the Christian religion to be true, or shall deny the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be of divine authority," is convicted, he shall for the first offence be adjudged incapable to hold any public offices or employments, and on the second shall lose his civil rights and be imprisoned for three years. This Statute expressly states as its motive the fact that "many persons have of late years openly avowed and published many blasphemous and impious opinions contrary to the doctrine and principles of the Christian religion."

As a matter of fact, most trials for blasphemy during the past two hundred years fall under the second head. But the new Statute of 1698 was very intimidating, and we can easily understand how it drove heterodox writers to ambiguous disguises. One of these disguises was allegorical interpretation of Scripture. They showed that literal interpretation led to absurdities or to inconsistencies with the wisdom and justice of God, and pretended to infer that allegorical interpretation must be substituted. But they meant the reader to reject their pretended solution and draw a conclusion damaging to Revelation.

Among the arguments used in favour of the truth of Revelation the fulfilment of prophecies

and the miracles of the New Testament were conspicuous. Anthony Collins, a country gentleman who was a disciple of Locke, published in 1733 his *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, in which he drastically exposed the weakness of the evidence for fulfilment of prophecy, depending as it does on forced and unnatural figurative interpretations. Twenty years before he had written a *Discourse of Free-thinking* (in which Bayle's influence is evident) pleading for free discussion and the reference of all religious questions to reason. He complained of the general intolerance which prevailed; but the same facts which testify to intolerance testify also to the spread of unbelief.

Collins escaped with comparative impunity, but Thomas Woolston, a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, who wrote six aggressive *Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour* (1727-1730) paid the penalty for his audacity. Deprived of his Fellowship, he was prosecuted for libel, and sentenced to a fine of £100 and a year's imprisonment. Unable to pay, he died in prison. He does not adopt the line of arguing that miracles are incredible or impossible. He examines the chief miracles related in the Gospels, and shows with great ability and shrewd common

sense that they are absurd or unworthy of the performer. He pointed out, as Huxley was to point out in a controversy with Gladstone, that the miraculous driving of devils into a herd of swine was an unwarrantable injury to somebody's property. On the story of the Divine blasting of the fig tree, he remarks: "What if a yeoman of Kent should go to look for pippins in his orchard at Easter (the supposed time that Jesus sought for these figs) and because of a disappointment cut down his trees? What then would his neighbours make of him? Nothing less than a laughing-stock; and if the story got into our Publick News, he would be the jest and ridicule of mankind."

Or take his comment on the miracle of the Pool of Bethesda, where an angel used to trouble the waters and the man who first entered the pool was cured of his infirmity. "An odd and a merry way of conferring a Divine mercy. And one would think that the angels of God did this for their own diversion more than to do good to mankind. Just as some throw a bone among a kennel of hounds for the pleasure of seeing them quarrel for it, or as others cast a piece of money among a company of boys for the sport of seeing them scramble for it, so was the pastime of the angels here." In dealing

with the healing of the woman who suffered from a bloody flux, he asks: "What if we had been told of the Pope's curing an haemorrhage like this before us, what would Protestants have said to it? Why, 'that a foolish, credulous and superstitious woman had fancied herself cured of some slight indisposition, and the crafty Pope and his adherents, aspiring after popular applause, magnified the presumed cure into a miracle.' The application of such a supposed story of a miracle wrought by the Pope is easy; and if Infidels, Jews and Mahometans, who have no better opinion of Jesus than we have of the Pope, should make it, there's no help for it."

Woolston professed no doubts of the inspiration of Scripture. While he argued that it was out of the question to suppose the miracles literally true, he pretended to believe in the fantastic theory that they were intended allegorically as figures of Christ's mysterious operations in the soul of man Origen, a not very orthodox Christian Father, had employed the allegorical method, and Woolston quotes him in his favour. His vigorous criticisms vary in value, but many of them hit the nail on the head, and the fashion of some modern critics to pass over Woolston's productions as unimportant because they are "ribald" or "coarse," is

perfectly unjust. The pamphlets had an enormous sale, and Woolston's notoriety is illustrated by the anecdote of the "jolly young woman" who met him walking abroad and accosted him with "You old rogue, are you not hanged yet?" Mr. Woolston answered, "Good woman, I know you not; pray what have I done to offend you?" "You have writ against my Saviour," she said; "what would become of my poor sinful soul if it was not for my dear Saviour?"

About the same time, Matthew Tindal (a Fellow of All Souls) attacked Revelation from a more general point of view. In his *Christianity as old as the Creation* (1730) he undertook to show that the Bible as a revelation is superfluous, for it adds nothing to natural religion, which God revealed to man from the very first by the sole light of reason. He argues that those who defend Revealed religion by its agreement with Natural religion, and thus set up a double government of reason and authority, fall between the two. "It's an odd jumble," he observes, "to prove the truth of a book by the truth of the doctrines it contains, and at the same time conclude those doctrines to be true because contained in that book." He goes on to criticize the Bible in detail. In order to maintain its infallibility, without doing

violence to reason, you have, when you find irrational statements, to torture them and depart from the literal sense. Would you think that a Mohammadan was governed by his Koran, who on all occasions departed from the literal sense? "Nay, would you not tell him that his inspired book fell infinitely short of Cicero's uninspired writings, where there is no such occasion to recede from the letter?"

As to chronological and physical errors, which seemed to endanger the infallibility of the Scriptures, a bishop had met the argument by saying, reasonably enough, that in the Bible God speaks according to the conceptions of those to whom he speaks, and that it is not the business of Revelation to rectify their opinions in such matters. Tindal made this rejoinder :—

"Is there no difference between God's not rectifying men's sentiments in those matters and using himself such sentiments as needs be rectified; or between God's not mending men's logic and rhetoric where 'tis defective and using such himself; or between God's not contradicting vulgar notions and confirming them by speaking according to them. Can infinite wisdom despair of gaining or keeping people's affections without having recourse to such mean acts?"

He exposes with considerable effect the monstrosity of the doctrine of exclusive salvation. Must we not consider, he asks, whether one can be said to be sent as a Saviour of mankind, if he comes to shut Heaven's gate against those to whom, before he came, it was open provided they followed the dictates of their reason? He criticizes the inconsistency of the impartial and universal goodness of God, known to us by the light of nature, with acts committed by Jehovah or his prophets. Take the cases in which the order of nature is violated to punish men for crimes of which they were not guilty, such as Elijah's hindering rain from falling for three years and a half. If God could break in upon the ordinary rules of his providence to punish the innocent for the guilty, we have no guarantee that if he deals thus with us in this life, he will not act in the same way in the life to come, "since if the eternal rules of justice are once broken how can we imagine any stop?" But the ideals of holiness and justice in the Old Testament are strange indeed. The holier men are represented to be, the more cruel they seem and the more addicted to cursing. How surprising to find the holy prophet Elisha cursing in the name of the Lord little children for calling him Bald-pate! And, what is

still more surprising, two she-bears immediately devoured forty-two little children.

I have remarked that theologians at this time generally took the line of basing Christianity on reason and not on faith. An interesting little book, *Christianity not founded on Argument*, couched in the form of a letter to a young gentleman at Oxford, by Henry Dodwell (Junior) appeared in 1741, and pointed out the dangers of such confidence in reason. It is an ironical development of the principle of Bayle, working out the thesis that Christianity is essentially unreasonable, and that if you want to believe, reasoning is fatal. The cultivation of faith and reasoning produce contrary effects; the philosopher is disqualified for Divine influences by his very progress in carnal wisdom; the Gospel must be received with all the obsequious submission of a babe who has no other disposition but to learn his lesson. Christ did not propose his doctrines to investigation; he did not lay the arguments for his mission before his disciples and give them time to consider calmly of their force, and liberty to determine as their reason should direct them; the apostles had no qualifications for the task, being the most artless and illiterate persons living. Dodwell exposes the absurdity of the Protestant position. To give all men liberty

to judge for themselves and to expect at the same time that they shall be of the Preacher's mind is such a scheme for unanimity as one would scarcely imagine any one could be weak enough to devise in speculation and much less that any could ever be found hardy enough to avow and propose it to practice. The men of Rome "shall rise up in the judgment (of all considering persons) against this generation and shall condemn it; for they invented but the one absurdity of infallibility, and behold a greater absurdity than infallibility is here."

