mazdaism tells us of two equal and eternally warring powers, and later Mazdaism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islamism, of two powers, a good power and an evil, whereof the former is the mightier, and shall ultimately prevail.

With any other questions relating to these religions we are not here concerned; this only is certain, that none affords any comprehensible solution of the great problem.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION AND ETHICS

RELIGION has to do with the relations between God and Man ; Ethics with the relations, which should obtain between Man and Man. In the domain of Religion, scarcely anything has yet been done, almost everything remaining to be accomplished ; but in the domain of Ethics, not only has substantial progress been made, but the theory underlying and explaining the practice of morality may be held to be already perfected.

In Ethics we may observe two stages—the first negative, the second positive, the former doubtless long preceding the latter.

From the earliest times, when men began to live together in communities, a dogmatic, negative system of Ethics must have in some measure existed. The need for it would be

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not so much personal as social. The tribe could hardly hold together unless its members were forbidden to rob or murder each other. But in the beginning those moral prohibitions were understood to apply only to the members of the community. The alien was an enemy; to attack him and if possible to slay him and take his goods was a matter of course, and no moral code protected him. This first or negative stage of Ethics long endured.

In the Hebrew religion, for example, the negative stage only had been reached, and in the Decalogue we find the injunctions, "Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt do no murder," the only positive command being that bidding man to honour his father and mother.

Such, too, was the condition of Ethics in China, when Confucius in a single sentence illuminated, explained, and extended all systems of negative morality. His maxim was: "Do not to others what you would not wish others to do to you." Here one great rule embraces and supersedes all particular and detailed prohibitions. And more than that, the rule of

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morality is made personal and not social, and its scope is at once extended from the tribe or nation to the race at large. Each man is enjoined to refrain from injuring or annoying his fellow-man, not because he is a fellow-tribesman, or a fellow-countryman, but because he is a fellow-man, and liable like oneself to resent the injury and to feel the suffering.

But with Christianity we reach another and much higher stage of Ethics. The injunction becomes not negative, but positive. Confucius says: "Do not do to others what you would not wish others to do to you." But Christ said: "Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." It is not enough that you should refrain from injuring others—you must actively aid them. And the motive of this active beneficence is to be love. You are to love your neighbour as yourself. And it is only as you are prompted by this sincere and genuine love of others, that your conduct towards them and your kindly actions are of any value.

Here we have Ethics raised to a burning, purifying passion, and it is difficult to suppose

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that any higher standard of virtue can be discovered or placed before us.

But if this second stage of Ethics culminated in the teaching of Christ, it did not begin there; it had been in existence and slowly growing, maturing, and becoming diffused throughout many preceding ages. In Egypt we have records, in the trials of the dead, of claims advanced on behalf of the Soul whose merits and demerits were being placed in the balance, not only that on earth he had refrained from injuring his fellows, but that he had been beneficent and merciful and had actively aided those about him.

Thus Christian Ethics are seen to be the ultimate outcome of the growth of ages, for nothing in this world is fashioned but by degrees.

But Christ furnished us not only with the practical rule of conduct: "Do to others what you would that others should do to you"; but with the active, vitalising principle underlying and supporting all morality, namely: "Love thy neighbour as thyself."

It is true that this ethical rule was accom-

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panied and preceded by a like religious rule or injunction, namely : "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart and strength."

But the former injunction appears to me to be impracticable. How shall we love that of which we know nothing? Reason assures us that there is a God, but further than that we have not got at present. The presentment of God afforded by the Religions of the Past is altogether conflicting and incongruous. Moreover, it is wholly at variance with the condition of the Universe in which we find ourselves and the plain and incontestable factors of human existence.

Nothing is more striking and impressive in the evidence afforded by Geology, Biology, or Astronomy, than the stability, the continuity, the slow but unvarying progress, throughout enormous periods of time, of the gradual building up and evolution of all things. We can find no trace of the action of caprice, of passion, or of interference with that unbroken chain of Cause and Effect which dominates all things, and which is seen to extend through infinite space and immeasurable periods.

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To the study of these Chronicles of the Universe, neither prepared nor tampered with by human hands, to the study of the noble and pitiful aspects of human life and human destiny, Religion must turn if aught is to be discovered respecting the nature and proceedings of Him who is the author of the wondrous whole.

When that has been done, and some positive conclusion is arrived at, it would not be surprising to find that the religious, no less than the ethical, injunction of Christ may be found worthy of acceptance. But before we can attain to that knowledge, we must entirely clear out of our minds the grotesque misrepresentation of the Deity contained in the ancient writings ; and meanwhile, and until that stage of religious knowledge be attained, we must content ourselves with conforming to the ethical precept to love the neighbour whom we do see, as a necessary preliminary step to learning to love the Creator whom we have not seen.



Part II

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CHAPTER I

ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM NEEDED—THE METHOD OF REASONING TO BE EMPLOYED

WE have seen in the first part of this little book that two solutions of the problem of religion have been propounded, and furthermore that while each solution has found wide and long acceptance, yet when examined neither is satisfactory to the critical intelligence.

And here we must remark that hitherto one method only of investigation has been pursued in this branch of human enquiry. Men have retired within themselves, have revolved the question in the light of their own minds and the warmth of their own affections, and have sought and have supposed that they have received revelation from on high.

Any other mode of prosecuting the enquiry

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would be, we are told, sacrilegious. Such is the dictum to which we have hitherto bowed—ought we still to bow to it?

