THE
RELIGIOUS
IDEAS

W. J. FOX

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We look around us, and all seems to change: the theology of our fathers is unreadable. The soul of man remains the same: God still speaks in reason, conscience, faith—is still immanent in his children.—THEODORE PARKER (1842).

THE
RELIGIOUS IDEAS

BY THE LATE

WILLIAM JOHNSON FOX, M.P.

WITH A BRIEF SKETCH OF HIS LIFE

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NOTE

The course of fifteen Lectures in this volume were delivered by William Johnson Fox in South Place Chapel, Finsbury, in 1848–9. The views advocated with such ability and eloquence, nearly sixty years ago, are still in advance of the ordinary religious teachings of most churches at the present time.

It is hoped that the lectures will be read with interest not only by church and chapel-goers, but by people who seldom perhaps enter a place of worship, who nevertheless are not unwilling to be influenced by a reasonable and reverent religious faith.

A brief sketch of the career and work of William Johnson Fox, written by a sincere admirer of his teachings, is prefixed to the lectures.

W. C. B.

LONDON, *June*, 1907.

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Our very progress, which is our peculiar glory, consists in at once losing and learning the past; in gaining fresh stations from which to take a wiser retrospect, and become more deeply aware of the treasures we have used.—JAMES MARTINEAU (1843).

WILLIAM JOHNSON FOX

THE NORWICH WEAVER-BOY

A man whose flock the People loved to be:
Won, not by any cheat of birth,
But by his clear-grained human worth
And brave old wisdom of sincerity.

SOME men spend their lives in building up fortunes; some in building up ambitions. Others, hero-like, resolve instead to build up characters—to build up themselves. Among the self-made men, who have toiled along this uphill course in silent gradual growth, was William Johnson Fox.

He was born 1st March, 1786, in Suffolk. His father removed afterwards to Norwich, and became a weaver. William worked with him at the loom for some years, and earned his future title of 'The Norwich Weaver-Boy.' At fourteen he got employment in a bank, where he stayed six years, working hard all the while to educate himself. With little help he mastered a wide range of knowledge, going into mathematics, Latin, Greek, natural science, and

His oratorical powers went on developing until he became, as no less experienced a critic than the late Joseph Cowen, M.P., pronounced him—'probably the most polished speaker of modern times.' His eighty *Lectures to the Working Classes* stimulated thousands to self-cultivation; for they saw from his life that his teachings were not mere theory, but sprang from successful practice.

One result of these labours was his return to Parliament, in 1847, as member for Oldham, free of expense. 'Only one instance,' he said, 'of bribery at Oldham ever came to my knowledge; and that was when the noble people of Oldham bribed me to be their representative.' But he had, for several years past, suffered from heart disease, and preserved his life only by systematic abstinence from everything that might excite him. This prevented him from taking a prominent part in Parliament, even had he not entered it too late. Wilberforce said men seldom succeed in the House who enter it when past thirty; and as Mr. Fox entered it when past sixty, it was not strange that he should prove too old for success. Yet he did good work there. He was one of the first to demand compulsory education. In 1850 he brought in 'A bill to promote the secular education of the people'—the first important effort ever made in Parliament for a really national system. He continued to represent Oldham till 1863. On 3rd June, 1864, he died, aged 78 years.

An elaborate biography of him, from materials

compiled by his daughter and by that eminent scholar the late Dr. Richard Garnett, of the British Museum, is now being prepared for publication.

His writings occupy sixteen volumes. What a tale of industry they tell! But what a tale his whole life tells! Farmer boy, weaver lad, bank clerk, the dissenter's son ('nourished,' as he said, 'upon the sour milk of Calvinism, which sorely disagreed with him'), the awkward nervous speaker, the active politician, the popular writer, the eloquent orator—what a tale of hope to every struggling youth, what a reproach for every idler and coward! To the lad toiling after self-education, to the student trembling at his growing doubts of orthodoxy, to the earnest heart seeking some work to be done 'for God and the people'—to all, the life of W. J. Fox comes as a lamp and a beacon.

Amongst his many public utterances on religion, none are more eloquent or have had wider influence than the addresses reprinted here, on 'The Religious Ideas.' They were delivered in 1848–49, when he was at the culmination of his powers. They are marked by the eclectic width of sentiment and the impressive wealth of language and illustration that characterized all his greatest efforts. Forty years after their publication, a French gentleman, into whose hands a copy of the volume had accidentally fallen, was so much impressed by it that he issued a translation of it for readers in France. These addresses are an earnest attempt, based on forty years

of assiduous study and reflection, so to harmonize modern intellectual speculation with the needs of man's spiritual nature as to lay the foundations of an assured and satisfying faith. By a survey of the various fitnesses which the human soul manifests for religion, the writer tries to assign to our race its position in the Universal Order, and to forecast the religious progress of mankind. Readers of the present day will find in these pages some remarkable anticipations of the main principles of that 'New Theology' recently enunciated by the Rev. R. J. Campbell at the City Temple.

Mr. Fox left behind him no orator, either in the pulpit or the senate, possessing his humour, his power of sarcasm, his acquaintance with English literature, his command of polished language, his expressive yet calm delivery, his gentleness—almost as touching as that of woman. And, as his congregation said, in addressing him at the end of his first twenty-five years of ministry, 'When juster views shall prevail of the duty of man to God and of man to man; when wiser estimates shall be formed of life and of death; when in politics the welfare of the human family shall take precedence of class legislation; and in religion bigotry and intolerance shall give place to charity and love—then will be found in the foremost records of the wise and great, by whom these blessings have been wrought, the name of WILLIAM JOHNSON FOX.'

THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS

I

THEIR UNIVERSALITY

ALL religions are constructed of the same materials. They are all developments of the same germs: the developments varied and modified by the influence of circumstances. But still, the diversities of religions are upon the surface; and, as we penetrate deeper, an approach to identity is always perceptible. Whatever may be their names or their pretensions; whether they are enshrined in creeds and sacred books, or only exist in the legends of the poet or of the multitude; whether they were promulgated by legislators, when society itself was framed, by some monarch-priest dictating the spiritual as well as the temporal law, or only preached by some hermit or self-ordained peasant, 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness,' or in the streets; whether they bear upon them the stamp of Oriental enthusiasm, or of the calmness and severity of European intelligence; whether they hold their solemnities amid the pomp of courts,

or seek the darkness and the security of the cavern, or worship in some humble barn; whether their worship be one of strict simplicity, or call to its aid all the resources of all the arts; still religions, however diversified, are the same in their essentials. They are manifestations of the same ideas; they are formed from the same elements. As all buildings, from the cottage to the palace, or the enduring pyramid, are constructed with a few materials, wood, stone, metals, etc.; or as the letters of the alphabet, by their combinations, form all we can express in record and oratory, in poetry and science; or as, from time to time, we find how few are the elements that in their different states and combinations produce all the phenomena of this material world; so are a few simple ideas the source, the essence, the elements, and the power of all religions.

Yes, they are few and simple—revelation, God, providence, the sense of right and wrong, duty, redemption, heaven—these, and such as these, are the primeval elements of religion. They are the Religious Ideas. My purpose is, to deliver a succession of lectures on these, the religious ideas, separately considered, but pursuing a similar course with them, which I shall indicate on the present occasion.

These are the conceptions which we find in the most intellectual forms of religion, in the most dissenting Dissent, and the most protesting Protestantism; we find them in the strongest assertion of individual judgment in matters of faith, and we find them also

in the most implicit submission which the devout believer in the Roman Catholic system renders to the guide of his conscience, his priest, who is his mediator. We find them in all forms of Christianity, and we find them in that Judaism which originated Christianity. We may trace them in the fierce mythology of the Goths, and in the graceful mythology of the Greeks. We behold them in the multitudinous idolatry of the Hindu, and in the stern monotheism of the Mohammedan. We find them in the different forms which each religion has assumed under differing circumstances; and we may go back till we behold them shadowed out in the remote and gigantic forms of primeval Egyptian superstition. They are in all; although, diversified by various influences, they form different and hostile religions, seeking for the conversion of one another, mutually excommunicating, and influencing by their conflicts the rise and fall of empires.

As we trace these, the religious ideas, in succession, I think it will appear that they have a deeper foundation than the mere ceremonies, the creeds, the books, the priesthood, the teachers, the oracles, by which religions are distinguished, and from which they are called. I think we shall find that they have their root in human nature; that they are the growth of man's intellectual and moral constitution; that they are in their essence a reality, as much as he is a reality. I do not call them innate ideas; that

doctrine of innate ideas has been exploded from the days of Locke. We are not born with thoughts, but we are born with tendencies to thought, and to certain modes and forms of thought, which afterwards take a definite existence. For though Locke exploded the doctrine of innate ideas, his comparison of the mind of man to a sheet of blank paper fails egregiously; there are some things which cannot be written upon that paper by any hands; and there are symbols of ideas which will appear upon it, although no hand be excited to trace them there; which, under the appropriate influences, will come out, like the writing on paper with sympathetic ink when it is held to the fire, and will grow plain and legible even to untutored tribes. There are tendencies to modes of thought, such as what philosophers mean by 'the moral sense'; not a power born with us, like the physical and external senses, but such a constitution as that, in due time, the conceptions of right and wrong, of good and evil, of duty, will arise in the mind and exist there to a certain extent, though that extent may be diversified by the acquirements and the exercise of the faculties of the individual. The assumption that such tendencies are physically manifested is the foundation of phrenology, and is a correct conception in itself, whether the phrenology which is thus founded be true or false, complete or imperfect, accurate or inaccurate in its deductions. Whether there be or be not in the head an organ of veneration, the tendency

of man's being is to venerate; and this tendency will discover or create for itself an object. Veneration seeks the majestic; it will delineate and believe in the majestic. It has a tendency towards this; and although it may be often wrong, and may be corrected by logic and philosophy, by experience and observation, yet this is only saying the very same thing that we have to say of the physical and external senses. Our sight and hearing are corrected by the operations of our mind, and by the deductions of knowledge and experience. And as the testimony of these senses yet carries with it the assurance that leads to belief in the external existence of objects, so is there in the intimations of the internal senses, in the objective tendencies of our different faculties, veneration, love, hope, fear, and so on—so is there in these an assurance that leads to a belief also in the objective and external existence of corresponding realities. There is in human nature an internal impulse towards the divine. Hence religion. But religion modified in a thousand different ways, and by a thousand different influences; most extensively modified by the claimants of revelation; by the utterers and expounders (whatever the testimonials of their authority) of what they call divine oracles; by those who speak in the name of the Lord, or in the name of the multiplicity of gods whom their people worship; by those who have left the impress of their individuality on religions that have prevailed over islands and continents and the broadest empires, and who

have exercised authority upon large portions of the human race, and through the lapse of long ages. They have all been modifiers, and no more, of these internal universal conceptions of human nature, without which to work upon, priests, kings, prophets, or reformers, would vainly have endeavoured to establish their systems. But in this work of modification they have sometimes played most fantastic tricks, opposing the legitimate influence of the growth of knowledge and science upon conceptions dictated by our own constitution—physical, intellectual, and moral. They have given to certain names and ceremonies, certain outward and physical expressions, a factitious sanctity. By making consecrated ground of some spots, they have desecrated the rest of God's earth. They have given names to the Deity, 'Allah' or 'Jehovah'; they have endeavoured to define the Infinite; they have sought to give a strict outline, an external embodiment, to that which is only susceptible of an internal and spiritual existence. Many religions, partaking of the historical character, have exalted into importance the commemoration of different events—natural or preternatural, real, fictitious, or exaggerated, and so on—which they have raised to the dignity of that moral truth which is essentially different from, and above, mere historical truth. By these varied agencies, by the establishment of different classes of teachers, by the power of different priesthoods, they have thus very often, while differing from one another, plunged also into a much more

important difference from man's first, natural, original instincts, the instincts of his own moral sense, of his own spiritual nature and tendencies, which are a surer guide than any external authority. In like manner the power of governments, their peculiar characters—despotic or republican—the influence of climate; these have their effects very legibly written upon the religion of different countries. Different races of mankind—for assuredly a very striking diversity of race may be traced—that too has its effect, disposing some to one form, and some to another. Consequently, even in the religions which seem the best founded there has been change, continuous change. Literature and science have wrought their work upon them. No Church claiming a continuity of miraculous powers can stand against anything like freedom of discussion and open thought, and a literature which bears the impress of those qualities. And in the Christianity of the present day, what modifications have not been enforced by the power of successive discoveries in astronomy and geology! Religions succeed to one another; or a religion preserving the same name becomes a different thing. Scepticism, as to all, has its room and ground of triumph; but even in that gloomy triumph there is a latent conviction of something which really belongs to nature, and therefore belongs to eternity. There is a remarkable instance of this sort of latent conviction in an exceedingly well-known passage—I mean the sceptical stanzas which occur in

Lord Byron's 'Childe Harold,' suggested by the ruins of Athens:

> Son of the morning, rise, approach you here;
> Come, but molest not yon defenceless urn;
> Look on this spot—a nation's sepulchre—
> Abode of gods, whose shrines no longer burn.
> Even gods must yield, religions take their turn;
> 'Twas Jove's—'tis Mahomet's; and other creeds
> Will rise with other years; till man shall learn
> Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds;
> Poor child of doubt and death, whose hope is built on reeds!

And then, in the intended continuation of this same scornful vein, how a protest of humanity beams out:

> Bound to the earth, he lifts his eye to heaven!

The same powers, the same influences, that did bind man to earth, have taught him also to lift his eye to heaven. It is the peculiarity of his condition, that, being so bound, his senses and his thoughts do not grovel with his position; that in the various influences that have made him what he is, that have planted him on this globe, and rendered it alike his cradle and his grave, the scene of all his exertions, and the limitation of his knowledge, there is still, together with this, the universal result, confessed by the poet of scepticism, even when most sceptical, perhaps unconsciously, that—

> Bound to the earth, he lifts his eye to heaven!

and so he *will* raise it.

There are yet other modifications than those introduced by the founders of religions, prophets, and priests, and kings, the tendencies of governments and of social condition. There are other influences besides these—the powers of nature around us as well as in us, which modify these modifying influences themselves; which tend to keep man true to his first, simple, original thought; which very often, in their power upon him, bringing out different forms of devotion, show the universal identity of devotion; which, while they cast on religion the shadows of gloomy regions, or excite to aspiration by the altitude of mountains; while they colour man's piety with all their own hues, whatever they may be, giving to all the song of birds as the lyrical music of worship, and the eternal roar of the ocean as its profound anthem, do yet in all bear testimony to the identity of the sentiments whose expression is so infinitely varied. The Unitarian preachers of England stood astonished at the translations made by Rammohun Roy, the Brahmin, from those ancient Hindu books, the Vedas. 'The gospels themselves,' said Mr. Belsham, 'teach not a purer monotheism than do the sacred writings of the Hindus.' The prayer of Epictetus, what character has it to distinguish it from a Christian prayer? Is it not a form of devotion which the sincerest believer of the present day may adopt as the expression of his own desires, wants, and wishes, and his reliance upon divine wisdom? The language of the 'Divine Dialogues' of Plato harmonizes with

the mystic spirituality of modern times. Pope was abundantly justified in his 'Universal Prayer.' That the 'Father of all' has been 'in every age' adored 'by saint, by savage, and by sage,' is a fact which we are compelled to recognize; and the red man of the woods talks of the 'Infinite Spirit' in language which the European philosopher admires for its truth and its sublimity.

There is, then, a *religion of humanity*, of which perchance we may gain some glimpses as in succession the religious ideas are made to pass before us. There is a religion of humanity, though not enshrined in creeds and articles—though it is not to be read merely in sacred books, and yet it may be read in all, whenever they have anything in them of truth and moral beauty—a religion of humanity, more ancient than the oldest superstitions, more divine than the best attested oracles, more enduring than the faith which seems to be the most firmly established in the world—a religion of humanity, which goes deeper than all, because it belongs to the essentials of our moral and intellectual constitution, and not to mere external accidents; the proof of which is not in historical argument or metaphysical deduction, but in our own conscience and consciousness—a religion of humanity, which unites and blends all other religions, and makes one the men whose hearts are sincere, and whose characters are true, and good, and harmonious, whatever may be the deductions of their minds, or their external profession—a religion of humanity,

which cannot perish in the overthrow of altars or the fall of temples, which survives them all, and which, were every defined form of religion obliterated from the face of the world, would re-create religion, as the spring re-creates the fruits and flowers of the soil, bidding it bloom again in beauty, bear again its rich fruits of utility, and fashion for itself such forms and modes of expression as may best agree with the progressive condition of mankind.

Strange changes have of late been rife in the world. There has been a season of confusion and of destruction, and of the struggling forms of new social arrangement, like Milton's 'tawny lion' half imbedded in the soil, and 'pawing to get free.' Thrones, and principalities, and powers have been shaken. They have reminded us of the bold simile in the Apocalypse, where the stars of heaven are said to fall 'as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind.' Revolution has succeeded revolution. The authors have followed the objects. Those hurled from power by convulsions have been speedily succeeded in their exile by the authors and leaders of those convulsive movements; and throughout the earth men's minds have seemed involved in a chaotic condition. There has been universal turmoil; and those peaceful influences by which man generally feels that he treads his path in safety—which give their assurance to commercial enterprise and industrial undertaking—these, too, have been strangely warped and interrupted; and throughout the earth there

have been scenes of change in rapid and astounding succession. And well it is, amid all this, in the very time of chaos, to look onward in confiding reliance on the harmonious operation and results of the system by which hitherto humanity has been conducted. Well it is to look from the evanishing to the lasting, and feel assured that as, in all change and vicissitude, there is no safety but in holding fast by the great, the enduring principles of our moral being—wisdom, virtue, truth, justice; so, in the turmoil of our thoughts, it is well to rest on that which is enduring, and keep steadily before us what cannot be overwhelmed by revolutions, but will abide the shock of all convulsions. Let us do the duties of our position, whatever they may be; and happy are those who, what the hand findeth to do, do it with their might; yet happier if, while achieving the peculiar business of the day, while working the work of time, they do it with 'thoughts that wander through eternity,' and repose upon the Infinite.

II

THEIR OBJECTIVE REALITY

ALL religions are constructed from the same materials. (1) However varied they appear when only superficially considered, they are, as to their essentials, compounded of certain thoughts or conceptions, which, in these lectures, I term the Religious Ideas, such as Revelation, God, Providence, and so on. (2) These religious ideas, although perhaps we cannot technically term them innate ideas, are yet so prevalent, as to show themselves the genuine result of the human faculties, of the moral and intellectual constitution of man, however modified and obscured by the claims of those who pretend to peculiar revelation, by different forms of religious establishments, or by the dogmas of different teachers. (3) And that they are so—that they maintain their existence and their power even beneath the superincumbent weight of a pile of superstitions and incongruities—shows that however much we may be warranted in doubting, disregarding, or rejecting many forms of religion, still religion itself is a reality, a permanent

and enduring reality. These three propositions are what I endeavoured to illustrate in the first Lecture, as introductory to a series of discourses on the Religious Ideas; and it seems to me that, before proceeding to consider these ideas separately, I may yet further prolong my introductory remarks, by amplifying somewhat more the third, and the most likely to be disputed of these assertions, namely, that because these ideas are consonant with human nature—the common growth of human nature—they therefore point to religion as in itself a reality, however it may be misrepresented, or blended with what seems falsehood to men's perceptions.

And this is an important result to arrive at. It is surely something, knowing how much there is of mere invention, of superstition, of ignorant fancy in what is called religion—it is something to know that there is more than this in it, and elements of a very different character and tendency. Religion is not a dream; it is not mere cloud-scenery; it is not a vain and evanescent imagination. Such delusions have prevailed, they have overshadowed nations and ages, but they have passed away, because they were no more than dreams, before the rising sun of knowledge. Religion has not so passed away. It is something to arrive at the conclusion that religion is not a fraud, a deception. Deliberate and gross deceptions have no doubt often been practised in its name. Claims and professions have been set up utterly devoid of all grounds; there

have been seasons when, as we are told of Rome, augur could not meet augur without laughing in each other's faces: but these times have never long endured; they have come in the corruptions of states, and have passed away with the corruptions of states. They are exceptional in human history; the world were else one great lie: and what is much more extraordinary, that very falsehood would be the stimulus to the noblest aspirations, a source of comfort in the deepest and darkest sorrows, and the impulse of the most devoted heroism.

It is something to arrive at the conclusion that religion, being neither fancy nor fraud, is not, either, to be classed with mere historical legend. The historical forms which it has often assumed are very unimportant as to its essence. All historical legend is full of prodigy—has large masses of falsehood intermixed with truth—requires the application of a close and searching criticism to distinguish the one from the other; its wonders fade away with the lapse of ages, becoming more and more incredible. Religion is not to be mixed with this: it is moral truth, resting on moral proof, and cannot fade or waste away. Nor is it a mere chance. We cannot say that religion came upon earth, as some say America was peopled, by accident. It is there as the flowers are there which grow on the soil; it is there as the stars are in the heavens, shining in their perennial brightness; it is there by the ordination of that omnipotent Nature from which all result.

It grows as they grow; it blossoms in the heart as surely as those flowers upon the soil; it ripens in the character as surely as do the fruits of harvest in the fields. It belongs to nature; it belongs to humanity. This is the position I am endeavouring to illustrate. And as there is continual confusion from requiring an inappropriate kind of evidence, especially on religious topics, it may perhaps be useful to remind a certain class of reasoners that logical forms are not essential to satisfactory conclusions; that as, in the history of invention, the greatest discoveries have not been made by working out a process of demonstrative thought, so there are truths which will not yield themselves to the common forms and arrangements in which the logician delights, and in which very often he mistakes the means for the end—the dexterous use of his own implements for the value of the result at which he professes to arrive.

There are instances of common convictions—firm ones too—which you cannot put to proof in a logical form. There is our reliance on *the permanency of the laws of Nature*. One of the ablest reasoners, and with no bias towards Christianity or any particular form of religion in his mind, has found himself unable to account for this reliance but by terming it a human instinct, something analogous to the instincts of animals. That the sun rose to-day is no logical proof that the sun will rise to-morrow. That the grain grew last year does not argue, by syllogistic deduction, that the grain will grow next year. And

yet where is there a confidence stronger than this? Where is a belief more firm? We rest on this, while there is much that, with all its array of professed demonstration, would fail of commanding our credence, still more our confidence. Our conviction of *the reality of external nature* is another instance of the same description. That, too, baffles the logician. You cannot show that there is matter, or existence at all, beyond yourself; and yet you believe it, rely upon it, act upon it. It may all be only impression on our consciousness. The Berkeleian can dispose of the whole material universe in this way with the greatest ease. There may be no stars shining in heaven, no trees growing in the forest—all may be but sensation, thought, in us; still, who does not rest upon, who does not act upon, the reality of something which is out of us with an assurance as strong as that of our belief in our own existence? Those who require direct agencies of demonstration in such matters as these—who contend that belief and the logical forms of proof have an inseparable union—must find their way out of this dilemma as well as they can; and how far they will find their way in real knowledge, and that which relates to the business of life, it is difficult to say. It must be left to themselves.

Now, I think this association of the religious ideas in the human mind with their being representatives of actual realities, is countenanced by the fact, that all our faculties are *objective*. All our faculties have

relation to something out of ourselves, which something is a reality. Whether we analyse man phrenologically, and take his organs as they are mapped out upon the skull, or whether we resolve his faculties into associated ideas, according to the philosophical doctrines of Hartley—still the argument which I propose in this case holds just the same. On both theories human faculties are objective; they relate to existence beyond ourselves, to real existence. The eye has its relation to light, and the ear to those vibrations of the atmosphere which we call sound. Human feelings and tendencies have all their external relations; love and mutual need build up society. Our tendency to enjoy regular intervals, and the repeated occurrence of certain movements, cherishes music. Every quality which we seek to cultivate has this relation; a relation which the phrenologists, such as Combe, have largely traced, between what is within us and something which is without us. Are we, then, to suppose that this holds only of the lower faculties? that the higher are exceptional to this law of objectivity? Are we to suppose that objects of sight are provided for the eye—that that organ has everything which corresponds with its functions; that sounds are provided for the ear; that there are objects for every tendency, even of cupidity or destructiveness—that all the inferior faculties have their corresponding objects without; but that such faculties as veneration, wonder, hope, conscientiousness—which all philosophers alike place

at the very highest elevation of our mental constitution—are alone unprovided for; have nothing which corresponds to them; but fail of indicating, as all the inferior faculties indicate, actual and external being? Through the whole range of faculties, beginning with the very lowest, this objective relation obtains. It holds true of the common bodily senses; of the various animal propensities which link humanity with inferior natures; of the intellectual powers framed for exercise in so many spheres of existence; and it cannot be supposed to cease just when we reach the noblest class of tendencies. The moral faculties of man require the reality of the religious ideas.

Further, the affinity of religion with human nature is observable in this, that both human nature and religion are results of the *same influences and agencies*. They are portions of the same system; the power which provides for the one provides for the other also.

The system in which we live is full of these harmonies; they beset us around; we find them everywhere. The hero of an age, the great man who is to stamp his intellectual portraiture upon the pages of history, who is to give his name to an era, who is to make revolutions in the concerns of humanity, in sciences, arts, arms, religions, or governments—he is prepared for by a thousand previous contrivances, leading us back through long ages: for him other heroes have fought and conquered, or endured; for him historians have recorded the rise and fall of

states; for him the poet has felt the burning glow of inspiration; for him have artists put forth their varied powers; for him did time and circumstance conspire—the material with the spiritual, the unconscious with the human, the heavens with the earth; these all uniting, and combining their diversified influences, produce, just at that time, just that combination of faculties, powers, tendencies, and aspirations, which make him the hero of his age, which give him his pre-eminence, and through him form and fashion the destinies of humanity. There is this provision in all things; in those harmonies of external nature which become the inspiration of the poet or of the musician; in those diversities and arrangements of colour which beam their rainbow light upon the painter's eye, and give him the enthusiasm of his art. We find them even in reference to what is most material and mechanical. Long and countless ages ago mighty forests were whelmed by the floods; they changed their qualities beneath the superincumbent pressure, and were formed into those mines of coal which minister to steam, the great material agency of civilization in our time. This production has been the result of processes continued through periods too vast for our arithmetic; but comes at last into its proper combination, and renders to humanity its unparalleled service.

As these are parts of one great plan; as we see the same power which provided habitations for humanity causing man to arise therein, and take possession

of his abode; as there is the framework of nature, through all its different gradations, giving food to bird and beast, and arranging according to their several properties the climates to which they are indigenous, and where they find their nutriment, and whence they spread their numbers—so there is the same kind of harmony, the same kind of uniformity, in the productive power with regard to religion. That, too, is thus provided for from the first dawn of human intelligence; it is thus ministered unto, sometimes by the ignorant and erring, and sometimes by the enlightened and wise; sometimes by force and fraud, and at others by persuasion and example; but still it springs up, and grows on the earth: it is part and parcel of humanity itself. The power which makes man makes religion; the power which sustains man sustains religion; the power which multiplies humanity till it subdues the earth renders religion universal. We resolve both into the same source; and as we trace in them the common products of one system of causation, we are led to pronounce the one a reality as much as the other.