I have still to speak of the (Third) Earl of Shaftesbury, whose style has rescued his writings from entire neglect. His special interest was ethics. While the valuable work of most of the heterodox writers of this period lay in their destructive criticism of supernatural religion, they clung, as we have seen, to what was called natural religion—the belief in a kind and wise personal God, who created the world, governs it by natural laws, and desires our happiness. The idea was derived from ancient philosophers and had been revived by Lord Herbert of Cherbury in his Latin treatise *On Truth* (in the reign of James I). The deists contended that this was a sufficient basis for morality and that the Christian inducements to good behaviour were unneces-

sary. Shaftesbury in his *Inquiry concerning Virtue* (1699) debated the question and argued that the scheme of heaven and hell, with the selfish hopes and fears which they inspire, corrupts morality and that the only worthy motive for conduct is the beauty of virtue in itself. He does not even consider deism a necessary assumption for a moral code; he admits that the opinion of atheists does not undermine ethics. But he thinks that the belief in a good governor of the universe is a powerful support to the practice of virtue. He is a thorough optimist, and is perfectly satisfied with the admirable adaptation of means to ends, whereby it is the function of one animal to be food for another. He makes no attempt to reconcile the red claws and teeth of nature with the beneficence of its powerful artist. "In the main all things are kindly and well disposed." The atheist might have said that he preferred to be at the mercy of blind chance than in the hands of an autocrat who, if he pleased Lord Shaftesbury's sense of order, had created flies to be devoured by spiders. But this was an aspect of the universe which did not much trouble thinkers in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the character of the God of the Old Testament roused Shaftesbury's aversion. He attacks Scripture not directly, but by allu-

sion or with irony. He hints that if there is a God, he would be less displeased with atheists than with those who accepted him in the guise of Jehovah. As Plutarch said, "I had rather men should say of me that there neither is nor ever was such a one as Plutarch, than they should say 'There was a Plutarch, an unsteady, changeable, easily provokable and revengeful man.'" Shaftesbury's significance is that he built up a positive theory of morals, and although it had no philosophical depth, his influence on French and German thinkers of the eighteenth century was immense.

In some ways perhaps the ablest of the deists, and certainly the most scholarly, was Rev. Conyers Middleton, who remained within the Church. He supported Christianity on grounds of utility. Even if it is an imposture, he said, it would be wrong to destroy it. For it is established by law and it has a long tradition behind it. Some traditional religion is necessary and it would be hopeless to supplant Christianity by reason. But his writings contain effective arguments which go to undermine Revelation. The most important was his *Free Inquiry* into Christian miracles (1748), which put in a new and dangerous light an old question: At what time did the Church cease to have the power of performing

miracles? We shall see presently how Gibbon applied Middleton's method.

The leading adversaries of the deists appealed, like them, to reason, and, in appealing to reason, did much to undermine authority. The ablest defence of the faith, Bishop Butler's *Analogy* (1736), is suspected of having raised more doubts than it appeased. This was the experience of William Pitt the Younger, and the *Analogy* made James Mill (the utilitarian) an unbeliever. The deists argued that the unjust and cruel God of Revelation could not be the God of nature; Butler pointed to nature and said, There you behold cruelty and injustice. The argument was perfectly good against the optimism of Shaftesbury, but it plainly admitted of the conclusion—opposite to that which Butler wished to establish—that a just and beneficent God does not exist. Butler is driven to fall back on the sceptical argument that we are extremely ignorant; that all things are possible, even eternal hell fire; and that therefore the safe and prudent course is to accept the Christian doctrine. It may be remarked that this reasoning, with a few modifications, could be used in favour of other religions, at Mecca or at Timbuctoo. He has, in effect, revived the argument used by Pascal that if there is one chance in any very

large number that Christianity is true, it is a man's interest to be a Christian; for, if it prove false, it will do him no harm to have believed it; if it prove true, he will be infinitely the gainer. Butler seeks indeed to show that the chances in favour amount to a probability, but his argument is essentially of the same intellectual and moral value as Pascal's. It has been pointed out that it leads by an easy logical step from the Anglican to the Roman Church. Catholics and Protestants (as King Henry IV of France argued) agree that a Catholic may be saved; the Catholics assert that a Protestant will be damned; therefore the safe course is to embrace Catholicism.[1]

I have dwelt at some length upon some of the English deists, because, while they occupy an important place in the history of rationalism in England, they also supplied, along with Bayle, a great deal of the thought which, manipulated by brilliant writers on the other side of the Channel, captured the educated classes in France. We are now in the age of Voltaire. He was a convinced deist. He considered that the nature of the universe proved that it was made by a con-

[1] See Benn, *Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. i, p. 138 *seq.*, for a good exposure of the fallacies and sophistries of Butler.

scious architect, he held that God was required in the interests of conduct, and he ardently combated atheism. His great achievements were his efficacious labour in the cause of toleration, and his systematic warfare against superstitions. He was profoundly influenced by English thinkers, especially Locke and Bolingbroke. This statesman had concealed his infidelity during his lifetime except from his intimates; he had lived long as an exile in France; and his rationalistic essays were published (1754) after his death. Voltaire, whose literary genius converted the work of the English thinkers into a world-force, did not begin his campaign against Christianity till after the middle of the century, when superstitious practices and religious persecutions were becoming a scandal in his country. He assailed the Catholic Church in every field with ridicule and satire. In a little work called *The Tomb of Fanaticism* (written 1736, published 1767), he begins by observing that a man who accepts his religion (as most people do) without examining it is like an ox which allows itself to be harnessed, and proceeds to review the difficulties in the Bible, the rise of Christianity, and the course of Church history; from which he concludes that every sensible man should hold the Christian sect

in horror. "Men are blind to prefer an absurd and sanguinary creed, supported by executioners and surrounded by fiery faggots, a creed which can only be approved by those to whom it gives power and riches, a particular creed only accepted in a small part of the world—to a simple and universal religion." In the *Sermon of the Fifty* and the *Questions of Zapata* we can see what he owed to Bayle and English critics, but his touch is lighter and his irony more telling. His comment on geographical mistakes in the Old Testament is: "God was evidently not strong in geography." Having called attention to the "horrible crime" of Lot's wife in looking backward, and her conversion into a pillar of salt, he hopes that the stories of Scripture will make us better, if they do not make us more enlightened. One of his favourite methods is to approach Christian doctrines as a person who had just heard of the existence of Christians or Jews for the first time in his life.

His drama, *Saul* (1763), which the police tried to suppress, presents the career of David, the man after God's own heart, in all its naked horror. The scene in which Samuel reproves Saul for not having slain Agag will give an idea of the spirit of the piece.

SAMUEL: God commands me to tell you that he repents of having made you king.

SAUL: God repents! Only they who commit errors repent. His eternal wisdom cannot be unwise. God cannot commit errors.

SAMUEL: He can repent of having set on the throne those who do.

SAUL: Well, who does not? Tell me, what is my fault?

SAMUEL: You have pardoned a king.

AGAG: What! Is the fairest of virtues considered a crime in Judea?

SAMUEL (to Agag): Silence! do not blaspheme. (To Saul.) Saul, formerly king of the Jews, did not God command you by my mouth to destroy all the Amalekites, without sparing women, or maidens, or children at the breast?

AGAG: Your god—gave such a command! You are mistaken, you meant to say, your devil.

SAMUEL: Saul, did you obey God?

SAUL: I did not suppose such a command was positive. I thought that goodness was the first attribute of the Supreme Being, and that a compassionate heart could not displease him.

SAMUEL: You are mistaken, unbeliever. God reproves you, your sceptre will pass into other hands.

Perhaps no writer has ever roused more hatred in Christendom than Voltaire. He was looked on as a sort of anti-Christ. That was natural; his attacks were so tremendously effective at the time. But he has been sometimes decried on the ground that he only demolished and made no effort to build up where he had pulled down. This is a narrow complaint. It might be replied that when a sewer is spreading plague in a town, we cannot wait to remove it till we have a new system of drains, and it may fairly be said that religion as practised in contemporary France was a poisonous sewer. But the true answer is that knowledge, and therefore civilization, are advanced by criticism and negation, as well as by construction and positive discovery. When a man has the talent to attack with effect falsehood, prejudice, and imposture, it is his duty, if there are any social duties, to use it.

