

IV

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

‘And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’

—GENESIS i. 26.

‘When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honour.’—

PSALM viii. 3-5

‘Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him. But we see Jesus Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.’—HEBREWS ii. 8, 9.

IV

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THE position which Religion, and especially the Christian Religion, assigns to man, to man as he ought to be, is very high. He is made in the image of God, he is a little lower than the angels, a little lower than God, he is a partaker of the Divine Nature. But as the corruption of the best is the worst, there is nothing in the whole creation more miserable, more loathsome, than man as he has forgotten his high estate and plunged himself into degradation. 'What man has made of man,' is the saddest, most deplorable sight in all the world. Amid the awful splendour of the winning loveliness of Nature, 'only man is vile.' That is the terrible

verdict which may be pronounced upon him renouncing his birthright, surrendering himself to the powers which he was meant to keep in subjection. It is not the verdict to be pronounced on Man as Man, the child of the highest and the heir of all the ages. The appeal of Religion, the appeal of Christianity above all, has continually been, O sons of men, sully not your glorious garments, cast not away your glorious crown.

I

It is irreligion, it is unbelief, which comes and says, Lay aside these fantastic notions as to your greatness: you are the creatures of a day: you belong, like other animals, to the world of sense, and you pass away along with them: a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast. Banish your delusive hopes; confine yourselves to reality; waste not your time in the pursuit of phantoms: make the best of the world in

which you are : seize its pleasures : shut your eyes to its sorrows : enjoy yourselves in the present and let the future take care of itself : follow the devices and desires of your own hearts in the comfortable assurance that there is no judgment to which you can be brought, save that which exists in the realm of imagination.

Listening to such whispers, obeying such suggestions, walking in such courses, the spectacle which man presents can be viewed only with compassion, with horror, or with disdain. His ideals, his aspirations, his self-sacrifices are only so many phases of self-deception. The natural conclusion to be drawn from denying the spiritual origin and eternal prospects of man must be that he is of no more account than any of the transitory beings around him, that, if he has any superiority over them, it is only the superiority of a skill with which he can make them the instruments of

his purposes. With no glimpses of a higher world, with no inspirations from a Spirit nobler than his own, he can hardly regard the achievements of heroism as other than acts of madness, he can be fired with no desire to emulate them, he cannot well be trusted to perform ordinary acts of honesty and morality, let alone extraordinary acts of generosity and magnanimity, should they come in collision with his objects and ambitions.

Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how mean a thing is Man !

Deny his divine fellowship, extirpate his heavenly anticipations, and it might seem as if no race on earth would be so poor as do him reverence.

II

One thing is assumed by not a few, the absurdity of the Almighty caring for such a race, and therefore the impossibility of the Incarnation. 'Which,' asks Mr. Frederic

Harrison, 'is the more deliriously extravagant, the disproportionate condescension of the Infinite Creator, or the self-complacent arrogance with which the created mite accepts, or rather dreams of, such an inconceivable prerogative? His planet is one of the least of all the myriad units in a boundless Infinity; in the countless æons of time he is one of the latest and the briefest; of the whole living world on the planet, since the ages of the primitive protozoon, man is but an infinitesimal fraction. In all this enormous array of life, in all these æons, was there never anything living which specially interested the Creator, nothing that the Redeemer could care for, or die for? If so, what a waste creation must have been! . . . Why was all this tremendous tragedy, great enough to convulse the Universe, confined to the minutest speck of it, for the benefit of one puny and very late-born race?'¹

¹ *Creed of a Layman*, p. 67.

But is it not the fact that along with the discovery of Man's utter insignificance, there has come the discovery of powers and faculties unknown and unsuspected, so that more than ever all things are in subjection to him; his dominion has become wider, his throne more firmly established? Is it not the fact that the whole realm of Nature is explored by him, is compelled to minister to his wants or to unfold its treasures of knowledge? Is it not the fact that more than ever it can be said :

The lightning is his slave : heaven's utmost deep
 Gives up her stars, and, like a flock of sheep,
 They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on,
 The tempest is his steed : he strides the air.
 And the Abyss shouts from her depth laid bare
 'Heaven, hast thou secrets ? Man unveils me : I have
 none.'¹

Is it not the fact that deposed from his position of proud pre-eminence as centre of the universe, Man has by his labours and his ingenuity reasserted his high prerogative

¹ Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*.

to be lord of the creation? The printing-press, the railway, the telegraph, how have inventions like these invested him with an influence which he did not possess before! And is it not the fact that when most conscious of our nothingness before the immensities around us, when humbled and prostrate before the Infinite of which we have caught a transitory glimpse, we are also most conscious of our high destiny, we are lifted above the earthly to the heavenly, we discern that, though we cannot claim a moment, yet Eternity is ours? 'What, then, is Man! What, then, is Man! He endures but an hour and is crushed before the moth. Yet in the being and in the working of a faithful man is there already (as all faith, from the beginning, gives assurance) a something that pertains, not to this wild death element of Time; that triumphs over Time, and *is*, and will be, when Time shall be no more.'¹

¹ Thomas Carlyle.

