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BY

J. M. ROBERTSON,

AUTHOR OF "A SHORT HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT," ETC.

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PREFATORY NOTE

Of the following papers, only one is now published for the first time—that on "The Causation of the French Revolution." For permission to reprint that on "The Prose of the English Bible" from the (unfortunately defunct) Journal of English Studies I have to tender my thanks to Horace Marshall & Sons; and for permission to reprint four papers from The Reformer my thanks are due to Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner. All, in this reprint, have undergone slight modifications, omissions having in some cases been made good and elucidations supplied in others. It is perhaps unnecessary to ask the reader to note the dates of the papers.

THE CAUSATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

THOUGH Sociology is reckoned "the last of the sciences," and has little to show in the way of accepted results, its cultivators can point to a whole library of material, going back to the beginnings of literature. Sociology emerges in Genesis; and ever since, men have been writing it, even as M. Jourdain spoke prose. What its students aspire to, now that it has a name, is a procedure comparable to that of the sciences in general in respect of accuracy in statements testable, rectitude in induction, and consistency in deduction. But these standards are still somewhat too high for the bulk of even the academic writing that properly comes under the sociological heading. It is with a certain hope for reform, and a strong conviction of the need for it in an age in which all men talk of "reconstruction," that I raise the particular issue hereinafter discussed. Reconstruction of society can hardly go on successfully without some approach to rational comprehension of the past. Yet we find ostensible experts formulating the causation of even the historically near past in a fashion that seems to defy almost every principle of scientific induction.

The University Lectures of the late Professor Sidgwick on "The Development of European Polity" (1903) were edited after his death from his repeatedly revised manuscripts by the very competent hands of Mrs. Sidgwick, and were scrutinized in proof by at least five qualified scholars, who subjected them to criticism. Any noticeable proposition of a general historical character which they contain, then, may be supposed to be such as will pass current among scholarly people

as a statement of fact, whether or not there be difference of opinion as to interpretation of a sociological kind. On that head, some diversity of view would be a matter of course; and no agreement in any one of Professor Sidgwick's conclusions is to be inferred in the case of any one of those who assisted the editor. But I suppose they would all be ready to point out a grave historical error. When, then, such an error is found obtrusively put in the lectures, it seems reasonable to infer that it is not special to the author, but that he is putting a view generally current in English academic circles. And when it is put by a writer of such extensive knowledge and ripe judgment as we all ascribe to Professor Sidgwick, it becomes important to debate it.

The "Development of European Polity" is obviously, in respect of its aims and its authorship, an important sociological treatise; and in all its sections it exhibits original judgment, proceeding upon wide study. It is precisely because of the general ability and value of the book that I am concerned to criticize its treatment of one of the most important of its problems, that of the development of French life and political thought in the eighteenth century. Here we are in clear touch with the determining forces of modern history; and wrong thinking and erroneous history here become serious to an extent that they could not if they occurred—I do not say that they often do—in the earlier sections. It is in the important lecture on "Political Thought: the Influence of Rousseau" that the Professor thus generalizes (p. 385) the transmutation which he supposes to have overtaken French life and mind in the generation before the Revolution :—

> Rousseau's work seized hold of the public mind at a time when—according to the almost unanimous agreement of French historical writers—the critical and negative work, of which Voltaire was the leader, was seriously demoralizing the educated world. It co-operated with and aided the tendency of the political conditions, due to

the deliberate policy of the monarchy, to produce a luxurious and frivolous aristocratic society, of which the court was the centre.

A wealthy and polite society from which the monarchy had, as we have seen, withdrawn almost all the steadying and ennobling influence exercised by the responsibilities of political power, the performance of serious and important social services to their fellow men—such a society might yet be partially saved from mere frivolity by strong religious convictions having the support of thoughtful opinion and the prestige of eloquent expositors, as it had in the great days of the seventeenth-century monarchy. But when the hold of Catholic orthodoxy on the minds of most educated persons had been shattered by the unrivalled literary skill of Voltaire; and the talkers at salons and at dinner-parties talked—to use Berkeley's phrase—"as if atheism was established by law, and religion only tolerated"; when philosophy, following the new impulse to learn from England, had abandoned Descartes for Locke, and developed Locke's teaching in the direction of materialism and sensationalism in metaphysics, and naked egoism in morals, then the chief intellectual barrier against luxurious frivolity and artificiality was removed.

