

## WHAT IS RELIGION

And in What Does Its Essence Consist?

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In all human societies there always, at certain periods of their life, arrives a time when religion at first deflects from its fundamental meaning, then, deflecting more and more, loses its fundamental meaning and finally congeals in once for all established forms, and then its action upon the lives of men grows constantly less and less.

During such periods the cultured minority, not believing in the existing religious teaching, only pretends to be believing in it, as it finds this necessary in order to retain the popular masses in the established structure of life ; but the popular masses, though through inertia abiding in the once established forms of religion, in their lives are no longer guided by the demands of religion, but only by the popular customs and state laws.

Thus it has been many times in various human societies, but there has never before happened what now is going on in our Christian society. It never happened before that the rich, ruling, and most cultured minority, which has the greatest influence upon the masses, should not believe in the existing religion, but should be convinced that in our time no religion is needed, and should impress upon the people who doubt in the truth of the professed religion, not some more rational and clearer religious doctrine than the existing one, but the fact that

religion has in general outlived its time and is now not only a useless, but also a harmful organ of the life of societies, something like the blind gut in man's organism. Religion is studied by these men, not as something known to us through our inner experience, but as an external phenomenon, like a disease, to which some people are subject and which can be investigated only from its external symptoms.

Religion, according to the opinion of some of these men, originated in the spiritualization of all the phenomena of Nature (animism);

according to others, in the conception of the possibility of establishing a relation with the deceased ancestors ; according to others again, in the fear of the forces of Nature. And since, the learned men of our time continue to reason, science has proved that trees and stones cannot be vitalized, and the deceased ancestors no longer feel what the living are doing, and the phenomena of Nature are explained according to natural causes, there has also been destroyed the necessity of religion and of all those restrictions which, in consequence of religious beliefs, people have imposed upon themselves. According to the opinion of the learned there was a period of ignorance, – of religion. This period was long ago outlived by humanity, and only rare, atavistic signs of it are left. Then followed the metaphysical period, and that too has been outlived. But now we, the enlightened men, are living in the scientific period, in the period of positive science, which takes the place of religion and leads humanity to a high stage of development, such as it could never have reached by submitting to superstitious religious doctrines.

In the beginning of 1901 the famous French scholar, Berthelot, delivered a speech {Revue de Paris, Janvier, 1901) in which he informed his hearers that the time of religion was past, and that religion must now give way to science. I quote this speech, because it is the first which fell into my hands and because it was delivered in the capital of the cultured world by a well-recognized scholar ; but the same idea is constantly expressed everywhere, beginning with philosophic treatises and ending with newspaper feuilletons. M. Berthelot says in this speech that formerly there were two principles which moved humanity : force and religion. Now these movers have become superfluous, because science has taken their place. By science M. Berthelot, like all men who believe in science, apparently understands such science as embraces the whole field of human knowledge, harmoniously connected and distributed according to the degree of its importance, and is in possession of such methods that all the data acquired by it form an unquestionable truth. But since such a science does not exist in reality, while what is called science forms a conglomerate of accidental, disconnected bits of knowledge, which frequently are useless and not only do not represent an undoubted truth, but are filled through and through with the grossest delusions, which to-day are put forth as truths and to-morrow are overthrown, it is evident that there does not exist the very subject which, according to M. Berthelot's opinion, is to take the place of religion. Consequently the assertion of M. Berthelot and of the people who agree with him, that science will take the place of religion, is quite arbitrary, and is based on an ungrounded faith in the infallible science, which completely resembles the faith in the infallible church. Meanwhile, the people who call themselves and are called learned are absolutely convinced that such a science already exists, and that it must and can take the place of religion, and has even now overthrown it.

" Religion has outlived its usefulness, and it is a sign of ignorance to believe in anything but science. Science will arrange everything needed, and we should be guided in life by nothing but

science," think and say both the learned and the people of the crowd, who, though far removed from science, believe in the learned and with them assert that religion is an obsolete superstition, and that in life we should be guided by science, that is, in reality by nothing, since science, from its very aim, – to study everything in existence, – is unable to give any guidance in the life of man.

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The learned men of our time have decided that religion is not necessary, that science will take its place, or has already taken its place, and yet, as before so also now, no human society, no rational man, has lived, or can live, without religion (I say "rational man," because an irrational man, like an animal, can live without religion). A rational man cannot live without religion, because it is only religion that gives a rational man the necessary guidance as to what he should do, and what he should do first and what next. A rational man cannot live without religion, even because reason is the property of his nature. Every animal is guided in its acts – except those toward which it is driven by the direct necessity of gratifying its wishes – by considerations about the nearest consequences of its acts. Having reflected upon these consequences by means of that power of cognition which it possesses, the animal harmonizes its acts with these consequences and always without wavering acts in the selfsame manner, in correspondence with these considerations. Thus, for example, a bee flies after the honey and brings it into the hive, because in the winter it will need the food collected for itself and for its young ones, and outside of these considerations it does not know and cannot know anything ; even so acts a bird in weaving its nest and in flying from north to south and back again. Even so acts every animal in performing an act which does not result from the direct, present necessity, but which is conditioned by considerations of expected consequences. But it is not thus with man.

The difference between a man and an animal is this, that the animal's faculties of cognition are limited by what we call instinct, while man's fundamental faculty of cognition is reason. The bee, in collecting the food, can have no doubts as to whether it is good or bad to collect it. But a man, in collecting the harvest or fruit, cannot help but think as to whether he is destroying for the future time the production of the corn or the fruit and whether by his harvesting he is depriving his neighbours of food. And he cannot help but think as to what will become of his children whom he feeds, and many more things. The most important questions of the conduct of life cannot by a rational man be determined definitely for the very abundance of consequences, which he cannot help but see. Every rational man feels, if he does not know, that in the most important questions of life he must not be guided by his personal impulses, or by considerations as to the immediate consequences of his activity, because he sees too many various and frequently contradictory consequences, that is, such as with equal probability may be beneficent or injurious, both for him and for other people. There is a legend as to how an angel, who descended upon earth into

the house of a Godfearing family, killed the child in the cradle, and, when he was asked why he did that, replied that the child would have grown to be a great malefactor and would have caused the family a misfortune. Not only the question as to what human life is useful, useless, or harmful, but also all the most important questions of life cannot be solved by a rational man from a consideration of their nearest relations and consequences. A rational man cannot be satisfied with those considerations which guide the acts of an animal. A man may consider himself as an animal amidst animals who live in the present day, and he can consider himself as a member of his family and as a member of society, a nation, which lives by centuries, and he can and by all means must (since his reason irrepressibly draws him to it) consider himself as a part of the whole endless universe, which lives an infinite time. And thus a rational man has always been obliged in relation to the infinitely small phenomena of life which may influence his acts to make, and always has made, what in mathematics is called integration, that is, to establish, besides his relation to the nearest phenomena of life, his relation to the whole universe, infinite in time and space, by comprehending life as one whole. Such an establishment of man's relation to the whole, of which he feels himself to be a part and from which he deduces guidance in his actions, is what has been called religion. Therefore religion has always been and always must be a necessity and an irremovable condition of the life of a rational man and of rational humanity.

3

Thus has religion always been understood by men who are not deprived of the faculty of the higher, that is, the religious, consciousness, which distinguishes man from the animal. The oldest and most customary definition of religion, from which also comes the word "religion" itself (religare, to bind), consists in this, that religion is man's union with God. "Les obligations de l'homme envers Dieu, voilà, la religion," says Vauvenargue. A similar meaning is ascribed to religion by Schleiermacher and Feuerbach, who recognize as the basis of religion man's consciousness of his dependence on God. "La religion est une affaire entre chaque homme et Dieu" (Beile). "La religion est le résultat des besoins de l'âme et des effets de l'intelligence" (B. Constant). "Religion is a certain method for man to realize his relation to the superhuman and mysterious forces on which he considers himself to be dependent" (Goblet d'Alviella). "Religion is the definition of human life by means of the connection between the human soul and that mysterious spirit whose government of the world and of himself is recognized by man and with whom he feels himself to be bound up" (A. Reville).

