

protects their rights; it establishes irresistible sway over us, yet defines and balances it so that it is bound to maintain justice and to produce prosperity. It is for such excellence that a splendor of Divine wisdom shines forth from this scheme. Who could not see in this organization of society a Divine plan, a lustre of reason and a profusion of the bounty of God, as in the marvellous harmony of the universe we cannot but acknowledge a reflection of the divine intellect? For an order comprising so many things, so admirably reconciling freedom with necessity, so equal and just in all its relations, so firm as to its foundation, so effective and beneficent in its operations, cannot be the invention of a human mind.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF INTROSPECTION.

THE history of the past of mankind is the history of those radical changes in its life which are wrought by the march of time on one hand, and by the progress of civilization on the other. Of these changes, political, social and religious, the human race leaves an imprint behind in the art, science and literature of each period, and in nearly every domain of knowledge belonging to that period. New modes of thought obtain currency, new habits are acquired, inventions and discoveries are made, facilitating their diffusion; and all this very forcibly impresses upon observant minds the fact that life, after all, is but a continuous change, applied either to the individual or to society at large. In this way progress and civilization have become identified in the popular mind with the idea that they are simply synonyms of the term "change." We are born into this world, we live a little while in it, we die and pass away from it. The child is born and becomes an infant, the infant grows into manhood or womanhood, reaches a point of culmination, declines perhaps into old age, and then life ends. This is the brief history which tells the fate of all mortals; and what else is it but a record of continuous transformation? Change, ever-recurring change, appears, therefore, as the most marked characteristic of life; as a fact undisputed, because indisputable.

The theory of "change" applies, indeed, to life in all its phases, but there runs through life at the same time an undercurrent of an entirely different character. Between the narrow limits drawn by

birth on one hand, and by cold pitiless death on the other, there moves that stream of hope and despair, of friendship and enmity, of love and hatred, which determines for each whether his term of terrestrial existence has been one of happiness or of misery. That current depends upon agencies which remain the selfsame at all times and under all circumstances, and these silent agencies constitute in the ever-surging ocean of life the only changeless elements. If we glance back over a period of some two thousand years, we see that the civilization of Greece and Rome was superseded by that of the Middle Ages, and that mediæval civilization in turn gave way to that of modern times. Yet, the desire for happiness, for instance, dwelt as strongly in the breast of the Greek and Roman, and of the semi-barbarians which swept over Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries, as it does in the generations of our times. The same passions ruled in antiquity and in mediæval times whose violent throbbings cause so much apprehension in our days. Nations appear and disappear, but the perennial longings of the human heart are transmitted unchanged, as a patrimony not dependent upon time and place and surroundings, not subjected to their disintegrating influence, but immaculate, in pristine virginity, in every human breast.

Now these elements of life possess a very vital importance whenever any issue, involving the entirety of life, is being dealt with. For, it must obviously lead to erroneous conclusions to take cognizance of the outward manifestations of human activity only, and to ignore the inner springs of life. And this, it seems to us, has been one of the most fruitful sources of error in the formation of opinions regarding the question of religion and its issues. Our times appear deeply concerned with subjects like "the decline of faith," "the decay of Christianity," "the disintegration of the Church," and the like. It is pretty generally recognized, what even the most rudimentary knowledge of the past teaches us, namely, that religion and life are correlative terms. But not a few neglected to inquire into, or if they did, failed to grasp the true relationship subsisting between them, and, in consequence thereof, life- or death-sentences have been pronounced upon one creed or another with an air of gravity and with all serious earnestness, which are, at best, *agri somnia vana*. Religion, let it be emphasized, is an expression of human nature only when it is stripped of all appendages of time and place. The outward life of mankind is being cast into fresh moulds and is taking new shape and form with every age, but the inner life presents always the selfsame characteristics. These considerations make it self-evident that no opinion deserves to be entitled to the serious attention of society, unless it be based upon a careful study of man's inner

structure, and the extent to which a religious system corresponds with his manifold wants.

These general remarks, we hope, have cleared the ground sufficiently to let us perceive that the introspection of life alone, or rather of the unchangeable elements of life, furnishes the means of formulating a view worth having, upon any of the issues with which we are here indirectly concerned.