"The feudal aristocracy," says Taine, "became a *société de salon*—absorbed in the life of the salon to an unparalleled extent, to the subordination of other interests and duties, to the loss not merely of all deep patriotic concern for public affiairs, but of all real force and vitality in the domestic affections. Intellectual interests, indeed, remain.....; but the interest in serious topics is only on condition that the serious topics become a means of entertainment. So far as they believe in anything, these denizens of the salon believe in progress.....But the sole business of good society is to talk about this progress in the intervals of fêtes, bon mots, and badinage....."

It was such a society as this that Rousseau startled, and to a remarkable extent *passionately moved*, by his preaching of the superiority of the natural life of a man to the artificial product of civilization.

It might have been supposed that the sentence last quoted, with the words italicized, would have suggested to the writer the psychological nullity of his elaborated proposition. A society made thoroughly frivolous by Voltaire, only to be at once "passionately moved" by

Rousseau, is a rather grossly chimerical conception; unless we are meant to understand that it was only thoroughly frivolous people who could be so moved. The term "startled" is perhaps so far justified by the statement of Garat, in his "Mémoire sur M. Suard," that "admiration and a sort of terror were almost universal"; but that notion too is clearly not to be taken literally. As has been repeatedly remarked, the notion of the superiority of the state of nature "was already to be found almost everywhere—for example, in the 'Lettres Persanes,' in the second part of the 'Histoire des Troglodytes,' or in Marivaux's 'Ile des esclaves,' and the 'Ile de la raison.'"[1] But before we discuss the psychology let us attend to the simpler and less debateable business of the chronology. The Professor tells us that "the almost unanimous agreement of French historical writers" bears him out in his account of the movement of things. Before discussing that claim, too, it will be well to examine the dates. As Mr. Birrell reminds us, there are some kinds of assertion that cannot possibly be true even in the House of Commons; and such propositions ought not to be accepted by English professors even from French historical writers.

The Professor specifies as the first work of Rousseau's that "brought him into notice" the essay "which not only won the prize of the Academy of Dijon, but the applause of the metropolis." That essay was published in 1750. The "Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité," which, as Lord Morley notes, "neither gained the prize nor created as lively an agitation as its predecessor had done," was dedicated to the Republic of Geneva in 1754, and was published at Amsterdam in 1755. The "startling" of frivolous France, then, was presumably done in

[1] Lemaître, "Jean Jacques Rousseau," En. tr. 1907, p. 87. The thesis is much older than the eighteenth century. The Benedictine Dom Cajot pointed out in 1766 that it had been developed for Rousseau by Lillo Giraldi in the sixteenth.

or soon after 1750. What, then, had Voltaire by this time achieved in the way of demoralizing the French aristocracy?

His first notable piece of freethinking is the poetic "Épitre à Uranie," which is usually dated 1722, but which in MS. can hardly have had a very disintegrating effect on a society in which its simple deism was already of long standing. The well-known biographical fact, too, that Voltaire withdrew from Paris in his prime, long before 1750, precisely because of the frivolity of upper-class life there, might serve to put in grave doubt the theory that it was he who had demoralized Paris. Did he, then, begin to do so by his writings before or after he withdrew? The first of his books that made any stir by its apparent heterodoxy was the "Lettres Philosophiques," of which, after the letters had circulated in manuscript, five editions appeared in 1734. This book was certainly burned by the common hangman, and a bookseller was imprisoned for it; but I doubt whether any man who has read it, not a Catholic priest, will pretend that it could have done anything to make French society frivolous. It was not fear of such demoralization that led to its seizure; and until any one seriously advances the charge I shall count it beneath discussion. The letter "Sur le Parlement" seems to have been the main cause of agitation in official circles. Apart from the letter "Sur les pensées de M. Pascal," which only discusses what Pascal had discussed in the previous century, even the freethinking of the book is of a very guarded kind, only slightly hinting at the much more pronounced freethinking then common in England, where society, on Professor Sidgwick's view, must then have been far gone in demoralization, though he does not say so.