Thus the essence of religion has always been understood by men who are not deprived of the highest human quality to be the establishment by man of his relation to the infinite being or beings whose power he feels over himself. And this relation, no matter how it may differ for the different peoples and at different times, has always determined for men their destiny in the universe, from which naturally has resulted the guidance for their activity. A Jew

understood his relation to the Infinite to be this, that he was a member of a nation chosen by God from among all the nations and so had to observe before God the covenant entered into with this nation by God. A Greek understood his relation to be this, that he, being related to the representatives of infinitude – the gods, must do what was pleasing to them. A Brahmin understood his relation to the infinite Brahma to be this, that he was a manifestation of this Brahma and must through a renunciation of life strive for a union with this supreme being. A Buddhist understands his relation to the Infinite to be this, that he, passing from one form of life to another, inevitably suffers, and that the sufferings are due to passions and desires, and that, therefore, he must strive for an annihilation of all passions and desires and for a transition into Nirvana. Every religion is the establishment of man's relation to the infinite existence to which he feels himself related and from which he deduces his rules of action. And so, if a religion does not establish man's relation to the Infinite, as, for example, is the case in idolatry and sorcery, it is not a religion, but only a degeneration of it. If a religion, though establishing man's relation to God, establishes it by means of assertions which are contrary to reason and contemporary knowledge, so that a man cannot believe in these assertions, this is again not religion, but only its semblance. If a religion does not bind up man's life with the infinite existence, this is again not a religion. Nor is that a religion which demands faith in propositions from which no definite direction for man's activity results.

True religion is man's relation to the infinite life about him, as established by him, a relation which is concordant with reason and human knowledge and binds his life up with this Infinity and governs his acts.

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The learned men of our time, though nowhere and at no time men have lived without religion, say, like that physician against his will in Molière's comedy, who insisted that the liver was in the left side, " Nous avons changé tout cela," and that we can and must live without religion. But religion, as it has been, so it remains the chief mover, the heart of the life of human societies, and without it, as without the heart, there can be no rational life. There has always been a great variety of religions, because the expression of man's relation to the Infinite, to God or the gods, differs in time and according to the degree of the development of the various nations, but never has any society of men, from the time that men have been rational beings, been able to live without religion, and never has any lived without it.

It is true, there have been periods in the life of nations when the existing religion was so corrupted and so far removed from life that it no longer governed it. But this interruption in the action of religion upon the lives of men, which arrives for every religion at a certain time, has been only temporary. Religion, like everything living, has the property of being born, developing, aging, dying,

again being born and always reborn in a more perfect form than before. After a period of the highest development of religion there always arrives a period of its weakening and stagnation, after which generally follows a period of regeneration and of the establishment of a more rational and lucid religious teaching than the former. Such periods of development, stagnation, and regeneration have existed in all religions : in the profound Brahmin religion, in which, as soon as it began to age and petrify in once established gross forms that deflected it from its fundamental meaning, there appeared, on the one hand, the regeneration of Brahminism, and, on the other, the advanced teaching of Buddhism, which greatly promoted humanity's conception of its relation to the Infinite. A similar decadence happened in the Greek and the Roman religions, and in a similar way, after the decadence had reached the highest point, there appeared Christianity. The same happened with the ecclesiastic Christianity, which in Byzantium degenerated into idolatry and polytheism, when, to counterbalance the corrupt Christianity, there appeared, on the one hand, Paulician-ism, and, on the other, in opposition to the doctrine about the Trinity and the Holy Virgin, strict Mohammedanism, with its fundamental dogma of the one God. The same thing happened with Popish Christianity in the Middle Ages, when it called the Reformation into life. Thus the periods when religions weaken, as regards their effect upon the majority of men, are an indispensable condition of the life and the development of all religious teachings. This is due to the fact that every religious teaching in its true sense, no matter how gross it may be, always establishes man's relation to the Infinite, which is the same for all men. Every religion recognizes man as equally insignificant in the presence of the Infinite, and so every religion always includes the conception of the equality of all men before what it considers to be God, be it the lightning, the wind, a tree, an animal, a hero, a deceased or living king, as was the case in Rome. Thus the recognition of the equality of men is an inevitable, fundamental property of every religion. But since in reality there has nowhere and at no time existed any equality among men, the moment there appeared such a new religious teaching, which always includes the recognition of the equality of all men, those men for whom the inequality was advantageous immediately set out to conceal this fundamental property of the religious teaching, by distorting the religious teaching itself. This has been done wherever a new religious teaching has made its appearance. And this has generally happened unconsciously, merely in consequence of the fact that the men for whom the inequality was advantageous, the ruling men, the rich, in order to feel themselves right in the face of the newly accepted teaching, without changing their own condition, tried in every way to ascribe to the religious teaching a meaning with which the inequality would be possible. But the distorted religion, which made it possible for those who ruled others to consider themselves right, was naturally transmitted to the masses whom it impressed with the idea that their submission to the ruling people was a demand of the religion professed by them.

Every human activity is evoked by three impelling causes, by feeling, by reason, and by suggestion, by that property which the physicians call hypnosis. At times a man acts only under the influence of feeling, striving to obtain what he wishes ; at other times he acts under the influence of reason alone, which points out to him what he ought to do ; at other times again, and this most frequently, man acts because he has suggested to himself and has had suggested to him by others a certain action and he unconsciously submits to this suggestion. Under normal conditions of life all three factors take part in man's activity. Feeling draws man toward a certain action, reason verifies the conformity of this action with what surrounds it, with the past and the assumed future, and suggestion compels man, without feeling or thinking, to commit acts that are evoked by feeling and approved by reason. If there were no feeling, a man would not undertake anything ; if there were no reason, a man would at once abandon himself to many contradictory feelings, which would be harmful both to him and to others ; if there were no property of submitting to one's own suggestion and to the suggestion of others, a man would be obliged without cessation to experience the feeling which has impelled him to a certain course of actions, and constantly to strain his reason for the verification of the correctness of his feeling. For this reason all three factors are necessary for the simplest human activity. When a man walks from one place to another, this is due to the fact that his feeling has impelled him to go from one place to another, his reason has approved of this intention and has prescribed the means of execution (in the given case the walking along a certain path), and the muscles of the body obey, and the man marches in the direction prescribed. During the time that he is walking his feeling and reason are set free for another activity, which could not be, if there did not exist the possibility of submitting to suggestion. This is what takes place in all human activities as well as in the chief activity, the religious. Feeling evokes the necessity of establishing man's relation to God ; reason defines this relation ; suggestion impels man to act in accordance with this relation. This is true only so long as religion is not subject to distortion. The moment this distortion begins, suggestion becomes stronger and stronger, and the activity of feeling and reason grows weaker. The means of suggestion are always and everywhere the same. These means consist in making use of that condition of man when he is most receptive for suggestion (childhood, important events in life, - death, birth, marriage), and in affecting him through productions of art, - architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dramatic performances, - and in this condition of susceptibility, which resembles the one obtained over separate persons in a state of halfsleep, in suggesting to him what is desired by the suggested.

This phenomenon may be observed in the case of all the ancient creeds : in the exalted teaching of the Brahmins, which degenerated into a coarse worship of numberless representations in various temples, with the accompaniment of singing and incense ; in the ancient Jewish religion, which was preached by the prophets and which changed into the worship of God in a magnificent temple, with solemn songs and processions ; in exalted Buddhism, which, with its

monasteries and representations of Buddha, and its endless solemn rites, has changed into the mysterious Lamaism; in Taoism, with its sorcery and incantations.

In all religious teachings, when they are on the point of becoming corrupt, their guardians of the religious teachings have always employed every effort in bringing men into a condition of a weakened activity of reason, and in suggesting to them what they themselves want. What it has been necessary to suggest in all religions has been the same three propositions which serve as the foundation of all those distortions to which the aging religions have been subjected : in the first place, that there is a special kind of men who alone can be the mediators between man and God or the gods; in the second place, that miracles have taken place and that these prove and confirm the authenticity of what the mediators between man and God say ; and, in the third place, that there are certain words, which are repeated by word of mouth or are written down in books, and which express the invariable will of God or the gods, and so are sacred and infallible. The moment these propositions are accepted under the influence of the hypnosis, everything else which the mediators between God and men may say is accepted as the holy truth, and the chief aim of the distortion of religion is attained, that is, not only the concealment of the law of the equality of men, but also the establishment and confirmation of the highest inequality, the division into castes, the separation into men and " goys," into orthodox and infidel, into saints and sinners. This very thing has also happened in Christianity : there was recognized the absolute inequality of men among themselves, who as regards the comprehensions of the teaching were divided into clergy and laity, and as regards the social position were divided into men who had the power and those who must submit to them, – and this inequality according to Paul's doctrine is recognized as established by God himself.

