

## CHAPTER 6

The Sovereign of the Universe is on the whole a good Sovereign, but with so much business on His hands that He has not time to look into details. Such was Cicero's apology two thousand years ago for Jupiter's neglect of his terrestrial kingdom.<sup>1</sup> And the words would fairly express the vague thoughts which float through the minds of common men if they think of God at all in relation to the affairs of earth. But there are times in every life when, in the language of the old Psalm, "heart and flesh cry out for the living God" (Psa. 84:2). The *living* God: not a mere Providence, but a real Person--a God to help us as our fellow man would help if only he had the power. And at such times men pray who never prayed before; and men who are used to prayer, pray with a passionate earnestness they never knew before. But what comes of it? "When I cry and call for help, He shuts out my prayer" (Lam 3:8, R.V.): such is the experience of thousands. Men do not speak of these things; but, as they brood over them, the cold mist of a settled unbelief quenches the last spark of faith in hearts chilled by a sense of utter desolation, or roused to rebellion by a sense of wrong.

To some no doubt all this will savor of the mingled profanity and ignorance of unbelief. But by many these pages will be welcomed as giving full and fair expression to familiar thoughts. And the statement of these difficulties here is made with a view to their solution. But where is that solution to be found? It is no novel experience with men that Heaven should be silent. But what is new and strange and startling is that the silence should be so absolute and so prolonged; that, through all the changing vicissitudes of the Church's history for nearly two thousand years that silence should have remained unbroken. This it is which tries faith, and hardens unfaith into open infidelity.

Can this mystery be solved? Mere speculations respecting it are profitless. The solution must be found in Holy Scripture, if at all. The Old Testament, of course, will throw no light on it. Neither will the Gospels afford a clue; for these are the record of "days of heaven upon earth." Not yet need it be sought in the Acts of the Apostles, for, as already seen, the Book is the record of a transitory dispensation marked by abundant displays of the power of God among men. Is it not clear that if the key to the great secret of the Gentile dispensation can be found at all, it is in the writings of the apostle to the Gentiles that we must make search for it?

But here the ways divide. The wide and well-worn highway of religious controversy will never lead us to the truth we seek. *That* is reached only by a path which the general reader will refuse. Our choice lies between a study of these Epistles viewed as disclosing the "Pauline" developments, or perversions, of the teaching of the great Rabbi of Nazareth, or as containing that further revelation promised and foreshadowed by our Divine Lord in the later discourses of His ministry on earth. The one road is deemed the highway of modern enlightenment, the other is disparaged as a bypath now disused, or frequented only by the mystic and the unlearned. But in this sphere popularity is no test of truth. Let the atheistic evolutionist account for it if he can, the fact remains that man is

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<sup>1</sup> Froude's "Cesar, a Sketch" p. 87.

essentially a religious being. He may sink so low as to deify humanity and make self his god, but a god of some sort he must have.<sup>2</sup> Religion is a necessity to him. The Christian religion prevails in Christendom; other systems hold sway among the decaying civilizations of the world; but neither the deepest degradation nor the highest enlightenment has ever produced a single nation or tribe of atheists.

This undoubted fact, however, may well give rise to most serious thoughts. It cannot be admitted that the element of *truth* is of no account in religion, or that all these religions are equally acceptable. And once we come to the question of their relative excellence, the religion of Christendom defies all comparison. May we, then, maintain that all adherents of the Christian religion are assured of Divine favor? Let us for a moment, forgetting what is due to "the spirit of the age," assume the Divine authority of Scripture, and we shall find ourselves confronted by doubts whether religion in this sense is of any avail whatever. Judaism was, indeed, a Divine religion. It had "ordinances of Divine service and its sanctuary" (Heb. 9:1, R.V.), Divinely appointed in a sense to which no other system could pretend. And yet we read: "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart" (Rom. 2:28). And again, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). Now, if in a religion which seemed to consist so much in externals, the externals were absolutely of no value whatever save as they had their counterpart and reality in a man's heart and life, this surely must be still more true of Christianity. May we not assert with confidence that he is not a *Christian* who is one outwardly, but he only is a Christian who is one inwardly? May we not maintain that there is a distinction sharp and clear between *Christianity* and the religion of Christendom?