It is true that Voltaire's propaganda for the Newtonian theory, which began in the "Lettres Philosophiques," may have tended to undermine Catholic orthodoxy; but

I do not understand Professor Sidgwick to argue that people are demoralized by science even when it shakes their religious opinions. That would not now be a popular view, though it once was. If it were accepted, we would apparently be committed to the conclusion that Newton had turned to frivolity the earnestness of the English aristocracy after the Restoration, which seems unplausible. And if any stress be laid on the fact that the Marquise du Châtelet became a strong Newtonian under Voltaire's guidance, besides studying hard in other directions, I would ask whether it is inferred that she thus became more frivolous than she would otherwise have been, or whether her morals were impaired only by that means, or whether they were in any way "startling" for her aristocratic circle.

Looking through Voltaire's early work for anything else likely even to shake, not to say shatter, Catholic orthodoxy, I can find before 1750 nothing save "Zadig" (1748); and it would seem impossible for any society to be collectively deprived of its faith and demoralized by that performance, even with a much longer vogue than one or two years. The simple biographical fact is that Voltaire had done nothing in the way of serious detailed criticism of orthodoxy till after Rousseau had "startled" and "passionately moved" French society by the first of his two "Discours." It is true there are some chronological mystifications about his work. The "Examen Important de milord Bolingbroke" and the "Défense de milord Bolingbroke" have been ante-dated, the former to 1736, the latter to 1731; whereas they appeared only in 1767 and 1751–2 respectively. It is true, too, that Lord Morley, in his brilliant book on Rousseau, speaks of the Creed of the Savoyard Vicar in "Émile" (1762) as something attractive to "souls weary of the fierce mockeries that had so long been flying like fiery shafts against the far Jehovah of the Hebrews and the silent Christ of the later doctors and dignitaries"; and lauds

the "superiority of the sceptical parts of the Savoyard vicar's profession.....over the biting mockeries which Voltaire had made the fashionable method of assault." But we get no reference to these "fierce mockeries" and "biting mockeries." The fact is that Lord Morley is seriously and surprisingly wrong in his chronology, and this, indeed, by his own showing; for in his "Voltaire" he accurately notes that the patriarch began his attacks on "L'Infâme" only after settling at Ferney —that is, after 1758. The poem "La religion naturelle" (1755) and that "Sur la destruction de Lisbonne" (1756) cannot plausibly be described as mockeries of Jehovah. In any case, they come long after 1750.

Coming to the French biographical writers who, on any view, ought to be first consulted on such points, we find Condorcet, who really must have known something of his subject, reporting in his "Vie de Voltaire," concerning that very "Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard," with its direct discussion of Christian beliefs, that "cette hardiesse étonna Voltaire, et excita son émulation."[1] It is true that the "Sermon du Cinquante," described by the Basle editors as his "first frontal attack on Christianity," has been proved by M. Champion to have been written a year or two before; but it had not been published. Voltaire's "mockeries" of Jewish religion (apart from the jests about Adam and Eve in the "Mondain," the attack on Jews in "La religion naturelle," and the pleasantries of "Candide") begin with "Saül" in 1763.

It would thus appear that Professor Sidgwick's explicit proposition as to the influence of Voltaire before 1750 is rather unhappy nonsense, excusable only on the ground of his belief that French historical writers are almost unanimous to the same effect. We have to ask, then, what documentary grounds of that kind he had. It must be premised that the contemporary writers, who clearly

[1] Ed. 1792 (vol. 100 of "Œuvres de Voltaire"), p. 118.