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The inequality of men, not only of the clergy and the laity, but also of the rich and the poor, masters and slaves, was established in the ecclesiastic Christian religion in just as definite and glaring a form as in the other religions. And yet, to judge from the data which we have concerning the primitive condition of Christianity, according to the teaching expressed in the gospels, it seems, all the chief methods of distortion practised in the other religions were foreseen, and a warning against them is clearly expressed. In relation to the class of the priests it says directly that no man can be the teacher of another (do not call yourselves fathers and teachers) ; in relation to ascribing a sacred significance to books it says that what is important is the spirit, and not the letter, and that men must not believe in the traditions of men, and that the whole law and the prophets, that is, all the books which were regarded as sacred writings, reduce themselves only to this, that we should do to our neighbours as we wish that our neighbours should do to us. If nothing is said against miracles, and miracles are described in the Gospel as having been practised by

Jesus, it is none the less to be seen from the whole spirit of the teaching that the truth of Jesus' teaching is not based on the miracles, but on the teaching itself. (" He who wants to know whether my teaching be true, let him do as I do.") Above all things, the equality of all men was proclaimed by Christianity, not as a deduction from men's relation to the Infinite, but as a fundamental teaching of the brotherhood of all men, since all men are recognized to be sons of God. For this reason, it would seem, it was impossible so to distort Christianity as to destroy the recognition of the equality of men among themselves.

But the human mind is inventive, and an entirely new means ("vraie," as the French say) was thought out, maybe unconsciously or semiconsciously, for making the Gospel warning and the obvious proclamation of the equality of all men ineffective. This " true " consists in ascribing an infallibility, not only to a certain letter, but also to a certain assembly of men, called the church, which has the right to transmit this infallibility to men chosen by them.

A short addition was invented for the Gospels, which was, that Christ, in ascending to heaven, transmitted to certain men the exclusive right, not only to teach men the divine truth (according to the letter of the Gospel verse He also transmitted the right to be immune against serpents, scorpions, and fire, though this right is generally not made use of), but also to make men saved or unsaved, and, above all else, to transmit this right to other men. As soon as the concept of the church was firmly established, all the Gospel tenets which interfered with the distortion became inactive, because the church was superior to reason and to the Scriptures, which were considered to be sacred. Reason was recognized to be the source of error, and the Gospel was not interpreted as was demanded by common sense, but as was wanted by those who composed the church.

Thus the previous three methods of the distortion of the religions, priesthood, miracles, and the infallibility of the Scriptures, were recognized and in full force in Christianity, as elsewhere. The legitimacy of the existence of mediators between God and men was recognized, because the necessity and the legitimacy of the mediators was recognized by the church ; the reality of miracles was recognized, because the infallible church bore witness to it ; the Bible was recognized as being holy, because the church so recognized it.

Christianity was corrupted like all the other religions, but with this difference that, for the very reason that Christianity with peculiar clearness proclaimed the fundamental proposition about the equality of all men, as sons of God, it was necessary to make a particular effort to distort this teaching, in order to conceal its fundamental proposition. This was done with the aid of the concept of the church, and it was done to an extent to which it was not carried in any other religious teaching. Indeed, never has any religion preached propositions so discordant with reason and with the contemporary knowledge of men and so immoral, as those which are

preached by the ecclesiastic Christianity. To say nothing of all the insipidities of the Old Testament, such as the creation of light before the sun, the creation of the world six thousand years ago, the putting of all the animals in an ark, and of all kinds of immoral abominations, such as the slaying of children and of whole settlements by the command of God; to say nothing of that stupid sacrament, about which Voltaire said that there exist all kinds of stupid religious doctrines, but that there never existed one, in which the chief religious act consists in eating one's own God, – what can be more senseless than that the Mother of God is both a mother and a virgin, that the heaven opened and a voice was heard from it, that Christ flew to heaven and there sits somewhere on the right of the Father, or that God is one and three, not three gods, like Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, but one and at the same time three? And what can be more immoral than that terrible teaching according to which God, being evil and revengeful, punishes all men for Adam's sin, and for their salvation sends His son down upon earth, knowing in advance that the men will kill Him and will be cursed for that ; and this, that the salvation of men from sin consists in being christened or in believing that all that actually happened thus and that the Son of God was killed by men for the salvation of men, and that those who do not believe this will be punished by Him with eternal torments ? Thus, to say nothing of what is considered by some to be an addition to the chief dogmas of this religion, such as all the beliefs in all kinds of relics, the images of all kinds of Holy Virgins, the supplications directed to all kinds of saints, according to their specialties; to say nothing of the Protestants' doctrine about predetermination, – the universally recognized foundations of this religion, as established by the Nicene symbol, are so stupid and immoral, and are carried to such a contradiction to sound human feeling and reason, that people cannot believe in them. Men may with their lips repeat certain words, but they cannot believe in what makes no sense. It is possible to say with our lips, " I believe in this, that the world was created six thousand years ago," or to say, " I believe that Christ flew to heaven and is sitting on the right of the Father, or that God is one and at the same time three ; " but no one is able to believe in all that, because these words make no sense. And so the men of our world, who profess the distorted Christianity, in reality do not believe in anything. In this does the peculiarity of our time consist.

7

The men of our time do not believe in anything, and yet, according to that false definition of faith which they take from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is incorrectly ascribed to Paul, they imagine that they have a faith. Faith, according to this definition, is the realization (yTrdaraais) of things hoped for and the assurance (eXevxoç) of things unseen. But, to say nothing of this, that faith cannot be the realization of things hoped for, since faith is a spiritual condition, while the realization of things hoped for is an external event, faith is as little the assurance of things unseen, since this assurance, as it says in the further elucidation, is based on trust in the testimony of truth, whereas trust and faith

are two different concepts. Faith is not hope and not trust, but a special spiritual condition. Faith is man's recognition of his position in the world, such as obliges him to commit certain acts. A man acts in accordance with his faith, not because, as it says in the catechism, he believes in the things unseen, but only because, having determined his position in the world, he naturally acts in correspondence with this position. Thus an agriculturist works the land and a navigator navigates the seas, not because, as it says in the catechism, either of them believes in the unseen, or because he hopes to get a reward for his activity (this hope exists, but it does not guide him), but because he considers his activity to be his calling. Even so a religious man acts in a certain manner, not because he believes in the invisible or expects a reward for his activity, but because, having come to understand his position in the world, he naturally acts in conformity with this position. If a man has determined his position in society by being a labourer, or an artisan, or an official, or a merchant, he considers it necessary to work, and he works as a labourer, an artisan, an official, or a merchant. Even so a man in general, having in one way or another defined his position in the world, inevitably and naturally acts in conformity with this definition (sometimes not even with this definition, but with a dim consciousness). Thus, for example, a man, having determined his position in the world by assuming that he is a member of God's chosen nation, who, to enjoy God's protection, must fulfil the demands of this God, will live in such a way as to fulfil these demands ; while another man, having determined his position by assuming that he has been passing through various forms of existence and that his better or worse future will depend on his acts, will in his life be guided by this determination ; and a third man, who has determined his position by assuming that he is a fortuitous combination of atoms, in which the fire has been temporarily kindled, and that this fire will be destroyed for ever, will act differently from the first two.

The conduct of these men will be quite different, because they have variously defined their positions, that is, because they believe differently. Faith is the same as religion, with this difference, that by the word " religion " we mean the phenomenon perceived externally, while by " faith " we mean the same phenomenon as experienced inwardly by man. Faith is man's cognized relation to the infinite world, from which results the direction of his activity. Consequently true faith is never irrational, or discordant with the existing knowledge, and its property cannot consist in supernaturalness and senselessness, as some think and as was expressed by a father of the church, " Credo quia absurdum." On the contrary, the assertions of true faith, though they cannot be proved, not only never contain anything contrary to reason and discordant with men's knowledge, but always elucidate what in life without the propositions of faith presents itself as irrational and contradictory.

Thus, for example, an ancient Jew, who believed that there was a supreme, eternal, almighty being who created the world, the earth, the animals, and man, and so forth, and would protect his nation, if

the nation would fulfil his law, did not believe in something irrational and discordant with his knowledge, but, on the contrary, this belief explained to him many otherwise inexplicable phenomena of life.

Similarly a Hindoo, who believes that our souls were in animals and that, according to our good or bad life, they will pass into higher or lower animals, by means of this faith explains to himself many phenomena which without it are inexplicable to him. The same is true of a man who regards life as an evil, and the aim of his life to be peace, which is attainable by the destruction of desires. He does not believe in something irrational, but, on the contrary, in what makes his world-conception more rational than it was without this faith. The same holds good in the case of a real Christian, who believes that God is the spiritual father of all men and that the highest good of man is attained when he recognizes his sonhood to God and the brotherhood of all men among themselves. All these beliefs, though incapable of proof, are not irrational in themselves, but, on the contrary, lend a more rational meaning to the phenomena of life, which, without these beliefs, seem irrational and contradictory. Besides, all these beliefs, in determining man's position in the world, inevitably demand certain acts to correspond to this position. Therefore, if a religious teaching asserts senseless propositions which explain nothing and only add to the confusion of the comprehension of life, this is not faith, but a distortion of it, such as has lost the chief properties of the true faith and not only does not demand anything of men, but even means to them a ministrations. One of the chief distinctions between a true faith and its distortion is this, that with the distortion of faith a man demands of God that, in return for his sacrifices and prayers, God shall fulfil his wishes, shall serve man, but with the true faith a man feels that God demands of him, man, the fulfilment of His will, – that He demands that man shall serve God.

