ESSEX HALL LECTURE, 1922

Orthodoxy

Right Hon. H. A. L. FISHER

Essex Hall Lecture 1922

PRICE 1/- NET

THE LINDSEY PRESS
5 ESSEX STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C. 2.
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PRINTED BY ELSOM AND CO., LTD.
MARKET PLACE, HULL.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THE Essex Hall Lecture was established with the object of providing an opportunity for the free utterance of the thoughts of a selected speaker on some religious theme of general interest.

The first lecture was delivered in 1893 by the late Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, on 'The Development of Theology, as illustrated in English Poetry from 1780 to 1830.' 'The Relation of Jesus to his Age and our own,' by Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter; 'The Immortality of the Soul in the Poems of Tennyson and Browning,' by Sir Henry Jones; 'Heresy, its Ancient Wrongs and Modern Rights,' by the Rev. Alex. Gordon; 'The Religious Philosophy of Plotinus, and some Modern Philosophies of Religion,' by Dr. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's; 'The Place of Judaism among the Religions of the World,' by Dr. Claude G. Montefiore; 'Christianity Applied to the Life of Men and of Nations,' by Bishop Gore; 'The Lost Radiance of the Christian Religion,' by Dr. L. P. Jacks—these are a few of the subjects of the Lectures in past years.

ESSEX HALL, LONDON,
June, 1922.

are worthy of love and admiration, others are on the contrary deficient in the qualities which deserve to excite such emotions and give offence to our moral and æsthetic sensibilities.

Without some such ground of common belief or orthodoxy the business of life could not be conducted at all. We have only to imagine a state of things, in which human beings acted upon the hypothesis, either that all other human beings were phantoms of the mind, or that life was timeless, or that good and evil were non-existent or indistinguishable, or that sensible things were incapable of affecting the emotions by way of pleasure or pain, to realize that under such conditions human life as we understand it, could not be carried on. Indeed, within certain wide limits all education presupposes the necessity of furnishing to mankind some common measure for the interpretation of the facts of life. Each generation conceives it to be a duty to hand down to its suc-

cessor a common body of knowledge, and of belief about the facts of the past and the present. We do not allow heterodoxy as to the order of the letters in the alphabet, or as to the rule of three, or as to the names of the Kings of Israel and Judah. We notice that the effective conduct of life requires the use of a common language, and that the limits within which phonetic variations are permissible must in the interests of public convenience be drawn as closely as possible. When we consider the cerebral life of the average man, and attempt to estimate how much of it deviates from the norm, how many of his operative beliefs and opinions are in reality his own, or what part is derived through the channels of education, sympathy or imitation from others, the element of originality or dissidence reduces itself to minute, if not to invisible dimensions. To keep the rule of the road is more than a precept, it is an instinct.

Some large measure of orthodoxy then may be regarded not only as a convenience but as a social preservative. Without it, rational human communication would cease to exist. Common action implies at least some measure of common thought. How much will depend on circumstances. In periods of national stress and danger, the code of national orthodoxy tends to become fierce and exacting. Governments, which in peaceful times are willing to allow a wide latitude of thought and expression, find it necessary or expedient to revise their practice in time of war, and to suppress all manifestations, however legitimate from the theoretical point of view, which are calculated to perplex the national confidence or to diminish the volume of popular prejudice which furnishes the motive power to the war machine. In such times as these, the most dangerous form of heterodoxy is that of the conscientious objector who

refuses military service, the popular form of orthodoxy, and fails to respond to the announcement from the pulpit that the cause of the Nation is the cause of God, and that to forward it is part of goodness itself.

I think there can be no question that, whatever may be the differing shades of ethical value to be attached to such manifestations of political orthodoxy, the acceptance of a large body of common beliefs is essential to the effective and coherent action of any organized society. Is it, however, a sufficient defence for orthodoxy to claim for it social utility ? And would orthodoxy only so defended continue to make the appeal which gives it so unique an importance as one of the binding forces in Society ?

