

**CONDITION
AND PROSPECTS
OF PROTESTANTISM**

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IN one of the western counties, the writer of this paper was recently present at an evening Evangelical prayer-meeting. The congregation were partly church-goers, partly dissenters of various denominations, united for the time by the still active revivalist excitement. Some were highly educated men and women farmers, tradesmen, servants, sailors, and fishermen made up the rest: all were representative specimens of Evangelical Christians, passionate doctrinalists, convinced that they, and only they, possessed the 'Open Sesame' of heaven, but doing credit to their faith by inoffensive, if not useful, lives. One of them, who took a leading part in the proceedings, was a person of large fortune, who was devoting his money, time, and talents to what he called the truth. Another was well known through two counties as a hard-headed, shrewd, effective man of business; a stern, but on the whole, and as times went, a beneficent despot over many thousands of unmanageable people.

The services consisted of a series of addresses from different speakers, interchanged with extempore prayers, directed rather to the audience than to the Deity. At intervals, the congregation sung hymns, and sung them particularly well. The teaching was of the ordinary kind expressed only with more than usual distinctness. We were told that the business of each individual man and woman in the world was to save his or her soul; that we were all sinners together – all equally guilty, hopeless, lost, accursed children, unable to stir a finger or do a thing to help ourselves. Happily, we were not required to stir a finger; rather, we were forbidden to attempt it. An antidote had been provided for our sins, and a substitute for our obedience. Everything had been done for us. We had but to lay hold of the perfect righteousness which had been fulfilled in our behalf. We had but to put on the venture provided for our wearing, and our safety was assured. The reproaches of conscience were silenced. We were perfectly happy in this world, and certain to be blessed in the next.

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If, on the other hand, we neglected the offered grace; if, through carelessness, or intellectual perverseness, or any other cause, we did not apprehend it in the proper manner; if we tried to please God ourselves by 'works of righteousness,' the sacrifice would then cease to avail us. It mattered nothing whether, in the common acceptation of the word, we were good or bad; we were lost all the same, condemned by perfect justice to everlasting torture.

It is, of course, impossible for human creatures to act towards one another on these principles. The man of business on week days deals with those whom he employs on weekday rules. He gives them work to do, and he expects them to do it. He knows the meaning of good desert as well as of ill desert. He promises and he threatens. He praises and he blames. He will not hear of vicarious labour. He rewards the honest and industrious. He punishes the lazy and the vicious. He finds society so constructed that it cannot exist unless men treat one another as responsible for their actions, and as able to do right as well as wrong.

And, again, one remembered that the Christian's life on earth used to be represented as a warfare; that the soldier who went into battle considering only how he could save his own life, would do little credit to the cause he was fighting for; and that there were other things besides and before saving their souls which earnest men used to think about.

The listeners, however, seemed delighted. They were hearing what they had come to hear – what they had heard a thousand times before, and would hear with equal ardour a thousand times again – the gospel in a nutshell; the magic formulas which would cheat the devil of his due. However antinomian the theory might sound, it was not abused by anybody present for purposes of self-indulgence. While they said that it was impossible for men to lead good lives, they were, most of them,

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contradicting their words by their practice. While they professed to be thinking only of their personal salvation, they were benevolent, generous, and self-forgetful. People may express themselves in what formulas they please; but if they sincerely believe in God, they try to act uprightly and justly; and the language of theology, hovering, as it generally does, between extravagance and conventionality, must not be scanned too narrowly.

There is, indeed, attaching to all propositions, one important condition – that they are either true or false; and it is noticeable that religious people reveal unconsciously, in their way of speaking, a misgiving that the ground is insecure under them. We do not mean, of course, that they knowingly maintain what they believe may possibly be a mistake; but whatever persuasion they belong to, they do not talk about truth, but they talk about *the truth*; *the truth* being the doctrine which, for various reasons, they each prefer. Truth exists independently of them. It is searched for by observation and reason. It is tested by evidence. There is a more and a less in the degree to which men are able to arrive at it. On the other hand, for *the truth* the believer has the testimony of his heart. It suits his spiritual instincts; it answers his spiritual desires. There is no ‘perhaps’ about it; no balancing of argument. Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants are each absolutely certain that they are right. God, it would seem, makes truth; men make *the truth*; which, more or less, approaches to the other, but is not identical with it. If it were not so, these different bodies, instead of quarrelling, would agree. The measure of approximation is the measure of the strength or usefulness of the different systems. Experience is the test. If in virtue of any creed men lead active, upright, self-denying lives, the creed itself is tolerable; and whatever its rivals may say about it, is not, and cannot be, utterly false.

It seems, however, as if the Evangelicals were painfully anxious to disclaim any such criterion. When the first address was over, the

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congregation sung the following singular hymn, one of a collection of which, it appeared from the title-page, that many hundred thousand copies were in circulation:

Nothing, either great or small,
Nothing, sinners, no;
Jesus did it-did it all
Long, long ago.