Not only do the men of our time not have this faith, but they do not even know what it is, and by faith they mean either the oral repetition of what is given out to them as the essence of faith, or the performance of rites which may help them to receive what they wish for, as they are taught to believe by the ecclesiastic Christianity.

8

The men of our time live without any faith. One part of mankind, the cultured, rich minority, having freed itself from the ecclesiastic suggestion, believes in nothing, because it considers every faith to be either foolish or a useful instrument for exerting power over the masses. But the vast majority of the poor and the uncultured, who, with the rare exceptions of men who actually believe, are under the influence of the hypnosis, think that they believe in what is suggested to them under the guise of faith, but that is not faith, because it does not explain to man his position in the world, and only confuses it more than ever. Of this position and mutual relation of the unbelieving, hypocritical minority and the

hypnotized majority is the life of our world, which calls itself Christian, composed. And this life, both of the minority, which holds in its hands the means of the hypnotization, and of the hypnotized majority, is terrible, on account of the cruelty and immorality of the ruling men and of the crushed condition and stultification of the vast labouring masses. Never, at no time of the religious decline, has the neglect and oblivion of the chief property of every religion, especially the Christian, that of the equality of men, reached such a stage as in our day. The chief cause of the terrible present-day cruelty of man toward man is due, not only to the complete absence of religion, but also to the refined complexity of life, which conceals from men the consequences of their acts. No matter how cruel an Attila, a Dzhingis-Khan, and their men may have been, so long as they personally killed people, the process of killing must have been disagreeable to them, and still more disagreeable the consequences of the killing, – the sobs of the relatives, the presence of the corpses. Thus the consequences of the cruelty moderated cruelty itself. But in our time we kill people through such a complicated system of transmission, and the consequences of our cruelty are so carefully removed and concealed from us, that there are no actions to restrain cruelty, and the cruelty of one set of men against another has been growing and growing, and has in our time reached limits never reached before.

I think that if in our time, not a Nero, who is by all men recognized as a malefactor, but the simplest kind of an enterprising man wanted to make a pond of human blood for the sick, the wealthy, to bathe in, by the prescription of learned physicians, he would be able without molestation to arrange this matter, ' provided he did so within decent, accepted forms, that is, provided he did not forcibly compel men to draw their blood, but placed them in such a condition that they could not live without doing so, and, besides, invited the clergy and the learned, the first – to sanctify the new pond, as they sanctify cannon, guns, prisons, gibbets, and the second – to discover the proof of the necessity and legality of such an establishment, just as they discovered the proof of the necessity of wars and of houses of prostitution. The fundamental principle of every religion – the equality of all men among themselves – has been so forgotten, abandoned, and choked up by all kinds of stupid dogmas in the professed religion, and in science this same inequality has, in the form of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest, been to such an extent recognized as a necessary condition of life, that the destruction of millions of human lives for the advantage of the minority of the ruling men is regarded as a most common and necessary phenomenon of life, and is constantly taking place.

The men of our time never get tired boasting of those brilliant, unusual, colossal results achieved by technical art in the nineteenth century.

Without any doubt there has never in history existed such material progress, that is, such a command of the forces of Nature, as has been achieved in the nineteenth century. But there is also no doubt

concerning this, that there has never in history been an example of such an immoral life, free from all the forces which restrain the animal tendencies of man, as the one which our Christian humanity lives, growing more and more beastly all the time. The material progress achieved by the men of the nineteenth century is really great ; but this progress has been bought by a neglect of the most elementary demands of morality, such as humanity never attained, not even in the time of Dzhingis-Khan, or Attila, or Nero.

Unquestionably it is all very nice to have ironclads, railways, printing, tunnels, phonographs, Rontgen rays, and so forth. All that is very nice, but not less nice, not to be compared with anything, as Ruskin said, are the human lives which now are mercilessly wasted by the million in order to acquire ironclads, railways, tunnels, which not only do not adorn life, but even distort it.

In reply to this we are generally told that they are now inventing and in time will have invented such appliances that men's lives will not be wasted as they are now, but that is not true. So long as men do not consider all men to be their brothers, and do not consider human lives to be the most sacred thing, a thing which cannot be violated, and the maintenance of which should be considered the first, most urgent duty, that is, if men will not act religiously toward one another, they will always waste each other's lives for their own personal advantages. No fool will consent to waste thousands, if he is able to attain the same end by spending one hundred with the addition of a few human lives which are in his power. In Chicago approximately the same number of men are killed every year by the railroads, and the owners of the roads systematically introduce no appliances by which people may not be killed, having figured out that the damages paid every year to the families of the injured are less than the interest on the sum necessary for such appliances.

It is very likely that the men who ruin human lives for their advantage will be put to shame by public opinion or will be compelled to introduce these appliances. But so long as men are irreligious and do their business before men and not before God, they will, though introducing life-saving appliances in one place, again use human lives in another business, as being the most profitable material for gains.

It is easy to conquer Nature and to make a lot of railways, steamships, museums, and so forth, if human lives are not spared. The Egyptian kings prided themselves on their pyramids, and we admire them, forgetting the millions of slaves' lives that were ruined in these structures. Even so we admire our exposition palaces, ironclads, cables, forgetting how we pay for all that. We could be proud of it all, only if it were all done without restraint by free men, and not by slaves.

Christian nations have conquered and subjugated the American Indians, the Hindoos, the Africans, and now conquer and subjugate the Chinese, and are proud of this. But these conquests and

subjugations are not due to the fact that the Christian nations are spiritually higher than the nations subjugated, but, on the contrary, to the fact that they are spiritually incomparably lower than they. To say nothing of the Hindoos and the Chinese, even the Zulus have certain religious, obligatory rules, which prescribe certain acts and forbid others; but our Christian nations have no such rules. Rome conquered the whole world at the precise time when it was free from all religion. The same thing, though in a much higher degree, is now taking place with the Christian nations. They are all in the same condition, without religion, and so, in spite of the inner discord, they are all united in one federative band of robbers, in which theft, pillage, debauchery, the murder of individual persons, and mass murder are not only committed without the slightest pricks of conscience, but also with the greatest self-satisfaction, as happened lately in China. Some believe in nothing and are proud of it ; others pretend to be believing in what they, for the sake of their advantage, under the guise of faith, impress upon the people ; and others again, the vast majority, all the masses, accept as faith that suggestion under which they are, and slavishly submit to everything which is demanded of them by the commanding and unbelieving suggesters.

These suggesters ask for the same thing that was asked for by all the Neros, who tried in some way to fill the void of their lives, – the gratification of their senseless, all-pervading luxury. Now luxury is obtained in no other way than by the enslavement of men ; the moment there is enslavement, luxury is increased ; and the increase of luxury invariably brings with it the intensification of enslavement, because it is only the hungry, the cold, the needy, who can work all their lives at something that they do not need, but which is needed for the amusement of their masters.

9

In the sixth chapter of Genesis there is a profound passage, in which the writer of the Bible says that before the flood God, seeing that the spirit which He had given men to serve Him with had been used by them to serve their own flesh, became so angered at them that He was sorry for having created them and, before destroying men, decided to shorten their lives to 120 years. It is precisely the thing for which, according to the words of the Bible, God grew angry and shortened their lives, that has now happened with the men of our Christian world.

Reason is that force of men which determines their relation to the world ; and since the relation of all men to the world is one and the same, the establishment of this relation, that is, religion, unites men. But the union of all men gives them the highest physical and spiritual good accessible to them.

The perfect union, in the perfect, highest reason, and so the perfect good, is an ideal toward which humanity is striving ; but every religion which gives the men of a certain society the same answers to their questions as to what the world is and what they,

the men in this world, are, unites men and so brings them nearer to the realization of the good. But when reason, abstracting itself from its proper activity, – the establishment of its relation to God and its activity in correspondence with this relation, – is directed, not only upon the ministration of the flesh and on an evil struggle with men and with other beings, but also upon justifying this its bad life, which is contrary to man's properties and destination, then there result those terrible calamities from which the majority of men suffer now, and that condition under which a return to a rational and good life presents itself as almost impossible. The pagans who are united among themselves by the grossest religious teaching are much nearer to the cognition of the truth than the so-called Christian nations of our time who live without any religion, and in the midst of whom the most advanced men are sure and impress upon others that there is no need of religion and that it is much better to live without any religion.

