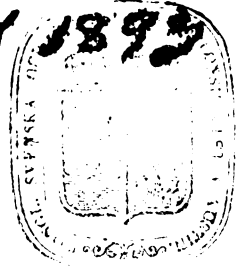


Swanee Palm
Arthur
Sept 1893
LECTURES



ON THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

DELIVERED AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA,

DURING THE SESSION OF 1860-1.

with
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(Arthur S. S. S. S.)

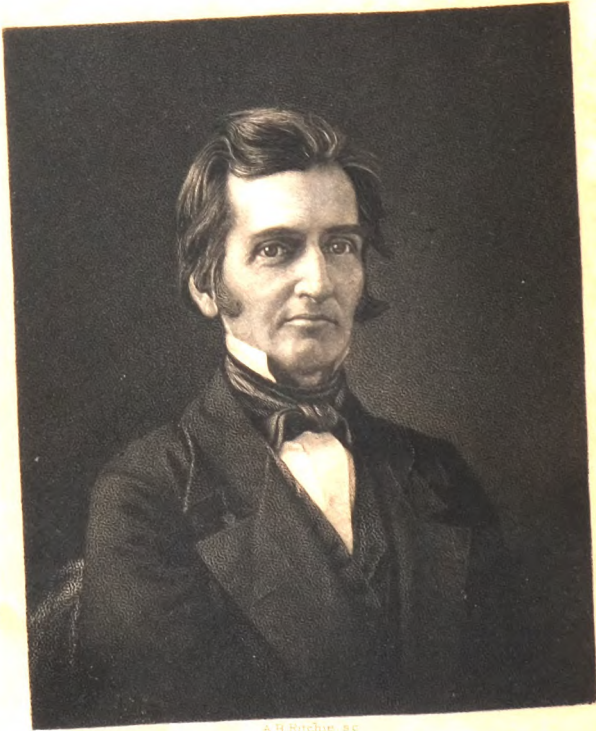
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George L. Rice

The Moral Effects of Christianity.

BY

REV. N. L. RICE, D.D.,

CINCINNATI.

THAT men are fallen creatures, the past history and the present condition of the world sufficiently prove. Christianity professes to reveal the only means by which they can be restored to the favor of God and to happiness. Two great difficulties stand in the way of such restoration, viz.: their legal responsibilities and their moral character. As transgressors, all are condemned; as sinners they are hateful to God, and are miserable. Christianity offers gratuitous justification through the atonement of Jesus Christ, and sanctification by the Holy Spirit through revealed truth. It proposes to secure to those who embrace it, a title to an eternal inheritance, and to fit them for its enjoyment. Sinful affections, as the Scriptures teach, are necessarily the cause of misery. Perfect happiness, therefore, cannot be enjoyed, unless perfect holiness be attained.

The chief means by which the moral perfection of human nature is to be accomplished, is *the truth*. "Ye shall know the truth," said our Saviour to the Jews who believed on him, "and the truth shall make you free." "Sanctify them through thy truth," he prayed for his disciples, "thy word is truth." Christianity is eminently distinguished from all other systems of religion, in that the affections it requires, and the virtues it inculcates, arise and are matured in connection with correct views of truth. The service it demands, therefore, being obedience to the truth, is eminently a "reasonable service." The doctrine of the Scriptures is, that the tendency of moral and religious truth is to produce virtuous affections and upright conduct; the tendency of error, the reverse. False teachers, therefore, as our Saviour taught, are to be distinguished from the true "by their fruits"—that is, by the effects of their doctrines upon their own moral character, and upon that of their followers. One might as reasonably expect to gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, as to find true virtue the result of false principles. The same idea is beautifully expressed by Bacon—"Truth and goodness differ but as the seal and the print; for truth prints goodness." I think, I may venture to as-

sume the truth of this principle without labored argument, and may venture, without the fear of contradiction, to found upon it the following proposition, viz.:—

There is no safer test of the truth of any system of religious belief, than its practical effects upon those who embrace it. If the practical effects of any system are partly good and partly bad, then it is partly true and partly false. If they are wholly good, then it is wholly true. But in looking for the effects of Christianity we must be careful not to attribute to it effects which it does not produce. Mistakes on this point have thrown upon it most unmerited reproaches, and have driven multitudes to infidelity. That we may avoid such an error, and obtain a fair view of this important subject, I remark—

1. Christianity cannot be justly held responsible for evils existing *where its doctrines and worship have been materially changed and corrupted.* It is not fair, for example, to charge Christianity with the ignorance and the immorality which prevail in countries, where Roman Catholicism predominates. For there the people have not access to the Scriptures; and the doctrines of the gospel have been corrupted by a multitude of human traditions, and by the interpretations of a corrupt priesthood. We are here to defend Christianity as it is presented to us in the Bible alone.

2. Nor is Christianity to be held responsible for evils resulting *from interpreting the Scriptures according to popular systems of philosophy.* Both in ancient and modern times not a few professed expounders of the Scriptures have insisted, that philosophy must furnish the key to the right understanding of them. Origen, the most learned of the Christian fathers, employed all his learning and ingenuity in the vain effort to harmonize the doctrines of Revelation and the philosophy of Plato and his followers. To do this, it became necessary to neglect the obvious meaning of the language of the Scriptures, and to adopt the most fanciful methods of interpretation; and it is not difficult to trace many of the most absurd superstitions of the dark ages to the unnatural union of false philosophy and Christianity. And in modern times many learned men in Germany have attempted to expound the Bible in accordance with a system of philosophy which denies the possibility of inspiration. "Esteeming themselves wise, they became fools." The same philosophy which declared inspiration an impossibility, drove its admirers into the glaring absurdities of Pantheism.

The Bible was not written exclusively or chiefly for learned men, but for the people; and its writers intended to be understood. We insist, therefore, that it be understood according to the obvious meaning of its language; and we are prepared to abide the result. If, when thus interpreted, its effects are bad, let its claims be rejected.

3. Christianity cannot be expected to produce its legitimate fruits where church and state are united. The church is trammelled by the legislation of men who neither understand the doctrines, nor regard the precepts of the gospel; and civil honors and worldly gain bribe corrupt men to enter her pale, and to seek the ministerial office. If you would judge fairly of any system of religion or of morals, examine its fruits where it stands on its own merits, and makes its own impress upon the characters of men. Christianity has achieved her most glorious triumphs, when the world stood in open hostility to her; and she asks still to be allowed to stand forth in the majesty and power of truth, and to be judged by her fruits.

4. It is important to remark, that Christianity proposes gradually to purify, not instantly to perfect those who embrace it. Their progress is as the growth of the human body from infancy to manhood, or as the gradually increasing light from the early dawn to "the perfect day." Even the Apostles of Christ professed not to have attained perfect holiness, but only to be pressing toward it. We must, therefore, expect to find imperfections even in sincere Christians, and still greater imperfections in the church, since it is impossible entirely to exclude from its pale, self-deceived or hypocritical men. But when evils do appear, fairness and candor require us, before admitting them as evidences against the claims of Christianity, to inquire, whether they are the result of adherence to its doctrines, or of departure from them. If the former be true, an argument, we acknowledge, is thus presented against its claims; if the latter, those very evils prove its truth. The skill of a physician is as clearly proved by the fact that his patients suffer by departing from his prescriptions, as that their health is improved by regarding them.

We are now prepared to inquire into the practical tendencies of Christianity. These are so numerous and so important, that we can do little more, in a single discourse, than glance at the more prominent.

I. Our first inquiry shall be concerning *the moral effects* of Christianity. Sin, as the Scriptures teach, is not only dishonoring to God, whose moral image it effaces from the human mind, and

whose law it transgresses, but is the prolific cause of all the degradation and misery in our world. The intelligent and candid philosopher must acknowledge the truth of this doctrine. For it is not reasonable that free moral agents under the government of an infinitely perfect God, should be made wretched, or in any degree unhappy without guilt; and a large portion of the sufferings of men are traceable directly to sin. When, therefore, the Scriptures teach, that the attainment of perfect holiness is essential to the enjoyment of perfect happiness, they may safely appeal to sound philosophy for a confirmatory testimony.

What, then, are the moral tendencies of Christianity? We may answer this question either by inquiring into the character of its doctrines, and judging from what we know of human nature, what must be the effects of such doctrines upon it, or by ascertaining from history what effects it has actually produced. We propose very briefly to adopt both these methods.