All imaginative creations, all conceptions of the mind which are congruous with the ascertained laws of nature, are indicative of reality. The public taste even more and more requires this congruousness in fictitious creations. Nobody believes now in 'men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders'; the anatomical laws and principles are too well understood. We become impatient of allegory, because allegory

requires in its creations qualities to be blended together which do not exist together in fact, either in the nature of animals or in the human mind. In ignorant times, conceptions are free from the restrictions imposed by the discovery of scientific laws. Those which are at variance with such laws gradually subside, are exploded, and disappear; whilst those which remain, remain because they are in harmony with the reality, and are indicative of reality. Take, for instance, the finest characters in Shakespeare: who can doubt that they do exist, or have existed? We may not know them; the poet might not know them himself; they may have borne or may bear other names; they may live in different countries or ages to what he has assigned them; they may not yet have come into existence; but of those characters we may safely assert, that they are of real existence, that they have existed, or that they shall exist; for the mere conception of them is a pledge that amongst the boundless modifications continually going on in the production of actual human character, prototypes of these have, and have had, and will have their place. They have internal evidence of a corresponding actual external existence; the metaphysician reasons upon them as if literally historical. So it is with those religious conceptions which, not fading away with the progress of knowledge, have become clearer and brighter as the mind of man was more expanded. That notion which is itself the source and yet the summit of all—the conception of Deity, the loftiest

thought of man's ideality, which, produced so early, disfigured, it may be, by savage ignorance, or perverted by abstruse and fanciful doctrines—still, that notion ever clears and brightens itself in the human mind, and seems even an independent existence there, enlarging and raising the humanity by whose faculties the perception is produced. *The thought of Deity is a proof of Deity.* And so powerful are these natural ideas, these religious ideas, in humanity, that no system of faith and worship, however strong its external recommendations to support, has ever proved powerful enough to keep them down. Look at the polytheism of antiquity, how firmly it was established; look at its prevalence among the wandering Arabs of a comparatively late period; look at the gross idolatries of those old Israelites; yet they did not suppress the tendency of the human mind to think of the Divinity as ONE; and monotheism was proclaimed first by Moses, and then by Mohammed, and humanity heard and reverenced the proclamation. It was the same in Greece: Greece patronized the polytheistic system—Greece, with all the beauty and sublimity of its mythology; Athens, where it was said that it was easier to find a god than a man; and yet even there, in spite of establishments, in spite of policy, in spite of popular opinion, and in spite of martyrdom, did Socrates arrive at and inculcate the same monotheism which holds its power in the minds of Hindu Brahmins, which even teaches the savages in their fetish idolatry something of a universal

principle, an infinite spirit. It is the religious idea congruous with human nature—the produce of human nature; and you cannot keep it down.

The future state is another of these ideas. The Mosaic institutes were founded either in ignorance or intentional disregard of the expectation of a future life. It was ignored by Moses; it had no place in the inscriptions on the tables of stone lodged in the sanctuary; there was no future in the Book of the Law; the people were not instructed therein; their teachers did not surround it with authority; their oracles and their miracles alike had regard to the transactions of this life—to a retribution here; and yet, in spite of all this, the notion of a future life would come, did come, and, with the slight exception of a small and comparatively irreligious sect, prevailed over the whole people.

And so it is, whenever the dictates of that moral sense, which I class amongst the religious ideas, are violated by the professed enactments of religion. The right of self-defence, for instance, is one of the dictates of that moral sense; it is too strong for doctrines and precepts, for creeds and articles. A man's Bible may say to him, 'When thy right cheek is smitten, turn thy left'; but generally and permanently he will not do that, whatever may be his faith in, or reverence for, his Bible. He evades it; he finds some mode of interpreting it which takes his case out of the law. If he does not relinquish the authority which teaches it, he explains away, and

endeavours himself to escape from that authority. One of the Thirty-nine Articles of our Church of England is meant to prevent the simple and literal adoption of such a text as that; and condemns those who hold it not lawful, on certain occasions, or under certain circumstances, to bear arms. The instinct of self-defence and self-preservation, harmonizing with the moral sense of humanity—with one of the religious ideas which grow in our mental and spiritual being—is too strong for precept, however allowedly divine, and however direct and explicit in its enactments. It is the same with the doctrine of total depravity, and vindictive and eternal torment. It becomes a conventionalism; it is explained away; casuists and teachers devise different means of escaping from such a punishment for all about whom they are interested. The heart revolts from it; and forms and creeds cannot enforce it. And thus it ever is, when the religious ideas are invaded. There is no sanctity of books, however infallible they may be deemed; there is no power of miracles, though they were wrought before one's own eyes, instead of being merely the legendary record of long past ages; there is no authority or persuasion of teachers; there is no force of establishments, that can prevail against such notions: they baffle them all, they outlive them all; they stand unshaken, whilst creeds and forms totter and fall; they maintain their identity with human nature, the enduring—with the world, the permanent—with God, the everlasting.

There are, then, presumptions of various kinds which still lead us to this association of thoughts. Certain conceptions are native to man; they are indicative of real existence; they point us towards religion as something which, however it may be disfigured by arts and devices, still retains its own certainty of being—will revive wherever humanity revives—will show itself in affinity with our nature, our highest nature, wherever that nature has most opportunities of development, and, if the different modes and forms that now constitute religion were all to pass away, would replace them with natural and appropriate expressions, by which they would still maintain their influence, diffuse their consolations, and excite the aspiring hopes of humanity.

I dismiss these introductory remarks by merely adding, that it is not with the ignorance of man, but with his knowledge, that these thoughts have an affinity; they are associated with progress. Real and essential religion has a harmony with our condition, of which the external forms imposed upon it for various purposes are generally destitute. They seek to fix some mode as the enduring standard of faith and excellence; they say to the human mind, 'Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther.' They are thus at variance with humanity, just in the same degree and to the same extent as they are untrue to religion. But if religion really belongs to ourselves; if we may in its genuine spirit look abroad and recognize its reality, though in forms most alien

from our own convictions and our own feelings; if we may see it purifying and exalting even those whom we deem the victims of idolatry and superstition; if we can trace it amidst some of the darkest clouds that have brooded over human thought; and, at the same time, if we find it in the closest affinity with whatever is purest and brightest: why, then it is something destined to endure—it is a reality—it is beyond ourselves; and in our conceptions of it we are exalted as it were to a higher mode of perception and of enjoyment; we trace in it, and along with it, a tendency to progress, which is the noblest item in the charter of the privileges of human nature—which belongs to us in our affinity with heaven—which raises us towards higher grades of being—which infuses into us a spirit of oneness with that Power who rules everywhere, and is still educing good from evil, and making good more vast and more lasting. Let us rejoice in such a view of religion, which calls upon us for no base submission to that at which 'reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded'; but appeals only to our best powers, is in harmony with our brightest prospects, and tends to make man worthy of the position that he occupies on earth, and not unworthy of having in him a principle of enduring life, for which yet ampler spheres, and nobler occupations and enjoyments, are provided.

III

REVELATION

RELIGION and revelation are twin thoughts: wherever we find the one we find the other also. All religions claim to be or to contain revelations. It is not improbable that they all make the claim with some degree of truth; but if so, the exclusive claim of any must fall to the ground. In this country we are accustomed to identify revelation with Christianity. When we speak of revealed religion, as distinguished from that of nature, we mean what is contained in the Old and New Testaments. We indulge in that common fallacy by which people assume that their own notions are the truth, that their own institutions are the wisest form of government, that their own religion is the only religion, and that their circle is the world. But if we look abroad we find a similar disposition in a great variety of directions. The Koran much more distinctly claims to be, in its entirety, a revelation, than the Bible. The Koran does not mix up, as the Bible does, history, poetry, argument, and a great variety

of the forms of communication between man and man. It is one long appeal of Deity to his creatures. It is a divine monologue: the prophet is merely the amanuensis. God speaks, and Mohammed writes. Other religions have similar pretensions. Where is there one which does not rest on the notion, or that does not at least include the notion, of a revelation? The institutes of Menu come with similar claims of authority to the institutes of Moses. Zoroaster taught divine things, having arrived at them by divine knowledge. Odin sought Hela for the solution of mysteries. The Grand Lama of Tibet is a living revelation, continually renewed. And the idolatry of the old classical times abounded in oracles. They came from trees and caverns, from rivers and mountains; the priestess uttered them on the tripod, and 'still her speech was song.' The craving after revelation makes man believe almost any pretender to the rank of priest or prophet. Strange methods have been devised to obtain revelations: corpses have been exhumed; they have been, it is said, reanimated, that they might tell the fate of ensuing battles. The flight of birds has been watched, the entrails of animals have been dissected, in order thereby to arrive at some intimation from the gods. It was done by the augurs of Rome; it was done by the patriarch Abraham when he sacrificed; for the Jews had recourse to these methods, as well as other people. Even the glittering of a stone has been sometimes made the medium of an oracle. The Urim and

Thummim, the breastplate of the high-priest, with its jewels, shone or was darkened, according to the favourable or unfavourable answer of Divinity. Even those who have advocated a natural religion, as opposed to all preternatural revelation, have clung to the same belief or practices. Socrates had his attendant demon, for monition, warning, and encouragement; and Lord Herbert of Cherbury, seeking a sanction for the publication of his work against Christianity, knelt down and prayed, and heard the affirmative response of heaven's thunder in an unclouded sky!

Revelation, then, is eminently entitled to class amongst what, for the purpose of these lectures, I have called the religious ideas. It has an intimate association with the very notion of religion itself. And why is this, but that for religious principle, guidance, and support, there is a general want and craving in humanity? and there is a persuasion as general, that for every want there is a supply in the arrangements of nature or of providence. Man finds this by experience in his inferior wants and cravings. He needs sustenance; the fields bear him their fruits. His eye requires light, and it beams around him, and becomes the medium of his perceptions. His ear has the want of sound, and sound comes to him borne on the waves of the atmosphere. And if it be true, that 'the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing,' it is that in our very senses there is something of that tendency which distinguishes the

higher faculties and the general constitution of humanity; and therefore, that dissatisfaction is the mode by which nature stimulates art, in order to provide yet higher gratifications—with them higher wants—and so again, in a progression which nature and art are yet very far indeed from having exhausted.

The different races of mankind are found in the localities best adapted to their peculiarities of temperament. The very beasts of the field vary in different regions, and are sure to seek for the region best adapted to them. Where their appropriate habitation is, where their natural food grows, where their different powers can be best exerted, there they are, as in their natural seat, their original nest, from which, indeed, they may be moved to other regions, but where we find, as it were, the fountain of their existence. The craving mind of man seeks after the knowledge of the qualities and properties of things and of past ages; and here again, in the natural progress of society, arise the means of meeting this want, and filling his mind with acquirements in which he becomes possessed of the supplies of all ages; and perceiving this, he is led to infer, that for other wants, belonging to a different set of faculties, there must also be a provision. For the religious wants are at least as obvious as any other. They are, wherever humanity exists. Where *it* is, there is darkness to be dispelled, exertion to be made, sorrow to be borne; there are all the different actions and influences which, in their operation upon our frame, make us conscious how

much we need of that highest kind of knowledge, of that strongest form of consolation and support. How soon is man doomed to be perplexed in his spirit, to be compelled painfully to say of himself, that he does not know, that he cannot penetrate the darkness around him! How often has man to endure a calamity that presses heavily upon him, when sympathy fails him, when his own resources fail him, except as in those resources he finds the suggestion to look beyond and to look above! Who is there that has not been perplexed like David at 'beholding the prosperity of the wicked'? Who is there that has not felt the sense of injustice keen and strong at his heart, in the view of man's oppressions over his brother man? Who is there to whom the grave has not covered up hopes and affections, and made the mind long—painfully and intensely long—for some discerning power—that is, for some revelation? There have been books published under the name of 'Inquirer.' 'Inquirer' is the name of humanity. Man everywhere is naturally seeking, grasping, groping after something which is to support, to guide, to strengthen, and to impel him onward.

As yet, religions in their peculiar and distinctive forms have generally failed of satisfying this want. The religions of the old civilized world have passed away, vanished from the earth; or they remain only in the glorious works of art which they have produced, looked at with other eyes, with the admiration of taste, but not with the homage of

worship. By no power can those ancient faiths be revived. What religion has thoroughly satisfied the craving mind and heart of man? Christianity has had eighteen centuries, and where, for two-thirds of that period, has been its extension? Mohammedanism reigns over a larger number of the human race; and yet what enlightened mind is satisfied with the attributes of 'Allah,' or with the trees and fountains of the paradise of the Koran? No religion has so appealed in its entirety to the common human heart as to become the religion of human nature; and yet they have all had ample time for doing so, had it been in them. As to Christians, they have taken of late rather to split than to multiply; to divide rather than to extend. They cannot convert one another, and hence there is little chance of their converting the Hindus or other heathen. Man is yet seeking for something of a different kind from any religion considered in its technicality, its entirety, and its exclusiveness. They have all paltered with humanity; they have all professed to give more than the human mind found they actually realized. The light which they shed abroad has been found frequently to 'lead astray,' and could not be recognized as 'light from heaven.' They have not given the abundant satisfaction after which our nature is still striving, and after which it will continue to strive, though in its fulness it may be found unattainable. They have not raised the veil of Isis, or if they have, only to discover that there was

no great truth beneath to show to the nations. They have baffled the inquiries of mankind, as the young Epictetus, in his studies, was baffled by his tutor, who expounded to him Hesiod's Theogony, and told him that—

Eldest of beings, Chaos first arose.

'And Chaos whence?' said the young inquirer. Poets and theologians, he was told, had no answer for that, he must go to the philosophers. And what could they achieve? The greatest oracle of Greece, that of the far-seeing Apollo, was solicited to designate the wisest of men. It named Socrates; and the philosopher's account of his own wisdom was, that he knew only that he knew nothing. The world has been left unsatisfied.

We are accustomed to say, in familiar language—some sects—that the Bible *is* a revelation; others, aiming at a nicer distinction, that it *contains* a revelation. There is a sense in which both these are true; but it is not the sense in which they are commonly affirmed. Indeed, few books bear less of the character of claiming in their entirety to be a revelation, than the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. One of the best condensed descriptions of them was given by Edmund Burke, in the discussion on the clerical petitioners, who, about a century ago, had claimed relief from subscription to Articles.

'The Scripture,' he says, 'is no one summary of doctrines regularly digested, in which a man could not mistake his way; it is a most venerable, but most

multifarious collection of the records of the divine economy; a collection of an infinite variety of cosmogony, theology, history, prophecy, psalmody, morality, apologue, allegory, legislation, ethics, carried through different books, by different authors, at different ages, for different ends and purposes. It is necessary to sort out what is intended for example, what only as narrative; what to be understood literally, what figuratively; where one precept is to be controlled and modified by another; what is used directly, and what only as an argument *ad hominem*; what is temporary, and what of perpetual obligation; what appropriated to one state and to one set of men, and what the general duty of all Christians.'

Such was the true and just description given by that illustrious man. What was his inference from it? That the Scriptures needed the addition of the Creeds and Articles of the Church, in order to fix their meaning. And what was this, but to make the Church the revealer, and not the Scripture—to raise the agent above the author—and by this authority of interpretation, to make another effort, but a much vainer one, towards the object commonly ascribed to the Scriptures.

What, indeed, is there on which we can lay our finger, and say, 'Here is a truth, in some distinct preternatural form, communicated from heaven to earth'? The very being of Deity is taken for granted in the whole of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. When did men learn that God was their father?

We cannot tell when the thought first occurred; it is most prevalent in the New Testament, but we find it in the Old Testament. The Jew exclaims, 'Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?' We find it in the prophets, and we find it also in the ancient poets of Greece and Rome, as well as in the speculations of the Oriental monotheists. The notion of Deity grows before our eyes in the history of the human mind—at first imperfect, confused, partaking of the material forms of humanity, surrounded by attributes that belong rather to the warrior than to the legislator, as afterwards rather with those that belong to the legislator than to the parent. We behold it everywhere growing with the growth of human nature, and enlarging with the extension of the human mind.

Was the future life a revealed doctrine, in this preternatural way? There is no text for it; no communication even by the greatest of the prophets; but the Jews picked it up in Babylon. Having found it there, though in the land of sorrow and captivity, it had so much affinity with their thoughts and feelings, that it speedily became the general faith of the nation. Is the doctrine of the devil a revelation? When, where, or how? The conception is only an attempt, an abortive attempt, at a solution of the great problem of the origin of evil. We see him taking varied forms —some sublime, some ludicrous; passing through all gradations, from an obedient though an accusing spirit—the attorney-general of heaven's court—until

he claims a co-ordinate throne with God, and maintains a universal struggle with his power for dominion over life, and heart, and soul. The idea of a divine preternatural revelation cannot be brought into contact with associations such as these. We must look elsewhere. We must look further.

Where is revelation? Everywhere; everywhere that man, cherishing his purest thoughts and highest faculties, finds his spirit in communion with the great universal Spirit. It is not here or there exclusively. It is with the poet of an idolatrous country; it is with sages arising in barbarous times, their light shining amidst the thick night of ignorance; and it is with those who, enjoying higher degrees of knowledge, surrounded by an atmosphere of intelligence, find their own minds enabled thereby to look yet higher, even to the great Source of light. Wherever moral and spiritual truth suggests itself to the mind, grows in that mind, passes from it to other minds—there is revelation; by whatever name it may be called, under whatever external forms of religion it may be conveyed, with whatever establishments and institutions of priests or churches it may be associated—revelation is there, and there should we thankfully acknowledge its existence.

There is a state of mind to which it comes—not preternaturally—there is no conjuration in the case, there is no violation of law; it comes in harmony with the great laws of matter, mind, spirit. When a man has meditated in solitude, or has discoursed in society

—if he has become familiar with antique volumes, or has listened to living teachers—whenever and wherever he has felt himself most at one with the scheme of things in which he exists; when, his mind retiring from petty struggles and petty enjoyments, or seeking relief from its weight of sorrows, allowing the course of his thoughts to run freely, he has perceived, amid the great confusion of things, some moral truth, as it were beaming from above—there has been God's revelation; and let him lay it to his heart, and cherish it.

There is something analogous to this in science. It was by no logical process, by no calculation, that the theory of the universe first arose in the mind of Newton; at least, according to the story, the apple fell, and the thought sprung up—how the power of gravitation might bind the planets into a system, and unite system with system, through all the regions of space. And thus it is that moral truth, in the minds of men disposed to be recipients of heaven's bounty, has come to them in all countries, and in all ages—and will continue to come, while nature and man exist as they are now constituted. It is true, thought works on these conceptions. It may supply some degree of external evidence, though it does not discover them; but after all, such is not the basis on which they rest. It may endeavour to hew them into a shape more accordant with the acknowledged principles of the time and the country; but this will not affect the essence of the thought itself, the dis-

covery of the moral truth—what I call the revelation. Bentham laboured all his life in merely amplifying a sentence which he found in the writings of Dr. Priestley —'that the proper end of government is the greatest happiness of the greatest number'—a sentence probably written by that fluent author without himself having any distinct comprehension of the extent and grandeur of the meaning of that on which he thus conferred expression. Bentham, the most logical of men, spent his life in amplifying and applying this truth; but he never proved the assertion itself—the basis of all his philosophy, the spirit and life of his whole system, that which to deny reduces all his juridical and social speculations to a mere hypothesis: he never did prove that—he never dreamt of proving it; and perhaps he might be unaware through his whole life, that he was thus receiving a truth on the ground of its moral fitness and consonance with the best dictates of human nature, which had really nothing of the logical demonstration and foundation that he was endeavouring to give to all his minor propositions.

Such is the way we deal with things in this Western world. The Orientals affect not the logical forms as we do; a thought darts into their minds, and they receive it as something from without—something (if it bear marks of truth and beauty) from above. Hence inspiration is to the Orientals what logic is to the Western world; they ascribe their thoughts directly to the great Source of thought. Religions

have generally originated with them, and bear the Oriental character. The East has been their cradle, though elsewhere they may have been cherished to maturity. But all that has been done for these elementary thoughts in morals and religion has been only to endeavour to systematize and arrange them, to give them logical forms which did not belong to them originally, and perhaps never can belong to them in the dawn where they were first produced. The revelations, then, which religions make, are only modifications—modifications of these thoughts; and I might have replied at once to this question of 'Where is revelation?' by the words of William Penn, the Quaker, who, in his work entitled *Fruits of a Father's Love*, thus gives his conception of true religion: 'That blessed principle, the eternal word, I began with to you; and which is that light, spirit, grace, and truth I have exhorted you to, in all its holy appearances and manifestations in yourselves, by which all things were at first made, and men enlightened to salvation. It is Pythagoras' great light and salt of ages; Anaxagoras' divine mind; Socrates' good spirit; Timæus' unbegotten principle, the author of all light; Hieron's God in man; Plato's eternal, ineffable, and perfect principle of truth; Zeno's maker and father of all; and Plotin's root of the soul. These were some of those virtuous Gentiles commended by the Apostle, that though they had not the law given them as the Jews had—those instrumental helps and advantages—yet, doing by nature the

things contained in the law, they became a law unto themselves.'

It is not in what is peculiar to them that religions are revealers, but in what is common to them with other religions. Generally, what they have as a peculiarity is something which will ill bear the test of time, as compared with what is essential. For instance, the doctrine of a future life is common to religions: the Christian apostles blended with it the resurrection of the body—a physical impossibility. Hinduism also teaches a future life, and blends with it the transmigration of the soul—a great improbability. The Greek philosophers had some notion of a future life, and they blended with it the pre-existence of the soul—a very questionable addition. But the hope itself, the anticipation, is common to them all. That is the revelation, the most important of the whole; it is the source of consolation and of guidance; it is what alone the soul can rest on, whilst all else, though peculiar, is disputable, and may pass away.

Religions have much in common, even of what we may deem their light and graceful ornament, as well as that which is essential to their substance. The circlet of glory that surrounds the head of Christ and of saints in our paintings, first shed its rays from the heads of the old gods of Greece. 'The mother and child,' so worshipped over the European continent, you will find in the zodiac of the Egyptians. Humanity trampling on the serpent is an emblem deriving the

materials of its description, not only from the book of Genesis, but you may see it in the pictorial illustrations of the Hindu religion. And when 'the cross' surmounts 'the ball,' and we behold the emblem of Christianity predominant over a world, we only repeat a form which may yet be seen in the tombs within the Pyramids—the symbol of that aspiration which has ever stimulated the efforts of men after immortality—a sign that the good king or hero had become a divinity. There is similar identity in what has most importance, in the truths which have the most relation to the mind and heart, the life and circumstances of humanity.

Now, if this be really the state of things as to the different religions of the world, we no longer feel it a mystery that there should be characters the most eminent for piety, wisdom, beneficence, in all religions; and we see the arrogance of the presumption that claims alone to know the path to heaven, and of a benevolence that is degraded by the principles with which it is conjoined; that would convert other nations; that would call on all to tread in this path, and this alone; which tells them that we have saving truth, and they have only damning error; that our assertions must be admitted, or their souls cannot be saved; and which calls upon them to pass condemnation on all their ancestors—on all whom they have venerated—all whom they have loved, and to consider them all as one mass of corruption, destined to eternal burning; while, verily, we have the light—with us alone are its beams to be perceived, and from us alone

must it go forth and irradiate the universe. It ill befits man, this sort of assumption—this claim of infallibility; it is quite certain this is no revelation from heaven; it bears no mark of divinity as to its truth, its spirit, or its mode of operation.

Revelation is not something out of law, or beyond law. It is not the petty wonder of a transformation of one substance into another that is really miraculous; but the enduring works of nature, renewed every night and morning, renewed every seed-time and harvest. Why stand amazed at a multitude fed with five loaves? Nature feeds man with as little material from year to year; her fields are enriched by divine power, and nations eat and are satisfied. Throughout the world there are wonders ever adapted to excite our veneration, far more than all those contrivances, those fantastic wonders, that may for a time lay hold of our imagination, but while they 'play round the head,' assuredly 'come not near the heart.' It is in the course of those influences which belong alike to all beings that man finds himself the subject of revealing power; that moral truth becomes clearer, brighter, lovelier, dearer to him; and whether it be enshrined in the words of a text, whether it take the pictorial form or that of sculptured thought, whether it come to him in written book or by tradition, it is ever welcome, so long as it bears these distinctive and exalted marks.

And this I take to be the true spirit of religion; alike free from enthusiasm or scepticism; treating

respectfully the myths and legends that have associated themselves differently in different countries, but in all going to the heart and life of religion; free from the fervour of proselyting zeal, shrinking back from the denunciations of spiritual pride, abhorring lines of demarcation and exclusion between different portions of God's rational beings; turning from all these as things that can have no affinity with religion, any more than they have with genuine humanity; looking within for the source of thought and truth, by deep meditation on our own nature, as harmonized with the nature of things around us, and in these 'seeing him who is invisible,' and perceiving not only his existence, but his power and loveliness, his majesty and glory. We thus imbibe a universality of spirit akin to that which we behold in the entire system of Providence—a universality of spirit like that of the ages, which in the long succession of their march demonstrate that humanity is moving onward, and still onward, in civilization and knowledge, science and religion—a universality of spirit like to that which is manifested in human nature itself, in its diversity of races and religions, of climates and nations, all so varied, yet each with its peculiar type of goodness, power, and greatness, and all ministering to the common advancement and progress—a universality of spirit akin to that of the earth, whose rich soil bears the frailest and loveliest flowers, and yet the enduring oak, and dark and eternal forests; which bears whatever can minister to animals, or to human beings;

fashioning itself, as it were, into one great altar, on which man may present his offering to the supreme and directing Power—a universality of spirit akin not only to the ages, to human nature, to the earth, but to the heavens themselves—the boundless heavens, with their comets and planets, their suns and stars and constellations.

IV

GOD

THE human ever believes in the divine. The notion of Deity is as natural to man as that of humanity. Real atheism is an abnormal condition; it is out of the rule of human life and human feelings. It was said by an old divine, that a nickname was the hardest stone the devil could throw at a man. The imputation of atheism is the hardest of those hard stones: it is a mere calumny in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases at least out of a thousand. Often it is rather in words than in reality that the imputation has any basis; and perhaps scarcely an instance can be found of an intellectual life, the whole of which bears the mark of atheism. It is a phase, a variation, an exception, holding such proportion in the lives of those who avow themselves to be atheists, as disease does to health in the ordinary routine of human affairs. Many are not atheists who profess themselves to be so, and believe themselves to be so. 'Queen Mab' is not an atheistical poem, whatever Shelley might think or profess. It recognizes that pervading

spirit of love presiding over universal being which is only one phase of theism—a peculiar phase, and certainly not amongst the least lovely. Exceptional cases prove nothing as to the human constitution; and however it may have occurred, in times of dreadful suffering or violent confusion, or in times of great luxury and widespreading and deep depravity of manners, that numbers have made profession of atheism, it has still been but an exceptional case in the history of nations, as it is in the history of individual life. That great logician and mathematician, Hobbes, would never believe that he had not accomplished the impossible problem of squaring the circle; and yet we bring this forward as no proof that mathematical demonstration is not irresistible. Recently, horror has been excited by the profit made of those burial societies established in some parts of our own country, where it seems the parents have trafficked in the lives of their infant children; and yet no one infers from this that the parental affection, the parental instinct, is not essential to the human constitution. To great and pervading principles, instances like these offer little difficulty; and against such exceptions as these we have the otherwise universal voice of human nature. Civilization and barbarism, science and ignorance, despotism and freedom, manners the most refined and the most uncultivated, ages of prosperity and of calamity, the inhabitants of regions the most remote, from the frigid to the torrid zone—through all its varying phases

humanity proclaims 'There is a God,' and renders that God its homage.