It is finished, yes, indeed,
Finished every jot:
Sinners, this is all you need,
Tell me, Is it not

When He from His lofty throne
Stooped to do and die,
Everything was fully done
Hearken to His cry, –

Weary, weary, burdened one,
Wherefore toil yon so ?

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Cease your doing, all was done

Long, long ago.

Till to Jesus' work you cling

By a simple faith,

Doing is a deadly thing,

Doing ends in death.

Cast your deadly doing down,

Down at Jesus' feet.

Stand in Him, in Him alone,

Gloriously complete.

And this, we said to ourselves, is Protestantism. To do our duty has become a deadly thing. This is what, after three centuries, the creed of Knox and Luther, of Coligny and Gustavus Adolphus, has come to. The first Reformers were so anxious about what man did, that if they could they would have laid the world under a discipline as severe as that of the Roman Censors. Their modern representatives are wiser than their fathers and know better what their Maker requires of them. To the question, 'What shall I, do to inherit eternal life?' the answer of old was not, 'Do nothing,' but 'Keep the commandments.' It was said by the Apostle from whose passionate metaphors Protestant theology is chiefly constructed, that 'the

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Gentiles, who did by nature the things contained in the law,' were on the road to the right place.

But we have changed all that. We are left face to face with a creed which tells us that God has created us without the power to keep the commandments – that He does not require us to keep them; yet at the same time that we are infinitely guilty in His eyes for not keeping them, and that we justly deserve to be tortured for ever and ever, to suffer, as we once heard an amiable excellent clergyman express it, 'to suffer the utmost pain which Omnipotence can inflict, and the creature can endure, without annihilation.'

The scene of the evening was too soothing at the time for unpleasant reflections on the paradoxes of theology. The earnest attention, the piety, the evident warmth of belief, the certainty that those who were so loudly denouncing the worth of human endeavour would carry away with them a more ardent desire to do the works of righteousness of which they were denying the necessity—these things suggested happier conclusions on the condition of humanity: when the hearts of men are sound, the Power which made and guides us corrects the follies of our heads.

Nevertheless, when we are considering the general influence for good or evil of a system or systems, the intellectual aspect of them cannot be disregarded. Religion is, or ought to be, the consecration of the whole man of his heart, his conduct, his knowledge, and his mind, of the highest faculties which have been given in trust to him, and the highest acquirements which he has obtained for himself. When the gospel was first made generally known through the Roman Empire, it attracted and absorbed the most gifted and thoughtful men then living. Pagan philosophy of the post-Christian era has left no names which will compete on its own ground with those of Origen, Tertullian, and Clement of

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Alexandria. When the Reformers broke the spell of superstition in the sixteenth century, their revolt was ascribed by the Catholics to the pride of human reason. Some enchantment must now have passed over Protestantism, or over the minds of those to whom it addresses itself, when science and cultivation are falling off from it as fast as Protestantism fell away from its rival. How has a creed which had once sounded the spiritual reveille like the blast of the archangel's trumpet come now to proclaim in passionate childishness the 'deadliness' of human duty?

The best that every man knows dies with him; the part of him which he can leave behind in written words conveys but half his meaning even to the generation which lies nearest to him, to the men whose minds are under the same influences with his own. Later ages, when they imagine that they are following the thoughts of their forefathers, are reading their own thoughts in expressions which serve to them but as a mirror. **The pale shadow called Evangelical religion clothes itself in the language of Luther and Calvin. Yet what Luther and Calvin meant is not what it means.** The Protestantism of the sixteenth century commanded the allegiance of statesmen, soldiers, philosophers, and men of science. Wherever there was a man of powerful intelligence and noble heart, there was a champion of the Reformation: and the result was a revival, not of internal emotion, but of moral austerity. The passion of Evangelical teachers in every country where the Reformation made its way, was to establish, so far as the world would let them, the discipline of Geneva, to make men virtuous in spite of themselves, and to treat sins as crimes. **The writings of Knox and Latimer are not more distinguished by the emphasis with which they thunder against injustice and profligacy than by their all but total silence on 'schemes of salvation.'** **The Protestantism of the nineteenth century has forsaken practice for opinion. It puts opinion first and practice second; and in doing so it has parted company with intellect and practical force. It has**

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become the property of the hysterical temperament which confounds extravagance with earnestness; and even of those most under its influence, an ever-increasing number are passing back under the shadow of Catholicism, and are taking refuge in the worn-out idolatries from which their fathers set them free. What is the meaning of so singular a phenomenon? Religion – Protestant as well as Catholic – is ceasing everywhere to control the public life of the State. Government in all countries is becoming sternly secular. The preambles of old Acts of Parliament contained usually in formal words a reference to the will of the Almighty. Legislators looked for instruction not to political economy, but to their Bibles. *“The will of the Almighty” is now banished to the conscience or the closet.* The statesman keeps rigidly to the experienced facts of the world, and will have neither priest nor minister to interpret them for him. Political economy may contradict the sermon on the mount, but it is none the less the manual of our political leaders.