Man's place in the universe may, according to Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, be nearer the centre of things than has so commonly come to be accepted. Modern discovery, he maintains, has thrown light on the interesting problem of our relation to the Universe; and even though such discovery may have no bearing upon theology or religion, yet, he thinks, it proves that our position in the material creation is special and probably unique, and that the view is justified which holds that 'the supreme end and purpose of this vast universe was the production and development of the living soul in the perishable body of man.' And another, a convinced and ardent disciple of Evolution, the late Professor John Fiske, argues that, 'not the production of any higher creature, but the perfecting of humanity is to be the glorious consummation of Nature's long and tedious work. . . . Man seems now, much more clearly than ever, the chief among God's

creatures. . . . The whole creation has been groaning and travailing together in order to bring forth that last consummate specimen of God's handiwork, the Human Soul.'¹ If this be so, this conclusion arrived at by those who do not hold the ordinary faith of Christendom, then the objection that the Incarnation could not have taken place for the redemption of such a race as ours, in a world which is so poor a fraction of the infinite universe, falls to the ground; and the protest of a devout modern poet carries conviction with it:

This earth too small
For Love Divine! Is God not Infinite?
If so, His Love is infinite. Too small!
One famished babe meets pity oft from man
More than an army slain! Too small for Love!
Was Earth too small to be of God created?
Why then too small to be redeemed?²

Man may, or may not, occupy a 'central position in the universe': other worlds may,

¹ *Man's Destiny*, p. 31.

² Aubrey de Vere.

or may not, be inhabited : this earth may be but a minute and insignificant speck amid the mighty All, this at least is certain, that not by mere magnitude is our rank in the scale of being to be decided, and that in the spirit of man will be found that which approaches most nearly to Him who is Spirit. 'The man who reviles Humanity on the ground of its small place in the scale of the Universe is,' according to Mr. Frederic Harrison, 'the kind of man who sneers at patriotism and sees nothing great in England, on the ground that our island holds so small a place in the map of the world. On the atlas England is but a dot. Morally and spiritually, our Fatherland is our glory, our cradle, and our grave.'¹

III

Hence, one of the ablest attempts to supersede Christianity is that which goes by

¹ *Creed of a Layman*, p. 76.

the name of Positivism or the Religion of Humanity, which sets Man on the throne of the universe, and makes of him the sole object of worship. 'A helper of men outside Humanity,' said the late Professor Clifford, 'the Truth will not allow us to see. The dim and shadowy outlines of the Superhuman Deity fade slowly away from before us, and, as the mist of His Presence floats aside, we perceive with greater and greater clearness the shape of a yet grander and nobler figure, of Him who made all gods and shall unmake them. From the dim dawn of history, and from the inmost depths of every soul, the face of our Father *Man* looks out upon us with the fire of eternal youth in His eyes, and says, "Before Jehovah was, I am."'

The founder of the organised Religion of Humanity was Auguste Comte, who died in the year 1857. He held that in the development of mankind there are three stages: the first, the Theological, in which

worship is offered to God or gods ; the second, the Metaphysical, in which the human mind is groping after ultimate truth, the solution of the problems of the universe ; the third, the Positive, in which the search for the illusive and the unattainable is abandoned, and the real and the practical form the exclusive occupation of the thoughts. On Sunday, October 19, 1851, he concluded a course of Lectures on the General History of Humanity with the uncompromising announcement, ' In the name of the Past and of the Future, the servants of Humanity, both its philosophical and practical servants, come forward to claim as their due the general direction of this world. Their object is to constitute at length a real Providence, in all departments, moral, intellectual, and material. Consequently they exclude, once for all, from political supremacy, all the different servants of God, Catholic, Protestant, or Deist, as being at once behindhand and

a source of disturbance.' All religions were banished by the truly 'uncompromising announcement': they were all condemned as futile and unreal. The best that could be said of the worship of the past was that it directed 'provisionally the evolution of our best feelings, under the regency of God, during the long minority of Humanity.'