Among the pagans there may be found men who, having come to comprehend the lack of a correspondence between their faith and the ever increasing knowledge and demands of their reason, will work out or adopt a religious teaching which is more in accord with the spiritual condition of the people, and in which they will be joined by their compatriots and fellow believers. But the men of our world, some of whom look upon religion as an instrument for ruling men, while others regard religion as a piece of foolishness, and others again, the vast majority of the people, being under the influence of a gross deception, think that they are in possession of the true religion, become impermeable for every forward movement and approximation to the truth.

Proud of their perfections, which are necessary for a physical life, and of their refined, barren reasoning, which has for its purpose to prove, not only their own righteousness, but also their superiority over all nations during all periods of history, they sink in their ignorance and depravity, fully convinced that they are standing upon such a height as has never before been reached by humanity, and that every forward step of theirs on the road of ignorance and depravity raises them to a greater height of enlightenment and progress.

10

It is proper for man to establish an agreement between his bodily – physical – and rational – spiritual – activity. A man cannot be satisfied, so long as this agreement has not been established in one way or another. This agreement is established in two ways : one, when a man with his reason determines the necessity or desirability of a certain act or acts, and then acts in conformity with the decision of his reason, and the other, when a man commits acts under the influence of feeling, and then invents a mental explanation or justification for them.

The first way of harmonizing the acts with reason is characteristic of men who profess some religion and who, on the basis of its tenets, know what acts they should perform, and what not. The second

way is characteristic chiefly of irreligious men, who have no common basis for the determination of the value of their acts, and who, therefore, always establish an agreement between their reason and their acts, not by a subordination of their acts to reason, but by this, that, having committed an act on the basis of a sentimental infatuation, they later employ reason for the purpose of justifying their acts.

A religious man, knowing what in his activity and in the activity of other men is good or bad, and why one thing is good and another bad, if he sees the contradiction between the demands of his reason and his acts or the acts of other men, uses all the efforts of his reason to find a means for the destruction of these contradictions, that is, for learning how in the best way to harmonize his acts with the demands of his reason. But an irreligious man, who has no guidance in the determination of the value of acts, independently of their agreeableness, in submitting to the whims of his feelings, which are most varied and frequently contradictory, involuntarily falls into contradictions ; but in falling into these contradictions, he tries to solve or conceal them by more or less complex and clever, but always false, reflections. Therefore, while the reflections of the religious people are always simple, not complicated, and true, the mental activity of the irreligious people becomes particularly refined, complicated, and false.

I will take the simplest kind of an example. A man is given to debauchery, that is, he is not chaste, is false to his wife, or, without marrying, abandons himself to debauchery. If he is a religious man, he knows that this is bad, and the whole activity of his mind is directed to finding means for freeing himself from the vice, – he tries to have no communion with fornicators and harlots, to do more work, to make his life as severe as possible, to avoid looking upon women as an object of lust, and so forth. All this is very simple and comprehensible for all men. But if a depraved man is irreligious, he immediately invents all kinds of explanations as to why he loves women so much. And here begin all kinds of most complex, cunning, refined reflections about the union of souls, about beauty, about freedom in love, and so forth, which, the more they spread, the more, they confuse the matter and conceal what is needed.

The same thing takes place for irreligious men in all spheres of activity and thought. To conceal the inner contradictions, complex, refined reflections are accumulated, and these, filling the mind with all kind of bosh, abstract people's attention from what is important and essential, and make it possible for them to persist in the lie in which the men of our time, without noticing it, live.

" Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil," it says in the Gospel. "For every one that doeth evil hate th the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved because they are evil."

And so the men of our world, in consequence of the absence of

religion, having arranged for themselves a most cruel, animal, immoral life, have also carried the complex, refined, trifling activity of the mind, which conceals the

( evil of this life, to such a degree of useless complication and intricacy that the majority of men have entirely lost the ability to see the difference between good and evil, between the lie and the truth.

For the men of our world there is not one question which they can approach directly and simply : all questions,– economic, internal and external governmental, political, diplomatic, scientific, – to say nothing of philosophic and religious questions, are with such artfulness put so incorrectly and are, therefore, swaddled in such a thick cloth of complex, unnecessary reflections, refined distortions of ideas and words, sophisms, and discussions, that all reflections about such questions circle in one place, without catching into anything, and, like wheels without the driving-belt of transmission, lead to nothing but that one purpose for which they have arisen, – to concealing from oneself and from men that evil in which they live and which they do.

11

In all the spheres of the so-called science of our time there is the same feature, which invalidates all the efforts of men's minds that are directed upon the investigation of various spheres of knowledge. This feature consists in this, that all the investigations of the science of our time avoid the essential question to which an answer is demanded, and investigate side issues, the investigations of which lead to nothing and become the more entangled, the farther they are carried on. Nor can it be different with a science which chooses its subjects of investigation by chance, and not according to the demands of the religious world-conception, which determines what is to be studied and when, what first and what last. Thus, for example, in the now fashionable subject of sociology, or political economy, there would seem to be but one question : why do some people do nothing, while others work for them ? (If there is another question, which consists in this, why people –work separately, interfering with one another, and not in common with all men, which would be more advantageous, this question is included in the first. If there shall be no inequality, there will be no struggle.) There would seem to be but this one question, but science does not even think of putting and answering it, but introduces far-fetched considerations, in which it deals in such a way that deductions from them can in no case either solve the fundamental question or contribute to its solution. They begin with considerations as to what has been and is, and this past and present are viewed as something invariable, like the course of the celestial luminaries, and they invent abstract ideas of values, capital, profit, percentage, and there appears a complex play of the minds of men quarrelling among themselves, which has been lasting for a hundred years. In reality the question can be solved easily and simply.

Its solution consists in this, that, since all men are brothers and equal among themselves, everybody must act toward others as he wishes that others should act toward him, and, therefore, the whole matter is in the destruction of the false religious law and the establishment of the new law. But the advanced men of the Christian world not only do not accept this solution, but, on the contrary, try to conceal from men the possibility of such a solution and for this purpose abandon themselves to that empty sophistry which they call science.

The same thing takes place in the juridical sphere. It would seem that the only essential question consists in this, why there are men who allow themselves to offer violence to other people, to rob, imprison, and execute them, to send them to war, and many more things. The solution of the question is very simple, if we consider it from the one relevant point of view, – the religious. From the religious point of view a man cannot and must not commit any acts of violence against his neighbour, and so, to solve the question, only one thing is needed, – to destroy all superstitions and sophisms which permit violence, and clearly to impress upon people the religious principles which exclude the possibility of violence.

The advanced people, however, not only fail to do so, but also use all the cunning of their mind for the purpose of concealing from men the possibility and the urgency of this solution. They write mountains of books about all kinds of laws, – civil, criminal, police, ecclesiastic, financial, and other laws, – and expound and discuss these themes, fully convinced that they are doing not only a useful, but also a very important work. But they do not even answer the question as to why men, being essentially equal, can some of them judge, coerce, rob, execute others, and do not even recognize its existence. According to their teaching it turns out that this violence is not exerted by men, but by something abstract called the \* state.

In a similar way the learned men of our time avoid and pass over in silence the essential questions and conceal the inner contradictions in all the spheres of knowledge. In the historical sciences there is one essential question : how have the working classes, that is, 999 thousandths of all humanity, lived ? To this question there is not even a semblance of an answer ; the question does not even exist, and mountains of books are written by the historians of one school as to how Louis XI. had a bellyache, what abominations were committed by Elizabeth of England and by John IV., who were the ministers, and what kind of verses and comedies were written by the literary men for the amusement of these kings and their paramours and ministers. But the historians of another school describe the locality in which the people lived, what they ate, what they traded in, what garments they wore, in general, what could not have had any influence upon the life of the people, but was the consequence of their religion, which by the historians of this category is recognized as the result of the food and the apparel used by the people.

However, the answer to the question as to how the working people used to live can be given only by recognizing religion as a necessary condition of the people's life, and so the answer is to be found in the study of those religions which were professed by the people, and which placed the people in the condition in which they were.