Here I think that a distinction may be drawn between politics and religion. We may readily admit that it is a sufficient defence for a body of political opinions, whether they be professed by

a party or a nation, that they are believed to be more expedient or less inexpedient than any competing or alternative scheme of doctrine. But would such a defence be regarded as an adequate justification for a religious creed? Is it sufficient to define religion in the words of George Eliot as that which helps you, or is there not also in the mind of every subscriber to the articles of a Church a formal expression of belief in their universal validity; not, be it observed, in their relative validity, in their validity as determined by space and time, but in their universal validity, in their truth for all men, for all nations, for all time?

There can be very little doubt that if this question were asked of the Anglican, or the Roman Catholic, or the Moslem, his answer would be in the affirmative. He would say that his doctrine was not only useful but true, as true as the axioms of geometry, as unassailable as the law of gravitation or of the con-

servation of energy. And he would add that if once it were admitted either that the doctrines in question were untrue but useful, or that their truth consisted in their utility, or that their truth and their utility were dependent upon adventitious circumstances, so that what was true and useful in one country and for one people, was untrue and useless in another country and for another people, the sap and life of the creed would wither away and it would cease to perform any service to mankind.

This would, I suggest, be the answer of the ordinary believer now. Whether such an answer would survive a much wider diffusion of the large body of knowledge now available with reference to Comparative Religion is more doubtful. In any case I should imagine that in the light of such wider experience, great parts of the dogmatic fabric of the European peoples would lose their claim to universal authority and

appear in the guise of honest but fallible attempts to state certain aspects of religious experience as they appeared to certain theologians of the Western world, living many centuries ago and working under the empire of philosophies long since extinct. What would impress such a student would be the universality of the religious impulse and the variety of the intellectual forms in which the religious consciousness has sought and still seeks satisfaction. To the student not of one religion but of all, the sense of the infinite, the yearning for consolation and support, the desire to be assured of the rationality of the Cosmos, the need for some transcendent sanctions for established rules of conduct, the passion for the dedicated life, these appetites are not confined to the profession of a single creed but are qualities, now gross, now sublimated, of the human mind and temperament itself.

To disengage the permanent, the

fundamental, the universal element of religion, from the transitory and variable embodiments of the spiritual impulse in man, to note what characteristics of religious belief are fashioned by historic accident or by the temperamental characteristics of great religious bodies, or by peculiarities of racial or national character, and what characteristics on the contrary are rooted in the deep subsoil of humanity, is perhaps the greatest function which the historian is called upon to perform.

But when that analysis has been effected, when in the crucible of history the beliefs of all the ages and all the lands have been melted down, there still will remain the question of values. By what test shall we discriminate the higher from the lower forms ?

One test, I think, that we must certainly discard is the test of numbers. The plebiscite may be a useful political instrument for giving warranty to a Government, but though a multitude

of adherents is a proof that a religion meets a wide demand, it furnishes no security that the demand is intelligent or refined. Indeed it is quite conceivable that a religion believed in by nobody and practised by nobody might be superior to any of the creeds now accepted by the religious institutions of the world. It is quite conceivable again, that a religion moulded both as to its theory and practice by religious minds in a religious age might be discarded as incomprehensible or commuted into baser shapes by the degenerate descendants of the people by whom it was originally accepted. It is an arguable proposition that some such fate has been experienced by religions which are still practised or professed among us, though the true state of affairs is masked by a conservatism which retains the forms without the substance, and professes the precepts without the practice.

We cannot then test the quality of

our orthodoxy by the number of our associates in belief. Indeed it would be more reasonable to expect that the nobler the creed, the fewer the professors. But if numbers are eliminated as irrelevant and misleading, what test shall we apply ? The student of history, to whom alone we are appealing, would probably be tempted to say, first that the religion of civilized man was higher than the religion of savages, that spiritual religion was higher than magical religion, and that of the various forms of religious beliefs held by different races of civilized men, that was the highest which expressed the religious consciousness of the highest races in the most complete form.