Revelation has been treated of as the first of those religious ideas to which these lectures relate, and the illustration of which I have proposed to myself. But revelation, though the first noticeable phenomenon of the human mind, yet implies at least a latent idea; revelation presupposes a revealer. This thought, this moral truth, which seems to beam and dart into man's mind as he is groping his way amongst the difficulties of his nature or his condition—this new thought, recognized at once as an emanation of truth and loveliness—whence emanates it? Whence came it? It is a messenger; and who sent it? It is an agency; and who is the author? We cannot rest in such a notion as truth revealed to inquiring humanity, without the notion of a revealer. Different nations and different habits of thought may furnish different phraseology for the same phenomena; but this incoming of truth upon the human mind is really and essentially the idea of revelation, however much it may have been coupled with the childish adjuncts of inspired books and oracles. When the impulse came to Gibbon, in the ruins of the Coliseum, amid mouldering walls and deepening shadows—when it blended with his recollections of grandeur passed away, and of its contrast with that other strange form of grandeur which had taken its place—no voice, indeed, from the clouds or from the earth said audibly to him, 'Go and write the history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman

Empire, in sentences as gorgeous as the hues of that sunset by which it is typified'; but the impulse came—came combinedly from without and from within; it was the sort of occurrence which, told in Oriental phraseology, would be, 'The word of the Lord came to such a one, and said, Go thou, and do this great work.' We have an unavoidable tendency, when truth thus comes upon us, to look at it as one link in a chain—a revelation, connecting the recipient with the revealer; and accordingly, there have been many times and countries in which Wisdom itself was deified and worshipped. In the mythology of the Greeks, Minerva sprang full-armed from the head of Jove. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon has personified Wisdom as dwelling with the Eternal, as preceding all creation, and then, even then, rejoicing before its almighty Parent; as laying the foundations of the earth, and measuring the courses of the stars. And this, in the Gospel of John, is varied by 'the Word,' which, 'in the beginning, was with God, and was God,' and that came and tabernacled amongst men; thus going as near as the genius of the Jewish and Christian systems admitted, to that which the Gentiles have done in their personification and deification of Wisdom; and showing, in both cases, the tendency of the human mind to associate these thoughts together, and in the progress of truth to perceive an emanation from that great and eternal orb of truth to which they traced it back. In this way, the relation which man perceives in himself to wisdom, to nature, to some invisible

suggestive power—all make the revelation, the notion of revealed thought, essentially connected with that of a revealing power. Sometimes the mind may pause a while in intermediate agency—'the friend, philosopher, and guide'—the angel, the spirit of the departed, the local deity; the earthly prophet, the heavenly Logos, or 'Word'; but these are only pauses. It never rests till it reposes in the thought of the ultimate and infinite Source of wisdom.

That which is done by the relation which revelation suggests, is also intimated by the other and varied relations of human nature with this same objective existence as to our faculties, with this same power as to phenomena around us and within us. We have been sometimes told, that 'Fear first made gods.' Whether it be true literally or not, the apprehensiveness of danger, the feeling of pain inflicted from without, must suggest the notion of such a power. There must be something which thunders, strikes, blasts, destroys. That realizes itself to man's mind; and, according to the grossness or the loftiness of his nature, he bows the knee in sordid apprehension, or in enlightened reverence. Gratitude, the result of another of our relations, has a similar effect. We cannot receive good without thinking of a bestower of good; we cannot rest in the sense of bounties without some conception of a donor. The mind craves after it. That would be almost a miserable life which was spent in the continual reception of bounties from an unknown hand. Man would become restless and enfevered to

find out the author. Gratitude demands expression, and enforces it. We must thank and bless somebody, or something, for the good of which we are the recipients. Thus gratitude, like fear, like the notion of revelation, still leads us to a God. The sense of beauty, the perception of power, the emotions that are excited in us by the grandeur and loveliness of natural objects—these all, again, as they possess themselves of the mind, and aggrandize themselves there, and give us new intellectual, which arise into new moral, perceptions—these, again, make us inquire after the 'first good, first perfect, and first fair.'

The conscience within us has a relative character. Conscience accuses, approves, judges; but who does not feel, while before its tribunal, that conscience is but a delegated judge—that this authority within us is but the type and symbol, is but the individual agency of a more pervading authority? And as its voice is heard, whether in the loud thunder of reprobation, or in the gentle whisper of self-applause, still that voice also proclaims—proclaims in its every judgment—'Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.' Thus the varied relations that exist between us and the something exterior or unknown to us, but which all, in their different ways, still point to an object—an object of veneration, of love, and of confidence—are all the means of rendering the conception or idea of God natural and general to the human mind.

The progress of man has been commonly traced, as to theology, through the three forms of the fetish

divinities of the savage, the polytheism of more refined countries, and the monotheism which has become the religion of European nations. And as to the expression of opinion, the forms of worship, and the condition of the great mass—at least the surface of that condition—there is truth in this gradation. It is what the historian of opinion must delineate, looking only to the apparent. But there is something more than this in human thought, even in its first, faint, struggling efforts. The fetish of the savage—the first object which the Indian sees after he has been made a warrior, and gained a substantive existence in the clan or tribe to which he belongs—which becomes a sacred symbol to him through life, and which he adores—does not this imply a previous thought, perception, idea, though latent? The notion of *the divine* must precede the notion of *a divinity*. Some recognition, therefore, of the universal principle, of pervading presence and power, blends itself even with the fetishism of the savage; much more does it with the polytheism of people more enlightened. The notion of God must precede the multiplication of divinities, of gods. We find the thought of a divine nature amongst the earliest of all in the speculations of poets and philosophers. It holds its way contemporaneously with all; and were we to imagine a solitary world—solitary human life in the world—a conscious and reflective being living perfectly alone—no brethren, no animated inferiors—sweep all away besides himself, except unconscious matter—and still that individual would have

the idea of life, and by it, in another state of things, he would recognize and identify *the living being*; and thus does the notion of the divine naturally precede the individual recognition of the particular divinity. GOD is before and above all gods. And although the different relations are intimately connected, either with the suggestion or with the growth and expansion of this thought, yet there is an abstraction of it that inevitably occurs, and occurs too at a very early period. We arrive at the notion of a revealer, a punisher and rewarder, a benefactor, a judge; we thus strengthen our dawning notion of a God; but we withdraw it from these—we regard it in itself. The conception of Infinity is associated with it. It is something to be recognized apart from these relations, essential to us, but not essential to the Deity who has thus arisen upon our conceptions. The thought of God stands alone in the mind; and in so doing it affects all other thoughts and all external contemplations. It is like the sun in the heavens, other things become visible in its light. What a wonderful conception it is when man becomes aware of this entrance, as it were, of an independent and commanding thought into his own mind! It is well described by the old Hebrew simile, as 'the coming of a king into the camp'; all are conscious of the presence, and render their homage. Every thought assumes a new relation; and as in the abstraction we have something in which every expansion of our own knowledge, every enrichment of our own thoughts, finds its appropriate object to invest

with that aggrandizement and enrichment, so do we become more and more possessed with it, till the very action or operation of abstraction leads to that of universal identification; and by looking at God alone, man learns to see God in everything.

It is the natural occurrence of these phases of the idea of Deity—of this succession of thoughts, emotions, or conceptions—which throws light on what to some has been a puzzling problem, namely, that of the antiquity of a pure and elevated theism; for nothing can be more inconsistent either with the philosophy of the case, or with the facts of the case, than to assume that nations, even in the earliest periods, were at first, and naturally, all polytheistic, and gradually advanced from that to monotheism. The one is at least as ancient as the other; nay, it has been remarked, and often remarked with astonishment, by inquirers who have deeply penetrated into antiquity on that dark subject—the condition of primeval man—that we often find symptoms of a more distinct conception of divine grandeur and infinity than prevailed in later ages. Mr. Belsham and other theologians have endeavoured to account for this by supposing a primeval preternatural revelation, analogous to their views of the Jewish and Christian sacred books, that vanished from the earth, whelmed in the deluge, perhaps, and not a copy left for the scribe, or subsequently for the printer. That early revelation is better looked for in the source of all revelations, in that with which all revelations must be

identified to be genuine—the moral constitution of human nature, the human mind and heart; for by the process to which I have just referred—the mental process of abstraction and identification—the idea of God, suggested by relations that may be called external, becomes an independent and self-expansive thought in the mind, and by it man attains at a very early period the notion of infinity, and of eternity, both associated with that of God.

Then he has the impulse and inspiration of the grandest thoughts that can be poured forth. Who, with all the advantages of the Christian dispensation, and of modern times—who surpasses, who approaches Plato in his conceptions of Deity—conceptions arising in the midst of an idolatrous people, and in an age which, theologically at least, was one of comparative darkness? What can be more sublime than the language of some of the Old Testament worship?—language uttered amongst a people whose hands were imbrued with the blood of their neighbours, who had possessed themselves of their neighbours' countries—a fierce and warlike race, and seemingly incapable of any high degree of mental action, or of the mental refinement and expansiveness of other Orientals, even of the Persians, for instance, to say nothing of the Grecian people. Yet there we find such descriptions as those familiar ones in the Psalms and the Prophets: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' Again: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.' This is language which will be appropriate in devotion while the world shall stand. The notion of infinity is not enlarged by the extension of scientific discovery. The Psalmists knew nothing of the magnitude of the solar system; they knew nothing of the immense distances of the fixed stars. It never occurred to them that there were

> Orbs whose light
> Has travelled the profound six thousand years—

or it may be said sixty thousand—

> Nor yet arrived in sight of mortal things.

Their notion of the world was no more to that which science now delineates than the mole-hill to the mountain; and yet they poured forth strains of adoration which cannot be rendered more grand or exalted, which must remain the language of the most enlightened, who, with the greatest discoveries that science has made, or ever can make, bow their knees before the Infinite, and raise their voices to his glory.

The language of science may become obsolete, the language of religion never. It is the expression of an idea natural to man; which as soon as his nature gains the power of expression, gives it a being that lasts through all ages, all changes; and the song of the 'sweet singer of Israel' may be the devout chant of those who, after myriads and myriads of ages, shall inhabit this world of ours, with a knowledge that has expanded in proportion to the periods which the human race will have enjoyed for its accumulation.

Of course this original and natural conception is modified by a great variety of influences. I have glanced at these. I shall refer to them no further now than just to mention one way in which the history of thought, as traceable in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, illustrates the tendency of different national conditions, so that the one and selfsame conception of Divinity is varied according to the circumstances of the great mass of individuals—varied superficially, while it remains the same essentially. We begin with the Israelites in their condition of subjugation, of enslavement, the beaten and starved vassals of Egyptian power—the language of complaint their natural language, and the expression of their pervading feelings; a people who have almost forgotten that there is a God over man; who reject the gods, the temples, and the sacrifices of their oppressors, as well they may, or turn away from them with disgust; who have some remote tradition, of which the prophet and champion knows how to avail himself, of the God

of their fathers, of the guiding Spirit that went with those mighty shepherd princes in their wanderings; and to this conception they turn. Here they make their appeal: their cry is for deliverance, for emancipation, for help—help in their down-trodden condition; and in this time of their dark and dire necessity, the first phase of Divinity which appears in their records is that of *a Deliverer*. God arises as their Saviour. It is a time of signs and prodigies; and no wonder that such should have been the first association of a barbarous and ignorant race so circumstanced. God works for them by wonders. The billows of the Red Sea roar the song of triumph over their insolent oppressors. The Law is given from Sinai's top, ratified by the pealing artillery of heaven, the trumpet of the Lord, the rolling thunder, beneath which the mountain shakes. They advance in their march; the river parts to make them a free passage, and the walls of towered and embattled cities fall down at their approach. It was a robbery, a robbery stained by sanguinary massacre, that conquest of Canaan; but the moral sense had not yet so developed itself as to check them in their career; and the notion of a delivering power, of Omnipotence as a delivering and emancipating power, occupied their thoughts, burst forth in what was true in their conceptions, and coloured their language and their records.

But they come to a more orderly condition. Moses dealt with them as it was well that a wise man should deal with such a horde of savages. With these rude

and wild materials, he endeavoured to build the temple of order, of lawful authority; and the next phase in which Deity was mainly contemplated by them is that of *the Legislator*. The 'Law of the Lord' becomes synonymous with the notions of revealed truth, and doctrine, and moral duty. All things are resolved into law; they have a religion of law; they worship by law; they live by law; they look for prosperity or adversity as the rewards or punishments which are the sanction of that law: it is the pervading thought, and throws its hue and colouring upon the other conceptions of the mind, and even, amongst the rest, on this most exalted one of Divinity. Miracles now abate; eventually they pass away with this perception of orderliness, and there is some glimpse of a law of nature as well as a law of ceremonies—some appearance of a law ruling over human spirits.

Then comes their military day, under their kings—the warlike age of the Jews, now so notorious for their aversion to the military profession—their incapability, it almost seems, of adopting that mode of action—but then so renowned for their martial deeds and prowess. Then, when they spake of Deity, '*the Lord of Hosts* was his name.' Modern interpretation introduces the notion of the hosts of heaven, the orderly marshalling of the stars; but it is clear that no such thought was in the mind of the Jew. His Jehovah became a sort of Mars or Odin, the leader of armies, the god of battles, and the giver of victory. That phase endured for its time; and then another season of degradation

—varied much from their Egyptian slavery, indeed but perhaps still more depressing to their thoughts—arrived: their vassalage to Rome, their hopeless struggle against the power that had subdued and that ruled the world; and their enforced submission, extending to so much in the relations and occupations of life, and ever and anon threatening even their religious observances. And then came the phase of supplication; the reliance upon pity in the Divinity; the plaintive, childlike cry that called on God as '*Our Father*'; then came those thoughts of mercy, and patience, and kindness, forbearance, and all long-suffering, which the woes and miseries of humanity have made but too enduring a form of the theological conception. They have, indeed, perpetuated it to our own times. Not that even now this tendency to modification is exhausted, or that I am giving more than a single specimen of what may be traced in a thousand different ways in all the diversities of the history of religious opinion. There may be a tendency to a peculiar modification in our own times. There is a thought which would show itself yet more strongly, were it not checked and impeded by the influences which the constitution of creeds and churches, and the wide establishment of conventional theories of religion, interpose. But the tendency of our days is to *universality*, to the recognition of the universality of humanity; we belong to the times when negroes have been freed, and Catholics emancipated, when the world has rung with a cry for the

'rights of man,' and shouts of 'liberty, fraternity, and equality,' have echoed from generation to generation and from country to country. Universal recognition as to our fellow-creatures has been a thought belonging especially to our own times, and magnifying itself in human opinion; and what is the modification which this effects on the great, the abstract, the enduring conception of Divinity, but that of universality, of a pervading power; not only of an impartial providence over all human beings, of all countries and religions, but of an essence, a spirit, a soul of the universe, incorporate with all, and in all, which manifests itself in every flower that blossoms, in every star that shines, in every cloud that flits across the sky, as well as in that everlasting arch which bends over all, and proclaims the Infinity coexisting with all these seeming and transitory modifications?

It is the work of religion to communicate this great thought, which shines through these different aspects; and to keep it still pure—the essence not dimmed nor perverted, but still remaining in the majesty in which it showed itself originally to the minds of those who made the abstraction of the notion of God from its varied relations with us, and adored the absolutely perfect.

And in such thoughts, amid the world's shocks and convulsions, or amid the changes, coming nearer to our hearts, of private life—in these thoughts, amid all things, we find a source of peace, of love, of joy, and of hope. We believe in God.

V

DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

If the principle be a just one which I am endeavouring to illustrate in these lectures; if we perceive that there are, common to all religions, certain elementary conceptions of God, his government, and his attributes; if these conceptions form the leading power of each particular religion; if they are thus common because they are in affinity with the intellectual and moral constitution of human nature; and if that affinity with the intellectual and moral constitution of human nature is a presumption of their independent, their objective character—of their existence and reality; it will also follow, that in their legitimate developments we shall find similar characters of truth and power; but in these alone, for they may be irregularly, partially, erroneously developed. And our recognition of the truth of the original conception, of course, does not bind us to the acceptance of these partial, and, to our apprehension, erroneous developments. They are so in almost, or in all, religions. They are so in the religion

of our country. The conception of a perfect being is deep amongst its roots, but we discern frequent contrariety with this conception in its actual developments. God is termed all-perfect in words; and yet actions are ascribed to him from which the good man would recoil. This is the sort of incongruity between the development and the original conception which it is my purpose to point out. We must, if we are to receive these developments as well as the original conception, ascribe perfection to a repenting and a vindictive being, to one who is capable of human passions in their most exaggerated form. What British judge is there on the bench that would not recoil from the notion of punishing the innocent for the guilty—who would accept substitution in such a matter—who would visit, not only with external punishment, but with the internal feelings of aversion, reprobation, and condemnation, one who was only guilty by substitution, by imputation, by a transfer which may be applicable to commercial intercourse, but which has no affinity with moral qualities? He would recoil from that which he ascribes to his Deity: and such is the development of the notion of God but too common in this country, and amongst other nations bearing the Christian name. It is received conventionally; it is the conception of a barbarous age, artificially preserved, and borne along by creeds, establishments, and other contrivances, into a more civilized age. It is a notion which is interwoven, perhaps, with the imperfections of some states of

human society, but which does not belong to it in other states, and ought to be repudiated in words, as it is in thought, whenever the moral sense is allowed its free scope and its fair action.

Here, then, is a distinction continually to be drawn; here is a case in which the simplicity of the original conception of a perfect being may serve us to hold in check and discriminate between the legitimate and the erring developments of that thought. Such differences must occur; the conception of perfection does not make perfection; the conception of absolute reason does not make an unerring reasoner. It is by humanity that these original ideas have to be developed; and therefore that development must partake of the limitations, the errors, the imperfections of human nature. It must partake not of these only, but also of those which are superinduced by the arrangements of society, by the influence of governments and education, on which a similar power operates, and which in their turn become causes, as well as effects. We find, therefore, an agency, a constant agency of obscuration and of error, acting upon that which in itself is so pure and simple. There is a counteracting power, indeed, in the records of their thoughts and feelings who have attained the higher degrees of wisdom amongst mankind; there is a counteracting agency in the ceaseless influences of nature; and the war is thus maintained between powers, some of which would hold man fast to his original and simple conception, and others lead him

tendency upon the hearts and lives, the conduct and the hopes of men be also obvious; then, I should say, though we have not an absolute standard, which we may take in our hands and walk through the world with, requiring everything to correspond thereto, yet we have encouragement for ourselves, encouragement to persevere in cherishing such modes of thought and feeling, encouragement to our aspirations. We are stimulated to go on, not as dictatorial bigots, but as humble inquirers—the true and genuine position of humanity, in all that relates to subjects in which the vastness of infinity and that incomprehensible eternity are involved, and with which they are connected.

And this may be done truthfully and earnestly by men who yet diverge in very different ways from one another, who would not abide the trial by each other's standard; but of whom it becomes none to say, 'This is the absolutely right, and that the wrong; this the true, and that the false.' Even though our own conceptions are as liable to be erroneous as those of any others, may we not see, in what we deem erroneous in different religions, in what makes us turn from them as arrant superstitions, as pernicious impostures perhaps—may we not very often indeed trace in these that there has been an honest, though to us a mistaken, development of the original truth; and that those with whom we associate such feelings of condemnation and aversion, are yet in reality striving, earnestly striving, to develop the thought that is in

them—the conception of God, of absolute perfection, according to their means, abilities, and tendencies? There is much of this, I say, in all systems.

Majesty is a notion that inevitably associates itself with infinity. Man's God must be to him a majestic being. But then, what ideas have we of majesty? In reverentially endeavouring to render his homage, man may be only showing the poverty and lowness of his own conceptions. 'Our God is majestic,' say some; and they proceed to picture to themselves a crowned and sceptred Deity; they enthrone their God; they worship him as dwelling in the cloudy splendours of his palace, on the top of Mount Meru or of Olympus; or they hear his thunderings and his voice itself from the summit of Sinai. They erect his sapphire throne upon the blue expanse, and stretch over it a rainbow canopy. They surround him with a court—a court of angels and spirits, or of inferior deities. They endeavour to show this thought of majesty by rearing magnificent buildings, temples, the glory of the world's architecture, in which the impulse appears to have been strongest to rival the grandeur and the wonders of nature itself. And those who are poor in marble become rich in words. Proud of worshipping God in the simplicity which perhaps poverty enforces upon them, they array him in the pomp of phraseology; they make long prayers, and enumerate the varied attributes which they ascribe to him; and thus seem to work out, with perfect well-meaning, their notion of the majesty of the

Infinite. Whilst there are those who see, in the quietness of intellectual energy, a power analogous to, but far above, that which, in the recesses of its councils, arbitrates on the condition and guides the destinies of nations; they see it silently operating through the regions of matter and of mind; and hence the contemplative man, when the association of majesty with divinity is strong within him, turns in disgust, perhaps, from all these tinsel shows of human greatness, whatever there may be to recommend them to his fancy; he seeks, for duly honouring the Divine majesty, marks of formation by Divinity itself; and he best contemplates it in that temple not built with hands, of which the world's wide expanse is the area, hills and mountains are the altars and pillars, the deep recesses of shady groves the sanctuary, the sky the roof, and the ocean its everlasting organ. There he holds communion with the majesty which, to his mind, is far above all other conceptions, and only degraded by the factitious pomp of human buildings and human ceremonies. Thus the contemplative man develops the notion in *his* way; and let him do it, and a blessing be on him; and blessing also be on the poorer fancy and the more lagging intellect, that can see the highest majesty of which it conceives only in other ways and far inferior forms.

The notion of holiness also is one which belongs to the simplest conception of Deity that we can form; and yet to what wild doctrines, to what strange and cruel practices, has not its erring development often

led humanity! Almost as soon as this attribute was distinctly contemplated, men, acting on the impulse of their own pride, began to ascribe to the Deity of holiness malevolent feelings towards other and opposite qualities. They held him to be 'of purer eyes than to behold iniquity'; and therefore 'angry with the wicked every day,' and with an anger which is 'a devouring flame.' They fancy that deviation from their standard must be alienation from his love; and they require the mediation of a priest, or an atoning sacrifice, or of a pleading saint or angel in heaven, or some such interposition, for their reconciliation. They fancy the punishment which holiness must inflict on those who have it not; they accumulate and describe —with what variety of power!—the tortures of their infernal regions. Tantalus, with his ebbing flood, and Sisyphus with his stone; or the worse tortures of that hell which, under the name of Christianity, has been preached to the world, with its never-ending torments. They delight in the lashing of the serpent-whips of the Furies; they have called together all things dark and horrible, in order to image that which is really a truth—the holiness of the Infinite, and his love for the true and the good. Wiser he, to our perception, who perceives the relation and subordination of evil to good—who apprehends that the Deity meant virtue to be a progressive thing in human nature, to be attained by trial and struggle; and the comparative and relative perfection of his being only to be reached by strife within and without, from which the spirit

mounts stronger and yet stronger after every conflict, until it basks in the brightness of the unclouded rays of the perfectly Holy. They interpret the attribute of holiness—they develop it in a manner as gracious as the other is appalling; and in that light they rejoice; but they do not forget that these rude thoughts of wild and stern men have yet had a truth for their origin, and perhaps, even in their gloomiest representations, have had the love of that truth as the impulsive power over the mind of him by whom they are believed.

And so with the attribute of power. 'God is powerful,' says the savage; 'yes, I heard his thunder—I saw his lightning strike the oak, and shiver it.' 'God is powerful,' says the Jew; 'He divided the waters of the Red Sea, and gave us safe passage, and drowned Pharaoh with all his host.' 'God is powerful, says the Christian; 'He raised the dead, and he will destroy the world and all that it contains.' Such are graduated conceptions of power, according with different states of humanity. They have sunk as low even as the notion of mere physical strength, as in the hammer of Thor making a cavern in the earth by its blow; and they have risen as high as that unseen, that all-pervading Influence, which works all things according to the council of his own will; so that we say of God that his thoughts are objects, and his purposes events.

Then there is the notion of plurality. It is curious how common this has been—how the most monotheistic religions have not been able to shake it off.

We find it everywhere: there is a trinity in Christianity; there is a trinity in Hinduism—a trinity in Plato—a trinity in the old Egyptian religion, with its Isis, Osiris, and Horus. Everywhere, the oneness of the thought of Divinity in man seems to have striven to blend itself with the notion of multitudinousness of manifestation, of person. And what is this but an effort after a firmer grasp of the infinite? which we cannot so well conceive of under the strict monotheistic reference of divinity to one conscious being, especially if that one conscious being is isolated, as it were, from the material world, and only a God *ab extra*—a Deity that lives without, and rules over, and thus manages, changes, and guides. Why, not merely in Hinduism, with its millions of deities—not merely in Greece, peopling every stream and valley, every forest and hill with gods—not only in Egypt, venerating almost all things that have living existence—not only in hosts of angels, and archangels, and saints, and martyrs—thus all breaking the interval between humanity and the one God, the God without, the independent being—but in the Christian trinity itself, and in all similar efforts, we discern, I think, intimations of this struggle to reconcile oneness with infinity. Mohammedanism is more strictly monotheistic, perhaps, than any religion; yet there we have archangels near the throne of God, and 'Eblis' to account for the existence of evil, and their chant of 'There is one God, and Mahomet is his prophet.' Christian Unitarianism has never found itself so much

in sympathy with mankind, notwithstanding its boast, and its justified boast, to some extent, of superior rationality, as to diffuse itself very widely in society; nor can any system which does not bring divinity nearer to us than the endeavour to conceive of an infinite person, and yet to separate that person from the world of existence. 'The association of God with nature,' said a child, 'seems to me to cramp the idea of nature.' And so it does, if we only suppose a God *ab extra*; that is, something superinduced, something interposed. There is the cold relation of maker and made, the ruler and the ruled. It was a step in the doctrine, though it might at first seem in a backward direction, the ascription of Godhead to Christ. 'God in Christ' was something towards God in humanity, as God in humanity was a progress towards God in universal nature. There alone we find the infinity which satisfies the thought; and departing from those blended notions that our own habit of conceiving of persons infuses into the mind, there we see one whose countenance towards us is in all that is grand and lovely—who is one with the majestic frame of the heavens and the earth—one with the mighty movements of material nature—one with intellectual and moral development in humanity—who lives, breathes, thinks, feels, acts in and by all that is—all that is being one with him, and he all and in all. Such, at least, is the last effort which the human mind seems to have made in the endeavour more fully to develop this notion of

infinity, which so early and so strongly associates itself with the thought of God.

