historical religions can permanently satisfy the needs of the human spirit is that their founders and fashioners were all so densely ignorant of this revelation. Why should we, to whom the telescope and the microscope have revealed infinity at both ends of the scale of being, continue to interpret life in terms that seemed adequate to men who knew no more of the universe than the unaided eye disclosed to them? Why should knowledge (however incomplete) go to sheer ignorance for guidance and inspiration? The blind leading the blind is a classical example of absurdity; but for the seeing to turn for guidance to the blind is by many degrees absurder still.

If Dean Inge will glance at the front page of the *Literary Guide*, he will find Rationalism defined as "the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority." The only word in this definition which seems to me to need a little further defining is "supremacy." Reason, as I understand it, is supreme as contrasted with all forms of unreason; it is the best, the only, guide we possess; but "supreme" must not be interpreted as meaning all-efficient. The whole substratum of existence—the underpinning of the universe, so to speak—escapes the apprehension and criticism of reason. We have no reason to suppose it irrational or contradictory to reason; wherefore, we reject the patently and childishly ridiculous accounts of the matter offered by the anthropomorphic mythologies, Christianity included. We can trace the growth of these futile imaginings from the infancy of the race onwards, and know exactly how reason went astray in the mists of primeval ignorance. But though we know infinitely more of the nature, the interplay, the mechanism of phenomena than did our far-away ancestors, the efficient force that permeates them and links them together eludes our reason just as it did theirs. We no longer sacrifice

kings (real or titular) to propitiate the fertility-spirits; we find chemical manures on the whole more efficacious; but, though we have experimentally ascertained that such-and-such combinations of chemical factors will lead to such-and-such results, we are no nearer than before to understanding the origin of the properties or tendencies inherent in these substances. We know that arsenic, alcohol, and castor oil affect the human organism in certain widely different ways; but how these substances came to be endowed with such various and invariable powers remains an unsolved mystery. We are so familiar with the facts that they have ceased to surprise us; but the moment we ask reason to answer the questions "How?" and "Why?" it can only confess itself baffled. It can and does register the interactions of the substances out of which the universe is built up; but how these substances came into being, and acquired the power of acting and re-acting as they do, it is totally unable to say. The very existence of the universe, in fact, is a perpetual challenge to reason: so far as reason can see, it might so much more easily *not* have existed. To say "God created it" is to make a meaningless assertion, implying nothing but a conventional agreement to affix the label "God" (like the algebraic x) to an unknown something, conjectured to lie behind phenomena. On the other hand, the proposition "Jehovah, the God of the Jews, created the universe" conveys a clear and definite meaning; but it is so palpably absurd that reason unhesitatingly rejects it. So far reason is "supreme"; it can pass judgment on all propositions apprehensible by the human mind. Its judgments are not infallible, indeed—the very folk-lore which lies at the root of the historical religions is in its origin a product of reason misapplied. But the errors of reason can be corrected by reason alone; there is no higher court to which to appeal. And it is the first duty of reason to confess that the ultimate problems of existence are beyond its ken, outside its jurisdiction. Whether

they must for ever remain so is another question. One is inclined offhand to pronounce the limitations of human faculty unalterable and eternal; but there is no need to beg so great a question: reason, on reflection, urges a suspension of judgment. Perhaps the inconceivable Thaumaturge may one day show us "how it's done"; and in the meantime reason, confronted with a hundred pseudo-explanations, is fully competent to decide against them. For instance, when we are told that the universe was created by a God who about A.U.C. 750 begat a son, and commissioned him to get himself executed in order to appease his (the Father's) wrath against mankind, we can with the serenest confidence declare that this is how it's *not* done.

Some people—it is not quite clear whether Dean Inge is one of them—apply the term "mysticism" to any philosophy which recognizes the underlying mystery of life. This is surely a most inconvenient abuse of language. The mystic, properly so called, I take it, is one who recognizes the existence of mystery only to declare that it is no mystery to *him*—that, by some special gift of intuition or special favour of God, he has passed beyond the limits of reason, and lives, moves, and has his being in a non-rational or super-rational universe. His spiritual life consists in the ecstatic contemplation of things incomprehensible and unutterable, which are the only true realities in a world of illusion. He neither asserts nor demands any evidences for the faith that is in him; it is its own evidence, and disclaims all allegiance to normal laws of thought. There is all the difference in the world between the admission that reason is not all-efficient and the assertion that it is totally irrelevant to the spiritual life.

Whatever may be Dean Inge's definition of mysticism, he builds upon a mystical basis when he adduces as evidence of the truth of Christianity "the testimony of the saints and mystics about the revelations made to them

in prayer and contemplation." He utterly rejects my suggestion that these experiences are "a matter of disordered nerves"; and I do not maintain that all of them fall within the domain of the alienist, though some undoubtedly do. Even in people who are sane enough for all practical purposes, intense concentration on an idea antecedently surcharged with emotion may beget strange hallucinations. And, whatever their origin, such experiences cannot safely be cited as evidences for any particular religion, since all religions have their saints, their mystics, their illuminates. The "extraordinary uniformity" of the testimony of the Christian saints and mystics, which convinces Dean Inge "that they are speaking the truth when they say they have had these revelations," may be interpreted in quite another way. No one doubts that they believe themselves to be speaking the truth: that is not the question. The question is whether these subjective experiences can be accepted as "revelations" of objective truth; and the uniformity in which Dean Inge finds proof of revelation may more reasonably be taken as showing that the phenomena spring from natural causes—psychological tendencies operating uniformly in individuals subjected to similar influences. If the experiences were really revelations from on high, Omnipotence might surely be expected to show a little more inventiveness, and diversify its miracles.

Dean Inge's concluding admonition is addressed, not to me personally, but to "our Rationalists" in general. I shall not, however, hold him to the letter of his contention that I am not a Rationalist, but shall rather think myself justified in assuming that he had me specially in his eye.

> Our Rationalists [he says] ought to reflect that a creed which has satisfied so many men who (they can hardly deny it) were far greater and wiser than themselves cannot be worthy of their contempt. Their objections are not new, and are not based on modern discoveries. What

> these critics need is the historical sense, and a little humility.

We shall come presently to the "historical sense"; let us first examine the second clause in the Dean's prescription.

What is this appeal for humility but an abandonment of the whole Protestant position (as I understand it) and a denial of the right of private judgment? Are we, or are we not, to hold that it is a man's duty to think out for himself his relation to the Unseen, accepting help, no doubt, from the research, the learning, the thought of others, but ultimately clinging to the truth as he sees it, in defiance of mere Authority, however imposing; however pontifical? And if we are to allow authority to determine our beliefs, whose authority is it to be? The authorities are as diverse as they are dogmatic. Dean Inge himself has no hesitation in rejecting the authority of the Church of Rome, whose doctrines have been accepted without demur by "many men who (he can hardly deny it) were far greater and wiser than himself." Even within his own Church of England the immense preponderance of authority—or I am greatly mistaken—is decisively against many of the tenets which he habitually avows. And, if it comes to a confrontation of authorities, "our Rationalists" are not without their cloud of witnesses. They are in constant communion with the splendid Rationalisms of Athens and Rome; for no one, surely, will pretend that the high intelligences of either city clung to their local cults as Dean Inge clings to the Christian myth. In modern times, too—though a half-careless and half-cowardly reticence has veiled the nevertheless indubitable Rationalism of many distinguished persons—the array of avowed disbelievers in Christianity ought to inspire a certain respect even in Dean Inge. Shall we upbraid him with lack of humility in setting up his own opinions against those of so many great and wise men? No; I think we shall rather conclude that a

sincere and earnest thinker may, without suspicion of arrogance, confess his reasoned conviction that (in the words of Emerson) "a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honourable of this world affirm it to be the crack of doom."

Now for the lack of "historical sense" with which the Dean upbraids us. Here, with an audacity to which I take off my hat, he carries the war into the enemy's country. For it is precisely their lack of historical sense —a sense of historic proportion—that is our strongest reproach against the Christian apologists. This Christianity of theirs is, when all is said and done, such a paltry, parochial affair,

> Before the stony face of Time,
> And looked at by the silent stars.

What is history—which, for the purpose of the present argument, must undoubtedly include pre-history—what is it but the saga of the race of man on earth? And in proportion to the length and breadth of that saga, how small a part has Christianity played! What of all the darkling æons in which men were emerging from savagery? Where was Jehovah, where was his Son, during these countless centuries? Yet, if souls need saving at all, surely these vanished multitudes were worth saving. Are we not more and more clearly realizing the splendid capacities of many pre-historic races? And then, within the limits of historic record, how many great civilizations, or at any rate magnificent barbarisms, have risen, flourished, and fallen without help or hindrance from Christianity or its parent Judaism! Has not the whole vast and teeming continent of Asia, except one inconspicuous corner, subsisted, from the beginning of time to this present writing, in ignorance of, and indifference to, the one true religion? Of Africa and the Americas it is needless to speak. True, Africa was unexplored, and America undiscovered, until quite recent times; but God must surely have known of them. Could he not have

spared a Saviour for these continents? It seems like arbitrary race-discrimination to reserve salvation, through so many centuries, for the Caucasian alone. When, at long last, Christianity came upon the scene, and took root among the ruins of antique civilization, it no doubt became a prominent factor in history. In spite of its most strenuous endeavours, it was less successful than other religions in enslaving the intellect of men; so that great and even stupendous advances in knowledge and power were made in the one continent it had conquered. How far it can fairly take credit for these advances is a question which is open to rational dispute, though I think there can be little doubt as to the ultimate verdict of history. At all events, its most fanatical advocate will scarcely maintain that it holds an unblemished historic record—that it made up for its late appearance on the scene by being wholly beneficent when it did appear. Its apologists write-off its colossal and appalling atrocities as arising from melancholy corruptions of the pure religion of Christ; but could not the one true God have announced himself in a religion less liable to hideous corruption? Both in respect of what it has *not* done and of what it *has* done, Christianity, in sum, cuts a very equivocal figure at the bar of history. It finds equal difficulty in accounting for the æons of its non-existence, and in excusing the centuries of its existence.