To produce upon the human mind the best moral impressions, there must be a *perfect moral* code—a code perfect in its requirements and in its system of motives. Such a moral code we find in the Scriptures. This truth has been so ably presented in preceding lectures of this course, that I need do no more than state a few leading principles.

1. The God whom Christianity teaches us to love and to worship, is a being of infinite holiness. The seraphim around his throne cry one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" Now, no truth is more evident, than that the moral characters of men are, to a very great extent, moulded by the character of the being whom they worship. In him they recognize the highest perfection, and it is their supreme desire to please him. His attributes are the constant theme of their admiring contemplation. No one wonders, that the worshippers of Bacchus were drunkards, or that those of Venus were licentious. In view of this principle, what, we ask, must be the moral influence of the character of the God of Revelation—a God of inflexible justice, of infinite truthfulness, of boundless benevolence—possessing, in an infinite degree, every moral perfection? But God has come nigh to us. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." God was "manifest in the flesh." We have before us in the Gospels, the history of his life and labors. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." And an Apostle exhorts—"Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." The Christian is the disciple,

the follower of Christ. In him he beholds and admires "all human beauties, all divine." How powerful the effect of such an example—an example of meekness and gentleness, of uprightness and holiness, of benevolence and good doing.

2. The moral law, is like its glorious Author, perfect. No sin was ever committed which it does not, directly or indirectly, forbid. No virtue ever adorned the human mind, which it does not inculcate. No relation which God has constituted or allowed, the duties of which it does not prescribe. Husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant, ruler and subject,—all find in it their duty and their reward; whilst the foundation of universal benevolence is laid in the truth, that all men are the children of the same Father, and in that other truth—that "he hath made of one blood all nations." This law lays hold on the heart's affections and places them on proper objects. "Love is the fulfilling of the law"—love supreme to God, and equal love to man. Christianity, unlike all other systems of religion, is not satisfied with forms, rites and ceremonies. It demands "clean hands and a pure heart." Could the hearts of all men be, at this moment, brought into conformity to its requirements, the ten thousand streams of misery that flood the earth, would be instantly dried up, and ten thousand streams of joy would be instantly opened.

3. Christianity, whilst it calls upon men to "follow holiness," presses upon their minds every possible motive to holiness, in its fullest strength. It appeals to the *understanding*, and claims a "reasonable service." It says to men—"Come and let us reason together." God is your Creator, supporter, benefactor, redeemer; is it not reasonable that you should serve him? It appeals to the *conscience*. God is glorious; are you not bound to adore and praise him? Is it too much for the Creator, and the author of "every good gift and every perfect gift," to claim the affections and the service of the creature? Is not man most solemnly bound to love Him by whom he was loved even unto death?—who gave his life a ransom for him? Christianity appeals to the *affections*. Look upon "the king in his beauty," and admire him. Think of his ten thousand unmerited gifts—above all, of "his unspeakable gift"—and be grateful. Consider all he has done and all he offers to do for you, and then exclaim—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Christianity appeals to the *interests* of men. They are averse to misery, and they desire happiness. It says to the righteous—"it is well," but "woe to

the wicked." It teaches that sin destroys peace of mind even in this life. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." It places before us the doctrine of a particular providence—a providence extending not only to every individual of the human race, but even to the sparrow sold for half a farthing; and upon this doctrine it founds another of vast practical importance—that the path of duty is always the path of safety and of prosperity. Wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace.

Christianity proclaims man immortal, and that the present life is probationary—a preparation for the next, which is eternal. It opens before him the deep, eternal degradation, and fearful ruin into which sin will inevitably plunge him. It holds up before him a crown of glory and of honor that fades not, to be placed on the head of him who perseveres in holy living. When the world would tempt him from virtue's path, it asks him—"What will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?"

The Christian regards himself as a pilgrim on the earth, and is accustomed to think of heaven as his eternal home. When he thinks of the shortness of life, he thinks also of his nearness to heaven. When weary of the cares, toils and troubles of life, he looks with delight to heaven as his rest. Now, no principle of human nature is better understood, than that its character is moulded very much by the objects of frequent and pleasing thought; nor is anything more natural, than that one should endeavor to become fitted for the station he expects and desires to fill. But the heaven of which the Christian thinks so constantly and with so much pleasure, is a holy place—a place of holy employments and holy joys; and without holiness none shall enter within its portals. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." How powerful the influence of the hope of such a heaven in elevating and purifying the affections. As often as the Christian thinks of heaven, he thinks of its spotless purity, and feels powerfully impelled to "follow holiness," without which he cannot hope to enjoy it.

Christianity brings those who embrace it, under the most solemn promise to live a life of holiness, to avoid even the appearance of evil. The promise is made, not to man, but to God. The baptismal water, the emblem of purity, seals the promise, and consecrates him forever to the service of the God of holiness; and God promises to bless him in his endeavors to cultivate virtue. And as

often as he partakes of the Lord's Supper, he renews that solemn covenant engagement, and is reminded by the broken bread and the flowing wine, that Jesus Christ died "to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Whatever influence, then, can be exerted by promises the most sacred, often and most solemnly repeated, is exerted by Christianity to preserve from sin those who embrace it.

The moral character of men is powerfully influenced by the sentiments and example of those with whom they associate. In view of this principle of human nature, Christianity brings its subjects into an organized body—the church. Thus each individual is sustained by those of similar views and aims.

Such are the moral influences which Christianity brings to bear on the minds of those who embrace it. And we may boldly challenge the infidel to find a single defect in its moral code, or to suggest a single additional motive, or even to add one particle of strength to any motive presented by the gospel. Whatever can be done, therefore, by reason, and motive, and encouragement to make men virtuous, Christianity does, and does perfectly. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." It approaches the mind by every avenue, lays hold of every faculty, and moulds the whole man to virtue. Its fruits are wholly good; and it is wholly true.

Does the *history* of Christianity sustain us in these positions? We affirm that it does. When Jesus Christ appeared on earth, he found the Jews in deep moral degradation, having substituted forms and ceremonies for the virtues of religion, zealous in the observance of their traditionary ablutions, and in tithing "mint, anise and cummin," but utterly forgetful of "the weightier matters of the law." The surrounding nations were enveloped in the midnight darkness of a degrading polytheism, which the intricate speculations of Grecian and Roman philosophers had utterly failed to dispel. "The world by wisdom knew not God."

But at the preaching of the gospel the Jew turned from his shadowy rites to cultivate the virtues of an elevated piety; and the Gentile abandoned his images of wood and stone to worship the high God of heaven. In the former, an expansive benevolence took the place of narrow bigotry; and in the latter, pure morality was substituted for degrading rites and beastly pollutions. "Certainly," says Wadsworth, "the character of the first Christians presents to us a singular spectacle of virtue and piety, the more

splendid as it was surrounded by very mournful and very general depravity." "Is there anything more unquestionable," asks the learned Witherspoon, "or that hath been more frequently observed, than that the victory of truth over error, in the first ages of Christianity, was much more owing to the shining piety of the primitive Christians in general, together with the patience and constancy of the martyrs, than to any other means?"

Even the uncandid and sarcastic infidel Gibbon was constrained to bear testimony to the eminent virtues of the primitive Christians. He felt it incumbent on him, in writing the history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, to account for the astonishing success of a religion which he would not allow to have come from God; and strangely enough he accounts for it in part from the extraordinary purity of the morals of its early converts. "The primitive Christian," he remarks, "demonstrated his faith by his virtues." And so far from intimating that there was any lack of purity in their morals, he considered them excessively severe. "It is," says he, "a very honorable circumstance for the morals of primitive Christians, that even their faults, or rather errors, were derived from an excess of virtue." Truly this is an important testimony. An infidel historian is constrained to testify, that such were the purity and the excellence of the character of the primitive Christians, as to convince multitudes who observed their conduct, that the religion producing such fruits was from heaven. When was a similar testimony borne in favor of any other system of religious belief?

And here it is worth while to adduce the testimony of Pliny, the Roman governor, to the virtues of the Asiatic Christians. In executing upon them the persecuting laws of Trajan, the emperor, it became his duty to inquire judicially into their character and conduct. But in searching out their crimes he was constrained to acknowledge their virtues. He ascertained, as he informed the emperor, that "they bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it." Nearly a century later, as Gibbon remarks, "Tertullian, with an honest pride, could boast, that very few Christians had suffered by the hand of the executioner, except on account of their religion."

