employ force; that metaphysics can and ought to be pursued without reference to divine and ecclesiastical authority; that Catholic states are right to allow foreign immigrants to exercise their own religion in public; that the Pope ought to make terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization. The document was taken as a declaration of war against enlightenment, and the Vatican Council as the first strategic move of the hosts of darkness. It seemed that the powers of obscurantism were lifting up their heads with a new menace, and there was an instinctive feeling that all the forces of reason should be brought into the field. The history of the last forty years shows that the theory of Infallibility, since it has become a dogma, is not more harmful than it was before. But the efforts of the Catholic Church in the years following the Council to overthrow the French Republic and to rupture the new German Empire were sufficiently disquieting. Against this was to be set the destruction of the temporal power of the Popes and the complete freedom of Italy. This event was the sunrise of Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise* (which appeared in 1871), a seedplot of atheism and revolution, sown with implacable hatred of creeds and tyrants. The most wonderful poem in the volume, the *Hymn of Man*, was

written while the Vatican Council was sitting. It is a song of triumph over the God of the priests, stricken by the doom of the Pope's temporal power. The concluding verses will show the spirit.

"By thy name that in hellfire was written,
and burned at the point of thy sword,
Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death is upon thee, O Lord.
And the lovesong of earth as thou diest resounds through the wind of her wings—
Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things."

The fact that such a volume could appear with impunity vividly illustrates the English policy of enforcing the laws for blasphemy only in the case of publications addressed to the masses.

Political circumstances thus invited and stimulated rationalists to come forward boldly, but we must not leave out of account the influence of the Broad Church movement and of Darwinism. The *Descent of Man* appeared precisely in 1871. A new, undogmatic Christianity was being preached in pulpits. Mr. Leslie Stephen remarked (1873) that "it may be said, with little exaggeration, that there

is not only no article in the creeds which may not be contradicted with impunity, but that there is none which may not be contradicted in a sermon calculated to win the reputation of orthodoxy and be regarded as a judicious bid for a bishopric. The popular state of mind seems to be typified in the well-known anecdote of the cautious churchwarden, who, whilst commending the general tendency of his incumbent's sermon, felt bound to hazard a protest upon one point. 'You see, sir,' as he apologetically explained, 'I think there be a God.' He thought it an error of taste or perhaps of judgment, to hint a doubt as to the first article of the creed."

The influence exerted among the cultivated classes by the æsthetic movement (Ruskin, Morris, the Pre-Raphaelite painters; then Pater's *Lectures on the Renaissance*, 1873) was also a sign of the times. For the attitude of these critics, artists, and poets was essentially pagan. The saving truths of theology were for them as if they did not exist. The ideal of happiness was found in a region in which heaven was ignored.

The time then seemed opportune for speaking out. Of the unorthodox books and essays,[1] which influenced the young and

[1] Besides the works referred to in the text, may be mentioned: Winwood Reade, *Martyrdom of Man*, 1871;

alarmed believers, in these exciting years, most were the works of men who may be most fairly described by the comprehensive term *agnostics*—a name which had been recently invented by Professor Huxley.

The agnostic holds that there are limits to human reason, and that theology lies outside those limits. Within those limits lies the world with which science (including psychology) deals. Science deals entirely with phenomena, and has nothing to say to the nature of the ultimate reality which may lie behind phenomena. There are four possible attitudes to this ultimate reality. There is the attitude of the metaphysician and theologian who are convinced not only that it exists but that it can be at least partly known. There is the attitude of the man who denies that it exists; but he must be also a metaphysician, for its existence can only be disproved by metaphysical arguments. Then there are those who assert that it exists but deny that we can know anything about it. And finally there are those who say that we cannot know whether it exists or not. These last are "agnostics" in the strict

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Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*; W. R. Cassels, *Supernatural Religion*; Tyndall, *Address to British Association at Belfast*; Huxley, *Animal Automatism*; W. K. Clifford, *Body and Mind*; all in 1874.

sense of the term, men who *profess not to know*. The third class go beyond phenomena in so far as they assert that there is an ultimate though unknowable reality beneath phenomena. But agnostic is commonly used in a wide sense so as to include the third as well as the fourth class—those who assume an unknowable, as well as those who do not know whether there is an unknowable or not. Comte and Spencer, for instance, who believed in an unknowable, are counted as agnostics. The difference between an agnostic and an atheist is that the atheist positively denies the existence of a personal God, the agnostic does not believe in it.