This at least is certain: that in no other department of research does this hold true.

Man has been placed in this world naked and ignorant. Whatever advance he has achieved from that state has been won by the strenuous exercise of the faculties which he possesses. Revelation has not aided him in his slow and difficult ascent of the path of knowledge. Why that should have been so ordered we know not, but we know that it has been thus with us and not otherwise.

It is assumed, however, that religion is a solitary exception to this general rule. It is assumed that in this instance we can expect to learn nothing except by revelation. If that assumption be correct, is it not strange that in the course of so many centuries so little has been accomplished, and that revelation, even when vouchsafed, utters a different message in every country and every age; and that, after thousands of years, it leaves us as ignorant on this subject as were our remotest ancestors?

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Is it not at least conceivable that this assumption on which we have hitherto proceeded is after all an erroneous one, and that man must surmount this difficulty, as he has surmounted so many lesser ones, by the exercise of his own faculties, and not by aid given supplementary to them?

For ages past we have been engaged in studying writings which we have been led to regard as sacred.

But now we free men of the West must turn from ancient manuscripts containing the imaginings and unverified records of the slavish East and study diligently those two mighty volumes written by no human hand that lie open before us: the great book of Nature and the great book of human nature.

Who can look on the first page of the great book of Nature, where astronomy discourses of the immeasurable distances and the inconceivable periods of time involved in a study of the Universe, without experiencing a feeling of awe at the thought of Him who planned and who controls by a single law all the complex, ordered, and infinite variety of the amazing whole?

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The puny tribal god of the ancients assumes at that moment a position very similar to the exploded science which looked upon this inconsiderable globe as the centre of the universe, and in all the vast and endless procession of heavenly bodies saw the mere lights hung in the vault of heaven to light the world. But not only in the scale and measure of His operations must our idea of the Maker be revised; it is necessary also that we entertain a juster notion of His moral government.

The Oriental habit of mind, and especially its subserviency and toleration of wrong-doing on the part of the Ruler, has led to most lamentable and prejudicial results when the Oriental mind has occupied itself with the subject of religion. Men with this view of the immunity of the Ruler from all criticism have not refrained from attributing to the Creator acts and conduct which we should, without hesitation, denounce as foolish and immoral if attributed to a fellow-man.

In truth the idea of the Creator which has been presented to the mind of man by the great Religions of the Past is, we have reason

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to suspect, so erroneous, so distorted, so unworthy, that it approaches the sublime truth but little nearer than does the stone or wooden image of the idolater. We have no reason to love, no reason even to respect, that God who is represented as cursing the creatures He has made and capriciously favouring a few and condemning the majority to the most terrible and disproportionate punishment. We may fear Him, as many a cruel and capricious despot has been feared, and apparently that was the Hebrew view, for they said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom."

But such a Being is, we may be sure, but a monstrous caricature of the Creator of All Things. The notion that anything which may appear strange and incomprehensible to man is to be set down to the wrath of God is a delusion, very natural in the ancients, and very inexcusable in ourselves. They looked upon a thunderstorm or an eclipse as portending an angry Deity. We know that all things are parts of a great scheme where all is orderly and the conditions of which are constant, and where nothing resembling the

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human passions of anger or partiality can be discovered.

If we could attain to any conception of the Author of the sublime, harmonious, the marvellous and infinitely varied adaptation of all things, both great and small, in the physical Universe, we feel that we could not fail to respect and venerate Him. And as to love? If we turn our gaze from the realm of physics to the lives of men, every noble aspiration, every instance of great-hearted sympathy for others, every case of self-sacrifice, every act of generous and unstinted aid, due not to policy but to affection, assures us that the celestial origin of the best and highest ethical developments of man's nature must, if we could but know and understand Him, be eminently worthy of our love.

Let us therefore seek to discover Him, not by guesswork, or the exercise of the imagination, but by patient and diligent study of what He has done and what He is doing.

From the conceptions of the Deity, formulated by the Religions of the Past, we must turn to the prosecution of a fresh enquiry. And in our

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study of Religion henceforth, we must avail ourselves of the modern or inductive method of reasoning. And what is the essential feature of that scientific process for the ascertainment of Truth? The essential feature of inductive reasoning is that the data—the facts, observations, or statistics—on which the reasoning is based, should be not only trustworthy, but adequate. Reasoning based on an inadequate foundation will always be liable to reach an erroneous conclusion. And it is only when the area of observation is sufficiently wide that the conclusion reached may be accepted with confidence. But since a general rule is for many made clearer by means of a concrete example, we will suppose that a foreigner should arrive in a country during the summer and stay four days, and that out of the four, three were wet. If he reason on the limited data at his disposal, he will conclude that the climate of the country is a wet one. But the weather during the four days may have been exceptional, and should the traveller stay not four days but four months, or four years, he would clearly be able to arrive at a much more



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trustworthy conclusion. All this may appear very obvious, but actually many results of sound reasoning from perfectly trustworthy data are altogether vitiated by the neglect to secure a sufficiently wide and adequate foundation.

In the case of Religion, we must base our enquiries on the accumulated observations, researches, and experience of mankind. We must work upwards from the known to the unknown. We must assume nothing that is not self-evident, or that we cannot prove. Even so, we must expect to make but slow progress; but every step in advance that we can secure will be sure and enduring. And thus in the case of Religion in the Future, as already in the domain of science generally, it will be an advance slow but certain of the whole of mankind, and not of any single community.