In the natural history sciences, it would seem, there was no particular necessity for dimming men's sound reason ; but even here, thanks to the mental process applied by the science of our time, they lose themselves, instead of giving the most natural answers to the question as to what the world of living beings, plants, and animals is, and how it is subdivided, in an empty, obscure and absolutely useless prattle, which is chiefly directed against the Biblical history of the creation of the world, about how the organisms originated, which nobody needs to know and which nobody can know, because this origin, no matter how we may explain it, will always be lost for us in infinite time and space. And on these themes they have invented theories and retorts, and additions to theories, which form millions of books, and the unexpected deduction from which is this one, that the law of life to which man must submit is the struggle for existence.

The applied sciences, moreover, such as the technical sciences and medicine, on account of the absence of a guiding religious principle, involuntarily depart from their rational purpose, and receive false directions. Thus the whole of the technical sciences are not directed upon the alleviation of the people's labour, but upon improvements needed only by the wealthy classes, which still more separate the rich from the poor, the masters from the slaves. If some advantages from these inventions and improvements, tiny bits of them, find their way among the popular masses, this is not so because they are intended for the masses, but only because by their property they cannot be withheld from the people.

The same is true of medical science, which in its false direction has reached a point where it is accessible only to the wealthy classes ; but the masses, from their manner of life and poverty and neglect of the chief questions of the improvement of their life of wretchedness, can make use of it to such an extent and under such conditions that this aid only shows more clearly the deviation of medical science from its purpose.

Most striking, however, is this deviation from the fundamental questions and their distortion in what in our time is called philosophy. It would seem that there is one question which is subject to the solution of philosophy, and that is : What must I do ? To this question there have been some kinds of answers in the philosophy of the Christian nations, though these were connected with the greatest unnecessary confusion of ideas : such answers were those by Spinoza, by Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason, by Schopenhauer, and especially by Rousseau. But of late, since the time of Hegel, who recognized everything in existence as sensible, the question as to what we shall do has been put in the background,

and philosophy directs all its attention to the investigation of what is, and to the subordination of this to a previously stated theory. This is the first step down. The second step that brings human thought even lower is the recognition of the struggle for existence as a fundamental law, only because this struggle may be observed in the case of animals and plants. According to this theory it is assumed that the destruction of the weaker is a law that should not be interfered with. Finally, we come to the third step, where the sophomoric attitudinizing of the half-

Nietzsche pretends to fight, but is also an eternal supreme law arrived at by all humanity, in Brahmanism, in Buddhism, in Confucianism, in the ancient Persian religion. Suddenly there appears a man who announces that he has become convinced that self-renunciation, humility, meekness, love, – all these are vices that ruin humanity (he has in mind Christianity, forgetting all the other religions). Naturally such an assertion at first puzzles one. But after a little thought and after finding in the work no proofs of this strange proposition, every sensible man must reject such a book and marvel, seeing that there is nothing so foolish that in our time it cannot find a publisher. But with Nietzsche's books it is not so. The majority of so-called enlightened men seriously analyze the theory of the overhumanity, recognizing its author as a great philosopher, an heir of Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant.

This is all due to the fact that the majority of so-called enlightened men of our time hate the mention of virtue, of its chief foundation, – self-renunciation, love, – which embarrass and condemn their animal life, and rejoice when they meet with some even poorly, senselessly, incoherently expressed teaching of egoism, cruelty, and the assertion of their own happiness and greatness at the expense of other people's lives, a teaching which they live by.

12

Christ reproached the Pharisees and scribes for having taken the keys of the kingdom of God and for not entering themselves and not letting anybody else enter.

The same thing is being done nowadays by the learned scribes of our time : these men have seized the keys, not of the kingdom of heaven, but of enlightenment, and they do not enter themselves, and do not let others in. The priests, the clergy, have by means of all kinds of decep-

tions and hypnosis impressed upon people that Christianity is not a teaching which preaches the equality of all men and so destroys the whole present pagan structure of life, but that, on the contrary, it maintains this structure; prescribes that people be distinguished from one another like the stars ; prescribes that it be accepted that every power is from God and must be obeyed without any discussion ; and in general inculcates upon the oppressed the idea that their condition is from God and that they must bear it in humility and meekness, and must submit to those oppressors who not

only may fail to be meek and humble, but must, correcting others, teach, punish, – as emperors, kings, popes, bishops, and all kinds of lay and spiritual powers, – and live in splendour and luxury, which their subjects are obliged to supply to them. But the ruling classes, thanks to this false teaching which they maintain by force, dominate the masses, whom they compel to serve their idleness, luxury, and vices. Meanwhile, the only men, the learned, who have freed themselves from the hypnosis, the men who alone could free the masses from oppression, and who say that they wish this, instead of doing what might attain this end, do the very opposite, imagining that they are thus serving the masses.

It would seem that from a mere superficial observation of what the men who keep the masses in subjection are interested in, these people might understand what the nations are moved by and what keeps them in a certain state, and should direct all their forces to this power ; but, far from doing so, they consider this to be quite useless.

It is as though these men did not wish to see the truth and as though, in spite of their carefully, often even sincerely, doing for the masses the most varied things, they did not do the one thing necessary for them, so that their activity resembles the activity of a man who should try with the effort of his muscles to shift a train, whereas he needs but get on the tender and do what he constantly sees the engineer do, – move the lever which admits the steam to the cylinder. This steam is the religious world conception of men. They need only see with what zeal all the rulers defend this power, by means of which they rule over the nations, to understand to what they must direct their efforts, in order to free the masses from their enslavement.

What does the Turkish Sultan defend, and what does he cling to most ? And why does the Russian Emperor, upon arriving in a city, make it his first business to visit the relics and images ? And why, in spite of all his varnish of culture, does the German Emperor in all his speeches, in season and out of season, speak of God, of Christ, of the holiness of religion, of the oath, and so forth ? Because they all know that their power is based on the army, and the army, the possibility of the existence of the army, only upon religion. And if rich people are particularly pious and pretend to be believers, attend church, and observe the Sabbath, they do so chiefly because their instinct of self-preservation tells them that with the religion which they profess is connected their exclusive advantageous position in society.

Frequently all these men do not know in what way their power is maintained by the religious deception, but they know from a feeling of self-preservation what the weak spot of their position is, and they first of all defend this spot. These men have always admitted and always will admit a socialistic, even a revolutionary propaganda, within certain limits; but they will never allow the religious foundations to be touched.

And so, if the advanced men of our time – the scholars, liberals, socialists, revolutionists, anarchists – cannot from history and from psychology understand what it is the nations are moved by, they could convince themselves by this objective experience that what moves them is not to be found in material conditions, but only in religion.

But, strange to say, the learned, the advanced men of our time, who very sensitively analyze and understand the conditions of the lives of the nations, do not see what blinds one by its very obviousness. If the men who do so leave the masses in their religious ignorance purposely, in order to maintain their advantageous position amidst a minority, this is a terrible, disgusting deception. Those who act like that are the very hypocrites whom more than any other, or even alone, Christ condemned, because no inhuman beings and scoundrels have introduced so much evil into the life of humanity as these men.

But if these men are sincere, the only explanation of this strange obfuscation is this, that, as the masses are under the influence of the false religion, so also the so-called enlightened men of our time are under the influence of the false science, which has decided that the chief nerve by which humanity has always lived is no longer of any use to it and may be supplanted by something else.

13

In this error or cunning of the scribes – the educated men of our world – does the peculiarity of our time consist, and in this is to be found the cause of that wretched condition in which Christian humanity lives, and of that bestialization in which it sinks more and more.

As a rule, the advanced, cultured men of our world assert that the false religious beliefs professed by the masses are not of any particular importance, and that it is not worth our while, nor even necessary, directly to struggle against them, as formerly did Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau, and others. Science, that is, all that scattered, incidental information which they disseminate among the masses, will, in their opinion, naturally attain this end, that is, a man, having learned how many millions of miles the earth is removed from the sun and what metals are to be found in the stars and the sun, will stop believing in the propositions of the church.

In this sincere or insincere assertion or assumption there is a great delusion or terrible cunning. From his earliest years, – an age most susceptible to suggestion, – when an educator cannot be careful enough about what is transmitted to the child, they inculcate upon him the stupid and immoral dogmas of the so-called Christian religion, which are not compatible with reason or with science. They teach the child the dogma of the Trinity, which is incomprehensible to a normal brain, the descent of one of these gods upon earth for the redemption of the human race, His resurrection and ascension to heaven ; he is taught to expect the second coming and punishment with eternal torments for not believing in these

dogmas ; he is taught to pray concerning his needs, and many more things. And when these propositions, which are not in harmony with reason, nor with contemporary knowledge, nor with the human consciousness, are indelibly impressed upon the child's susceptible mind, he is left alone, to find his way as well as he can amidst the contradictions which result from the dogmas accepted by him and made his own as the undoubted truth. No one tells him how he could and should harmonize these contradictions. If the theologians attempt to harmonize these contradictions, these attempts only confuse the matter more than ever. By degrees a man gets used to the idea (and in this he is strongly supported by the theologians) that reason cannot be relied upon, and that, therefore, everything is possible in the world, and that in man there is nothing by means of which he can distinguish good from evil and the lie from the truth, and that in what is most important to him, – in his acts, – he must not be guided by his reason, but by what others tell him. Naturally a terrible distortion in a man's spiritual world must be produced by such an education, and this distortion is in maturer years maintained with all the means of suggestion, which is exercised all the time against the masses with the aid of the clergy.