For constructive thinking we must go to the other great leader of French thought, Rousseau, who contributed to the growth of freedom in a different way. He was a deist, but his deism, unlike that of Voltaire, was religious and emotional. He regarded Christianity with a sort of reverent scepticism. But his thought was revolutionary and repugnant to orthodoxy; it made against autho-

rity in every sphere; and it had an enormous influence. The clergy perhaps dreaded his theories more than the scoffs and negations of Voltaire. For some years he was a fugitive on the face of the earth. *Émile*, his brilliant contribution to the theory of education, appeared in 1762. It contains some remarkable pages on religion, "the profession of faith of a Savoyard vicar," in which the author's deistic faith is strongly affirmed and revelation and theology rejected. The book was publicly burned in Paris and an order issued for Rousseau's arrest. Forced by his friends to flee, he was debarred from returning to Geneva, for the government of that canton followed the example of Paris. He sought refuge in the canton of Bern and was ordered to quit. He then fled to the principality of Neufchâtel which belonged to Prussia. Frederick the Great, the one really tolerant ruler of the age, gave him protection, but he was persecuted and calumniated by the local clergy, who but for Frederick would have expelled him, and he went to England for a few months (1766), then returning to France, where he was left unmolested till his death.

The religious views of Rousseau are only a minor point in his heretical speculations. It was by his daring social and political theories that he set the world on fire. His *Social*

Contract in which these theories were set forth was burned at Geneva. Though his principles will not stand criticism for a moment, and though his doctrine worked mischief by its extraordinary power of turning men into fanatics, yet it contributed to progress, by helping to discredit privilege and to establish the view that the object of a State is to secure the wellbeing of *all* its members.

Deism—whether in the semi-Christian form of Rousseau or the anti-Christian form of Voltaire—was a house built on the sand, and thinkers arose in France, England and Germany to shatter its foundations. In France, it proved to be only a half-way inn to atheism. In 1770, French readers were startled by the appearance of Baron D'Holbach's *System of Nature*, in which God's existence and the immortality of the soul were denied and the world declared to be matter spontaneously moving.

Holbach was a friend of Diderot, who had also come to reject deism. All the leading ideas in the revolt against the Church had a place in Diderot's great work, the *Encyclopædia*, in which a number of leading thinkers collaborated with him. It was not merely a scientific book of reference. It was representative of the whole movement of the enemies of faith. It was intended to lead

men from Christianity with its original sin to a new conception of the world as a place which can be made agreeable and in which the actual evils are due not to radical faults of human nature but to perverse institutions and perverse education. To divert interest from the dogmas of religion to the improvement of society, to persuade the world that man's felicity depends not on Revelation but on social transformation—this was what Diderot and Rousseau in their different ways did so much to effect. And their work influenced those who did not abandon orthodoxy; it affected the spirit of the Church itself. Contrast the Catholic Church in France in the eighteenth, and in the nineteenth century. Without the work of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and their fellow-combatants, would it have been reformed? "The Christian Churches" (I quote Lord Morley) "are assimilating as rapidly as their formulæ will permit, the new light and the more generous moral ideas and the higher spirituality of teachers who have abandoned all churches and who are systematically denounced as enemies of the souls of men."

In England the prevalent deistic thought did not lead to the same intellectual consequences as in France; yet Hume, the greatest English philosopher of the century, showed

that the arguments commonly adduced for a personal God were untenable. I may first speak of his discussion on miracles (in his *Essay on Miracles* and in his philosophical *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding*, (1748). Hitherto the credibility of miracles had not been submitted to a general examination independent of theological assumptions. Hume, pointing out that there must be a uniform experience against every miraculous event (otherwise it would not merit the name of miracle), and that it will require stronger testimony to establish a miracle than an event which is not contrary to experience, lays down the general maxim that "no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony is of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish." But, as a matter of fact, no testimony exists of which the falsehood would be a prodigy. We cannot find in history any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men of such unquestionable good sense, education and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit in the eyes of mankind as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood, and at the same

time attesting facts performed in such a public manner as to render detection unavoidable —all which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.

In the *Dialogues on Natural Religion* which were not published till after his death (1776), Hume made an attack on the "argument from design," on which deists and Christians alike relied to prove the existence of a Deity. The argument is that the world presents clear marks of design, endless adaptation of means to ends, which can only be explained as due to the deliberate plan of a powerful intelligence. Hume disputes the inference on the ground that a mere intelligent being is not a sufficient cause to explain the effect. For the argument must be that the system of the material world demands as a cause a corresponding system of interconnected ideas; but such a mental system would demand an explanation of *its* existence just as much as the material world; and thus we find ourselves committed to an endless series of causes. But in any case, even if the argument held, it would prove only the existence of a Deity whose powers, though superior to man's, might be very limited and whose workmanship might be very imperfect. For this world may be very faulty, compared to a superior

standard. It may be the first rude experiment " of some infant Deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance "; or the work of some inferior Deity at which his superior would scoff; or the production of some old superannuated Deity which since his death has pursued an adventurous career from the first impulse which he gave it. An argument which leaves such deities in the running is worse than useless for the purposes of Deism or of Christianity.

The sceptical philosophy of Hume had less influence on the general public than Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Of the numerous freethinking books that appeared in England in the eighteenth century, this is the only one which is still a widely read classic. In what a lady friend of Dr. Johnson called " the two offensive chapters " (XV and XVI) the causes of the rise and success of Christianity are for the first time critically investigated as a simple historical phenomenon. Like most freethinkers of the time Gibbon thought it well to protect himself and his work against the possibility of prosecution by paying ironical lip-homage to the orthodox creed. But even if there had been no such danger, he could not have chosen a more incisive weapon for his merciless criticism of orthodox opinion than the irony

which he wielded with superb ease. Having pointed out that the victory of Christianity is obviously and satisfactorily explained by the convincing evidence of the doctrine and by the ruling providence of its great Author, he proceeds "with becoming submission" to inquire into the secondary causes. He traces the history of the faith up to the time of Constantine in such a way as clearly to suggest that the hypothesis of divine interposition is superfluous and that we have to do with a purely human development. He marshals, with ironical protests, the obvious objections to the alleged evidence for supernatural control. He does not himself criticize Moses and the prophets, but he reproduces the objections which were made against their authority by "the vain science of the gnostics." He notes that the doctrine of immortality is omitted in the law of Moses, but this doubtless was a mysterious dispensation of Providence. We cannot entirely remove "the imputation of ignorance and obscurity which has been so arrogantly cast on the first proselytes of Christianity," but we must "convert the occasion of scandal into a subject of edification" and remember that "the lower we depress the temporal condition of the first Christians, the more reason we shall find to admire their merit and success."

Gibbon's treatment of miracles from the purely historical point of view (he owed a great deal to Middleton, see above, p. 150) was particularly disconcerting. In the early age of Christianity "the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a praeternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects, or received the earliest intelligence, of the prodigy. Each of these philosophers in a laborious work has recorded all the great phenomena of nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the

globe." How "shall we excuse the supine inattention of the pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses?"

Again, if every believer is convinced of the reality of miracles, every reasonable man is convinced of their cessation. Yet every age bears testimony to miracles, and the testimony seems no less respectable than that of the preceding generation. When did they cease? How was it that the generation which saw the last genuine miracles performed could not distinguish them from the impostures which followed? Had men so soon forgotten "the style of the divine artist"? The inference is that genuine and spurious miracles are indistinguishable. But the credulity or "softness of temper" among early believers was beneficial to the cause of truth and religion. "In modern times, a latent and even involuntary scepticism adheres to the most pious dispositions. Their admission of supernatural truths is much less an active consent than a cold and passive acquiescence. Accustomed long since to observe and to respect the invariable order of nature, our reason, or at least our imagination, is not sufficiently prepared to sustain the visible action of the Deity."

Gibbon had not the advantage of the minute critical labours which in the following century were expended on his sources of information, but his masterly exposure of the conventional history of the early Church remains in many of its most important points perfectly valid to-day. I suspect that his artillery has produced more effect on intelligent minds in subsequent generations than the archery of Voltaire. For his book became indispensable as the great history of the Middle Ages; the most orthodox could not do without it; and the poison must have often worked.