And what is the first step to be taken in prosecuting this enquiry? We must first consider whether any Religion is possible. And as Religion has to do with the relations between God and man, it is obviously necessary

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in the first place to decide the question whether there be any God. The idea of God is almost universal among the races of mankind, but that cannot be held of itself to prove His existence.

In the next chapter we will therefore discuss the existence of God as being the necessary foundation of Religion.

CHAPTER II

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

SINCE it is always desirable at the outset to define accurately the meaning of any terms of doubtful significance, we will define the word "God" as meaning for us "the Creator and Upholder of all things."

The first question then which presents itself to the student of religion is this: Does there exist any being who has created and who upholds and controls the visible universe and those ethical elements which exist, though they are not visible?

Now, setting aside metaphysical subtleties and mystifications, it must be evident to our plain common sense, to those processes of the intellect on which we rely for the ascertainment of truth in all other matters, that either the universe is indestructible matter following an

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endless cycle of change, and actuated by an everlasting force, which, by the conservation of energy, is kept constant and undiminished, or else it was created by some POWER, BEING, or INTELLIGENCE outside and anterior to itself.

The hypothesis of perpetual existence and perpetual motion which had no beginning and can have no end need not detain us very long. It is at best an assumption, unproved and unprovable; it affords no explanation of the order and harmony characteristic of the universe nor of the origin of the great principles or conditions of matter usually termed the laws of nature. It is essentially unscientific and necessarily barren.

An endless continuity of automatic, un-intelligent mutation with no informing intelligence presiding over and illuminating the whole would be not a universe but something less than a kaleidoscope.

A kaleidoscope may present an endless series of mechanical permutations, but in the universe we observe special adaptations of matter to particular uses and conditions which speak

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eloquently of a quite other range of intelligence than that demanded by the kaleidoscope ; and even the kaleidoscope never made itself, but intelligence was needed to order and fix the conditions of its existence.

For these reasons we need not linger long over the hypothesis of an everlasting and automatic universe. One observation only need be made about it, namely : if it were true, then the human mind need trouble no further as to religion, for we being by hypothesis but parts of an inevitable and endless series of transformations, no religion in any practical sense of the word would be possible to us.

It is in truth chiefly the harmony of the diverse and complex constituents and motions of the heavenly bodies that leads us to postulate an intelligent first cause.

To say that the universe came into existence and proceeded in the normal and ordinary sequence of conditions which we have ascertained that it does by some sort of automatic and inevitable process, fails altogether to explain why the operations of the huge

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automatic machine are so orderly and smooth, or the static and dynamic conditions of matter so beautifully and completely controlled by a few general laws or primal conditions, such as the laws and conditions of heat, the so-called law of gravitation, and so forth.

We know by experience that chance leads to confusion and chaos, and not to regularity, orderly sequence, and harmony, and it appears not more difficult to believe that a few pieces of metal thrown into a box and shaken up will by chance evolve a watch or a steam-engine than it is to suppose that chance has evolved from the elements of matter—these very elements themselves being also evolved by chance—the amazing spectacle presented to us by the celestial bodies, or the marvellous complexity and delicacy of adaptation of means to ends which we may observe in the study of detail on our own planet.

This argument from design is, of course, a very old one. But so is the argument which goes to prove that two sides of a triangle are greater than the third side. In the case of a logical argument, novelty can be no

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recommendation and antiquity may be no reproach. So far from that, indeed, the antiquity of a logical process, which has not been disproved, should tend the more to enforce it. For if logical strength and precision be sufficient to recommend an argument, how much more readily should that argument find acceptance that has withstood successfully the scrutiny and tests of ten thousand acute intellects.

For the thinker of to-day, therefore, it is difficult to imagine that there can be more than one answer to the question : Is there a Creator or first cause?

And although in former times men lacked the scientific precision and the comparative amplitude of our present knowledge, they have generally come to the same conclusion.

This must have been mainly due to the impossibility of the human brain conceiving any organised body or system springing from nothing. We feel instinctively, that wherever we meet with a cohesion of atoms or particles which are not confused and chaotic, but organised, and following a normal and regular

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procession of change, there effect demands a cause.

And this instinctive feeling is fully confirmed by the whole course of scientific enquiry. Everywhere, from the smallest and apparently least important details to the vastest and most general of the laws or conditions of matter, cause and effect are seen in ceaseless operation. If then, after tracing this invariable rule backwards or upwards from small to great, we should assume that when our senses fail us, and the further prosecution of the enquiry is beyond our present powers, the rule no longer holds good, the assumption would be altogether illogical.

No! As for every effect which we can trace there is a cause, even so we may rest assured that for the great fundamental and dynamic processes of the universe there is also a first cause, though we may fail to perceive or discover it.

In this way we arrive at a firm conviction of the existence of a first cause or Creator of all things, founded on a process of ordinary logical reasoning and essentially different from

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the pious opinion, supposed to be incapable of proof, resting on assumption and liable to doubt and fluctuation, which characterises the unreasoning faith or belief without proof of the ancient religions.

If when we pick up a chipped flint it is permissible to argue from its shape and make that chance never fashioned it, but that it was the work of an intelligent being who wrought it for a specific and definite purpose, much more is it permissible and even absolutely and imperatively necessary for us to believe that both the vast and the minute bodies, beings and phenomena we see around us, owe their existence not to chance but to design and intelligence.