We should, I think, have no difficulty in assenting to the view that a religion which enjoins human sacrifices or orgiastic rites, which inculcates the worship of demons or animals or the organs of generation is inferior to a creed which shows less obvious traces of fear,

cruelty or profligate desire. The difficulty, however, arises when we attempt to assess the value of the creeds which belong to the more civilized races of mankind. The three golden rings in Lessing's *Nathan* were intended to symbolize the view, familiar to enlightened spirits in the eighteenth century, that the three great theistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, were of equivalent value. It is clear, however, that though there is a common element in all these creeds, and though it may be possible to contend that the principle of Theism is so far more important and valuable than any other element of the religious consciousness that its presence in the three great religions which we have mentioned gives them a common fund of religious experience so deep as to overwhelm all the distinctive features upon which Jew, Christian and Moslem are wont principally to insist, yet these distinctive features necessarily come up for valua-

tion whenever comparisons are made.

The Jewish faith, for instance, is criticized by the Christian as being too formal, too abstract, too deficient in humanism, and as refusing to man the supreme hope of immortality. The Moslem is accused of mingling with the sublime emotions of the desert solitude, the crude materialism of the Oriental harem. To the Jew the Christian theology appears to be fantastic in its scholasticism, and its practice debased by concessions to polytheism. All three faiths appear to the pious Hindu to be seriously barren of the true genius of religion. When such disagreements are prevalent among men of high intelligence and deep religious instinct, who shall say where orthodoxy lies ?

Here, however, it is necessary to make a distinction. The formulary of a Church is not a religious but a political document. It is never the expression of the individual soul, always the expression of his racial circum-

stance. It is dyed with the waters of compromise like a political programme; it is so drafted as to cover within the limits of its phrases the greatest number of its adherents, and to solve the greatest number of antinomies. The value of the formulary is not that it creates thought but that it preserves it, not that it stimulates argument but that it suppresses it, not that it quickens the individual, but that it binds together the mass. The orthodox man is the man who follows the rule of the road. The orthodox Englishman does not question the value of being an Englishman; he accepts the institutions, the customs, the manner of life of his country. He obeys the laws. He is content. He does not say, "With a little trouble I might go and live in China and study Confucius, who is more sympathetic to me than any of the Western writers, in the land of his birth and become a naturalized Chinaman." He prefers on the contrary to vote in

Parliamentary Elections, to read "The Times" and to play golf. So too the orthodox Anglican accepts the Thirty-nine Articles. He may not care about them for themselves. He may not understand them. He accepts them, however, as the constitution of a Church for which he does care. And if you were to ask him why he cared, he might answer that he liked the ceremonial of the Church, that it brought him comfort and solace, and that he found inspiration in the example of Christ and in the moral beauties of Christian literature and of the Christian temperament.

Yet, however fully it may be admitted that the formal theology of a Church is for the vast majority of its members of secondary importance, it cannot be left out of account in a controversy as to credentials. Let us suppose that the battle is engaged between the Protestant and the Catholic embodiments of the Christian idea, to what criterion

will these rival controversialists make their appeal? Not to numbers if they are intelligent, nor yet to any external symbol of material success and power. They will ground their respective claims upon two considerations and two only. Firstly, the fidelity with which they have succeeded in preserving in its original radiance and freshness the idea of Christ, and secondly, the completeness with which in theology, in ritual, in institutional life, they succeed in giving adequate expression to the religious needs of the Christian soul. The Protestant will urge that the accretions of Catholic ritual and doctrine are inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospels, and that Jesus was first and foremost a preacher of righteousness, a moralist above all things, spreading the ideas of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. To the Catholic on the other hand the ethical side of the Gospels is not the most important. Even the Catholic Modernist, accepting the es-