It is true, a sad change was witnessed in the piety and morality of the church in succeeding ages; but this very change affords

evidence conclusive in favor of Christianity. For it took place just in proportion as the Scriptures ceased to be the sole rule of faith and of life, and as the doctrines of the gospel were corrupted by pagan philosophy and by vain traditions. It is well known, that during that long period emphatically and appropriately called *the dark ages*, the Bible was a prohibited book; and it is equally certain, that in churches where it was still read by the people, as among the Waldenses, no such corruption in morals occurred.

But the Reformation of the sixteenth century was emphatically a *Bible reformation*. The fundamental principle of it was, *the Bible alone the rule of faith and of conduct*. Its ministers proclaimed the doctrines and the morality of the Scriptures; and it placed the sacred volume in the hands of the people. A great reformation in morals was one of the results. If you would judge fairly of the moral effects of Christianity, begin with comparing the morality of pagan nations with that of Christian nations—nations where the Scriptures are freely circulated, and the doctrines of the gospel freely proclaimed. Compare, for example, India with Scotland! What a contrast, as between midnight and noonday. Then compare countries nominally Christian, but where the Bible is a prohibited book, and its doctrines corrupted by human tradition, with countries where the principles of the Reformation prevail, and where the Scriptures are in the hands of the people, and are regarded as the only unerring guide in faith and morals. Compare Spain, Portugal and Italy with England, Scotland and the United States. De Tocqueville asserts, that “there is no country in the whole world in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America;” and he adds—“There can be no greater proof of its utility, and of its conformity to human nature, than that its influence is most powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation on the earth.” He further testifies, that “in America all those vices which tend to impair the purity of morals, and to destroy the conjugal tie, are treated with a degree of severity unknown in the rest of the world.”

Let us descend to particulars. Among professing Christians there are doubtless not a few whose conduct proves the insincerity of their professed attachment to Christianity. Yet no candid man will deny, that in communities where religion flourishes, the tone of moral feeling is far higher than in those where it is comparatively unknown; nor can it be denied, that in Christian churches

a much higher standard of morals is maintained than in the world. How rare a thing is it to find a member of a Christian church in a jail or a penitentiary. And who, let me ask, are the firmest and most zealous opposers of immorality in all its forms? Are they infidels or Christians?

In works of benevolence what class are found most active? Hospitals for the insane and afflicted, asylums for orphans and widows, for the mute and the blind—are they not confined to Christian countries? And by whom are plans devised, and labors costly and often perilous performed, to civilize and moralize the degraded pagan nations?

But it is unnecessary, I am persuaded, to protract the discussion of this point. The moral code of Christianity, it must be acknowledged, is perfect. It purifies the hearts of individuals, and controls their conduct. It prompts and encourages them to deeds of virtue and benevolence. It approaches the human heart by every avenue, and presents every possible motive to holiness and goodness. It extends its hallowed influence over the domestic circle, and wisely prescribes the duties growing out of every relation in life. In its progress through the world, the wilderness and the solitary place are made glad; and the deserts rejoice and blossom as the rose. The mountains and the hills break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands. Its effects are wholly good; and therefore it is wholly true.

Second. I propose now to consider very briefly the effects of Christianity upon education, general intelligence, and the progress of science. Every system of religion has to do with God, his perfections and his works; with man, his nature, character, duty and destiny. Education and science travel over a large portion of the same territory. Consequently every false system of religion loses public confidence just as science progresses. The reason is obvious. Such systems inevitably teach concerning God and his works, man and his nature, false doctrines; and science detects and exposes their errors. Paganism, in all its forms, has uniformly sunk into contempt, as science has successfully carried forward its investigations. The hoary superstitions of India, which have fettered and degraded the minds of many generations, are now melting away before its light. "One look through the telescope," says a late elegant writer, "dispels all the illusions of the Brahminical faith, and blots out of existence as many myriads of

gods, as it brings into view myriads of stars reflecting the glory of the one living and true God."

Christianity, in its relations to the progress of human learning, stands in most striking contrast with all other systems of religion. It has maintained its undiminished authority over the most enlightened nations. It has numbered among its humble and devout disciples many of the brightest ornaments of science. It is sufficient to name Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Bacon, Newton, Locke, Grotius, Boyle, Hale, Selden, Addison, Bonnet, Beattie, Edwards, Witherspoon, Chalmers, Siliman, Miller, Neander, Tholuck. The list might easily be increased indefinitely.

Almost every department of human learning has, at one time or another, been arrayed against Christianity. She has been assailed by great names and by eminent learning. In such men as Hobbes and Herbert, Hume and Chesterfield, Voltaire, Volney, and Rousseau, infidelity found its ablest advocates. Christianity met its forces in the open field of free discussion, and smote them with the sword of Truth. Nay, more—she has laid under contribution the very sciences, that were triumphantly arrayed against her; and she has sent them forth to furnish multiplied evidences of her divine origin and of her high mission to earth. She has not only maintained her authority over the most enlightened nations and individuals, but she has taken science by the hand, and led it forth in the path of successful investigation. Who are the presidents and the professors in the best colleges and universities in Europe and America. They are *Christians*. Do you ask further evidence, that Christianity is the patron of science?—and that without her aid it has made almost no progress? You will find such evidence in the following considerations:

1. Christianity favors general intelligence and the progress of human learning, by elevating the moral characters of men. Depravity induces them to seek happiness in the gratification of the animal appetites or of a degrading ambition. Its language is—"Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." Or it arms individuals and nations against each other to gratify a miserable avarice or an unhallowed ambition. But when they embrace the pure morality of the gospel, and begin to cherish its exalted hopes, they no longer find enjoyment in indulgences and pursuits so degrading. They desire purer pleasures and more rational enjoyments; and they find them in the study of the perfections and the works of God whom they adore, and in devising means to improve

the condition of their fellow-men. The human mind is by nature active and inquisitive; but depravity of heart employs its noble powers in the pursuit of trifles. The heart gives direction to the intellect; when the former is purified, the latter looks up.

There are apparent exceptions to this rule. The ancient philosophers of Greece and Rome speculated profoundly or obscurely concerning the origin of all things, and concerning the nature and the destiny of man; but their philosophy was fundamentally false and demoralizing, and their noble powers systematically misdirected. The ancient poets wrote beautifully, often sublimely; but what an unseemly mixture they exhibit of the pure and impure, the sublime and the trifling. They wrote, not to reform but to please men; and therefore they ministered to their ruling passions. Even religion was invoked to patronize war, and drunkenness and debauchery; and the gods mingled with delight in scenes of grossest corruption and the greatest cruelty.

2. Christianity awakens in the mind a strong desire to know all that may be known of the laws of nature and the works of God; for the works of God exhibit and illustrate his perfections. Can he who loves and worships God, be indifferent to any of the works of his hands? Such, indeed, has been the effect of the religion of the Bible in every age.

The fame of Solomon, as an eminent naturalist, attracted to Jerusalem multitudes from the surrounding nations. "And he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." Job, and David, and Isaiah were accustomed to contemplate with delight the heavenly bodies, and to admire the wisdom, the goodness, and the power of God in all his works. Job adored the majesty of the Creator, "who alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea: who maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the South." "Where," says Bacon, "he takes knowledge of the depression of the southern pole, calling it the secrets of the south, because the southern stars were in that climate unseen." David sunk into insignificance in his own estimation, whilst he contemplated the greatness of God in the heavenly bodies. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou

art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" And as he looked out upon the heavens, and contemplated all the works of the Most High, he seemed to himself to hear them all proclaiming the perfections of their Creator. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." When Isaiah, the eloquent prophet, would comfort the pious in their affliction, and encourage them to trust in the mighty God, he exclaimed—"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold, who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by name, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth." These men contemplated the heavens, not with the superstitious veneration of the heathen, who saw in the heavenly bodies the deities who protected and blessed them, or who read in their motions the destiny of men; nor yet with the feeling of the irreligious astronomer, who inquires into the laws by which they are controlled, and admires the wonderful machinery without beholding and adoring the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of the mighty Architect.

"The devout astronomer is mad."

In nature's works they saw the glory of nature's God. They studied the works of God, the God of nature and of revelation, that they might acquaint themselves with him, and adore his perfections, illustrated by his works. Their piety awakened a strong desire to know all that could be known of creation and its laws. Indeed, the inspired writers declared knowledge preferable to silver and gold, and to all other possessions, and earnestly exhorted all to seek it. "Happy is the man," says Solomon, "that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her."