And this leads me to a final word regarding Dean Inge's assertion that our "objections are not new, and are not based on modern discoveries." It is true, of course, that many of our criticisms are almost as old as Christianity itself, arising as they do from the mere application of common sense to the Christian myth. But I think the Dean must have said in his haste, and will scarcely repeat at his leisure, that our case is not (in very great measure at any rate) "based on modern discoveries," from the Copernican astronomy to the record of the rocks. The glaring disproportion between Christianity

and the vastness of the universe, both in space and time, is a "modern discovery." It was a great shock to Christianity (as the Church of Rome did not fail to realize) when the geocentric theory implicit in its theology went by the board. But even for two or three centuries after that it was still possible for intelligent men to believe that God created the world some 5,000 years ago, and that the prologue, at any rate, to the history of Christianity began with the creation. Even the story of the Fall, with the consequent necessity for redemption, though always wildly absurd, was not until about sixty years ago proved to be flagrantly impossible. Now these myths have taken their place once for all among the thousand analogous fables in the high-piled accumulations of folklore. As for internal criticism of the Christian documents, it was, though sufficiently damaging, quite tentative and unsystematic until our own time. Each new science, in short, no sooner raises its head than it begins to testify against Christianity: how, then, can the Dean possibly maintain that our case is not enormously strengthened by "modern discoveries"? The fact, indeed, that they lacked the light shed by modern discoveries goes far to account for that simple-minded acceptance of Christianity by "great and wise men" of the past which Dean Inge finds so impressive. Mr. Gladstone, born in 1809, whose mind therefore began to ossify about the middle of last century, could still talk of "the impregnable rock of the Holy Scriptures"; can any intelligent man, born in or since 1859, use such a phrase? Dean Inge himself, I think, knows in his subconscious soul that the Christian Gibraltar is hammered all to pieces by the terrible projectiles of latter-day artillery, though he still, with a gallantry worthy of a better cause, keeps the flag flying among the ruins.

IS THE BATTLE WON?

Is the battle won? Is it time for us to lay down our arms and fraternize with the enemy? Is the Reign of Reason established once for all, and no quarrel left, save for certain negligible differences of idiom?

Many well-meaning people are inclined to answer these questions in the affirmative. "Christianity," they say, "has been driven from its stronghold of Privilege. Its weapons of Persecution have been wrested from its grasp. Even its most ardent adherents no longer assert the supernatural origin of its documents. Its harping Heaven and its wailing Hell are remembered only with a smile. Its services are nothing but rather moving recognitions of the marvel of the universe, combined with commemorative homage to the beautiful character of a Galilean moralist-mystic. Even if we do not care to join in these acts of 'worship,' there is no reason why we should seek to disturb the complacency of those who find satisfaction in them."

At first sight, there is a certain speciousness about this plea for an armistice. It practically amounts to saying: "The victories of Reason have been many: all the essential positions have been won; shall we not let the vanquished withdraw with the honours of war?" There is a pleasing air of magnanimity in the suggestion.

Unfortunately, when we look into the arguments of the peace party, we observe in them a very slight correspondence with the facts of the case. Each of them is so exaggerated that its opposite is much nearer the truth. Christianity still enjoys enormous privileges. It still persecutes whenever it dares. The supernatural origin of

its documents is still widely asserted; and even those who yield to evidence on the point of origin, continue to claim for them supernatural authority. Heaven and Hell are still realities to many millions of people. The services of the church are still, to many millions, rites of magical efficacy; and the whole mythology of trinitarianism is still, to these people, a literal record of historic truth.

The optimism begotten of many victories, in short, tends to betray us into gross laxity in the use of terms. We say, "No one nowadays believes in Christianity," as though that statement were so near the truth as to justify us in making it a principle of action—or of inaction. As a matter of fact, it is neither more nor less true than the statement that "No one remains in London on Derby Day." Both assertions are monstrous falsehoods, as any one would soon discover who acted as though they were true.

It appears to me that the tendency to come to terms with Christianity—to accept it as an expression of vague collective religiosity, in language entirely purged of any literal significance—is a tendency to be firmly resisted. It has been in some measure strengthened by the War. We feel that it would show a sort of sectarian churlishness, and even intolerance, to hold aloof from national rites of triumph or of mourning, merely because they are couched in a dialect we do not love. We make no protest when we see the Cross, with all its abhorrent associations, dominating the monuments of our dead. We bare our heads before inscriptions "To the glory of God, and in memory of the men of this village," and have no means of showing that it is the men we reverence, not the God who (if, and in so far as, he exists) sent them to the slaughter. The noblest of suggested epitaphs came as near the truth as human speech can carry us, in the line—

Whom God abandoned, these defended;

but I have yet to see it carved upon a war memorial.

It is not the exact truth, because the word "God" has no exact meaning. Possibly the Manichæans are right—I, for one, do not utterly reject their doctrine—who hold that the War was an episode in the never-ending struggle between a Power of Light and a Power of Darkness, and that "God" finally carried the day, though the hosts of the Adversary took a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together. But we cannot ultimately rest in a dualistic conception of the universe; and at all events it is one which Christianity vehemently denies, though its whole mythology implicitly affirms it. We cannot think clearly in terms of "God"—that is the whole story. It is equally true, no doubt, that we can in no terms think clearly on a problem which so transcends thought as the origin and governance of the universe. But at least we can abstain from accepting Hebraic folklore as a solution of the mystery, and complicating it with a new incarnation-myth from which even the Hebrew intelligence recoils.

During the past summer [1922] I have had the advantage of several discussions with a Norwegian friend, Professor Christen Collin, than whom there is no more ardent or more intelligent thinker and worker for the future of humanity. Our discussions circled round the word "religion." Dr. Collin is so impressed with the necessity of "religion" for the human race that he is even prepared to go out some way to meet Mr. Wells's "Invisible King." He does not actually adhere to the sect of that elusive deity (who, by the way, seems rather to have taken a back seat of late); but he goes so far as to accept Mr. Wells's contention that the ideal government of mankind is, and must be, a theocracy. I, on the other hand, am inclined to dislike "religion" as a word of entirely vague, and for the most part objectionable, connotations. Its exact origin puzzles the philologists. It has no clear derivational meaning. The metaphor petrified in it is obscure. But it is no use falling out about the value of a

word. The idea that Dr. Collin attaches to "religion" is, I take it, something like "cosmic emotion"; and I entirely agree with him that a cosmic emotion which should unite mankind in wonder at the miracle of its existence, and even in hope that it might not prove a wholly meaningless marvel, is a thing eminently to be desired. Our real difference is, I think, that he is more inclined than I to attach value to the religions of the past, and to hope that the religion of the future may develop out of them—especially out of Christianity.

For those who cherish this hope it may seem the right policy to accept a truce with Christianity, and try, so to speak, to tame it by kindness. I, however, cannot but think otherwise. To me it seems that mankind can never achieve its highest potentialities till it has thrown off the incubus of historic (and prehistoric) religion, and broken with all the superstitions of its past.

"A cosmic emotion which shall unite mankind"—that is surely the one rational conception of the religion of the future. Is it within the bounds of possibility that any existing form of Christianity, or any possible transformation of the cult, should unite mankind? When Christianity shows any sign of uniting Christians, it will be time enough to speculate on its power of uniting the world. "I came not to send peace, but a sword," said Jesus: little dreaming, poor man, what a literal and ghastly truth he was uttering. From the very moment of its foundation, Christianity broke up into sects. Generated in the corruption of Roman statecraft and Greek philosophy, the new superstition, if it did not hasten, certainly did nothing to check, the decline and fall of ancient civilization. Neglect and a certain measure of persecution for a time retarded the development of its inherent vices; but as it gathered strength it gathered arrogance, intolerance, and cruelty. Its mythology, being founded on physical impossibilities and notions defiant of reason, afforded material for endless metaphysical

cobweb-spinning, which was vastly congenial to the decadent mentality of Rome and Byzantium, Antioch and Alexandria. As soon as priesthood got power into its hands, it set up the inhuman idol of Orthodoxy, and offered up holocausts on its altar. Arians and Athanasians, Monophysites and Nestorians, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, massacred each other with the abominable cruelty of vicious children. There is no more hatefully grotesque page in the annals of humanity than the story of the early Church. "The enmity of Christians to one another," said Ammian, "surpasses the fury of savage beasts against man"; and Gregory Nazianzen confessed that "the kingdom of heaven was converted by discord into the image of hell itself." Wars of religion have always been cruel wars; but in those of modern times there has generally been some political motive behind the theological atrocities, rendering them, not less atrocious, but less idiotic. And if we do not now cut one another's throats to determine the precise relation of God the Father to God the Son, or the intimate physiological incidents and consequences of the Incarnation, it is not because these problems have been solved. They remain for ever insoluble, because they are problems in the realm of Non-Sense, where the writs of reason do not run. If they no longer lead to bloodshed, it is partly because the Churches have agreed to talk the language of Non-Sense without inquiring too closely into its meaning, and partly because the police would interfere if theologians of to-day behaved like their spiritual ancestors of the fourth and fifth centuries. One is bound to admit, however, that the rabid logicians of the early Church were trying to clear their own and each other's minds, whereas the peace of to-day (if it can be called peace) is purchased by a pusillanimous acquiescence in muddlement.

Though, as aforesaid, political and dynastic interests usually made modern wars of religion a little less insensate than those of old, the religious element in them

never failed to render the combatants ruthless in their savagery. If the Western Church, having left Eastern schismatics to "gang their ain gate" to perdition, settled down for some centuries to supine obscurantism, the first stirrings of reason were the signal for such cruelties of battle and siege, of rack and faggot, that the ministers of heaven (not in one sect alone) became indistinguishable, to the eye of reason, from emissaries of hell. Such was the "unity of cosmic emotion" begotten by Christianity. Even in the Ireland of to-day do we not see religious animosity embittering and dehumanizing political discord? What religion in the world has such an abominable record of intestine strife and barbarity?