We have seen how theological controversy in the first half of the eighteenth century had turned on the question whether the revealed religion was consistent and compatible with natural religion. The deistic attacks, on this line, were almost exhausted by the middle of the century, and the orthodox thought that they had been satisfactorily answered. But it was not enough to show that the revelation is reasonable; it was necessary to prove that it is real and rests on a solid historical basis. This was the question raised in an acute form by the criticisms of Hume and Middleton (1748) on miracles. The ablest answer was given by Paley in his *Evidences of Christianity* (1794), the only one of the apologies of

that age which is still read, though it has ceased to have any value. Paley's theology illustrates how orthodox opinions are coloured, unconsciously, by the spirit of the time. He proved (in his *Natural Theology*) the existence of God by the argument from design—without taking any account of the criticisms of Hume on that argument. Just as a watch-maker is inferred from a watch, so a divine workman is inferred from contrivances in nature. Paley takes his instances of such contrivance largely from the organs and constitution of the human body. His idea of God is that of an ingenious contriver dealing with rather obstinate material. Paley's "God" (Mr. Leslie Stephen remarked) "has been civilized like man; he has become scientific and ingenious; he is superior to Watt or Priestley in devising mechanical and chemical contrivances, and is therefore made in the image of that generation of which Watt and Priestley were conspicuous lights." When a God of this kind is established there is no difficulty about miracles, and it is on miracles that Paley bases the case for Christianity—all other arguments are subsidiary. And his proof of the New Testament miracles is that the apostles who were eye-witnesses believed in them, for otherwise they would not have acted and suffered in the cause of their new

religion. Paley's defence is the performance of an able legal adviser to the Almighty.

The list of the English deistic writers of the eighteenth century closes with one whose name is more familiar than any of his predecessors, Thomas Paine. A Norfolk man, he migrated to America and played a leading part in the Revolution. Then he returned to England and in 1791 published his *Rights of Man* in two parts. I have been considering, almost exclusively, freedom of thought in religion, because it may be taken as the thermometer for freedom of thought in general. At this period it was as dangerous to publish revolutionary opinions in politics as in theology. Paine was an enthusiastic admirer of the American Constitution and a supporter of the French Revolution (in which also he was to play a part). His *Rights of Man* is an indictment of the monarchical form of government and a plea for representative democracy. It had an enormous sale, a cheap edition was issued, and the government, finding that it was accessible to the poorer classes, decided to prosecute. Paine escaped to France, and received a brilliant ovation at Calais, which returned him as deputy to the National Convention. His trial for high treason came on at the end of 1792. Among the passages in his book, on which the charge

was founded, were these: "All hereditary government is in its nature tyranny." "The time is not very distant when England will laugh at itself for sending to Holland, Hanover, Zell, or Brunswick, for men" [meaning King William III, and King George I] "at the expense of a million a year who understood neither her laws, her language nor her interest, and whose capacities would scarcely have fitted them for the office of a parish constable. If government could be trusted to such hands, it must be some easy and simple thing indeed, and materials fit for all the purposes may be found in every town and village in England." Erskine was Paine's counsel and he made a fine oration in defence of freedom of speech.

"Constraint," he said, "is the natural parent of resistance, and a pregnant proof that reason is not on the side of those who use it. You must all remember, gentlemen, Lucian's pleasant story: Jupiter and a countryman were walking together, conversing with great freedom and familiarity upon the subject of heaven and earth. The countryman listened with attention and acquiescence while Jupiter strove only to convince him; but happening to hint a doubt, Jupiter turned hastily around and threatened him with his thunder. 'Ah, ha!' says the countryman, 'now, Jupiter, I know that you are wrong;

you are always wrong when you appeal to your thunder.' This is the case with me. I can reason with the people of England, but I cannot fight against the thunder of authority."

Paine was found guilty and outlawed. He soon committed a new offence by the publication of an anti-Christian work, *The Age of Reason* (1794 and 1796), which he began to write in the Paris prison into which he had been thrown by Robespierre. This book is remarkable as the first important English publication in which the Christian scheme of salvation and the Bible are assailed in plain language without any disguise or reserve. In the second place it was written in such a way as to reach the masses. And, thirdly, while the criticisms on the Bible are in the same vein as those of the earlier deists, Paine is the first to present with force the incongruity of the Christian scheme with the conception of the universe attained by astronomical science.

"Though it is not a direct article of the Christian system that this world that we inhabit is the whole of the inhabitable globe, yet it is so worked up therewith—from what is called the Mosaic account of the creation, the story of Eve and the apple, and the counterpart of that story, the death of the Son of God—that to believe otherwise (that

is, to believe that God created a plurality of worlds at least as numerous as what we call stars) renders the Christian system of faith at once little and ridiculous, and scatters it in the mind like feathers in the air. The two beliefs cannot be held together in the same mind; and he who thinks that he believes both has thought but little of either."

As an ardent deist, who regarded nature as God's revelation, Paine was able to press this argument with particular force. Referring to some of the tales in the Old Testament, he says: "When we contemplate the immensity of that Being who directs and governs the incomprehensible *Whole*, of which the utmost ken of human sight can discover but a part, we ought to feel shame at calling such paltry stories the Word of God."

The book drew a reply from Bishop Watson, one of those admirable eighteenth-century divines, who admitted the right of private judgment and thought that argument should be met by argument and not by force. His reply had the rather significant title, *An Apology for the Bible*. George III remarked that he was not aware that any apology was needed for that book. It is a weak defence, but is remarkable for the concessions which it makes to several of Paine's criticisms of Scripture—admissions which were calculated

to damage the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible.

It was doubtless in consequence of the enormous circulation of the *Age of Reason* that a Society for the Suppression of Vice decided to prosecute the publisher. Unbelief was common among the ruling class, but the view was firmly held that religion was necessary for the populace and that any attempt to disseminate unbelief among the lower classes must be suppressed. Religion was regarded as a valuable instrument to keep the poor in order. It is notable that of the earlier rationalists (apart from the case of Woolston) the only one who was punished was Peter Annet, a schoolmaster, who tried to popularize freethought and was sentenced for diffusing "diabolical" opinions to the pillory and hard labour (1763). Paine held that the people at large had the right of access to all new ideas, and he wrote so as to reach the people. Hence his book must be suppressed. At the trial (1797) the judge placed every obstacle in the way of the defence. The publisher was sentenced to a year's imprisonment.

This was not the end of Paine prosecutions. In 1811 a Third Part of the *Age of Reason* appeared, and Eaton the publisher was condemned to eighteen months' imprison-

ment and to stand in the pillory once a month. The judge, Lord Ellenborough, said in his charge, that "to deny the truths of the book which is the foundation of our faith has never been permitted." The poet Shelley addressed to Lord Ellenborough a scathing letter. "Do you think to convert Mr. Eaton to your religion by embittering his existence? You might force him by torture to profess your tenets, but he could not believe them except you should make them credible, which perhaps exceeds your power. Do you think to please the God you worship by this exhibition of your zeal? If so, the demon to whom some nations offer human hecatombs is less barous than the deity of civilized society!" In 1819 Richard Carlisle was prosecuted for publishing the *Age of Reason* and sentenced to a large fine and three years' imprisonment. Unable to pay the fine he was kept in prison for three years. His wife and sister, who carried on the business and continued to sell the book, were fined and imprisoned soon afterwards and a whole host of shop assistants.

If his publishers suffered in England, the author himself suffered in America where bigotry did all it could to make the last years of his life bitter.

The age of enlightenment began in Germany in the middle of the eighteenth century. In

most of the German States, thought was considerably less free than in England. Under Frederick the Great's father, the philosopher Wolff was banished from Prussia for according to the moral teachings of the Chinese sage Confucius a praise which, it was thought, ought to be reserved for Christianity. He returned after the accession of Frederick, under whose tolerant rule Prussia was an asylum for those writers who suffered for their opinions in neighbouring States. Frederick, indeed, held the view which was held by so many English rationalists of the time, and is still held widely enough, that freethought is not desirable for the multitude, because they are incapable of understanding philosophy. Germany felt the influence of the English Deists, of the French free-thinkers, and of Spinoza; but in the German rationalistic propaganda of this period there is nothing very original or interesting. The names of Edelmann and Bahrdt may be mentioned. The works of Edelmann, who attacked the inspiration of the Bible, were burned in various cities, and he was forced to seek Frederick's protection at Berlin. Bahrdt was more aggressive than any other writer of the time. Originally a preacher, it was by slow degrees that he moved away from the orthodox faith. His translation of the

New Testament cut short his ecclesiastical career. His last years were spent as an innkeeper. His writings, for instance his popular *Letters on the Bible*, must have had a considerable effect, if we may judge by the hatred which he excited among theologians.