Such, then, being the case as to human efforts, when we look to the extent to which they are made, and the spirit in which they are made, we may surely abate the apprehensions which at first we are prone to entertain, as to the degree in which imposture and fraud have intermingled themselves with different religions. No doubt they have so intermingled—the absurd with the sublime. The trickster has been there with his clever contrivances, in order to impress mankind with a notion of his sanctity, his wisdom, or his preternatural power. There has been the mixture of fanaticism and of hypocrisy—the latter quality induced upon the former, perhaps the more readily induced from the very strength of the individual's first belief in his own peculiar destiny and his reception of peculiar communications from heaven. There is the indifference that patronizes religion for the sake of others, and would recommend it on account of the convenience of its influence on their minds, rather than from any feeling of its worth to human nature. There have been all these tamperings, and many more, with truthfulness to ourselves, to religion, and to Deity; but still, after all allowance, we see much in the natural tendency of human thought, under the various and frequently adverse circumstances in which thought is exercised—we see enough to account for, and make us charitable towards, even many of the worst superstitions that have existed in this world of ours.

And in this spirit, which I think best becomes us, groping our own way with labour and through difficulty towards higher and clearer light—in this spirit let us survey those religions as they pass before us. Let them come with all their paraphernalia. Let those learned priests of old be there, who acquired so much insight into nature's secrets—those Egyptian priests, bearing the books of Hermes, and the ark of Osiris. Let Moses stretch forth his rod, smite the rock, and produce living water for his people; or let him bring tables of stone, inscribed with the finger of God, and given him amidst the thunderings and lightnings of the sacred mountain. Let Babylon build its high tower for the Divinity, 'a tower that shall reach up unto heaven.' Let the Persian climb the hill-top, to catch the first beam of the rising sun, and prostrate himself in worship to that symbol of eternal light. Let the Druid rear with gigantic stones his mystic circle. Let the Greek behold each lovely scene peopled with lovely forms, until in nature, as well as in his own glorious city, it is 'easier to find a God than a man.' Let Catholic Christianity marshal its processions, elevate its host, and rear its stupendous cathedrals; and Protestantism glory in the sterner simplicity of its worship. Let them come in their social manifestations, or in that individual devotion which seeks the hermitage or flies to the wilderness. Thus let the sons of men pass before us. They are doing their work, in varied ways, very imperfectly, very erroneously often, as needs must be with the imperfection of their

nature; but they are doing their work, the work of humanity, the work of divinity. They are endeavouring to unfold, according to their means, their native conceptions of the religious ideas; they are labouring for that. And let us not look on as uninterested spectators; but let us look on with sympathy, let us look on with hope, let us look on with help, according to our ability—that we too may have our share in the great result, our portion in the blessed heritage of eternal truth and happiness.

VI

CREATION AND PROVIDENCE

CREATION, Providence, these are religious ideas of a secondary character; they affiliate themselves, so to speak, upon the first, grand, primary conception of divinity. But they are religious ideas, and as such have asserted their universality. They are religious ideas, and as such they preceded scientific knowledge; and through this circumstance they have been connected with gross errors and with cruel persecutions. For the notions of creation and providence preceding those of law in nature—preceding acquaintance with the phenomena which were thus supposed to be accounted for—gave rise to various theories, which, receiving the sanction of churches and of states, fixed themselves in men's minds, and put the general notions of mankind on these topics in a state which, when science made its advances, implied either hostility or compromise. In the development of these ideas, there was freedom from those restrictions, from that guidance, which the progress of knowledge has afforded to later ages. They are, consequently, fraught with

absurdity in the different modes of development that have been given to them in different ages. What is the common notion of creation, at this day, amongst those who hold the authority of sacred books paramount to that of the great volume of nature, as read by discovery and philosophy? There is sublimity, no doubt, in the commonly received description of creation—a sublimity which the great critic of antiquity recognized in the grandeur of the expression, 'Let there be light, and there was light'; but the sublimity is not of a kind in affinity with pure, lofty, spiritual notions of Deity, any more than with the facts of philosophy. It is a sublimity akin to that which we are made to feel by the Jupiter of Homer—a grandeur circumscribed, full of false assumptions, incongruous, and, in a certain view of it, theatrical, implying a darkened universe, a chaotic world with universal gloom, a divine form commanding changes by enunciated words, an instant and preternatural transformation, and the existence as an independent substance of that which is only an emanation from other substance. All these show, though there may be poetical conception, and a certain degree of sublimity of thought, yet that by the precedence of the notion of creation, as a religious idea, and the refusal, so often given by religious people, to entertain the discoveries of science as demonstrated realities, they have, in this matter, too often put what was called religion, and what was known to be fact and truth, at variance with one another.

The common notion of creation supposes a double action of miraculous power. First, the creation of confusion, in order, from that confusion, to make way for a second creation of order. The rough material is first produced, and then the harmonized world. Elements are created, intermingling and in disorder, in order that they may afterwards be separated, and assigned apart to their different spheres. And man —this fine and delicate frame of humanity, with its apparatus not only of flesh and bone, but of nerves and fibres, with its delicate tissues, with all its complicated apparatus—this is supposed to be moulded in clay, in red earth, in order that afterwards the breath of life may be breathed into it, and it may become a living soul. In such strange and fantastic ways have men, often in ignorance of what science had to teach the world, or perhaps conflicting with it after its instructions were promulgated—in such imperfect manner have they endeavoured to develop the idea—the true, rational, universal idea of *the finite evolved from the infinite.* And even these conceptions have more of coherence than many which have obtained admission, and implicit belief, and long continuance, in the world. For creation belongs to all religions ; in fact, it seemed, at one time, to belong to all histories as well. A man could scarcely record the events of his own time, of which he might know a little, perhaps very little, without going back to that of which he could know nothing—the formation of the world. This was the beginning of their narratives

of human affairs, as well as of their theories of divine government. And what strange and uncouth representations have they given! There was the old fable of the mundane egg, which, being divided, the lower portion formed the earth, and the upper the heavenly arch above it; of a fermenting chaos, evolving first divinities, and then human beings; of an exercise of power more frequently approaching to the lower and poorer, though it may be to the ignorant, the more striking, exhibitions of power amongst us, than to any real agency worthy of human reverence.

Thus, in all religions, there have been the conceptions of divine origination—of a universal power—of the results of that power in the objects of our senses, and the objects of our thoughts and reflections. Everywhere there is the recognition of creation and of a creator. Even the seeming denials of it come to the same thing, when they are attentively regarded and fairly analysed. Those who asserted that the world was eternal, did not mean the eternity of the world as it now exists, or as it did exist in their times. They might as well have asserted the eternity of towns and cities. They supposed progress; they supposed an originating and developing power. They described the action of the original elements—chaos; but from chaos something springing by a natural result. They showed a universe tending, in confusion, towards order, and, in darkness, towards light. The old Grecian poet, who endeavoured to trace the origin of things, tells us how, after Chaos, Love arose, and one

divine form after another appeared, and the heavens separated themselves from the earth, and the earth from the ocean, until the nations had each their various localities, and the gods their abode on high Olympus. Amid all the confusion of what claims to be taken literally, and what is obviously meant as allegory—in all the theorizing and the invention, we still find this idea of a living power and principle in nature. They seem to say, 'Nature lives'—a truth—'and therefore nature is divine.' They trace what others have traced in different ways, but still with the same pervading thought, the same previous impulse in the human mind—the notion of the infinite originating the finite; and this is essentially the conception of creation. It is not by operations approaching to those of magic and conjuration. It is not by audible commands and elemental obedience. It is not by spoken words, and nothing becoming thereby something. It is not thus that creation is rationally conceived. These are the thoughts of children and of savages. They are feeble attempts to give an external and pictorial representation to that which the mind has conceived, and which it endeavours to realize; but which it requires the aids of growing knowledge and of extending science to accomplish more clearly, though at last how imperfectly! The notion of law, universal law, in nature, when once it arises, and is clearly apprehended, brings what is called creation within the same category as the events by which it is followed; it sees in them all developments, and

developments only—the one infinite, universal, and eternal, the great Original, and all else modifications and manifestations. What a chasm there is, what a wide gulf, between the notions of creation so generally received on the sanction of sacred books, and those to which the world is now evidently coming—finding creation regulated by law—tracing the 'vestiges' of that law—seeing how, in the order of things, one form of existence has followed another, as one form of the material globe which is their habitation has followed another—and thus, as the last thought of humanity upon this still perplexing subject, res ing in the conviction that creation is a work according to law, divine law, which goes on in this world and in other worlds, and has its proper place assigned it, not amongst preternatural and unaccountable phenomena, but in the common relation of cause and effect.

And how nature swarms with life! How the earth teems with life! The seeds of life—the principle, or spirit of life, appears to be everywhere. The transparent air is filled with beings which the microscope renders visible. We call worlds, planets, suns, the habitations of living beings; but the probability is, that not these alone, but the immense spaces between have their populations also, though utterly invisible to the senses of the inhabitants of those worlds, and defying the power of their optical instruments. As whatever we can observe is full of life, that which is hidden from our observation is in all likelihood filled in the same manner. How very narrow are the limits

of our senses, even when extended by artificial means! Sounds there are which we cannot hear—some may be too loud, and some too low; objects of sight there are to which our senses cannot reach; but as we find uniformity of law in all that is subject to our observance, we may presume it in that which is not. And amongst those laws certainly this has its prominent place—that life, life is everywhere—in the opaque earth as well as the transparent air; the waters are full of life. This human frame is built up of particles that are capable of separate existence and life; the very globules of the blood that flows in our veins may have, and under certain circumstances do possess, their independent being. The huge cliffs that guard our shores are often found to be congeries of myriads of minute beings that once had their existence, and their measure of enjoyment. The mummy-wheat is growing in our gardens; the burial of three thousand years has not extinguished its vitality, but the ears of Pharaoh's corn are reproduced in our own day and country. Turn up the soil; to whatever depth you go, you still find life within it; at the greatest depth, that which has not seen the light of day for many a revolving century, when spread abroad to the influence of air and sunshine, it puts forth some kind of vegetation. At different depths of the soil are different kinds of vegetation, all corresponding with the nature of the soil from which they spring; and each of such kinds of vegetation is the nucleus of animal life, of insect life, in its boundless varieties. Life is everywhere,

above us, and around us, and within us; and I say again that nature lives, and therefore nature is divine.

The prejudices that have operated against the recognition of law in creation, would of course affect in a similar way the recognition of law in providence. All believe in providence; but they expect its intervention; they look for it in the particular, and not in the universal. Jove nods assent to the prayer of the good man, or he hurls his thunderbolts at the wicked. Jehovah sends a storm to favour the advance of the Israelitish army, his hailstones driving full in the face of the Canaanitish hosts. Deliverance is prayed for; and the billows hush their roaring, and the bark is saved. Interposition by unseen means, but still preternatural, is the common faith of religionists, even at the present day. They do not note that each department has its laws, its separate laws—those of the material world, those of the mental world, those of the moral world. The ship not seaworthy will founder, whatever cargo it may bear of knowledge or benevolence. Wrong will recoil on the wrongdoer. The careful will accumulate, though his heart be hard as the nether millstone. Those who act according to the laws of any department of being will find their reward in the results to which such actions tend; and it is but a misapplication of the notion of providence, if they expect the laws of one series of events to be interrupted and turned aside by the laws which only regulate another series of events. But in due time this identity is perceptible, and as it is apprehended,

the entire view opens upon man of a system of things in which there is one pervading life, soul, spirit, tendency—in which all are harmonized—and which, therefore, through the diversities that may form the occasion of sore perplexity to those who only see a part, yet must tend eventually to general good. As this opens upon the mind, there comes that thought which constitutes the beauty, the grandeur, the power of all religions, and of the religious tendency in human nature—a beneficently harmonized world, though by a long process. And this has ever been the song of poets, teaching

> All discord, harmony not understood;
> All partial evil, universal good.

This has been the reflection of the philosopher, exclaiming, 'It is heaven upon earth for a man's mind to move in charity, rest on providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.' This general consent and ultimate universality of good constituted the prophecy of the sibyl's leaves that were scattered abroad. This is the inspiration of those Orphic hymns of such remote antiquity. This has been the anticipation of those who have struggled even to martyrdom and self-sacrifice in the cause of humanity. This is the millennium of the Christian, and the Utopia of the philanthropist. This is the future golden age, which religions have so generally promised, while they recorded a past golden age. This is the 'new Jerusalem'; this the revolution of the great Platonic year; this the harmony which Pythagoras

heard, 'the music of the spheres'; the chorus which he of the Apocalypse listened to, when every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea, and all that are in them, joined in their glorious hymn to the almighty and universal Power. This has been the anticipation of all, and this is the ultimate result of universal law, the great development towards which all things tend, of the infinite in the finite, of God in humanity and in nature.

Hence has followed in the human mind the sensation of piety; hence what are called the *theopathetic affections*, the trust, the reverence, the love, the gratitude, which humanity exercises towards the Being thus conceived of and thus acting. And when this feeling has been so produced in the mind, what is there that does not minister thereto? The grandest objects in nature, and the lowliest; the sternest seasons, and the brightest and most lovely; everything is instinct with meaning, and seems to speak to a mind thus impressed, to speak to the inmost heart and soul, and make its revelations there. The human affections, in their diversity, according to our many relations, also become its ministers. The love of God may have been a vision often; but it is not therefore visionary. Communion with the infinite Spirit may have been the dream of many enthusiasts; but it is not therefore in itself dreamy. There is a harmony with the spirit and life of things, of which the mind becomes conscious; and hence it is that no theories of law, no doctrines of necessity, no assurances of infinite unchangeableness,

can keep down, in some circumstances, the tendency of the human constitution to expressive devotion, to prayer, to that longing and craving after sympathy, which, baffled as to the particular, applies to the great generality, and would be at one with the universal harmony, although its own lot may be felt for the time discordant. True piety ever prays with a condition: 'Not my will, but thine be done.' It trusts that the cloud is ministering to good, although its shadow, for the time, casts a deeper and lengthening gloom, and believes it to be as much a minister of good as the brightness of the sunshine it has displaced. There is a longing in the mind that is penetrated with the truth, the beauty, the harmony of things, to be at one with him, their Maker, their pervading Spirit, who himself is one with them; and thus have a share and portion in this great enjoyment which beams abroad over the face of heaven and of earth.

Such are the tendencies of piety, of 'natural piety,' as it has been rightly called, springing up in man spontaneously, springing up from his inward thoughts and convictions, and finding merely suggestions in outward circumstances, though its contemplations of the boundless and the infinite vary, indeed, in some measure, according to those circumstances; and if, when men praise and rejoice in the divinity, they hail him as the almighty Creator, the great, universal Power, the infinite Spirit; they also feel the admonition in their times of sorrow and trial—'When ye pray, say, Our Father.'

VII

REDEMPTION

THE subject of Redemption follows those of Creation and Providence, belonging, like them, to the secondary ideas of religion in the natural history of their production in the human mind, although in the systems of artificial theology it is made the most prominent of all. In the fragments which are preserved of the ancient Phœnician writer Sanconiatho, there is the following account of a mystical sacrifice of the Egyptians :—

'It was the custom among the ancients, in times of great calamity, to prevent the ruin of all, for the rulers of the city or nation to sacrifice to the avenging deities the most beloved of their children as the price of redemption : they who were devoted for this purpose were offered mystically. For Cronus, whom the Phœnicians call Il, and who after his death was deified and instated in the planet which bears his name, when king, had by a nymph of the country called Anobret an only son, who on that account is styled Jeoud, for so the Phœnicians still call an only son :

and when great danger from war beset the land, he adorned the altar, and invested this son with the emblems of royalty, and sacrificed him.'

On this passage, Bryant, in his work on Ancient Mythology, has the following comments :—

'The mystical sacrifice of the Phœnicians had these requisites—that a prince was to offer it, and his only son was to be the victim : and as I have shown that this could not relate to anything *prior*, let us consider what is said upon the subject as *future*, and attend to the consequence. For if the sacrifice of the Phœnicians was the type of another to come, the nature of this last will be known from the representation by which it was prefigured. According to this, El, the supreme deity, whose associates were the Elohim, was, in process of time, to have a son αγαπητον *well-beloved*, μονογενη his *only-begotten* ; who was to be conceived of ανωβρετ, as some render it, of *grace*, but according to my interpretation, of the *fountain of light*. He was to be called Jeoud, whatever that name may relate to ; and to be offered up as a sacrifice to his father, λυτρον, by way of satisfaction and redemption ; τιμωροις δαιμοσι, to atone for the sins of others, and avert the just vengeance of God ; αντι της παντων φθορας, to prevent universal corruption, and, at the same time, general ruin. And it is further remarkable, he was to make the grand sacrifice, βασιλικῳ σχηματι κεκοσμημενος, invested with the emblems of royalty. These surely are very strong expressions ; and the whole is an aggregate of cir-

cumstances highly significant, which cannot be the result of chance. All that I have requested to be allowed me in the progress of this recital is this simple supposition, that *this mystical sacrifice was a type of something to come*: how truly it corresponds to that which I imagine it alludes to, I submit to the reader's judgment. I think it must be necessarily esteemed a most wonderful piece of history.'

The commentator has here, I think, introduced some adjuncts which are not in the original record. But we know his starting-point, and every one must perceive that to which he is tending. The analogy is one of those many resemblances which have so often presented themselves to the mind, sometimes to perplex, and sometimes to be made available as arguments, by the advocates of modern systematic theology. The Christian scheme of redemption, as expounded by the doctrines of the Church of England, or those of what are called Evangelical Dissenters, is clearly that towards which the mind of the writer is directed. He finds something similar in a sacrifice of the ancient Phœnicians. How account for this? For the modern doctrine of redemption is supposed to be a mystery above the reach of human faculties—above the flight of human invention—a doctrine peculiarly of revelation; and yet, here we have a barbarous people, in a barbarous age, exhibiting pictorially, according to their version, the same thing. It is vain to appeal to a prior revelation: the Phœnicians had no prophets amongst them, at least none

recognized by the adherents of Judaism and of Christianity. Bryant, indeed, has recurred to the supposition of a traditional prophecy entertained amongst the descendants of Esau, and derived from Abraham—a story which has no evidence whatever to support it, and which is scarcely compatible with the chronology, to say nothing of the locality of the transaction. We have something of the same sort as the modern plan of redemption in systematic theology, in a remote time, amongst a semi-civilized people, and attended with circumstances to render it as independent as possible of the Jewish and the Christian revelations. And this perplexity—or this argument, if they will—often besets the advocates of that theology. Trinities, incarnations, virgin mothers, and atonements, are to be found in a great variety of religions, and under a great diversity of circumstances. May it not be that the true solution lies somewhat deeper than theirs, and that these are the incidents—the pictorial, or emblematical, or, if you will, typical, working out of some thought which is common to humanity; and that when we penetrate through what there is of absurdity and of cruelty (and there is too often much of both), we shall arrive at an idea which is worth preserving—at another contribution to the religion of humanity?

Sacrifices abounded in the ancient world. They were the common expression and form of worship. Men honoured heaven by sacrifice, and by sacrifice they confirmed the compacts of earth. Various

notions, in different stages of knowledge and feeling, were associated with this work. Sometimes it was of the simplest kind, the most harmless and inoffensive; life was ever spared; only flowers and fruits were presented to the great benefactor. At other times blood flowed abundantly, even human blood, in too many recorded and authenticated instances. Some entertained the gross notion that sacrifices gave food to their deities—that the divine nature pined away, as it were, without that food. The Jewish Scriptures record the gratification of divinity from smelling a sweet odour in sacrifice. As they rose above this, sacrifices became acts of homage, rendering back the first-fruits to the bestower of all fruits; or they were an acknowledgment of greatness and beneficence, in which occasionally efforts were made that the splendour of the sacrifice should correspond with the magnitude of the bounty. Thus, Pythagoras is said to have offered a hecatomb, on the discovery of the well-known proposition which bears his name. Deity was honoured by what appealed to sight as well as by what appealed to the sense of hearing, although this too had its functions, as the Deity is glorified by beating gongs in China, and with salvos of artillery in Europe, to this day. But there was something besides this, and more than this, in the sacrifices of antiquity. The rational religionists, as they call themselves, of the present time are often much perplexed with this subject, in their endeavours to get rid of the common notions of atonement and

satisfaction. Expel those notions from the pages of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures I think they cannot, by any verbal criticism or torture of texts whatever. Plainly, in the ancient world, the expiatory notion, the notion of suffering transferred, prevailed very largely. There was the idea of one being suffering, so as to mitigate or remove the sufferings of another; and in this idea, which rational theology has often made war upon, I apprehend we have a great and profound moral truth—the fact that it is by suffering, by the sufferings often of the wisest and the best, that mankind are liberated from the evils under which they groan, and led onward towards the good which they desiderate.

Redeemers, thus understood, the world has had many, both historical and mythological. And it makes no difference to my present purpose whether they be historical or mythological; for in the appreciation of the history, and in the origination of the mythos, we trace the same fact, namely, the existence of this notion of redemption in the human mind. It is alike visible in what is merely recorded and admired, and in what is produced—its production being in harmony with the opinions and feelings of those amongst whom such myth originates. We have Moses, according to the record, praying the Deity that his name might be blotted out from the book of life, so that Israel was but spared, and conducted in safety and in triumph into the possession of the promised land. He refuses for himself and his posterity the offer of becoming a great

nation, under the auspicious guidance of the Omnipotent; he renounces self for others; and dies on the borders of that land which he was not permitted to enter—dies on the borders willingly, with a glad anticipation of successes in which he should have no personal share, of the triumph of principles and of a people to whom his whole being was devoted. We have another redeemer in the Prometheus of the Greek legends, the sympathizing and generous Titan, who resents the niggardliness of Jove towards human beings, who teaches them the different arts by which life is supported and rendered convenient and joyous, who steals celestial fire that he may cherish by its use those towards whom his whole affections thus nobly and self-sacrificingly flow. In Prometheus chained to his rock, his breast torn by the vulture, but defying the power of his Olympian persecutor, and rejoicing in the memory of what he had done, and in what his influence was still doing for mortals—in this we have the exhibition of a redeemer, strangely combining, as Coleridge has well observed, the scriptural attributes of Christ and of Satan, the rebel and the saviour in one person. In the history, real or exaggerated, of Agis, the self-devoted king of Sparta, that he might reclaim his people from their dissolute manners and oppressive practices, and restore the pure institutions of Lycurgus, going cheerfully to execution, and smiling at the superiority of his own lot over that of his murderers; in the Roman Curtius, leaping into the gulf; in all who, at any time, or in

any country, have given themselves up to some great or good work, and have endeavoured through peril or persecution to essay its achievement—in them all we see this selfsame principle of sacrifice, we see the redeeming principle. We find it too in women as well as in men, and perhaps much more abundantly; from that Egyptian Isis of old, wandering through the world, amid much endurance, to gather together the scattered members of Osiris; in that Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon; or in the parallel instance of the daughter of Jephthah, cheerfully submitting to a sacrifice which was the purchase of victory for a parent and the leader of his country's troops, in what was deemed a just and honourable warfare; in others of later times, who have manifested similar devotion, and in whom, as in the case of Joan of Arc, the sacrifice has extended not merely to life, but beyond life, through centuries of disgrace and infamy, until poetic hearts and philosophic minds have rendered them a tardy justice: in these we still see the same principle at work, and similar results arising from similar exertions and devotedness. And perhaps the most beautiful of all in that Catholic superstition—if we may indeed call it so; because it seems hard to apply the term superstition to such a worship, whilst we are so much more tender and sparing towards many of the notions that flourish around us, with less of beauty and more of a perverting power—but in the Catholic worship of the Virgin Mary, in the deification of the gentle mother, in the homage rendered to her

who watched over the infancy of the divine with anxiety, feeling beforehand the piercing of that sword which was to penetrate her very heart, in the sight of his sufferings, when she stood beside the cross; in the homage rendered to her, identifying her with similar females, though they were the creation only of mythological or poetical imaginations in ancient times; in all that raises her to the rank of Astarte, the queen of heaven, and acknowledges her power over the stormy waters, as well as in times and seasons of trial and trouble on the land; in all which recognizes in her that beauty which has softened so many stern hearts, that consolation which has strengthened so many failing hearts of the distressed, the afflicted, and the suffering—which has restrained from wandering into vicious paths those struggling with temptation—which has formed an object midway, as it were, between the conceptions of infinite Deity and of erring humanity—in this least objectionable of all idolatries, in this most lovely, and, in its tendencies, most useful of all superstitions, we behold another phase and form of the principle of redemption—of redemption by endurance, by devotion, and by the moral influence which attends upon self-sacrifice.

And yet, into how strange a shape has this notion been tortured by theologians! The exercise of metaphysical ingenuity has been altogether upon what was accidental and subordinate, and never on the primary conception. There is the manufactured doctrine from it which consigns the whole human race

to total depravity of nature and endless torment of condition; which represents them altogether as a loathsome mass of sin and deserved suffering; which affects to put Providence in a predicament, and reduces the Deity to saying, on the question of redemption, 'Die, man, or justice must'; which supposes an incarnate deity, for the purpose of bearing this load of sin and misery, and expiating it by his own agonizing death on the cross, enduring not only the desertion of man, but, we are told, the desertion of Deity also, in that awful moment. Such is the strange theory by which the conception of a pure and lovely devotion for the good of others, of endurance for their sakes, and of accomplishing their deliverance by endurance, is obscured, perverted, perplexed, and erected into a doctrine which, were it not consecrated by a conventional sanctity, and robbed of its horrors by the familiarity of it to all our thoughts, would be turned from, one might almost say, with indignation and abhorrence. How unlike it is to what—apart from the speculations and theories of the Epistles of the New Testament writers—is recorded by the Evangelists of Christ. To come into their narrative, after such a doctrine, is like breathing the pure and balmy air, after being choked and terrified by the dark horrors of a cavern. We see there a man moving amongst his fellow-men in kindness and love, divine truth beaming upon him in bright rays from the heaven above, or more correctly, perhaps, rising up to his lips from the abysses of his own beneficent heart; teaching

the lesson of universal love, and practising what he taught; mild and condescending to the child or to the social outcast; scorning none—publicans and sinners ever welcome to his tender regards, his just appreciation, and his wise instructions—and for this, hated and accused, calumniated and opposed; the multitude frequently ready to take summary vengeance upon him for what they deemed an inconsistency with some of the tenets of their law, once and again taking up stones to stone him; frowned upon by all those who possessed station and influence in the land, those who were in office only venturing to come to him under the protecting shadow of the night; and at last, amidst the popular acclamations, and after that intense agony which the prospect of an immediate and violent death produced in the garden of Gethsemane, haled away, amid the shouts of the people, to the endurance of his final suffering; even then a spirit of forgiveness and love radiating from the cross, and beaming around him an unfading halo. Hence it has ever been so dear; for not all the aggrandizements which theology has heaped on Jesus —not that mythic tale of preternatural birth—not that doctrine of deification—not that seat at the imagined right hand of God above the blue arch of heaven—not that ascension, visible from the earth to multitudes of disciples, through the air, to the regions above—not that coming again in the clouds of heaven—not that trumpet of the archangel, or the earthquakes, and summoning of the human race,

and the division of sheep and goats to their respective allotments of eternal glory or eternal torment—not all this, nor all the pomp and homage that has ever been rendered as to an incarnate God, can compare, in moral loveliness and moral grandeur, with that sign of meek, enduring nature, with that sustainment of persecution through life, and the exercise of the utmost self-sacrifice and devotion in the very agonies of death, which have rendered the cross the appropriate type of Christianity, have endeared it to men's hearts, have made it a consecrated emblem, and have exalted it in the clouds of heaven, above all human divinities.