We then, who have learnt to weigh the heavenly spheres, and ascertain their constituent elements, to whom the telescope reveals the infinite distances and the stately order of the heavens, the microscope the marvellous beauty and perfection of even the smallest and most insignificant things around us, who behold all Nature controlled and guided by a single, simple law or condition of

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matter—we indeed must needs feel, that such amazing variety, combined with such exquisite harmony and marvellous adaptation of means to ends, cannot be the result of chance, but proclaims in accents not to be misunderstood the existence of a Creative Force of unimaginable and incomprehensible power and wisdom.

But it will be said, What of all this? Men have already arrived by this very argument at the self-same conclusion. Where is the novelty?

There is no novelty in either the method or the result attained. Nevertheless, for us it is of the utmost importance. Because when we assert that reason is the one sure foundation of religion we are told that we err, that faith rules alone in that domain, and that reason is altogether unable to solve the problems of religion.

Well, we disregard that dictum, we appeal to reason, and what do we find? Is reason able to do nothing for us? On the contrary, the very first problem presented to us is solved by the usual method of reasoning from facts



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and observations to the conclusion inevitably resulting from the consideration and examination of them.

And henceforth for us the truth that there is and must be an intelligent Creator and Upholder of all things is a matter of knowledge and not of dogma.

By the aid of reason we have been enabled to take the first step in religious knowledge. It is true that it is but the first step, but it serves to prove the capacity of reason to deal with the subject, and encourages us to expect a like success when we proceed to investigate the many other difficult problems that await us.

It may be useful to pause here and consider what led men to abandon dogma and resort to reason, when dealing with the question of the existence of God. It is due to the attacks of Atheists. Certain men, becoming convinced of the inadequacy of Scripture and dogma as the foundation of truth, jumped rashly to the conclusion that the whole fabric of religion was rotten to its very foundation, and asserted that there was no God. Their error had to be

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combated; they repudiated the authority of Scripture and dogma, and the faithful resorted to reason, thus unwittingly entering on that new path which will, I doubt not, lead us to such great results if we will but deliberately adopt it and intelligently pursue it.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF GOD

WHEN by logical inference from the ascertained structure and conditions of the Universe we have become convinced that there needs must be an intelligent Maker and Controller of all things, the next step to be taken seems obviously that of considering what may be the nature of that august Being of whose existence reason assures us.

But in attempting to prosecute that enquiry, we evidently enter on a task the vastest and most difficult that can engage our attention, and from any attempt to solve the problem it would be absurd to expect more than a brief glance at a few of the salient features of the subject and possibly some hints or suggestions of the course that it may be advisable to pursue.

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When commencing this enquiry, the first question to be considered would seem to be this: Is God impersonal or personal? In other words, is the Deity an impersonal, impalpable, and indefinable essence, or an intelligent Being who initiated and upholds the visible and invisible Universe?

But not only have we already considered and decided against the former hypothesis, which is that of the great Indian religions, but having grounded our belief in the existence of God on evidence of design, we have virtually already decided this question in favour of the second hypothesis.

A description of the Deity as a personal, intelligent Being is very familiar to all of us. It is to be found in the Bible or Holy Scriptures. Of these Scriptures the Catholic Church has expressly decreed that God is the author by inspiration of all the parts of all the books, which are therefore necessarily free from error; and the Bible is so highly esteemed by Protestants that it has been termed "The Word of God," and a great society has been established, supported by the contributions of the faithful

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for the purpose of circulating it in every country and in every language. That society still exists and flourishes exceedingly, as the mere diffusion of the work in the vernacular is expected to effect a miraculous improvement in the moral and spiritual condition of all peoples into whose hands it is placed.

Here then, if anywhere, we ought surely to obtain a worthy and adequate presentment of the Maker of all things.

And when we open this volume of Divine Revelation, what do we find? At once we come upon that archaic Hebrew Cosmogony which relates how all things were created in six days. How light and day and night were created before the sun; how the sun was created to rule the day and the moon to rule the night—that day and night which had already been created. How the waters which covered the earth were “gathered together” that the dry land might appear. Which records the creation of the firmament, that vast dome supporting the water stored above it, and so forth. Next we have the narrative of the Fall of Man—the story of Eden and that

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unhappy pair whose one transgression wrecked the human race.

Yet although these statements are undoubtedly included in those canonical writings which the Catholic Church pronounces infallible, and which Protestants print and circulate by millions, one cannot help feeling that in these days any serious attempt to discuss and refute them will appear to most educated people a mere killing of the slain. Who nowadays believes that the earth is the centre of the Universe, that the sun, moon, and stars were created subsequently in order to serve as lights to this terrestrial area, above which the over-arching firmament supports the water which shall descend in rain to moisten the earth's surface? Who is not aware that this sky or firmament is a mere optical illusion, and the water stored above it, like itself, absolutely non-existent? Who does not know that, when looking through a telescope, no firmament or vaulted arch of sky is found to limit or impede the vision, but only the immeasurable spaces of the boundless heavens?

Many, even among believers, are anxious to

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avert their gaze from the scientific absurdities of the Cosmogony and the monstrous ethics of the fabled Eden of the Mythology, and to ask, How can the weakness of these ancient writings affect the stability of the stately edifice of the Christian faith ?