"Alas!" say the apologists, "even Christians, even prelates and presbyters, even saints, have not always been faultless; but consider the other side of the case!—think what the world owes to Christianity!" and they calmly proceed to place to its credit the whole of modern civilization. Not otherwise did the eulogists of Queen Victoria, at the time of her Jubilee, write as though she had invented the locomotive engine, the telegraph and the telephone, discovered chloroform, dug the Suez Canal, tunnelled the Alps, built the great Atlantic liners, and written the works of Dickens and Thackeray, Tennyson and Browning, Spencer and Darwin. I was about to say that civilization was due to Christianity in the same sense in which all these achievements were due to Queen Victoria; but that would not be true. Queen Victoria did nothing to obstruct the glories of her reign; she may even be said to have furthered them by a constitutional conduct which favoured domestic peace; whereas Christianity has fought with tooth and nail, with gag and halter, against every advance of civilization. A few scientific discoveries have been made by ecclesiastics; but they published them at their peril. If it is true that some beautiful sayings of Jesus have contributed to the amelioration of manners, it is also true that the extreme

unworldliness or other-worldliness of his whole body of ethical doctrine has made it utterly ineffective as a general rule of life. It never has been, and never can be, put in practice. "Why not give Christianity a trial?" wrote Bernard Shaw at the beginning of one of his prefaces; and he went on: "The question seems a hopeless one after 2,000 years of resolute adherence to the old cry of 'Not this man, but Barabbas.'" His exposition of the Christianity of Christ need not here concern us. My present point is that, whatever the beauties of that doctrine, it remains the dream of an ignorant enthusiast who had no vision or divination of the real world, or of the problems that humanity would have to encounter. Christianity, as a world-institution, acts dishonestly when it plumes itself upon the humanitarian maxims of Jesus; for if individuals, sporadically, have put them in practice (and been derided and persecuted for their pains), the Church, as a whole, has contemptuously ignored them. Christianity has made many wars—it has prevented none. Christianity has sanctioned and practised the most hideous cruelties—seldom, if ever, has it officially interfered to forbid them. Individual philanthropists, no doubt, have been Christians; but what triumph of philanthropy can the Church, as a body, place to its credit? The cleansing of prisons? No! The humanizing of the penal code? No! The abolition of the slave-trade? No! The emancipation of the negro? No! There have been liberal Churchmen, no doubt; but every political reform has been bitterly opposed by the Church as a whole. The religious bodies which have contributed to progress have always and everywhere been in rebellion against the tyranny of a dominant Church. Christianity has brooded like a nightmare over Europe, and only in so far as men have cast off its spell have they succeeded in making the world a tolerable place to live in. Material progress has been achieved in spite of its indifference, moral progress in defiance of its ban.

"But what about charity?" it may be said. "Were not the monasteries in the Middle Ages a refuge for the poor and the oppressed? Is not the Church at this day a great charitable organization, taking up collections for 'the poor of the parish,' sending 'settlements' into the slums, doing a little here and a little there to alleviate the miseries of poverty?" Yes, the Church has always claimed to administer, and has often grossly maladministered, the world's charities, making in this way pathetically ineffectual efforts to justify its existence. Has it done anything to get at the root of matters, and promote a just distribution of the produce of labour? The answer must be—Nothing whatever. But here, let us own, it may put forward a valid excuse—it received no rational guidance from its Founder. He—the Son of God—was quite ignorant of economics. Though he declaimed against great wealth, he had no idea of any effective method of combating poverty. So long as the world lasted (a short time at most) the poor were to be "always with us," while the rich were to pay ransom on earth, and lay up treasure in heaven, in the shape of lavish almsgiving. He never dreamed of a society in which no man should live on another's bounty; and the result is that, after nineteen hundred years, we are still so far from having solved this elementary problem of economic organization that the world is like to be bathed in blood before a solution is reached. We must own, then, that even if the Church had exercised its function of World-Almoner ten times more efficiently than has actually been the case, it would have done no permanent and substantial good, but merely helped, by palliatives, to delay the discovery of a radical cure.

"Can the blind guide the blind? Shall they not both fall into a pit?"—so said the Founder of Christianity, in one of those homely parables in which lay the strength of his dialectical method. He did not realize that, except in his own little province of moral intuition, he was as

blind as any man of his day, and blinder than a few who had some glimmerings of a scientific conception of the universe. Even moral intuition, too, will do more harm than good, unless its results, when tested, are found to minister to human well-being in the widest sense of the word. The path to a scientific morality has been, and still is, blocked by the elevation of a body of doctrines, more remarkable for poetic beauty than for practical wisdom, into divine decrees which it would be a sin to subject to any utilitarian test. "Can the blind guide the blind? Shall they not both fall into a pit?"

It is not the fault of Christians that Christianity has failed. Christians are no worse than other people, except in so far as their arrogant and hateful conception of Orthodoxy has betrayed them into insensate cruelties. Christianity has failed because its controlling elements are rooted in the "Ur-Dummheit" of primitive savagery. Its theology is a weary spinning of ropes of sand—an attempt to give coherence to incurably incoherent concepts. Its morality, though not without features of beauty, is vitiated by the Founder's almost complete ignorance of the world and of the laws of life. What Bishop was it who confessed, in a moment of candour, that if the precepts of Jesus were to be literally obeyed, society would not last for a day? They have been constantly and flagrantly disobeyed, yet they have never been revised in the light of fuller knowledge; and such revision is to this day bitterly opposed by the official representatives of the creed. The Christian world has always suffered, and still suffers, from the gross disharmony of its professions and its practices. No community can lead a healthy life which pays lip-homage to an impracticable code of laws. The prevailing laxity will inevitably be avenged by rigorous tyranny at the few points where pains and penalties can actually be enforced.

And, after all, what an evanescent bubble is this vaunted Christianity on the majestic stream of things!

For untold ages the race of man battled for life on the planet, in dense ignorance of the creed which is indispensable to "salvation." Here and there, through hundreds of thousands of years, one tribe and another advanced by infinitely slow degrees towards intelligence and civilization, "God" meanwhile lying low and saying nothing. Struggling out of the "Ur-Dummheit," men made themselves all sorts of gods, and subjected themselves to all sorts of taboos, the true "God" doing nothing to guide or enlighten them. Great empires and splendid barbarisms rose and fell—still no message from the one and only Deity. Then, well within historic time, "God" took a sudden fancy for a particular Semitic clan, and revealed himself to them along with a patently false story (largely plagiarized from other tribal legends) of his manufacture of the earth and man. For many centuries the "Chosen People" went on falling out with "God" and falling in again, while despising the much more intelligent and highly developed races around them for their exclusion from the knowledge of "God." But in the meanwhile (no one quite knows when) "God" had somehow exfoliated two other "Gods"—other, and yet the same. On a certain date about two thousand years ago—yesterday in comparison with the whole life-span of the race—one of the trio came down to earth and pretended to be a man. He quarrelled with the "Chosen People," who crucified him; and then, and not till then, it occurred to "God" to reveal himself, not to a single tribe, but to the race at large, and to make a bid for world-empire. "Weltmacht oder Niedergang" became his motto.

And what success has he had in this campaign? It took him just about a thousand years to make his symbol —an instrument of torture and death—dominant throughout Europe, the smallest of the continents. Of the largest, Asia, he touched only the fringe. There older deities were, and still are, immovably established. The

northern fringe of Africa, too, was for a season occupied, until a real monotheism arose and drove the monotritheism out. For many more centuries, the bulk of Africa, the two Americas, and Australia—making, with Asia, more than nine-tenths of the world—remained ignorant of the one true God. Since the fifteenth century, no doubt, his cult has nominally occupied larger areas of the planet; but that is not because the dwellers in these areas have heard and accepted his "gospel," but because Christians, having mastered the arts of ship-building and navigation, have spread over the waste places of the earth, expropriating and exterminating (in defiance of Christian principles) the original inhabitants. By including many millions whose Christianity is scarcely distinguishable from primitive fetichism, we may perhaps make out that about one-third of the population of the globe are now nominally Christians—divided into two mutually intolerant segments, the Catholic and the Protestant, and the latter, again, into a hundred not over-friendly sects. A poor result, this, for the two thousand years since Calvary, to say nothing of the twelve hundred years between Calvary and Sinai, and the untold ages between Sinai and the Neanderthal or the Cro-Magnon man. It is for Christians to explain why the true God or Godhead, on the correct knowledge of whose character and attributes "salvation" depends, delayed for so many millenniums to announce himself at all, and then announced himself so obscurely that the doctrinal differences of his adherents have been deadlier than plague or famine, and so inefficiently that after two thousand years only one-third of the world is even nominally Christian.

Do we not speak the simple truth, then, in describing Christianity as a mushroom growth, an inconsiderable episode, in relation to the whole life of man on earth? Can we possibly believe that the religion of the future—a cosmic emotion that shall unite mankind—is destined to grow out of this ill-omened union of mysticism and folk-

lore? Christianity is a religion of ignorance and darkness; the religion of the future must be a religion of light. The universe as we know it to-day is marvellous —aye, and mysterious—beyond the wildest dreams of Moses or of Jesus. They did not begin to conceive either the stupendous majesty of the heavens, or the minute, inexhaustible cunning with which Life works out its purposes on earth. All this we see and know, however imperfectly. We stand bewildered and almost crushed before the immensity of the vision; but that mood may be due to the very imperfection of our knowledge. Already the revelations of science eclipse the "revelation" of theology, as the sun outshines a will-o'-the-wisp; and revelations yet to come may give the whole vast spectacle a coherence and a meaning which as yet it seems to lack. Then, perhaps, we may begin once more to talk about "God"; though one fears that Christianity and the other groping religions of the twilight have hopelessly belittled the word.

THEOLOGY AND THE WAR

In a letter from Germany which I read the other day—no matter how it came into my hands—the writer, a lady, said: "If we should be defeated in this war, it would be a terrible thing for religion, for no one would any longer believe in God." I was reminded of the saying of a scholar-soldier who fought in the American Civil War, on the side of the South. "When the end came," he said, "there were many of us who lost their faith in God, but not their faith in the cause." But the question how we are to conceive of God in the face of such a spectacle as Europe now presents can scarcely depend, one would think, on the mere allocation of victory and defeat. Will the victors, if there is anything either of reason or humanity left in them, be able to sing "Te Deum laudamus" with an entirely reverent and unreproachful mind? One can scarcely believe it.