In the case of the Roman and Greek Churches, this distinction becomes a deep and yawning gulf. And further, as Mr. Froude has well said, in those countries which rejected the Reformation, "culture and intelligence have ceased to interest themselves in a creed which they no longer believe. The laity are contemptuously indifferent, and leave the priests in possession of the field in which reasonable men have ceased to expect any good thing to grow. This is the only fruit of the Catholic reaction of the sixteenth century." And he adds: "If the same phenomena are beginning to be visible in England, coincident with the repudiation by some of the clergy of the principles of the Reformation, and if they are permitted to carry through their Catholic 'revival,' the divorce between intelligence and Christianity will be as complete among ourselves as it is elsewhere."

"Between intelligence and *Christianity*" a divorce is impossible. But by "*Christianity*" the author here means "the religion of Christendom"; and with this correction his assertion is irrefutable. Mr. Balfour's "*Foundations of Belief*" escapes the difficulty here suggested by stopping short at the very threshold. His work is "*introductory* to the study of theology." And here his criticisms are searching, and his logic is without a flaw. But one step more would have brought him to the point where the ways divide. What is the theology he is

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<sup>2</sup> "We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long" (Edmund Burke). "Street arabs and advanced thinkers," is Mr. Balfour's classification of the exceptions to this rule ("Defence of Philosophic Doubt").

aiming at? Is it the religion of Christendom--a human religion based on a Divine ideal, framed to reach and regulate men's opinions and conduct so far as the spiritual side of their complex being is concerned? Or is it *Christianity*--a Divine revelation commanding the faith and thus molding the character and controlling the whole life of those who receive it?

In the estimation of some, the great religion of Asia compares favorably with that of Christendom, on account of its freedom from priestcraft and ceremonial observances, its repudiation of penance and everything of mere asceticism, and the singular truth and beauty of its doctrine of "the middle path." But the comparison is altogether dishonest. It is drawn between the ideal Buddhism of our English admirers of Gautama and the Christian system in its more corrupt developments. The practical Buddhism of Buddhist races is a gross and degrading superstition, and it cannot compare with the Christian religion even at its worst. And even the refined Buddhism presented by its Western exponents is lacking in that ennobling element which is distinctive of Christianity. The wholly legendary and half mythical story of Gautama's life are a poor equivalent for the well-ascertained facts of the ministry of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Here let a witness, Mr. Lecky, speak whose judgment is warped by no religious bias.

"It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character which, through all the changes of eighteen centuries has filled the hearts of men with an impassioned love, has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions; has not only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice, and has exerted so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists. This has, indeed, been the wellspring of whatever has been best and purest in the Christian life. Amid all the sins and failings, amid all the priestcraft, the persecutions, and fanaticism which have defaced the Church, it has preserved in the character and example of its Founder an enduring principle of regeneration."

If the Christian religion, even in its outward and human side, can justly claim such a testimony as this, what words are adequate to describe CHRISTIANITY in the higher and deeper sense? And let no one carp at this distinction as fanciful or forced. In fact, it is broad and vital. Just as the religion of Asia is based on the life and teaching of Gautama, so the religion of Christendom, regarded as a human system, claims to be based on the life and teaching of the great Rabbi of Nazareth. But the advent and ministry of Christ were, in fact, *introductory* to the great revelation of Christianity. Thus was crowned and

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3 For a calm, scholarly, and crushing refutation of those who, like deBensen, Seydel, &c., represent Buddhism as the original of Christianity, and of those who, like Sir Edwin Arnold, read Christianity into Buddhism, see Prof. Kellogg's "Light of Asia and Light of the World" (Macmillan). The Buddhism of Gautama, I may add, has no claim to be reckoned a *religion*, for it has no God. It was not a religion at all, but merely a philosophy. But his followers, in obedience to the instinctive craving of human nature for a religion, made Gautama himself their God. And the Buddhism of later times has invariably assimilated some of the elements of the base polytheisms by which it has been surrounded.

completed, as it were, the fabric which had been rearing for ages. In the public aspect of it, His mission had relation to the economy about to close. He was "born under the law" (Gal. 4:4). He "was a minister of the *circumcision* for the truth of God." Hence His words, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And as the result, infinite love, and grace which knows no distinctions, were restrained. "I have a baptism to be baptized with," He exclaimed, "and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"