But if a spiritually strong man with great labour and effort succeeds in freeing himself from the hypnosis in which he has been educated since his childhood and maintained in his maturer years, that distortion of his soul, through which he has been impressed with unbelief in his own reason, cannot pass unnoticed, just as in the physical world the poisoning of the organism with some powerful venom cannot pass without leaving any trace. Having freed himself from the hypnosis of the deception, such a man, hating the lie from which he has just freed himself, will naturally acquire that teaching of the advanced men according to which every religion is regarded as one of the chief impediments in humanity's forward movement on the path of progress. Having acquired this teaching, such a man will become just as unprincipled a man as his teacher, a man who is guided in life by nothing but his desires, and who, far from condemning himself for this, considers himself for this very reason to be on the highest accessible point of spiritual development.

Thus it will be with the men who are spiritually strongest. Those who are less strong, though they may awaken to doubt, will never fully free themselves from the deception in which they are brought up, and, allying themselves with all existing kinds of finely spun, misty theories, which are to justify the stupidity of the dogmas accepted by them, and inventing others, will live in the sphere of doubts, haziness, sophisms, and self-deception, and will only contribute to the obfuscation of the masses and will counteract their awakening.

But the majority of men, having no strength and no chance to struggle against the suggestion exercised against them, will live and die for generations, as they now live, deprived of man's highest good, – the true religious concept of life, – and will always form nothing but a submissive tool for the classes that rule over them

and deceive them.

It is this terrible deception that the advanced men say is not important and is not worth struggling against. The only explanation of such an assertion, if these who make it are sincere, is this, that they themselves are under the hypnosis of the false science ; but if they are not sincere, the attack of the established beliefs is not advantageous and frequently is dangerous. In any case, in one way or another, the assertion that the profession of a false religion is harmless or at least not important, and that, therefore, it is possible to disseminate enlightenment without destroying the religious deception, is absolutely untrue.

The salvation of humanity from its calamities is only in its liberation from the hypnosis in which it is held by its priests as also from the one into which it is led by the learned. In order to pour something into a vessel it is necessary first to free it from what it contains. Just so it is necessary to free men from the deception in which they are held, in order that they may be able to accept the true religion, that is, a regular relation to the beginning of everything, to God, which would correspond to the development of humanity, and a guidance for their activity, as deduced from this relation.

14

" But is there a true religion ? All the religions are infinitely varied, and we have no right to call any one of them true, simply because it more nearly fits in with our tastes," will say the men who consider the religions from their external forms as a certain kind of a disease, from which they feel themselves free, but from which the rest of the people are still suffering. But that is not true : the religious differ in their external forms, but they are all alike in their fundamental principles. It is these fundamental principles of all religions that form the true religion which alone in our time is proper for all men, and the adoption of which can alone save humanity from all its calamities.

Humanity has been living for a long time, and as it has traditionally worked out its practical acquisitions, so it could not help but work out those spiritual principles which form the foundations of its life, and the rules of conduct which result from them. The fact that the blinded men do not see them does not prove their nonexistence. Such a religion of our time, common to all men, – not some one religion with all its peculiarities and distortions, but a religion which consists in those religious propositions which are identical in all the widely disseminated and well-known religions, as professed by more than nine-tenths of the human race, – does exist, and men have not yet become completely brutalized because the best men of all the nations, even though it be unconsciously, hold to this religion and profess it, and it is only the suggestion of the deception which with the aid of the priests and the learned is exercised against people that keeps them from accepting it consciously.

The tenets of this true religion are to such an extent proper to men that, as soon as they are communicated to men, they are accepted as something well known and natural. For us this true religion is Christianity, in those of its tenets in which it coincides, not with the external forms, but with the fundamental propositions of Brahmanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Buddhism, and even Mohammedanism. Even so for those who profess Brahmanism, Confucianism, and so forth, the true religion will be the one whose fundamental propositions coincide with the fundamental propositions of all the other great religions. These propositions are very simple, comprehensible, and incomplex.

These propositions are that there is a God, the beginning of everything ; that in man there is a particle of this divine principle, which he is able by his life to increase or diminish in himself ; that for the increase of this principle a man must suppress his passions and increase his love in himself ; and that the practical means for doing this consists in acting toward others as we would that others should act toward us. All these propositions are common to Brahmanism, to Judaism, to Confucianism, to Taoism, to Buddhism, to Christianity, to Mohammedanism. (Though Buddhism does not give a definition of God, it none the less recognizes that with which man blends and into which he sinks, when he reaches Nirvana. Thus that with which man unites as he sinks into Nirvana is that principle which is recognized as God by Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism.)

" But this is not religion," will be said by the men of our time, who are accustomed to accept what is supernatural, that is, senseless, as the chief symptom of religion. " This is anything you please, philosophy, ethics, and reflections, but not religion." Religion, according to their conception, must be absurd and incomprehensible (*credo quia absicrduin*). And yet it is only out of these propositions or, rather, in consequence of their being preached as a religious teaching that by a long process of distortion have been worked out all those absurdities of miracles and supernatural events which are regarded as the fundamental symptoms of every religion. To assert that supernaturalness and absurdity form the fundamental properties of religion is the same as to assert, when one observes nothing but rotten apples, that the bitterness of decay and an injurious effect upon the stomach are the fundamental property of the apple.

Religion is the determination of man's relation to the beginning of everything, and of man's destination, which follows from this proposition, and, following from this destination, of rules for his conduct. And the universal religion, the fundamental propositions of which are identical in all professions, fully satisfies these demands. It determines man's relation to God, as of the part to the whole, and from this relation deduces man's destination, which consists in the increase of the divine property in himself ; now it is man's destination to deduce practical demands from the rule of doing unto others as we would that others would do unto us.

People frequently doubt, and at one time I myself doubted, whether such an abstract rule as this, that we should do unto others as we would that others should do unto us, could be as obligatory a rule and guide of acts as the simpler rules, – of fasting, prayer, communion, and so forth. But to this doubt an incontrovertible answer is given by the spiritual condition of, say, a Russian peasant, who would rather die than spit the Eucharist out on the manure pile, and yet is ready at the command of men to kill his brothers.

Why could not the demands which are deduced from the rule of not doing unto another what we should not wish another to do unto us – such as that we should not kill our brothers, should not curse, commit adultery, take vengeance, make use of our brother's want for the gratification of our lusts, and many others – be inculcated with the same force and become as obligatory and inviolable as is the belief in the sacredness of the Eucharist, the images, and so forth, to people whose faith is based more on trust than on any clear internal consciousness ?

15

The truths of the religion of our time common to all men are so simple, so comprehensible, and so near to the heart of every man, that, it would seem, it would suffice for the parents, rulers, and instructors, in place of the obsolete and absurd doctrines about the Trinities, mothers of God, redemptions, Indras, Trimurtis, heaven-ascending Buddhas and Mohammeds, in which they frequently do not believe themselves, to inculcate upon the children and the adults the simple, clear truths of the religion which is common to all men, – the metaphysical essence of which consists in this, that in man there dwells the divine spirit, and the practical rule of which is this, that a man should act toward others as he wishes that others should act toward him, and the whole human life would change of its own accord. If only, as now children and adults are impressed with the faith that God sent His Son in order to redeem Adam's sins, and established His church, which must be obeyed, and the rules resulting from this, which are to pray at such a time and place, and to offer sacrifices, and at such a time to abstain from a certain kind of food and on certain days from work, it were inculcated upon men and asserted that God is spirit, whose manifestation lives in us and whose power we can increase by means of our lives ! If this and everything which naturally results from these foundations were inculcated upon men, just as now they are impressed with useless stories about impossible events and with rules about meaningless rites resulting from these stories, there would, in place of a senseless war and disunion, and without the aid of diplomas, international laws, congresses of peace, political economists, and socialists of every description, very soon result a peaceful, concordant, happy life of humanity, guided by the one religion.

But nothing of the kind is taking place ; not only is the deception of the false religion not destroyed and the true religion not

preached, but men, on the contrary, more and more depart from the possibility of accepting the truth.