Nor does thought fare better than practice. The philosopher takes refuge in a ‘perhaps,’ and will not be driven to say things are certain which wise men cannot agree about. The man of science is supreme in his own domain, and will not permit theologians to interfere with his conclusions. Society, in its actual life, has long been atheistic. The speculative creed begins to show a tendency to follow in the track of practice.

That this singular estrangement should have taken place in France and Italy is no matter of surprise. The Catholic Church declared war with science when it denounced Galileo; and broke with temporal governments when it claimed a right to depose kings. It is chained to a system of doctrine which half Europe, three centuries ago, declared to be incredible, and which has received no further authentication since; while the taint is on it of the enormous crimes which it committed or prompted to sustain its failing dominion – crimes which it will not condemn and dares not

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acknowledge. The progress which mankind has made throughout the world in the last ten generations has been achieved in spite of a Church which could coexist with moral corruption, but shrunk from intellectual activity; which fought against reason with fire and sword, and still mumbles curses where unable longer to use force.

But why should the same phenomenon be visible among Protestants? Protestantism has no past to be ashamed of. The prosperity of so-called Protestant nations as contrasted with Catholic, is a favourite argument with Protestant controversialists. Protestantism was the creed of Burghley, of Cromwell, of Bacon, of Newton, of Berkeley. It shattered the Spanish Empire; it fused the United Provinces into a republic, and created in its modern aspect the nationality of Scotland. As a spiritual force there has been nothing equal to it since the growth of Christianity. Why has it, too, lost its power to charm? Why has the great river which bore upon its breast the destinies of nations sunk away into the sands of modern civilization?

The tendency of the changes in progress among us can be dimly seen, although the ultimate outcome of them is beyond the reach of prudent conjecture. The existing facts of the case become daily plainer. **The positive creed has lapsed from a rule of life into a debated opinion. It is no longer heard in our legislature. It is no longer respected in our philosophies. Its local spasmodic revivals resemble the convulsive movements of something which is in the agonies of death. Its threats and its promises, however clamorously uttered from the pulpits, are endured with weariness, or with the attention of resentful incredulity.**

Let us follow a little further the curious phrase to which we just now alluded. All religious bodies call their doctrine *the truth* – as distinguished from true. It is particularly characteristic of the Evangelicals who wish to be emphatic, and prefer the warmer expression. The more the words are

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studied, the more pregnant they appear. Truth is the same in all ages, in all languages, and to all races of men. The two sides of a triangle are greater than the third, in China as well as in England. The Professor of Astronomy at St Petersburg has no more doubt about the Newtonian theory than Le Perrier or Mr Adams. Hindoo surgeons accept and understand the circulation of the blood as easily as the students at St Thomas's. Facts once established are facts for all time; and human beings everywhere can be brought to recognize and admit them, where the evidence is properly before their eyes. There is no need of authority. There is no occasion to say 'Believe this, or you will be damned.' Truth carries its own witness with it, and an added denunciation would only suggest misgivings.

The conditions under which the propositions of a creed have found acceptance are singularly different: one man sees the force of the evidence for them; to another the evidence is no evidence at all. We are told that the heart must be in the right state, that there must be the gift of the Spirit, prevenient grace, election, conversion, assurance, and one knows not what. The phraseology points in itself to something individual, to special favour bestowed upon this or that particular soul. Yet the phenomena of the world and of history will not fit into any such formula. The doctrines of the Reformation were not accepted by this person or rejected by that; but as if by some latent magnetism, they selected throughout Europe the Teutonic races, leaving the Celtic and Latin races, after a brief struggle, to Catholicism, and scarcely touching the Slavonic races at all. England and Scotland became Protestant; but the arguments which converted the Saxons failed to touch the Irish. When the war of freedom ended in the Low Countries, the seven Teutonic Provinces were independent and Calvinistic; while Celtic Belgium remained to Rome and Spain. France, in which Celtic and Frankish elements were combined, was convulsed for half a century. The country could not be divided, and the majority carried the day. But it is

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said the part taken by the great families in the wars of the League was determined by their blood: the Colignies, the Turennes, the Montgomeries, the Rochefoucaulds, all the leading Huguenots, were of German descent.

We are not to suppose that there was a second time a selection of a peculiar people. No respectable divine has ever held that the Teutonic race, as a race, were favoured with a special revelation. Nor has piety, or the peculiar grace of character which religion, and only religion, bestows, been peculiar to them or their creed. There are saints and sinners among Latins as well as Teutons. There are saints and sinners among Catholics as well, as Protestants. Each only has followed a spiritual type of its own. Something else has been at work besides either divine grace or outward evidence of truth, something which, for want of a better word, we must call spiritual affinity.