3. Christianity not only awakens the desire for knowledge, but

it teaches a large amount of that which is most important, and gives the clue to further progress.

1st. It teaches the existence and the perfections of God, and that all things were created by him. I need not refer you to particular portions of the Scriptures to prove, that they teach the eternal, underived existence of the one true God, a pure Spirit, possessed of infinite perfections, natural and moral. Nor need I do more than quote the first verse in the Bible to prove that he is the *Creator* of all things. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Precisely here the minds of the most eminent philosophers labored. Gibbon says, "Of the four most celebrated schools, the Stoics and Platonists have left us the most sublime proofs of the existence and perfections of the First Cause; but as it was impossible for them to conceive the creation of matter, the workman in the Stoic philosophy was not sufficiently distinguished from the work; while, on the contrary, the spiritual god of Plato and his disciples resembled an idea, rather than a substance. The opinions of the Academics and Epicureans were of a less religious cast; but while the modest science of the former induced them to doubt, the positive ignorance of the latter urged them to deny, the providence of a Supreme Ruler."* All the ancient philosophers, without exception, adopted as an axiom—*De nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil posse reverti*. That is, that creation and annihilation are alike impossible. This fundamental error was fatal to all progress in philosophical investigation, and, as we shall presently see, exerted a most unhappy influence on morals and religion.

2d. The Scriptures teach, that man has an immaterial, incorruptible, immortal mind, as well as a material body. On this most important subject there is no obscurity in their language. It brings "life and immortality to light." Here again the wisdom of philosophers failed them. "The writings of Cicero," says Gibbon, "represent in the most lively colors the ignorance, the errors and the uncertainty of the ancient philosophers with regard to the immortality of the soul. When they are desirous of arming their disciples against the fear of death, they inculcate, as an obvious, though melancholy position, that the fatal stroke of our dissolution releases us from the calamities of life, and that those can no longer suffer who no longer exist." Those of them who believed in the soul's immortality, denying the possibility of creation, held the doctrine of its eternal pre-existence. "The ancient

* Vol. i. p. 19.

Atomists," says the learned Cudworth, "concluded, that souls and lives, being substantial entities by themselves, were all of them as old as any other substance in the universe, and as the whole mass of matter, and every smallest atom of it is: that is, they who maintained the eternity of the world, did consequently assert also *eternitatem animorum*,—the eternity of souls."

It was on this ground that Plato and his disciples defended the immortality of the soul. It was not *generated*, said they; therefore it cannot be *corrupted*. It always *has lived*; therefore it always *will live*. Intimately connected with this opinion, and growing out of it, was the doctrine of *the transmigration of souls*. Plato said—that some of the ancient philosophers were not without suspicion, that what is now called death, is to men more properly a nativity or birth into life, and what is called a generation into life, was rather to be considered a sinking into death; the former (death) being the soul's ascent out of the gross terrestrial bodies to a body more thin and subtile; and the latter (birth) its descent from a purer body to one more gross and terrestrial.

These fundamental errors involved the philosophers in inextricable difficulties in all their inquiries, and effectually prevented any real progress in natural and mental philosophy.

3d. The Scriptures teach moral science perfectly. The leading faculties of the mind, the intellect, the affections, the conscience and the will, are distinctly recognized. Man's free agency and accountability are taught with entire clearness. And, as we have already seen, their moral code is perfect. All standard writers on moral science acknowledge themselves indebted to the Scriptures for the principles they advance. Indeed, I know not a respectable writer on this most important science, who is not a firm believer in the inspiration of the Scriptures.

I will not now detain you to speak of the Bible as a history of the human race for many centuries, and as exhibiting the great principles of civil government; nor will I attempt to prove what I may safely affirm—that it presents many of the finest specimens of beautiful and sublime prose and poetic composition, and of clear, conclusive reasoning, that can be found in the world. Some of these points may be very briefly noticed before I close.

The precise truth which I desire now to impress upon your minds, is—that the Scriptures teach a large amount of most important truth, and that they give the true clue to all philosophical investigations.

4. Before proceeding to illustrate this truth from history, let me further state, that Christianity favors the progress of knowledge, by occupying the mind with themes adapted to develop and invigorate the *intellectual*, as well as the *moral* powers. If the study of mathematics strengthens the intellect, it still more expands and invigorates its power, when applied to the study of astronomy. For then the mind, whilst making careful calculations, contemplates objects vast, sublime, and magnificent. But if the heavens be a sublime and glorious subject of inquiry and contemplation, how much more the infinite perfections of the great Creator of all. If the study of mechanical philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, and of all the laws of nature, be adapted to invigorate the powers of the mind, how much more effectually does it accomplish this object, when the mind ascends from these finite objects to the great Infinite; when in the works and laws of creation it beholds and admires the perfections of the Creator. If the study of things temporal, and the continued effort to gain and enjoy them, may develop the mental powers; how much more the habitual contemplation of things eternal. What are the beauties and sublinities of earth, to the glories of heaven? The loftiest aspirations of the man of ambition, dwindle into insignificance, when compared with the cherished hopes of the humblest Christian. The objects of the Christian's pleasing thought are as vast as they are pure and lovely. The contemplation of them, therefore, tends directly and powerfully to develop the intellectual powers as well as to purify the heart.

Turning from the direct contemplation of the principles of Christianity, as they are stated in the Scriptures, let us hear the testimony of uninspired history. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was emphatically a Bible reformation. Its fundamental doctrine was, that the Scriptures contain the whole revelation of God for the instruction of men in faith and in conduct. With only the Bible in their hands, the reformers sought to deliver the church from the overwhelming mass of error and corruption under which it was crushed. Taking our position, then, by the side of the reformers, and looking backward and forward, we may be able to form a correct estimate of the effect of Scriptural Christianity upon the progress of knowledge. Let us, first, inquire what was the state of the world with regard to knowledge and science at the commencement of the Reformation.

In the third century Origen, the most learned of the Greek

fathers, became an ardent admirer of the Platonic philosophy; and believing, as not a few in our day, that revelation could not contradict science, he sought so to interpret the Scriptures, as to bring them into harmony with the principles of this sublime philosophy. Not a few of the Christian ministry united with him in this effort. "This great man," says Mosheim, "enchanted by the charms of the Platonic philosophy, set it up as the test of all religion; and imagined, that the reasons of each doctrine were to be found in that favorite philosophy, and their nature and extent to be determined by it." And since it was impossible to reconcile the literal and obvious meaning of the Scriptures with the principles of the Platonic philosophy, it became necessary to find in their language a mysterious or hidden sense. Having determined the existence of this hidden sense, Origen divided it into the *moral* and *mystical*; and the mystical sense he subdivided into the *superior* or *heavenly* and the *inferior*. If, then, the literal meaning of the Scriptures could not be made to harmonize with the doctrines of Plato, there could be no great difficulty in producing harmony by resorting to the hidden sense, in some of its divisions and subdivisions. And as this pagan philosophy had taught Christian men, that the Scriptures have a hidden sense of far greater value than the literal; it also taught them how that sense might be discovered. The divine nature, it taught, is diffused through all human souls; or the faculty of *reason* is an emanation from God, and comprehends in it the principles of all truth. This celestial flame was to be kindled, not by study and investigation, but by silence, solitude, meditation, and penances by which the body might be emaciated. Thus were the simple, sublime truths of the Bible excluded from the minds of men, and their excited imaginations became their only guide in their search after truth.

Now for the practical effects of this philosophy.

1. As it denied the possibility of *creation*, and held to the eternity of matter; it accounted for the existence of moral evil by tracing it to the connection of the pure spirit with matter. In this there was no impiety, since it was believed that matter was not the product of Omnipotence.

2. If moral evil proceeded from matter, and the mind had become contaminated by its contact with a material body; it followed, that the way to attain to moral perfection was to destroy, as far as possible, the influence of the body over the mind. To

improve the physical condition of men, therefore, and to add to the comforts of life, was not only no part of the office of that philosophy, but was utterly discountenanced by it. "The ancient philosophy," says an able writer, "disdained to be useful.—It could not condescend to the humble office of ministering to the comfort of human beings. All the schools regarded that office as degrading; some censured it as immoral." Seneca thought philosophy degraded by being applied to useful inventions. Those philosophers were right in this view, on the supposition that their first principles were true. For to multiply physical comforts, was but to pamper the body which was the source of impurity, and thus to fetter the soul in its aspirations after moral perfection. The true method of improving the condition of men was to emaciate the body by fasting and severe discipline; and he was the best practical philosopher who came nearest committing suicide by a lingering process.