But the fact that Religion will not be banished, that it must somehow find expression, never received fuller verification. We do not dwell upon the private life of Comte, its eccentricities and inconsistencies, but this at least cannot be omitted: he practised a course of austere religious observances, he worshipped not only Humanity at large, but he paid special adoration to a departed friend such as hardly the devoutest of Roman Catholics has ever paid to the Virgin Mary. Positivism became, what Professor Huxley called it, 'Catholicism *minus* Christianity.' Comte laid down for the guidance of his

disciples, who are potentially all mankind, rules which no existing religious communion can surpass in minuteness. The Supreme Object of Worship is the Great Being, Humanity, the Sum of Human Beings, past, present, and future. But as it is only too evident that too many of these beings in the past and the present, whatever may be said about the future, are not very fitting objects of worship, Humanity, the Great Being, must be understood as including only worthy members, those who have been true servants of Humanity. The emblem of this Great Being is a Woman of the age of thirty, with her son in her arms; and this emblem is to be placed in all temples of Humanity and carried in all solemn processions. The highest representatives of Humanity are the Mother, the Wife, and the Daughter; the Mother representing the past, the Wife the present, and the Daughter the future. These are in the abstract to be regarded as the guardian

angels of the family. To these angels every one is to pray three times daily, and the prayers, which may be read, but which must be the composition of him who uses them, are to last for two hours. Humanity, the World, and Space form the completed Trinity of the Positivist Religion. There are nine sacraments: Presentation, Initiation, Admission, Destination, Marriage, Maturity, Retirement, Transformation, Incorporation. There is a priesthood, to whom is committed the duties of deciding who may or may not be admitted to certain offices during life, of deciding also whether or not the remains of those who have been dead for seven years should be removed from the common burial-place, and interred in 'the sacred wood which surrounds the temple of humanity,' every tomb there 'being ornamented with a simple inscription, a bust, or a statue, according to the degree of honour awarded.' The priests are to receive so comprehensive

a training that they are not to be fully recognised till forty-two years of age. They are to combine medical knowledge with their priestly qualifications. Three successive orders are necessary for the working of the organisation: the Aspirants admitted at twenty-eight, the Vicars or Substitutes at thirty-five, and the Priests proper at forty-two.

The Religion of Humanity has a Calendar, each month of twenty-eight days being in one aspect dedicated to some social relation, and in another to some famous man representing some phase of human progress: Moses, Homer, Aristotle, Cæsar, St. Paul, Gutenberg, Shakespeare. Each day of the year is dedicated to one or more great men or women, five hundred and fifty-eight in number, and the last day of the year is the Festival of All the Dead. 'Our Calendar is designed to remind us of all types of the teachers, leaders, and makers of our race: of the many modes in which the servants of Human-

ity have fulfilled their service. The prophets, the religious teachers, the founders of creeds, of nations and systems of life: the poets, the thinkers, the artists, kings, warriors, statesmen and rulers: the inventors, the men of science and of all useful arts. . . . Every day of the Positivist year is in one sense a day of the dead, for it recalls to us some mighty teacher or leader who is no longer on earth. . . . But the three hundred and sixty-four days of the year's calendar have left one great place unfilled. . . . Those myriad spirits of the forgotten dead, whom no man can number, whose very names were unknown to those around them in life, the fathers and the mothers, the husbands and the wives, the brothers and the sisters, the sturdy workers and the fearless soldiers in the mighty host of civilisation—shall we pass them by? . . . It is those whom to-night we recall, all those who have lived a life of usefulness in their generation, though

they tugged as slaves at the lowest bank of oars in the galley of life, though they were cast unnoticed into the common grave of the outcast, all whose lives have helped and not hindered the progress of Humanity, we recall them all to-night.' ¹

IV

The Religion of Humanity has numbered among its adherents, in part or in whole, several celebrated persons in this country, such as Richard Congreve, Dr. Bridges, Professor Beesley, Cotter Morison, George Eliot. But at present it has no more eloquent and earnest advocate than Mr. Frederic Harrison, who, in *The Creed of a Layman*, and several other recent volumes, has passionately proclaimed its principles. For more than fifty years he has been its apostle: 'every other aim or occupation has been subsidiary and instrumental to this.' ² It

¹ Frederic Harrison, *Creed of a Layman*.