The theological aspect of the war is indeed so grotesque that it would need the irony of Swift to do it justice. We can scarcely open a paper without finding some pathetically earnest, bewildered soul going through the most amazing logical contortions in the endeavour to reconcile the plain facts of the daily record with the theory of an all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful Creator and Ruler of the Universe. The effort to cling to our comfortable preconceptions is very natural. No one wants to lose his faith in a Friend outside and above the cruel and heartless concatenation of things which we call life, precisely at the moment when its cruelty and heartlessness are most apparent, and the divine Friendship is consequently most needed. But the attempt to interpret the motives and actions of the Friend in terms of friendship and bene-

volence, as we understand them here below, is surely the most hopeless of intellectual enterprises.

War has always been cruel, but never, probably, so infernal as to-day. High explosives and machine-guns, to say nothing of poison-gas and liquid fire, have immeasurably heightened its hellishness. The Germans themselves were the first to experience this. Their plan of hurling columns of men in close formation against strongly-defended positions led to scenes of horror almost without precedent; for the rear ranks had to trample over ground thickly carpeted with the bodies of their dead and mutilated comrades, mown down by hailstorms of lead. There can be little doubt that the conduct of the German troops in Belgium was largely attributable to the shattering of their nerves by these indescribable loathsomenesses. The tactics of the Allies have perhaps not involved such concentrations of carnage; but the measuring of degrees of horror is probably illusory, for each hideous experience *seems* the worst possible at the moment of its enactment. At all events, millions of men all over Europe have died in agony, after living for months in the midst of every sort of torment, physical and spiritual, that human nature can endure without succumbing. Millions of non-combatants have undergone untold miseries from famine and exposure, in addition to indescribable mental sufferings. Never before in history have death, disease, mutilation, starvation, pain and anguish in every possible form, run riot over such wide areas of what we still, from incorrigible habit, call the civilized world. It is true there have been mitigations. Charity has been organized and dispensed on a scale hitherto undreamt of. Medical science is no longer so helpless as it once was. The horrors of surgery are tempered by anæsthetics. But it may be doubted whether, on the balance, the ghastliness of war has not been increased rather than diminished by science. There has probably never been anything in the world like the scene on board a great modern warship battered to death

by high explosives. And as to the numbers of our species that have, within a given time, been afflicted by all these evils, there can be no doubt that they are quite without parallel.

Meanwhile there has been a continual wafting of incense and chanting of praise from ten thousand cathedrals, churches, chapels, conventicles of all sorts, to the Power which is supposed to have ordained, and to regulate from moment to moment, this edifying spectacle—the Power which guides every bullet and countersigns every death-warrant. Thousands of professional apologists for this Power are explaining what great designs may be supposed to lurk behind its admittedly disconcerting proceedings ; millions of individual men and women, suffering intolerable torments of anxiety, are putting up, in silence or in broken words, petitions that from one dear head or another the bullet may be averted, the shrapnel-shard may be wrenched aside. The Germans, during the first year of the war, at any rate, had not the slightest doubt that the German God, an old and tried ally of the House of Hohenzollern, was marching at the head of their columns, diving in their U-boats, and sailing in their Zeppelins, for the confounding of their impious foes, and the ultimate healing of the world through the universal dissemination, at the bayonet's point, of the unspeakably beneficent German spirit. I am not caricaturing their views. I have read them in black and white in a hundred places. It will one day be an interesting task for a statistician to sum up the number of times that, in German sermons, speeches, and articles, the couplet of Geibel's, popularized by the Kaiser even before the war, has been dragged in to account for the tactics of the German God :—

> Und es mag an deutschem Wesen
> Einmal noch die Welt genesen.

It may be questioned whether they are now quite so confident of Geibel's prophetic inspiration, the healing miracle

having been so unaccountably postponed. But I have no evidence as to the present tone of their theology. Other nations have from the first viewed the policy of God with more surprise and, one may even say, misgiving; but all alike have appealed to him, sung to him, prayed to him, preached about him, with undiminished perseverance and fervency. There is nothing to show that there has anywhere been any considerable revolt against the theory that events on earth are directed in every detail by the will of an unseen Power—a will in all respects analogous to our own, save that it is unquestionably free, while our belief in our power of self-determination is by many believed to be an illusion.

And to all this multitudinous and world-wide appealing and beseeching—this vocal and silent supplication for ever thundering round the Throne—the silent not the least audible, we may be sure, if there be any ear to hear—what answer is vouchsafed from the empyrean? Never a whisper, never a sign, never a tremor of the ether. There sits God, surveying the hideous spectacle of devastation and massacre, and raising no finger to stay or to mitigate it. Does any one believe that the men who survive are those who are prayed for, and the men who fall are those who are not? There are innumerable testimonies to the contrary—testimonies of mothers and wives who have "wrestled with God" for the lives of their loved ones, and have wrestled in vain. Does any one believe that a bullet or a torpedo is ever deflected by one hair's-breadth from the course prescribed by the physical forces which set it in motion, and which act upon it as it moves? No one really believes any such thing. I am not here relying on any preconceived dogma of an eternal and immutable sequence of cause and effect running through the whole universe from the beginning to the end of things. I am not maintaining it to be impossible that God could have interfered to spoil the aim of the man who launched the torpedo at the *Lusitania*.

On the contrary, it seems to me perfectly possible. The action of mind upon mind, through no visible or ponderable medium, is now a matter of every-day experiment. If there be an all-embracing Mind, analogous to our own, though infinite in the scale of its workings, one sees no difficulty in conceiving it as constantly modifying by suggestion the cerebral processes on which our actions depend. Such guidance by suggestion would involve no interference with the order of nature; it merely postulates the existence of a force unrecognized and unmeasured, whose method of action has, however, several clearly-recognized analogies in common experience. Nor can one say with any certainty that such a force does not exist, and is not in constant operation. That whole range of our actions which seems to us to be guided by choice may, in fact, be the result of promptings from the divine mind. We may all be mere puppets of God, actuated by a sort of psychical wireless-telegraphy. It seems to me flatly impossible to say that this is not so; all I do say with confidence is that there is not the slightest sign of anything that we can recognize as intelligent purpose, to say nothing of benevolence, in the operation of any stimulating or controlling agency that may be conceived to exist. In other words, I do not say that we are not the puppets of God, but I do say that, if we are, he has a great deal to answer for. Any theory which relieves him from all immediate responsibility for the events of the past two years—to say nothing of the events of several previous æons—seems to me, if not more rational, at any rate a great deal more truly religious than that which makes him the deliberate fomenter of the whole world-frenzy.

There is no difficulty in conceiving a moral and beneficent government of mundane affairs. It is even possible—though this is harder—to conceive a moral and beneficent ruler whose action should be, in some small degree, influenced by the performance or omission of acts of

worship, and by the importunities of individual worshippers. But the very fact that we can conceive such an order of things only makes us more confident that it does not exist. Nor is there any one who really and sincerely maintains that it does. Jesus frankly admitted that the rain falls alike on the just and the unjust, and that the eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were no worse than their neighbours. The plea of popular theology, that the ways of God are past our finding out, merely gives up the case. Of what use is it to tell us that if we were gods ourselves we would see the absolute justice and beneficence of all that God does or permits to be done; but that, being purblind mortals, we cannot recognize the perfect beauty of the design which he is working out upon the loom of time, with our life-threads for the warp and woof? Of what use to us is a beauty which we cannot recognize, and which seems to us cruel and insensate ugliness? If it be said that one day our vision will be unsealed, and, from some celestial centre of perspective, we shall view the arabesque in all its glory, the answer is that, if the designer of the pattern could not execute it save through the medium of gigantic horrors like the present war, he had much better have let it alone. Such an episode in the history of our race is totally incompatible with the rule of any being who is at once benevolent and omnipotent as we understand the words; and to use them in some sense which we admittedly cannot understand is simply to talk nonsense.

It may be said, with some justice, that I am merely applying a very obvious analysis to the anthropomorphism inseparable from every conception of God as a moral agent. The moment we depart from pure pantheism, and attribute to God personality and will, we inevitably create him in our own image; and any criticism applied to a power so conceived is vitiated by the fact that the object criticized is not, and cannot be, the thing itself, but only a symbol of it, on an enormously reduced scale,

suited to the limits of our human faculties. Nay, the phrase I have just used, "an enormously reduced scale," is itself tainted with anthropomorphism; for it implies that there is actually some definite relation between our conception and the thing conceived, like the relation between a map of the world and the world itself; whereas in all probability there is no more resemblance between any man's idea of God and the actual power that sustains the universe than there is between the algebraical symbol x and whatever quantities it may stand for in any given equation. All this is quite rudimentary, and would not be worth repeating, were it not that I have a moral to draw. I suggest that the anthropomorphic god-idea is not a harmless infirmity of human thought, but a very noxious fallacy, which is largely responsible for the calamities the world is at present enduring. I suggest that the persistence of this god-idea is mainly instrumental in preventing people from recognizing what an indefensible anachronism war has become.