ought first to be consulted, give no shadow of authority for his thesis. The Abbé Gauchat, who began his "Lettres Critiques" in 1751, does indeed attack the "Lettres Philosophiques"; but he also assails Diderot's "Pensées Philosophiques," the anonymous "Discours sur la vie heureuse" (1748), the essay "Les Mœurs" (1748), and Pope's "Essay on Man." In his second volume he fastens on the "Lettres Persanes" of Montesquieu (1721), and other sets of "Lettres" written in imitation of them; and in his third volume he has nothing more obnoxious by Voltaire to discuss than the "Henriade," the "Mahomet," and some fugitive pieces. That is "how it struck a contemporary" very ready to convict Voltaire of anything. And in 1754 the Bishop of Puy, in his treatise "La Dévotion conciliée avec l'esprit," assures his flock: "You live in an age fertile in pretended *esprits forts*, who, too weak nevertheless to attack in front an invincible religion, skirmish lightly around it, and, in default of the reasons they lack, employ raillery."

Certainly there was plenty of unbelief in France before 1750. Grimm at that date retails a *gauloiserie* of Fontenelle about the evidence as to prevailing diseases given by the *affiches* of Paris, every street corner exhibiting two, of which one advertised a "Traité sur l'incredulité." Are we, then, to infer that unbelief had been a merely demotic malady in the previous age, and that, if not Voltaire, some other unbelievers had unhappily transferred it by their literary art to the upper classes? Again, evidence is totally lacking for such a bold hypothesis. There were a few "destructive" treatises current in the forties, not by Voltaire; but Voltaire had lived from his youth among freethinkers whose deism was a derivation from the past. The bulky manuscript of the Curé Meslier can have had few readers; and "La vraie religion," ascribed humorously on the title-page to Bishop Burnet, and seriously to Saint-Evremond and others, was

not printed till 1745. The works of d'Argens, published at Berlin, were certainly not calculated to "shatter" beliefs by literary skill. They are didactic and rather dull. But French deism is far older than that. It might have occurred to Professor Sidgwick that Pascal's argumentation for the faith in the previous century was motived by a good deal of open scepticism among the educated classes; that Fénelon's vindication of the existence of God was not written at deists; and that Huet would hardly have been driven to a defence of the faith on lines of philosophic scepticism save by much scepticism of the practical sort. Had the Professor gone into detail, he would have found a small library of rejoinders to "this multitude of *libertins* and of unbelievers which now terrifies us" as early as 1695, and he might have noted that Le Vassor, who used that language in 1688, complained of how "people talk only of reason, of good taste, of force of mind." As regards the aristocracy, we find the Duchesse d'Orléans declaring in 1698 that "every young man either is or affects to be an atheist." And he might further have discovered that "the first French work openly destructive of Christianity" was the privately printed "Lettre d'Hippocrate à Damagète," 1700, ascribed to that champion of feudalism, the Comte de Boulainvilliers, who further said some unsettling things in his "Vie de Mahomed," published in 1730.

After 1700, the first work of "frontal" criticism printed in France was the 1714 translation of Collins's "Discourse of Freethinking." And here we are led to note the fact that a number of French writers used to ascribe the French unbelief of the first half of the eighteenth century to *English* influence. Far from pretending that Voltaire had demoralized the aristocracy between 1734 and 1750, the Abbé Ranchon in his MS. Life of Fleury avowed that "the time of the Regency was a time of dissoluteness and irreligion," but claimed that "precisely" in this period "a multitude of those

offensive and irreligious books were brought over the sea." He could at least point to the translations of Collins and Shaftesbury, and to many other English books which *might* be read by Frenchmen who *could* read English; though it is doubtful whether he would have argued that the English aristocracy, between Newton and the deists, had become notably more frivolous than the French of the same period. On the other hand, we have seen the Abbé Gauchat vigorously impugning the "Lettres Persanes" of Montesquieu, which M. Lanson in our own day pronounces "fundamentally irreligious," and which long preceded everything heterodox by Voltaire. Professor Sidgwick puts none of the blame for the demoralization of the noblesse on Montesquieu; but if the critical reader will ask himself which book was the likelier to promote frivolity of spirit, the "Lettres Persanes" or the "Lettres Philosophiques," he will see fresh ground for scepticism as to the whole thesis upon which Professor Sidgwick declares French historical writers to be nearly unanimous.