chatological theory of Christ's activity, urges that the idea of the historic Christ is more literally represented in the theology of the Catholic Church than in any system of Christianity which attributes to Christ a new gospel of righteousness. And to the more orthodox Roman, the appeal is still to the same high Court. He argues that the doctrines and essential institutions of the Roman Church have always been the same, that every detail of the dogmatic, sacramental and hierarchical system was determined in detail by Christ to the Apostles and by them to their successors, that Christ instituted the Papacy and has given sacraments and the episcopacy and committed the system to the infallible guardianship of the Church. On this theory there is no development in belief, only an elaboration of an unstated creed already implicitly held by the faithful in all ages. All novelty is heresy; but appearances are deceitful and a Papal pronounce-

ment may remind us that a doctrine explicitly repudiated by St. Thomas may have been implicitly held by him.

All schools of Christian thought then make their primary appeal to the past and base their apologetics upon the conformity of their system either with the explicit directions or with the essential spirit contained in the teaching of the Founder. Other arguments are used but they are subsidiary, flying buttresses rather than the essential supports of the fabric. Thus appeal may be made to the quality of the sacred literature inspired by its religion, to its adaptability to the needs and superstitions of the vulgar, to the guidance which it affords to conduct, to the inspiration which it supplies to art or æsthetics or politics, or to its capacity for adapting itself to the progressive needs of civilized life. In the main, however, most religion professes to be conservative and bases its credentials upon the past.

Oracle, Church, Scripture, Conscience —man has at different times appealed to each as an infallible expression of the Divine mind. To James Martineau, experience offered nothing but mixed material, the divine blended with the human and only to be disengaged by an act of choice. "The tests," he wrote, "by which we distinguish the fictitious from the real, the wrong from the right, the unlovely from the beautiful, the profane from the sacred, are to be found within and not without, in the method of just thought, the witness of pure conscience, and the aspirations of unclouded reason. . . . These are the living powers which constitute an affinity with God."[1]

There is, however, one idea which seems to be so essential a part of any religious system that were it to be deprived of its empire over the ordinary ways of human thinking by the advance of historical knowledge and criticism, the fabric of orthodoxy would not long

[1] *Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 20.

survive its eclipse. I allude to the belief in the Providential ordering of the Universe. It is this belief which gives richness and content to the bare idea of Theism and justifies the ways of God to man. Without it, the world is darkness and chaos. With it the world becomes rational and informed by a thread of divine and intelligent purpose. Such a belief has, it is true, no necessary connexion with a theodicy of Epicurean gods who sit beside their nectar in indolent indifference to the tides of human affairs. But as soon as the assumption is made that man is a matter of divine concern and exists for some divine purpose, the physical history of the Universe and the natural history of man upon this earth are called upon to supply evidences of Providential design and so become not only essential parts of theology but operative influences in religious life. It follows that any new development of knowledge and experience, which gives a

shock either to the accepted theories of the Cosmos or to the natural belief in the essential goodness and rationality which control the world, is ill-viewed by the orthodox theologian. Aristarchus in the ancient and Galileo in the modern world were condemned as dangerous heretics for holding heliocentric doctrine, and regarded as proper objects for persecution. There is nothing surprising about this. Religions, being built out of the needs of man, are naturally anthropocentric. The sudden influx of an entirely new order of physical ideas, dethroning the earth from its ancient and exclusive primacy, revealing the existence of other planets upon which it is not inconceivable that human life may be sustained, and foreshadowing the possibility that this earth may one day become a wandering graveyard, as if the brief drama of human history had never been enacted at all upon its surface, is at war with many of the pious tradi

tions and optimistic instincts which nourish the religious consciousness of mankind. Similarly a plague, an earthquake, a war, or any other great calamity may, by weakening the faith in the Providential ordering of the Universe, bring in its train a widespread defection from Theistic beliefs. In a memorable paragraph Thucydides has described the moral and spiritual effects of the plague of Athens, how owing to the overwhelming nature of the calamity all laws sacred and divine fell into disrepute, how every one lived for the moment, judging it to be immaterial whether they worshipped or no, since all were equally destroyed, and plunged into the dissipation of the moment. Human nature changes little, if at all, and were the plague of Athens to be repeated now in London, the same results would follow from the same causes.