² *Memories and Thoughts*, p. 14.

is true that in some points he has retained his independence, and while those outside accuse him of fanaticism, some of his fellow-believers suspect him of heresy.¹ But he himself is assured that in the worship of Humanity he has obtained the solution of his doubts² and the satisfaction of his spirit, and on his gravestone or his urn he would have inscribed the words, *He found peace.*³ There is much that is marvellously elevated in thought as well as exquisite in expression, profoundly devout as well as brilliantly argued, in the narrative of his progress towards his present position. But when his vehement statements are carefully examined, it will almost inevitably be seen that all that is good and sensible in them is an unconscious reproduction of Christianity. His negations disappear: the affirmations which he makes are those which the Church has always

¹ *Memories and Thoughts*, p. 16.

² Appendix XIV.

³ *Creed of a Layman*.

maintained. The faith of his childhood permeates and strengthens and beautifies the creed which he adopted in his maturer years. The unity of mankind, the memory of the departed, the necessity of living for others, these are no novelties in Christianity. It is in Christ that they have specially been brought to light, in Him that they find their highest ratification, without Him they remain unfulfilled, with Him they attain to consistency and power.

The Great Being, Humanity, is only an abstraction.¹ 'There is no such thing in reality,' Principal Caird reminds us, 'as an animal which is no particular animal, a plant which is no particular plant, a man or humanity which is no individual man. It is only a fiction of the observer's mind.' There is logical force as well as humorous illustration in the contention of Dean Page Roberts, that 'there is no more a humanity apart

¹ Appendix XV.

from individual men and women than there is a great being apart from all individual dogs, which we may call Caninity, or a transcendent Durham ox, apart from individual oxen, which may be named Bovinity.’¹ Nor does the geniality of Mr. Chesterton render his argument the less telling: ‘It is evidently impossible to worship Humanity, just as it is impossible to worship the Savile Club: both are excellent institutions to which we may happen to belong. But we perceive clearly that the Savile Club did not make the stars and does not fill the universe. And it is surely unreasonable to attack the doctrine of the Trinity as a piece of bewildering mysticism, and then to ask men to worship a being who is ninety million persons in one God, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.’²

Can it be doubted that the Great Being,

¹ *Some Urgent Questions in Christian Lights.*

² *Heretics*, p. 96.

the sum of human beings, is less conceivable, less worthy of worship than the Great Being, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ?¹ Can it be doubted that the claim of Humanity to worship is less credible if we exclude the Perfect Man, Christ Jesus, from our view ? Can it be doubted that the Positivist motto, 'Live for others,' gains a force and a meaning unapproached elsewhere from the Life and Death of Him Who said, 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His Life a ransom for many ?' Humanity knit together in One, purified from every stain, glorious and adorable, is a lofty and inspiring idea, but nowhere has it been disclosed save in the Man Christ Jesus, the Word made Flesh, the Brightness of the Father's glory and the Express Image of His Person.

¹ Appendix XVI.

V

Dr. Richard Congreve owns that much of the Religion of Humanity exists already in the Christian Faith, but, in one respect, he asserts that the Religion of Humanity can claim to be entirely original. 'We accept, so have all men. We obey, so have all men. We venerate, so have some in past ages, or in other countries. We add but one other term, we love.'¹ That is what distinguishes this new religion and proves its superiority to the old: its votaries have attained this new principle and mode of life: they love one another. The boldness of the claim may stagger us. We turn over the pages of the New Testament. We see that Love is the fulfilling of the Law; is the end of the commandment; is the sum of the Law and the Prophets; is placed at the very summit of Christian graces; is the bond of perfectness;

¹ Appendix XVII.

is manifested in a Life and a Death which, after nineteen centuries, remain without a parallel. We recall the touching legend that in his old age the Apostle S. John was daily carried into the assembly of the Ephesian Christians, simply repeating to them, over and over, the words, 'Love one another. This is our Lord's command, fulfil this and nothing else is needed.' We recall that in early centuries the sympathy and helpfulness by which Christians of all ranks and races were united called forth from heathen spectators the amazed and respectful exclamation, 'See how these Christians love one another!' Recalling these things, we cannot but be startled that, in the nineteenth century of the Christian era, a teacher should, with any expectation of being believed, have ventured to affirm that the great discovery which it has been reserved for the present day to make is that of loving one another. Ignorance of Christianity, misrepresentation

of Christianity, we may well call it : ignorance inconceivable, misrepresentation inconceivable : and yet, as we consider the state of Christendom, do we not see what palliates the ignorance and the misrepresentation ? Have we not reason to confess that, if the commandment be not new, universal obedience to it would be new indeed ? May the calm assurance that love is foreign to Christianity not startle us into the conviction that we have forgotten what, according to our Lord's own declaration, the chief feature of Christianity ought to be ? ' By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.'