A typical example of its power for evil is to be found in Treitschke's now famous saying, "God will see to it that war constantly recurs as a drastic medicine for the human race." Treitschke was the most shameless of all anthropomorphists. He concentrated all his own prejudices, vanities, and even caprices, in an imaginary being whom he called God; and he was amply justified in declaring that an omnipotent Heinrich von Treitschke would see to it that war should constantly recur, at any rate until Prussia had conquered the world. Sensible men, of course, are quite sure that God, whatever he may be, is not an omnipotent Heinrich von Treitschke; but one fanatical phrasemonger under the dominion of this delusion can do more harm than a thousand sensible men can undo. And when a similar delusion takes possession of a man who is not merely a Prussian professor, but a hereditary, anointed War-Lord, who can doubt that calamity is inevitable? We laugh at the German

Emperor and his appeals to his "alte gute Gott"; but how many millions of people know to their cost that it is no laughing matter! In a very real—nay, in an ultimate—sense, it is this "alte gute Gott" that has made the war. That is one thing—among many others—that English apologists for Germany forget. They forget that from the highest to the lowest—at any rate, to the lowest professor, preacher, and publicist—the Germans almost to a man believed in a God who had declared that war was the noblest of human activities, and was the appointed instrument through which the beneficent German spirit was to bring salvation to an ailing world. It is quite amazing to find—as I have found in the course of much recent reading—how German war literature is impregnated with this idea. One thought of Germany before the war as a rather godless country; and so, indeed, it was. But the war has revealed the fact that every German in his heart believed in a German war-god, the concentrated essence of all the prejudices and vanities begotten by the national experience from Mollwitz to Sedan. And the Kaiser, as he had repeatedly stated even before the war, believes in an intimate personal relation between himself and this God, the sanctifier of his supreme will, the inspirer of all his sayings and doings. It may sound paradoxical, but what we are fighting against is, in the last analysis, that most inept of superstitions—the divine right of kings. It is true that, in such a fight, Russia is an odd ally; but it is none the less true that Germany is the only nation of Western Europe in which the superstition survives, and that, if the war does not put an end to it, the world will have agonized in vain. For the king who believes his right divine is almost bound to believe that it is conferred upon him by a war-god, who has, by an unalterable decree, made organized slaughter one of the supreme functions of kingship. The two superstitions belong to exactly the same phase of mental development, and arise from the

same habit of seeing in God a mere magnified projection of our own prejudices.

But it is, of course, not only in Germany that war is excused, palliated, almost sanctified, on the ground of its being "the will of God." The Germans differ from other people in claiming a peculiar property in the war-god, and supposing themselves his special favourites, his chosen people. This is a consequence, or a symptom, of the peculiarly strong tribal instinct which has long prevailed among them—the instinct which, even in an anti-Prussian writer like Heine, gives to the word "deutsch" a note of intimate, exclusive affection, quite different from any sentiment aroused by the word "English" or "Français" or "Italiano." Even the sceptic and cosmopolitan in Germany believes in his heart that his race is the salt of the earth. National vanity is prevalent enough in other countries, but it is neither so universal nor so naive in its manifestations as it is among the Germans. Accordingly, we do not speak of an English, French, or Italian God. We are content to share our God with other people. Nevertheless, we make God responsible for the war; we talk of it as the work of his inscrutable Providence; and some of us even try to make out, quite in the German spirit, that it is a purifying ordeal, designed for the ennoblement, the rejuvenation of the race. That sort of nonsense is well answered, in terms of theology, by one German theologian, F. W. Foerster, who has managed, even in the tempest and whirlwind of bellicose passion, to preserve a certain modicum of common sense. He says:—

> The fact that God can extract some good out of evil does not justify us in calling evil good, or in employing it as a means well-pleasing to God. The Corsican vendetta is doubtless a better school of bravery than our legal system, but we do not therefore propose to introduce it into civilized countries.

But, though Herr Foerster scoffs at the ordinary cheap

sophistries whereby war is reconciled with the goodness of an all-powerful God, he does not tell us how he himself proposes to effect the reconciliation. He does not tell us because he cannot. The thing is impossible. Any such reconcilement can only be a playing with words. It is no extravagant optimism to hope that a certain amount of good may result from all the suffering and horror of this war; but how disproportionate is the price paid for it! Some of us may even venture to trust that mankind is learning a lesson in this ordeal which—*human nature being what it is*—could have been learnt in no other way. But, then, whose fault is it that human nature is what it is? It cannot be the fault of an all-good and all-powerful God. If there is a God who wills the ultimate redemption of human nature, but can bring it about in no other way than this, then clearly he is not all-powerful, but has to fight for his ends against a very powerful obstacle—call it matter, or Satan, or Ahriman, or what you will. This brings us up to the Manichean theory of a good and evil principle for ever at war in the world: a theory which, so to speak, dramatizes the problem vividly enough, but does not begin to solve it; for to assume the existence of Ormuzd and Ahriman is only to shift the real difficulty a stage further back, and to leave as inconceivable as ever the unity from which this duality must have emerged. All our popular theology—the theology, for instance, of *Paradise Lost*—is purely Manichean. Whatever phrases we may use about the kingdom and the power and the glory, we always think of it as a restricted kingdom, a divided power, a glory sadly incomplete. In this there is no philosophic satisfaction, but only a confession of mental impotence in face of the mystery of existence. But, at any rate, a frank and explicit acceptance of the theory of a benevolent, but limited, power making for good would be less harmful than the self-contradictory assumption of an all-good and all-powerful Will which employs Hohenzollern

War-Lords, high explosives, poison-gas, the *Morning Post*, and Mr. Leo Maxse as means to its ends.

There is no great practical harm in the belief that the world is directed by the will of God, so long as we clearly recognize that its good ends can be attained only through the active and enlightened co-operation of the will of man. The theory of the "will of God" becomes positively noxious only when it is made an excuse for the endurance and perpetuation of manifest evil. But if we want to think clearly, and see things in their plain outlines, unwarped by the mists of mythology, we shall have to admit that the only intelligent and purposive will of whose existence we have one jot or tittle of evidence is the will of man. It is to that will, and none other, that we must look for the amelioration of mundane conditions, towards which the abolition of war is only the first step. When we are asked: "What actuates the will of man? Whence comes that slow-moving, but irresistible, bias towards the good to which we owe all the progress that has been achieved from the days of the cave-man onward?"—we can only answer that, though the natural history of the idea of Good can be, to some extent, traced, the ultimate origin of the bias remains the one great mystery of the moral world. Is it the work of God? It is certainly the most plausible evidence we possess of the existence of some well-meaning power at work behind the framework of things. Kant's saying about the starry heaven and the moral law may be accepted without demur, if by "moral law" we understand no external code, but simply the bias towards good. It is the most godlike thing of which we have any real knowledge; but it does not point to the omnipotent personal God, the "magnified and non-natural man" of the theological creeds and formularies.

HUMANITY THE BEST POLICY

"History teaches us," says Mr. Bernard Shaw or one of his mouthpieces, "that history can teach us nothing." This saying—if I quote it incorrectly, the criticism, of course, recoils upon my own head—this saying might be approximately true if for "can teach" we were to read "teaches." But as it stands it is absolutely false. It is not history that cannot teach us, but we that cannot or will not learn. If only we would open our minds to its lessons, history could teach us to avoid half the stupidities in which we wallow. Its teaching is mainly negative; it tells us on every page "how not to do it." For the positive and complementary knowledge of "how to do it" we must turn to science; but to be quite sure "how not to do it" is, after all, a long step on the way towards wisdom.

One of the plainest lessons of history, to my thinking, is that inhumanity is not only wicked, but stupid. It hardly ever achieves its ends. To say "never" would be to claim a knowledge of history to which I am far from pretending. I suppose there have been exterminations that really exterminated some hated race, persecutions that really uprooted some damnable heresy. But they have been very few, and certainly fewer as time has gone on. It may have been possible on an Ægean island to make a clean sweep of men, women, and children, and wipe out the very name of an inconvenient breed. But these are parochial affairs. I do not recall an instance of a really successful massacre on a national scale. The Turks massacred in Bulgaria; and behold! the Bulgarians are a nation, and, by a triumph of German craft, the allies of their oppressors. The Turks have done little else than massacre in Armenia; yet they have not succeeded, and

probably never will succeed, in obliterating the Armenian race.

As for persecution, is it not a commonplace that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church? I have seen it said that it was the terrorism of Philip II and Alva that kept Belgium Catholic. What truth there may be in the statement I am not historian enough to say; but I strongly suspect that some deeper-lying cause could be found for the religious divergence between the Dutch on the one hand and the Flemings and Walloons on the other.

The massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the unspeakable horrors of the wars of religion, did not root out Protestantism in France. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes succeeded in impoverishing the country and enriching its neighbours. It may even have succeeded in making France wholly Catholic in name; but the substantial gain to the Catholic Church was certainly of the scantiest.

The Inquisition, I take it, flourished in Spain because it suited the temper of Spanish Catholicism. The auto-da-fé was the religious correlative of the secular bullfight. It did not save the Church, which was never in danger. It only left another and a darker blot upon the blood-stained name of religion.

In our own island what has persecution done? It has manifestly extirpated neither Protestantism nor Catholicism. It may very plausibly be maintained, I think, that the Marian horrors put an end to the last chance of a reconciliation between England and the Papacy. The so-called persecutions under Elizabeth were political rather than religious, and must be judged by political standards; but it may safely be said that, with a few arguable exceptions, the cruelties of the whole Reformation period were futile and self-defeating. There was one measure of ecclesiastical police, however, to which one cannot look back without a touch of regret. In the reign of Henry VIII, and, I think, of his son, a parson who

made himself objectionable used often to be hung from the tower of his church. It seems a pity that this quaint and pious old custom should have become wholly obsolete.

In Scotland, again, what did Lauderdale and Claverhouse effect? They lent an added dourness to Presbyterianism, but they advanced the cause of Prelacy no more than the cause of Islam.

In politics, Ireland is the standing instance of the total inefficacy in the long run (and generally in the short run as well) of "strong"—or, in other words, brutal and barbarous—methods. If "strong" men and policies of "thorough" could bring prosperity to a country, Ireland would be an Island of the Blest. Strafford and Cromwell are only the most famous names in the long series of ruthless "pacifiers" and administrators whom England has, of her bounty, bestowed upon the sister island. If there is a blacker page in all history than the annals of Ireland under Elizabeth, it has not come in my way. It is heartbreaking; it is almost incredible. Men who were good men in England—Sir Henry Sidney, the father of Sir Philip, and the well-meaning Earl of Essex—became mere murderers and abettors of murder when they crossed St. George's Channel. Elizabeth herself was not by nature cruel; but in relation to Ireland she forgot the meaning of pity, and, if she did not order, at any rate never rebuked, the most blood-curdling atrocities. I do not say that the Irish character was not difficult to deal with; I do not say that the Irish, when they found an opportunity, did not give us as good as they got. But the Irish character was not a thing fixed and immutable; the Irish character was very largely what England had made it.

