

MS865, pp. 4-11

And now as to the relation of fallibilism to religion. I confess that for my poor part I am looking forward to great changes in the churches during the next thirty years, —to a final surrender to what are now known as the liberal parties,— to a return in part to a primitive simplicity of belief, with a spiritualization of the creeds, —and to a great awakening of religious faith and religious life. Not to seem to speak oracularly, I will briefly outline my reasons for thinking so.

In the first place, in the present age, dense and ignorance and fogigism cannot long withstand the pressure of scientific good sense; and therefore modern biblical criticism cannot & much longer be denied. In the early dawn, men may persuade themselves that night still reigns; but nor after the full blaze of a summer's sun has appeared over the horizon.

The results of Biblical study, then, must be admitted; and when the moment of assent comes, it will be found these results reach much further than had been supposed. Those results cannot be admitted without bursting into pieces a great deal of the Calvinistic theology, and in particular, all those parts of it which represents man's salvation to be the indirect result of a kind of divine book-keeping, and which in general make the ways of God depend upon nice mathematical calculations. The futility and the unedifying dessication of all that conception of the highest things will then come out clearly. But that hand, unspiritual made of thoughts is the very cogwork that makes the wheels of the Calvinistic theology turn round. The change will therefore be much wider and deeper than the leaders of the liberal parties in the churches are today prepared to welcome. But that is not all: these changes will invite great accessions to the churches from classes who now appear to be indifferent to religion but who cannot maintain indifference much longer, and from the ranks of agnostics who find their negative belief unsatisfying; and the consequence will be that the present liberals and their successors will find themselves the conservatives. Now it is not in the nature of theologians after they are once secure from all danger of being themselves excommunicated, not to look about them to see who there is whom they, in their turn, can persecute.

All the creeds that ever were made, were made with a run of cutting somebody off from the church. Article after article have been inserted as it has been found necessary, on account of somebody having denied the doctrine that article embodies. Accordingly, nothing has been or could be inserted as to which all christians have always agreed. Now all have always and everywhere agreed about one thing, the fundamental proposition of christian philosophy, -the doctrine of love and of the Sermon on the Mount; -and hence it is that about this their vital kernel of the whole religion not one single word is to be found in any of the creeds of Christendom. Christian love has never found insertion in any creed, because a creed is the decree that settles a controversy, and christian love has never in any quarter been called in question. The consequence has been that christians as far as they have learned their christianity from creed, have had their attention mainly called to what is much disputable and dubious, and have almost overlooked that which is alone central and vital; and this distorted vision of the religion has much affected these who have much studied in.

But the Nineteenth Century, among its noble achievements, may boast of having done Humanity and Religion the Signal Service of calling into doubt, at last, the principle of love. These persons whom I expect to see flocking into the churches in consequence of the triumph of the liberals are penetrated through and through with the philosophy of political economy and of the Darwinian theory. They never can believe anything so sincerely as they believe that philosophy. Now the philosophy of political economy is that the chief agency in the advancement of civilization is intelligent selfishness.* I do not mean that the science of political economy reaches any such conclusion, which is quite outside of its purview; but I mean that the study of political economy tends to make rash and unwary logicians believe that Darwin directly teaches that among animals it is the ruthless trampling under of the weak by the strong which has been the principal factor in the elevation of those races; and this tends to make impatient generalizers ready to find such passions the most efficacious in the improvement of human society. The whole class of men of whom I am speaking, who may roughly be called agnostics, the true children of the nineteenth century with its contempt for sentimentalism, with its gigantic industrial organizations, much its science and above all its economy, all these people if I have been able to understand them, and I mingle with them everyday, the majority of my friends are among them; -have already a distinct disbelief in the principle of love as a sufficient or even as a main engine of progress.

[Yet every banker must admit that without ordinary honesty to the wheels of business would come to a standstill.] By the time these people find themselves in the churches, their opinions on this head will be still more deeply engraved into their minds; and they and the present liberals, who will then be conservatives will come to an issue upon that question. Then, for the first time in the history of christianity, will the principle of love be emphasized in a creed; and the result of this much be a great spiritualization of religion and an awakening of religious life. When the churches have searched their condition, it will be seen clearly enough that religion only asserts that certain elements are presents in the world and will be dominant in the end. It has no interest to [asserting?] that anything is absolutely certain and mathematically exact. A certain kinds of infallibility the church calls rightly enough; but it is a practical infallibility not a mathematical one.

Now let me speak of the bearing upon philosophy of the greatest results of scientific researches. The most perfect intellectual fruit of the tree of science has been the ideas of force, of continuity, and of growth.

*Intelligent selfishness absurd.