It was not, however, in direct rationalistic propaganda, but in literature and philosophy that the German enlightenment of this century expressed itself. The most illustrious men of letters, Goethe (who was profoundly influenced by Spinoza) and Schiller, stood outside the Churches, and the effect of their writings and of the whole literary movement of the time made for the freest treatment of human experience.

One German thinker shook the world—the philosopher Kant. His *Critic of Pure Reason* demonstrated that when we attempt to prove by the light of the intellect the existence of God and the immortality of the Soul, we fall helplessly into contradictions. His destructive criticism of the argument from design and all natural theology was more complete than that of Hume; and his philosophy, different though his system was, issued in the same practical result as that of Locke, to confine knowledge to experience. It is true that afterwards, in the interest of ethics, he tried to smuggle in by a back-door the Deity

whom he had turned out by the front gate, but the attempt was not a success. His philosophy—while it led to new speculative systems in which the name of God was used to mean something very different from the Deistic conception—was a significant step further in the deliverance of reason from the yoke of authority.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROGRESS OF RATIONALISM

(NINETEENTH CENTURY)

MODERN science, heralded by the researches of Copernicus, was founded in the seventeenth century, which saw the demonstration of the Copernican theory, the discovery of gravitation, the discovery of the circulation of the blood, and the foundation of modern chemistry and physics. The true nature of comets was ascertained and they ceased to be regarded as signs of heavenly wrath. But several generations were to pass before science became, in Protestant countries, an involuntary arch-enemy of theology. Till the nineteenth century, it was only in minor points, such as the movement of the earth, that proved scientific facts seemed to conflict with

Scripture, and it was easy enough to explain away these inconsistencies by a new interpretation of the sacred texts. Yet remarkable facts were accumulating which, though not explained by science, seemed to menace the credibility of Biblical history. If the story of Noah's Ark and the Flood is true, how was it that beasts unable to swim or fly inhabit America and the islands of the Ocean? And what about the new species which were constantly being found in the New World and did not exist in the Old? Where did the kangaroos of Australia drop from? The only explanation compatible with received theology seemed to be the hypothesis of innumerable new acts of creation, later than the Flood. It was in the field of natural history that scientific men of the eighteenth century suffered most from the coercion of authority. Linnæus felt it in Sweden, Buffon in France. Buffon was compelled to retract hypotheses which he put forward about the formation of the earth in his *Natural History* (1749), and to state that he believed implicitly in the Bible account of Creation.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Laplace worked out the mechanics of the universe, on the nebular hypothesis. His results dispensed, as he said to Napoleon, with the hypothesis of God, and were duly

denounced. His theory involved a long physical process before the earth and solar system came to be formed; but this was not fatal, for a little ingenuity might preserve the credit of the first chapter of *Genesis*. Geology was to prove a more formidable enemy to the Biblical story of the Creation and the Deluge. The theory of a French naturalist (Cuvier) that the earth had repeatedly experienced catastrophes, each of which necessitated a new creative act, helped for a time to save the belief in divine intervention, and Lyell, in his *Principles of Geology* (1830), while he undermined the assumption of catastrophes by showing that the earth's history could be explained by the ordinary processes which we still see in operation, yet held fast to successive acts of creation. It was not till 1863 that he presented fully, in his *Antiquity of Man*, the evidence which showed that the human race had inhabited the earth for a far longer period than could be reconciled with the record of Scripture. That record might be adapted to the results of science in regard not only to the earth itself but also to the plants and lower animals, by explaining the word "day" in the Jewish story of creation to signify some long period of time. But this way out was impossible in the case of the creation of man, for the

sacred chronology is quite definite. An English divine of the seventeenth century ingeniously calculated that man was created by the Trinity on October 23, B.C. 4004, at 9 o'clock in the morning, and no reckoning of the Bible dates could put the event much further back. Other evidence reinforced the conclusions from geology, but geology alone was sufficient to damage irretrievably the historical truth of the Jewish legend of Creation. The only means of rescuing it was to suppose that God had created misleading evidence for the express purpose of deceiving man.

Geology shook the infallibility of the Bible, but left the creation of some prehistoric Adam and Eve a still admissible hypothesis. Here however zoology stepped in, and pronounced upon the origin of man. It was an old conjecture that the higher forms of life, including man, had developed out of lower forms, and advanced thinkers had been reaching the conclusion that the universe, as we find it, is the result of a continuous process, unbroken by supernatural interference, and explicable by uniform natural laws. But while the reign of law in the world of non-living matter seemed to be established, the world of life could be considered a field in which the theory of divine intervention is perfectly valid, so

long as science failed to assign satisfactory causes for the origination of the various kinds of animals and plants. The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 is, therefore, a landmark not only in science but in the war between science and theology. When this book appeared, Bishop Wilberforce truly said that "the principle of natural selection is incompatible with the word of God," and theologians in Germany and France as well as in England cried aloud against the threatened dethronement of the Deity. The appearance of the *Descent of Man* (1871), in which the evidence for the pedigree of the human race from lower animals was marshalled with masterly force, renewed the outcry. The Bible said that God created man in his own image, Darwin said that man descended from an ape. The feelings of the orthodox world may be expressed in the words of Mr. Gladstone: "Upon the grounds of what is called evolution God is relieved of the labour of creation, and in the name of unchangeable laws is discharged from governing the world." It was a discharge which, as Spencer observed, had begun with Newton's discovery of gravitation. If Darwin did not, as is now recognized, supply a complete explanation of the origin of species, his researches shattered the supernatural theory and confirmed the view to

which many able thinkers had been led that development is continuous in the living as in the non-living world. Another nail was driven into the coffin of Creation and the Fall of Adam, and the doctrine of redemption could only be rescued by making it independent of the Jewish fable on which it was founded.

Darwinism, as it is called, has had the larger effect of discrediting the theory of the adaptation of means to ends in nature by an external and infinitely powerful intelligence. The inadequacy of the argument from design, as a proof of God's existence, had been shown by the logic of Hume and Kant; but the observation of the life-processes of nature shows that the very analogy between nature and art, on which the argument depends, breaks down. The impropriety of the analogy has been pointed out, in a telling way, by a German writer (Lange). If a man wants to shoot a hare which is in a certain field, he does not procure thousands of guns, surround the field, and cause them all to be fired off; or if he wants a house to live in, he does not build a whole town and abandon to weather and decay all the houses but one. If he did either of these things we should say he was mad or amazingly unintelligent; his actions certainly would not be held to indicate a

powerful mind, expert in adapting means to ends. But these are the sort of things that nature does. Her wastefulness in the propagation of life is reckless. For the production of one life she sacrifices innumerable germs. The "end" is achieved in one case out of thousands; the rule is destruction and failure. If intelligence had anything to do with this bungling process, it would be an intelligence infinitely low. And the finished product, if regarded as a work of design, points to incompetence in the designer. Take the human eye. An illustrious man of science (Helmholtz) said, "If an optician sent it to me as an instrument, I should send it back with reproaches for the carelessness of his work and demand the return of my money." Darwin showed how the phenomena might be explained as events not brought about intentionally, but due to exceptional concurrences of circumstances.

The phenomena of nature are a system of things which co-exist and follow each other according to invariable laws. This deadly proposition was asserted early in the nineteenth century to be an axiom of science. It was formulated by Mill (in his *System of Logic*, 1843) as the foundation on which scientific induction rests. It means that at any moment the state of the whole universe

is the effect of its state at the preceding moment; the causal sequence between two successive states is not broken by any arbitrary interference suppressing or altering the relation between cause and effect. Some ancient Greek philosophers were convinced of this principle; the work done by modern science in every field seems to be a verification of it. But it need not be stated in such an absolute form. Recently, scientific men have been inclined to express the axiom with more reserve and less dogmatically. They are prepared to recognize that it is simply a postulate without which the scientific comprehension of the universe would be impossible, and they are inclined to state it not as a law of causation—for the idea of causation leads into metaphysics—but rather as uniformity of experience. But they are not readier to admit exceptions to this uniformity than their predecessors were to admit exceptions to the law of causation.