Did criminal law lose or gain in efficiency as its vindictive "severities" were relaxed? Was England a more law-abiding country in the days when the sheep-stealer and the murderer hung on the same gallows? And if we read aright the lesson of the progressive humanization of

the penal code, can we possibly believe that the limit of desirable humanization has been reached? The survivals of the retributive theory of punishment do not strengthen, but weaken, our legal system. We cannot too soon recognize that, in the treatment of criminals, justice is a mere illusion, and social expediency the one relevant principle of action. We must not, indeed, treat the criminal in such a way as to put a premium on crime, but neither must we torture him out of sheer traditional stupidity, or in the mistaken belief that his sufferings act as a deterrent to others. Even if any deterrent effect could be clearly traced to the surviving horrors of prison life (which I do not for a moment believe), society had much better face a little temporary increase in crime than itself be guilty of the crime of endowing places of torment and paying men to inflict deliberate cruelties on their fellows. Of course, this reasoning, if it be just, strikes at the root of the gallows-tree. There seem to be no good grounds for believing that the abolition of capital punishment would lead to an increase in murder; and even if it did, in some slight degree, send up the statistics, that would be better than maintaining the sanguinary tradition of legalized homicide. The whole tone of social feeling is lowered by such survivals of barbarism. No one who is alive to the tendency of things can doubt that capital punishment is doomed. The only question is whether its lease of life has ten years, or twenty, or fifty, to run; and surely it is the part of wisdom to go out to meet the inevitable rather than to waste temper and energy in struggling to stave it off.

Down to the seventeenth century, statesmanship was one of the dangerous professions. The man who accepted political office put a rope round his neck—or rather suspended an axe over his head. Does any one seriously suppose that the affairs of the country would be better managed to-day if this tradition were revived? There is a certain class of journalists who write as if they had

actually adopted that opinion, and held that the way to win the present war would be to establish a Reign of Terror at home. There is only one advantage that I can perceive in the proposal, and that is that some of these Héberts and Clootzes would certainly not be among the last to go to the guillotine. Deliberate treachery, no doubt, should be rigorously punished, because the vast interests at stake in war create a strong motive for the subornation of treason; and where a man might earn millions by betraying his country, it is only natural to provide a strong counter-motive by making the attempt extremely perilous. But to inflict vindictive punishments on honest error, or even on manifest incapacity, is as impolitic as it is unjust. Incapacity, of course, should be deprived of all chance of doing further mischief; but that is only an administrative precaution, not a penal measure. As for mistakes of judgment, do they not punish themselves in the sense of failure, and in the automatic and inevitable set-back to the career of the person committing them? To clamour for further penalties is to yield to the childish vindictiveness which says: "Since you have involuntarily hurt me, I will voluntarily hurt you." Moreover, it is often impossible to distinguish with any certainty between mistakes of judgment and sheer ill-luck. The most trifling accident may convert triumph into disaster. That is a risk which every executive officer has to face; and you do not stimulate, but rather paralyse, him if you insist on doubling his stake in the gamble and making him feel that misadventure is likely to be treated as crime.

Here, again, sanity would be greatly promoted by a little historical reading. The greatest statesmen and the most famous captains have committed acts which proved, in the result, to be disastrous blunders. Napoleon's career is strewn with cases in point: not only with political decisions which can be accounted for only as the results of megalomania, but with military errors and oversights

for which a subordinate commander might well have been court-martialled and broke. Napoleon, however, knew the inherent nature of war too well to make a practice of shooting marshals or admirals "pour encourager les autres." Rather he dealt too leniently with manifest failures of judgment and of zeal. It is only coffee-house politicians and armchair strategists who set off baying in quest of scapegoats the moment anything goes wrong.

In the German treatment of Belgium we have a gigantic example of the rank impolicy of frightfulness. I have studied the matter pretty closely, and have come to the conclusion that the alleged francs-tireurs—the civilians who fired on the invading hosts—were almost entirely imaginary. But even supposing they had been real, the attempt to repress them by means of indiscriminate massacre and devastation would have been an enormous blunder. By the Germans' own showing, it did not succeed. Though their terrorism began on the very first day of their advance upon Liège, franc-tireur attacks are stated to have continued during the whole month of August, 1914, and even to have lasted into October, when the Germans marched southwards after the fall of Antwerp. What did they gain, then, by the infamous brutality of which they are accused, unquestionably with substantial justice, and by the ruthless carnage to which they confess? They gained no practical advantage whatever, and they earned a world-wide execration which has raised up millions of enemies against them, and will assuredly react to their discomfort and detriment through many a long year. The systematic—one might almost say the pedantic—inhumanity with which they have chosen to conduct the War is one of the chief obstacles to the peace for which they are yearning, and will certainly prove an abiding hindrance to their reinstatement in the goodwill and esteem of civilized mankind.

But what of ourselves? Would our position to-day be any the worse if we had allowed humanity, instead of

a vindictive legalism, to dictate our policy towards Casement and the Dublin rebels? It would not have been worse, but, I am convinced, immeasurably better. The manufacture of martyrs is one of the silliest activities in which a Government can engage. Technically, no doubt, the lives of all these misguided enthusiasts were forfeit; but what reasonable man would stand upon technicalities in order to raise a fresh barrier to the reconciliation of a people estranged from us by centuries of bloodshed and misrule? Rebels, of course, they were, but traitors they were not. They levied war openly, and there can be no moral infamy in casting off allegiance to an alien power. However, I am not arguing that they had any legal claim to belligerent rights, or that it was a crime to shoot them. All I say is that it was a manifest blunder, for which we shall yet pay dearly and possibly in blood.

Finally, what have we gained by suffering the Conscientious Objectors, in defiance of the manifest intention of an Act of Parliament, to be handed over without defence to the tender mercies of a truculent militarism? I have not one atom of sympathy with their doctrine. It seems to me a pitiful form of unreason, all the less admirable because it implies a large measure of sickly self-righteousness. I will even add that, from their own point of view, they ought to welcome martyrdom. Since the faith that is in them is so immeasurably superior to every other human consideration, they ought to be glad to bear witness to it in obloquy and suffering. Manifestly they can thus advance and advertise it far better than if they were merely passed over with a shrug of the shoulders. But it is not from their point of view that I am looking at the matter: it is from the point of view of the nation at large. Does anybody gain by the expenditure of time and energy on the torturing of a handful of obdurate fanatics? Assuredly not. It may even be said that their tormentors play into their hands by enabling them to prove that, whatever else they may be, they are certainly

not cowards. This pitiful episode, however, is having one good result: it is making manifest the degradation of character which ensues when militarism is in the saddle, and leading thousands of men and women to resolve that, the War once over, militarism shall never sit in the saddle again.

It may, perhaps, be asked why, in denouncing the various forms of traditional cruelty, I omit to execrate the cruellest and stupidest of all—to wit, war. No one detests war more than I do; but it does not fall quite within the framework of my present argument. My contention is that nothing is ever gained by inhumanity; but it is impossible to maintain that nothing is ever gained by war. So long as monstrous ambition, arrogance, and rapacity are in control of armed force, they must be met by armed force, if all that makes life worth living is not to perish from the earth. It is not inhuman to resist inhumanity. He who draws the sword is always in the wrong, but not he who parries the blow and tries to disarm the swashbuckler. Wanton inhumanity in war (as we have seen in the case of Belgium) is no less stupid and self-defeating than it is in peace; but the inevitable cruelties of war fall on the head of him who wills the war, not of him who unwillingly undergoes it for the sake of honour, justice, freedom, and, ultimately, of peace itself. Indiscriminating denunciation of war is as futile as denunciation of cholera or cancer. It will never be cured by denunciation, but by the discovery and elimination of the conditions which produce it. Nothing, however, will more potently help to exorcise the evil spirit of war than the general recognition of the plain fact that in all departments of life humanity is the best policy, and vindictive punishment and legalized torture are as hurtful to the society which inflicts them as to the individual on whom they are inflicted.

THE BELEAGUERED FORTRESS

If vitality were a test of truth, the Christian religion would certainly have strong claims upon our acceptance. The gospel miracles which are cited among its evidences are the veriest trifles compared with the authentic, undeniable miracle of its mere existence. The stars in their courses testify against it; the rocks, the waters, rise up to overwhelm it; history flouts it, morality disowns it; savage superstitions and the bloody rites of barbarians claim, and prove, a degrading kinship with it; the spectacle of a world-agony, which it has done a great deal to cause and can do nothing to cure, puts it daily and hourly to shame. But still it rears its head, serene, arrogant, undismayed. Subjected to a bombardment of unexampled violence from every point of the material and moral universe, it shows never a sign of surrender. Defences it has none; its last bastions were pulverized at least a generation ago. But it has withdrawn into some immaterial, impalpable stronghold upon which shot and shell make no impression. It has clothed itself in some ghostly substance which feels no wounds and shows no scars. Blown sky-high to-day, it presents an unbroken and smiling surface to-morrow. The Great Boyg in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, which has puzzled so many people, is manifestly (whether Ibsen meant it or not) a symbol of latter-day Christianity.

No other religion, be it remembered, is subjected to anything like the same ordeal. Brahminism, Buddhism, and Islam are all practically out of range of the artillery of science and reason. They are entrenched in the sheer ignorance of the vast majority of their adherents. It is the survival of Christianity in the realistic atmosphere of

the West that is such an amazing, such an impressive phenomenon.