Whether a closer study of the course of human history is calculated to fortify the belief in the Providential ordering of

the world is another question. The difficulty of reconciling the fact of evil with the existence of a God at once good and omnipotent is one of the oldest puzzles of mankind. I do not propose to discuss it here. It is sufficient to note that a belief in a wise and good Providence can well coexist with a belief in the reality of evil, provided that we can satisfy ourselves that upon the whole the good prevails. It is not necessary that the religious man should be an optimist—but it is, I think, necessary that he should be a meliorist, convinced upon the whole that the world is improving, or that it will improve. At least it would seem hard to reconcile an opposite hypothesis, that of a divinely ordained stage upon which only one scene was acted and that the progressive degeneration of the human race in morality, in happiness and in spiritual power with any confidence either in the wisdom or in the goodness of God as we understand those qualities.

But how far does history lend countenance to the doctrine of meliorism? How far does it support the view, not only that there has been improvement but that the improvement was not the result of pure accident, and further that it is likely to continue. Let me say at once that I am a meliorist. So far as my acquaintance with history goes, it leads me to believe in all these propositions. I think that the science of conducting human life upon this planet has improved, is improving, and is likely to continue to improve. I believe that man is happier and better now than he was five centuries ago, and that the general conditions under which life is carried on are more favourable than were those of distant ages, to the attainment of those qualities which the common assent of mankind has designated as good. Would it, however, be equally reasonable for a South Sea Islander, or a Masai tribesman, or an Australian aboriginal to hold this view? Each of these

representatives of one of the less successful races of the earth might reasonably be excused for doubting the benignity of a process which threatens to improve him and his kinsmen off the face of the planet. Or again can we feel secure that the progress evidenced as we think by the course of history is the result of so massive a combination of causes that it cannot be regarded as a caprice or an accident? Incontestably the greatest fact in history for us is the rise and spread of European civilization. Is the amazing energy and genius of the quarrelsome inhabitants of this comparatively small peninsula a fact which commends itself to the intellect as inevitable? Do you ascribe it to climate? There are other temperate climates which have been sterile of gifts to the human family. The island of Vancouver has a climate nearly resembling that of Great Britain but the greater part of its surface is still an unexplored wilderness. Do we ascribe

the European ascendancy in the world to the Greeks ? The hypothesis is more plausible, for almost everything we possess in art and poetry, in religion and politics, in science and philosophy, can be traced back to the wonderful achievements of Ancient Greece. But how can we account for the sudden efflorescence and equally mysterious decline of Hellenic genius ? If it be true that the decay of Greece is due to the malaria, then what a happy accident that the malaria came after Homer and Plato and Aristotle and not before them ! And if it be contended that, if Greek civilization had not occurred, results of equal value would have been obtained otherwise and elsewhere, we can only reply that the contribution of Greek genius, manifested within the narrowest limits of space and time, has so far been supreme, inexplicable and unique.

Calculate again the risks which affronted the inhabitants of the peninsula, now from the Saracens, now from the

Mongols, now from the threatened submergence of a great classic heritage under the flood of Teutonic barbarism. Can it be affirmed that the eventual triumph of Europe was certain and God-ordained, and that the present distribution of power in the world as between European and non-European nations is a just and ultimate ordinance of fate ?

An equal doubt attaches to the theory of indefinite meliorism. In the Brothers Karamazoff, the old Russian monk foretells the downfall of Europe in a fierce war of mutual extermination. We have now learnt that forecasts of Armageddon are not altogether chimerical and that there is nothing inherently impossible in a world war, waged on such a scale and with weapons so destructive as to undo in a few years the progress of centuries. Indeed it is one of the ironies of Providence that the destructiveness of wars varies directly with the public virtue and scientific knowledge of the peoples engaged upon

them, so that given a great world issue such as the competition for the settlement of a half-empty continent and the populations of the world ranged upon opposite sides, a sufficiently high standard of science and patriotism in both camps would ensure the spread of famine, pestilence and revolution throughout the globe.