The idea of development has been applied not only to nature, but to the mind of man and to the history of civilization, including thought and religion. The first who attempted to apply this idea methodically to the whole universe was not a student of natural science, but a metaphysician, Hegel. His extremely difficult philosophy had such a wide influence

on thought that a few words must be said about its tendency. He conceived the whole of existence as what he called the Absolute Idea, which is not in space or time and is compelled by the laws of its being to manifest itself in the process of the world, first externalizing itself in nature, and then becoming conscious of itself as spirit in individual minds. His system is hence called Absolute Idealism. The attraction which it exercised has probably been in great measure due to the fact that it was in harmony with nineteenth century thought, in so far as it conceived the process of the world, both in nature and spirit, as a necessary development from lower to higher stages. In this respect indeed Hegel's vision was limited. He treats the process as if it were practically complete already, and does not take into account the probability of further development in the future, to which other thinkers of his own time were turning their attention. But what concerns us here is that, while Hegel's system is "idealistic," finding the explanation of the universe in thought and not in matter, it tended as powerfully as any materialistic system to subvert orthodox beliefs. It is true that some have claimed it as supporting Christianity. A certain colour is lent to this by Hegel's view that the Christian creed, as

the highest religion, contains doctrines which express imperfectly some of the ideas of the highest philosophy—his own; along with the fact that he sometimes speaks of the Absolute Idea as if it were a person, though personality would be a limitation inconsistent with his conception of it. But it is sufficient to observe that, whatever value he assigned to Christianity, he regarded it from the *superior* standpoint of a purely intellectual philosophy, not as a special revelation of truth, but as a certain approximation to the truth which philosophy alone can reach; and it may be said with some confidence that any one who comes under Hegel's spell feels that he is in possession of a theory of the universe which relieves him from the need or desire of any revealed religion. His influence in Germany, Russia, and elsewhere has entirely made for highly unorthodox thought.

Hegel was not aggressive, he was superior. His French contemporary, Comte, who also thought out a comprehensive system, aggressively and explicitly rejected theology as an obsolete way of explaining the universe. He rejected metaphysics likewise, and all that Hegel stood for, as equally useless, on the ground that metaphysicians explain nothing, but merely describe phenomena in abstract terms, and that questions about the origin

of the world and why it exists are quite beyond the reach of reason. Both theology and metaphysics are superseded by science—the investigation of causes and effects and co-existences; and the future progress of society will be guided by the scientific view of the world which confines itself to the positive data of experience. Comte was convinced that religion is a social necessity, and, to supply the place of the theological religions which he pronounced to be doomed, he invented a new religion—the religion of Humanity. It differs from the great religions of the world in having no supernatural or non-rational articles of belief, and on that account he had few adherents. But the "Positive Philosophy" of Comte has exercised great influence, not least in England, where its principles have been promulgated especially by Mr. Frederic Harrison, who in the latter half of the nineteenth century has been one of the most indefatigable workers in the cause of reason against authority.

Another comprehensive system was worked out by an Englishman, Herbert Spencer. Like Comte's, it was based on science, and attempts to show how, starting with a nebular universe, the whole knowable world, psychical and social as well as physical, can be deduced. His *Synthetic Philosophy* perhaps did more than

anything else to make the idea of evolution familiar in England.

I must mention one other modern explanation of the world, that of Haeckel, the zoologist, professor at Jena, who may be called the prophet of evolution. His *Creation of Man* (1868) covered the same ground as Darwin's *Descent*, had an enormous circulation, and was translated, I believe, into fourteen languages. His *World-riddles* (1899) enjoys the same popularity. He has taught, like Spencer, that the principle of evolution applies not only to the history of nature, but also to human civilization and human thought. He differs from Spencer and Comte in not assuming any unknowable reality behind natural phenomena. His adversaries commonly stigmatize his theory as materialism, but this is a mistake. Like Spinoza he recognizes matter and mind, body and thought, as two inseparable sides of ultimate reality, which he calls God; in fact, he identifies his philosophy with that of Spinoza. And he logically proceeds to conceive material atoms as thinking. His idea of the physical world is based on the old mechanical conception of matter, which in recent years has been discredited. But Haeckel's *Monism*,[1] as he called his doctrine, has lately been reshaped

[1] From Greek *monos*, alone.

and in its new form promises to exercise wide influence on thoughtful people in Germany. I will return later to this Monistic movement.

It had been a fundamental principle of Comte that human actions and human history are as strictly subject as nature is, to the law of causation. Two psychological works appeared in England in 1855 (Bain's *Senses and Intellect* and Spencer's *Principles of Psychology*), which taught that our volitions are completely determined, being the inevitable consequences of chains of causes and effects. But a far deeper impression was produced two years later by the first volume of Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* (a work of much less permanent value), which attempted to apply this principle to history. Men act in consequence of motives; their motives are the results of preceding facts; so that "if we were acquainted with the whole of the antecedents and with all the laws of their movements, we could with unerring certainty predict the whole of their immediate results." Thus history is an unbroken chain of causes and effects. Chance is excluded; it is a mere name for the defects of our knowledge. Mysterious and providential interference is excluded. Buckle maintained God's existence, but eliminated him from history; and his book dealt a resounding blow at the theory

that human actions are not submitted to the law of universal causation.

The science of anthropology has in recent years aroused wide interest. Inquiries into the condition of early man have shown (independently of Darwinism) that there is nothing to be said for the view that he fell from a higher to a lower state; the evidence points to a slow rise from mere animality. The origin of religious beliefs has been investigated, with results disquieting for orthodoxy. The researches of students of anthropology and comparative religion—such as Tylor, Robertson Smith, and Frazer—have gone to show that mysterious ideas and dogmas and rites which were held to be peculiar to the Christian revelation are analogous to crude ideas of primitive religions. That the mystery of the Eucharist may be compared to the heathen rite of eating a dead god, that the death and resurrection of a god in human form, which form the central fact of Christianity, and the miraculous birth of a Saviour are features which it has in common with pagan religions—such conclusions are supremely unedifying. It may be said that in themselves they are not fatal to the claims of the current theology. It may be held, for instance, that, as part of Christian revelation, such ideas acquired a new significance and

that God wisely availed himself of familiar beliefs—which, though false and leading to cruel practices, he himself had undeniably permitted—in order to construct a scheme of redemption which should appeal to the prejudices of man. Some minds may find satisfaction in this sort of explanation, but it may be suspected that most of the few who study modern researches into the origin of religious beliefs will feel the lines which were supposed to mark off the Christian from all other faiths dissolving before their eyes.

The general result of the advance of science, including anthropology, has been to create a coherent view of the world, in which the Christian scheme, based on the notions of an unscientific age and on the arrogant assumption that the universe was made for man, has no suitable or reasonable place. If Paine felt this a hundred years ago, it is far more apparent now. All minds however are not equally impressed with this incongruity. There are many who will admit the proofs furnished by science that the Biblical record as to the antiquity of man is false, but are not affected by the incongruity between the scientific and theological conceptions of the world.

For such minds science has only succeeded in carrying some entrenchments, which may

be abandoned without much harm. It has made the old orthodox view of the infallibility of the Bible untenable, and upset the doctrine of the Creation and Fall. But it would still be possible for Christianity to maintain the supernatural claim, by modifying its theory of the authority of the Bible and revising its theory of redemption, if the evidence of natural science were the only group of facts with which it collided. It might be argued that the law of universal causation is a hypothesis inferred from experience, but that experience includes the testimonies of history and must therefore take account of the clear evidence of miraculous occurrences in the New Testament (evidence which is valid, even if that book was not inspired). Thus, a stand could be taken against the generalization of science on the firm ground of historical fact. That solid ground, however, has given way, undermined by historical criticism, which has been more deadly than the common-sense criticism of the eighteenth century.

The methodical examination of the records contained in the Bible, dealing with them as if they were purely human documents, is the work of the nineteenth century. Something, indeed, had already been done. Spinoza, for instance (above, p. 138) and Simon, a Frenchman whose books were burnt, were

pioneers; and the modern criticism of the Old Testament was begun by Astruc (professor of medicine at Paris), who discovered an important clue for distinguishing different documents used by the compiler of the Book of Genesis (1753). His German contemporary, Reimarus, a student of the New Testament, anticipated the modern conclusion that Jesus had no intention of founding a new religion, and saw that the Gospel of St. John presents a different figure from the Jesus of the other evangelists.