The fruits of this false philosophy ripened fast under the genial warmth of Christianity. Philosophers speculated concerning moral perfection, and pointed out the way to attain it; but their speculations had no power to inspire men with the ardent desire, and to excite them to the pursuit of it. Such a desire Christianity awakened; and it was not lacking in motives. Christianity awakened the desire of perfection; but most unfortunately Christians went to philosophers, rather than to the Scriptures, to learn how to gain the desired blessing. In Egypt, therefore, where the unnatural union between Christianity and false philosophy was first effected, many, in the third and following centuries, retired into caves and deserts, where they macerated their bodies with hunger and thirst, and submitted to all the miseries of the severest discipline that a gloomy imagination could present. "And it is not improbable," says Mosheim, "that Paul, the first hermit, was rather engaged by this fanatical system, than by the persecution under Decius, to fly into the most solitary deserts of Thebais, where he led, during the space of ninety years, a life more worthy of a savage animal than of a rational being."

This philosophical superstition had a most remarkable development, in the fifth century, in the *stylites* or *pillar saints*—sancti columnares—who stood motionless upon the tops of pillars for years together. The most celebrated of these was Simeon, a Syrian, who spent thirty-seven years of his life upon five pillars of six, twelve, twenty-two, thirty-six, and forty cubits high. These

eminent saints, as they were considered, spent their time in fastings, penances, and prayers, and excited the wonder and admiration of the superstitious multitude by their worthless virtues.

If intelligent infidels laugh at this miserable superstition, let Plato and the old philosophers have the credit of it. For Paul the hermit and Simeon the stylite were but reducing to practice the principles of their philosophy; and admitting the truth of that philosophy, we must greatly admire, instead of ridiculing, their course of life. Withdrawn from worldly pursuits, they destroyed their bodily appetites by severe penances, and raised their souls toward God by devout meditations and prayers. In such men you see the ancient philosophy reduced to practice.

But during this period, Aristotle divided with Plato the empire of mind, and in the ages immediately preceding the Reformation had almost expelled him from the schools. The philosophy of Aristotle did not differ essentially from that of Plato; but he was the author of a system of dialectics which, together with the fundamental errors of the system, rendered the discovery of truth still more difficult. By the aid of his logic the schoolmen sharpened their intellects by the discussion of questions the most trivial.

The ancient philosophy was characterized by perfect sterility. False in its first principles, it could make no progress. "The ancient philosophy," says Macaulay, "was a treadmill, not a path. It was made up of revolving questions—of controversies which were always beginning again. It was a contrivance for having much exertion, and no progress." The reason is obvious. Holding to the eternity of matter and of mind, the ancient philosophers very naturally regarded the question, how things came to be as they are, as the first great question to be solved by philosophy. Consequently, their gigantic intellects were employed in endless theories and conjectures, which could never be more than mere theories and conjectures. He who will examine the fundamental principles of that philosophy, will no longer wonder that, as Lord Bacon says, "from the systems of the Greeks and their subordinate divisions in particular branches of the sciences during so long a period, scarcely one single experiment can be culled that has a tendency to elevate or assist mankind, and can be fairly set down to the speculations and doctrines of their philosophy." Nor will he censure the declaration of Macaulay as too strong, that "words and mere words, and nothing but words, had been all the fruit

of all the toil of all the most renowned sages of sixty generations."

This sterile philosophy which, incorporated with Christianity, withered all its lovely virtues, had received the sanction of councils and popes, and, therefore, bore the stamp of infallibility. "Driven from its ancient haunts, it had taken sanctuary in that church which it had persecuted; and had, like the daring fiends of the poet, placed its seat

'Next the seat of God
And with its darkness dared affront his light.' **

The wondrous virtues which it had produced in deserts and caves, had excited almost universal admiration; and the men whom it had driven mad, had been solemnly canonized. To assail it, therefore, was to assail Christianity which it had corrupted; and he who had the rashness to make the assault, expected the anathemas of the church, and the tortures of the inquisition.

Such was the state of things when the Reformation aroused the world from deep slumber. I have said it was emphatically the work of the Scriptures. It rejected at once the infallibility of the Church and her multiplied traditions. It held up the Bible as the only unerring guide in faith and morals. It translated the sacred volume into the vulgar tongue, and put it in the hands of the people, and bade them read and understand. The reformers saw at once the falsity of the old philosophy which then reigned in the church and the university, under the authority of Aristotle; and they attacked it boldly. "The first adversaries Luther attacked," says D'Aubigné, "were those celebrated schoolmen whom he had studied so deeply, and who then reigned supreme in every university. He accused them of Pelagianism; boldly opposing Aristotle (the father of the school) and Thomas Aquinas, he undertook to hurl them from the throne whence they exercised so commanding an influence, the one over philosophy, and the other over theology." "I desire nothing more ardently," said Luther, "than to lay open before all eyes this false system, which has tricked the church, by covering itself with a Greek mask, and to expose its worthlessness before the world." One year later he wrote exultingly—"God works among us: our theology and St. Augustine make wonderful progress, and are already paramount in our university. Aristotle is on the wane, and already totters to

* Macaulay.

his fall, which is near at hand and irreversible." The other reformers agreed with Luther. Zwingli, Bucer, Peter Martyr and Calvin had denounced the old philosophy as boldly as he.

This attack was successful. Wherever the doctrines of the Reformation were received, Plato and Aristotle were overthrown, and overthrown simply by the Scriptures. "Thus before the birth of Bacon," says Macaulay, "the empire of scholastic philosophy had been shaken to its foundations. There was in the intellectual world an anarchy resembling that which in the political world often follows the overthrow of an old and deeply-rooted government. Antiquity, prescription, the sound of great names, had ceased to awe mankind. The dynasty which had reigned for ages was at an end; and the vacant throne was left to be struggled for by pretenders."

The Reformation cleared away the rubbish of ages, and proclaimed freedom of thought. Then Bacon arose. He commenced his career as a philosopher with the Bible in his hand; and the Bible gave him the first great truths of philosophy, and indicated to him the limits of philosophical investigation. It taught him—

1st. That matter and finite spirits are not eternal, but created by the omnipotent Jehovah.

2d. That all things by him created are "very good."

Bacon wrote a confession of faith, drawn from the Scriptures, which commences thus: "I believe that nothing is without beginning, but God; no nature, no matter, no spirit, but one only, and the same God—that he made all things in their first estate good—that God created spirits, whereof some kept their standing, and others fell: he created heaven and earth, and all their armies and generations; and gave unto them constant and everlasting laws, which we call nature; which is nothing but the laws of creation," &c. These truths admitted, what is the proper range of philosophic investigation; and what the object it should seek to accomplish? We answer:

1. If God created all things, animate and inanimate, material and spiritual, philosophy has simply to ascertain what he did create, and what laws he established. Creation is an infinite miracle, not to be explained or comprehended. How completely this simple truth explodes all the speculations and theories concerning the formation of the world, the eternity of finite spirits and the transmigration of souls. The ancient philosophy utterly mistook the

legitimate field of inquiry. Unable to conceive the sublime truth declared in the first verse of the Bible—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—it wandered in endless mazes, as Bacon says, "fruitful of controversy and barren of effects." The *inductive philosophy* is the legitimate offspring of this sublime truth. Had it been known to those giant minds, whose powers we still admire, even when we reject as most absurd their speculations, what progress they might have made in the different sciences! Had Bacon been ignorant of it, his labors would have been as fruitless as theirs.

2. If, as the Bible teaches, all things came from the creative hand, "very good;" then matter is not inherently evil, and the mind is not contaminated by contact with it. Then holiness is not to be attained by torturing and destroying the body, nor by retiring into caves and deserts. How completely this truth annihilates the virtues so much extolled by the ancient philosophers, and so much admired among professing Christians, misled by their false theories.