Nor is this all. Free-thought was once offered to the world in the form of Protestantism, but it was offered once only. Those who refused it then never seem to have had a second opportunity; and the subsequent rebellions of reason against authority have all taken the form of revolution. [Protestantism has made no converts to speak of in Europe since the sixteenth century.](#) It shot up in two generations to its full stature, and became an established creed with defined boundaries; and the many millions who in Catholic countries proclaim their indifference to their religion, either by neglect or contempt, do not now swell the congregations of Protestant church or conventicle. Their objections to the Church of Rome are objections equally to all forms of dogmatic and doctrinal Christianity. And so it has come about, that the old enemies are becoming friends in the presence of a common foe. Catholics speak tenderly of Protestants as keeping alive a belief in the creeds, and look forward to their return to the sheep-fold; while the old Antichrist, the Scarlet Woman on the Seven Hills, drunk with the blood of the saints, is now treated by

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Protestantism as an elder sister and a valiant ally in the great warfare with infidelity. The points of difference are forgotten; the points of union are passionately dwelt upon; and the remnants of idolatry which the more ardent English Protestants once abhorred and denounced, are now regarded as having been providentially preserved as a means of making up the quarrel and bringing back the churches into communion. The dread of Popery is gone. The ceremonial system, once execrated as a service of Satan, is regarded as a thing at worst indifferent, perhaps in itself desirable; and even those who are conscious of no tendency to what they still call corruption, are practically forsaking the faith of their fathers, and re-establishing, so far as they can or dare, those very things which their fathers revolted against.

These phenomena seem to say that Protestantism, as a body of positive doctrine, was not a discovery or rediscovery of truth – of truth as it exists from eternity, independent of man's conception of it-but something temporary, something which the minds of men who were determined at all costs to have done with idolatry, threw out of themselves as a makeshift in the confusion – a passionate expression of their conviction that God was a spirit – to be worshiped in spirit and in truth, and not with liturgies and formularies. In the desperate struggle for emancipation, their emotion took form in vehement and imaginative metaphors; and those metaphors, full of fire and force in an age which was in harmony with them, have become gradually, as times have changed, extravagant, unmeaning, and false. The outpourings of pious enthusiasm are addressed rather to the heart than to the head, and when taken out of their connection and shaped by cold theologians into articles of faith, they cannot stand the test, and fall to pieces.

Whence, then, came the original power of Protestantism? What was there about it which once had such extraordinary attraction for great and

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noble minded men? Enthusiasm does not make heroes if it is enthusiasm for illusion. Some great genuine truth there must have been at stake in that tremendous conflagration, or it would have burnt out like a fire of straw. Something indisputably there was which the descendants of the Reformers have forgotten, and have lost their strength in forgetting it. *In the Protestantism of a Latimer or a Knox there were two constituents. The positive part of it was the affirmation of the elementary truth of all religions,, the obligation of obedience to the law of moral duty; the second or. negative, part was a firm refusal to believe in lies or to conceal or disguise their disbelief.* All great spiritual movements have started under the same conditions. They have their period of youth and vitality, their period of established usefulness, and in turn their period of petrification.

Creeds, by the very law of their being, stiffen in time into form. Wherever external ceremonial observances are supposed to be in themselves meritorious or efficacious, the weight of the matter is sooner or later cast upon them. To sacrifice our corrupt inclinations is disagreeable and difficult. To sacrifice bulls and goats in one age, to mutter paternosters and go to a priest for absolution in another, is simple and easy. Priests themselves encourage a tendency which gives them consequence and authority. They need not be conscious rogues, but their convictions go along with their interests, and they believe easily what they desire that others should believe.

So the process goes on, the moral element growing weaker and weaker, and at last dying out altogether. Men lose their horror of sin when a private arrangement with a confessor will clear it away. Religion becomes a contrivance to enable them to live for pleasure, and to lose nothing by it; a hocus-pocus which God is supposed to have contrived to cheat the devil – a conglomerate of half-truths buried in lies. As soon as this point is reached the catastrophe is not far off.

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Conscience does not sleep. The better sort of men perceive more or less clearly that they are living upon illusions. They may not see their way to anything better. They may go on for awhile in outward conformity, but sooner or later something occurs to make them speak, some unusually flagrant scandal, or some politically favourable opportunity for a change. A single voice has but to say the fitting word, and it is the voice not of one but of millions. In the hearts of all generous high-minded persons there is an instinctive hatred of falsehood: a sense that it is dreadful and horrible, and that they cannot and dare not bear with it. They had wanted bread and they were fed with stones – but the stones will not serve them longer, and they fall back on the original elementary moral certainties which are the natural food of their souls.