But in the nineteenth century the methods of criticism, applied by German scholars to Homer and to the records of early Roman history, were extended to the investigation of the Bible. The work has been done principally in Germany. The old tradition that the Pentateuch was written by Moses has been completely discredited. It is now agreed unanimously by all who have studied the facts that the Pentateuch was put together from a number of different documents of different ages, the earliest dating from the ninth, the last from the fifth, century B.C.; and there are later minor additions. An important, though undesigned, contribution was made to this exposure by an Englishman, Colenso, Bishop of Natal. It had been held that the oldest of the documents which

had been distinguished was a narrative which begins in Genesis, Chapter I, but there was the difficulty that this narrative seemed to be closely associated with the legislation of Leviticus which could be proved to belong to the fifth century. In 1862 Colenso published the first part of his *Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined.* His doubts of the truth of Old Testament history had been awakened by a converted Zulu who asked the intelligent question whether he could really believe in the story of the Flood, " that all the beasts and birds and creeping things upon the earth, large and small, from hot countries and cold, came thus by pairs and entered into the ark with Noah? And did Noah gather food for them *all*, for the beasts and birds of prey as well as the rest? " The Bishop then proceeded to test the accuracy of the inspired books by examining the numerical statements which they contain. The results were fatal to them as historical records. Quite apart from miracles (the possibility of which he did not question), he showed that the whole story of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt and the wilderness was full of absurdities and impossibilities. Colenso's book raised a storm of indignation in England—he was known as " the wicked bishop "; but on the Continent its reception

was very different. The portions of the Pentateuch and Joshua, which he proved to be unhistorical, belonged precisely to the narrative which had caused perplexity; and critics were led by his results to conclude that, like the Levitical laws with which it was connected, it was as late as the fifth century.

One of the most striking results of the researches on the Old Testament has been that the Jews themselves handled their traditions freely. Each of the successive documents, which were afterwards woven together, was written by men who adopted a perfectly free attitude towards the older traditions, and having no suspicion that they were of divine origin did not bow down before their authority. It was reserved for the Christians to invest with infallible authority the whole indiscriminate lump of these Jewish documents, inconsistent not only in their tendencies (since they reflect the spirit of different ages), but also in some respects in substance. The examination of most of the other Old Testament books has led to conclusions likewise adverse to the orthodox view of their origin and character. New knowledge on many points has been derived from the Babylonian literature which has been recovered during the last half century. One of the earliest (1872) and most sensational

discoveries was that the Jews got their story of the Flood from Babylonian mythology.

Modern criticism of the New Testament began with the stimulating works of Baur and of Strauss, whose *Life of Jesus* (1835), in which the supernatural was entirely rejected, had an immense success and caused furious controversy. Both these rationalists were influenced by Hegel. At the same time a classical scholar, Lachmann, laid the foundations of the criticism of the Greek text of the New Testament, by issuing the first scientific edition. Since then seventy years of work have led to some certain results which are generally accepted.

In the first place no intelligent person who has studied modern criticism holds the old view that each of the four biographies of Jesus is an independent work and an independent testimony to the facts which are related. It is acknowledged that those portions which are common to more than one and are written in identical language have the same origin and represent only one testimony. In the second place, it is allowed that the first Gospel is not the oldest and that the apostle Matthew was not its author. There is also a pretty general agreement that Mark's book is the oldest. The authorship of the fourth Gospel, which like the first was sup-

posed to have been written by an eye-witness, is still contested, but even those who adhere to the tradition admit that it represents a theory about Jesus which is widely different from the view of the three other biographers.

The result is that it can no longer be said that for the life of Jesus there is the evidence of eye-witnesses. The oldest account (Mark) was composed at the earliest some thirty years after the Crucifixion. If such evidence is considered good enough to establish the supernatural events described in that document, there are few alleged supernatural occurrences which we shall not be equally entitled to believe. As a matter of fact, an interval of thirty years makes little difference, for we know that legends require little time to grow. In the East, you will hear of miracles which happened the day before yesterday. The birth of religions is always enveloped in legend, and the miraculous thing would be, as M. Salomon Reinach has observed, if the story of the birth of Christianity were pure history.

Another disturbing result of unprejudiced examination of the first three Gospels is that, if you take the recorded words of Jesus to be genuine tradition, he had no idea of founding a new religion. And he was fully persuaded that the end of the world was at hand. At

present, the chief problem of advanced criticism seems to be whether his entire teaching was not determined by this delusive conviction.

It may be said that the advance of knowledge has thrown no light on one of the most important beliefs that we are asked to accept on authority, the doctrine of immortality. Physiology and psychology have indeed emphasized the difficulties of conceiving a thinking mind without a nervous system. Some are sanguine enough to think that, by scientific examination of psychical phenomena, we may possibly come to know whether the "spirits" of dead people exist. If the existence of such a world of spirits were ever established, it would possibly be the greatest blow ever sustained by Christianity. For the great appeal of this and of some other religions lies in the promise of a future life of which otherwise we should have no knowledge. If existence after death were proved and became a scientific fact like the law of gravitation, a revealed religion might lose its power. For the whole point of a revealed religion is that it is not based on scientific facts. So far as I know, those who are convinced, by spiritualistic experiments, that they have actual converse with spirits of the dead, and for whom this converse, however delusive the evidence

may be, is a fact proved by experience, cease to feel any interest in religion. They possess knowledge and can dispense with faith.

The havoc which science and historical criticism have wrought among orthodox beliefs during the last hundred years was not tamely submitted to, and controversy was not the only weapon employed. Strauss was deprived of his professorship at Tübingen, and his career was ruined. Renan, whose sensational *Life of Jesus* also rejected the supernatural, lost his chair in the Collège de France. Büchner was driven from Tübingen (1855) for his book on *Force and Matter*, which, appealing to the general public, set forth the futility of supernatural explanations of the universe. An attempt was made to chase Haeckel from Jena. In recent years, a French Catholic, the Abbé Loisy, has made notable contributions to the study of the New Testament and he was rewarded by major excommunication in 1907.

Loisy is the most prominent figure in a growing movement within the Catholic Church known as Modernism—a movement which some think is the gravest crisis in the history of the Church since the thirteenth century. The Modernists do not form an organized party; they have no programme. They are devoted to the Church, to its traditions and

associations, but they look on Christianity as a religion which has developed, and whose vitality depends upon its continuing to develop. They are bent on reinterpreting the dogmas in the light of modern science and criticism. The idea of development had already been applied by Cardinal Newman to Catholic theology. He taught that it was a natural, and therefore legitimate, development of the primitive creed. But he did not draw the conclusion which the Modernists draw that if Catholicism is not to lose its power of growth and die, it must assimilate some of the results of modern thought. This is what they are attempting to do for it.

Pope Pius X has made every effort to suppress the Modernists. In 1907 (July) he issued a decree denouncing various results of modern Biblical criticism which are defended in Loisy's works. The two fundamental propositions that "the organic constitution of the Church is not immutable, but that Christian society is subject, like every human society, to a perpetual evolution," and that "the dogmas which the Church regards as revealed are not fallen from heaven but are an interpretation of religious facts at which the human mind laboriously arrived"—both of which might be deduced from Newman's writings—are condemned. Three months

later the Pope issued a long Encyclical letter, containing an elaborate study of Modernist opinions, and ordaining various measures for stamping out the evil. No Modernist would admit that this document represents his views fairly. Yet some of the remarks seem very much to the point. Take one of their books: "one page might be signed by a Catholic; turn over and you think you are reading the work of a rationalist. In writing history, they make no mention of Christ's divinity; in the pulpit, they proclaim it loudly."

A plain man may be puzzled by these attempts to retain the letter of old dogmas emptied of their old meaning, and may think it natural enough that the head of the Catholic Church should take a clear and definite stand against the new learning which seems fatal to its fundamental doctrines. For many years past, liberal divines in the Protestant Churches have been doing what the Modernists are doing. The phrase "Divinity of Christ" is used, but is interpreted so as not to imply a miraculous birth. The Resurrection is preached, but is interpreted so as not to imply a miraculous bodily resurrection. The Bible is said to be an inspired book, but inspiration is used in a vague sense, much as when one says that Plato was inspired; and the vagueness of this

new idea of inspiration is even put forward as a merit. Between the extreme views which discard the miraculous altogether, and the old orthodoxy, there are many gradations of belief. In the Church of England to-day it would be difficult to say what is the minimum belief required either from its members or from its clergy. Probably every leading ecclesiastic would give a different answer.

The rise of rationalism within the English Church is interesting and illustrates the relations between Church and State.