If all things created by God are *good*; then they are designed for the benefit of man. The body is to be nourished, as the instrument through which the mind now acts. The laws of nature are to be learned, that they may minister to the wants of men, that their happiness may be greater. Then it is not degrading to philosophy to cause it to minister to the comfort of human beings. On the contrary this is precisely its province and its glory. The philosopher is not to spend his life in solitude, in meditation and fastings, but must imitate the example of the Son of God, "who went about doing good." Bacon had in his mind this scriptural truth when he made *usefulness* the test of sound philosophy. "For which reason," said he, "in the same manner as we are cautioned by religion to show our faith by our works, we may very properly apply the principle to philosophy, and judge of it by its works; accounting that to be futile which is unproductive, and still more so, if, instead of grapes and olives, it yield but the thistle and thorns of dispute and contention."

"Two words," says Macaulay, "form the key of the Baconian doctrine—utility and progress." For both, we affirm, Bacon was indebted to the Bible. It taught him that God created all things, and consequently the work of philosophy is to ascertain what he did create and what laws he established. Thus theories give place to fact and experiment. It taught him, that all things are

good, and therefore the business of philosophy is to apply all to the good of man.

To the Reformation, then, which was the work of the Scriptures, we are indebted for a sound philosophy, and for progress in knowledge and in all the sciences. On this subject I take pleasure in quoting a *prize essay*, presented to the National Institute of France by Charles Francis Dominic de Villers, on "The Influence of the Reformation by Luther." Of the learning and ability displayed in this essay, we need no other evidence than the fact, that it had such an award by such an institution. He says—"It has been already sufficiently shown above, what an imperfect philosophy reigned in the schools before the Reformation, and what an extravagant and puerile dialectic was amalgamated with the system of the Roman theology, which maintained itself by its aid. To support this system was, in fact, for many centuries, the end of all philosophy; the theologians, who were generally monks, were the only philosophers—A firm, independent philosophy, which aspired at becoming universal, was, in this state of things, a monstrosity; consequently, nothing of this description existed before the Reformation. * * * A strange mixture of disguised propositions of peripatetism, which was applied in the strangest manner to matters of faith and controversy, formed all the groundwork of the doctrine of the schools. Subsequent to the renovation of letters, some men of talents, with the famous Erasmus at their head, had opposed this monkish barbarism. But, remaining in the bosom of a church to which scholastic divinity had become an indispensable auxiliary, how could they labor effectually to destroy this support? Such an undertaking could only be accomplished by reformers bold enough to quit this church, and to establish one separate from it upon the pure principles of the gospel and of reason. It was in this manner that the Reformation dethroned the scholastic divinity." And in this way, we may add, it prepared the way for all the progress which science has since made.

If we would see the force of this argument in favor of Christianity, let us compare the progress of human learning in pagan lands, with its progress in Christian countries. Has it made even the slightest progress in the former? Has it not decidedly retrograded? What pagan nation now in existence will bear comparison with ancient Greece and Rome? Again, compare countries *nominally* Christian with those where the Bible freely circulates,

and Protestantism prevails. Villers said, there was more real knowledge in one single Protestant university, as that of Göttingen, or Halle, or Jena, than in the eight Spanish universities then existing. A similar comparison may be made of literary institutions in Protestant and Roman Catholic countries throughout the world. "In these," says Villers, "they teach what must, with or without the consent of reason, be believed; in the others they teach how a reasonable belief may be acquired, on any subject whatever. Here the Decretals are given for infallible oracles; there, no other oracle is acknowledged but reason, and the best supported facts." How shall we account for the fact, that science and Christianity have gone hand in hand in every country, and that the former has flourished just as the latter in its purity has prevailed; unless we admit, that Christianity is the great patron of sound learning? And how shall we account for the fact, that a book embracing so great a variety of subjects as the Bible does, written by so many different men, of few pretensions to human learning, during the darkest periods of the history of our world, does so promote learning and science, unless we admit, that it was given by inspiration of God? Is it credible that such men, under such circumstances, if uninspired, could write such a book?

Third. Let us now consider, with great brevity, the effect of Christianity upon civil and religious liberty. In every age and in almost every country, some form of religion has been established by law. The consequence has been, that multitudes have been robbed of their dearest rights, and persecuted even unto death for conscience' sake. And even in the middle of the nineteenth century neither the principles of civil, nor of religious liberty are generally understood. Indeed our happy country is almost the only country in the world, where these principles are well understood and respected. We propose to inquire how far the world is indebted for the liberty it enjoys to the influence of Christianity.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY is the unrestrained exercise of the right to examine all moral and religious questions, and to act in accordance with one's own convictions of truth, without interfering with similar rights of others. This, as the Scriptures clearly teach, is an inalienable right. This is evident from the following considerations:—

1. True religion, according to the Bible, is the belief and hearty reception of revealed truth, and a corresponding conduct. It is unnecessary to refer to particular parts of the Scriptures to prove,

that such is the religion there taught. It will not be disputed. Now, in the nature of things, belief can be produced only by evidence; and a *heartly* reception of the truth cannot be the effect of compulsion. Civil rewards and penalties on account of religious belief, therefore, make hypocrites of the unprincipled, and rebels of the conscientious; and thus they corrupt the church by filling it with hypocrisy, and weaken the government by alienating from it men of principle, who would be its firmest supporters.

2. God requires every one to examine, and to believe accordingly. "Search the Scriptures." "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Such is the language of the Scriptures. Now, to forbid any one to examine freely, and thus to form a rational faith, is to trample under foot the authority of God. He says to each individual—"Search the Scriptures;" who, then, shall venture to forbid any one to do so?

3. Every individual is accountable to God for his own religious faith and conduct; and his eternal interests are suspended upon these. To forbid freedom of investigation and of worship, therefore, is the height of tyranny and of cruelty. Why will any man or class of men step between me and my God in the formation of my faith and the regulation of my conduct, when they cannot step between us in judgment? "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

4. Civil government, though ordained of God, is designed simply to protect men in the enjoyment of their rights, and to promote their temporal interests. So Christianity teaches. This truth is distinctly recognized in the law of Moses. "I charged your judges at that time," says Moses, "saying, hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him," Deut. i. 16. The civil and the religious laws of the Jews were kept quite distinct. Much more should they be distinct now, when no religious qualification is required of civil officers. For civil rulers, then to legislate concerning religious faith and worship, is as glaring a perversion of their office, as for ministers of the gospel by virtue of their office, to claim authority in civil matters. It is true, that civil government and religion are often concerned about the same things, as blasphemy, perjury, murder, theft, &c. But these things have both a civil and a religious aspect. It is only with reference to the

former, that the civil law takes cognizance of them. "Our law," says Blackstone, "considers marriage in no other light than as a civil contract. The *holiness* of the matrimonial state is left entirely to the ecclesiastical law: the temporal courts not having jurisdiction to consider unlawful marriage as a sin, but merely as a civil inconvenience."

The Scriptures not only inculcate the general principles of religious liberty, but determine the precise limits of civil authority.

1st. Civil rulers may not dictate to the people their religious faith or worship. Such authority belongs not to their office.

2d. They may not require subjects to do what God has forbidden, or forbid them doing what God has commanded. "Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation," says Blackstone, "depend all human laws; that is to say, no human laws should be suffered to contradict these. * * * If any human law should allow or enjoin us to commit murder, we are bound to transgress that human law, or else we must offend both the natural and the divine." God has not authorized civil magistrates either to enact laws binding the conscience, or to abolish those laws by which he has bound it. Upon these plain principles acted our Lord and his Apostles. Two of those Apostles, forbidden by the Jewish sanhedrim to preach the gospel, made this noble answer: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Upon the same broad principle Luther took his stand before the Diet of Worms. Truly sublime was the stand taken by a humble monk before Charles V. and his princes, and in the midst of a most excited multitude. The eyes of Christendom were fastened upon him with intensest interest. He was commanded to retract what he had published. He answered in a firm tone—"If I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture or by cogent reasons: if I am not satisfied by the very texts I have cited, and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God's word, I neither can nor will retract anything: for it cannot be right for a Christian to speak against his conscience. I stand here, and can say no more:—God help me."

3d. The civil law must be obeyed in all points, within the proper limits of civil jurisdiction. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." "Put them in mind," said Paul

to Titus, "to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." All systems of human laws are, like their authors, imperfect; and consequently great injustice is often done in the administration of law. But inasmuch as it is far better to have an imperfect government, than anarchy and misrule, the Scriptures require, as a duty we owe to God, to obey even imperfect laws. "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake."