The negative element is usually that which at the beginning most occupies them, which constitutes at once their honour and their peril. The positive element is simple and rapidly summed up; nor in general does it contain the points for which the battle is being fought. **The Reformers' chief business always is to destroy falsehood, to drab down the temple of imposture where idols hold the place of the Almighty.**

The growth of Christianity at the beginning was precisely this. The early martyrs did not suffer for professing the name of Christ; the Emperor Adrian had no objection to placing Christ in the Pantheon; but they would not acknowledge the deities of the empire. They refused to call beings divine which were either demons or nothing. The first step in their conversion was the recognition that they were living in a lie, and the truth to which they bore witness in their deaths was not the mystery of the Incarnation, but simply that the gods of Greece and Rome were not gods at all. The thoughts of their Master and Saviour hovered before them in their tortures, and took from death its terrors; but they died, it cannot be too clearly remembered, for a negation. The last confession before the prætor,

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the words on which their fate depended, were not 'We do believe,' but 'We do not believe.' 'We will not to save our miserable lives take a lie between our lips, and say we think what we do not think.'

The Reformation was yet more emphatically destructive. The very name Protestant was a declaration of revolt. It commenced with the repudiation of pardons and indulgences; and the theory of the priesthood followed. The clergy professed to be a separate and sacred caste, to possess magical powers in virtue of their descent from the Apostles, and to be able to work invisible miracles by gestures and cabalistic sentences. The war passed rapidly to the central mystery of the Catholic faith. Heaven did not interfere, so the Church fought for it, and went to work sword in hand to chastise the innovators. Where they could not resist they died; and if we look over the trials of the Protestant confessors in Holland, France, or England, we find them condemned, not for their positive doctrines of election, justification, or irresistible grace – the Church would have let them say what they pleased about curious paradoxes, which would have added but fresh propositions to the creed and furnished fresh material for faith – the Church destroyed them for insisting that bread was bread and wine was wine, and that a priest was no more a conjuror, than a layman. And then to serious persons like John Frederick, and Coligny, and William the Silent, the question rose, should the Church be allowed to do this?

While the debate turned on intricacies of theology, they were uncertain, and were inclined to stand still. These great men did not quarrel with transubstantiation as a mere theological opinion. They were unwilling to embroil Christendom for words. They would have left opinion free, and allowed the liberty to others which they demanded for themselves. The burnings and massacres forced them into a sterner attitude. When towns began to be sacked, and women ravished and buried alive, and men by tens of thousands hanged, shot, roasted, torn in pieces, and babies tossed upon

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the pikes of Romish crusaders, a cause had risen which might well command the sympathies of every brave man; the cause of humanity against theology, the cause of God against the devil. It is idle to say that the Catholic cruelties of the sixteenth century rose from the spirit of the age. If the plea were true, the Papacy could not be held excused, for the Papacy claims to be inspired by God, and not by the temper of the times. But the age was not cruel till the Church made it so. The Reformers, before they were persecuted, never sought or desired more for themselves than toleration; they demanded merely permission to think and speak their own thoughts. If in isolated cases extreme fanatics followed the atrocious examples of the Catholics, it was because they had not wholly shaken off the spirit of the creed in which they had been bred. But the judicial murders which can be laid to the charge of Protestants are as units where the Church is responsible for thousands.

On obscure subjects on which certain knowledge is impossible, it is at once inevitable and desirable that men should have different opinions. Such truth as we can hope to obtain on these matters is advanced and protected by discussion, and theological schools are not to be allowed to compensate by violence for the absence or weakness of argument. That we should not be forced at the sword's point by a so-called authority to say that we believe what we do not believe, and deny the intelligence which God has given us, – this is what we have a right to demand, and Protestantism, if the same circumstances return, will again command our allegiance as heartily as ever. But the history of it tells us the secret of its strength as well as of its weakness.

When the power to persecute was taken from the Church, when Protestantism became a system of positive opinion, contending for supremacy as soon as it had achieved toleration, when it showed a disposition to revive in its own favour the methods from which it had

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suffered, the tide which had carried it to victory ceased to flow. From that time forward it was contending for no great principle. It was contending only for its own formulas, which may or may not be true, but which are not proved to be true; and, by parallel necessity, the weakness of the two creeds has developed side by side. As Rome ceased to tyrannize from want of power, the positive Protestant lost the noblest of his allies, and lost hold in himself of the real principles for which the battle of the Reformation had been fought.

The Reformer of the sixteenth century denied the power of the keys. It was decided that for himself and those who went with him, he had a right to say what he thought: but he obtained no right to punish by disabilities or otherwise his neighbour who continued to believe in the keys; and his own theories of Justification were of little moment to those who preferred to remain in suspense on matters beyond comprehension. Luther, on the other hand, might have taught justification by faith if he would have left the priesthood alone, just as the priests might have gone on teaching their own doctrines as long as they could get a congregation to listen to them, if the Inquisition would have left the Protestants alone. The evil element in Catholicism which made good men so detest it, was not that it held a theory of its own on the relation between God and man, but that it murdered everybody who would not agree with it. The work of the Reformation was done when speculative opinion was declared free. The lay intelligence of the world cares at all times more for justice than theology, and it left the Protestants to fight their own battles with their own arguments, as soon as it had secured them fair play.

