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STEARNS***



***CHRISTIANITY
AND MODERN
THOUGHT***

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Martineau**

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INTRODUCTION.

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The following discourses were delivered in Boston, at Hollis-Street Church, on successive Sunday evenings, and repeated at King's Chapel on Monday afternoons, during the winter of 1871-72, in response to an invitation of the Executive Committee of the AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION, whose purpose was thus declared in the letter of invitation:

—

"It is not proposed that the course shall be a merely popular one, to awaken the indifferent and interest them in familiar religious truths; but rather to meet the need of thoughtful people perplexed amid materialistic and sceptical tendencies of the time. Nor is it desired simply to retrace in controversial method the beaten paths of sectarian or theological debate; but rather, in the interest of a free and enlightened Christianity, to present freshly the positive affirmations of faith."

The several discourses were prepared independently, without conference or concerted plan; and for their statements and opinions the responsibility rests solely with their respective authors.

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ANCIENT FAITH AND WORSHIP.

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There is evidently a growing disrelish, in an important portion of the people of our time, for professional religion, technical piety, and theological faith. These were always unpopular with youth, and people in the flush of life and spirits; but this was because they called attention to grave and serious things; and youth, as a rule, does not like even the shadow of truth and duty to fall too early or too steadily upon it. Restraint, care, thoughtfulness, it resists as long as it can; and none who recall their own eager love of pleasure and gayety, in the spring-time of life, can find much difficulty in understanding or excusing it. Of course, too, careless, self-indulgent, sensual, and frivolous people have always disliked the gravity, and the faith and customs, of people professing religion, and exhibiting special seriousness. They were a reproach and a painful reminder to them, and must be partially stripped of their reproving sanctity, by ridicule, charges of hypocrisy, and hints of contempt. But, all the while this was going on, the youth

and frivolity of previous generations expected the time to come when they must surrender their carelessness, and be converted; and even the worldly and scoffing shook in their secret hearts at the very doctrines and the very piety they caricatured. The old relations of master and pupil describe almost exactly the feeling which youth and levity held toward instituted faith and piety, a generation or two since. The schoolboy, indeed, still thinks himself at liberty to call his master nick-names, to play tricks upon him, and to treat with great levity, among his fellow-pupils, all the teaching and all the rules of the school. But he nevertheless sincerely respects his teacher; believes in him and in his teachings, and expects to derive an indispensable benefit from them, in preparing himself for his coming career. So it was with the religion and piety of our fathers. The people profoundly respected the creed, the elders in piety, and the eminent saints in profession and practice, although the young had their jibes and jests, their resistance to church-going, their laugh at sanctimony; and the majority of people then, as now, were not fond of the restraints of piety, or the exercises of devotion.

But the alienation to which I wish to draw your attention now is something quite different from the natural opposition of the young to serious thoughts; or the gay, to grave matters; or those absorbed in the present, to what belongs to the future; or of those charmed with the use of their lower or more superficial faculties and feelings, to the suggestions and demands of their deeper and nobler nature. That the body should not readily and without a struggle submit to the mind; that thoughtlessness should not easily

be turned into thoughtfulness; that youth should not readily consent to wear the moral costume of maturity, or the feelings and habits of riper years; that the active, fresh, curious creature, who has just got this world with its gay colors in his eye, should not be much attracted by spiritual visions, and should find his earthly loves and companions more fascinating than the communion of saints or the sacred intercourse of prayer,—all this, to say the least of it, is very explicable, and belongs to all generations, and hardly discourages the experienced mind, more than the faults and follies of the nursery the wise mother who has successfully carried many older children through them all.

It is quite another kind of antipathy and disrelish which marks our time. It is not confined to youth, nor traceable to levity and thoughtlessness. The Church and its creed on one side, the world and its practical faith on the other, seem now no longer to stand in the relation of revered teachers and dull or reluctant pupils; of seriousness, avoided by levity; of authoritative truth, questioned by bold error; of established and instituted faith, provoking the criticisms of impatience, caprice, ignorance, or folly. An antagonism has arisen between them as of oil and water,—a separation which is neither due to period of life, nor stage of intelligence, nor even to worth of character; which does not separate youth from maturity, the thoughtless from the thinking, the bad from the good, but divides the creeds, observances, and professions of Christians, from a large body of people who insist that after a certain fashion they are Christians too, and yet will have little or nothing to do

with professions of faith, or pious pretensions, or religious ways of feeling, talking, or acting.