In spite of these grim possibilities, the history of the human race in the past does seem to give warrant for a limited meliorism. We are not, indeed, guaranteed against the destruction of the earth by some unforeseen but not unimaginable celestial catastrophe. But if we restrict our vision to what is likely to happen to the human race in the next three or four hundred years, we have, certain assumptions being granted, sufficient ground for believing that the world will improve. What are these assumptions? First, that human life being a benefit and not a curse, an organization of the world which enables

a large number of human beings to live a reasonable life upon the planet is superior to one in which human life is "nasty, brutish and short"; second, that knowledge, physical health and foresight are good things, and that the spread of knowledge, health and foresight through education is therefore to be welcomed; and, finally, that under the political-social forms which we now see developing around us, average human nature is finding it easier and not more difficult to obtain the satisfaction of its higher wants. These are not everybody's hypotheses. The majority of the inhabitants of the British Empire would reject them. But on these assumptions it is reasonable for the historian to cherish a modest hope for the future of the human race.

That a faith in the Providential ordering of the Universe has in effect been corroborated by the belief in human progress will be generally admitted. Is it, however, true that faith

in Providence implies faith in Progress ? Would it be possible for the student of history, convinced that the past conduct of mankind gives no warrant for believing in the spiritual advance of the human race, notwithstanding to retain his faith in the government of the Universe by a wise and benignant Power ? May theological optimism be combined with an acute sense of the ironies, the tragedies and the wrongs of history ? Is it possible to hold that a degenerating or stationary society can be elevated by an overmastering will for good ? Only, it would seem, upon one hypothesis. Let it be postulated that the phenomenal world, revealed to us by observation or inference, is but a crucible for the trial and purification of imperishable souls, and the verdict of history becomes immaterial. Given some doctrine of spiritual immortality, bringing new worlds into existence to balance the old, the ugly face of history may be confronted with composure. Such

a doctrine has been a general, though not a universal feature of religion throughout the ages, assuming diverse forms, now coarse, now sublime, according to the quality of the culture of which it has been a function. But wherever it has been held with intensity, it has had the effect of bringing consolation in sorrow and of mitigating inevitable, if unspoken criticism, upon the work of the great Artificer.

The other hypothesis is that of the general predominance of good over evil in human nature. The greatest liar, as Dr. Johnson observed very sensibly, tells more truths than lies; and it is possible to hold that the greatest criminal does more good than evil actions in his life. Even supposing that the evidence of history would appear to indicate a declension in the general standard of morality, such a predominance of good over evil, assuming it to exist, might be taken as sufficient indication of a divine purpose in

history. The argument, as you are aware, has been put with great force and eloquence by your distinguished leader James Martineau.

Every individual, however inventive, accepts from others more than he discovers for himself. Curiosity and criticism, the two cardinal features of the scientific intellect, do not constitute the complete outfit of the wholesome human mind. An element of unanalysed acceptance of knowledge or belief, upon which no critical faculty has been exercised, furnishes the necessary background of repose for the discovering intellect. Science, in other words, has its orthodoxy as well as religion. There are things which a scientific man may not believe, there are things which a scientific man may not disbelieve without forfeiting the esteem of the brothers of his craft. Sometimes after the lapse of a century a line of scientific inquiry, judged to be unsound and chimerical when first propounded, is

taken up again and, being attacked from a new angle, is found to yield results. The scientific heterodoxy of one age becomes the scientific orthodoxy of another. The discredited Mesmer experiences a palingenesis in the person of the fashionable and acclaimed professor of telepathy and auto-suggestion. Such experiences might seem to indicate a spirit of caution in those who may be tempted to condemn avenues of scientific inquiry as bound in advance to be unfruitful. Yet it does not follow that the march of science is impeded by such premature judgments. Rather they may be regarded as the sheep-dogs, which keep the scientific flock together in its progress to those fields of thought which for the moment offer the richest pasture.