The points of contact between religion and humanity are many. The evidence of the past compels us to concede that some sort of "belief" presents itself as an irrepressible want of human nature. And if we inspect all creeds of which we possess any knowledge, with a view to singling out an element common to all, we again encounter "belief." Thus "belief" is one point of contact. Again, right and wrong are distinctions drawn between certain lines of action by religion as well as by society, so that morality may be said to form another point of contact. Again, happiness, a happiness untarnished by any shadow, stands ever as an ideal before man's elevated ambition, for which he has endeavored to reach out at all times. And happiness, a happiness undefiled, is the promise of the future, held out by nearly all religions to their adherents. Here, then, we have some precincts which religion and humanity occupy between themselves. It is manifest, moreover, from the very nature of the case, that in the inner structure of human nature there must be given *that* which religion is intended to complement, to perfect, to elevate, to satisfy; and whatever religion performs this office in the most perfect and complete manner, *that* religion and that *alone*, we are warranted in predicating, will be the one to which the theory of the survival of the fittest will apply.

We proceed now to examine more minutely some of the common territory. The most patent, and consequently the least disputed and at the same time also the most prominent, element of religious feeling consists in what is called "conscience," a power of which we know very little besides the fact that it does exist. It may be defined as the consciousness of right and wrong. It descends upon all human beings as an unquestioned birthright. Perhaps it may be urged that the notions as to what is right and what wrong, differ so widely that conscience cannot be taken as a central and common force of universal human nature. It is quite true that the notions of right and wrong have differed and do differ, but this is a matter with which we are here not concerned at all. It suffices entirely for our purpose that the consciousness of right and wrong, as an abstract perception of the intellect, inseparable from human nature, links the cultured agnostic of the nineteenth century to his half-savage ancestor. We do not inquire *why* the notions

of the one are crude, raw, uncouth, and those of the other developed into a delicate sensibility; but we ask simply, why is this notion extant in both? To this query but one answer can be made, which is not alone acceptable to reason, but likewise borne out by experience. Conscience is a universal patrimony, because of a universal intuitive knowledge, no matter how indefinite, that some standard of right and wrong has been established by some power above us, and that we are bound to conform our lives to this standard. This implies a belief, again quite indefinite, that right conduct is rewarded, and wrong conduct punished; in other words, that we are endowed with free-will, and impair or advance our prospects of reaching that happiness for which we cannot help longing by the choice which we make for the shaping of our conduct through life. Whether the innate desire for happiness take the form of looking forward towards reaching Nirvana, or of hoping for a communion of saints, with direct intercourse with the Deity and participation in divine felicity, does not matter in the least. Dogmatism lies in this search far beyond our sphere, since its issues run in strata which we are not at all investigating at present. Thus belief, faith, that fundamental principle of all religious systems, owes its existence to a want of human nature; for, as we have seen, conscience, the root of all belief, rests only and solely upon the intuitive knowledge of a power, superhuman and greater than ourselves, that made a standard of right and wrong for us. Religion springs, therefore, from nature itself, and is as old as nature.

The general consideration of the necessity of religion enables us, however, to draw some very important conclusions. In the first place the necessity of a definite form of belief appears no longer doubtful, and all religions of the past present themselves simply as attempts to furnish humanity that requisite definite belief. In the second place, it is quite clear that but *one* religion can be in full accord with human nature, for the coexistence of two *systems* means necessarily the coexistence of two different standards of morality, which is an absurd monstrosity and logically impossible, if they are, as they would have to be, absolute standards.

Retracing our steps into the past again, we will ascertain now how far the creeds in force prior to the advent of Christianity responded to that universal craving for a definite belief, which the analysis of conscience established as a prime requisite of human nature. As regards classic Paganism, as it lived and ruled in the popular mind of Greece and Rome, the most striking fact, as Mr. W. S. Lilly, in a paper, "Supernaturalism, Mediæval and Classic," so well observes, is the wellnigh total absence from it of any idea at all nearly corresponding to that which the term "God" conveys, more or less distinctly, to the European mind of the present

day. Deep down in the heart of antiquity, underlying all religious conceptions, was the idea of a Supreme Will, irresistible, inscrutable, inexorable. This vague, mysterious, awful power was personified as "*Fatum*," which ruled not only over the generations of mortal men, but likewise over the immortal anthropomorphic deities, and formed the nearest approximation to what we understand by the word "God." This all-pervading fatalism is the key to the religions and philosophies of Paganism. The indefiniteness and obscurity of this notion of a Supreme Ruler failed, of course, to offer any satisfaction to the imperative demand of human nature for a definite belief, and led the innate tendency to believe to put out shoots in other directions. Thus we find a belief in invisible realities, surrounding man on every side, and a belief in powers and agencies, superhuman and directly and intimately affecting man. Nor is this the only effect produced by the absence of a less certain idea of God. It disabled ancient Polytheism, nay, rendered it absolutely powerless to represent any ethical idea or to establish any standard by which life should be governed. It had nothing to offer to the inquiries of a restless heart. The office of all propitiatory sacrifices consisted merely in assuaging the fear of that righteous retribution, of the existence of which the teachings of conscience gave warning. Inadequate and impotent as the creeds of Paganism were, they were on that account doomed to crumble to pieces when brought in contact with a religious system less wanting in the most essential requisite, namely, adaptation to man's nature.