Clearly, it would not do any longer to say that the worth and virtue and influence of society, in this country, could be estimated by the number of communicants in the churches, by the degree of credit still given to any of the long-believed theological dogmas, deemed in the last generation the sheet-anchors of the State. We all know hundreds of people, who could sign no creed, and give no theological account of their faith, whom we do not count as necessarily less worthy in the sight of God or man than many who have no difficulty in saying the whole Athanasian Creed. Nay, there are some millions of people in this country, not the least intelligent or useful citizens in all cases, who never enter a church-door. A generation or two back, you would safely have pronounced all these absentees to be worldly, careless people, infidels, atheists, scoffers. Do you expect to find them so now? Some, of course, but not the majority. Indeed, you would find a great many of these people supporting churches, to which their families go, and not themselves; or to which others go, for whom they are glad to provide the opportunity. They would tell you, if they could discriminate their own thoughts, something like this: "Public worship and church organizations, and creeds and catechisms, and sermons and ceremonies, and public prayers and praises, are doubtless very good things, and very useful up to a certain stage of intelligence, and for a certain kind of character. But we have discovered that the real truth and the real virtue of what people have been misnaming religion is a much larger, freer, and more interesting thing than

churches, creeds, ministers, and saints seem to think it. Here is this present life, full of occupations and earnest struggles and great instructions. Here is this planet, not a thousandth part known, and yet intensely provoking to intelligent curiosity; and science is now every day taking a fresh and an ever bolder look into it; and we want our Sundays to follow these things up. That is our idea of worship. Then, again, the greatest philosophers are now writing out their freest, finest thoughts about our nature; and, if we go to church, we are likely to find some fanatical and narrow-minded minister warning us against reading or heeding what these great men say; and it is a thousand times fresher and grander and more credible than what he says himself! Why, the very newspapers, the earnest and well-edited ones, contain more instruction, more warning, more to interest the thoughtful mind, than the best sermons; and why should a thinking man, who needs to keep up with the times, and means to have his own thoughts free, go where duty or custom makes it common to frown upon inquiry, doubt, and speculation,—to shut out knowledge and testimony, and stamp a man with a special type of thinking or professing?"

For there are, you observe,—in justice to these thoughts,—these two instructors to choose between in our generation. Here is the Church, with its ecclesiastical usages and its pious exhortations; its Sunday school for the children; its devotional meeting in the week, and its Sunday teaching and worship,—all acknowledged as good for those that like them, and are willing to accept what people thought or believed was true a hundred or five hundred

years ago; and here is the modern press, with the wonderful profusion of earnest and able books, cheap and attractive, and treating boldly all subjects of immediate and of permanent interest; and here are the reviews, quarterly and monthly, that now compress into themselves and popularize all that these books contain, and furnish critical notices of them; and then, again, here are the newspapers, wonderful in variety and ability, that hint at, suggest, and bring home all the new and fresh thoughts of the time. And the marvel is, that most of these books, reviews, papers, are in the interest of, and seem inspired by, something larger, freer, fresher, truer, than what the churches and the creeds are urging. Thus church religion and general culture do not play any longer into each other's hands. If you believe what the men of science, the philosophers, the poets and critics, believe, you cannot believe, except in a very general way, in what the creeds and churches commonly profess. Accordingly, the professors in college, the physicians, the teachers, the scientists, the reformers, the politicians, the newspaper men, the reviewers, the authors, are seldom professing Christians, or even church-goers; and if they do go to church from motives of interest or example, they are free enough to confess in private that they do not much believe what they hear.

Assuming that this is a tolerably correct account—although doubtless exaggerated for pictorial effect—of the existing state of things among the reading and thinking class of this country, what is the real significance of it? Is it as new as it seems? Is it as threatening to the cause of religious faith as it seems? Reduced to its most general

terms, is it any thing more or other than this? The faith and worship of this generation, and the experience and culture of a portion of this generation, have temporarily fallen out; and, as in all similar quarrels, there is, for the time, helpless misunderstanding, mutual jealousy and misrepresentation. The faith and piety of the time pronounce the culture, the science, the progressive philanthropy, the politics, the higher education and advanced literature, to be godless and Christless; and the culture of the age retaliates, perhaps, with still greater sincerity, in pronouncing the faith and worship of the time to be superstitious, antiquated, sentimental, and specially fitted only to people willing to be led by priests and hireling ministers.