The writer of this period who held agnosticism in its purest form, and who turned the dry light of reason on to theological opinions with the most merciless logic, was Mr. Leslie Stephen. His best-known essay, "An Agnostic's Apology" (*Fortnightly Review*, 1876), raises the question, have the dogmas of orthodox theologians any meaning? Do they offer, for this is what we want, an intelligible reconciliation of the discords in the universe? It is shown in detail that the various theological explanations of the dealings of God with man, when logically pressed, issue in a confession of ignorance. And what is this but agnosticism? You may call your doubt

a mystery, but mystery is only the theological phrase for agnosticism. "Why, when no honest man will deny in private that every ultimate problem is wrapped in the profoundest mystery, do honest men proclaim in pulpits that unhesitating certainty is the duty of the most foolish and ignorant? We are a company of ignorant beings, dimly discerning light enough for our daily needs, but hopelessly differing whenever we attempt to describe the ultimate origin or end of our paths; and yet, when one of us ventures to declare that we don't know the map of the Universe as well as the map of our infinitesimal parish, he is hooted, reviled and perhaps told that he will be damned to all eternity for his faithlessness." The characteristic of Leslie Stephen's essays is that they are less directed to showing that orthodox theology is untrue as that there is no reality about it, and that its solutions of difficulties are sham solutions. If it solved any part of the mystery, it would be welcome, but it does not, it only adds new difficulties. It is "a mere edifice of moonshine." The writer makes no attempt to prove by logic that ultimate reality lies outside the limits of human reason. He bases this conclusion on the fact that all philosophers hopelessly contradict one another; if the subject-matter

of philosophy were, like physical science, within the reach of the intelligence, some agreement must have been reached.

The Broad Church movement, the attempts to liberalize Christianity, to pour its old wine into new bottles, to make it unsectarian and undogmatic, to find compromises between theology and science, found no favour in Leslie Stephen's eyes, and he criticized all this with a certain contempt. There was a controversy about the efficacy of prayer. Is it reasonable, for instance, to pray for rain? Here science and theology were at issue on a practical point which comes within the domain of science. Some theologians adopted the compromise that to pray against an eclipse would be foolish, but to pray for rain might be sensible. "One phenomenon," Stephen wrote, "is just as much the result of fixed causes as the other; but it is easier for the imagination to suppose the interference of a divine agent to be hidden away somewhere amidst the infinitely complex play of forces, which elude our calculations in meteorological phenomena, than to believe in it where the forces are simple enough to admit of prediction. The distinction is of course invalid in a scientific sense. Almighty power can interfere as easily with the events which are, as with those which are

not, in the Nautical Almanac. One cannot suppose that God retreats as science advances, and that he spoke in thunder and lightning till Franklin unravelled the laws of their phenomena."

Again, when a controversy about hell engaged public attention, and some otherwise orthodox theologians bethought themselves that eternal punishment was a horrible doctrine and then found that the evidence for it was not quite conclusive and were bold enough to say so, Leslie Stephen stepped in to point out that, if so, historical Christianity deserves all that its most virulent enemies have said about it in this respect. When the Christian creed really ruled men's consciences, nobody could utter a word against the truth of the dogma of hell. If that dogma had not an intimate organic connection with the creed, if it had been a mere unimportant accident, it could not have been so vigorous and persistent wherever Christianity was strongest. The attempt to eliminate it or soften it down is a sign of decline. "Now, at last, your creed is decaying. People have discovered that you know nothing about it; that heaven and hell belong to dreamland; that the impertinent young curate who tells me that I shall be burnt everlastingly for not sharing his superstition is just as ignorant

as I am myself, and that I know as much as my dog. And then you calmly say again, 'It is all a mistake. Only believe in a something—and we will make it as easy for you as possible. Hell shall have no more than a fine equable temperature, really good for the constitution; there shall be nobody in it except Judas Iscariot and one or two others; and even the poor Devil shall have a chance if he will resolve to mend his ways.'"

Mr. Matthew Arnold may, I suppose, be numbered among the agnostics, but he was of a very different type. He introduced a new kind of criticism of the Bible—literary criticism. Deeply concerned for morality and religion, a supporter of the Established Church, he took the Bible under his special protection, and in three works, *St. Paul and Protestantism*, 1870, *Literature and Dogma*, 1873, and *God and the Bible*, 1875, he endeavoured to rescue that book from its orthodox exponents, whom he regarded as the corrupters of Christianity. It would be just, he says, "but hardly perhaps Christian" to fling back the word infidel at the orthodox theologians for their bad literary and scientific criticisms of the Bible and to speak of "the torrent of infidelity which pours every Sunday from our pulpits!" The corruption of Christianity has been due to theology "with

its insane licence of affirmation about God, its insane licence of affirmation about immortality"; to the hypothesis of "a magnified and non-natural man at the head of mankind's and the world's affairs"; and the fancy account of God "made up by putting scattered expressions of the Bible together and taking them literally." He chastises with urbane persiflage the knowledge which the orthodox think they possess about the proceedings and plans of God. "To think they know what passed in the Council of the Trinity is not hard to them; they could easily think they even knew what were the hangings of the Trinity's council-chamber." Yet "the very expression, *the Trinity*, jars with the whole idea and character of Bible-religion; but, lest the Socinian should be unduly elated at hearing this, let us hasten to add that so too, and just as much, does the expression, a great Personal First Cause." He uses *God* as the least inadequate name for that universal order which the intellect feels after as a law, and the heart feels after as a benefit; and defines it as "the stream of tendency by which all things strive to fulfil the law of their being." He defined it further as a Power that makes for righteousness, and thus went considerably beyond the agnostic position. He was impatient of the

minute criticism which analyses the Biblical documents and discovers inconsistencies and absurdities, and he did not appreciate the importance of the comparative study of religions. But when we read of a dignitary in a recent Church congress laying down that the narratives in the books of Jonah and Daniel must be accepted because Jesus quoted them, we may wish that Arnold were here to reproach the orthodox for "want of intellectual seriousness."