But such a position is untenable, for the Hebrew and Christian religions are based on the primal assertion of the Fall of Man and his redemption. The story opens with an account of Paradise lost, and is supplemented by the account of Paradise regained. How then shall we give up the first and yet retain the second ? If the first Adam and the direful results of his disobedience be relegated to the region of myth and fable, how shall we continue to hold fast to the story of the second Adam, that Messiah who has come or is coming to redeem the sinner and obliterate the baleful effects of the primeval curse ?

But it will be said, we have to accept this account as part of divinely revealed truth. Is not that begging the question ? Can the Creator be held responsible for the absurdities of the Hebrew Cosmogony, which may be so

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naturally explained as due to the ignorance of man? But in that case we must bear in mind that the same incompetent authority that gave us the impossible Cosmogony gave us also the story of the Fall of Man, which in the region of Ethics is no less outrageous and incredible than are the details of Creation in the domain of Physics.

But to return to the account of Creation given us in the Hebrew Scriptures. We are, we must remember, concerned with this account of Creation mainly as affording some hints of the nature and methods of the Creator. And it is very noteworthy, therefore, to observe that after the six days' work of creation the Creator rested on the seventh day, and apparently found the rest of the seventh day so much more pleasing and satisfactory than the work of the six preceding days, that it is recorded that He blessed the seventh day and ordered man under the severest penalties to follow His example and to cease entirely from work on the seventh day. And this need of and enjoyment of repose, this preference of rest to work, is the first glimpse afforded us by

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the Bible of the nature of the God of the Hebrews.

But as we proceed with the narrative, other disclosures follow.

In the story of Eden we are told that for some undefined period Adam and Eve continued to live in a state of miraculous innocence. But at length this state of miraculous innocence was terminated. For the power of evil influencing Adam through his helpmate induced him to disregard the only prohibition that had been placed upon his freedom of action. Whereupon the offended Deity cursed both of them, cursed the world for their sakes and inflicted the direst penalties upon them, extending the curse to all, even the remotest generation of their unhappy progeny. There we have indeed the nature and procedure of the Deity revealed to us in a lurid light. He had made these creatures, and from Him they immediately derived their weakness no less than their strength. Yet that did not prevent their first lapse from obedience calling down on them appalling and far-reaching curses, such as even the most ruthless and cruel tyrant

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of the East must fail to parallel. But it will not be uninstrusive to consider the character of the punishment inflicted on them, as that may throw a considerable light both on the nature of the Deity as depicted unconsciously by the Hebrew writer and of the qualifications of the writer for the task he had undertaken.

The first punishment inflicted on the offenders was work. The second was death. Adam was to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and finally to return to the dust whence he had sprung.

This representation by the Hebrew writer of work and death as punishments inflicted on mankind is completely at variance with the conclusions forced upon us by history and science. For we observe from the records of human progress that all wealth, all advancement, every branch of knowledge and civilisation is due to labour; and not that only, but in our experience work leads to wealth as doubt leads to knowledge. And that work which is so valuable, so necessary an equipment for man is truly a blessing and not a curse. Work is the sweetener of existence, and it is the idle

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man, not the worker, who is apt to be gloomy and despondent.

But this was not the view of the Hebrew scribe. We have seen already that he represents the Deity Himself as needing and enjoying rest, and as especially blessing it. Thus it is not so surprising to find that in his account of the Fall of Man the first penalty inflicted was the obligation to labour.

How different, how much truer a view of the subject is given by our great poet in the words :

“If all the year were playing holiday,
To sport would be as tedious as to work.”

Work was the first punishment inflicted on Adam, the second was death. Now of death it has been said, “Death is as natural as life.” This is so true that not man only, but all living creatures, all vegetation, even the celestial orbs—suns and worlds—are by their very constitution limited to a necessary course of progress and dissolution. Yet in the Hebrew scriptures we are informed that death is a punishment inflicted subsequent to their original creation on the human race as the tremendous penalty of a single lapse into disobedience of

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one pair of human beings at some remote and unascertainable period. In the view of the Hebrew Chronicler it evidently required a miracle or direct interference of Divine power to account for death. In the view of a man acquainted with the results of modern enquiry, it would seem rather to require a miracle or direct and exceptional intervention of the power of the Creator to account for the absence of death, if any case of such absence could be discovered. To cease to be is involved in the very constitution of every created thing or being, and all that comes into existence comes into existence for a definite period only.

Such is the account of the Fall of Man and the consequences thereof which we find in the beginning of Genesis ; and such the nature and procedure of the God with whom man has to do. This Divine Being is represented to have formed a creature too feeble to withstand the temptation to which he was subjected, and thereupon to have cursed and condemned the wretched being and his remotest posterity to dire misfortunes and penalties.

But if the Deity were capable of paroxysms

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of fierce and ungovernable rage, of cursing mankind and the world, He was capable also of feeling repentance. That this was the belief of the Hebrew writers is unquestionable. Long after the days of Eden, when God beheld the world full of iniquity, and man wholly given over to evil, we are expressly told that He repented having created man and determined to destroy him, which He proceeded to do by the miracle of the flood.

Now this picture of furious and ungovernable rage and the subsequent repentance is very characteristic of those Eastern despots who were the prototypes of God in Eastern religions.

When the famous Caliph Haroun Al Raschid early in his reign ordered the baker to be baked to death in his own oven because he had sold short weight, the monarch is represented as having admitted to his Vizier afterwards that perhaps he had been somewhat hasty.