Now, if this were a quarrel between experience and inexperience, between good and bad, between truth and falsehood, it would be easy to take sides. But faith and knowledge have both equal rights in humanity. People who are sincerely in love with knowledge and science and philosophy are not thereby made enemies of God or man; certainly are not to be discouraged and abused for their devotion to practical and scientific truth, their search for facts, their interest in the works of the Creator, even if they are not possessed of what the church properly calls faith and piety. And, on the other hand, however shocked established faith and piety may naturally be by the handling which religion and its creeds and worship receive from modern inquisitors, ought the deeper believers to be seriously alarmed for the safety of its root or its healing leaves, on account of the shaking which the tree of life is now receiving? However slow science and culture may often

show themselves to be in recognizing the fact, can any reasonable and impartial mind, acquainted with history or human nature, believe that faith itself is an inconstant or perishable factor in our nature? prayer a childish impulse, which clear-seeing manhood must put away? the conscience, not the representative of a holiness enthroned over the moral universe, but an artificial organ, which social convenience has developed, much like the overgrown liver in the Strasburg goose? In short, who that considers the part that faith and worship have played in the history of the race, can doubt their essential and permanent place in human fortunes? The question of *some* religion, of *some* worship, for the people, does not seem debatable. The only alternative among nations has been a religion in which mystery, awe, and fear prevailed, clothing themselves in dread and bloody sacrifices, or else a religion in which more knowledge, more reason, more love, embodied themselves in a simpler and gentler ritual. The nations have had only a choice—not always a wholly voluntary one—between terrific superstitions and more or less reasonable religions. Christianity has prevailed in civilized nations, since Constantine, by accommodating its theological dogmas and external ritual to the needs of successive eras; beginning with coarser and more heathenish symbols, and running itself clearer and more clear, as the mind and taste and experience of the race have developed "sweetness and light." But does this make Christianity only a human growth, and so predict a coming decay, which many seem to think has already begun? On the contrary, the decisive fact about Christianity is, that, while its intellectual history is changing,

its early records are in form fixed and permanent, and that its real progress has been uniformly a return towards its original simplicity. Other faiths develop. It is we who develop under Christianity, and are slowly changed unto the original likeness of Christ. Christ's statements, Christ's character, Christ's words, do not become antiquated. We are not called upon to explain away, as superstitions of the time, any of the *certain* words he said, or thoughts he had, or commandments he left. True, there are critical embarrassments about the record, and room enough to question how it was made up; and we cannot always trust the reporters of that age, or our own. But when we get, as we certainly do get in hundreds of cases, at Christ's own words; or when we really see—as by a hundred vistas, through all the *débris* and rubbish of the age, we may see—the true person and bearing and spirit of Jesus, we behold, we recognize, we know, a Being who, transferred to this age, and placed in the centre of the choicest circle of saints and sages whom culture and science and wisdom could collect, would bear just the same exalted relation of superiority to them that he did to the fishermen and publicans and kings and high-priests and noble women and learned rabbis of his own day. We should not hesitate, any more than they did, to call him Master and Lord; to say, "To whom else shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Those, then, who fear that true culture, that science or philosophy boldly pushed, that learning and logic impartially applied,—whether in studying God's method in creation, or his method in revelation,—can injure permanently faith and piety, or endanger Christianity, as a whole, must either

think the religious wants of man very shallow or very artificial, or the providence of God very easily baffled, and the harmony of his word and works very badly matched. If there be in nature or in man, in earth or in our dust, in chemistry, astronomy, anthropology; in geology, the language of dead eras; or in language, the geology of buried races, any thing that disproves the existence and providence of a living God, the holiness and goodness and trustworthiness of his character; the moral and religious nature of man, his accountableness, his immortality; the divine beauty and sinless superiority of Jesus Christ, and the essential truth of his religion,—by all means let us know it! Why should we allow ourselves to be beguiled by fables and false hopes and make-believes? But the faith of religious experience, the confidence of those who know and love and have become spiritually intimate with the gospel of Jesus Christ, is usually such that they would sooner mistrust their senses than their souls. They have found a moral and spiritual guidance, a food and medicine in their Christian faith, which enables them calmly to say to criticism, to science, to culture, "We do not hold our faith, or practise our worship, by your leave, or at your mercy." Faith leans first on the spiritual nature of man, and not on demonstrable science. It would not be faith, if it were only a sharper sight. It is insight, not sight. It springs from its own root, not primarily from the intellect. As we love our wives and children with something besides the judgment, or the logical faculty, so we love God with the heart, and not with the understanding. We stand erect, with open eyes, when we are seeking truth; we fall on our knees with closed eyelids,

when we are seeking God! Religion is not the rule of three, but the golden rule; it is not the major and minor premises and copula of logic, but the sacred instinct of the soul, which Jesus Christ has satisfied, and guided, and owned, and directed, in an inestimable way.