These years also saw the appearance of Mr. John Morley's sympathetic studies of the French freethinkers of the eighteenth century, *Voltaire* (1872), *Rousseau* (1873), and *Diderot* (1878). He edited the *Fortnightly Review*, and for some years this journal was distinguished by brilliant criticisms on the popular religion, contributed by able men writing from many points of view. A part of the book which he afterwards published under the title *Compromise* appeared in the *Fortnightly* in 1874. In *Compromise* "the whole system of objective propositions which make up the popular belief of the day" is condemned as mischievous, and it is urged that those who disbelieve should speak out plainly. Speaking out is an intellectual duty. Englishmen have a strong sense of political responsibility, and a correspondingly weak

sense of intellectual responsibility. Even minds that are not commonplace are affected for the worse by the political spirit which " is the great force in throwing love of truth and accurate reasoning into a secondary place." And the principles which have prevailed in politics have been adopted by theology for her own use. In the one case, convenience first, truth second; in the other, emotional comfort first, truth second. If the immorality is less gross in the case of religion, there is " the stain of intellectual improbity." And this is a crime against society, for " they who tamper with veracity from whatever motive are tampering with the vital force of human progress." The intellectual insincerity which is here blamed is just as prevalent to-day. The English have not changed their nature, the " political " spirit is still rampant, and we are ruled by the view that because compromise is necessary in politics it is also a good thing in the intellectual domain.

The *Fortnightly* under Mr. Morley's guidance was an effective organ of enlightenment. I have no space to touch on the works of other men of letters and of men of science in these combative years, but it is to be noted that, while denunciations of modern thought poured from the pulpits, a popular diffusion of freethought was carried on, especially

by Mr. Bradlaugh in public lectures and in his paper, the *National Reformer*, not without collisions with the civil authorities.

If we take the cases in which the civil authorities in England have intervened to repress the publication of unorthodox opinions during the last two centuries, we find that the object has always been to prevent the spread of freethought among the masses. The victims have been either poor, uneducated people, or men who propagated free thought in a popular form. I touched upon this before in speaking of Paine, and it is borne out by the prosecutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The unconfessed motive has been fear of the people. Theology has been regarded as a good instrument for keeping the poor in order, and unbelief as a cause or accompaniment of dangerous political opinions. The idea has not altogether disappeared that free thought is peculiarly indecent in the poor, that it is highly desirable to keep them superstitious in order to keep them contented, that they should be duly thankful for all the theological as well as social arrangements which have been made for them by their betters. I may quote from an essay of Mr. Frederic Harrison an anecdote which admirably expresses the becoming attitude of the poor towards ecclesiastical

institutions. "The master of a workhouse in Essex was once called in to act as chaplain to a dying pauper. The poor soul faintly murmured some hopes of heaven. But this the master abruptly cut short and warned him to turn his last thoughts towards hell. 'And thankful you ought to be,' said he, 'that you have a hell to go to.'"

The most important English freethinkers who appealed to the masses were Holyoake,[1] the apostle of "secularism," and Bradlaugh. The great achievement for which Bradlaugh will be best remembered was the securing of the right of unbelievers to sit in Parliament without taking an oath (1888). The chief work to which Holyoake (who in his early years was imprisoned for blasphemy) contributed was the abolition of taxes on the Press, which seriously hampered the popular diffusion of knowledge.[2] In England, censorship of the Press had long ago disappeared

[1] It may be noted that Holyoake towards the end of his life helped to found the Rationalist Press Association, of which Mr. Edward Clodd has been for many years Chairman. This is the chief society in England for propagating rationalism, and its main object is to diffuse in a cheap form the works of freethinkers of mark (cp. Bibliography). I understand that more than two million copies of its cheap reprints have been sold.

[2] The advertisement tax was abolished in 1853, the stamp tax in 1855, the paper duty in 1861, and the optional duty in 1870.

(above, p. 139); in most other European countries it was abolished in the course of the nineteenth century.[1]

In the progressive countries of Europe there has been a marked growth of tolerance (I do not mean legal toleration, but the tolerance of public opinion), during the last thirty years. A generation ago Lord Morley wrote: "The preliminary stage has scarcely been reached—the stage in which public opinion grants to every one the unrestricted right of shaping his own beliefs, independently of those of the people who surround him." I think this preliminary stage has now been passed. Take England. We are now far from the days when Dr. Arnold would have sent the elder Mill to Botany Bay for irreligious opinions. But we are also far from the days when Darwin's *Descent* created an uproar. Darwin has been buried in Westminster Abbey. To-day books can appear denying the historical existence of Jesus without causing any commotion. It may be doubted whether what Lord Acton wrote in 1877 would be true now: "There are in our day many educated men who think it right to

[1] In Austria-Hungary the police have the power to suppress printed matter provisionally. In Russia the Press was declared free in 1905 by an Imperial decree, which, however, has become a dead letter. The newspapers are completely under the control of the police.

persecute." In 1895, Lecky was a candidate for the representation of Dublin University. His rationalistic opinions were indeed brought up against him, but he was successful, though the majority of the constituents were orthodox. In the seventies his candidature would have been hopeless. The old commonplace that a freethinker is sure to be immoral is no longer heard. We may say that we have now reached a stage at which it is admitted by every one who counts (except at the Vatican), that there is nothing in earth or heaven which may not legitimately be treated without any of the assumptions which in old days authority used to impose.