The contrast between the negative and positive principles – the power of the first and the weakness of the second – has become increasingly apparent in every successive generation.

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As long as Jesuitism continued powerful in Spain and Austria – as long as the old regime was maintained in France, and want of orthodoxy in Catholic countries was directly or indirectly treated as a crime—the cause of Protestantism was more or less the cause of liberty. The revolutions at the close of the eighteenth century completed the work of the sixteenth. The last poison fangs of the old serpent were drawn; it was left a harmless creature whose crimes were things of the past; and it became venerable to sentimentalism for its feebleness and its antiquity. Other questions arose to agitate the intellect of the thinking portion of mankind, which timid Protestants found as dangerous to their own speculations as they were dangerous to what was left of Romanism. They forgot their ancient abhorrence of falsehood. Propositions which they came into being to deny have become more tolerable to them than a further advance on the road to freedom. They have quarrelled with their best friends. They have ceased to protest; and on many sides, and in a thousand subtle ways, they are making advances to their old antagonist, and endeavouring to unite their forces with his against ‘the infidel spirit of the age.’

The sacramental system means something, or it means nothing. It is true, or it is false. The English Evangelicals used to answer in clear ringing tones for the second alternative. There was no playing with words, no sentiment, no mystification. They insisted sternly and firmly that material forms were not and could not be a connecting link between God and the human soul. The English High Churchman was less decided in his words, but scarcely less so in his practice. He was contented to use the ambiguous formulas which the Reformation left in the Liturgy; but he confined his ‘celebrations’ to four times a year. He regarded the Anglican ceremonial generally rather as something established by law which it was his business to carry out than as a set of rites to which he attached a meaning. High Churchmen have discovered now that the mystic body in the Eucharist is in the hands as well

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as the heart of the believer. They pine for more frequent communions as the food of their spiritual existence. They are gliding rapidly into the positive affirmation of the doctrine which Latimer and Ridley were executed for denying. The Evangelicals shrink from being behindhand. They have lost confidence in themselves; they play with mysticism, and admit that things untrue in one sense may be true in another. They are patching their garments from the rags which their fathers cast away, anxious rather to maintain their party than their principles, as the Tories steal the policy of the Radicals to keep their Cabinet in office.

The predominant feature in the English Reformation was the abridgment of the special prerogatives of the clergy. From a position of almost supremacy, they were reduced into the servants of the State. They were made to feel that they were not a separate order deriving their authority from the Apostles, and raised above the laity by privileges or prerogative or special spiritual powers, but were a part of the general community, with particular duties to perform. And they had learnt their lesson. They had come at last, after many vicissitudes, to understand and accept the new order of things. Men now in middle life remember the rector of their childhood as a higher kind of squire – and often combining the two characters. He was justice of the peace; he took his share in general local business; he attended sessions and county meetings; he farmed his glebe or his estate; he was to all intents and purposes a well educated, country gentleman, with a higher moral standard than the laity round him, fulfilling admirably well the obligations of his station, and possessed of all the influence which naturally belonged to it.

The type is fast changing, and will soon be extinct – much for the better, as we are told in newspapers and bishops' charges. The clergy of all persuasions attend now exclusively to their spiritual functions. The incumbent of ----- is no longer to be seen, like his predecessors, on the

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board of magistrates in the next town. He is reading daily service at his church; he is at the Convocation House at Westminster; he is making speeches at a missionary meeting, or addressing his diocesan on the enormities of Bishop Colenso. He wears a long coat and a peculiar waistcoat, and curtails his shirt collars. He cuts his apparel as near as he dares after the Catholic fashion, and aspires to match the priest at his own weapons. He is once more professional. He is one of an order which he hopes to restore to its dignities, and he loops back on the secular parson, who hunted and shot and went to cricket matches and election dinners, as a monster of the dark ages. The secular parson shared the pleasures as well as the occupations of his neighbour. He was no better than a layman.

The modern clergy prefer the earlier condition, and desire to be once more a priesthood. We hear of few moral scandals among them. They are, as a class, devoted, self-sacrificing, hard-worked men, and, in an age more than ever given up to money-making, they are contented with the wages of an upper servant. But what they lose in secular position they aspire to recover in spiritual authority; and whatever else we may conjecture about their future, it is quite certain that they will not long remain members of a Church established and governed by the State. Either they must drop their pretensions, or the Established Church will cease to be. They may preach more doctrine than their fathers; it may be that they preach more truth; but they know infinitely less of the people under their charge; and they in turn are less appreciated by their people. There are no longer independent points of contact between men who have no common occupations; and in town and country, notwithstanding the multiplication of churches, the revival of architecture, the religious newspapers and magazines, and the increased talk about religion everywhere, the practical influence of the clergy diminishes daily, and they know it is so, and know not why it is.