But when faith and worship have taken this true and independent tone, let them not join the foolish bigots, who think that because faith rests on other foundations than science, therefore it owes nothing to science and culture, and can wholly separate its fortunes and future from them. True, *faith* and *culture*, religion and science, in spite of their general and permanent agreement and connection, when they cannot get on honestly together, had better for the time separate; for they embarrass each other, and it is in their insulation that they sometimes ripen and prepare in separate crucible elements that are ultimately to blend in a finer compound than either ever knew before. Thus faith, driving science and culture out of her cell, and closing the doors on fact and observation, wrapt in devotion, has sometimes caught visions of God through her purely spiritual atmosphere, which sages in their laboratories have never seen. The great religious inspirations have not come from scholars, but from seers; from men of soul, not men of sense. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" said his contemporaries of Christ. Well, he knew no letters, but he had what letters never teach,—divine wisdom! He knew God, that end of knowledge; he knew man, that last of philosophy. Faith therefore often recruits itself in a temporary divorce from science, just as Romanism profitably drives her priests into periodical retreats for

prayer and exclusive meditations on God and Christ. It is beautiful to study even those humble and uninstructed Christian sects, whose simple and implicit faith is protected, yes, and exalted, by their providential indifference to science or unacquaintance with speculative difficulties. It is not their ignorance that kindles their devotion, but it is faith's vitality, which in certain exceptional natures and times beams and glows most purely, fed only on its own sacred substance. When you have reached the inner kernel of a true Moravian, or even a true Catholic heart, and found a solid core of faith, unsupported by any other evidence than that which the Scripture described in the words, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," you have gone far towards fathoming the holiest secret in our nature, the well of living water. And, on the other hand, how much better, both for faith and science, that science should, at a time like this, go without religious ends into physical or metaphysical pursuits, investigate, inquire, test, question, in absolute independence of theological or spiritual results. It is only when thus free and bold and uncommitted that her testimony is worth any thing. Think of Newton, meditating and exploring the solar system, in the simple love of truth, without let or hindrance from ecclesiastical intermeddlers, and compare him with Galileo, lifting his telescope under the malediction of the priesthood of Rome.

No: let science be as free as light, as brave as sunbeams, as honest as photography! Encourage her to chronicle her conclusions with fearless and unreproached fidelity. She will doubtless make many things which have been long

associated with religion look foolish and incredible. But it is only so religion can shed some husks, and get rid of some embarrassments. It is, in short, only just such assaults and criticisms from science and experience that ever induces religion to strain out the flies from her honey; to dissociate what is accidental in faith from what is essential and permanent. And, when science and culture have gathered in the full harvest of this wonderful season of discovery and speculation, we may expect to find faith stripped of many garments, now worshipped, which ignorance and fear put upon her for protection and defence; but really strengthened in substance, by the free movements allowed her lungs, and the dropping of the useless load upon her back. Then, too, science and philosophy will again resume their places at the feet of the master-principle in our nature, until again driven away, by new disagreements, to return again by the discovery of a finer harmony.

Self-culture will never supersede worship, more than golden lamps burning fragrant oils will ever supersede the sun; more than digging and hoeing and planting will supersede sunshine and rain from heaven. Self-culture? Yes: by all means, and in any amount, but not as an end. When people look to ornamental gardening for the crops that are to feed the famine-smitten world, and not to the pastures and prairies, as they lie in the light of the common sun, they will look to self-culture for the characters, the hearts, the souls that glorify God and lift and bless the world. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." That is the irrepealable law of growth. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and

all other things shall be added unto you." Worship, faith, duty, devotion to God, Christ, humanity, to justice, freedom, truth,—these, and not self-culture, have lifted the race and the world. Learn, acquire, cultivate, improve, develop yourselves, by art, music, reading, languages, study, science, experience, but do it all in seeking to know and love and serve God and man. Seek to know Christ, and you will learn more, indirectly, than though you sought all knowledge without this thirst. Seek to know God, and you shall find all science and culture healthful, sacred, harmonious, satisfying, and devout.