Here, then, is the principle of redemption; not in the metaphysical doctrine of the transfer of sin and of righteousness, a sort of juggling with moral qualities, as if they were marketable commodities; not in divine vindictiveness, a strange and foul conception for man to entertain; but in the truth, the law, perceived but late it may be, yet shadowed forth early in men's thoughts and feelings—that if we would serve our fellow-beings we must be content to suffer; that no great benefit, no extended emancipation, whether from mental slavery, from political bondage, or from social evil—no great work of emancipation, of deliverance, of redemption, is ever wrought by humanity, unless the benevolent heart that undertakes the task has the strength of self-sacrifice, and is content to lay its account with long-continued endurance, and with bitter agony. This is the mode in which humanity is served and man is matured.

It is to such that the thoughts turn. When politicians express their allegiance to the cause of freedom, they pledge the memories of those who died in the field or on the scaffold. When the energies of nations awake, their minds first turn, not to those who have conquered, but to those who have fallen. The lingering friends of liberty in Rome looked to the name of Cato, and the victorious cause that pleased the gods was held by them to be inferior to the vanquished cause for which Cato sacrificed his own life. The name of Kosciusko is that which recurs to the Pole when he groans over the bondage of his native land, and heaves an earnest sigh for its deliverance. When we think of the slave or the prisoner, Clarkson arises to our mind, urged by the conception of African suffering and the horrors of the middle passage to the intensity of fever; consecrating to the remedy of such evils his entire powers; braving calumny and opposition, enduring hostility and coldness, and working on, year after year, through the lapse of half a century, before the first beams of light, the recompense of his labours, broke upon the world. And thus Howard went from region to region; still the clank of the prisoner's chain was in his ears; still the perception was ever present to his senses of the loathsome and stifling vapour of the prisoner's dungeon; still the evils, physical and moral, of those who were thus enduring needless tortures and depraving tortures, instead of being led gently through a reformatory process—these still urged on his mind,

sending him forward, regardless of power and station, all the attractions of art, and all the minor elements of human enjoyment; going to jail after jail, like a messenger from heaven—not one whose nature was incapable of being touched with feeling for their sorrows, but with a keen perception of all—till at last his own life fell a victim to that prison-fever which he had so often breathed, and which he has done so much towards abolishing and sweeping away from the face of the earth.

Thus has it ever been. We hear of hero-worship; and let mankind render due homage to the successful hero; but there is a grander thing than hero-worship, unless we identify the hero with the martyr, who is indeed the greatest, and render to the martyr the worship which humanity has ever been ready to render, and which is indeed a faith in the natural doctrine of redemption by sacrifice.

The beings thus devoted hold on their course, though hope may fail—all hope as to personal objects, and perhaps all near hope of the accomplishment of those wider, loftier purposes to which they are consecrated. It is not hope on which their souls feed, at least not a hope in which self has any concern. It is the perception, the strong perception, of good arising out of and displacing some deep and dark existing evil. The good, the deliverance fills their minds; it brightens, and pervades, and rules there. It possesses itself of every thought, as the Spirit of God possesses every atom of universal being. It

animates them; they say with Christ, 'I have a baptism wherewith to be baptized, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!' 'My meat and drink are to do the will of him that sent me'; and so they labour on until the good is achieved, and the great redress, deliverance, or redemption of their thoughts is attained. It is not a sense of duty; it is not obedience to a law; there is nothing of mere fancy about it. They are not working for fame or glory—not they. They are working for a good which has become in their minds an existing and essential reality, which displaces other things as shadows and phantasms, and to which their whole being is devoted.

The wise laws of Providence do not allow the individual to be morally sacrificed by this devotion. Suffering they may take upon them and bear; sin they cannot take upon them and feel. In redeeming others, they redeem themselves. As they achieve their works of mercy, they are nearer to God; they grow up into his likeness; their own being becomes more pure, more exalted, more godlike, with every renunciation of what, according to common thoughts, may tend to the support and the gratification of that being. Thus the redeemer has glory in the redemption for which he sinks every other thought; in his life we trace a pure emanation of divinity; and we feel that death restores or raises him to a more perfect identification with that divinity.

VIII

HUMAN IMMORTALITY

THE philosophers, both of the material and spiritual systems, the mere naturalist, speculators of every kind and class, all agree in the peculiarity of the human constitution. While some say it differs from that of inferior animals by the gift of a spiritual and immaterial principle of thought, akin to the Deity, others, denying any such principle, yet allow that it has material organs which are different from, and, in their functions, superior to, those of other creatures. All place the *genus homo* in a peculiar and elevated position. The world smiles at the classification of Linnæus, and will not recognize, in anything more than the barest technicality, that humanity is to be assigned to the same region of being with the whale, the monkey, or the bat. Even those who tell us that the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile, are yet compelled to allow that the human brain secretes thoughts of which brute brains are altogether incapable, which are above their sphere, and beyond their compass. Man stands alone, and in nothing

more alone than this, that as to his being he looks backward and forward; he alone asks the *whence* and the *whither* of his destiny; he alone claims to speculate on things beyond the range of his sensuous observation or his earthly experience. And assuredly he has a right to be heard for himself. Does he submit to the classification sometimes made? Does he plead guilty to mere brutedom? Does he consent to own corruption for his father, and the grave for his mother? Is he willing to be

> Borne round in earth's diurnal course,
> With stocks, and stones, and trees?

or to be, at last, in nowise distinguishable but in form from the brutes that range the forest or fatten in the field? What is his voice in this matter? By philosophers of all classes it is thought worth something upon many points; it has its weight in questions of scientific invention and progress, of social improvement, of political right; and if there be any soundness in the structure which I am endeavouring to erect in these lectures, his voice is potential as to the notions we entertain of invisible and enduring power. He is authorized to say to the world that there is a God, for he believes in God; and surely he is entitled to say what he thinks of himself, his being, his progress, and his destiny. The voice of nature interrogates him, catechizes him, asks—'Who art thou?—whence coming, and whither going?' and his reply, the reply of all ages, the reply

of all countries, has been—'I am the child of God; I am the heir of immortality.'

But, say some, man naturally is densely and helplessly ignorant of spiritual things; he knows nothing of religious ideas but by instruction; they all come to him from without. And what is the proof of this? We are told that the deaf and dumb, deprived of tuition, have no religious conceptions. It is forgotten how readily they receive them when communicated, as if in affinity with their being, with its hitherto undeveloped tendencies and aspirings. The appeal is carried further; to the instances, the few instances which have occurred, of isolated human beings—Peter the Wild Boy, the Savage of Aveyron, and such; and we are told that they had no conceptions of God and immortality. And are we to infer from this, that neither had the great mass of humanity such conceptions, unless by instruction from without, from something preternatural to humanity? But these abnormal instances of human existence prove too much. They would prove man a quadruped; for all these beings have been found running on all-fours. They would prove articulate speech not natural to man—a conclusion perhaps from which some theologians would not shrink. But they would prove, beyond this, what is not so easily disposed of, that man is not a social being, or that the qualities, functions, and tendencies of an essentially social being can be developed in the solitary state, or judged of by the solitary condition. Why, the gregarious

animal does not show what it is—does not display its whole nature, and cannot, if it is utterly separated from its kind. No more can those of human kind. The readiness with which, when instruction is imparted, the religious ideas find admission even to the densest minds, and those most unfortunately situated, shows that there is in us something which relates to those ideas—something which disposes the mind, like soil, for their reception—something in which they naturally grow and germinate. These are all exceptional cases, not more difficult—not so difficult to account for, as the intellectual men, the instructed minds, that have at different times avowed their disbelief both in immortality and in Deity. And these we have yet felt ourselves authorized to treat merely as exceptional cases. They have never been found so in affinity with the common sense and feeling of mankind, as for any course of time to establish their blank negation in the world. It has prevailed for a while, but it has soon passed away; and they might be addressed in the language of the Bard to Edward:

> Fond, impious man! think'st thou yon sanguine cloud,
> Raised by thy breath, has quench'd the orb of day?
> To-morrow he repairs the golden flood,
> And glads the nations with redoubled ray.

And so has ever the faith in God and immortality risen from these seasons of eclipse, and poured forth a brighter and stronger tide of light upon the nations.

The absence of any direct antagonistic evidence, still more of any absolute disproof, of a future life, is

a point to which I have so repeatedly adverted in this place, that I need but glance at it. The most that can be said is, that we do not see the principle of thought; and if we did, it might be said perhaps, that we did not see in it the elements and the certainty of continuous existence. And what then? Is not nature full of powers and principles, ever-acting agencies, which are not subject to our perception, which the eye cannot detect, which the ear cannot hear, which the knife of the most accomplished dissector cannot lay bare, as he does the muscles and sinews of the human frame—which even the microscope does not exhibit—the microscope which has its boundaries as well as the human eye, and is only the little extension of a little power to limits somewhat wider? Invisibility to our sense is no disproof of existence, of active agency, of continuous being. Nor is there any presumption against the future life of the human being that might not, at some period of the world's history, have been alleged against all the orders of existence which, in their long succession, have sprung up and occupied spheres prepared for them by the previous operation of great nature. If we go back to the time when the elemental powers and principles of this world were yet struggling in what we call their chaotic state, when they were but gradually subsiding according to their several densities, when the globe was but assuming its form and its place in the planetary system, what a presumption might then have been raised by some spiritual

observer against life ever springing up here! What symptom was there of life? All was inanimate, unorganized; there seemed no materials which philosophy could demonstrate would, by their composition, produce any such strange and striking phenomenon as vitality. And yet, when they subsided in order, the moss sprung up upon the rock, and the seaweeds began to spread themselves in the depths of ocean. Again, it might be argued, there is nothing here like conscious existence—there is nothing that feels pain or pleasure—nothing here that deserves the name of life in the higher acceptation of that word, nor any evidence of the possibility of its existence. And yet geological ages roll on, and these phenomena come in their due time; and birds fly in the air, and fish disport themselves in the waters, and the various tribes of being, advancing in their nature, people the wildernesses of the dry land. Still the presumption might have been against a being endowed with reason, gifted with the various faculties by which man looks before and after, attaining to that compass of knowledge which is within his reach, as to the elements of nature, and the mode in which they may be applied to his own subsistence and comfort. But, in spite of all such presumptions, man's habitation is there, and man springs up and takes possession. Now we have in each of these cases as strong a presumption against the next form of being as there is, as there can be raised, against the future life of the human being. And yet all these presumptions were fallacious. We

have, moreover, the advantage of being able to trace this ascending series of development, of seeing how a superior form has always succeeded to an inferior, how the golden chain has been still continued; and what reason can be given why it should now terminate, be broken off, and the whole system left eternally imperfect?

In regarding the future life of man as a religious idea, we must not confound it with the delineations that have been presented of that existence, or the arguments that have been advanced in its behalf. A distinct conception of its nature, a logical demonstration of its certainty, are both very different things from a moral persuasion that we are its inheritors. It may remain, although they are entirely disproved. There is one thing, indeed, which they prove. They prove the hold which this notion takes upon the mind, and the stimulus which it gives to our powers. With some, future life has been the metempsychosis. They have seen vitality passing from humanity to the brute creation, and from the brute creation to humanity again—perhaps a system of rewards and punishments in these various transmigrations. There was the Hades of the old time—that gloomy and shadowy region deep in the bowels of the earth. There was the sensuous Paradise of the Mohammedan. There have been the various conceptions and locations by which the Christian heaven has, at different periods, been characterized. There have been the future heavens of barbarians, where their condition of bliss

was to be an everlasting tournament, cutting each other to pieces every morning, and regaining life to enjoy the banquet afterwards; and again the same the next day, until life was one fight eternal. There have been schemes as wild, yet as distinctly delineated, as if these geographers had visited

> That undiscover'd country, from whose bourne
> No traveller returns.

These are but the shadows of earth cast upon the clouds. They are like the feeling, as it were, of the earth for the reality of the moon, when its own shade puts it in eclipse. They show a sort of groping after that which is beyond our reach; and though they prove nothing else, at least they prove this, that on a future state of existence man is intent, and that he cannot so bridle or curb his imagination, but that it will disport itself in fancies and suppositions, although it can have no acquaintance with the realities.

And so with the different grounds on which the faith has been rested. They are as various as the delineations themselves. The Mohammedan believes in it, for the Koran says it; and the Koran is the recorded language of God: Allah affirms it, and therefore it is true. There were philosophers who believed the future existence of the soul because they thought they had proved its past existence. Having arrived, in their way, by logical deduction, at a pre-existence they argued a future existence. Some have rested the belief of immortality on the

assertion of their legislators. The great lawgivers of antiquity generally professed to declare it in the name of the Deity, thinking it conducive to the obligation of their laws and institutions on the consciences, as well as on the external actions, of those for whom they legislated. Some have believed in it because they supposed they had seen, or known, or had had authenticated to them that others had seen, the ghosts of the departed. Some believe that all men will rise from the dead, because they hold to the historical testimony that Christ rose from the dead. In a thousand different ways have men advanced towards this same conclusion, showing their determination to get at the conclusion by some route or other; the mistake being here, that it was not in their arguments, but in the tendency of their being, in the inextinguishable desire within us for such a state, and its strength and prevalence; it was in showing this that the value of the indication consisted, and not in bare logic.

The notion of a future life—of immortality—has always presented itself as *a religious idea*; it has always assumed the form, the character, the relations, of a religious idea. There are passions of the earth that rule, and run their course in reference to earthly things. Ambition delights in the tumult of battle, the shout of victory, the formation and the conquest of empires. Avarice accumulates its stores, and drives its thriving trade, with reference either to the mere possession of wealth, or to the various uses and advantages which wealth gives in society. Invention,

the child of necessity, seeks the abridgment of toil, for the procuring of food and of comfort, by its never-failing devices. The poet pours forth his song, because the thought is burning within him, and he must speak and give it utterance. Human passions, affections, interests, build up, and ever have built up, family relations. They all pursue their earthly course; they might pursue that same course if religion entered not at all into the human mind. But when the religious sentiment is excited, then the hope of immortality appears in strength, and beauty, and glory. Place man in the light of religious sentiment, and he sees beyond the dark portals of the grave. When the choral song of multitudes is swelling in adoration of the God and Father of all; when

> Storied windows, richly dight,
> Shedding a dim, religious light,

give solemnity to the perceptions of the senses; when philosophy speculates on the unfinished materials of character, the rudimentary marks which are borne by those whose existence here is prematurely terminated; when the spirit is in unison with the great harmonies of nature, and drinks in delight and instruction from every object of sight or sound, luxuriating, as it were, in the beauties of the fields, the woods, the blue heavens, or the boundless ocean; when meditation communes with its own heart upon its bed, and is still, and in the silence hears the low voice within whispering holy oracles; when bereave-

ment stands by the yet uncovered grave, weeping over its blighted hopes; then, and in all circumstances inducing similar states of emotion, exciting the religious sentiments, human nature feels that a future life is an undoubted reality; and when is human nature more to be trusted than under such circumstances?

Indeed, what is religion without this? It may be only a secondary idea; but does not the primal one of Deity, by close affinity, bring this in its train? Can man call God his Father without implying his own childhood, and, in that filial relation, his own future destiny? Does he not feel the truth of that saying, 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living'? Must he not have the conviction that 'all live to him'? Does he contemplate these grand relations only as things that are to pass away, like the other passing phenomena of this world of ours? When he says, 'My God,' is it, as sometimes has been suggested, only with a sense of property? Is it not rather with that of *relation*, that of the filial condition, and in that, of participation in the future parental eternity? In that unfinished melody of our hymn-book—'Art thou not from everlasting to everlasting, O God, mine Holy One? We shall not die,'—is there not a sequence of thought as close as in the most logical chain of causes and effects that was ever linked together? If religion were capable of existing in its proper strength and greatness without the immortality of man, it would become fainter as we approach

the verge of our existence. It would grow less and less in the prospect of dissolution; it would partake of that oblivion which is spread over wealth, and power, and so many other things by which man's passions and ambition are excited in their most active moments. Is this the fact? Is it not most directly the reverse? Is not the triumph of religion, the hope of immortality, always greater at such times? Is not the death-bed especially the scene, the peculiar scene of the vigour of the religious sentiment, including this as one essential idea, though only a secondary one, of that religious sentiment? So it was rightly judged by him who sang that Hope would

> Light her torch at Nature's funeral pile.

She lights it at the funeral pile of the individual, as well as at that of congregated nature.

> Unfading Hope! when life's last embers burn,
> When soul to soul and dust to dust return,
> Heaven to thy charge resigns that awful hour,
> Oh, then thy kingdom comes, immortal power!

Let it stand, then, as the second great article of the religion of human nature. If we take it from the ground of logical deduction, it is not a lowering, but a raising of it; for we place it on the same footing with the existence and perfection of the divinity. Let it stand as a fact inculcated by the very tendencies of our moral and intellectual being, and therefore anterior to, and paramount over, the thoughts and

inventions which we devise to ourselves in the sport or the working of those faculties. There let it ever stand, bound within the covers of no sacred book—independent of tradition and legend—not resting upon the questionable testimony of historical evidence—unlinked from an association with preternatural wonders—needing the confirmation of no church or priesthood—neither affirming nor denying any divine mission, but resting and remaining, like the enduring pyramids, or rather like some mountain heaved up by nature herself, to tower aloft and hold communion with the skies, those skies which are the type of divinity. 'Love to God and love to man' was the summary of the stone-tables of natural and Christian duty. There is a summary of the religion of nature inscribed on the fleshly tables of the heart, and that summary is—'The perfection of divinity—the immortality of humanity.'

IX

THE MORAL SENSE

CONSCIENCE—the moral sense—the perception of right and wrong, of the fit and the unfit, of good and evil—this is generally evolved by the human constitution. We find it wherever we find humanity. The calculations of the utilitarian may produce a subsequent judgment upon actions; but this principle supersedes calculation by immediate perception, and gives, in many cases, the previous impulse. If morality or virtue be nothing more than the balance of external good, if there be no need of an inner harmony of the powers and faculties of our nature with themselves, as well as with external objects, then, indeed, morality may be resolved merely into calculation. But the constitution of the human being taken generally, nay even the individual constitution, must needs be an element without which all calculation is vitiated, as by it, very often, all such calculation is superseded.

The sturdiest utilitarian of modern times, Jeremy Bentham, has by implication conceded this, although

generally overlooked in his writings, when he says that, 'supposing the game of push-pin give as much pleasure as the study of Homer's *Iliad*, then the game of push-pin is as good as the *Iliad* of Homer.' That is to say, a mere idiosyncrasy, a childish idiosyncrasy, is equivalent to one of the greatest intellectual creations. The very possibility of its being made so by any constitution or tendencies of a human being, shows the importance of that constitution and of those tendencies in every estimate of morals. For to them we must go; whatever the result may be, they are an element more important, more decisive than all external and calculable result. It is within us that we find the source of judgment upon moral topics; it is there that we find the preponderating decision in behalf of the true, the good, the beautiful, the obligatory. A conscience, or moral sense, is general as human nature. Knowledge expands and elevates it; superstition may corrupt and debase it; but they find it there; they require this previous element, in order to institute their operations and influences, and exercise their agency over human life and character.

Virtue, then, is not merely something that is useful, something that is made out by a calculation of external advantages, or external disadvantages, resulting from its exercise; it is more than this—the true, the beautiful, the grand, the noble, and ennobling.

All mankind have ever reverenced the good man; and the portraiture, by whomsoever drawn, and

wheresoever drawn, and with all those diversities which may be the result of the manners of different times, and the degree of knowledge and cultivation, still presents the same essential features. The knowledge of morals was not revealed through Moses on Mount Sinai; it was not first made known by Christ on the shores of the Lake of Galilee. It pre-existed—the injunctions of Christ have been traced to more ancient writers, by whom they were recognized and taught to different nations. The Arabs knew what virtue and vice were before Allah spoke by the voice of Mohammed and indited the Koran. It has been justly said that the Roman Lucretia, though she worshipped Venus, yet died for chastity. The savage mother boasts that her son never told a falsehood. In the remotest ages, in the darkest regions, we still find there is a perception of the true and the good, prior to all other things, acknowledged as something superior to all calculation, recognized promptly, and in which heart responds to heart, all the world over.

Religions find it, and too often pervert it. They appeal to the sense of duty, and they misinterpret the particulars of duty. They raise the ceremonial above the moral. They tell man there may be a deadlier sin in eating flesh on Fridays than in injuring his neighbour. They inculcate a virtue of factitious merits; they warn of factitious crimes. By different religions, the moral sense, the conscience, has been often blinded, perverted, rendered callous in some instances to evil, and in others unconscious of good.

But still, superstition, at most, has only succeeded in partially defacing this divine image within humanity, in partially stifling this universal oracle, in which God speaks by the feelings of his rational creatures.

This moral sense has also always been a religious idea. It belongs to the class of thoughts and conceptions of which I am treating in these lectures. It is in affinity with the notions of God and of immortality. The same faculties of our minds are exercised upon it. These conceptions act and react upon this of virtue, strengthening and exalting one another. No religion has been without moral precepts. To enforce them have the world's sanctities been established. For their advancement, nominally at least, and to a certain extent in reality, have priests been consecrated, and temples built, and altars raised, and sacrifices offered, and ceremonies observed, and men have been baptized and buried with solemnity, and over life has been cast the sanction of a religious character and obligation. It is this sense of the superiority of moral good which has so strengthened the notions of reward and punishment, which has made them almost eclipse every other in the anticipations of futurity, which has believed in their realization even in this life, and traced retribution here, as well as hereafter, first in a special providence, and then in heaven and hell. Guided by this principle has man sought to connect everything therewith, and to regard all as subservient to the moral culture of mind, and heart, and character. Of course there have been diversities

similar to those I have indicated in connexion with other religious ideas. They have exhibited themselves in the temporary acknowledgment as virtues of certain prevalent vices. Men have endeavoured to idealize military glory, and other vanities, in the same way as in their conceptions of divinity they have idealized a Mars or a Moloch. But still, the faith has remained firm and unshaken in man's heart, of the reality, the worth, and the enduring nature of moral good.

And with this, the social principle—that strong and universal tendency of our nature—has allied itself. The notion of a Church has prevailed from the earliest periods to the present time—the notion, that is, of the affinity of good men, and the need of their associating or linking themselves together, in some way or other, for the promotion of that which they most esteem.

We see it existing in the Jewish nation. The nation and the Church were one—the people constituting a religious, as well as a political combination. But this did not permanently suffice. By the time of Christ we find something like a Church within this national Church. The discipline of the synagogue had established itself—there was a species of social moral tribunal, to which Christ refers, as 'the Church,' taking cognizance of an offending brother. Then Christianity itself became identified with a Church, and has remained so, with the majority of its professors, to this day. And this had its origin in a

yet earlier state of things. The peculiarity of the Mosaic dispensation was, that Moses rendered public and popular to the entire nation that which had been confined to a select few in Egypt. The mysteries there, to which persons were initiated with so many forms, and such severity of trial, were but another phase of the same idea. They passed into Greece, long maintaining there a revered and sacred character in the popular mind. That great reformer Pythagoras organized his disciples on a similar principle. This has often been done through the intervention of nationality; and a corrupting influence has been exercised by that combination. The identity of Church and State ceased to be a fact, and then sprung up the fiction of the alliance of Church and State. But still mankind have acknowledged, under every form, the social principle in connexion with the moral sense, and the moral sense as a religious idea.

This Churchism has, indeed, made sad havoc with it. For, as generally constituted, churches implied priests, and priests implied priestcraft, and priestcraft has often been rampant, seating itself in the very throne of God. Ethics have been filled with Church-made crimes and Church-made virtues. There has been in these theological bodies a manufactory of factitious merit; the devout observance of a routine of ceremony; making praises, prayers, and sacrifices, kneelings, and gesticulations, more important than doing justice, and loving mercy, and walking humbly before God. The appropriation of wealth by Churches

has been carried on—systematically carried on—at one time to such an extent, that, had not political and other interests interfered, the Church would have appropriated to itself the broad lands of every country, would have held all the property of Europe and of the world. Another Church-made virtue has been that of submission—'prostration of the understanding'—enforced first towards the priest, then to the written word, or to its exposition in a creed—enforced as the first of all virtues; not allowing a man to call his thoughts or his soul his own; restraining all freedom of expression, of spoken or written language, and endeavouring to obliterate that liberty without which there is neither virtue, nor moral greatness, nor real religion in the world. For the slave soul can conceive of nothing better than a tyrant Deity.

Still, whatever the monstrous perversions that have been induced, the source from which they flow was pure; and its purity is sustained in permanence by a host of influences. The moral principle, the social principle, in their native loveliness remain. There is a safeguard for them in human nature; whilst man's moral and intellectual being are constituted as they are, that appreciation and that love and reverence must remain. The influences of nature are with them—its harmonies and beauties—they all tend to keep up accuracy of perception in good and evil, and the preference of the former over the latter. Kindred thoughts have ministered to them. Whatever relates to the spiritual and the invisible—to the

enduring—these have all kept up man's estimate of goodness, and his value for its exercise. The memorials of the dead, of what they were, and did, and taught—memorials preserved for their worth, from age to age; these fulfil their mission, surrounding him who runs his earthly race as with a cloud of witnesses. And, in addition to all, he ever seeks the association of the like-minded, that they may strengthen one another in love and good works, that mutual help may lead on to mutual improvement, and eventually to their common enjoyment and progress.

Here, then, in the purity of the source, let us forget for a while the extent of the perversion that has been superinduced. Let us rejoice in its permanence, and that beneath the rank growth of superstition there still is this pure and beautiful product of human nature, flowering in the shade, but filling the air with its fragrance. In our path of life, let us not turn too hastily or with disgust from that which may seem deformed and offensive, which wounds, stings, poisons, and appears to usurp the soil. Push it aside, and that gently; for beneath it is blossoming that flower of truth and loveliness, which is native to the human heart; which renews its being, maintains its beauty, and ever sheds abroad its blessed influences.