In this brief review of the triumphs of reason in the nineteenth century, we have been considering the discoveries of science and criticism which made the old orthodoxy logically untenable. But the advance in freedom of thought, the marked difference in the general attitude of men in all lands towards theological authority to-day from the attitude of a hundred years ago, cannot altogether be explained by the power of logic. It is not so much criticism of old ideas as the appearance of new ideas and interests that changes the views of men at large. It is not logical demonstrations but new social conceptions that bring about a general trans-

formation of attitude towards ultimate problems. Now the idea of the progress of the human race must, I think, be held largely answerable for this change of attitude. It must, I think, be held to have operated powerfully as a solvent of theological beliefs. I have spoken of the teaching of Diderot and his friends that man's energies should be devoted to making the earth pleasant. A new ideal was substituted for the old ideal based on theological propositions. It inspired the English Utilitarian philosophers (Bentham, James Mill, J. S. Mill, Grote) who preached the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the supreme object of action and the basis of morality. This ideal was powerfully reinforced by the doctrine of historical progress, which was started in France (1750) by Turgot, who made progress the organic principle of history. It was developed by Condorcet (1793), and put forward by Priestley in England. The idea was seized upon by the French socialistic philosophers, Saint-Simon and Fourier. The optimism of Fourier went so far as to anticipate the time when the sea would be turned by man's ingenuity into lemonade, when there would be 37 million poets as great as Homer, 37 million writers as great as Molière, 37 million men of science equal to Newton. But it was Comte

who gave the doctrine weight and power. His social philosophy and his religion of Humanity are based upon it. The triumphs of science endorsed it; it has been associated with, though it is not necessarily implied in, the scientific theory of evolution; and it is perhaps fair to say that it has been the guiding spiritual force of the nineteenth century. It has introduced the new ethical principle of duty to posterity. We shall hardly be far wrong if we say that the new interest in the future and the progress of the race has done a great deal to undermine unconsciously the old interest in a life beyond the grave; and it has dissolved the blighting doctrine of the radical corruption of man.

Nowhere has the theory of progress been more emphatically recognized than in the Monistic movement which has been exciting great interest in Germany (1910–12). This movement is based on the ideas of Haeckel, who is looked up to as the master, but those ideas have been considerably changed under the influence of Ostwald, the new leader. While Haeckel is a biologist, Ostwald's brilliant work was done in chemistry and physics. The new Monism differs from the old, in the first place, in being much less dogmatic. It declares that all that is in our experience can be the object of a corresponding

science. It is much more a method than a system, for its sole ultimate object is to comprehend all human experience in unified knowledge. Secondly, while it maintains, with Haeckel, evolution as the guiding principle in the history of living things, it rejects his pantheism and his theory of thinking atoms. The old mechanical theory of the physical world has been gradually supplanted by the theory of energy, and Ostwald, who was one of the foremost exponents of energy, has made it a leading idea of Monism. What has been called matter is, so far as we know now, simply a complex of energies, and he has sought to extend the "energetic" principle from physical or chemical to biological, psychical, and social phenomena. But it is to be observed that no finality is claimed for the conception of energy; it is simply an hypothesis which corresponds to our present stage of knowledge, and may, as knowledge advances, be superseded.

Monism resembles the positive philosophy and religion of Comte in so far as it means an outlook on life based entirely on science and excluding theology, mysticism, and metaphysics. It may be called a religion, if we adopt Mr. MacTaggart's definition of religion as "an emotion resting on a conviction of the harmony between ourselves and the

universe at large." But it is much better not to use the word religion in connexion with it, and the Monists have no thought of founding a Monistic, as Comte founded a Positivist, church. They insist upon the sharp opposition between the outlook of science and the outlook of religion, and find the mark of spiritual progress in the fact that religion is gradually becoming less indispensable. The further we go back in the past, the more valuable is religion as an element in civilization; as we advance, it retreats more and more into the background, to be replaced by science. Religions have been, in principle, pessimistic, so far as the present world is concerned; Monism is, in principle, optimistic, for it recognizes that the process of his evolution has overcome, in increasing measure, the bad element in man, and will go on overcoming it still more. Monism proclaims that development and progress are the practical principles of human conduct, while the Churches, especially the Catholic Church, have been steadily conservative, and though they have been unable to put a stop to progress have endeavoured to suppress its symptoms—to bottle up the steam.[1] The

[1] I have taken these points, illustrating the Monistic attitude to the Churches, from Ostwald's *Monistic Sunday Sermons* (German), 1911, 1912.