Before the advent of Christianity there existed but one theistic conception in which men could and did believe, namely, the one possessed by the Hebrews and transmitted by them from generation to generation. The Jews alone knew God as a living God, the fountain of life, supreme Lawgiver and Judge of men, yet a merciful God, listening to prayers and standing in direct relationship with the people. The elect tribe of Northern Semites had a definite God, and hence a definite law, yet an impassable gulf separated, as it were, the finite creature from the Infinite, preventing human nature from rising to the inaccessible heights on which He was enthroned. He was too far removed from humanity to be approached with other feelings than those of awe and fear. Thus even the Jewish faith did not come up fully to the requirements of humanity in that sphere. More had to be given than was given to the Hebrews, in order to encompass mankind's clamorings, and Christianity, at last, gave it.

The mediæval era is ushered in with the God-man as central figure. The bright beams of light which the new religion shed profusely soon chased away Paganism's gloomy and dark vision

of fate, and turned the feelings of awe and fear of the Hebrew conception into those of love and friendship. The Word made flesh was God, indeed, but was man also, full of compassion, of love, of sympathy, ever ready to lift our burdens and attracting by His luminous beauty all alike. The Incarnation is the bridge which forever spans the shores of divinity and humanity, and by the Cross life's perplexing mysteries were solved. Life was no longer a hopeless struggle, happiness no longer beyond the reach of mortal arm. The sting of death was removed, the keen edge of suffering taken away. Passion and virtue, which had occupied overlapping territories, were assigned districts of their own, and between these a line of demarcation was drawn. Society was furnished a code of ethics, which to this day has been admitted by believers as well as unbelievers to be unsurpassed in its matchless perfection. To be sure, there was much left that still remained unfathomable, but though Christianity promulgated what defied comprehension, nothing was beyond apprehension of human reason and intelligence. Even in its most general aspect, the Christian religion touches the secret springs of human nature, satisfies its yearnings, and fills the void into which all preceding creeds had been emptied in vain.

Christianity followed a period in which the material universe and the senses whereby it appeals to us had been all in all to mankind. They were removed from the horizon upon which the gaze of society had been fastened for so long, and other objects, worthy of intense contemplation, placed there instead. This world receded from the views of society before the dazzling brightness of the world to come. The fulfilment of the hope of centuries generated, as was to be expected, an ecstasy in the human heart, which found vent in that severe asceticism of which mediæval history renders many, to us rather astonishing, accounts. The war with man's lower nature was waged then all the more fiercely because of the undisputed and long-continued sway of the passions before the inauguration of this war. Recoiling from that loathsome dominion, the very force of the rebound led to a total spiritualization of life. The victor's crown was not expected here below, but was seen only beyond the grave. These reflections suggest themselves very forcibly as the correct explanation of the ascetic tendency of the Middle Ages, a tendency which has been very severely and very adversely criticised, though the facts warrant only the interpretation which we put upon it.

As the one great foundation of all religions lies in the voice of conscience, in the sense of the infinite, in man's spiritual aspirations, in the need of faith, in short a need universal and unchangeable, so does the strongest evidence of Christianity lie in its unique

accord with every want of man's inner nature. History itself bears out this assertion, for the history of Christianity is the history of the superiority of all Christian nations. As soon as the Western world was filled with the teachings of Christ, the supremacy of the people inhabiting it was established. Progress and civilization appear only as allies of Christianity, so much so that wherever the soil is not first fertilized by it, the engrafting of civilized ideas, refined habits, and cultured social life is altogether impossible. The most avowed atheists even are honest enough to grant that the religion given by Christ to mankind surpasses all preceding systems, while it is a fact recognized by every observant mind of every age since the beginning of our era, that the services rendered by Christianity to mankind in spheres outside of religious teaching are simply immense. Yet, notwithstanding this general encomium of praise bestowed upon it, there has grown up in our times a doubt and a suspicion regarding the future of Christianity with its two thousand years of life. It would be superfluous to say more than simply to state the fact that the downfall of Christianity is not only predicted but believed in by a numerically growing portion of society. The weight to be attached to prognostications of that kind depends, as has been remarked before, upon this test of unflinching character,—can a religious system more fully and more thoroughly in accord with human nature be conceived or not? But a good deal, if not all of what has so recently been predicated of Christianity, does not require an inquiry into an abstract problem. It is simply necessary to define clearly the different meaning of the term "Christianity" when applied to mediæval and to modern times.