The pietistic movement known as Evangelicalism, which Wilberforce's *Practical View of Christianity* (1797) did much to make popular, introduced the spirit of Methodism within the Anglican Church, and soon put an end to the delightful type of eighteenth-century divine, who, as Gibbon says, " subscribed with a sigh or a smile " the articles of faith. The rigorous taboo of the Sabbath was revived, the theatre was denounced, the corruption of human nature became the dominant theme, and the Bible more a fetish than ever. The success of this religious " reaction," as it is called, was aided, though not caused, by the common belief that the French Revolution had been mainly due to infidelity; the Revolution was taken for an object lesson showing the value of religion for keeping the people in order.

There was also a religious "reaction" in France itself. But in both cases this means not that free thought was less prevalent, but that the beliefs of the majority were more aggressive and had powerful spokesmen, while the eighteenth-century form of rationalism fell out of fashion. A new form of rationalism, which sought to interpret orthodoxy in such a liberal way as to reconcile it with philosophy, was represented by Coleridge who was influenced by German philosophers. Coleridge was a supporter of the Church, and he contributed to the foundation of a school of liberal theology which was to make itself felt after the middle of the century. Newman, the most eminent of the new High Church party, said that he indulged in a liberty of speculation which no Christian could tolerate. The High Church movement which marked the second quarter of the century was as hostile as Evangelicalism to the freedom of religious thought.

The change came after the middle of the century, when the effects of the philosophies of Hegel and Comte, and of foreign Biblical criticism, began to make themselves felt within the English Church. Two remarkable freethinking books appeared at this period which were widely read, F. W. Newman's *Phases of Faith* and W. R. Greg's *Creed*

of Christendom (both in 1850). Newman (brother of Cardinal Newman) entirely broke with Christianity, and in his book he describes the mental process by which he came to abandon the beliefs he had once held. Perhaps the most interesting point he makes is the deficiency of the New Testament teaching as a system of morals. Greg was a unitarian. He rejected dogma and inspiration, but he regarded himself as a Christian. Sir J. F. Stephen wittily described his position as that of a disciple "who had heard the Sermon on the Mount, whose attention had not been called to the Miracles, and who died before the Resurrection."

There were a few English clergymen (chiefly Oxford men) who were interested in German criticism and leaned to broad views, which to the Evangelicals and High Churchmen seemed indistinguishable from infidelity. We may call them the Broad Church—though the name did not come in till later. In 1855 Jowett (afterwards Master of Balliol) published an edition of some of St. Paul's Epistles, in which he showed the cloven hoof. It contained an annihilating criticism of the doctrine of the Atonement, an explicit rejection of original sin, and a rationalistic discussion of the question of God's existence. But this and some other unorthodox works

of liberal theologians attracted little public attention, though their authors had to endure petty persecution. Five years later, Jowett and some other members of the small liberal group decided to defy the "abominable system of terrorism which prevents the statement of the plainest fact," and issued a volume of *Essays and Reviews* (1860) by seven writers of whom six were clergymen. The views advocated in these essays seem mild enough to-day, and many of them would be accepted by most well-educated clergymen, but at the time they produced a very painful impression. The authors were called the "Seven against Christ." It was laid down that the Bible is to be interpreted like any other book. "It is not a useful lesson for the young student to apply to Scripture principles which he would hesitate to apply to other books; to make formal reconcilements of discrepancies which he would not think of reconciling in ordinary history; to divide simple words into double meanings; to adopt the fancies or conjectures of Fathers and Commentators as real knowledge." It is suggested that the Hebrew prophecies do not contain the element of prediction. Contradictory accounts, or accounts which can only be reconciled by conjecture, cannot possibly have been dictated

by God. The discrepancies between the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke, or between the accounts of the Resurrection can be attributed "neither to any defect in our capacities nor to any reasonable presumption of a hidden wise design, nor to any partial spiritual endowments in the narrators." The orthodox arguments which lay stress on the assertion of witnesses as the supreme evidence of fact, in support of miraculous occurrences, are set aside on the ground that testimony is a blind guide and can avail nothing against reason and the strong grounds we have for believing in permanent order. It is argued that, under the Thirty-nine Articles, it is permissible to accept as "parable or poetry or legend" such stories as that of an ass speaking with a man's voice, of waters standing in a solid heap, of witches and a variety of apparitions, and to judge for ourselves of such questions as the personality of Satan or the primeval institution of the Sabbath. The whole spirit of this volume is perhaps expressed in the observation that if any one perceives "to how great an extent the origin itself of Christianity rests upon *probable* evidence, his principle will relieve him from many difficulties which might otherwise be very disturbing. For relations which may repose on doubtful grounds as

matters of history, and, as history, be incapable of being ascertained or verified, may yet be equally suggestive of true ideas with facts absolutely certain "—that is, they may have a spiritual significance although they are historically false.

The most daring Essay was the Rev. Baden Powell's *Study of the Evidences of Christianity*. He was a believer in evolution, who accepted Darwinism, and considered miracles impossible. The volume was denounced by the bishops, and in 1862 two of the contributors, who were beneficed clergymen and thus open to a legal attack, were prosecuted and tried in the Ecclesiastical Court. Condemned on certain points, acquitted on others, they were sentenced to be suspended for a year, and they appealed to the Privy Council. Lord Westbury (Lord Chancellor) pronounced the judgment of the Judicial Committee of the Council, which reversed the decision of the Ecclesiastical Court. The Committee held, among other things, that it is not essential for a clergyman to believe in eternal punishment. This prompted the following epitaph on Lord Westbury: "Towards the close of his earthly career he dismissed Hell with costs and took away from Orthodox members of the Church of England their last hope of everlasting damnation."

This was a great triumph for the Broad Church party, and it is an interesting event in the history of the English State-Church. Laymen decided (overruling the opinion of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York) what theological doctrines are and are not binding on a clergyman, and granted within the Church a liberty of opinion which the majority of the Church's representatives regarded as pernicious. This liberty was formally established in 1865 by an Act of Parliament, which altered the form in which clergymen were required to subscribe the Thirty-nine Articles. The episode of *Essays and Reviews* is a landmark in the history of religious thought in England.

The liberal views of the Broad Churchmen and their attitude to the Bible gradually produced some effect upon those who differed most from them; and nowadays there is probably no one who would not admit, at least, that such a passage as Genesis, Chapter XIX might have been composed without the direct inspiration of the Deity.

During the next few years orthodox public opinion was shocked or disturbed by the appearance of several remarkable books which criticized, ignored, or defied authority—Lyell's *Antiquity of Man*, Seeley's *Ecce Homo* (which the pious Lord Shaftesbury said was " vomited

from the jaws of hell"), Lecky's *History of Rationalism*. And a new poet of liberty arose who did not fear to sound the loudest notes of defiance against all that authority held sacred. All the great poets of the nineteenth century were more or less unorthodox; Wordsworth in the years of his highest inspiration was a pantheist; and the greatest of all, Shelley, was a declared atheist. In fearless utterance, in unfaltering zeal against the tyranny of Gods and Governments, Swinburne was like Shelley. His drama *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), even though a poet is strictly not answerable for what the persons in his drama say, yet with its denunciation of "the supreme evil, God," heralded the coming of a new champion who would defy the fortresses of authority. And in the following year his *Poems and Ballads* expressed the spirit of a pagan who flouted all the prejudices and sanctities of the Christian world.

But the most intense and exciting period of literary warfare against orthodoxy in England began about 1869, and lasted for about a dozen years, during which enemies of dogma, of all complexions, were less reticent and more aggressive than at any other time in the century. Lord Morley has observed that "the force of speculative literature always hangs on practical opportuneness,"

and this remark is illustrated by the rationalistic literature of the seventies. It was a time of hope and fear, of progress and danger. Secularists and rationalists were encouraged by the Disestablishment of the Church in Ireland (1869), by the Act which allowed atheists to give evidence in a court of justice (1869), by the abolition of religious tests at all the Universities (a measure frequently attempted in vain) in 1871. On the other hand, the Education Act of 1870, progressive though it was, disappointed the advocates of secular education, and was an unwelcome sign of the strength of ecclesiastical influence. Then there was the general alarm felt in Europe by all outside the Roman Church, and by some within it, at the decree of the infallibility of the Pope (by the Vatican Council 1869–70), and an Englishman (Cardinal Manning) was one of the most active spirits in bringing about this decree. It would perhaps have caused less alarm if the Pope's denunciation of modern errors had not been fresh in men's memories. At the end of 1864 he startled the world by issuing a Syllabus "embracing the principal errors of our age." Among these were the propositions, that every man is free to adopt and profess the religion he considers true, according to the light of reason; that the Church has no right to