Christianity is nothing if not a revealed religion. It is doubly revealed: first, through a series of books written at the dictation of God; second, through the bodily appearance of God on earth, and the record of his conversations. On the very face of these documents, it is evident that God's claim to be the Creator of the universe is a late afterthought. Down to the period of his incarnation, he was content to be the tribal god, the patron spirit, of certain obscure Semitic clans, the rest of the world being jealously excluded from the benefits of his patronage. Thus, even at a time when no one thought of challenging the Mosaic cosmogony and the chronological schemes founded thereon, it was clear that the overwhelming majority of mankind could never have heard of their Creator, and that the pains and penalties denounced against those who had failed to do him homage were therefore monstrously unjust. That a solitary, universal God should have revealed himself so very coyly, and should, even after he set up his claim to universality, have failed to make it known to more than (perhaps) a tenth part of the human race, was a consideration which, even in the darkest ages of faith, might well have given pause to any thoughtful person.

We know, however, that even in the most thoughtful persons reason was paralysed by the enormous prestige of religion. So long as there were no munitions available for the attack on the fortress from without, we perhaps ought not to wonder that few had the insight or the courage to attempt its demolition from within.

But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries men began to attain to some accurate knowledge of the construction of the universe and of their own place in it. From the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards, this knowledge grew apace, and the nineteenth century witnessed the most momentous discoveries in every depart-

ment of inquiry. And every discovery bore stronger and stronger witness to the remarkable fact that the Creator who inspired the sacred books of Christianity knew nothing whatever about his own creation. He shared all the illusions of the primitive peoples among whom the books came into being. His conception of the history and environment of the human race was utterly remote from the now unquestioned and unquestionable facts; and upon that conception the validity of his message, his gospel, was almost entirely dependent. Is it not a marvellous thing that this annihilation of what may be called the material bases of Christianity—the physical presuppositions on which it rests—should have left the spiritual superstructure, to all appearance, practically unaffected? It hangs in air, but it hangs together.

The first revelation that gave the lie to Revelation was the Copernican astronomy. But though it was curious that God should have adopted the geocentric theory, and regarded the sun and moon simply as gliding lamps to lighten the ways of mankind, this was perhaps the least important of his errors. For if our earth is the only spot in the universe where conscious life has come into being—and, for aught we know, this may be true—then it is in very deed the centre of all things, whatever be its spatial relation to the inconceivable wilderness of suns amid which it traces its little orbit. "God could not be expected," the Christian may contend, "to write a treatise on astronomy for the ancient Hebrews. What he did was to convey to them the spiritual essence of the situation, in terms suitable to their apprehension; and that spiritual essence remains true yesterday, to-day, and for ever." On the assumption that the earth is the sole abode of sentient life, this argument must be allowed to have some force; though it is not easy to understand why God—if he knew better—should have acquiesced in a theory which so belittled the spectacular magnificence of his creation.

A much more serious matter than his apparent ignorance of space was his manifest ignorance of time. Space is, in itself, a thing inert and insignificant, but time is measured in human heartbeats. No amount of symbolic juggling with the inspired texts can get away from the fact that their inspirer believed the human race to have been suddenly planted on earth a few hundred or a few thousand years before the time of writing. He had not the slightest idea that man's life on the planet must be measured by scores of thousands of years, and that therefore a religious scheme which came into operation, so to speak, some 4,000 years B.C. left wholly out of account immeasurable multitudes of human beings for whose salvation (or damnation) any truly universal religion ought certainly to have provided.

It was conceivable, however, that God's ignorance of geology, like his ignorance of astronomy, might have been assumed in order to fit his revelation to the understanding of his Chosen People. It was conceivable that he might deliberately have resolved, for reasons of his own, to exclude the vast, the overwhelming majority of his creatures from what are called the blessings of true religion. But it is not conceivable that he should have wittingly based his whole scheme of salvation (and damnation) on a demonstrably false conception of man's course of development. His ignorance of—I will not say biology—but at least of anthropology, is a fact too stubborn to be explained away. It is perhaps an excess of caution to omit biology from the list of God's ignorances; but the theory of unbroken continuity between man and the other animals cannot yet claim the certainty which belongs, for instance, to the heliocentric theory in astronomy. On the other hand, there is no possibility of doubt that, however man may have come into being, his original estate was a low and not a high one. Anthropology puts utterly out of court the notion of a fall from primal innocence, on which the whole Christian scheme

is based. Without that lapse into sin, where was the need for the atonement? The fundamental concept of Christianity is that of Paradise Lost through ancestral error or crime, and Paradise Regained through a piacular sacrifice. But we now know of an absolute surety that Paradise never was lost—that there never was a catastrophic fall from a state of innocence. The innocence of our first parents was the innocence of the beasts. Sin was born with society, and developed with the developing realization that only as a social animal can man fulfil his highest possibilities. There is not a shadow of justification for the idea that he was originally fitted out with high moral perfections which he forfeited by some act of disobedience to celestial orders. But that, and no other, is the pivotal assumption of Christianity.

Of all the batteries that are trained upon the beleaguered fortress, that of anthropology is perhaps the deadliest. One can understand at a pinch how the belief in revelation survived the counter-revelations of astronomy, geology, and biology. But anthropology not only knocks out the pivot of the Judæo-Christian system—it also throws a fatal flood of light upon the origin of the most characteristic features of Christian faith and practice. "Sacred history" is found to be largely composed of variants of profane mythology. "Theology" proves to be an effort to systematize and spiritualize fragments of folklore. The central mysteries of the faith are traced back, by no long or doubtful pedigree, to world-wide practices of fetishism, ancestor-worship, sympathetic magic. Things which had seemed imposing in their very absurdity—things which almost tempted one to say, "*Credo quia impossibile!* This is such dreadful nonsense that it can have emanated from no human brain"—such things are found, on investigation, to lack even the augustness of incomprehensibility, and to be perfectly comprehensible on their native plane of puzzle-headed savage logic. The Eucharist, for example, with its manifest suggestions of

human sacrifice and ceremonial cannibalism, takes its place among a hundred god-eating rites which have prevailed throughout the ages in as many different parts of the world. There is no feature of Christianity which has not its clear counterpart in African, Polynesian, Indian, American, and early European conceptions, doctrines, and rites. "Revealed religion" is seen to be natural religion in the fullest sense of the term—an indistinguishable part of the tropical jungle of fantasy and speculation which has everywhere its roots in man's ignorance and dread of the invisible and sinister powers of his environment.

Many other batteries are ranged against the beleaguered fortress. Not the least powerful is that of textual criticism, with its demonstration of the "human, all-too human" origin of the documents supposed to be dictated by God. Turn where we will, we find one or other of the assumptions of Christianity disproved and overthrown by the process, not of hostile speculation or philosophizing, but of dispassionate, disinterested research, patiently building up vast constructions of unassailable knowledge.

There remained, however, until four years ago, one defensive sleight which had not lost all its virtue. It was possible to fall back on a sort of pragmatism, and say: "The true religion is not that which harmonizes with objective fact, but the religion which *works*. See how beautifully Christianity works! What would the world be without it? How lofty is its ethic! How humane and gracious its spirit! It may be nonsense, but it is, oh, such beneficent nonsense!" Until August, 1914, it was possible, with a little effrontery, to hold this line of argument; to-day the reply to it is of the simplest: "*For 'beneficent' read 'impotent.'*" It was sufficiently ridiculous to maintain that a world in which the slum and the brothel and the gin-palace flourished mightily—a world in which the nations, even when not actually cutting each other's throats, were devoting their best

energies to preparations for massacre—was an incontrovertible testimony to the elevating and humanizing influence of Christianity. But now! What are we to say now, when the nations engaged in unprecedented orgies of murder are each of them claiming the special sanction, and even co-operation, of the Christian God? If such be the fruits of Christianity, what paganism could be more disastrous? If it be said that the madness of the modern world is a fruit, not of Christianity, but of its corruptions, the plain reply is that Christianity never existed save in its corruptions—by them alone is it known to history.

But it is just here that we find ourselves face to face with the miracle. Discredited beyond expression by the testimony of the whole universe, from the ocean deeps to the furthest constellation—historically, intellectually, morally bankrupt—Christianity is, nevertheless, as prosperous, to all appearance, as ever it was in the night of medieval ignorance. It has lost, no doubt, a good deal of its power to torture and to tyrannize; but are we quite safe even from a revival of these enormities? At all events, the whole mechanism, so to speak, of man's relation to the Unseen remains in his hands. Not only do the vast majority of Europeans have recourse to its forms and ceremonies at all the most important epochs in their lives, but when they seek to give collective utterance to any great emotion of hope or sorrow, of triumph or abasement, it must needs take the form of addresses to a deity who demonstrably began life as a tribal fetish. How are we to explain this invulnerability, this power of serene survival?

A full explanation of the miracle would mean an exhaustive treatise on religious psychology. In my small remaining space I can only jot down three partial explanations which occur to me.

In the first place, may we not fairly say that it is not the body of Christianity which survives, but rather its

ghost?—and ghosts are well known to be invulnerable. On certain levels, of course, especially in Roman Catholic and Orthodox countries, it survives as a full-blooded superstition, just as the worship of Vishnu survives in India and that of the Buddha in Ceylon. But in Protestant countries what is called Christianity is only an airy simulacrum, with no substance for shot or shell to bite upon.

Secondly, many people shrink from avowing to themselves their disbelief in Christian mythology and dogma, because they feel that in doing so they would be abandoning their hope of immortality. If life after death were ever to become a matter, not of faith, but of scientific certitude, Christianity would not gain, but would lose enormously by the demonstration. There would be a mighty landslide in the direction of Rationalism. As it is, the desire to believe in a heavenly re-union with those we have loved on earth leads many people to cling to a faith which so confidently promises this consummation. And as most Protestant Churches have surreptitiously, if not openly, thrown hell overboard, and retained only the agreeable aspects of immortality, there is the less motive for inquiring too closely into the grounds for their belief in it.