The break between modern thought and ancient creeds and worship, thus considered, though serious, and worth the utmost pains to heal, by all arts that do not conceal or salve over, without curing the wound, is not permanently discouraging to earnest and well-considered Christian faith. Nor are all the signs of the times one way. For—after all that has been said about the restless and dissatisfied condition of the critical and conscious thought of the time, and the scepticism of the learned, or the speculative class, or of the new thinkers born of the physical progress of the age, and the decay of worship in the literary and artistic, the editorial and poetical circles—it remains to be said, that, leaving this important and valuable body of people aside,—not badly employed, and not without personal warrant for their doubts and withdrawal from positive institutions,—there remains a mighty majority, on whom the Christian religion and historical faith and the external church have a vigorous and unyielding hold; whose practical instincts and grand common-sense and hereditary experience anchor them

safely in positive faith, while the scepticism raves without and blows itself clear, and passes over. Christianity first addressed itself to common people, not to avoid criticism, but to secure the attention of the moral affections and the spiritual powers, instead of the meaner understanding. It has lived on the heart and conscience and needs and yearnings of the masses, from and to whom practical wisdom and fixed institutions and simple faith always come and always return. Common sense is not the sense that is common, but the sense that is *in* common. And popular faith is not the faith of private ignorance massed, but of that wisdom which alone enables ignorant people to find a basis for feelings and actions that all feel to be beyond and above their private ignorance or self-will. The common people were the first to hear Christ gladly: they will be the last to hear any who deny him.

It is easy to exaggerate the decline of modern faith, and to misread the tendencies of the time on which we have been dwelling. Thus, paradox though it seem, it were just as true to say that more people are deliberately interested in Christian faith and worship to-day than at any previous era in the history of our religion, as to asseverate that more people doubt and regret it than ever before. Both statements are true; and they are reconciled only by the fact that it is only in this century that the claims of faith and worship have been popularly debated, or that the people were expected or allowed to have any independent opinion about them. The general soil of our humanity is for the first time surveyed and sown; and it is found that, with more *wheat* than ever, there are also more *tares*. With more

intelligent and convinced worshippers, there are more wilful or logical neglecters of worship; with more genuine believers, more sceptics; with more religious activity, more worldliness. Without an army in the field, there will be no deserters; without a common currency of genuine coin, no counterfeits; without a formidable body of affirmers, few deniers.

The positive institutions of Christianity decline in one form, to spring into new life in other and better forms. Doubtless, fourfold more money is expended to-day upon temples of worship than in what have been falsely called the ages of faith,—rather the ages of acquiescence. Religion does not decline as a costly interest of humanity with the progress of doubt, freedom, intelligence, science, and economic development. It is a permanent and eternal want of man, and is always present, either as a vast, overshadowing superstition, or as a more or less intelligent faith. Nowhere has it a stronger hold on society than in free America, which false prophets, with their faces to the past, muttered was about to become its grave. This busy, delving, utilitarian country, without a past, denied the influence of ruins and the memory of mythic founders, a land without mystery or poetry,—how could so tender and venerable a sentiment as reverence live in its garish day? how so sweet a nymph as Piety kneel in its muddy marts of trade, or chant her prayers in its monotonous wilderness, ringing with the woodman's axe or the screeching saw? But now delegates of all the great religious bodies in the Old World are visiting America, for religious instruction and inspiration. Nowhere, it is confessed, is there to be found a people so generally

interested in religion, ready to make so great sacrifices for it, or so deeply convinced that its principles and inspirations are at the root of all national prosperity. Nowhere do churches and chapels spring up with such rapidity, and in such numbers; nowhere is the ministry as well supported, or its ministers as influential members of society; nowhere do plain men of business and intelligence, I do not say of science and philosophy, participate so freely in religious worship. And since all political compulsion has been taken off from the support of religion, and it has been made purely voluntary, its interests have received even more care. There is little doubt that the decline of religious establishments, the decay of priestly authority, the complete withdrawal of governmental patronage, the discrediting of the principle of irrational fear, the dispersion of false dogmas, the clearing up of superstition, the growth of toleration and charity, instead of weakening true faith or lessening public worship, will greatly increase and strengthen both. For it is not man's ignorance, weakness, and fears, that lead him most certainly to Christian worship and faith. There is a worship and a faith of blindness and dread; but they have no tendency to develop a moral and spiritual sense of the character of God, or the character becoming man, or to survive the spread of general intelligence and mental courage. If thought, if courage of mind, if inquiry and investigation, if experience and learning and comprehensive grasp, if light and sound reason, and acquaintance with human nature, tended to abolish a living God from the heart and faith of man, to disprove the essential truths of Christianity, or to make life and the human soul less sacred,