Those writers, however, must in turn be sought for. The Professor names only Tocqueville, Taine, and Paul Janet in his general discussion on French political evolution in the period in question. Now, not one of these bears him out. I cannot pretend to have read everything of Janet; but in the standard work to which Professor Sidgwick refers, his "Histoire de la science politique" (1872), Janet pays a tribute to Voltaire as a teacher which is nearly a complete negation of the Professor's charge. As thus:—

"Men have not yet forgotten what they owe him; and whatever effort may have been made to render his name odious, it seems that it has only served to render him more popular." Voltaire too often lent himself, indeed, to an anti-ascetic morality, and his readers went further than he; but "if Voltaire is sensible and prudent, though little elevated in his views on men and life.....we should not hesitate to say that in public morality he is great,

when he invites society to have more regard for human nature, to respect more its dignity and its rights. A society the most polished that had yet been seen, and the most enlightened, lacked humanity and often even justice. Of all the writers of his time Voltaire is the one who devoted himself with most ardour and laboured with most persistence at the noble task of correcting prejudices and abuses."[1]

Professor Sidgwick had this book before him, and specially recommended it to his students. Where, then, did he get his theory of the demoralizing influence of Voltaire?

Tocqueville's able book contains a good deal of hasty deductive generalization and inconsistent theory, but he nowhere suggests the notion of an educated society made frivolous by the removal of its religion at the hands of the school of Voltaire before 1750, and "passionately moved," in consequence, by Rousseau's panegyric of the simple life. He knew the main outlines of the history too well to be capable of such a fantasy. Not only that; his book again and again puts conceptions of causation which are utterly irreconcilable with it. Had Tocqueville met with Professor Sidgwick's thesis, he would have politely assented to the general idea of the importance of religion to morals and family life and seriousness of conduct; and he might have added platitudes of his own on that head; but he would have indicated that the thesis gave no idea of the actual social causation. What he says in that regard is not that orthodoxy was destroyed by Voltaire before 1750, but that in the period between 1750 and the Revolution the literary attack on "religion" became newly abundant and fierce; and he seems to imply that this was part of a rising tension in all things. Far from pretending that early Voltairism demoralized a good and previously well-conducted noblesse, he declares[2] that "the spirit of Voltaire had long been in the world"

[1] Work cited, ii, 557-9.
[2] "L'ancien Régime," 2 ième edit. 1856, p. 251.

[i.e., before Voltaire wrote], "but Voltaire himself could hardly have actually reigned save in the eighteenth century and in France." Far from pretending that unbelief worked out as frivolity, he writes[1]: "If the Frenchmen who made the Revolution were more incredulous than we in the matter of religion, there remained to them at least a belief which is lacking to us: they believed in themselves. They did not doubt of the perfectibility, of the potentiality of man....."

The whole truth, indeed, is not to be reached in Tocqueville's survey. He also was too much of an apriorist, too indocile to induction, to face all the facts; and he chronically falls into the common snare of collective abstraction, regarding a great complex as a simple process, ignoring counter forces, solving an imbroglio with an epigram. The due result is self-contradiction. Once he absurdly writes[2] that the freethinkers "wrought ardently and continually to take away from men's souls the faith which had filled them; and they left them empty"—a proposition negated by all human experience, and flatly contradicted by his own words above cited. A little further on[3] we get the twofold contradiction: "When religion deserted men's minds she did *not* leave them, *as often happens*, empty and debilitated; they found themselves momentarily filled by sentiments which for the time held her place, and did not at once permit them to fall away." A little more of inductive scruple would have saved Tocqueville from these exercises in suicidal verbalism. It almost suggests wilful blindness to find him denying that the Church had provoked attack, and alleging[4] that "she was infinitely [!] more tolerant than she had been hitherto, and than she was in other countries."