Monistic congress at Hamburg in 1911 had a success which surprised its promoters. The movement bids fair to be a powerful influence in diffusing rationalistic thought.[1]

If we take the three large States of Western Europe, in which the majority of Christians are Catholics, we see how the ideal of progress, freedom of thought, and the decline of ecclesiastical power go together. In Spain, where the Church has enormous power and wealth and can still dictate to the Court and the politicians, the idea of progress, which is vital in France and Italy, has not yet made its influence seriously felt. Liberal thought indeed is widely spread in the small educated class, but the great majority of the whole population are illiterate, and it is the interest of the Church to keep them so. The education of the people, as all enlightened Spaniards confess, is the pressing need of the country. How formidable are the obstacles which will have to be overcome before modern education is allowed to spread was shown four years ago by the tragedy of Francisco Ferrer, which reminded everybody that in one corner of Western Europe the mediæval

[1] I may note here that, as this is not a history of thought, I make no reference to recent philosophical speculations (in America, England, and France) which are sometimes claimed as tending to bolster up theology. But they are all profoundly unorthodox.

spirit is still vigorous. Ferrer had devoted himself to the founding of modern schools in the province of Catalonia (since 1901). He was a rationalist, and his schools, which had a marked success, were entirely secular. The ecclesiastical authorities execrated him, and in the summer of 1909 chance gave them the means of destroying him. A strike of workmen at Barcelona developed into a violent revolution, Ferrer happened to be in Barcelona for some days at the beginning of the movement, with which he had no connection whatever, and his enemies seized the opportunity to make him responsible for it. False evidence (including forged documents) was manufactured. Evidence which would have helped his case was suppressed. The Catholic papers agitated against him, and the leading ecclesiastics of Barcelona urged the Government not to spare the man who founded the modern schools, the root of all the trouble. Ferrer was condemned by a military tribunal and shot (Oct. 13). He suffered in the cause of reason and freedom of thought, though, as there is no longer an Inquisition, his enemies had to kill him under the false charge of anarchy and treason. It is possible that the indignation which was felt in Europe and was most loudly expressed in France may prevent the repetition of such extreme measures, but

almost anything may happen in a country where the Church is so powerful and so bigoted, and the politicians so corrupt.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JUSTIFICATION OF LIBERTY OF THOUGHT

Most men who have been brought up in the free atmosphere of a modern State sympathize with liberty in its long struggle with authority and may find it difficult to see that anything can be said for the tyrannical, and as they think extraordinarily perverse, policy by which communities and governments persistently sought to stifle new ideas and suppress free speculation. The conflict sketched in these pages appears as a war between light and darkness. We exclaim that altar and throne formed a sinister conspiracy against the progress of humanity. We look back with horror at the things which so many champions of reason endured at the hands of blind, if not malignant, bearers of authority.

But a more or less plausible case can be made out for coercion. Let us take the most limited view of the lawful powers of society over its individual members. Let us lay

down, with Mill, that "the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually and collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their members is self-protection," and that coercion is only justified for the prevention of harm to others. This is the minimum claim the State can make, and it will be admitted that it is not only the right but the duty of the State to prevent harm to its members. That is what it is for. Now no abstract or independent principle is discoverable, why liberty of speech should be a privileged form of liberty of action, or why society should lay down its arms of defence and fold its hands, when it is persuaded that harm is threatened to it through the speech of any of its members. The Government has to judge of the danger, and its judgment may be wrong; but if it is convinced that harm is being done, is it not its plain duty to interfere?

This argument supplies an apology for the suppression of free opinion by Governments in ancient and modern times. It can be urged for the Inquisition, for Censorship of the Press, for Blasphemy laws, for all coercive measures of the kind, that, if excessive or ill-judged, they were intended to protect society against what their authors sincerely believed to be grave injury, and were simple acts of duty. (This apology, of course, does not

extend to acts done for the sake of the alleged good of the victims themselves, namely, to secure their future salvation.)

Nowadays we condemn all such measures and disallow the right of the State to interfere with the free expression of opinion. So deeply is the doctrine of liberty seated in our minds that we find it difficult to make allowances for the coercive practices of our misguided ancestors. How is this doctrine justified? It rests on no abstract basis, on no principle independent of society itself, but entirely on considerations of utility.

We saw how Socrates indicated the social value of freedom of discussion. We saw how Milton observed that such freedom was necessary for the advance of knowledge. But in the period during which the cause of toleration was fought for and practically won, the argument more generally used was the injustice of punishing a man for opinions which he honestly held and could not help holding, since conviction is not a matter of will; in other words, the argument that error is not a crime and that it is therefore unjust to punish it. This argument, however, does not prove the case for freedom of discussion. The advocate of coercion may reply: We admit that it is unjust to punish a man for private erroneous beliefs; but it is not unjust to forbid the

propagation of such beliefs if we are convinced that they are harmful; it is not unjust to punish him, not for holding them, but for publishing them. The truth is that, in examining principles, the word *just* is misleading. All the virtues are based on experience, physiological or social, and justice is no exception. *Just* designates a class of rules or principles of which the social utility has been found by experience to be paramount and which are recognized to be so important as to override all considerations of immediate expediency. And social utility is the only test. It is futile, therefore, to say to a Government that it acts unjustly in coercing opinion, unless it is shown that freedom of opinion is a principle of such overmastering social utility as to render other considerations negligible. Socrates had a true instinct in taking the line that freedom is valuable to society.