The chief reason why men do not do what is natural, necessary, and possible, consists in this, that the men of our time have become so accustomed, in consequence of a long irreligious life, to arranging and strengthening their existence by means of violence, bayonets, bullets, prisons, gibbets, that it seems to them that such a structure of life is normal, and even that there can be no other. Not only is this the belief of those to whom the present order is advantageous, but also those who suffer from it are so stupefied by the suggestion exerted against them that they consider violence the only means of order in human society. And yet it is this very arrangement and strengthening of human life by means of violence that more than anything else removes men from the comprehension of the causes of their suffering and so from the possibility of a true order.

What is taking place is very much what a bad and ill-intentioned physician does when he drives in a vicious eruption, not only deceiving the patient by this, but even aggravating the disease itself and making its cure impossible.

To the ruling men, who have enslaved the masses and who think and say, "Après nous le deluge," it seems very convenient by means of the army, the clergy, the soldiers, and the police, and by means of threatening bayonets, bullets, prisons, workhouses, gibbets, to compel the enslaved men to continue to live in their stultification and enslavement, and not to interfere with the rulers in their enjoyment of their position. And this the ruling people do, calling such an order of things good, though nothing so much interferes with the true social order as this. In reality such an order is not only not good, but is even an establishment of evil.

If the men of our societies, with the residue of those religious principles which none the less live in the masses, did not constantly see crimes committed by those men who have taken it upon themselves to watch over order and morality in the lives of men, – wars, executions, prisons, taxes, the sale of whiskey, and of opium, – they would never think of doing one-hundredth part of those evil deeds and deceits, and the violence and murder, which they now commit with the full assurance that these deeds are good and proper to men.

The law of human life is such that its improvement, both for the individual and the society of men, is possible only through an internal moral perfection. But all the attempts of men to improve their lives by external interactions by means of violence serve as a most efficient sermon and example of evil, and so not only fail to improve life, but, on the contrary, increase the evil, which grows more and more, like a snowball, and more and more removes men from the one possibility of the true improvement of their lives.

In proportion as the habit of violence and of crimes, which under

the guise of law are committed by the guardians of the peace and of morality, becomes more and more frequent and more and more cruel, and is more and more justified by the suggestion of that lie which is given out as religion, men become more and more confirmed in the idea that the law of their life is not in love and in mutual service, but in struggle and mutual devouring.

And the more they become confirmed in this idea which debases them to the level of the animal, the more difficult it is for them to awaken from that hypnosis in which they are and to accept as the foundation of life the true religion of our time, which is common to all humanity.

A false circle is established: the absence of religion makes possible the animal life, which is based on violence ; the animal life, which is based on violence, makes the liberation from the hypnosis and the acceptance of the true religion more and more impossible. For this reason men do not do what is natural, possible, and indispensable in our time, – they do not destroy the deception of the similitude of religion and do not accept and preach the true religion.

16

Is there a way out from this magic circle, and in what does it consist?

At first it appears that these men ought to be brought out of that circle by the governments which have taken it upon themselves to guide the life of the nations for their own good. Thus always thought the people who tried to substitute for the structure of life which is based on violence another structure of life, which is rational and based on mutual service and love. Thus also thought the Christian reformers, and the founders of various theories of European communism, and the famous Chinese reformer, Mi-ti, who proposed to the government, for the good of the nation, to teach the children in the schools non-military sciences and exercises, and not to give to adults rewards for military acts, but to teach children and adults rules of respect and love, and to offer rewards and encouragement for acts of love. Thus also have thought many Russian religious reformers from among the masses, many of whom I have known, beginning with Syutàev and ending with an old man who has five times petitioned the Tsar to command the false religion to be abolished and true Christianity to be preached.

It naturally seems to people that the governments, which justify their existence by their care for the public weal, ought, for the confirmation of this good, to wish to use that one means, which in no case can be injurious to the masses and which can be productive of only the most fruitful consequences. But the governments have never and nowhere taken this obligation upon themselves ; they have, on the contrary, always and everywhere with the greatest zeal defended the existing false, obsolete creed, and have with all the means at their command persecuted those who have tried to give the

masses the foundations of the true religion. In reality it cannot be otherwise : for the governments to show up the lie of the existing religion and to preach the true religion is the same as though a man should cut off the branch on which he is sitting.

But if the governments do not do that, it would seem that it ought to be done by those learned men who, having freed themselves from the deception of the false religion, wish, as they say, to serve the masses which have nurtured them. But these men, like the governments, do not do so, in the first place, because they consider it purposeless to subject themselves to the unpleasantness and dangers of persecutions from the governments by revealing the deception which is defended by the government and which, according to their conviction, will destroy itself ; in the second place, because, considering every religion an outlived delusion, they have nothing to offer to the masses in place of the deception if they should destroy it.

There are left those great masses of unlearned men, who are subject to the hypnosis of the ecclesiastic and governmental deception, and who, therefore, think that that semblance of religion which is suggested to them is the one true religion, and that there is and can be no other. These masses are subjected to a constant, intensified action of hypnosis ; generation after generation is born, lives, and dies in that stupefied condition in which it is held by the clergy and the government, and if men free themselves from it, they inevitably find their way into the school of the learned who deny religion, and their influence becomes as useless and harmful as the influence of their teachers.

Thus this is disadvantageous to some, and impossible to others.

17

There seems to be no way out.

Indeed, for irreligious people there is and there can be no way out from this condition : though the men who belong to the upper ruling classes may pretend to be interested in the weal of the popular masses, they will never seriously attempt to destroy that stultification and enslavement in which the masses live and which make it possible for the upper classes to rule them (nor can they do so, since they are guided by worldly considerations). Similarly the men who belong to the enslaved, who, too, are guided by worldly considerations, cannot wish to make their otherwise bad condition worse by a struggle with the upper classes as the result of revealing the false teaching and preaching the true. Neither of them have any reason for doing so and, if they are wise people, will never try to do so.

But it is not so in the case of religious people, those religious people who, no matter how much society may be corrupted, with their own life preserve that holy fire of religion without which human

life could not exist. There are times (our time is such) when these men are not to be seen, when they, despised and humbled by all, pass their lives ingloriously, as in our country, in exile, in prisons, in disciplinary battalions ; but they exist and through them the rational human life is maintained. It is these religious people, no matter how few there are of them, who alone can and will break that magic circle in which all men are kept in fetters. These men can do it, because all the inconveniences and dangers, which prevent a man of the world from going counter to the existing order of life, not only do not exist for a religious man, but even increase his zeal in his struggle with the lie and in his profession in words and deeds of what he considers to be the divine truth. If he belongs to the ruling classes he not only will not wish to conceal the truth for the sake of the advantages of his position, but, on the contrary, despising these advantages, will use all the forces of his soul for the purpose of liberating himself from these advantages and preaching the truth, since in his life there will no longer be any other aim than that of serving God. But if he belongs to the enslaved, he, renouncing the desire to improve the conditions of his carnal life, which is common to men in his position, will similarly have no other aim than that of doing God's will, in arraignment of the lie and professing the truth, and no suffering and no threats will be able to keep him from living in accordance with that one meaning which he recognizes in his life. Either will act as naturally as labours a worldly man who bears privations for the acquisition of wealth or for the purpose of pleasing the mighty of the world from whom he expects some advantage. Every religious man acts thus because a man's soul which is enlightened by religion no longer lives this life of the world alone, as it is lived by irreligious people, but the eternal, infinite life, for which sufferings and death in this life are as insignificant as are, for the labourer who ploughs the field, the calluses on his hands and the weariness of his limbs.

It is these men who will break the magic circle in which people are now held fettered. No matter how few such men there are, no matter how low their social position may be, no matter how feeble they may be in intellect or education, they will, as certainly as the fire consumes the dry steppe, inflame the whole world, all the hearts of men, which have dried up from a long irreligious life and which thirst for renovation.

Religion is not a faith, once for all established, in certain supernatural events which are supposed to have taken place in the past, or in the necessity of certain prayers and rites ; nor is it, as the learned think, a remainder of

the superstitions of ancient ignorance, which in our time has no meaning and no application in life ; religion is an established relation, concordant with reason and modern knowledge, of man to everlasting life, to God, which alone moves humanity forward toward its predestined end.

" The human soul is God's lamp," says a wise Jewish proverb. Man is

a weak, unfortunate animal so long as God's light does not shine in him. But when this light burns up (and it burns only in a soul that is enlightened by religion), man becomes the most powerful being of the universe. This cannot be otherwise, because then it is no longer his own force, but God's, that acts in him.

So this is what religion is and what its essence is.

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