In like manner God is represented in the Bible narrative as having first in a moment of vehement wrath cursed man and the world He had created, and as having afterwards so far relented and repented as to have devised a

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scheme of Redemption or Atonement for those whom He had condemned.

As He had decided that the whole race should suffer for the disobedience of one man, in the same way He ordained that some at least should be pardoned on account of the obedience of another man. Human intelligence finds it equally impossible to comprehend the reasonableness or justice of either decree ; they must be accepted with unquestioning submission. But it is certainly disappointing to observe how much more effectual is the curse than the cure ; all must suffer, but few are saved ; many may be called, but few are chosen. The gate leading to safety is narrow, but the path leading to destruction is wide and easy.

The result of our study of the Scriptures comes therefore to this : that we cannot accept the Catholic dictum that God is the Author by inspiration of all the parts of all the books, nor the equivalent Protestant view that the Bible is the Word of God, the study of which will lead us to all truth.

So far from that, we find on examination that while it displays in parts aspirations after truth

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and excellence which do honour to human nature, yet it is everywhere cramped and vitiated by human ignorance and human defects, limitations, and infirmities.

Undoubtedly in Hebrew literature, as elsewhere, a certain measure of improvement and progress may be detected. There is, in the course of ages, an evolution of the idea of God, as of other ideas, but in this case the sway of the primary idea was too strong to permit of any great advance being made. There were isolated flashes of insight and appreciation in some of the prophetic books which soar far above the current notions of the Deity. But these have effected little alteration in the ancient conception of Him as a capricious and irresponsible arbitrary despot.

Moreover, it must not be overlooked that if the human mind evolved during the Bible period higher and nobler conceptions of the Divine, the human mind has advanced still further and erected a higher standard of ethical perfection, both human and Divine.

What, nowadays, should we think of a ruler who would study and promote the good

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of his people only on condition that they incessantly implored his clemency, approached him with the most abject humbleness, and belauded him with the most fulsome praise? What should we think of a father of whom it could be said that "he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"? Consider the evolution in the meaning which has been attached to that word "father." It is a very old word, come down to us from the ancient Sanscrit. But how has our conception of its meaning changed even in quite recent times! Not so very long ago the father was the austere ruler of his sons, who stood before him with humility and called him "sir." Now, with the noblest natures, the father is the beloved and indulgent comrade, generous, broad-minded, tolerant, and one who, as the son well knows, would scorn any servile homage. Milton, who was steeped in Biblical lore, could speak of his great task-master. Youths to-day may form and cherish an ideal more worthy of the one whom human imagination has pictured as the Father of all.

But this very fact of progress has furnished to some Protestant champions of the Bible a

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new argument in support of Revelation. They say objectors must understand that this Divine Revelation is a progressive Revelation. This pronouncement is supposed to give great comfort and aid to the faithful. But if the progressive Divine Revelation embraces statements which are subsequently disproved and have, therefore, to be abandoned as erroneous and misleading, what possible use can such a Revelation be? How are we to discriminate at any given moment—say, the present—between that part of the progressive Revelation which is true and that part which may hereafter be shown to be false and misleading?

Moreover, it would be interesting if the champions of progressive Revelation could or would explain in what respect this progressive Revelation differs from the natural progressive accumulation of knowledge and evolution of thought which may be observed in every branch of human enquiry.

In this very brief review of the Bible account of the Creator, only a few of the most salient features have been touched on. But it is surprising to note how many lines of thought

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starting from the most diverse observations uniformly converge to the same conclusion—the conclusion, namely, that we have not in the Bible any picture of the Deity which can bear examination or be accepted as adequate, worthy, or even possible. This, we feel, is not and cannot be a true picture of Him who created all things—so far we get and no further. Yet this negative result of the investigation is an inevitable step in the path of progress. First error must be perceived to be erroneous before the search for truth can be commenced. The ground must be cleared before it can be planted. So long as we believe that we possess in the Bible an inspired and therefore true picture of the Creator, what need can there be of further enquiry? Only when we have examined and rejected the Biblical account is the path clear for that collection of data and logical inferences therefrom which constitute the pathway to truth in all other directions. But obviously the data needed in order to be able to come to any trustworthy conclusion are spread over so wide an area—over, in fact, the entire realms both of



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Physics and of Ethics—that nothing more can be expected from anyone at present than a few hints and suggestions as to the best course for investigators to pursue. Accordingly, in the next chapter I shall attempt to offer a few such hints and suggestions.

CHAPTER IV

CONCERNING THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE INDUCTIVE METHOD IN THE ACQUIREMENT OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

IT is quite conceivable, I think, that when it is proposed to ascertain truth in the domain of Religion by the same method of inductive reasoning which is pursued in other fields of enquiry, some may object that it is not feasible to do so. How, it may be asked, can it be possible to form any theory concerning (say) the nature of God from the consideration of observations and particulars concerning the physical universe, or the nature or experience of man?

On reflection it may appear that the task is by no means so difficult as at first sight it may seem to be.

Is it possible to form a trustworthy estimate

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of the character and disposition of a man by means of a careful study of his work : of what he has done, and is doing? And, if so, why should not the same method yield satisfactory results if applied to the similar, though doubtless more difficult task, of ascertaining the nature of the Deity?

That by studying a man's work we may gain at least a partial insight into his character and disposition, there is no doubt.