X

HEAVEN

THE chief good—the highest condition of humanity —the final cause of its existence—what is it ? where to be enjoyed ? when and how attained ? These are questions on which philosophy employed itself, in its most earnest speculations, in ages when philosophy best deserved that appellation. Blind ignorance gropes after a solution of these inquiries. Some, as Solomon, with royal means, have instituted an experimental pursuit of the chief good, trying, in succession, one thing after another, pronouncing all vanity, until they rested in the religious idea, which the world has been accustomed to take as the only solution within its reach of such questions ; which, under the term HEAVEN, men have described in various ways, according to their tastes and aspirations, and which by that name we recognize as one of the religious ideas which have been the object of our consideration.

As a religious idea, the chief good has been generally held to combine in its elements purity, blessedness,

communion with God; but indefinitely varied and modified—as all the religious ideas are varied and modified—by different forms of worship, by different modes of thought, by different habits of life. Accordingly, some have looked for their heaven above the clouds, environed with all the splendour of the stars; others in the central depths of the earth, and the shady groves of Elysium. Some have filled it with sensuous delights of a grosser or more refined species; whilst these are rejected by such as have anticipated an exclusively intellectual and spiritual condition of existence. Some have anticipated a nearer approach to the divinity than we possess here, but of the same kind—the contemplation of works full of grandeur, wisdom, and loveliness; others have expected to gaze even on the divine essence itself; and others again have looked to the absorption of created spirits—their entire absorption, to the loss of individuality, into the universal and creative Spirit.

The purification by which the condition is attained has been similarly diversified. There has been the 'metempsychosis,' where the transmigration of the mind through different forms constituted a series of trials and a course of purification. There has been the 'purgatory,' in which some have believed; the 'hades,' as a temporary state of a more ancient time; the corrective 'hell,' on which one class has speculated; whilst another, looking to the trials and the course of things on earth as man's only moral discipline, have contrasted their future eternal heaven with a hell of equal eternity.

But, under all these varieties, in all their conceptions, we see human nature striving after the chief good, and calling it by that name of heaven, because it has adopted the thought as a religious idea, and the pursuit as a religious course of action—the spiritual life—the life of God in the soul of man.

And thus, looking beyond the present scene of existence for the full development of the human constitution to its grandest dignity and its most extensive enjoyment, what information has man derived from the specialities of religion—what from the particular forms as distinguished from the universal essence of religion—the forms that have been set up, as it were, instead of that essence, and very frequently so as to hide it from man's contemplation? Who or what has given us more authentic information than that which we derive from the human mind and heart, from man's moral constitution? Who are the revealers of the unseen world? Under what right or title do any of them claim that appellation? Some profess to have heard the articulate voice of God himself, and to repeat its utterance in mortal ears. Others tell us, or it is said of them, that they abode in heaven, and came down to sojourn on earth, and made known the things belonging to their pristine condition. Others have been caught up to the 'third heaven,' or to the 'seventh heaven,' there to hear what was not to be heard in this lower world. Some have called the corpse from the grave to question it, and derive information of the unseen state. Others

profess to have talked with ghosts, with spirits, with saints and angels, and to have received the communications of those who had passed through the great partition that divides the visible from the invisible world.

And what have they all told us? What specific article of information can we find, either in consecrated bodies of men or in sacred books? In the Vedas, in the Koran, in the Bible, where can we lay our finger upon a distinct communication of some particularity of the unseen state, which is thus made a definite object of knowledge? Priests and bishops, inheriting the holy Spirit of God, and transmitting it, as they tell us, from one generation to another of their ecclesiastical dignities, what have they told us, what have they to tell us? We are but where we were, for such professed communications; the veil remains unraised. In some particulars, indeed, where they have attempted to define, advancing science proves the fallacy. However religions may have taught a local heaven, a heaven to which one might be rapt in a chariot of fire, and to which another might ascend through the clouds, astronomy and geology, in their firm march onward, dissipate the vision, and disprove the fallacy, and bring us back to the only sure guidance in these matters, the dictates and tendencies of our own moral being as compared with those of the great system of things around us. Were all professed descriptions of the invisible and future to perish from the earth, we should be as wise; the sources of

wisdom—of real revelation—would remain, because they belong to our very being ; just as if, were all the works on geology and botany to be consumed in one great conflagration, the eternal mountains would remain, constituted of the same strata ; the great stone volume would contain the same legible lessons ; and nature, with every returning spring, would again put forth its flowers and blossoms, and every autumn would bear its fruits. They would be renewed were the teachers of such sciences and their tuition to perish utterly. And so, were the specific forms of religion, and professed revelations of futurity—of heaven and hell—to vanish also, man's nature would renew the real truth and wisdom ; the hope would spring eternal in his breast of a better state of things than any he has yet enjoyed, and the great impulse and tendency of his being would be yet onwards to the full participation of that condition.

And yet, with all this ignorance, how much tyranny has been perpetrated in the world through the assumption of a particular knowledge as to futurity. This power of heaven and hell has been as the golden sceptre and the thunderbolt in the hands of the priesthood. They have ruled the world ; their slaves and creatures have been ready at their bidding to throw themselves, as the Hindu would at the command of his Brahmin, beneath the chariot of any crushing juggernaut. Europe can be hurled upon Asia in one vast mass, as it was in the time of the Crusaders ; the world may be subdued, as it was by

the Mohammedans, animated by the prospect of the joys of their paradise, and the certainty of its inheritance by true believers and devout proselyters, though by fire and sword, to the religion of their prophet. What power there was in that ancient Popery, which placed its foot upon the neck of kings and emperors! And what a power was there not, again, in that Reformation which burst this vassalage, and liberated Europe, and bade its nations look up beyond the shrine at which they had worshipped, and behold their God! Heaven and hell have been the mighty power which has been thus wielded from age to age, and which is not merely evident in these broad characters of the history of mankind, but which penetrates into the innermost recesses of individual life. It subdues mind; it humbles intellect. The exclamation of Bishop Bramhall—'I dare not inquire!'—has been sometimes ascribed to the effect of worldly motives and inducements. But it might not be so; for there have been multitudes within the Christian pale who dared not inquire, because they were taught that belief in certain dogmas was the passport to heaven, and that disbelief or scepticism was the passage to eternal reprobation for their souls. Mind has been conquered, and feeling has been conquered—friends alienated from friends—children cast off by their parents. Even the mother's heart has been taught to rest on a system which, like the Prayer Book of our Established Church, makes the salvation of infants conditional on their submission to the

rite of baptism; or, at any rate, speaks of it as uncertain, passes it over in dubiety, unless they are baptized. Here is a system which grapples with, tramples upon, the strongest powers we know—the greatness of intellect, the tenderness of feeling. Such powers, resolvable into man's natural impulse for the chief good of his nature, have a foundation in truth, or they would not be powers. They are not wholly a fraud, or they would not be so powerful. There is a reality in them. If heaven—I use the appellation as that which has been commonly applied to the chief good when regarded as a religious idea—if heaven be indeed a dream, it is one of nature's dreams, whose visions are prophecies.

The extent of human capability, compared with the limitation of the external world as the means of filling the capacity of enjoyment, indicates something more than is attained, or than can be attained, in this world and in this life. The affections, in their development, point onward to perpetuity; it is their very nature and impulse. The philanthropic dreams of a Utopia are the strivings after such good, not only for the individual, but for society. The universal conviction of mankind is, that there is a reality in the anticipation of some period to come, in some world or other, in some state or other, where man shall make more manifest approximations than he does here towards the realization of that chief good for which he exists. The feeling extends even to the physical world; and we hear of a creation

groaning and travailing in pain, and longing for deliverance—of heavens and earth destroyed, to make way for 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

And how has imagination luxuriated in the contemplation! The affinity of this idea of heaven—of man in his best estate—with an enduring existence before him, has so laid hold, as it were, of the fondness of the human mind, that the imagination has gone rejoicingly to work to frame its brightest pictures, to erect its most brilliant palaces, to lavish all the splendour of its own colours and grace upon that future abode. It has been placed in gardens cultivated by divinity itself, to enrich them with all that is delightful to the eye and to the taste. It has been located in shady groves, such as contemplation delights in—Elysian fields, where happy spirits wander, and hold delighted converse. Men have thought of 'islands of the blest,' in some remote and untraversed ocean, where the spirits of the just shall congregate, and, free from all that embittered their previous life, enjoy its full fruition. The planets in succession have been, as it were, seized upon, and appropriated to this purpose, with all their diversities and with all their brilliance; and whatever the wit and fancy of man could devise has been supplied, in order to render them more worthy of being the abodes of exalted creatures, who have sometimes been pictured as advancing from one world to another, until they reached the throne of Deity, erected in the great

central sun, and there shedding forth its moral light and life, as well as the beams of material light, upon a surrounding and adoring universe. The rainbow pavilion, which some have reared high in the clouds, others have built above the stars, making them only the sparkling dust of its pavement; and there they have fancied themselves, in renovated and ever-during youth, possessing the plenitude of happy existence. There they have anticipated the great gathering of the wise and the good—of saints and martyrs in their religion, or of philosophers, poets, sages, patriots, in their wider views of human excellence, forming that august assembly, that glorious company, with which they hope to be permanently associated. There they have believed in the companionship of other beings of more majestic attributes; there they have fancied eternal strains like those of which, under another system, it was said that

> the Muses in a ring
> Aye round about Jove's altar sing.

In like manner they have encompassed the throne of Jehovah with angels and archangels, who, untiring, breathed lays of spontaneous adoration; whilst from the world beyond was heard, even from the heavens and the earth, in all their extent, the chorus of redeemed intelligences. Thus has imagination shown its fondness for the theme—its delight in an idea which that very delight intimates must have affinity

with our nature, must be a natural and genuine product of our intellectual and moral constitution.

Nor has it only been the theme of imagination. It has been a homely delight and strength to millions in all generations. They have clung to it for support in the time of temptation; it has kept them firm in trials which minds such as theirs might have been unable to meet by contemplations that yet had their power on the poet and the philosopher. It has nerved the confessor and the martyr for his endurance. Of the flames in which men have perished for their faith it has made a halo of enduring brightness. It has cheered and glorified the quiet and secluded death-bed of the humble and unobtrusive. With the exile it has gone in all his wanderings, causing him to feel, on remotest ocean, or languishing in the wilderness, that this hope, like the blue sky, was over all; deferred by no distance, changed by no circumstances. The philanthropic and devoted man has been enabled to bear the bitterness of the disappointment which so often befalls those who would deliver their fellow-creatures, but find that, by some strange perversity, mankind is blind to its own good, and will not yet accept of its own deliverance. The hope, the expectation, has gone with multitudes from the cradle to the grave. It has been a reality to them in all the changes and chances of life. A reality, of which nothing could destroy the persuasion, the strong presumption in their souls, and which has adapted its voice to their circumstances. Laying

hold of the paternal character of Deity, and pressing onward to the bounties pledged to us, as it were, by that paternal character, they have looked up in the strength of hope, and exclaimed: 'In my Father's house are many mansions'; and, in the bitterness of privation, when the same light that had gilded the abodes of active life falls upon the rank grass of the recent grave, they have been enabled to say in resignation: 'Father, not my will, but thine be done.'

XI

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

THROUGH ten successive lectures I have now endeavoured to illustrate what I term the Religious Ideas—first, those associated with the conception of Deity; and then, those associated with our notions of humanity. Sundry of the secondary as well as of the primary Religious Ideas, regarded as the natural product of the human constitution, have thus passed before us. More might have been added—more of the secondary class with similar claims; but I think enough has been said to make my own conception intelligible, and to stimulate the thoughts of those who are disposed to pursue such a train of meditation. I therefore dismiss these two divisions of the subject, and proceed now to some general considerations on this view of religion taken as a whole, and its bearing on several questions of great importance and interest.

If the views which have been advanced are sound, it is plain that there is a Religion of Humanity—a religion which belongs to human nature; which is not the religion of the western world or of the eastern

world, of the modern world or of the ancient world, or exclusively perhaps of this world at all; but it may be of all worlds—a religion which does not descend to have an earthly metropolis, whether it be Rome, Jerusalem, or Mecca—a religion which is not bound up within the covers of a book, be it the Vedas, the Koran, or the Bible—a religion which is not the property of the white race or of the black race; not the religion of Europe or of Hindustan, of Greece or of Persia, of Palestine or of Egypt—a religion which existed before Moses reformed that of Egypt, and has existed since Luther reformed that of Europe—a religion which is not subordinated to the influences of climate; which does not rise or disappear with the attainment by mankind of a different stage—a more advanced stage, of civilization; which is the same permanently; continues as human nature continues; which is to be found wherever man is found; common as sense and reason, thought and feeling, mind and heart; and which, as it refers itself back to the earliest ages of history, so will it not grow dim with age, nor fade in years through the coming generations.

The constitution of human nature—this is the origin and the test of moral truth. It is allowed to be so in other things besides theology by the best teachers of ethics. It is the origin and the test of all moral conceptions. They rise from within, and not from without; they are in us, and of us, and not externally or artificially superinduced. They grow like the native

products of the soil. Human nature is that which proves axioms—that to which we refer for intuition instead of induction; to which we look for propositions that shall bring their own evidence. A religion thus arising accommodates itself to humanity in all its phases. It may be dark in the ignorant, but it is luminous in the intelligent; it is greatest in the greatest minds and characters; it is loveliest in the loveliest minds and characters. It is never exceeded by their thoughts and feelings, as all positive religions are. You cannot proceed till you come to some tenet at which the moral sense stands rebuked, or which must be rebuked by the moral sense. Rooted thus deep within us, it is free from the collisions which ever attend specific theologies. It deals not in antagonisms. Its tendency, indeed, is to put down all antagonisms, and to make us feel at one with nature, with God, and with humanity.

This religion has its revelations; and they are the only truths worthy to be called revelations. The religious ideas which belong to the human constitution, and are traceable to its dictates, as surrounded by the great objects of nature—these are self-luminous, self-proving; their evidence is not to be sought for without, like the evidence of historical fact, where you have to weigh the testimony of witnesses, and endeavour to hold with an even hand the balance of probabilities; where you have to grope through a mass of impertinent matter, and then estimate with minute accuracy the few grains of proof that can be

discovered. These great moral and religious ideas prove themselves by their very existence and nature; they grow and shine as suns grow and shine, by the condensation of the great nebulæ. They shed their light upon surrounding worlds, making them luminous with reflected lustre; they prepare for humanity a different world of existence—a spiritual world, unfolded to us by the inward sense, as the external world is created anew to every human being by the influences of the outward senses. They live and reign in the mind; and, as I have said, they alone deserve the name of revelation. For when one professes to bring a revelation from heaven, a discovery of the invisible, a promulgation of momentous truth otherwise unknown, and incapable of being known, what mockery, or worse than mockery, is it which holds out to us only a book in a dead language—a book whose discoveries, so called, are marked in unknown characters; where we must have recourse to translation, and then again have recourse to interpretation, subject to all the liabilities to mistake and perversion which occur in these processes. It is a revelation, say some, that the Deity said in ancient Hebrew to Moses —'I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children.' Here, what room is there not for doubt! What was meant by each term? What by the entire proposition? What was jealousy, and what Deity, in the conception of the writer; and what are they to our minds? Have we the true meaning and rendering of the words?

Were they designed for a limited application, or for a universal one? Were they of temporary force and truth, or eternal? Here are clouds upon clouds, deepening the darkness till it is palpable as that of Egypt.

The thoughts that rise within our own minds have nothing of this ambiguity. Words, mere words, cannot be a revelation of such objects as those on which religion is conversant. They cannot convey to us our best and purest, our highest and noblest, conceptions of an infinite God, or of an immortal principle in man. This must spring up within us, and of us, and must present itself as part of the system of things in which we live—a portion of nature, for it does thus rise and grow. The very savage feels influxes, as it were, of these thoughts, from pure nature springing up in a mind that is purely disposed, and calling forth from its recesses the latent conceptions which lie there. It belongs to the system of nature, like the products of the soil, or like the stars of the firmament, or like the principle of gravitation that binds planets and suns and worlds and constellations together into harmonious unity. Nor can it perish while nature endures.

There is, then, a religion of humanity. Humanity adores a God—humanity hopes for a futurity. Idealized and personified perfection and progress; these are its primary, its essential doctrines—if doctrines they may be called—leading us to conceive of power and wisdom, of majesty and goodness, of law

and order, of beneficent purpose and infallible execution. Humanity, with its hopes and its fears, its loves and its joys; humanity evolving its moral perceptions of the difference between right and wrong, feeling the beauty and power which there is in the one and not in the other; humanity calling to its aid the social principle, to cheer and encourage the pilgrim in his course, looking abroad on nature as a father's work; cultivating even arduous virtues because they appear congruous with the Divine Father's plans, and thus accomplishing the great ends of being—such is religion—simple, pure, and undefiled. And it fulfils the offices and functions of religion as no positive or specific system can fulfil them. It generates piety, enforces morality, proffers consolation. A piety not, indeed, venting itself in forms altogether unmeaning or darkly emblematical of something ill-understood—not a piety of grovelling apprehensions and servile deprecations; but springing from a heart at one with the true, the beautiful, and the lovely around it—a heart consenting to the will and works of Deity—a heart sympathizing in that which is joyous therein, and offering its continuous tribute of thankfulness; feeling that if it has sometimes an unknown God, that is, a God but partially understood, it can never have a God limited or thwarted, partial in his love for his creatures, or baffled in the graciousness of his providence. It elevates morality, raising our whole nature, and, as it were, purifying the moral taste within us, until

deviation from its dictates is as abhorrent as discords to the musical ear, or as loathsomeness to those who have cultivated refinement of manners and of thought. And repentance—repentance is not, with it, the base principle that would bargain for the crimes and offences that are past, that would purchase heaven by a treaty of self-punishment. Repentance, with it, is the opening of the heart to the mild and benignant influences of nature—an impatience of being any longer a discordant atom in that great system of things—a longing to be entirely at one with the life that is, and the life that is manifesting itself in progressive development.

This, I apprehend, is the soul of all peculiar systems of religion. It is in them, though obscured, though perverted. It is in them, whatever doctrines they may set up as peculiar and essential doctrines; and however, in their propagation of such dogmas, they may disregard these primary elements. True, indeed, they may tell us, that without believing this or that dogma man cannot be saved. But if salvation means the freedom of the soul from the fetters of vice and ignorance—if it means the gradually emancipating power of the human mind, as resulting from our constitution—if it means this, salvation has been enjoyed by people of every tribe and of every country. It cannot be confined to the believers of any system, however exclusive its pretensions. Wherever we find the symptoms of a true, of a sincere, of a holy, of an aspiring and beneficent piety, there is religion in its

practical form. We find them amongst Christians of the present day; we trace them in the records of those patriarchs who lived in the sternness of primeval Judaism, before Christianity with its peculiarities was made known to the world. We find them in idolaters, who seem sunk below the specific systems most received in the world, and in the philosopher who believes that he rises above them. Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free, exhibit them. Search the spiritual annals of the world, and, imperfectly as they are preserved, we find that piety has existed everywhere.

> We cannot go
> Where universal love smiles not around

in nature; nor can we go amongst the various demarcations of humanity, where the traces of piety and love are not to be discerned. That which is common cannot spring from peculiar and exclusive causes; we trace it to the common and universal cause—we trace it to the great cause and source of all moral thought—to the human constitution; and, acting on that, in spite of the diversities of secondary and specific ideas, we see a common character given to the piety and the goodness of the most pious and the best, in all countries and through all ages.

That which is the religion of humanity is, therefore, a progressive religion. No positive system is progressive; and only takes the appearance of being so, because improved and enlightened interpretations are

affixed to words that originally bore a low and barbarous meaning. Hence, in all religions, corruptions are complained of. They have their sacred books, full of all wisdom; but still the Hindus complain that their purest and brightest volumes of sacred lore have been forgotten, or obscured and perverted. In Mohammedanism, sects and interpretations have arisen; and with all the power of an intellect which has made some advances, though not commensurate with those of the more improving nations of the world, there still is a necessity for affixing a more pure and spiritual interpretation to sundry passages than at first they bore.

The Christian world is full of complaints of the corruptions of Christianity; and thus must it ever be with the attempt to lock up all divine truth within the compass of certain written words. It is a warfare against the great and vital principles of human nature. Hence these specific religions are always afraid of science; for they all involve the notion that where law is Deity is not—that God works preternaturally, and not naturally. The extension of the domain of law is to them a narrowing of the sphere of religion. In proportion as events are ascertained to coincide perfectly with the course and order determined by some natural principle, in that very proportion there seems to them to be less sphere for their piety, for their admiration, for their religion. Geology has deprived Christianity of some doctrines, astronomy of others. The one has incontestably refuted the

notion that death came into the world in consequence of the transgression of Adam; the other has demolished the old picture of a local heaven. And so, with these religionists, the effect of advancing science is to drive religion backward, and to expel their God from the world of his own creation.

It cannot be thus with the true religion of humanity. As man advances, it must advance also; as he gains more knowledge, it rises more brightly upon his mind, and beams through a clearer atmosphere. As his feelings expand towards other beings, as his love becomes larger and wider, and flows in a stronger tide, in that he sees its operation within himself, as a great natural principle, evolving a moral world as it has evolved a material world. He has no fear that as a discovery may be made in physics a doctrine in theology must be abandoned; all within him stands the more firm and clear for these discoveries; and although to the bounded vision there must always be mysteries in the plan and works of the Infinite, as well as in himself, yet, in spite of these, he has that enlightened reliance which arises from distinct perception, from a satisfaction with the course and order of things, so far as he can trace it, and from marking its tendency as always bearing the same character, and moving onward to the same blessed results. He has Faith.

His religion therefore remains, whilst others vanish; it increases and expands, whilst others fade and disappear. He can look around on the fruits of

discovery, on the triumphs of science, with perfect satisfaction. He sees that they are all subordinate to the eventual development, in a higher degree, of the real religion of human nature.

Come, then, all sciences, with your discoveries, however remote, however stupendous, however contrasted with past philosophies and systems; come, then, all sciences, and bring your tribute of homage to that religion which is the soul of all, and join with the loveliness and poetry of the world, making the same offering, and uniting in the same worship. Man, perplexed and bewildered by positive systems—enslaved, entangled, and rendered wretched by dogmas—in this pure light of science and of love, feels the breaking upon him of a brighter day; he looks up, and he hails the dawn with songs of gratitude and gladness.

XII

CHRISTIANITY

ALL religions, Christianity included, will appear in a light different from that in which they are commonly regarded, if it be indeed the fact, as I have endeavoured to show in these lectures, that there is a religion of humanity—universal, everlasting, evolving itself from the human constitution, and belonging to human nature. If this be so, we shall no longer look at religions as founded on missions or revelations, real or pretended, but perceive that there was a prior impulse, something independent of, pre-existent to, and more powerful than all these missions and revelations, which necessitated the latent acknowledgment at least, if not the avowal, of certain general principles and feelings of piety and morality. The acknowledged true and just and sound dictates or precepts, which are to be found, in a greater or less degree, in all specific forms of religion, will no longer seem to us incidental merely; they will not appear as the accidental adjuncts of what is usually held forth as the peculiarity of such religion in its origin or character,

but in them we shall see its real essence, however obscured by the forms or pretensions with which it may have been overlaid.

Hence in all religions there will be occasion for discriminating between that which belongs to the true and the universal—that which is really a portion, taken possession of and applied by that specific form of religion, of the great universal religion of the human family—and that which is the result only of fraud, of superstition, of enthusiasm, or of whatever influences —perhaps of a different and far purer character—have been at work. While we may trace some parts of these specific forms of religion to the influence of prophets and priests, of books or miracles, we shall trace other portions to the varied influences of nature ; and the great and essential elements of all religions we shall assign to the human constitution itself.

One result of this view of religion is, that it denies to all specific forms the exclusiveness which most of them claim. However ancient their origin, however wide their dominion, whatever the lustre of their professors or their priesthoods, it will not allow that any of them are exclusively the one true religion. It claims that in its degree for all ; it denies the monopoly of it to any form whatever, even to those which seem to have the most right to be exclusive, as they claim a local God. Athens with its Minerva, or Judea with its Jehovah, might have its peculiar Deity ; but the religion of humanity shows us elements of a more extensive nature, elements of the universal,

which mingle with all, and the nature and tendency of which is to overrule all. Let them have their defects or excellences, their truths or falsehoods, their real piety or their gross superstition, their foundation in reason or their claim to the preternatural, it says to all, that in these dictates of our being is religion—religion universal and everlasting: this is the heart of their hearts, the religion of all religions.

Christianity is no exception to this rule. If we would be correct in our conceptions of Christianity, we should endeavour not to look at it from our own limited and restricted position, but rather to regard it as citizens of the world, as partakers of the common human nature. For what is there in Christianity, in its claims to the examination of those trained under a different system, which other systems do not possess something of in relation to us? What is the Christianity of any here? The Christianity of the minority, probably, of our own country. What is the Christianity of our own country but the religion of a minority in relation to Christendom? and what is Christendom itself but a minority of the human race, most largely outnumbered, not only by the aggregate of other religions, but by the Mohammedan religion alone? What can we say which may not be said in return? Do we claim an ancient origin? other religions have an origin more ancient. Are miracles claimed for Christianity? other religions have their miracles, as wonderful, more wonderful—more numerous. Specific forms of Christianity have theirs; and the

Roman Catholic Church boasts of their continuance even down to the present day. Do we refer to the morality of Christianity? other religions have the selfsame moral principles; and we find in them the selfsame spirit of piety. Hence we should not wonder that people cannot be induced very easily to go into the technical evidence of the authenticity of the Scripture history, and the various books of Scripture. We need not wonder at the failure of the great array of missionary operation. They fall back, as Christians in Europe fall back, on their numbers, the antiquity of their religion, its general reception amongst them, the wonders by which it has been authenticated, and the providential interpositions of their Divine Being, which they believe to have been matters of their own experience.

Hence the difference between religion and the arts. Let us make a useful invention, and it spreads among other nations. The Hindus are learning the art of cleaning their cotton, so as to bring it into more general use; Constantinople has its printing-presses at work, and a newspaper is published there; and Grand Cairo has buildings and gardens lighted with gas. Our arts spread, but not our doctrines; and that, I apprehend, is because we are accustomed to give too exclusive a character to that peculiar modification of the common religion of which we make profession.

The most striking peculiarity of Christianity is this, that it is the religion of the predominant races in the world; of those in whom both intellectual

power and industrial energy have been the most largely developed. It is the religion of the conquering and colonizing races; it is the religion of the reflective, the inventive, the generally progressive races. Whether this be by an affinity with the peculiarities of their constitution, or whether its own influences upon them have not had their share in such a development, is another question. The amount of action and reaction it may be very difficult to estimate in such a case; but there stands the broad fact, that Christianity is the religion of the grandest portion of the earth's inhabitants, and of those who, if they do not exclusively possess the world, yet bid fair to subdue and to govern the rest of mankind.