aspiring, and religious, the world would be on its rapid way to atheism. But I maintain that science itself, philosophy and free inquiry, however divorced from religious institutions and dogmas, were never so humble, reverential, and Christian as since they partly emancipated themselves from theological or ecclesiastical censure and suspicion. For ages science knelt to religion as she went to her crucible or laboratory, like the sexton passing the altar in a Catholic cathedral, and with as little thought or feeling as he, simply to avert censure, while she pursued inquiries she knew would banish the superstition she pretended to honor. Faith and knowledge were at opposite poles; religious truth and scientific truth, finally and permanently amenable to different standards. How dishonoring to religion was this distrust of light and knowledge! how faithless in God, this faith in him which could not bear investigation! how compromising to Christianity, the sort of trust which refuses as blasphemous the application of all the tests and proofs which are required in the certification of every other important conviction! Religious faith rests on the spiritual nature; but its basis is not less real for being undemonstrable, like the axioms of mathematics. That is not real faith which dares not investigate the grounds of its own being. It is irreverent to God, to affirm that he does not allow us to try his ways; to demand proofs of his existence and righteous government; to ask for the credentials of his alleged messengers; to doubt until we are rationally convinced. If the artificial feeling that faith is opposed to reason; religious truth to universal truth; that belief in unseen things is less rational or less capable of verification

than the radical beliefs of the senses,—if these prejudices were sound, or not the reverse of true, the world would be on its inevitable way to universal infidelity and godless materialism. But is that the tendency of things? Is it that religion is growing *less* mystic? or only science more so? Have not real and affecting mysteries been very much transferred for the time from theology to philosophy, from the priest to the professor? I doubt very much whether men of science are not more truly on their knees than men of superstition, in our days. Never did such candor, such confessions of baffled insight, such a sense of inscrutable wisdom and power, such a feeling of awe and dependence, seem to prevail in science as now, when so many theologians are raising the eyebrow, and seeking to alarm the world at what they call the atheism of the most truth-loving, earnest, and noble men. I would sooner have the scepticism—reverent and honest and fearless—of these solemn and awed inquisitors in the inner shrines of nature, than the faith of self-bandaged priests, who are thinking to light the way to heaven with candles on the mid-day altar, or to keep faith in God alive only by processions in vestments of purple and gold.

Nor has Christianity any thing permanently to fear from the disposition which now so largely prevails, to separate it from its accidents, its accretions, and its misrepresentations. The days have not long gone by when men were counted as entitled to little respect, if they did not wear side-swords and bag-wigs. You recollect how our Benjamin Franklin surprised, shocked, and then delighted all Europe, by appearing at the court of France in plain citizen's clothes?

Religion, too, has had her court-dress, and her sounding court-titles, and official robes, and circuitous ceremonies. The world has felt horror-stricken whenever any brave and more believing spirit has ventured to ask the meaning of one of these theological tags and titles. But how much less wholesome is living water, if drunk out of a leaf, or the palm of one's hand, than if presented on a salver, in a curiously jewelled flagon, by a priest in livery? How much has theological ingenuity of statement and systematic divinity, which it takes the study of a life to understand, added to the power of the simplicity of Christ as he unfolds himself in the Sermon on the Mount? Yet, if any one has dared to be as simple as Christ himself was in his own faith, he has been said to deny the Lord that bought him. It has been called infidelity, to think Christ meant only just what he said, and was understood to say, in his simple parables. You must believe something not less incredible and abstruse than the church Trinity; something not less contrary to natural justice and common sense than the church vicarious atonement; something not less cruel and vindictive than the eternal misery of all who through ignorance, birth, or accident, or even perversity and pride, do not hear of, or do not accept, the blood of Christ as their only hope of God's mercy and forgiveness, or you are no Christian. Now I hold these dogmas themselves to be unchristian in origin and influence, although held by many excellent Christian men. I believe that they are the main obstacles with many honest, brave, and enlightened men in our day, to their interest in public worship; and that millions repudiate the Church, and Christianity, which is a different thing, simply because they

suppose her to be responsible for these barnacles upon the sacred ship. It would be just as reasonable to hold the Hudson River responsible for the filth the sewers of the city empty into it; or to hold the sun answerable for the changes in its beams, caused by the colored glass in church-windows.