Let us suppose that we come upon a model village. The houses are designed with taste, and are precisely suited to the needs of the inhabitants. They are placed in orderly fashion ; each is surrounded by its little plot of garden, and each is fitted with domestic conveniences, and no sanitary requirement has been overlooked. In the village there is a library and reading rooms, and recreation rooms also, both for sedentary games and for athletic exercises. In short, without enumerating further particulars, it is sufficient to say that the village bears in its very aspect conclusive testimony to the fact that it is no haphazard collection of human dwellings, but

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an organised whole, obviously the creation of someone who has planned it with forethought and for a definite purpose.

Now the question arises, whether it is possible from a careful consideration of the facts concerning this settlement to arrive at any conclusions regarding the character of him who designed it? Is it not plain that certain leading characteristics of him who planned the model village may be safely inferred from particulars we may observe of its constitution? Clearly the designer is a man of intelligence and foresight, and as clearly he is humane and benevolent. His intellect has discerned the wants of others, and his good feeling has prompted him to provide for them.

Thus we perceive that from observation of the material facts of the village, we are able to evolve a very definite idea as to some of the leading features of the character and disposition of him who designed it.

And this simple illustration may serve to convince us that it is quite feasible to rise from material facts to conclusions respecting intelligence and ethics.

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Hence, in the enquiry into the nature of the Deity, it would be not only feasible but comparatively easy to arrive at many interesting and pregnant conclusions, were it not for the difficulty—the difficulty referred to in the first chapter—of accounting satisfactorily for the co-existence of good and evil.

To doubt the existence of both good and evil, of pleasure and pain, of joy and sorrow, would be as futile as to doubt the actual existence of light and darkness or of heat and cold. Our great thinker and poet expressed this with his usual felicity and conciseness when he said :

“ This truth within thy mind rehearse,
That in this boundless Universe
Is boundless better, boundless worse.”

And recognising and not attempting to deny the facts as they are, the task that lies before us is that of finding a theory that will embrace them all and explain and harmonise them.

Religion at this moment is in much the same position as was astronomy before the time of Newton. Many observations have

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been made, much material has been collected, but we await the discovery by some Newton of the future of the great law or principle which underlies, illumines, and explains the apparently opposing and conflicting conditions and experiences.

When we attain in the domain of religious enquiry to some equivalent to the law of gravitation in the domain of physics, all the seemingly heterogeneous material at our disposal will fall into its natural place, and the day of light and knowledge will succeed the night of darkness and ignorance.

In the meantime, and until this Newton of the future provides us with a solution of the mystery, a key to the problem which bars our way, what, if anything, can be done?

Now, supposing a man unacquainted with the formula for ascertaining the area of curved surfaces were asked to determine the surface area of the segment of a sphere, what course should he pursue? Would it be wise of him to say, "I have not at present the means of accurately determining this question, I will therefore make a guess at it?" By no means;

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his guess would have no value. It would probably be completely wide of the mark, and could in any case inspire no confidence whatever. His best course would undoubtedly be to say, "I am here confronted with a feature of difficulty with which in my present state of knowledge I cannot grapple." The fact that the surface to be estimated is curved and not flat is the stumbling-block. Well, in order to arrive at some sort of idea of the answer, I will eliminate the point of difficulty and suppose the surface to be flat and not curved. It is true that the hypothesis I shall work on is incorrect, and therefore the result I shall arrive at will be inaccurate. But, at least, it will be definite and a trustworthy approximation to the truth. I shall have ascertained that the area is at least so great, and further I shall know that the error is one of deficiency and not of redundancy. Because the surface to be measured being really curved and not flat, the area must necessarily be somewhat greater and not less than the result obtained by working on the hypothesis of flatness.

Obviously, therefore, the result of such a

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calculation is of immeasurably greater value than any guess.

Now, when we come to consider the nature of God, we are, I think, confronted with a difficulty and complication very similar to that supposed above. As the curved surface is an additional, and in a certain state of knowledge an insuperable difficulty, such in the other enquiry is the existence of evil. And in both cases some progress is possible if we simply ignore the obstacle which at present prevents us from attaining to complete accuracy. And we may in that way attain to a definite and approximately correct result, one absolutely trustworthy as far as it goes, and needing only some further adjustment, when increase of knowledge shall enable us to bring and justify us bringing into view the point of difficulty we had neglected. The advantage to be obtained from thus proceeding with the investigation of the problem is that we substitute reasoning for guessing, and obtain a result infinitely more trustworthy than can be the result of even the happiest of guesses.

Suppose, therefore, that to get rid for the

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moment of the complication of the problem caused by the existence of evil, we assume that the ancient Persian was right in his supposition of dual forces, one good and one evil, and each equal to the other. This hypothesis will probably prove eventually to be incorrect and will have to be superseded by a more correct one, but meanwhile it enables us to study the nature of the good power without reference to evil.