To those who like ourselves have no expectation of any good coming to

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us either from politics or science, unless statesmen and philosophers have some kind of faith in God, the outlook is not a happy one. The reaction towards Romanism, Angle-Catholicism, or whatever it is called, is probably temporary – a mere eddy in the tide. It would not have arisen among us at all, except for the ignorance of modern history, which still accompanies our highest education. The Calvinistic and Lutheran Reformation agreed on one point at least -that the magical power supposed to belong to the clergy had no existence. It treated their absolution as imposture. It regarded their sacraments in the form which they had assumed, as mere idolatry, their whole conception of Christianity as false from the root. It is now pretended that in England the priest theory was retained in a modified form, and people who hold that theory maintain that the English Church is a great deal nearer Rome than to the Presbyterians or continental Protestants.

It is certain, nevertheless, that however politicians for state purposes might choose to adjust the Anglican organization, there would have been no such thing as the English Reformation, except for those among us who did not believe in priests at all.

The first step of the English Parliament was to break the spine of sacerdotal assumption. They allowed its ghost to hover about the service-book, but on condition that it should never take substantial form again. Nor can England be separated in any real sense from the reformed States abroad. English, Dutch, French, Germans fought side by side for the liberties of Europe, against an enemy which neither acknowledged nor acknowledges that there is any distinction between them. If England was in any way singled out, it was as the country where the Protestant heresy had taken strongest and deepest root. Had Protestantism been trampled down in Holland and Germany, the apostolic succession of her bishops would not have saved England from the same fate; and as a feature in the religious history of mankind, the Reformation everywhere must be considered as one

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movement. If it was a good thing, all who broke off from Rome shared the honour; if it was an evil thing, all were equally guilty.

Are we then to believe that the Reformation was an evil thing? Let us have a plain answer. If Dr Pusey will not tell us, we must appeal to general intelligence. Looking at the deeds that were done in the sixteenth century, and at the men who did them – looking at the character of the leaders on both sides, on the conditions of the struggle, and on the spirit in which the battle was fought out – can a doubt, we ask, be fairly entertained on which side the right was lying? A Catholic who has been bred up in the atmosphere of his creed, who has learned history from Lingard and Audin, and whose later studies have been controlled by the Index, may entertain an unshaken faith in the immaculate Church, which can err neither in judgment nor in action. A Howard or a Ker may cling to a cause for which his ancestors fought and suffered, which is identified with the traditions of his family, which at one time was the cause of the aristocracy against the Revolution. But when educated Protestants turn Romanists or Anglo-Catholics, and profess to hate the Reformation, they imply that they regard Coligny as a rebellious schismatic, and Catherine de Medici and her litter of hyena cubs as on the side of providence and justice; they take part with a Duke of Alva against William the Silent, with Mary Stuart against Knox and Murray. And such a phenomenon, we repeat, can only be explained by the system of instruction at our English Universities, where we are taught accurately the constitution of Servius Tullius, but where we never hear of the Act of Supremacy, and find it an open question whether Latimer was not a raving fanatic, and Cranmer a sycophant and a scoundrel.

Let there be no mistake about this. Not only those who are becoming Catholics, but those also who are setting the Church of England upon stilts, and praying for the reunion of Christendom, must equally condemn the Reformation. They regard the Continental Protestant as a schismatic, and

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his revolt from the Catholic Church as a crime. The Anglo-Catholics palliate the separation of their own Church of England, on the plea merely that it was kept providentially from lapsing into heresy, and they do not care to conceal their contempt and hate for the persons of the Reformers. Yet, all this time, the so-called ‘ horrors of the French Revolution’ were a mere bagatelle, a mere summer shower, by the side of the atrocities committed in the name of religion, and with the sanction of the Catholic Church.

The Jacobin Convention of 1793-4 may serve as a measure to show how mild are the most ferocious of mere human beings when compared to an exasperated priesthood. By the September massacre, by the guillotine, by the fusillade at Lyons, and by the drownings on the Loire, five thousand men and women at the utmost suffered a comparatively easy death. Multiply the five thousand by ten, and you do not reach the number of those who were murdered in France alone in the two months of August and September, 1572. Fifty thousand Flemings and Germans are said to have been hanged, burnt, or buried alive under Charles the Fifth. Add to this the long agony of the Netherlands in the revolt from Philip, the Thirty Years' War in Germany, the ever-recurring massacres of the Huguenots, and remember that the Catholic religion alone was at the bottom of all these horrors, that the crusades against the Huguenots especially, were solemnly sanctioned by successive popes, and that no word of censure ever issued from the Vatican except in the brief intervals when statesmen and soldiers grew weary of bloodshed, and looked for means to admit the heretics to grace.

With this infernal business before men's eyes, it requires no common intellectual courage to believe that God was on the side of the people who did such things – to believe that He allowed His cause to be defended by devils – while He permitted also good and brave men, who had originally no sympathy with Protestantism, to be driven into it by the horrible fruits of

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the old creed.