Civil government, as the Scriptures teach, is an ordinance of God, not for the advantage of the chief ruler, or of an aristocracy, but of *the people*. To the virtuous, the civil ruler is to be "a minister of God for good," and "a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Consequently civil government should impose on its subjects, individually or collectively, no greater restraint than the greatest good of the whole requires. Just so far as any government goes beyond this limit in restraining individual liberty, it ceases to be what God designed it—for the good of the people; and the civil officer ceases to be to them "a minister of God for good."

Civil government is an ordinance of God; but since he has not appointed any particular form of government, it is evident that every nation has the right to choose any form which to them may seem best adapted to promote their interests, and to modify that form as often as they may deem it wise so to do. God gave to the Jews a civil government. In their folly they grew weary of it, and demanded a king. Samuel was directed to make no opposition to their wishes beyond warning and remonstrance. What stronger evidence need we of the right of a nation to modify or change its form of government, than the fact that the Jews were allowed to change a form divinely appointed?

But civil office confers power, which, even under the best regulated governments, may be abused. Christianity bids rulers remember, that as they are God's ministers, they are accountable to him for the manner in which they discharge the duties of their office. The Scriptures address them in such language as the following: "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." The bold and fearless Isaiah thus addressed the Jews, in the days of great corruption and oppression: "Thy princes are rebellious and com-

panions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come before them. Therefore, saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies. And I will turn my hand upon thee and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning. Afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

Such are the principles of civil and religious liberty inculcated in the sacred Scriptures. That they are the true principles of liberty, will not be denied. But where do we find them recognized and respected? We answer, where the Scriptures are most revered, and best understood. These principles were proclaimed by the Reformation of the sixteenth century, to which great event whatever there is in the world of true liberty, is traceable. It was, as we have said, emphatically a *Bible Reformation*. That we may appreciate the influence of Christianity in securing freedom to men, let us, for a moment, consider the state of things before the Reformation, when the Bible was a prohibited book.

The doctrine then prevailed, that the pope and his bishops had the right divinely conferred to dictate to the people their religious faith and their morals; and that to call in question their infallibility, was a crime to be visited with the severest civil penalties. The civil ruler who refused to exterminate heretics by fire and sword, did so at the peril of his crown, if not of his life. For crowns and kingdoms were believed to be at the disposal of the Pope. The clergy, sustained by that most horrible institution, the Inquisition (which even in the middle of the nineteenth century disgraces Rome), exercised a severe censorship over the press; and authors, publishers, printers, booksellers and readers, trembled at their dreadful authority. The human mind with all its noble powers was crushed to the earth. The fate of John Huss, burned by the Council of Constance in shameful disregard of the Emperor Frederick's safe-conduct, and of Galileo, imprisoned in the inquisition for his astronomical discoveries, were a fearful warning to all against the exercise of their dearest rights. "Let us only reflect," says Villers, "on the immense train of censures, prohibitions and inquisitors employed by the Romish church to keep every eye closed, at a period in which every new truth be-

came a heresy, that is to say, a crime deserving the severest punishment, and against which all the rigor of the secular arm was demanded ; and we shall shudder at the danger incurred by humanity before the sixteenth century." These doctrines, together with that of the divine right of kings to tyrannize over their subjects, rendered the existence of liberty an impossibility.

The first effective attack upon these despotic doctrines was made by the reformers. Long, indeed, had the Waldenses borne a solemn and a suffering testimony against them. Wickliffe, and Huss, and Jerome of Prague had ventured to disobey popes and kings ; but an almost Egyptian darkness enshrouded and oppressed the nations. Only the faint glimmerings of the morning star of the day of freedom had been seen. But Luther had found a Bible in his convent ; and gradually its pure light had penetrated the thick veil of superstition which darkened his understanding. Soon his stirring voice aroused all Europe from profound slumber, and made the pretended successor of Peter tremble on his throne. "In Geneva, Calvin and Beza, rejected by their own country," says Villers, "established a new and powerful focus of religious reform. The first fruit of it was the liberty of Geneva." To this place fled Scotch and English exiles from the persecutions of "the bloody Mary," to become "intoxicated with republicanism and independence." A multitude of men of talents, says the writer already quoted, have issued from Geneva, who, as writers, and as men in office, have, in the most decided manner, influenced the different states of Europe.

If you would get a clear view of the effects of Christianity upon civil and religious liberty, begin with that wonderful man, John Knox, who had sat at the feet of John Calvin, and followed the Presbyterian church of Scotland in her struggles against tyranny, through the reigns of the Jameses and Charleses, to the ignominious flight of James II. and the establishment of William and Mary on the English throne. The final crisis which turned the scales in favor of freedom, was brought on by the famous Archbishop Laud and Charles II., in the mad attempt to force upon the Scotch a form of government and a liturgy which they abhorred. "To this step," says Macaulay, "taken in the mere wantonness of tyranny, and in criminal ignorance or more criminal contempt of public feeling, our country owes her free-

dom. The first performance of the foreign ceremonies produced a riot. The riot rapidly became a revolution."

These principles, taught in the Scriptures, proclaimed by the Reformation, nourished and matured in the stormy history of Scotland and England, were transplanted in our own country; and here have they borne such fruits as have never before been enjoyed. The noble men and women who laid the foundations of our free government were *Christians*, fled from persecution, that in the wilds of the American wilderness they might enjoy unmolested the rights of conscience. For the great principles of civil government they sought in the Word of God. True, they were not altogether free from prejudice, and therefore did not, at first, get a full view of some of the important principles there taught; but further investigations dispelled all darkness, and resulted in the organization of the noblest government the world ever saw. "They brought with them into the new world," says De Tocqueville, "a form of Christianity, which I cannot better describe, than by styling it a democratic and republican religion. This sect contributed powerfully to the establishment of a democracy and a republic; and from the earliest settlement of the emigrants, politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved."

Thus do we find, in the sacred Scriptures those great principles of civil and religious liberty which have made our country the freest and happiest country on the globe, which are now becoming diffused through all nations, and by which all tyranny will be ultimately overthrown. "Who can foretell," said Villers, writing when our republic was yet in its infancy, "all that may result in the two worlds, from the seductive example of the independence conquered by the Americans? What new position would the world assume, if this example were followed? and without doubt it will be in the end. Thus two Saxon monks will have changed the face of the globe." The Reformation, he remarks, introduced a new order of things. "Powerful republics were founded. Their principles, still more powerful than their arms, were introduced into all nations. Hence arose great revolutions, and those which may yet arise, are doubtless incalculable."

Christianity has not only laid the broad foundations of civil and religious liberty, but it still moulds and sustains the particular laws enacted. It is a remarkable fact, that the Jews were the first na-

tion who had a written constitution, and a written code of laws. It is a fact even more remarkable, that many of the most important laws of the most enlightened nations have been borrowed from the law of Moses. And yet the people to whom this excellent code of laws was given, had but just escaped from a long-continued and degrading bondage. And now, as in past ages, the best systems of laws in the world are to be found in Christian countries; and in those countries, more than in any other, the authority of law is supreme. There the people are more intelligent; they better understand their own and each other's rights; and to support the laws, is not only their true interest, but their religious duty. "Despotism," as De Tocqueville well remarks, "may govern without *faith*, but liberty cannot. How is it possible that society should escape destruction, if the moral tie be not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed? and what can be done with a people which is its own master, if it be not submissive to Divinity?"

We are authorized, I think, in view of this discussion, to come to the following conclusions:

1st. That whatever the world now enjoys of civil and religious liberty, it owes to the Bible and Christianity; and that the progress of the principles of true liberty depends upon the progress of Christianity. Both the past history and the present state of the world justify this conclusion. The permanency of our free institutions, we are accustomed to say, depends upon the virtue and the intelligence of the people; and true virtue and general intelligence can be maintained only by Christianity.

2d. Christianity is not more decidedly the enemy of tyranny than of radicalism and anarchy. It claims even for the humblest their inalienable rights, and requires the most honorable to obey the powers that be. It throws its shield over the domestic circle, and sanctifies the relations of husband and wife, parent and child. It condemns equally the tyranny of the husband and the cruelty of the parent on the one hand, and the unfaithfulness of the wife and the disobedience of the child on the other. It utterly repudiates the levelling and demoralizing principles of Socialism in all its phases. It is eminently a *liberalizing*, yet *conservative* power.