But still, this falls short of the character of universality and of perpetuity, which belongs to the religion of humanity—belongs to that religion which enters into all religions. For what is the history of Christianity? It is the history, not of the simply spiritual and unchanging, but the history of change and of accommodation. From its origin in Judea, the records of Christianity are the records of a series of modifications—modifications arising out of the changing condition of the world, or the changed character of those by whom the religion was professed. In Judea, for instance, it lacked organization; converts were made individually; their church association or church government was of the simplest kind—rising out of the connexion of the Jews together religiously, by their voluntary attendance on syna-

gogue teaching, or copied from the establishment of the Essenes. Christians were comparatively isolated. The keen mind of the Apostle Paul saw this, and he introduced organization. He not merely made churches more strict and exclusive bodies, but he ordained bishops and elders over them; he, as it were, regimented and banded them in their several localities and provinces, and was himself the great travelling primate of the religion which he did so much to establish in the world. Time rolled on; Christianity prevailed extensively in the Roman empire; something else was needed—some other modification in its original form, besides the organization with which the Apostle Paul had started. More of appearance, more of grandeur and of pomp, was requisite for the religion of the masterly Romans, than had sufficed for the religion of the despised and oppressed tribe of people that abode in Jewry. Then came the season of pomp; then worship grew into magnificent ceremonial; then the commemoration of Christ was the offering of high mass, with its imposing forms; then were rich robes and vestments, and altars, and temples of architectural grandeur made subservient to Christian worship. We have these forms, this splendour of service, in the initiatory condition of the Roman Catholic Church. But this did not suffice without another modification that was speedily to follow. For the then circumstances of the world, there was too much isolation and separation in Christian societies—too much of independence

in congregations or dioceses, if not of peculiarities of thought in individuals. More unity was necessary. The scattered elements of the Church were cemented together—the great pile rose tapering towards the skies like the spire of a cathedral; the whole was bound together in its oneness by the power of the Roman pontiff; and the pope donned his triple crown.

As European intellect unfolded itself, as it was stimulated to thought, meditation, and inquiry, this system was found insufficient for its wants. More was needed of freedom, more of spirituality, more of simplicity, more of the certainty of a written word to appeal to, so far superior to that of the spoken words of the priest. The Reformation was necessary, and Luther rose. And how has it been since Luther's time? Is there no modification now obviously in progress? Has not science within the last three centuries been making its most brilliant discoveries? Have we not had the telescope and the microscope brought in aid of our bodily senses? Has not man penetrated into the bowels of the mountains and the caverns of the earth, and read in characters of stone the history of the past revolutions of the globe? Is not science continually modifying some doctrine or other? Have not tenets once universally received, and supported by Scripture—as those of witchcraft, of demoniacs, of a local heaven, of the recent creation of the world, of the introduction of death after the formation of man—have not these, one after another,

been shaken to their very foundations by the discoveries of science? Christianity teems with a new birth, and must accommodate itself to the spirit of the age—must undergo another modification, compelled to it by the advance of scientific knowledge. But all this is the history of change, and not of unchangeableness; it is the history of modification, and not of something essentially enduring in its nature and universal in its application.

Nor let it be said, in reply to this view, that the Scriptures have remained unchanged through all this. What are the Scriptures themselves but the record of a similar series of changes which took place before their completion? Trace their record of thought, of doctrine, of Deity, of devotion, of human nature and duty, from Genesis to Revelation, and you see as marked a succession of modifications and changes before the last verse of the Apocalypse was penned as you see after it. The Scriptures do not draw a line between the changing and the unchanging; they record the last of one series of modifications, and immediately there begins another series of modifications. The Jehovah of the ancient Jews was not the God and Father of Christ; the change was as marked and distinct as any modern views of Christianity can be from those that were generally entertained in early times. We trace in all this the record of modifications; all of them, it may be, in connexion with the universal principles that constitute the religion of humanity; but that connexion also

claimed by, and with justice assigned to, other religions which humanity has believed and professed.

The universal and enduring are in Christianity; and, allowing that they exist in all religions, the result of a complete and fair examination will be, I apprehend, that they exist more truthfully and efficiently in Christianity than in any other of these specific forms. We find them in its devotion. How sublime are the delineations of the Deity by the old prophet-bards of Judea! How magnificent their exaltation of the power of God over human imaginations and devices! How grand the theology of the Old Testament! How benignant the theology of the New Testament! What can the heart know of piety that is indisposed to adore the Lord God with Isaiah, to trust the heavenly Father of Christ? This cannot change while the world shall last. As long as the stars shine in their brightness, and roll in their orbits, it will be felt that we may worthily and devoutly use the language of the Jewish Psalmist, and affirm that 'the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.' Look at the morality of Christ; how heart-searching; how pure from conventionalism; how clear, and true, and strong; how simple his maxims, how easily applicable, and how complete his summary of human duty and human good, in loving the Lord our God with our heart and soul, our mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves!

These are things eternal enshrined in Christianity.

No storm can shake them; they can be superseded by no discovery in science. The moral pictures of the Scriptures are everlasting, be they historical truth or be they fancy-work; let them be the narratives of the literal chronicler, or let them be parables, still there they are; and such characters as those of Joseph, of Moses, of Caleb, of Ruth, of the good Samaritan, of the zealous and energetic Apostle Paul, will remain through all time, unchanging in their worth and in their power as moral influences. They are paintings whose colour no time can obliterate, no accident impair; which are never obscure in their meaning nor feeble in their application.

These, and together with these the maxims and precepts founded on a deep observance of the heart of man—the readings, clear and distinct, of that law which was written, not upon tables of stone, but on the fleshly tables of the heart—dictates of truth, and thoughts which cannot pass away—legends which in their very wildness have a force and beauty that charms the mind—these are all of the enduring, these will last. And pre-eminent above them all, the character of him, the Son of God, the crucified one for man's salvation, so full of gentleness and tenderness, so rich in compassion, so prompt to forgiveness, and so submissive in agony; so confiding in God, in humanity, and in futurity—that remains, the soul of all, Christianity incarnate and yet unchanging. These, then, are the enduring, the universal. They speak for themselves; they appeal

for their proofs not to the musty records of dark ages, not to verbal criticisms on Greek or Hebrew —but they appeal to our own moral sense, to our elementary perceptions; they commend themselves there, and there they command full and lasting admiration.

But this does not extend to the records; it does not extend to the discrepancies in the narratives of the biographers of Christ. This does not reconcile their contradictions, nor make us capable of at once believing contradictory statements. This does not redeem the fact that much that was put on record was evidently only obtained by the writer from hearsay, from distant and indistinct report. This does not change the date of these compositions, nor overcome the critical probabilities that they did not assume their present form before the middle of the second century. This does not obliterate the manifest fact that there were prior documents, of which all made use, and which, apparently, are for ever lost to the world. This does not blind us to the prejudices or passions of the writers, to their belief in possession and various other notions which knowledge has banished from the world, never to return. This does not establish legend and mythos as historical fact, nor make us admit that to have been transacted on the globe which is clearly only the reflex of a mind imbued with certain previous notions of the character and the destiny of the Messiah, for whom the Jewish nation was looking in anxious expectation. All these things

are left untouched by our frank and full confession, that the universal and the eternal are, nevertheless, enshrined in Christianity, and in the personal character of Jesus Christ. The originality of that character, above the power of invention, is good for the reality of the character itself, and it is good for nothing more. It does not uphold the various adjuncts which have accompanied it down to our time. The history of the Scriptures must be tried, like other histories, by those principles of criticism which, developed in a comparatively recent time, yet enable the studious of our own day to know more of the real history of ancient nations, more of the Romans or the Greeks, than the Greeks and Romans did themselves of their own forefathers, or of the previous triumphs and disasters of their people. By such principles of criticism must it be tried, and the true separated from the false, the probable from the wholly incredible. This does not uphold the preternatural. Scripture miracles must be tried like any other miracles—like those of the Romish saints—like those of the Egyptian priests (some of which the Scripture records, and records as having been actual transformations); or like those of any other people, claiming thus to prop up the religious notions which they inculcate. This does not uphold mere legend or theory; descriptions of the creation of the world, of which no one could tell as a witness, but about which men were so prone to theorize; which were always the beginning of their records, of the annals of their country, and

which modern discovery has altogether superseded. In short, of all the adjuncts, it is clear that they must stand or fall by their own proved reality, or by their want of such proof. And in their evanescence there will be nothing to fear; for in whatever renders Christianity most credible and admirable, notwithstanding all the deductions that can be made from it; in the selections which might be formed either by sound criticism, or artistical feeling, or moral principle, seeking for illustration and recommendation; in all these, which would still remain, there will be enough to constitute the Bible the most valuable of books; there will be enough to render it worthy of public and reverential reading, and of private study. There will be enough to recommend it as the companion of the meditative man, when he goes forth in the fields 'to meditate at eventide.' There will be enough to make it the worthy source of inspiration to the artist, in his grand conceptions; enough to recommend it to the poet for his theme, singing it in such strains as those of Milton's 'Paradise Lost and Regained,' and his sublime 'Ode on the Nativity.'

But in these matters it will become us to distinguish. Many do not apply the name of Christianity to that which is permanent and universal, so much as to that which is only a modification, which is only the temporary and the accidental. The application of a name is only a struggle about a word; the difference between the enduring and the transitory, between the universal and the limited—this is a difference which

concerns us all. With the same boldness that Paul called the institutions of Judaism 'beggarly elements,' and cast them off, while he professed to retain their enduring spirit—in that same way, if he so pleases, may the discriminator as to the varied contents of the Scriptures reject their accidental and temporary matter, whilst he prizes all the more their permanent and enduring principles. And let us hope that human thought, in the profession of our form of religion, and in the many other forms that prevail in the world, may make the same divarication—may, in the same way, separate adjuncts from principles; and thus, free and pure, devout and elevated thought, in all religions and in all nations, will verge towards a oneness in the mode in which Deity is spoken of and honoured, and in which man sees his rights and his duties as a member of the lasting brotherhood, in which he is bound by creating power. And for ourselves let us prize that which is worthiest to be prized—that which lasts, not that which perishes. Let us comparatively disregard what has only a failing evidence, which grows weaker and weaker with the lapse of generations and centuries, and cling to that which has the ever-renewed evidence of the tendencies of human nature and the human constitution. Let us comparatively disregard that which relates to outer form and ceremony, and makes technical worship and technical duties, or creates artificial sins, and cling to that which consults human nature as the source of moral thought; as that which religion is designed to

elevate, in its spirituality and its affections, instead of lowering it to the condition of a gesticulating slave. Let us comparatively disregard that which is exclusive and arrogant in its pretensions, which marks out the precise nature of heaven and the conditions of salvation, and rests everything on verbal authority, and cling to that which appeals only to reason, love, and hope, and, relying on God and futurity, is content to await their own revelation of their own nature and duration. Let us comparatively disregard that which has been the source of anathemas, of wars, of persecutions, and cling to that which raises the song of angels, the song of universal humanity: 'Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, good will amongst men!'

XIII

POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT

THE religion of humanity needs no state patronage. It requires not, either for its springing up in the individual or for its progress in society, the agency of power or of wealth. In fact, its own existence is prior to that of the state. It flows from the same principles in our constitution by which men are prompted not to dwell in solitude, but to form themselves into communities. It is one of what we call the leading instincts of our nature, as the formation of society is another. If it be, as I have endeavoured to show in these lectures, the natural and general result of certain principles of our being, then we may be certain of its existence, even though order, and society, and law, and institutions, and governments, had not themselves been called into existence. And it is self-renewing: it springs up again, like the spontaneous products of the soil, with every renewed development of the human constitution. It need not be in any degree traditional. It revives with reviving humanity; it is renewed with renewing

humanity. It is above and beyond all pretence of being a creature of the state, supported by the state, dependent upon the state, or under the control of the state. If a ruler, in the plenitude of his kindness as well as of his power, says to himself—'Will my subjects be religious? How can I make my subjects religious?'—the reply to his solicitude is by another question—'Are your subjects human beings? If they are, let them alone, and they will grow religious; and if you want to promote religion in them, do it by promoting the development of their human nature.'

Moses, and Lycurgus, and Numa, and those other great men whose images we perceive through the long vista of history and the twilight of early ages, still closing the perspective as the founders of states and nations—they generally—universally, it may perhaps be said—combined religion and law. They endeavoured to fashion by their principles the communities which they erected; but they were impelled to do so by the very universality, which has been shown, of the religious ideas. They could not overlook them; they could not ignore the existence of such a power in human nature; they consulted it—sometimes only adverting to notions and practices already received and current as religions amongst those for whom they legislated; at other times, themselves speaking in the divine name, and as invested with divine authority. True, their religion, like their institutions, was frequently somewhat uncouth. No wonder that it should have been so in the infancy of society; theirs

was but the rough hewing of states, to receive their future polish in the progress of knowledge and of civilization. But, so far as they did homage to human nature and its tendencies, and in these to religion, we look to them as witnesses of the great fact of the universality of these principles. True, they often went beyond them. They endeavoured to embody, not only religion itself, but some specific form of religion, in their institutions. And when they did so, and so far as they did so, what was the consequence? While that specific form remained the unquestioned belief of the state they had founded, all things went on smoothly; but it was faith, not establishment, that gave the power to religion in that phase, in that peculiar mode of its embodiment. Just in proportion as the religion thus held up and identified with civil society was specific—in the very extent and degree in which it was specific—the more certainly and the more rapidly came the critical period, the period of doubt, of heresy, and of denial. This happened to them all: and then arose the alternative of religious liberty or religious persecution—of allowing human thought in the individual its free course, or of restraining it by pains and penalties—the alternative of freedom or persecution—persecution which, to be effectual, must go the length of extermination. These have been followed, in later times, by that mongrel medium called toleration, which is simply another name for modified persecution; for persecution of a gentler kind, indeed, but still partaking of

the same malignant essence; persecution receding, it may be—and so we bestow on it a name less harsh than on the same thing when it is advancing—but still persecution, even to the extent to which it tolerates; because toleration is the assumption by one man or set of men of superiority over another—the assumption of truth and the imputation of error.

An established religion has always been religion in some specific form or other; founded on some mission—appealing to some book—embodied in some forms, creeds, or ceremonies. Established religions have been specific forms from the very nature of the case. For when you make a religion according to law, it must consist in things of which law can take cognizance; it must have its outward profession and prescribed ceremonial; it must have articles, prayers, forms; it must have that which man can command of man, and see that the command is complied with. And what is the tendency of this—what the inevitable tendency, but to take all life out of the particular form of religion so established; to intermix the basest motives with the noblest; to bring in the desire of worldly pomp and worldly possessions, and to endeavour to fuse them into one with what relates to the growth of the human spirit, its communion with the Father of spirits, and the advance of mankind in all that most assimilates their nature to the divine? All such establishments must hinder and oppress inward religion; because pure religion may exist in some other specific form than that which the

legislature or the ruler has taken under his especial patronage; or it may exist, and often has existed, without particular regard to any such forms. It is then proscribed, denounced; it bears the marks of what those who follow implicitly the dictates of the law deem heresy, or infidelity, or atheism—exciting in them sensations which no human being ought to excite in any other, on any account whatsoever. It introduces mental chicanery; the constant attempt to prove that words bear a meaning which it is plain they were not intended to bear by those who originally used them. And, in our own country, what a world of casuistry, of word-mongering, of juggling with the understanding, of wresting words from their plainest meaning, scope, and tendency, has there been, in order to show that the creed of the individual was in conformity with the creed of his church; or the creed of his church in conformity with the creed of the Scriptures. Hence bickerings and strife; hence inequalities in society, the raising up of one class, and the depression of another; and hence the longest train of human evils that can perhaps be traced to any one cause operating on the condition and prospects of mankind.

For, what is the language of experience as to these attempts, what their unvarying history? Look at them from the world's beginning to the present time: you see the same vicious circle ever fulfilled: you find everywhere an invasion of rights. The establishment of a specific form of religion cannot be found, in

any one instance, in harmony with an entire equality of civil rights, that equality which members of human society have a right to claim from the governments under which they live. A priesthood has almost always been the enemy of public liberty. Philosophical historians trace the connexion between different forms of religion and of government, discriminating them by this very circumstance, and showing, either that in proportion as governments grow despotic, there are modes of religion on which they look with peculiar favour, or else that there are modes of religion which tend to make governments more despotic than they would otherwise become. The world's peace—what has broken it like established religions? What has made enemies of those that belonged to the same household, and should have been brethren? What has extended animosity, as it were, from this world to the next, and made the Deity a party to human antagonisms, and infinity and eternity the scene and the extent of their full gratification? The peaceful current of life, in its most secluded scenes and with its most unobtrusive tendencies, has thus been dashed with bitterness. As affects different nations, their several religions have mingled largely with the causes of war, the excitements to war, and the honours rendered to warlike exploits; and sometimes the contagion has spread from nation to nation, until the whole world seemed to be only one vast mass of hostility. Knowledge—knowledge must ever be dreaded by those who have petrified what is deemed

saving truth into some peculiar, specific, and defined form. They must ever be afraid lest this should be impaired or enlarged. In science they see a deadly enemy; for when have priests and priesthoods, and the advocates of established religions, or of religions that have only attained a sort of half-way to establishment, embodied in creeds and articles—when have they not been jealous of science; when have they not had at least a latent hostility towards, and suspicion of, the progress of scientific discovery? It has been thus in modern times, and in the great days of scientific advance. Thus ever, from the time when Galileo first directed his telescope towards the heavens, to our own, when we see so many fearful of every attempt to lay bare and plain before the public the great discoveries of geology and astronomy, endeavouring to compromise matters, and twist words and phrases, and sometimes, it may be apprehended, to slur over facts, to bring them into harmony with that which the law has enacted we shall receive as truth perfect and unchangeable.

The history of the establishment of specific forms of religion is the history not only of contention, war, and persecution; it is not only the history of a struggle against the advance of knowledge; but it is the history of failure, of universal failure, at least as to its professed purposes. It may have gratified the pride of a class or a sect; it may have opened a mine of wealth to some parties, and high honours and state dignities may have been showered down upon others;

but as to producing a real uniformity of religion, it has failed of that—failed from the first—fails still wherever tried—fails egregiously—fails universally. The more nearly you approach towards an external uniformity—such an approach as has been made in some Catholic countries of modern Europe—the more certain you are of a great mass of infidelity beneath the surface. Where the apparent success is most, the real discrepancy is of the greatest magnitude.

But, then, it may be said, are these high instincts and mighty tendencies in the individual to become altogether inert when he associates with his fellows, and with them constitutes a state? Is a nation to have no religion, no expression of that which almost every heart in that nation feels, and which almost every voice in that nation, in some way or other, is ready to express? I say not that. I see no reason why great aggregates of humanity, like the individual, should not express that which they feel, express it as they feel it, and do so without interfering with the conscience or with the rights of any who may dissent from that which they think and feel and express. I see nothing necessarily or reasonably to interfere with the religious expressions that may occur in the great acts of nations, when they solemnize their formation, their preservation, their liberation, in terms deduced from those undying truths of which our nature is the continuous assertor. Or if they agree beyond this—if they agree in some peculiar and specific forms—why, then, according to those forms

let them make that expression, so that the national voice accords with the national feeling. Nothing which is genuine should be suppressed in the nation any more than in the individual. Let Egypt's priests of old bear the ark of Osiris in solemn procession along the banks of the beneficent Nile; and let Jewish Levites bear the ark of Jehovah before the army marshalled for the conquest of their promised country. Let the old Athenians wreathe with flowers the altar of Minerva. Let Roman senators raise their arms, and swear by Victory, the undying flame of whose altar blazed in their Capitol. Let those who hold the most extensive form of Christianity—let mitred and tiaraed pontiffs celebrate high mass with believing multitudes; and let Archbishops of Canterbury proclaim a fast or a thanksgiving day, with forms of prayer verbally modified from previous documents of a similar description. Each according to their impulse and condition, let them give expression, social expression, with the same freedom and truth as individual expression, but not calling on men to join in that expression who do not feel with them. Surely it should not impair to our eyes the brightness of the heavenly orbs as we gaze upon them, nor the majesty of the resounding ocean when its eternal anthem is in our ears, that some may be standing by and looking on, who neither perceive the one nor recognize the other, nor participate in our feelings or in our adoration. What shall be done with them? We must not forget that, general as is the result of the rudi-

mental religious ideas in humanity—instinctive, in a certain sense, as we have asserted them to be—there still are those to whose perception the world is without an author, without a providence, without a God. Well, what is the first lesson that occurs from this fact? Certainly, not to injure these people—not in any way to interfere with their rights, or with the justice which is due to them in social concerns or in the appreciation of their characters; for if so, we punish a calamity. It is surely a misfortune not to see and to feel with the great majority of the human race on any important topic. It needs no punishment; it is itself a punishment, for which no pride of conscious intelligence or courage can be an adequate compensation to the individual. Let the evil rest there, and do not augment it. A minority will not insult, unless it be insulted. There is great reason to inquire how far such doubt and denial may not be the reaction—the almost inevitable reaction—of the too proud and confident assertion of our own notions as God's truth, and obligatory upon others by whom they are not perceived, as well as upon ourselves by whom they are perceived. Nothing, therefore, should be thought or felt of such but justice, kindness, and love, which are the fraternal due of man to man. And the fact of their existence, or of their numbers, need never impede that combined, that aggregate expression, which, enforcing nothing, levying no penalty, conveying no imputation, yet acknowledges the power to which we owe existence,

and renders the homage which we think due to that power. There is a gracefulness and a wisdom in states sometimes doing this; in sanctioning those mutual agreements which are to consolidate the harmony of nations by an appeal to the divinity whose name is love. Patriotism seems to grow yet more noble when it believes itself to devote not only a life that is necessarily soon to perish, but when it brings into the struggle with ignorance and with oppression the power of an immortal soul, and appeals to the eternal and universal principle of justice and the sacredness of the cause to which it is devoted. Every great and noble motive seems to grow yet greater and nobler in this light; and so let men in their multitudes, as well as in their individuality, recognize what they cannot but think, what they cannot but feel; recognize it in such expression as nature also dictates to them—not mere traditionary forms, but expressions that have meaning and soul within them, and which strengthen the feeling while they give it utterance.

Freedom itself may almost be called, perhaps, one of the religious ideas, although not to them is it confined. Freedom is the general, the universal requirement of the faculties of the human constitution for their full and proper development, for their rightful exercise, and for their best results. Freedom and religion should be indissolubly associated in our minds; they should coexist. And eminently is freedom, intellectual freedom, needful, when we have to do

with subjects connected with eternity and infinity; where there is no voice that can speak with an authority to silence all doubt or inquiry; where we must still be seekers after truth, the most diligent and the wisest of us; where 'inquirer' has been the character of man, and will be the character of man as long as he exists; ay, be his character even for immortality. He can never fathom the Infinite. Religious ideas springing up in the mind—vast, undefined, inexhaustible—of themselves call on us for continuous exercise of thought, as well as for continuous culture of feeling; they light us on our way; they are stars for us to steer by, though never to be approached perceptibly nearer; for the most ignorant and the wisest are still on a level as compared with the Infinite. If we would cherish in all this disposition; if we would have individual life one continuous effort of mental and moral culture, and, in that sense, a continuous sacrifice to the divinity and exercise of religion; it is, I apprehend, by this view that such a life is best promoted. Here we have no intermediate forms, no specific embodiment of that which cannot be contained in creeds or forms, to stop us in our search, to bar our advance, to say, 'Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther'; but we still feel ourselves beckoned onwards, still prompted to pursue the brightness which glows the more brilliantly as we advance, although we never can closely approach to its radiance.

If we would have this to be true, not only of ourselves, but of others—if we would see through our

own country, and through other countries, a spirit of genuine humility and inquiry in religious matters substituted for one of dogmatism—if we would behold the decline of that sectarian narrowness and strife which occasion so much of pride and of bitterness in the world—if we desiderate the predominance of the spiritual over the physical, even with those who are most strictly condemned by daily toil to earn their daily bread—if we are anxious for approximation towards a generous unity of feeling, amid a diversity of thought, in the various modifications to which the religious ideas are subjected in individual minds—if we would free religion from the associations that now beset it, of spiritual domination, of creeds and forms, restriction and persecution, and behold it shining in its native purity and lustre—if we would have a national religion, a really national religion, which at the same time should be a world religion—we must seek for it in some very different way from that of state patronage and political establishment.

XIV

EDUCATION

EDUCATION is the voluntary action of mind upon mind, for the purpose of influencing the formation of character. It comprises both teaching and training. Very much that is called by the name is altogether unworthy of being so designated, or only belongs to that lower department of education, which, by a distinction common in speech, though perhaps without etymological foundation, is termed instruction as distinguished from education. It is not education merely to communicate the knowledge of facts, to cram the memory. Education comprises much more than this, both in operation and in purpose. It is an intellectual and a moral agency, with an intellectual and moral object. It is, as I have just said, the voluntary action of mind upon mind to influence the formation of character; to influence it—not to form it; for much goes to the formation of character that is altogether beyond our powers. The schemes of forming men for particular states of society by education, if their formation for such state implies

any material difference from the character they would otherwise exhibit, are altogether vain. The tone of society—the influence of literature—the passing events of the time, whether private or public—these, and a thousand other influences, bear upon the formation of character in human beings, which man can no more control than he can direct and change the motions of the planetary bodies. Form a character! you might as well talk of forming a world. God and nature are the real agents. The tendencies of our constitution, the objects by which we are surrounded, the circumstances and events which occur—these in God, or God in these, constitute the power by which character is made. Far more than by any voluntary efforts which human beings can make is it guided and determined by these. They are ever at work; essential to our existence as the air we breathe; and they modify the nature, the qualities, the character, the tendency of that existence. Directly, by our own formation, and by the action upon our senses of the material world, does God educate humanity: indirectly, by the involuntary and unconscious influence of mankind upon each other—by the various circumstances that I have just enumerated—by the social tone—by the condition of life, in wealth or in poverty, with stimulus to exertion or inducements to indolence—by public events of a stirring and animating character, or of a quieting and calming tendency—by books, those which have gained immortal renown, or those which, perhaps, have little

worth in themselves, and yet, from peculiar circumstances, exercise an extraordinary power over the individual mind, so that some can date an era in their lives from the perusal of a particular volume: these, acting indirectly, as the other agencies directly, are the means by which mainly we are formed and fashioned. As it has been justly said, the world is God's great infant-school; and there a training is continually going on, which, in itself and in its results, may be often perplexing to us, but which, by that very perplexity, suggests to our minds the hope that this is but preparatory—that its mysteries to us are like the mysteries of instruction to children in the infant-school; and that they must be so, because they embrace a wider and a longer scope, and lead us on, by this very circumstance, to the anticipation of other spheres in which higher influences shall give our minds larger expansion, and prepare us for nobler degrees of moral dignity.