If this be true, then indeed, as an Oxford Professor tells us, our human conceptions of justice and goodness are no measure of what those words mean when applied to God. Then indeed we are in worse case than if the throne of heaven was empty, and we had no Lord and Father there at all. 'I had rather be an atheist,' says Bacon, 'than believe in a god who devours his children.' The blackest ogre in a Negro fetish is a benevolent angel compared to a god who can be supposed to have sanctioned the massacre of St Bartholomew.

It is an old story that men make God after their own image. Their conception of his nature reflects only their own passions. Theological fury in the sixteenth century turned human creatures into fiends, and they in turn made God into a fiend also. The Neo-Catholics of our own day, while they will not disclaim the God of Gregory XIII, have softened the outlines, but have failed to add to its dignity. The divinity of the Ritualistic imagination abandons the world and all its pursuits, cares nothing for the efforts of science to unfold the mysteries of the creation, or to remove the primeval curse by the amelioration of the condition of humanity – all these it leaves to the unconverted man. It takes delight in incense, and ceremonies, and fine churches, and an extended episcopate, and for the rest is occupied in its own world, and in helping priests to work invisible miracles.

The Evangelical, far nobler than these, yet embarrassed still with his doctrines of reprobation, forms a theory which has some lineaments of superhuman beauty, but unable to rid himself of the savage element left behind by Calvin, offers us a Saviour at once all merciful and without mercy – a Saviour whose pity will not reject the darkest sinner from His grace, yet to those whose perplexed minds cannot accept as absolutely and

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exhaustively true the 'scheme of salvation' deals harder measure than the Holy Office of Seville. The heretic, in the *auto-da-fe*, endured but a few moments of agony. The Calvinist preacher consigns him without a shudder to an eternity of flames. *Faith* is the cry of all theologians. Believe with us and you will be saved; refuse to believe and you are lost. Yet, they know nothing of what belief means. They dogmatize but they fail to persuade, and they are entangled – in the old dilemma which faith alone can encounter and despise.

In the present alienation of the higher intellect from religion it is impossible to foresee how soon or from what quarter any better order of things is to be looked for. We spoke of an eddy in the stream, but there are 'tides in the affairs of men' which run long and far. **The phenomena of Spirit-rapping show us that the half-educated multitudes in England and America are ready for any superstition.** Scientific culture seems inclined to run after the Will-o'-the-wisp of Positivism; and as it is certain that ordinary persons will not live without a belief of some kind, superstition has a fair field before it, and England, if not Europe generally, may perhaps witness in the coming century some great Catholic revival. It is a possibility which the decline of Protestantism compels us to contemplate, and it is more easy to foresee the ultimate result than the means by which its returning influence can be effectually combated.

Catholicism has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. It is tolerant now because its strength is broken. It has been fighting for bare existence, and its demands at present are satisfied with fair play. But let it once have a numerical majority behind it and it will reclaim its old authority. It will again insist on controlling all departments of knowledge. The principles on which it persecuted it still professes, and persecution will grow again as naturally and necessarily as a seed in a congenial soil. Then it will once more come in collision with the secular intelligence which now passes by it

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with disdain. The struggle ended in blood before; and it will end in blood again, With further results not difficult to anticipate.

We are indulging, perhaps, in visionary fears, but if experience shows that in the long run reason will prevail, it shows also that reason has a hard fight for it; and in the minds even of the most thoughtful rarely holds an undisputed empire. We expect no good from the theory of human things with which men of intellect at present content themselves. We look for little satisfaction to our souls from sciences which are satisfied with phenomena, or much good to our bodies from social theories of utility – utility meaning the gratification of the five senses in largest measure by the greatest number. **We believe that human beings can only: live and prosper together on the condition of the recognition of duty, and duty has no meaning, and no sanction except as implying responsibility to a power above and beyond humanity. As long as the moral force bequeathed to us by Christianity remains, the idea of obligation survives in the conscience.** The most emancipated philosopher is still dominated by its influence, and men continue substantially Christians while they believe themselves to be only Benthamites. But the feebleness of Protestantism will do its work of disintegration at last, and a social system which has no religion left in it will break down like an uncemented arch.

We have no hope from theologians, to whatever school they may belong. They and all belonging to them are given over to their own dreams, and they cling to them with a passion proportionate to the weakness of their arguments.

There is yet a hope – it is but a faint one – that the laity, who are neither divines nor philosophers, may take the matter into their own hands, as they did at the Reformation. If Catholicism can revive, far more may Protestantism revive, if only it can recover the spirit which gave it birth.

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Religion may yet be separated from opinion, and brought back to life. For fixed opinions on questions beyond our reach, we may yet exchange the certainties of human duty; and no longer trusting ourselves to so-called economic laws, which are no more laws than it is a law that an unweeded garden becomes a wilderness of stinging nettles, we may place practical religion once more on the throne of society. There may lie before us a future of moral progress which will rival or eclipse our material splendour; or that material splendour itself may be destined to perish in revolution. Which of these two fates lies now before us depends on the attitude of the English laity towards theological controversy in the present and the next generation.