The reasoned justification of liberty of thought is due to J. S. Mill, who set it forth in his work *On Liberty*, published in 1859. This book treats of liberty in general, and attempts to fix the frontier of the region in which individual freedom should be considered absolute and unassailable. The second chapter considers liberty of thought and discussion, and if many may think that Mill unduly minimized the functions of

society, underrating its claims as against the individual, few will deny the justice of the chief arguments or question the general soundness of his conclusions.

Pointing out that no fixed standard was recognized for testing the propriety of the interference on the part of the community with its individual members, he finds the test in self-protection, that is, the prevention of harm to others. He bases the principle not on abstract rights, but on "utility, in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being." He then uses the following argument to show that to silence opinion and discussion is always contrary to those permanent interests. Those who would suppress an opinion (it is assumed that they are honest) deny its truth, but they are not infallible. They may be wrong, or right, or partly wrong and partly right. (1) If they are wrong and the opinion they would crush is true, they have robbed, or done their utmost to rob, mankind of a truth. They will say: But we were justified, for we exercised our judgment to the best of our ability, and are we to be told that because our judgment is fallible we are not to use it? We forbade the propagation of an opinion which we were sure was false and pernicious; this implies no greater claim to infallibility than any act done

by public authority. If we are to act at all, we must assume our own opinion to be true. To this Mill acutely replies: "There is the greatest difference between assuming an opinion to be true, because with every opportunity for contesting it it has not been refuted, and assuming its truth for the purpose of not permitting its refutation. Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action, and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right."

(2) If the received opinion which it is sought to protect against the intrusion of error, is true, the suppression of discussion is still contrary to general utility. A received opinion may happen to be true (it is very seldom entirely true); but a rational certainty that it is so can only be secured by the fact that it has been fully canvassed but has not been shaken.

Commoner and more important is (3) the case where the conflicting doctrines share the truth between them. Here Mill has little difficulty in proving the utility of supplementing one-sided popular truths by other truths which popular opinion omits to consider. And he observes that if either of the opinions

which share the truth has a claim not merely to be tolerated but to be encouraged, it is the one which happens to be held by the minority, since this is the one "which for the time being represents the neglected interests." He takes the doctrines of Rousseau, which might conceivably have been suppressed as pernicious. To the self-complacent eighteenth century those doctrines came as "a salutary shock, dislocating the compact mass of one-sided opinion." The current opinions were indeed nearer to the truth than Rousseau's, they contained much less of error; "nevertheless there lay in Rousseau's doctrine, and has floated down the stream of opinion along with it, a considerable amount of exactly those truths which the popular opinion wanted; and these are the deposit which was left behind when the flood subsided."

Such is the drift of Mill's main argument. The present writer would prefer to state the justification of freedom of opinion in a somewhat different form, though in accordance with Mill's reasoning. The progress of civilization, if it is partly conditioned by circumstances beyond man's control, depends more, and in an increasing measure, on things which are within his own power. Prominent among these are the advancement of knowledge and the deliberate adaptation of his

habits and institutions to new conditions. To advance knowledge and to correct errors, unrestricted freedom of discussion is required. History shows that knowledge grew when speculation was perfectly free in Greece, and that in modern times, since restrictions on inquiry have been entirely removed, it has advanced with a velocity which would seem diabolical to the slaves of the mediæval Church. Then, it is obvious that in order to readjust social customs, institutions, and methods to new needs and circumstances, there must be unlimited freedom of canvassing and criticizing them, of expressing the most unpopular opinions, no matter how offensive to prevailing sentiment they may be. If the history of civilization has any lesson to teach it is this: there is one supreme condition of mental and moral progress which it is completely within the power of man himself to secure, and that is perfect liberty of thought and discussion. The establishment of this liberty may be considered the most valuable achievement of modern civilization, and as a condition of social progress it should be deemed fundamental. The considerations of permanent utility on which it rests must outweigh any calculations of present advantage which from time to time might be thought to demand its violation.

It is evident that this whole argument depends on the assumption that the progress of the race, its intellectual and moral development, is a reality and is valuable. The argument will not appeal to any one who holds with Cardinal Newman that "our race's progress and perfectibility is a dream, because revelation contradicts it"; and he may consistently subscribe to the same writer's conviction that "it would be a gain to this country were it vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce in its religion, than at present it shows itself to be."

While Mill was writing his brilliant Essay, which every one should read, the English Government of the day (1858) instituted prosecutions for the circulation of the doctrine that it is lawful to put tyrants to death, on the ground that the doctrine is immoral. Fortunately the prosecutions were not persisted in. Mill refers to the matter, and maintains that such a doctrine as tyrannicide (and, let us add, anarchy) does not form any exception to the rule that "there ought to exist the fullest liberty of professing and discussing, as a matter of ethical conviction, any doctrine, however immoral it may be considered."