3d. The Bible is the word of God. How, if it be not, shall we account for the fact, that though written in ages when true liberty was unknown, it yet inculcates the true principles of liberty in all their fulness?—and is now the great patron of rational

freedom?—that though written, for the most part, when the word of the king was law, and politics and religion were everywhere united, it contains the wisest laws, and draws so accurately the limits of civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction? In a word, how shall we account for it, that Christianity has done, and is doing for liberty, civil and religious, just what it has done, and is doing for morals and for science? Can we persuade ourselves, that the writers of the books which constitute the Bible, as men uninspired, were so inconceivably before all other men in their knowledge of the rights of men?

4th. Let us finally consider, with great brevity, the effects of Christianity *upon the happiness of men*. That God is a being of infinite benevolence, I need not attempt to prove; nor need I adduce proof, that a system of religion from him would promote the highest happiness of his rational creatures. I may also assume without proof, that false principles can no more promote permanently the *happiness* of men, than true *morality*. If, then, it can be made to appear, that Christianity does secure to those who embrace it the most exalted happiness, it will follow as a legitimate and certain conclusion, that it is from God. That it does effect this object, will appear from the following considerations:—

1st. It most effectively promotes the purest morality and the most exalted virtue. It thus delivers those who embrace it from all the unhappiness produced by immorality in its various forms. And who that has read the history of the past, or that is acquainted with the present state of the world, does not know how large a proportion of all the wretchedness of men is traceable, mediately or immediately, to their evil passions and the conduct to which those passions impel them. But the influence of religion is not merely or chiefly negative. The fear of God and the expansive benevolence with which it fills the heart, cause us to delight in relieving the afflicted, and in promoting the happiness of all. How happy will be the condition of the human race, when this religion shall be universally diffused, and every man shall rejoice to do good to his fellow-men.

2d. It promotes general intelligence and the progress of learning, and thus puts men in possession of many sources of enjoyment, and causes the works of God and the laws of nature to minister to their happiness. Who of us would be willing to exchange the pleasures afforded by the knowledge he possesses of

the works and laws of nature, for all the treasures of the Indies? And who can number the enjoyments afforded us by the achievements of science, of which pagan nations are deprived?

3d. It promotes civil and religious liberty, leads to the enactment and the support of wise and wholesome laws; and thus secures to men the enjoyment of their dearest rights, and gives them in their lawful pursuits a delightful feeling of security. Every man sits under his own vine and fig-tree unmolested, worshipping God according to the dictates of his own conscience, and rejoicing in the fruits of honest industry. These inestimable blessings has Christianity conferred upon our country in a high degree; and Christianity only can preserve them as a rich heritage to our children.

4th. It imparts to those who embrace it the most exalted hopes, and consequently the most exalted joys. The human mind is so constituted, that it cannot be satisfied with present enjoyments, however great, but intensely desires future, unending bliss. It is, therefore, constantly looking forward, and fearing or hoping, as its prospects seem to become darker or brighter. Many of its troubles arise from anticipated evils; and many of its sweetest pleasures, from expected good. Christianity meets these desires of the human mind, and affords them the highest gratification. The Christian believes himself a child of God, and, therefore, an heir of glory. He has the promise of a future life—a life of perfect holiness, of ever-increasing knowledge, and of unmingled joy. His future home is described, in the beautifully figurative language of Scripture, as a city whose walls are of the most precious stones, whose gates are pearls, whose streets are paved with purest gold, whose light is Jehovah himself, whose inhabitants are clothed in garments of spotless white, indicative at once of their purity and of their happiness, whose glory and bliss are eternal. Cheered by such a hope, the Christian can rejoice greatly in the midst of afflictions and troubles, saying with Paul the apostle, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” And this hope, whilst it wonderfully smooths the rugged path of life, and imparts the sweetest pleasure, powerfully excites the Christian to holy living, and raises him above the temptations by which he is constantly assailed. Exclude from the mind the light of the Scriptures, and how dark, even to the wisest, is the eternal future. Is the soul immortal? They who have

relied on reason and the light of nature, give contradictory answers. If immortal, what is to be its future condition? What has it to hope for? Is there a heaven or a hell? Can God consistently forgive sins? If he can, on what conditions will he do it? The only answers to these most important questions are vague conjectures and contradictory assertions. Thus all that is dear to man is left in perfect uncertainty, and the exalted hopes of the future give place to the grovelling sentiment—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

These are some, not all, the pleasures flowing from Christianity. But in this life we see its power but imperfectly developed, and consequently the happiness it imparts, but imperfectly enjoyed. Men are here in the infancy of their being; and they learn imperfectly the elements of the sublime science taught in the Scriptures. An eternity of perfect holiness, of rapidly increasing wisdom, and of more than angelic happiness alone can unfold its "unsearchable riches." The peaceful and triumphant death of the righteous gives the clearest view afforded in the present state, of the glorious excellency of the religion of Christ Jesus.

To what conclusions may we legitimately come from the very imperfect view of this whole subject as now presented?

1. That the Bible is the word of God. Is not this conclusion both legitimate and inevitable? Do you say, no? Then take a bold stand, and maintain the following positions:—

1st. That a succession of vile impostors and deceivers (for such were the writers of the books which compose the Bible, if they were not inspired) through a period of fifteen hundred years, when universal corruption prevailed amongst all nations, became the authors of the purest code of morals the world ever saw—a code condemning most severely vice in all its forms and shades, commending most strongly every virtue that can adorn the human character, and enforcing its requirements by every possible motive, approaching the mind with its persuasions to virtue by every avenue!—a code of morals which has been cherished by the good and hated by the evil in every age, and which, wherever it has been received as divine, has dried up the fountains of pollution and misery, and opened those of purity and joy!—a code which has proved alike an inestimable blessing to individuals, to families, to communities, and to nations! Come forward and boldly maintain, that false principles produce purer

morals and more elevated virtue, than the truth, and, therefore, that falsehood is a greater blessing to men than the truth !

2d. Then proclaim to the world, that a succession of ignorant, unprincipled men, in the darkest ages of the world's history, wrote a book embracing in its vast range not only theology, but several of the most important branches of science, as history, chronology, geography, law, mental and moral science, &c.—which book has successfully asserted its claims, as a divine revelation, over the most enlightened nations, and over many of the most gigantic intellects richly stored with human learning ; nay, which gave to the greatest philosophers the true clue to their discoveries, and is the most successful patron of learning in all its branches ! Proclaim it, that ignorance is wiser than wisdom—that darkness shines more brightly than the light !

3d. Go further, and affirm, that those degraded, ignorant men did better understand, and more clearly teach the great principles of liberty, civil and religious, did more fully define the duties and guard the rights of individuals in all the relations of life, than any other men who have lived ; and through their writings have broken, and are breaking the yoke of tyranny, and proclaiming liberty to the nations !

4th. Tell it to all, that the greatest imposture the world ever saw, has been the greatest blessing the world ever enjoyed—has done more than all other causes to dry up the fountains of human crime and wretchedness, to make every man a blessing to his fellow-men and earth a blooming paradise ; to meet and satisfy the noblest aspirations of the human mind, inspire it with glorious hopes, smooth the rough pathway of life, and make the dying hour an hour of peace, and triumph, and joy !

He who is not prepared to assert absurdities so glaring, must acknowledge the conclusiveness of the argument, and admit, that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

2. He who would promote most effectually the highest interests of men, must put into their hands the inspired volume, and bring them, as far as possible, under its hallowed influence. All schemes of reform which rest not upon its teaching, will, as they have ever done, not only fail, but will aggravate the evils they are designed to remove. The Bible alone strikes at the prolific cause of human misery, which is *sin*, and points out clearly the path of real prosperity and happiness.

3. Young men especially, should regard the claims of the

Bible, and acquaint themselves with its doctrines. Its history, its science, its literature, its morals, its grace, its glorious hopes, all claim their attention. "Wherewithal," asked David, the king of Israel, "shall a young man cleanse his way?" He answers—"By taking heed thereto according to thy word." Multitudes of young men of fairest promise have fallen under the temptations that have assailed them; but not one ever fell, till he forsook that Book—"the light to the feet and the lamp to the path."

But we are all immortal. The interests of this life are the merest trifles, compared with the interests of the eternal future. We are all sinners; and in the Bible only we find a Saviour and a heaven. He died for us, and rose again. He is able to save to the uttermost. Repent, believe, and live forever.