Here the cold touch of dates and facts is as fatal to him as to Professor Sidgwick. What gave the tone of

[1] P. 260. [2] P. 251. [3] P. 259. [4] P. 252.

asperity and passion to the Voltairean campaign *after* 1750—*after* 1760—was just the renewal of savage persecution by the Church. The "Infâme" of Voltaire's detestation was the Church that slew the heretic. He expressly tells that under that name he wars against fanaticism, not against "religion," which he cherishes. The cases of Jean Calas and the Sirven family (1762), and of the lad La Barre, slain for alleged frivolous blasphemy—these were the atrocities that drove him to his great campaign of aggression; and he wrought as zealously for the family of the judicially murdered Protestant as for the memory of the scapegrace boy. Of the "frivolous" Voltaire Lord Morley has written that such infamies were as knives to his heart. Tocqueville was fain to exclude them from his view, though they point to the very explanation that his problem called for —an explanation which, indeed, he partly glimpses immediately afterwards when he backs the view of Hume, that intolerance promoted enlightenment, against the opinion of the French freethinkers that it did not. In reality neither view gave the whole truth, though Hume came near it. Cruel intolerance roused a propaganda of anger which went fast and far; whereas in England the relative (though imperfect) tolerance of the political system supplied no such fuel. But what happened in France was rather an accentuation of the spirit of the freethinker than any such wholesale rooting out of "religion" as is so commonly and so absurdly alleged. On this head the traditional view is pure delusion. As Taine obliviously confesses, the vast mass of the French nation was untouched by freethinking. Even among the leading revolutionaries many, like Lafayette, were orthodox. As Aulard has shown, there was only one convinced and avowed atheist among them, the journalist Salaville, who calmly and rationally opposed the semi-official "Cult of Reason." The others were mostly zealous deists, of the school of Rousseau, preaching

a religion of justice against a so-called religion of love that chronically and officially spelt murder.

Add that the Church blindly persisted in the policy of persecution to the last, and Tocqueville's indignant "Why?" is answered, on the political side. In 1757 was pronounced the death penalty against all writers attacking religion; and down to 1780 books were constantly being officially burned. As Tocqueville expressly avows,[1] complete liberty of the press would have been far less injurious to the Church; persecution quintupled the press's power. But there is a further touch of judicial blindness in Tocqueville's thesis[2] that freethought, left alone, dies out. In the next breath he thoughtlessly claims, as if it were a comforting doctrine, that after the Revolution the irreligious noblesse became formally religious from motives of political self-preservation; and yet again he avers, quite falsely and very absurdly, that long before the Revolution the Church, in the face of the indifference of the noblesse, became "silent," with the result that many believers were afraid to avow their faith! Thus to ignore at once the constant activity of the pulpit and the actual output of apologetics is again to flout induction for an à priori theory. None of the theorists will patiently investigate the facts.

It has indeed been the custom, since Alison, to say that the defence of the faith in eighteenth-century France, as compared with England, was "bad"; but this is only one more shibboleth. The apologetics of Pascal, Bossuet, Fénelon, and Huet, to begin with, whatever their logical force, had been more thoroughgoing in point of philosophy than any then produced on the orthodox side in England; and these remained classics. Fénelon, if not a very powerful reasoner, had the charm of a high amenity, as had Crousaz, who replied to Collins and Pope. The polemic of Gauchat, which ran

[1] P. 255.

[2] Pp. 256–7.

to fifteen volumes, in its turn was more systematic than anything done against deism in England, where there were scores of scattered replies, but no collocation of their case down to Paley, though Leland produced a general survey in 1754–6.[1] The Abbé Bergier, who produced at least four works of vigorous polemic between 1765 (beginning with an attack on the deism of Rousseau) and 1773, was quite as competent an apologist as any in England up to that time. And there were many others. If Voltaire was not "answered" in France, neither was he in England: Bishop Watson warmly avowed the vexatious difficulty. A thesis which ignores or denies these facts is condemned in advance.