Exceptions, cases where the interference

of the authorities is proper, are only apparent, for they really come under another rule. For instance, if there is a direct instigation to particular acts of violence, there may be a legitimate case for interference. But the incitement must be deliberate and direct. If I write a book condemning existing societies and defending a theory of anarchy, and a man who reads it presently commits an outrage, it may clearly be established that my book made the man an anarchist and induced him to commit the crime, but it would be illegitimate to punish me or suppress the book unless it contained a direct incitement to the specific crime which he committed.

It is conceivable that difficult cases might arise where a government might be strongly tempted, and might be urged by public clamour, to violate the principle of liberty. Let us suppose a case, very improbable, but which will make the issue clear and definite. Imagine that a man of highly magnetic personality, endowed with a wonderful power of infecting others with his own ideas however irrational, in short a typical religious leader, is convinced that the world will come to an end in the course of a few months. He goes about the country preaching and distributing pamphlets; his words have an electrical effect; and the masses of the uneducated

and half-educated are persuaded that they have indeed only a few weeks to prepare for the day of Judgment. Multitudes leave their occupations, abandon their work, in order to spend the short time that remains in prayer and listening to the exhortations of the prophet, The country is paralysed by the gigantic strike; traffic and industries come to a standstill. The people have a perfect legal right to give up their work, and the prophet has a perfect legal right to propagate his opinion that the end of the world is at hand—an opinion which Jesus Christ and his followers in their day held quite as erroneously. It would be said that desperate ills have desperate remedies, and there would be a strong temptation to suppress the fanatic. But to arrest a man who is not breaking the law or exhorting any one to break it, or causing a breach of the peace, would be an act of glaring tyranny. Many will hold that the evil of setting back the clock of liberty would outbalance all the temporary evils, great as they might be, caused by the propagation of a delusion. It would be absurd to deny that liberty of speech may sometimes cause particular harm. Every good thing sometimes does harm. Government, for instance, which makes fatal mistakes; law, which so often bears hardly and inequitably in individual cases. And

can the Christians urge any other plea for their religion when they are unpleasantly reminded that it has caused untold suffering by its principle of exclusive salvation?

Once the principle of liberty of thought is accepted as a supreme condition of social progress, it passes from the sphere of ordinary expediency into the sphere of higher expediency which we call justice. In other words it becomes a right on which every man should be able to count. The fact that this right is ultimately based on utility does not justify a Government in curtailing it, on the ground of utility, in particular cases.

The recent rather alarming inflictions of penalties for blasphemy in England illustrate this point. It was commonly supposed that the Blasphemy laws (see above, p. 139), though unrepealed, were a dead letter. But since December 1911 half a dozen persons have been imprisoned for this offence. In these cases Christian doctrines were attacked by poor and more or less uneducated persons in language which may be described as coarse and offensive. Some of the judges seem to have taken the line that it is not blasphemy to attack the fundamental doctrines provided "the decencies of controversy" are preserved, but that "indecent" attacks constitute blasphemy. This implies a new definition of

legal blasphemy, and is entirely contrary to the intention of the laws. Sir J. F. Stephen pointed out that the decisions of judges from the time of Lord Hale (XVIIth century) to the trial of Foote (1883) laid down the same doctrine and based it on the same principle: the doctrine being that it is a crime either to deny the truth of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion or to hold them up to contempt or ridicule; and the principle being that Christianity is a part of the law of the land.

The apology offered for such prosecutions is that their object is to protect religious sentiment from insult and ridicule. Sir J. F. Stephen observed: "If the law were really impartial and punished blasphemy only, because it offends the feelings of believers, it ought also to punish such preaching as offends the feelings of unbelievers. All the more earnest and enthusiastic forms of religion are extremely offensive to those who do not believe them." If the law does not in any sense recognize the truth of Christian doctrine, it would have to apply the same rule to the Salvation Army. In fact the law "can be explained and justified only on what I regard as its true principle—the principle of persecution." The opponents of Christianity may justly say: If Christianity is false, why

is it to be attacked only in polite language? Its goodness depends on its truth. If you grant its falsehood, you cannot maintain that it deserves special protection. But the law imposes no restraint on the Christian, however offensive his teaching may be to those who do not agree with him; therefore it is not based on an impartial desire to prevent the use of language which causes offence; therefore it is based on the hypothesis that Christianity is true; and therefore its principle is persecution.

Of course, the present administration of the common law in regard to blasphemy does not endanger the liberty of those unbelievers who have the capacity for contributing to progress. But it violates the supreme principle of liberty of opinion and discussion. It hinders uneducated people from saying in the only ways in which they know how to say it, what those who have been brought up differently say, with impunity, far more effectively and far more insidiously. Some of the men who have been imprisoned during the last two years, only uttered in language of deplorable taste views that are expressed more or less politely in books which are in the library of a bishop unless he is a very ignorant person, and against which the law, if it has any validity, ought to have been enforced.

Thus the law, as now administered, simply penalizes bad taste and places disabilities upon uneducated freethinkers. If their words offend their audience so far as to cause a disturbance, they should be prosecuted for a breach of public order,[1] not because their words are blasphemous. A man who robs or injures a church, or even an episcopal palace, is not prosecuted for sacrilege but for larceny or malicious damage or something of the kind.