Up to the time of the Reformation the Christian religion was practically a unit and coextensive with Catholicity. Since then, however, the word Christianity has been used somewhat loosely as comprising Catholicity and Protestantism. Between these two forms of religion there are radical differences, which render it obviously clear that what may be truthfully asserted of the one need not apply at all to the other. Christianity and Catholicity were once interchangeable terms, but they have ceased to be so, and hence the fatal confusion.

Protestantism is, at best, Christianity on sufferance. Apart from a theistic conception of God it has little in common with Catholicity. The more conservative Protestant denominations preserve, of course, a greater semblance to original Christianity than the more advanced, liberal churches, of which not a few are openly disavowed by the former as not Christian. With dissensions in the family we have here, however, nothing to do. Since its origin Protestantism has been suffering from internal disintegration,

the process of splitting up, a process very marked and very rapid, is still going on. It does not matter how near to the line which forever divides the Catholic Church from Protestantism some sects may approach, how far others stand off; for that line is like the equator, a mathematical line in its distinctness. Whosoever is not north of it is necessarily south.

Now Protestantism, in general, was an attempt on the part of its founders to effect a compromise between the material world of old and the supernatural world of Christianity. The life of the passions, strong at all times, revolted against the severe discipline of mediæval times, introduced into these by the fervor of ecstasy. With the lapse of years that fervor lost its intensity, and in proportion as it subsided did the rule of passions make headway, until towards the close of the fifteenth century it had acquired an overpowering ascendancy and crept into Church and society. Reformation was, indeed, needed within and without. Within, where it was brought about by legitimate means, the end was accomplished, and it was accomplished solely because the Christian religion was left unchanged in its entirety. Without, however, it resulted in vain endeavors to reconcile the irreconcilable, and hence its failure. The uncompromising attitude of Christianity towards materialism of any kind displeased the Reformers. Some concessions to man's lower nature were therefore made, and so much thrown overboard as was too directly in opposition with these concessions. In the course of time materialism overshadowed more and more the fragments of Christianity, which still had been retained, and, by degrees, the principle of private judgment cut loose from all those indispensable adjuncts of religion, without which it can neither fulfil its own mission nor satisfy the human heart.

That a few shabby tinsels of Christianity do not appeal with any force to men of intelligence who recognize the true mission of religion, is not in the least to be wondered at. Nor, again, can we wonder that this portion of society, after having ceased to believe in the creed of a Protestant church, turns with serious expectations to the physical sciences which have achieved so much, and believes them to hold the promise of evolving a religious system less out of joint with human nature than the one they abandoned with the hopeless reluctance of despair. It is rather natural that the religion-seeking world should turn in that very direction, for they perceive that accord with nature is the *sine quâ non* of religion. Looking for that, and knowing that the scientists unravel nature's mysteries, the situation itself seems to point out that they have chosen the right path. Yet if they look to science for the lost treasure they deceive themselves, like those scientists who indulge in the same hopefulness. Science can never unravel more than

the one part of human nature which is open to inspection of the closest and most minute character. If it gives, some day, a full and correct account of man's physical nature, its mission will be ended. The voice of the heart will ever tell many things which the senses cannot and do not report, and reveal much that is, indeed, not opposed to the senses, but above the senses. Conscience, free-will, moral responsibility, they are not matter, substance, in fine, material, in the strictest sense of the word. They will ever reach out into and belong to the non-physical order. The negation of the latter implies the negation of all three. For, can moral responsibility be rationally conceived without one to whom we are responsible? Is free-will not a farce if the distinctions between right and wrong are withdrawn? Is conscience thinkable without some sort of faith? Yet, strange to observe, the very ones who emphatically deny the existence of a supernatural order, and of a God in the Christian acceptation of the term, declare in the same breath moral responsibility not abrogated, free-will not impaired, conscience not annulled. It is certain, at all events, that science could only establish a Godless religious cult, and to that the consent of man's nature can never be obtained for any length of time, because it would soon prove itself incapable of standing that crucial test to which we have referred already, "full accord with the wants of human nature;" a test which the religions of the future will have to stand, as well as those of the past.