Christianity, the Christianity of Christ, is simple, rational, intelligible, independent of, yet in perfect harmony,—if it be often an unknown harmony,—with philosophy, ethics, science; true, because from God, the God of nature as well as grace; true, because the transcript of self-evident and self-proving principles; true, because guaranteed by our nature; true, because of universal application, unimpeached by time or experience. It affirms the being and authority of a righteous, holy, and all-loving God, whom man can serve and love and worship because he is made in his image; can know, by studying himself; and to whom man is directly related by reason, conscience, and affections. It affirms divine science and worship to consist in obedience to God's laws, written on man's heart, and for ever urged by God's Spirit. It affirms the present and persistent penalty, the inevitable consequences, of all moral and spiritual wrongdoing and disobedience; the present and future blessedness of well-doing and holiness. It sets forth Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Son of Man,—appellations that, deeply considered, really mean the same thing,—the direct messenger, representative, and plenipotentiary of God,—his perfect moral image. It insists upon men's putting themselves to school to Christ, honoring, loving, and following him; forming themselves into classes,—another

name for churches,—and by prayer, meditation, and study of his life, informing their minds and hearts, and shaping their wills in his likeness, which is the ideal of humanity. Its clear object is to dignify and ennoble man, by presenting God as his father; to show him what his nature is capable of, by exhibiting Christ in the loveliness, sanctity, and power of his awful yet winning beauty; to make him ashamed of his own sins, and afraid of sin, by arousing moral sensibility in his heart; safely to fence in his path by beautiful and sacred customs,—the tender, simple rites of baptism and communion; the duty of daily prayer, the use of the Scriptures, and respect for the Lord's Day.

Here is a Christianity without dogmatic entanglement; plain, direct, earnest, simple, defensible, intelligible to a child, yet deep enough to exhaust a life's study. For it is the simplicities of religion that are the permanent and glorious mysteries that never tire. They draw our childhood's wonder, our manly reverence, and age's unquenched curiosity and awe. Do we ever tire of the stars, or the horizon, or the blue sky, or the dawn, or the sunset, or running water, or natural gems? Do we ever tire of the thought of a holy, all-wise, all-good Spirit of spirits, our God and our Father, or of hearing of the reverence and trust, the obedience and the love, due to him? Do we ever tire of Jesus Christ, considered as the sinless image, within human limitations, of God's love and truth and mercy and purity? Do we ever tire of hearing the wondrous story of his obedient, disinterested, and exalted life and sacrifice? or of the call to follow his graces and copy his perfections into our own hearts and lives? Are we ever weary of hearing of the

blessed hope of immortality, with the comfortable expectation of throwing off the burden of our flesh, and winging our way in spiritual freedom nearer to God and the light of our Master's face? Who can exhaust, who can add to, the real force and attraction and fulness of those truths and promises? Truly received, they grow with every day's contemplation and use; they fill the soul with an increasing awe and joy; they prove only less common-place as they are more nearly approached, more copious as they are more drawn upon, and more sacred as they are more familiar.

It is the common, simple, universal truths that are the great, inexhaustible, powerful, and never-wearying truths. But doubtless it requires courage, personal conviction, and self-watchfulness, to maintain personal piety or religious institutions under free and enlightened conditions, when they are just beginning. When sacramental mysteries are exploded, when the official sanctity of the ministry is disowned, when the technical and dogmatic conditions of acceptance with God are abandoned, when every man's right of private judgment is confessed, when common sense is invited into the inner court of faith, when every man is confessed to be a king and a priest in that temple of God which he finds in his own body and soul, when real, genuine goodness is owned as the equivalent of religion, then it is evident that the support of religious institutions, of public worship, of the church and the ordinances, must appeal to something besides the ignorance, the fears, the superstitions, the traditions of the Christian world. They must fall back on the practical convictions men entertain of their intrinsic importance. They must commend themselves