The abolition of penalties for blasphemy was proposed in the House of Commons (by Bradlaugh) in 1889 and rejected. The reform is urgently needed. It would "prevent the recurrence at irregular intervals of scandalous prosecutions which have never in any one instance benefited any one, least of all the cause which they were intended to serve, and which sometimes afford a channel for the gratification of private malice under the cloak of religion."[2]

The struggle of reason against authority has ended in what appears now to be a decisive and permanent victory for liberty. In the

[1] Blasphemy is an offence in Germany; but it must be proved that offence has actually been given, and the penalty does not exceed imprisonment for three days.

[2] The quotations are from Sir J. F. Stephen's article, "Blasphemy and Blasphemous Libel," in the *Fortnightly Review*, March, 1884, pp. 289–318.

most civilized and progressive countries, freedom of discussion is recognized as a fundamental principle. In fact, we may say it is accepted as a test of enlightenment, and the man in the street is forward in acknowledging that countries like Russia and Spain, where opinion is more or less fettered, must on that account be considered less civilized than their neighbours. All intellectual people who count take it for granted that there is no subject in heaven or earth which ought not to be investigated without any deference or reference to theological assumptions. No man of science has any fear of publishing his researches, whatever consequences they may involve for current beliefs. Criticism of religious doctrines and of political and social institutions is free. Hopeful people may feel confident that the victory is permanent; that intellectual freedom is now assured to mankind as a possession for ever; that the future will see the collapse of those forces which still work against it and its gradual diffusion in the more backward parts of the earth. Yet history may suggest that this prospect is not assured. Can we be certain that there may not come a great set-back? For freedom of discussion and speculation was, as we saw, fully realized in the Greek and Roman world, and then an unforeseen

force, in the shape of Christianity, came in and laid chains upon the human mind and suppressed freedom and imposed upon man a weary struggle to recover the freedom which he had lost. Is it not conceivable that something of the same kind may occur again? that some new force, emerging from the unknown, may surprise the world and cause a similar set-back?

The possibility cannot be denied, but there are some considerations which render it improbable (apart from a catastrophe sweeping away European culture). There are certain radical differences between the intellectual situation now and in antiquity. The facts known to the Greeks about the nature of the physical universe were few. Much that was taught was not proved. Compare what they knew and what we know about astronomy and geography—to take the two branches in which (besides mathematics) they made most progress. When there were so few demonstrated facts to work upon, there was the widest room for speculation. Now to suppress a number of rival theories in favour of one is a very different thing from suppressing whole systems of established facts. If one school of astronomers holds that the earth goes round the sun, another that the sun goes round the earth, but neither is

able to demonstrate its proposition, it is easy for an authority, which has coercive power, to suppress one of them successfully. But once it is agreed by all astronomers that the earth goes round the sun, it is a hopeless task for any authority to compel men to accept a false view. In short, because she is in possession of a vast mass of ascertained facts about the nature of the universe, reason holds a much stronger position now than at the time when Christian theology led her captive. All these facts are her fortifications. Again, it is difficult to see what can arrest the continuous progress of knowledge in the future. In ancient times this progress depended on a few; nowadays, many nations take part in the work. A general conviction of the importance of science prevails to-day, which did not prevail in Greece. And the circumstance that the advance of material civilization depends on science is perhaps a practical guarantee that scientific research will not come to an abrupt halt. In fact science is now a social institution, as much as religion.

But if science seems pretty safe, it is always possible that in countries where the scientific spirit is held in honour, nevertheless, serious restrictions may be laid on speculations touching social, political and religious questions.

Russia has men of science inferior to none, and Russia has its notorious censorship. It is by no means inconceivable that in lands where opinion is now free coercion might be introduced. If a revolutionary social movement prevailed, led by men inspired by faith in formulas (like the men of the French Revolution) and resolved to impose their creed, experience shows that coercion would almost inevitably be resorted to. Nevertheless, while it would be silly to suppose that attempts may not be made in the future to put back the clock, liberty is in a far more favourable position now than under the Roman Empire. For at that time the social importance of freedom of opinion was not appreciated, whereas now, in consequence of the long conflict which was necessary in order to re-establish it, men consciously realize its value. Perhaps this conviction will be strong enough to resist all conspiracies against liberty. Meanwhile, nothing should be left undone to impress upon the young that freedom of thought is an axiom of human progress. It may be feared, however, that this is not likely to be done for a long time to come. For our methods of early education are founded on authority. It is true that children are sometimes exhorted to think for themselves. But the parent or instructor who gives this

excellent advice is confident that the results of the child's thinking for himself will agree with the opinions which his elders consider desirable. It is assumed that he will reason from principles which have already been instilled into him by authority. But if his thinking for himself takes the form of questioning these principles, whether moral or religious, his parents and teachers, unless they are very exceptional persons, will be extremely displeased, and will certainly discourage him. It is, of course, only singularly promising children whose freedom of thought will go so far. In this sense it might be said that "distrust thy father and mother" is the first commandment with promise. It should be a part of education to explain to children, as soon as they are old enough to understand, when it is reasonable, and when it is not, to accept what they are told, on authority.

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dever exigir-lhes.

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