Education, then, is a religious work, according to the explanation which I have endeavoured to give of religion in these lectures, and which, I need scarcely say to those who have read them, affixes a very different sense to that expression from what it commonly bears in the discussions now going on in our country. When education is usually called a religious work, it is meant that it should be conducted according to some system of technical theology; that its main purpose should be to imbue the youthful mind with certain dogmas—to enforce certain notions upon early

credence, so that they may defy investigation or evidence in future years; and, in short, not to educate but to proselyte. In this sense I should deny that education is a religious work; but in a just interpretation of the term, or, at any rate, in that interpretation which has been affixed to the words through these lectures, it is eminently a religious work. It consists in the development of religious beings by religious beings; for education is properly development. Its aim is not to stamp the impress of one being upon another; not to form, and fashion, and perpetuate our own intellectual and moral likeness, whatever that may be; but to unfold what there is of intellectual and moral vitality in the subject of education. It is to take what God and nature have made, and endeavour to bring it to its full expansion and maturity; in the same way as we place the acorn in the ground, and subject it not only to our own care and tendence, if they be needful, but to the action of the soil, of the dews, of the airs of heaven, and thus watch, and do what little we can towards its full growth and development in the stately oak. Perhaps not much more than this is what we can do in the education of the human being. But even to do that little well and wisely it is requisite that we should have the right object in view—that we should seek development rather than power; not to multiply transcripts of ourselves, but to produce, in their full perfection, the works of the same nature as that to which we owe our own existence. And if there be any truth in the

theory I have propounded—that the religious ideas are natural to man ; that they are the growth of the human constitution ; that it is the tendency of our intellectual and moral being to conceive such ideas, and, with the progress of mind and character, to enlarge those ideas—a continual action and reaction going on ; and man, as he finds himself impelled to think, to fancy, to believe in God and immortality, becoming himself in turn aggrandized and elevated by those very conceptions—if this be the fact, then the development of these principles in the subject of education must be a material operation of education, the work indeed to which all should tend. For if all be the productions of the same power, there must needs be in them this harmony, this oneness of consent in their operations. Strange nonsense it is which we have sometimes heard of 'unsanctified science' and 'godless colleges'! Why every science, and every honourable and useful art, all learning that can be got by books into the human mind, or by man's own observation or experiment—all has its sanctification ; all is, not godless, but full of God ; it is in itself one species of the manifestation of divinity. We need be under no apprehension lest the mountains or the stars should tell us falsehood, or inculcate infidelity. They speak with the same language that the human heart employs, spring from the same Author, have the same character and tendency. And if education be religious as to its subject ; if religion be evolved (I speak generally) in the proper development of the powers of

the subject of education—assuredly its conscious presence in his mind will be needful for the educator, to keep his eye single to the true and the good; needful to make him aware of responsibility in what he can do, and of the narrow limits of his competence; needful to guide him in the selection of those influences which he should bring to bear upon the solemn charge committed to him, in the training of a youthful but immortal being; needful to sustain his patience, to make him unwearied in well-doing, and long-suffering with ignorance or perversity; and needful to fill all that he attempts, and all that he conceives, with that atmosphere of love which is the union between the earthly and the divine, and gives to his humblest occupations and offices in the work of education a truly godlike character.

This I call religious education. But this is what the controversialists to whom I referred, and people generally in our day, would term secular education only, being devoid of what they mean by religion, which is not religion but theology; not religion in its broad and elementary conceptions, but religion in those additions and interpretations, in those figments, in those little petrifactions and legendary or mythical exhibitions of it, which they have endeavoured to recommend to the world as the life of that of which, in reality, they are at best but the outer husk, and with which very often they have no connexion whatever, or only bear a pernicious and obstructive relation thereto. But, according to them, nothing

can be religion unless it includes these; and so they would train the infant mind to what—if one sect rule over the education of a country—would make only intellectual slaves; and to what, if all sects are allowed their full play in the education of the people of a country, would only make a nest of contending bigots. We may rely on the influences to which I have adverted for developing the religious principle, in its due time and form, in the human being; and for that it becomes us patiently to wait. They must surely concede that the religion which, by their own records, has existed in a far simpler shape than at present—the religion which was enough for the piety of holy patriarchs, whose names are venerable, in different countries, and in different specific forms of religion; that what sufficed for their piety may suffice for the piety of the child, until its mind be sufficiently matured to judge for itself on conclusions only supported by historical or metaphysical evidence. That time may come; and then let its powers be exercised freely, as their nature requires.

Hence, what is called secular education, but what I term religious education, or rather education with its natural and inherent tendency towards religion, is all that can be rightfully promoted by public acts, or the interference of the state. The condition of a country in which theological opinions are divided should prevent any notion of overbearing the mind of that country in education by specific forms of doctrine. It is giving one class an undue influence; it

is depriving another of its proportionate claims and rights. And if we look to the foundation of society, we see it erected on principles that are utterly inconsistent with such interference. Representation implies the equal rights of all; it places all on the same level; it is not founded on the notion that man is something which a particular sect must take in charge, and train in a particular way, in order to render him the possessor of the common rights of citizenship. It is true that a state cannot directly educate. As it cannot wisely or justly establish a religion, so neither can it wisely or justly establish an education. It is not the business, nor is it within the ability, generally, of the rulers of a state, to prescribe even what relates to the technicalities of instruction, to say nothing of the far more important operation of moral training. But there are some things which the state may and can do. If education be, as to society, a parental privilege, it may facilitate the exercise of that privilege by parents. If it be, in moral obligation, a parental duty, it may enforce on parents the performance of that duty. If education in civilized society be an advantage, to the inheritance of which the child is born, the state may secure for him the possession of that heritage. If education be a needful qualification to perform the duties of a member of a political and civilized society, the state may see that its subjects are not despoiled of that provision, nor itself injured by their want of it. All this may be done, and yet more than this. It may

scatter over the country the means of education, so that they are attainable easily from every cottage-door. While stimulating local efforts, it may provide that, in localities where the pressure of poverty is combined with the multiplication of ignorance, there shall be help from richer and more favoured localities. It can take care that sects, and churches, and priesthoods, do not pervert the operation of education to their own selfish or class purposes. It may, as in professions affecting the health and the property of society, take care that the unqualified shall not rush into a task for which they are unfitted. It may require that those who aspire to teach shall prove that they know; that those who aspire to the guidance of the young shall have the qualities which enable them to exercise self-guidance, and to stimulate and cherish such a power in the minds under their influence. It may find out the proper persons whom to trust; it may invest them with a certain degree of dignity in the eyes of society; it may give them opportunities and advantages for the accomplishment of their great purpose; and then let it stand by and desire a blessing on their endeavours.

It is only in a spirit of reverence for humanity that this work can be achieved. If we believe man born to a poor, narrow destiny—if we look on him as created only to eat, and drink, and sleep, to work, and to enjoy wealth for a few years—then education sinks from its grandeur and its glory. Or if we look on man as a being depraved and cursed, odious in the sight

of his Maker, and deserving to be so to his fellow-creatures, as some creeds inculcate; why then education is no longer best considered as a development, for the development of depravity only unfolds the man into a demon. The educator must have before him an ideal of humanity. He must take the actual human being as he finds him; must make allowance for adverse circumstances and hereditary tendencies, perhaps, in intellect and morals, allowing for them in the same way as he would for any physical defects. With this exception, the education of one human being is the education of all; it is the expansion, the cherishing, the training of powers to maturity, which are in all, and are evidently there for the purposes of culture. Only with a noble idea of humanity can education be expected to exercise its true and legitimate power in the formation of character.

And education, like religion, has its missions and its inspirations, and not less divine. As some have felt within themselves the glowing impulse to tell their fellow-creatures the thoughts that germinated in their souls of God and providence, of redemption and immortality; so have there always been, there exist from generation to generation, others who have a similar impulse glowing within them to take and train the human being, and send it on its way, strong and rejoicing, in the world, to accomplish its noblest destinies. There have been, in all the departments and degrees of education, people thus manifested to the world from time to time: a Bell and a Lancaster

for the mechanical arts and actions which are requisite in the training of numbers; Hamiltons and Edgeworths, as expounders and commentators of the detail of instruction, and of the application to it of sound theories of mental and moral philosophy; and for prophets, Rousseaus, Fellenbergs, and Pestalozzis. They have proclaimed to the world the objects for which education should be conducted; and, in so doing, they have indicated the mode, and have shed abroad the spirit which animated their own bosoms.

The business of society is to find the educators, to place them in their sphere, and to give them every facility for their work. And there are always such, if we will but look with the single determination of discovering them and of assisting them. There are those the delight of whose minds through their whole maturity is in communion with infant minds. There are those who can sympathize with a child's thoughts more readily than with those of their own age and standing in life. There are those, alike attracted and attractive when children are in question, whose souls find their home amongst their charge, and sit with them in gladness and rejoicing. Their delight is in their work; they are willing to devote their lives to such an occupation, if society will but let them—society too often disregarding them, and most strangely misapplying its principles of trade or of competition to a subject on which they have no bearing, and with which they have no natural connexion. Our object should be to find out God and nature's priesthood for

the purposes of education. It exists upon earth, a true and lasting priesthood, more consecrate than are those inducted to their office by all the traditional solemnity of theological forms—a priesthood bringing man, by its agency, into communion of heart and of mind with his Creator—a priesthood offering on living altars the best sacrifices of truth and love, in the characters whose formation they have promoted.

And the time will come, we may hope, when society will endeavour to discover and to bring into—not a slavish, and subordinated, and qualified operation—but into the fulfilment of their own proper agency, those who are thus marked by nature for training their youthful fellow-creatures. Doubtless, for such a time we must wait yet, and wait a long while; entangled as society is, on this question, by ill-understood notions of education, most low and unworthy notions; and entangled as society also is by the conflicts of hostile theological parties, demanding religious education, and meaning only juvenile proselytism. We must wait for a time when such conflicts will wear away before the spreading influence of truth; and then, something nobler than the amplest measure of political rights, although it enable every adult to regard himself as an influential member of the community, and as possessing his relative degree of power in the enactment and execution of laws—a right infinitely more important than that of the freedom of industry from restrictions that mar the progress of commercial prosperity—a right more

essential than any which relates merely to political condition, or to physical enjoyment and progress—will be recognized in the people, and its exercise assisted by the state. Then will society, in its loving regard for the individual being, exercise one of its noblest duties, bestow one of the greatest advantages which it is capable of conferring; and humanity, not subject from its birth to the will and purposes of others, but regarded as a holy thing, trained carefully for the purpose, ever kept in view, of its own best natural development—humanity thus circumstanced will, more than ever the world has yet seen, grow up into the image of divinity.

XV

PRACTICAL INFLUENCES

It will be asked whether the religious ideas—these mere abstractions, as they have been called—are of potency to control the passions of the multitude, to stimulate their discharge of duties, to tame the wildness of their vices. It will be suggested that they need something more tangible, more specific; that there must be the awful sanctions of eternal torments and eternal joys; that there must be prescribed forms and ministering priesthoods; and that only by something thus framed, thus specific, thus applied, can they be kept in that order which the purposes of civil society demand. And what, then, is the meaning of this question? Is it that you think religion exists for the purposes of the civil governor, to enable him to keep a nation in a submissive condition? Is it that you would try and test religion by its fitness for this purpose? What power has authorized the application of religion to any such ends as these? Let those who hold political power look to themselves, to their responsibilities, and to their interests; and,

if they claim thus to employ religion, show us some right derived from that same authority from which religion emanates. You have your own coarse means for attaining the coarse purposes of external social order. Are there not institutions and offices, laws and magistracy, jails and gibbets? Try these, and let religion alone; or, better still, try fair, just, wise, good government, and see whether social order will not be its sure companion, without any appeal to religious sanctions, or to the supposed need of a specific form of religion to exercise its influence over the multitude. It is this notion of religion being something for the use and purpose of the civil governor, which has led to the worst hypocrisies, to the most atrocious frauds, to the greatest impostures, that have ever been connected with the name of religion. It has stimulated professions alien from the dictates of mind and heart; persecutions the most embittered, wars the most sanguinary. In those pages of the world's history which record the greatest use of religion as the means of government, we see, not the brightest virtues of humanity, but some of its darkest crimes. The theocracies of old Egypt, of Hindustan, of Judea anterior to the monarchy, of papal Rome in more recent times—do these, in the fullest exercise of religion as the instrument of government, show any encouragement to its use for that purpose? Do they exhibit such results as to make us feel that this is indeed the mode in which governments should act, and in which a national character should be built up?

If it be true, as politicians sometimes tell us, that the people need a specific form of religion, that they cannot rest in anything so abstract or spiritual as what has been described, then the people will have it; there will be no lack of a supply for that want. Specific forms of religion will exist, as much as politicians can possibly desire; and they will have this advantage, that they will be in affinity with the people, instead of being alien from them, and imposed upon them by external influence. Those who need marvels in religion, will find legends wild enough to gratify their intensest craving for the marvellous. Those who are not content with ancient prodigies, may have modern ones. If the old prophets do not suffice, new prophets will arise, and will prophesy to them according to their heart's desire. If people must see miracles as well as believe them, new miracles will be wrought. They have been in our own day: divine judgments have followed the violation of the temperance pledge of Father Mathew; miracles have been wrought by Prince Hohenlohe and others. Providential interpositions, supposed to be of a preternatural kind, are frequent in the histories of modern religionists. Methodism was accompanied by such from its first rise, when, indeed, it struck deep root into the popular mind; and the Roman Catholic form of Christianity at this very time is spreading amongst us, with its peculiar claims to the Holy Ghost, and miraculous powers residing in the Church down to the present day. Oh, there is no fear of people

being without a specific form of religion, if they are in that stage of civilization with which such specific form holds an affinity. The ruler may rest in peace; he may be assured that if the people need miracles for their belief, he will soon find that

> Miracles believed
> Work on their minds like miracles achieved.

If they need prophecies and portents, prophecies and portents will multiply around them; if they require forms, forms will be devised, and will be carried out to the most minute directions for bowing, and kneeling, and whatever gesticulations are supposed by those who deal in such things to propitiate divinity. And thus supplied, he may surely rest satisfied that there should be in society those who think the specific form the creature of the day, the offspring of a particular degree of civilization, and deem it not important as compared with the great, the vital, the enduring essence of religion. It may surely be worthy of his regard, that there should be some who, amid the stormy contentions of hostile creeds, are as oil poured upon the surface of the waters; some who look complacently on all the good that there is in every form of religion, are in affinity with that good, and, by the spirit of love, keep in check the spirit of bigotry.

Others will say of the religious ideas—'Are they sufficient for the salvation of my soul? Will they produce the life of God in the soul of man? Will they create in me a new heart, secure for me a spiritual existence here, and immortal happiness hereafter?'

Again, I say, what mean ye? If you desire to know whether, in the religious ideas, we find a God bound by a bargain to the salvation of his creatures; if you seek there for the reconciliation of supposed jarring attributes, by ingenious devices, analogous to the legal tricks of a court of justice; if you inquire whether there be in them an assurance, such an assurance of pardon as you require—that is to say, your own guilt carried to the account of another, and the righteousness of another imputed to you, till it clothes you as a garment; if you inquire whether there be in those ideas that which will give you the consciousness of a preternatural change within—make you the subject of a miracle, a perpetual, living miracle—a loathsome and depraved nature changed preternaturally into an angelic one; if you ask whether there be in these something which will sustain you in an elevated state above your brethren of the human race—a spiritual and heaven-favoured condition, whilst theirs is a carnal and condemned state; if you ask whether there be in these ideas what will certify your future place at the right hand of the Judge, whilst the millions that think not, or feel not, as you do, are to be consigned to his left hand, and to eternal torment—why I say No: there is no such thing in these ideas. If this be salvation and spiritual life, I acknowledge that salvation and spiritual life are not in them. But if it be salvation and spiritual life to be ever aspiring to know more of the infinite beauty of the universe and its pervading Power;

if it be salvation and spiritual life to have the conception of divinity ever growing in the mind, and filling that mind with its majesty and love; if it be salvation and spiritual life to see desires and principles of a lofty nature gaining ever more and more ascendancy over our intellectual and moral being, to feel ourselves fraternally bound in one with all mankind—the universal created becoming one with the Infinite Creator; if it be salvation and spiritual life to look at death not as the infliction of a vindictive penalty, but as one link in the golden chain which binds the past, the present, and the future, and by which we pass onwards, still surrounded by the same munificent Power and Wisdom, still portions of the same great plan—looking for nearer approaches of the finite towards the Infinite, the created towards the Creator—if this be salvation and spiritual life, then these simple ideas, the universal heritage of humanity, the testimony of man's own spirit to the spirit of God that is in him, do save the soul, and produce the life of God in the soul of man.

'Oh,' but some will say, 'how much is cast off to arrive at these simple conceptions of religion! What a long and dreary series of negations and abjurations! How much of "all that the nurse and all the priest have taught" must have been renounced, to clear away the notion of religion to anything so single and elementary!' And then we have descriptions of the dreariness of a negative course; of the misery of one negation following another, until at last,

perhaps, nothing whatever is left, and the mind sinks into the dreary abyss of Atheism. But is it, indeed, so? May we not be too hasty in applying the offensive term 'negation' to a mental process which terminates in the result I have described? Is it negation, is it destructiveness, when the cultivator of the soil thins the plants of his fields and his garden—whether weeds, or whether the real fruit-bearing plant itself—when he draws them up by the roots, and flings them away? Why, this destructiveness is essential to increase the produce of his field; he does not destroy, he makes room for full development, and secures a more abundant harvest. Nature itself does something of the same sort, as we may occasionally see in the forest. Some sturdy tree, some oak of more vigorous vitality than other trees near it, sends up its trunk and throws out its branches; as the boughs spread above, the roots spread below, and the ministering of the soil supplies it ever increasingly with food. It flourishes on the elements of earth and air, the dews of heaven from above and the richness of the soil beneath; thus it grows, and as it grows it lacks space for its expansion; other things wither in its neighbourhood, and seem to retire; and, without the help of the woodman's axe, the space around is cleared for its amplest expansion; and there it stands alone in that regal circle, the monarch of the forest: like eternal truth amid retiring and withering superstitions!

This mental process is not negation; it is positive instead of negative; it is the expansion of the most

valuable truths. It is so in reference to Christianity. The inspiration of the Scriptures is held to be a Christian truth. Well; and truly they are inspired. What Jews, trained in the bigotry and exclusiveness of their condition in the time of Christ, could teach such lessons of charity and love, as did the Apostles, but by inspiration? What but inspiration framed the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan? Those lofty lyrics of the prophets, in which they portray the majesty of Jehovah—these are passages that breathe of inspiration. They show the mind in an excited and exalted state, as a spirit akin to spirits of a higher order, akin to the one, the great, the almighty, the eternal Spirit. But do we find this only in the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures? Are there no passages in the Hindu Vedas that have commanded the reverence of enlightened Christians by their sublime monotheism? Were there not passages in the Koran that established the mission of Mohammed in the minds of his countrymen, and made the poets of Arabia bow in homage before a greater poet? Was not that inspiration which made the ancients, in all their pride of learning, and the grace of their eloquence, and the growing wisdom of their philosophy, do homage to the name of Plato, as one who spoke on earth the language of the gods? Have we not, in our own literature, passages—many and many a passage—instinct with life and power, which must be felt by every one who comes to it in an appreciating state of mind—the language of inspiration

again and again in our poets and our philosophers, till we feel, by our hearts burning within us, the presence of divinity ?

True, mingled with these are inconclusive reasonings —perhaps unconsciously, but really, sophistical arguments—false science, or ignorance of science, mistaken chronology, the temporary overlaying the permanent, and the partial overlaying the universal. All these, and derivation more or less direct from other sources, we may find in company with those outpourings of the soul that seem instinct with a higher power ; and which of these can we not also find in the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures ? To deny the infallibility of every sentence, the conclusiveness of every argument and assertion—this is not to deny inspiration. We arrive at a better view of it by the very expansion of the notion of inspiration, which has cleared and brightened itself, and grown upon the mind, and expanded our view of the sphere in which it operates ; and has thus really made us more truly believers in inspiration than when cherishing that slavish submission to the words of texts on which some pride themselves, as what they call reliance on the Word of God.

And so with regard to revelation considered in its connexion with facts. If we look for the spirit of the Hebrew and Christian systems, we shall very often find it, not in laws and ordinances applying to temporary circumstances, but in recorded facts—facts very often claiming to be of a preternatural character. We shall see in that pictorial work the

tribes of Israel taught the supremacy of Jehovah by the superiority of the wonders wrought by Moses over those of the Egyptian magi. We shall find one miracle supposed to be the enunciation of one doctrine, and another miracle of another. An acute writer has summed up the Old and New Testaments by the declaration, that the one teaches by facts the doctrine of a providence, and the other by facts—especially the resurrection of Christ—the doctrine of a future state. If the preternatural were essential to our idea of a revelation, this might be exclusive. But have the stars no voices? Is the history of human nature dumb to us? Do objects and events bring with them no lessons which they leave impressed upon the attentive mind? Why, all nature, all event, is full of revelation to him who is desirous of having revealed to him the beauty, the variety, the grandeur, the great beneficent purposes, enshrined in this system in which we live. The perception of revelation by facts, as extended at once to the grandest and the simplest objects of the material world, has had its power even over the most specific forms of religion; so that we may find religions of the mountains and the woods, of the skies, of the caverns, of the rivers, of the forest, of every element of nature that was known—all have left their broad and deep impress even on specific forms; thus proclaiming that revelations are in them for the enlightened eye and the loving heart that seek to read them there.

God in Christ is put forward as a Christian notion.

It is so. God was in the kindness that blessed the clustering babes around him; God, in that generous pity that rebuked the Pharisee for reproaching the sinner who anointed his feet with oil, and wiped them with the hair of her head. And is not God in all things godlike; in all moral majesty; in mercy and forgiveness rising above persecution and injury; in devotedness sparing nothing, but giving up friends, time, life, for the world and its advancement? Is not God in all humanity, and in things inanimate too? And if there be truth and beauty in such manifestations as the prophets give us, so is there in others for which a very different class of persons are responsible. If we see a manifestation of God in the prophet Daniel's 'Ancient of Days,' do we not see one also in the Jove of Phidias? What is the feeling, where the intelligence, where the impartial estimate, when the veneration given to the one is withheld from the other? The pictured majesty that strikes the senses with awe and the heart with reverence—this is a manifestation of divinity. And I might pursue this train of thought through many other particulars. It is the expansion of truths that exist in the most specific forms of Christianity; it is an expansion and not a negation, by which the mind is led to the contemplation of the universal; it is the positive process, and not the negative. Nor is there anything really abjured but the exclusiveness which would cramp and confine thoughts of infinitude within the narrow limits prescribed by the bigot's mind.

Progression in religion is to be traced in the Scriptures. There is a progression from the family deity of the patriarchal times to the Jehovah of the Hebrew nation; from the Jehovah of the Hebrew nation to the one God and Father of Christ. There is a progression traceable in the views of the Hebrew mind —in the elevation of their conceptions from material rewards and punishments to the spiritual consequences of human character and actions. But within what narrow bounds this progression is limited! Can we call it a negative process when man takes a larger and longer view of religious progressiveness? Is that mere negation? After having been left in darkness by his own revelations, the superior intelligence of Persia and Babylon helped on the Jew in a most important degree, and first gave him his doctrine of the immortality of the human soul. But is it a rejection or a negation of the notion of progressiveness, if we trace it in other changes, in connexion with other religions—if we see it not merely in the history of the Jew, but in the history of human nature? Polytheism had its mission as well as monotheism. Monotheism gave more strict, and pure, and refined conceptions of the divine essence; but its practical effect was, at the same time, to limit the idea, in its mental realization, of the divine presence—to dissociate it from the objects of human contemplation. Polytheism, on the other hand, lowered—or at least did not raise—the common conceptions of the divine essence; but it multiplied the lively apprehension of

the Divine presence, filling all natural objects with their tutelary deities, and seeing divinity connected with the flowing streams, the rolling billows, the blossoming fruits and plants. The one made divinity too remote, the other made divinity too familiar; but both were contributions towards the gradual progress of the notion of divinity in the general human mind. Judaism adored a God *above* nature, and polytheism beheld its gods *in* nature. The creed of the Christian church afterwards tried a compromise between the two. It endeavoured to become the synthesis of the past—of monotheism and polytheism together, by its doctrine of a trinity, of the incarnation in human form of the second person, and by its saints and angels. The latter came to fill up the void, to human feelings, left by the outworn mythology; and, by their spiritual character and their national and individual relations, to connect the seen with the unseen world, the finite multitudes of created beings with the one uncreated Infinite, so immeasurably above them as else to seem isolated. This system has been not unwarrantably termed Christian mythology. Its distinct personalities are following those of ancient polytheism, and fading into the recognition of the universality of the divine spirit, incorporate in man and nature, the being of beings, God 'all in all.' Well, then, here we trace progress—progress contributed to by Judaism and by heathenism—contributed to by what some deem the corruption of Christianity, but still holding on

its course. And who is to say that it is now to come to a pause; that there is nothing beyond; that there are no other, better, nobler conceptions of divinity than those to which the world has thus groped its way? Why, this same process may continue for ages and ages yet to come, and the finite not be perceptibly nearer to the Infinite, nor man able to comprehend his Maker, but still knowing more of him, and knowing him better than he did formerly. And this view of progression, of religious progression—not only of that advance recorded in the Scriptures, but of that which we find amongst various nations—of that which we trace in the history of the world at large—of that which affords indications that it is a certain continuing process in the human mind—this, I say, is not a negation; it is amplification; it is enlargement of our view of God's truth—of its grandeur as evolved by this same fact of religious progress.

With such views the ardour of proselytism will of course be abated. Exclusiveness is a tendency that will be restrained by the mind, or wholly abolished. Influenced by these simple yet boundless thoughts, man will look around in love, look forward in hope. If different specific modes of worship meet his regards, he will be less inclined to criticize their failings than to detect what there is in them of truth and beauty, and with that to find himself in heartfelt sympathy. He will look for it, delight in it; the common thoughts of religionists he will prize more than their varying opinions; as in character he will regard the common

elements by which our human nature is built up even to its ideal perfection. He will look onward with none of those man-created fears that make another world so terrible. All worlds to him are but portions of one system, governed on one principle, filled with the same power of almighty love. He will feel his oneness with what is nearest divinity on earth, and so be assured that all other scenes and all future ages will only unite him more closely with his God. And, resting in such hopes, his mind will rise above the atmosphere of collision and perturbation; he will ascend towards that calmness and blessedness which are the characteristics of the infinite and the eternal.

Here, then, I bring this course of lectures to a close. It has defects which I should not seek to excuse were my purpose other than it is, which is simply to give a summary of my own truthful thoughts to truthful minds for their contemplation. Let them have the consideration to which I think they are entitled. Time is rapidly bearing the world on to more enlightened opinions, perhaps, than any of us in the present generation hold; and yet more rapidly is time bearing on individuals to that state where mistakes and ignorance shall vanish away, and where our just, though here imperfect, speculations shall present themselves in all the truth and the grandeur of glorious and eternal realities.

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