VI

' How can we,' it has been well said, ' be asked to give the name of Religion of Humanity to a religion that ignores the greatest human being that ever lived, and the very source from which the Religion of Humanity

sprang ?' ¹ Man in himself, man so full of imperfections, man having no connection with any world but this, man unallied to any Power higher, nobler than himself, is this to be our God ? Which is more reasonable : to set up the race of man, unpurified, unredeemed, worthless and polluted, as the object of adoration, or to maintain that 'Man indeed is the rightful object of our worship, but in the roll of ages, there has been but one Man Whom we can adore without idolatry, the Man Christ Jesus' ? ² The Religion of Humanity, so called, would have us worship Man apart from Christ Whom yet all acknowledge to be the glory of mankind, but we call on men to worship Christ Jesus, for in Him we see Man without a stain, we see our nature redeemed and consecrated, we see ourselves brought nigh to the Infinite God. We adore Humanity, but Humanity

¹ E. A. Abbott, *Through Nature to Christ*.

² Frederick William Robertson, Sermon on *John's Rebuke of Herod*.

in its purity : we adore Humanity, but only as manifesting in the Only Begotten Son the glory of the Eternal Father. Thus we place no garland around the vices of the human race : thus we abase, and thus we exalt : thus are we humbled to the dust, thus are we raised to the highest heavens. Apart from Christ, the magnitude of the creation may well depress and overwhelm : apart from Christ the human race is morally imperfect instead of being a fit object of blind adoration. Seeing Christ, we not only feel our inconceivable nothingness in presence of the Infinite Majesty, but we stand erect and unpresumptuously say, ' We wonder not that Thou art mindful of those for whom that Son of Man lived and died, we are in Him partakers of the Divine Nature. There thou beholdest Thine Own Image.'

Made in the image of God, such is the ideal of Man that comes to us from the beginning of his history ; and such is the ideal

that once, and once only, has been realised. 'Ecce Homo! Behold the Man!' said Pontius Pilate, in words more full of significance than he knew, pointing to the victim of priestly hatred and popular fickleness. Behold the Man! man as he ought to be, the Image of God. Before that Divine Humanity we reverently bow, to that Divine Humanity we humbly consecrate ourselves, in fellowship with It alone we learn and manifest the true worth and dignity of Man.

One writing frantically to exalt mankind and to depreciate Christianity, tells us how he sat on a cliff overhanging the seashore and gazed upon the stars, murmuring, 'O prodigious universe, and O poor ignorant, that could believe all these were made for him!' but the sight of a steamship caused him to rejoice at the triumph of Art over Nature, and to exclaim, 'If man is small in relation to the universe, he is great in relation to the earth: he abbreviates distance and time,

and brings the nations together.' Then he saw that man is ordained to master the laws of which he is now the slave ; he believed that if man could understand this mission, a new religion would animate his life, and, in the strength of this revelation, the writer says that he sang in ecstasy to the waters and winds and birds and beasts, he felt a rapture of love for the whole human race, he resolved to preach the New Gospel far and wide, and proclaim the glorious mission of mankind.¹

On the whole the Old Gospel will be found as ennobling, as inspiring, as practical as the New. All that this new Gospel aims at, we, as Christians, already believe : and we possess a Divine Token, a Sacred Pledge which is foreign to it : we believe that a higher destiny is in store for us than even the construction of wonders of mechanical skill.² Stripped of all rhetoric, the conclusion of unbelief in God and Immortality can only

¹ Winwood Reade, *The Outcast*.

² Appendix XVIII.

be 'Man is what he eats': the conclusion of Christianity, 'There is but one object greater than the soul, and that is its Creator.'

One in a certain place testified, saying, 'What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels: Thou crownest him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see JESUS Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. We see Him Who is our Brother and our Fore-runner within the veil; and in His Exaltation we behold our own.¹ No vision of the future can surpass that which the Christian Church

¹ Appendix XIX.

has cherished from the beginning, that we shall all 'come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a Perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ . . . from Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.'