The industrialism of our great cities produces its native and congenial orthodoxy in a sentimental and canonized form of materialism. Christianity is condemned as an artifice for the pro-

tection of capitalistic greed, providing the illusory opiate of a future life to still the urgent disquiet of the poor and the oppressed. So strongly is this felt in some parts of Europe that I have known of a case in which a man was ejected from a Trade Union in France for having given his child Christian burial. To be a Christian was accounted inconsistent with Trade Union orthodoxy—it was a base superstition, belonging to the Dark Ages, associated with the rule of the priest and the noble, incompatible with the dignity of a free man and inconsistent with the great aim of securing social justice upon earth and the overthrow of the capitalistic regime.

Such a cult has many worshippers. Socialism has its schools, its hymns, its ritual, its catechism. Its sacred scriptures are the writings of the German Jew, who first adequately described the evils of industrial society. A Church militant, it has its Councils, its proscriptions. In wealth of pity and un-

selfishness it is probably equal to many transcendental religions, and no less intolerant than they of opposing philosophies. I do not propose to speculate upon the future of this religion, but if anything certain can be predicted of the fate of humanity, it is that some form of Socialistic creed will continue to exert an empire over many hearts as long as want and poverty exist.

It is difficult for me to end this random discourse, in the course of which so many grave questions have been raised and dropped, without adding one final speculation as to the effect which education is likely to produce upon orthodoxy. The beliefs of intellectual people are inevitably affected by the growing knowledge of the world and by the prominence which the scientific discoveries or philosophical theories of the moment gives to certain ideas. Religious beliefs, in common with scientific and historical beliefs, are subject to this general influence and undergo

transformations and trans-valuations under the empire now of this and now of that intellectual dynasty. To the savage imagination man is naturally immortal and the prolongation of his natural life upon this earth can only be arrested by the evil works of the sorcerer. Contrast this crude doctrine of immortality with the creed expounded in Kant's "Critique of Practical Reason" or Browning's "La Saisiaz." How different are the flowers, how unlike is the fruit. Yet the root is the same.

The progress of culture, while failing to extinguish the primordial appetite for survival, has succeeded in robbing it of that wild vesture of panic and cruelty in which it was originally clothed. Education then produces great changes in the religious landscape of the world. It has cleared away some of the wilder and grosser forms of superstition; it has created subtle theologies, fine and moving liturgies, great devotional litera-

tures. It is constantly at work, revising, adapting, as well as transmitting the creeds which have come down from antiquity. But has it destroyed those fundamental instincts of mankind out of which religions are fashioned? Has it even provided a permanent dyke against the return of gross and even savage superstitions? We may be permitted to doubt. The battle for the higher against the lower forms of civilization is incessant. It proceeds daily. It is renewed with every generation. It cannot be intermitted with impunity. If the garden of belief be neglected by the hand of the gardener, the weeds will grow rank and luxuriant in the night. Polytheism, necromancy, magic, the seeds are thickly sown and the plants ready to spring up and flourish if the restraining pressure of civilized opinion be ever so little relaxed.

I say advisedly the pressure of civilized opinion, for when I speak of education, I am not merely referring to

schools and schoolmen. Improvements in the quality of religious belief are only in a small degree the result of the labours of theologians or their critics. All the ennobling and humanizing influences, which inform the art and literature, the science and politics of an age, co-operate to the same end, forming the atmosphere in which man lives, giving colour and outline to his spiritual world and bringing to the interpretation of ancient formularies converging lights from every quarter of the horizon. A creed is the product of the age which holds it. It is vain then to expect, that if the standard of civilized life be depressed, the working creeds of a people will escape the general deterioration.

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