But the main reason, no doubt, for the survival of Christianity even among educated people lies in the fact that, apart from its promise of eternity, it steeps our earthly life in more or less roseate hues of sentiment. To many natures some sort of worship—the ritual utterance of the emotion begotten of the marvel and mystery of life—is a deep-seated spiritual necessity. They may have little or no faith in Christian documents or dogmas, but they must have some God to adore, and the Christian God comes handiest. In spite, therefore, of the scant success of many bygone attempts in that direction, I cannot but think that Rationalism ought to seek diligently for some artistically adequate form of

utterance for the cosmic emotion which it by no means excludes—nay, rather, which specially belongs to it, since it was reason, not superstition, that revealed the true marvels of the universe. If all England became Rationalist to-morrow, we should have to make mere museums of the Cathedrals, for we should not know what else to do with them. That is a great pity. I believe that, when we are prepared to make fitting use of these magnificent instruments of collective awe and aspiration, they will fall to us, as of right, by a natural inheritance. By "we" and "us" I do not mean, of course, the existing generation, but the immortal confraternity—or Church if you will—of those who believe that things are what they are, and that the real universe is ten thousand times more marvellous than the purblind imaginings of mythology and theology.

"RATIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS REACTION"

(TO THE EDITOR OF "THE LITERARY GUIDE")

DEAR SIR,—You ask me to review Miss Jane Harrison's lecture on *Rationalism and Religious Reaction;* but that I cannot do. Miss Harrison's paper is compounded of learning which I do not possess and experience to which I cannot attain. How can the ignoramus review the expert? It is done every day, no doubt, and more especially every week; but it is none the less a ridiculous and immoral proceeding. No; I cannot review Miss Harrison's "confiteor" of the "new Immanentist," any more than a colour-blind and stone-deaf man can criticize a Russian ballet. But I can, and will, jot down a few of the reflections awakened in me by her very suggestive discourse; and, if you think fit, you can print them for what they are worth.

The gist of her argument, I take it, is that the old Rationalism has had its day and done its work; that Christianity no longer makes any claim to literal historical truth; that theology has followed astrology into the lumber-room of the pseudo-sciences; and that what we have now to do is to accept "religion" as one of the data of psychology, and come back to "God" as a convenient medium of "emotional appeal," a "haunting melody," or (if I may suggest a humbler image) a sort of tuning-fork enabling us to strike a certain pitch, if not of irrational, at any rate of extra-rational, sentiment. Perhaps one might sum up the series of propositions as a denial of objective, and an affirmation of subjective, religion; and

both the denial and the affirmation seem to me to demand the closest scrutiny.

Is it the case that, as Miss Harrison puts it, "the idol is overthrown—the old orthodoxy is dead"? Is it the case that "such dogmas as the verbal inspiration of the Bible and the eternal damnation of the wicked are not only *not* held to-day by the religious, but are felt and avowed to be a danger and a prejudice to modern religion"? Does not this very statement carry its own confutation? How can a dogma not held by the religious be a danger to religion? What Miss Harrison really means is that these dogmas *are* held by a (great or small) number of persons who are not, in her eyes, "the religious," and of whom "modern religion," as she understands it, disapproves. That, of course, is true; but the importance of the proposition depends upon the relative strength of the adherents of "modern" and of ancient religion. Miss Harrison implies that the people who worship the Bible and those who believe in Hell are a negligible remnant; but is this so? I will only say that my impression is far otherwise.

Miss Harrison shows that the Bishop of Oxford does not believe in "things about the Creation and the Flood and the beginning of our race," which he finds "alien to the whole trend of philosophy, science, and history." Upon this her comment is: "Does any Rationalist ask more? What need to go on crying *Écrasez l'infâme* when a bishop himself declares *l'infâme* to be infamous?" But when Voltaire spoke of *l'infâme*, was he thinking of the folklore of Genesis? Surely not. He was thinking of the clericalism which had erected, on the basis of a childish folklore, a gigantic and cruel and paralysing tyranny. Is that tyranny dead, even in our own country? It no longer burns heretics or breaks them on the wheel; but is not, for example, Bishop Gore himself one of those emissaries of heaven who want to make it as difficult as possible for people to escape from the hell of an ill-

assorted and radically immoral marriage? Moreover, the brief extract from the Bishop's writings which Miss Harrison cites leaves it quite uncertain how much of the folklore of Christianity he rejects. He washes his hands of the Flood; but what about the Fall? And if he rejects the Fall, what about the Atonement? And if he rejects the Atonement, what about the Church of England? And why is he a prelate of that august hierarchy?

I set forth by avowing my ignorance, and I again apologize for it. In a world which is full of more urgent interests, I have not found time to inform myself as to the theology of the Bishop of Oxford. But the theology, or at all events the philosophy, of Bishop Blougram is known to all of us. It is no new thing. In a thousand variants it has prevailed in ten thousand palaces, deaneries, rectories, curacies—to say nothing of monasteries—since priestcraft was first invented. No doubt it is much more prevalent to-day than it was a hundred, or even fifty, years ago. No doubt sincere belief in the folklore of Christianity is to-day the exception rather than the rule. But is clericalism the less noxious for being insincere? Is priestly power and influence a more desirable factor in human affairs because many, or most, of the men who exercise it have to palter with their conscience in order to do so? Is it not rather, in a very real sense, all the more *infâme?* So long as a priestly caste professes to find "the word of God" in a bundle of Hebrew and bastard Greek writings, and to interpret it with heaven-given authority, can "we Rationalists," as Miss Harrison puts it, afford to "lay down our arms"? Does the fact that they no longer believe these writings to be the veritable "word of God" in any way diminish the ludicrously disproportionate importance and authority they claim for them? To put it in more general terms, is Christianity the less an incubus upon our political, social, and spiritual life because intelligent people—and intelligent priests—no longer believe in its supernatural pretensions? How

incalculable would be the advance in sanity and sincerity if the Churches could to-morrow be secularized, and all their lip-service to folklore silenced for ever! Blougramism is no doubt better than Torquemadism, but "thin partitions do their bounds divide"; and so long as Blougramism, sleek, subtle, and seductive, remains a power in the land, it seems to me that Rationalism, militant Rationalism, even the good old "Bible-smashing," has still a great and indispensable part to play.

What, now, of the religion of the "New Immanence," which Miss Harrison seems to regard as an enormous substantive acquisition to the world, a sort of ultimate birth of time, the "Open sesame!" to a spiritual millennium? In it, she would have us think, all antagonistic tendencies of thought are reconciled, Rationalism and mysticism can kiss and swear eternal friendship, and, before we know where we are, we shall all be going to church and receiving the sacrament—not because we credit it with any magical virtue, but because institutionalism is the indispensable expression of religion as a group function.

Now, Sir, though there is a certain novelty in the terms in which all this is expressed, it seems to me, in its essence, painfully familiar. We all know by observation—not all, I hope, by experience—the state of mind which finds Rationalism cold and comfortless, and hankers after the emotional excitements, the spectacular flourishes, of superstition. Here again we may say, no doubt, that sham superstition, superstition simulated for purposes of auto-suggestion, is less hurtful than real, naive, fanatical superstition. But does that justify us in hailing as a new gospel what is only a new and fashionable method by which persons too fastidious to indulge in a debauch of the good old dogma and ritual may attain a mild approach to the old intoxication?

Mysticism, according to Miss Harrison, has entirely cleared its character, because "it has yielded up to science

some of its secrets, and is mysterious no longer." It is "an emotional and intellectual state produced by special focus of attention, often coupled with suggestion. Its milder forms are 'reverie,' as known to us all; its extreme developments range up to dissociation of personality and even lunacy." Because some of the conditions of a morbid mental state are understood and can be experimentally reproduced, is the state any less morbid? And are the religious intuitions or experiences incident to that state entitled to any peculiar reverence? In so far as they are ecstatically pleasurable, it is a question for the mystic himself, as for the opium-eater, whether he does or does not pay too dear for his trances. But if we ask whether the mystic is a better man, or a more efficient member of society, for his habit of losing his "selfhood" in "intense contemplation" of "this God, this all-in-all," the reply must surely be that the evidence scarcely points in that direction. Read the history of India.

What makes me, I confess, a little impatient of this "modern," or "near-beer," religion is the implied assertion that the universe revealed by reason makes no appeal, or no adequate appeal, to the imaginative and emotional side of our nature. That is in my eyes the true Atheism, purblind and contumacious. With the marvel of existence throbbing in our veins and beating in upon us from the furthest galaxies, we must needs turn aside from that awe-struck contemplation which is surely the one true religion, and indulge our souls in orgies of theatrical symbolism, derived from monstrous savage rites, or else in ecstasies of vision which confessedly depend on nervous disturbances, and belong to the domain of the psychoanalyst, if not of the alienist. Failing to find God in the stupendous series of miracles daily and hourly impressing itself upon that fundamental miracle, our consciousness, we must seek him in attenuated devil-dances or artificially-begotten hallucinations. If Miss Harrison is right in telling us that the younger generation is seeking and

finding solace in these coquettings with the inane and the insane, I can only deplore such a symptom of racial neurasthenia. But *is* she right? May she not be mistaking an eddying backwater for the true stream of tendency?

No one would dream of denying that religious emotion is one of the inseparable data of human psychology. We are born with the instinct to ask "How?" and "Why?". We apply that instinct to the stupendous complex of phenomena in which we live and move and have our being; and, after tracing a little way back certain sequences of what we call cause and effect, we are always and everywhere brought up against a barrier of sheer, utter mystery, impenetrable to our senses, to our intelligence, to our imagination. The universe reveals itself as an immeasurable structure composed of a mysterious something which we call "matter"; and "matter" is all the time obeying an odd set of tendencies or habits—how acquired we know not—which we are fain to catalogue as its "properties." The persevering behaviour of all substances is equally marvellous: the chemistry of the sun no whit more so than the chemistry of a lump of coal or a drop of water. It is only from thoughtlessness that we are impressed by the immeasurably big and pass over the infinitely little. But, big or little, the whole thing is utterly inexplicable to our reason, which can measure processes, follow transformations, and utilize for practical ends the observed habits of matter, but can form no plausible conjecture as to how those habits arose. Then it is further observed that certain kinds of matter, pursuing their characteristic tendencies, combine to form peculiar pastes or jellies which have extraordinary powers of assimilation, growth, and reproduction; until in the fullness of time a new set of phenomena present themselves in the midst of the hurly-burly—a race of beings, to wit, who can focus it all, or a vast part of it, in the magic mirror they call their consciousness, and, standing