Throughout Tocqueville gives no shadow of support to the special thesis of Professor Sidgwick. He posits[2] "the universal discredit into which all [!] religious beliefs fell at the *end* of the century," not in its first half; and at the same time, knowing too well the nullity of the notion that upper-class demoralization was the result of deistic literature, he pronounces[3] that the effect of that "was much more in disordering minds than in degrading hearts, or even corrupting morals." Few Frenchmen, indeed, can ever have been capable of the pretence that French upper-class life was "serious" and moral under Louis XIV and the Regency, and became frivolous and dissolute under Louis XV. Taine really makes no such pretence; though it is probably from some of his self-contradictory formulas that Professor Sidgwick has deduced his. In respect of rash generalizations, often mutually destructive, Taine almost outgoes Tocqueville. When, however, he uses the expression quoted from him by the Professor, as to the noblesse becoming a *société de salon*, he is not saying what the Professor's context

[1] In the "Dictionary of National Biography" Sir Leslie Stephen writes of Leland's "View of the Principal Deistic Writers," that "though the argument is commonplace" the book "is a contribution of some value to the history of English thought."

[2] P. 259.

[3] Ib.

makes him say. He is really dealing with the whole monarchic process, completed by Louis XIV, of bringing the nobility from feudal semi-independence to court subordination. In this connection Voltaire is not even named; nor is his period indicated.

Where Taine misleads Professor Sidgwick is in his non-chronological section on "L'esprit et la doctrine," in which he works out a theoretic progression, abounding in untested assumptions, after the manner of his formula of "race, milieu, moment,"[1] in his scheme of literary evolution. It is here that he posits "two stages" or "stadia" in the "expedition" of reason against "religion," the first of which, with Voltaire conducting the philosophic army, "takes from the enemy his exterior defences and his frontier fortresses."[2] Here he couples with Voltaire the Montesquieu of the "Lettres Persanes," describing the attack in terms of that book and of the "Lettres Philosophiques"—the ironical comparison, namely, of different constitutions, religions, moralities, "the diversity, the contradiction, the antagonism of fundamental customs, all equally consecrated by tradition." And, he wildly alleges, "From this moment, the charm is broken.....Scepticism enters by all the breaches. In regard to Christianity, it changes *at once* into pure hostility, into a prolonged and fierce polemic."

To this extravagance a critical reader would give the answer of common sense, that the main facts indicated by Montesquieu and Voltaire (apart from details about England[3]) had been perfectly well known for centuries, and had been both sceptically and orthodoxly discussed, from the days of Boccaccio to the days of Bossuet. But

[1] It is to be remembered that "moment" in this phrase primarily meant "momentum," though Taine vacillated between that sense and that of "the moment."

[2] "Origines de la France contemporaine: L'Ancien Regime," ed. 1878, p. 279.

[3] Even these, which Taine takes to have been highly novel for French readers, must have been largely known. Rapin had long been widely read.

even without this exercise of ratiocination, he would find the thesis cancelled by Taine himself, both before and after propounding it. A few pages earlier[1] (after a theory of the genesis of religion that is more loosely catastrophic than any of the "philosophic" theories of the eighteenth century, and one long ago exploded, as Taine elsewhere recognizes, by Voltaire), he had told us that religion *cannot* be cut out of the human heart: "its germ is too deep." In a later section, where he has returned to his historic method, such as it is, he indicates on the one hand that with the Regency unbelief came into the daylight ("l'incrédulité se produit au grand jour"), and quotes the mother of the Regent as declaring in 1698 that "one hardly sees now a single young man who does not want to be an atheist"; and, in 1722, that she does not believe "there are in Paris a hundred persons, either among the ecclesiastics or among the laity, who have the true faith, or who even believe in our Lord." This exorbitant testimony Taine tables as he does any other, not gainsaying it. Thus the thesis as to the instantaneous breach made by Voltaire and Montesquieu somewhere about 1721–34 is tranquilly abandoned—as it well might, seeing that the "stage" had been illustrated by reference to Voltaire's procedure after 1760.

And, after having, like Tocqueville, ignored the salient *political* facts which really explained the severity of the later critical attack, Taine further cancels his previous demonstration *in vacuo* by noting how the Church had aroused antagonism against itself *and against religion* by obstinately refusing to submit to the taxation of ecclesiastical wealth. "In 1748 a work of Toussaint in favour of natural religion, 'Les Mœurs,' became all at once so celebrated that, says Barbier, 'in a certain class there is no one, man or woman, claiming to have *esprit*, who does not want to see it.'" In 1753 d'Argenson had noted

[1] P. 274.