Now when we begin to consider the nature of the Deity, as a being by hypothesis absolutely and wholly good, it will be easier to determine, first, what He is not rather than what He is. I think that reflection must convince us that any picture of Him which represents Him as less noble, tolerant, and magnanimous than the best of men, must needs be a libel upon Him. In this connection, let us consider what we are to think of the view of God presented to us by the Religions of the Past, viz., that He demands constant praise and adulation. What should we think of a man who should demand the like of his children? A strong and intelligent man is immensely big and strong and wise when

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compared to the weakness of childhood. But what should we think of a father who should insist on this superiority of strength and intelligence being continually extolled by his children ; who should make his kindness towards them and his forgiveness of their errors or misdoings dependent on this fulsome praise of himself? Yet such precisely is the picture of God which the Religions of the Past have uniformly presented to us. That picture is libellous. It would constitute a gross, outrageous, and offensive libel if taken as descriptive of any kind-hearted, broad-minded man ; and how much more gross, outrageous, and offensive must it be as a description of Him who is greater and better than the greatest and the best of us. And can it be supposed that this misrepresentation of the Father or Creator can benefit the child or the creature? Could a son be advantaged if we could suppose his father to be so egotistical, mean-spirited, and greedy of applause? And can man be benefited if he believes the Creator of all to be less large-minded and tolerant than many whom we have seen and known? "He has

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mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." What, the highest and the mightiest so capricious and unjust? Not until we have thoroughly purged our minds of such false and unworthy conception of Him, can we hope to attain to even a far-off glimpse of His true nature.

Let us study all records of human worth, magnanimity, goodness, and nobleness, nay, let us not neglect even the highest flights of imagination in this direction, for how shall man even imagine a more exalted goodness than is His who is the Author of goodness? And then we may say to ourselves, "Behold how large-hearted, how tolerant, how wise, is the creature, and surely his Creator is on a plane of intelligence and feeling infinitely higher than he is."

The subject is vast—I have no strength left to do what is needed. With these few and brief hints and suggestions I leave to others younger, better, and better qualified than myself the task of discovering a satisfactory solution to the ancient and hitherto unsolvable problem of Religion.

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Age and long-continued illness make even intermittent application to study increasingly difficult, and may any day terminate the possibility of further work. Under these circumstances, I feel that my position must be simply that of a signpost, indicating to others the right road, the road which will lead them to success, the road which I myself am no longer capable of pursuing. And this personal inability is all the less to be regretted or deplored because the road, as far as we can see, is illimitable and the goal remote.

All may labour at the prosecution of the important and arduous task that lies before us, but none can hope to see it completed. For if the knowledge of the Universe and of ourselves is ever progressing, yet always incomplete, how much less can we expect ever to know perfectly the Unknown and probably unknowable origin of all things? Yet, as knowledge, though partial and incomplete, of the Universe and of ourselves is of great and inestimable value to mankind, much more may we reasonably be expected to benefit by every increase of knowledge concerning Him who has contrived the wondrous

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whole and ordained the conditions of inanimate and animate existence. That religious knowledge when it comes will, it cannot be doubted, not cramp nor imprison, but enlarge and free the intellect and affections of mankind.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUDING REMARKS

THE author of this little work ventures to assume that it is written with sufficient clearness, and that it does not stand in need of explanation.

But one circumstance may seem to call for remark, namely, the fact that it is published anonymously.

There may be more than one reason for this; but certainly there is at least one good and sufficient reason.

The omission of the author's name from the title-page tends to draw attention to, and to emphasize, a fundamental difference between the Religion of the Future and the Religions of the Past.

In all religions hitherto, the personal note has been predominant. The attitude of the

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promulgator and of every prophet or apostle of the Faith was always that of a man giving utterance to some special message from the Divinity. "Thus saith the Lord," is the correct formula. And this message from God to man, due to inspiration, is to be received by the Faithful with submission and without cavil or argument.

But in the case of the Religion of the Future, it is quite otherwise. Any one of us, N or M, A or B, studies the subject, draws conclusions, and publishes those conclusions, with the arguments on which they are based.

And it cannot be too constantly borne in mind that for the reader the question to be considered is : not who is N or M, A or B, but do the views set forth and the arguments supporting them appear to be sound, convincing, and indisputable?

Dogmatic assertions require the support which may be supposed to be derived from the character, position, and authority of those making them.

But the value of an argument depends solely on the adequacy of its premises and

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the soundness of its logic. The personal question concerning the authorship of the argument is irrelevant and apt to prove misleading.

We should therefore banish as far as possible the personal element and appeal solely to the dictates of Reason.

That is the fundamental difference that is to obtain between the Religion of the Future and the Religions of the Past. This is to be based on Reason; those were based on Authority: Argument succeeds to Faith.

It must do so necessarily, because Faith affords an uncertain and treacherous foundation: it may convince us of what is false as often or more often than it shall convince us of what is true.

Every religion, including every form of idolatry, is rooted in Faith, and supported by Authority and Dogma, and the only possible appeal from conflicting forms of Faith is the appeal to Reason.

And this is so true that even those who most strenuously maintain that Faith is the only safe basis of true religion, *i.e.*, of their

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own religion, are yet quite ready to judge and condemn Idolatry, and what they are pleased to term false religions, by means of argument and those most effective forms of argument : sarcasm and irony.

But not only is Reason necessary as an instrument to discriminate between various forms of Faith, it is in truth the only secure groundwork of every human opinion and belief.

The idiot having no mental power can form no opinion nor hold any belief that is entitled to be respected by others ; and he who persuades himself that Faith and not Reason is the sole basis of his religion, overlooks or hides from himself the fact that an act of volition was needed in order to enable him to accept and occupy that position.

To sum up : When we endeavour to discover Truth, and to raise the enduring structure of the Religion of the Future, we must adhere strictly to those investigations and processes of reasoning by which alone man has found it possible to arrive at any certain conclusion regarding any subject.

Concluding Remarks

All may use that only and inevitable pathway to Knowledge, and may each that uses it be sincerely and simply a

TRUTH-SEEKER.





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