It may not be superfluous to single out one case in which the incompetency of Protestantism to stand this test is well brought to light.

Confession, as is well known, is in the Catholic Church not only a sacrament, but a matter of obligation upon all its members without exception. It is, therefore, beyond question a very characteristic mark of Catholicity, *i. e.*, Christianity. Protestantism refuses to recognize confession as a tenet of vital import, either as a matter of belief or as of any practical value in regard to human nature. Ritualism, in its most advanced form, goes so far as to accept confession as a sacramental rite, whatever that may mean, but it leaves it optional with its members to avail themselves of it. Outside of the small body of Ritualists, confession is tabooed, abhorred, shunned. Now, then, what we have to examine into is not whether auricular confession has been abused or not, nor whether such a tremendous power as the one of forgiving sins has been lodged with the priesthood, nor, again, whether it was wise to intrust into the safekeeping of frail human nature so enormous a prerogative; all this is here quite foreign matter and perfectly irrelevant. What we have to ascertain is simply this: Does confession correspond

to a want of human nature, or does it not? Is there something within our structure which makes us desirous of an unburdening? In short, is there any need for confession as a sacrament and as a binding obligation, or is there none?

Confession would be turned at once into a ridiculous absurdity if all men lived without ever swerving or being liable to swerve from the standard of absolute righteousness. It is very plain that if there is nothing to confess, confession is superfluous. But it is only necessary to recall the very general outcry that has been raised at the time of the proclamation of the dogma of infallibility, in order to be able to assert positively that, by universal consent, human nature is considered liable to do wrong. Infallibility, of course, does not mean impeccability, but it was largely understood to imply as much, which was the cause of the very just and very general protest. Human society was thus perfectly unwilling to admit that but one human being at a time, and that an old and virtuous man as a rule, could possibly be exempt from going astray. We may draw from this verdict the inference that all mortals, without exception, that is to say, the whole race, in all its component parts, are considered liable to transgress the divine law. Now, if this universal liability does exist, it is fair to presume that a good many individuals leave now and then the narrow paths of righteousness. And if so, why should not those who offend God, whom they adore as their Creator and Father, feel towards Him the same generous impulse which prompts a well-brought-up child, if it breaks anything which it was forbidden to touch, to run up to his parents, own up the mischievous deed, and implore among tears their forgiveness? That sentiment in children is not found fault with by the most confirmed unbeliever, for it strikes home in its touching simplicity. But the selfsame feeling evinced by the children of God towards Him, their heavenly Father, is made sport of. Both cases are exactly alike; there is transgression in the one, there is transgression in the other. And so are the motives alike, be they love or fear; that is to say, sorrow for the transgression, or the dread of punishment. Nay, further than this: we venture to assert boldly that any parent would much rather have his child run up, less on account of an anticipation of being chastised, than because of real sorrow for having done something which will grieve the parent. It is human nature to feel so as parents, matter and substance and all their properties notwithstanding. And the Catholic Church teaches that precisely the same relationship exists between God and man, and proclaims that sorrow over sins resulting from love far exceeds a contrition prompted by fear. Nor is this all. Society readily acknowledges that a wrong confessed is

half atoned for. There is the further evidence of criminals who escape the hand of justice, but who find no rest until their deeds are confessed, and who therefore surrender themselves. From all these considerations it seems that confession must be regarded as an evidence of good-will on the part of the wrongdoer to right the wrong. If there are consciences dulled to such an extent that such desire rise no more in them, it is to be hoped their number forms an infinitesimal fraction of human society. For all, except such, confession appears as a means devised by Supreme Wisdom for an end, which end is to help human frailty onward, to encourage the despondent, to lift up the outcast, in fine, to succor nature when succor is needed. Can it be said that confession does not meet frail mortals half-way?

The future of Christianity has, thus, not yet been dimmed by any shadows. It cannot be doubtful as long as it preserves those integral characteristics which stamp upon it the seal of genuineness through nature itself. Whatever doleful predictions are made apply not to Catholicity, the only true religion. Christianity is not Protestantism, and should not be confounded with it. Christianity is always Catholic, Protestantism always exclusive. The ship of society lost the old moorings, the cargo of science shifted in the hold, the compass pointed in the wrong direction, and thus it is drifting with the high tide. When the ebb tide sets in, and the breakers ahead will be seen, society will verify the compass, and, guided by the unfailing yearnings of the heart, it will make land and find again the God-man, who stands there with the beacon-light of truth, whom to know is to possess life, but of whom St. Augustine truly said, "non cognoscitur nisi amando."
