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Obstacles and the Encouragements

TO

MISSIONARY EFFORT,

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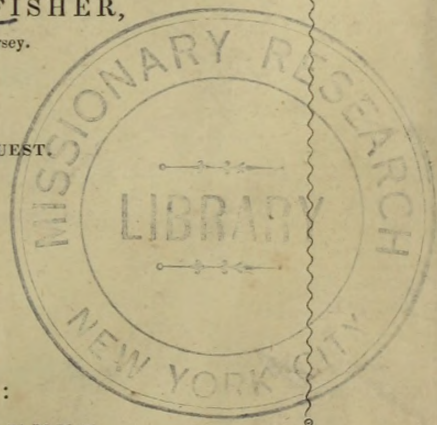
ANCIENT AND MODERN CHURCH.

A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE BOSTON YOUNG MEN'S SOCIETY
FOR THE DIFFUSION OF MISSIONARY KNOWLEDGE.

BY SAMUEL W. FISHER,
West Bloomfield, New Jersey.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BOSTON:
TAPPAN AND DENNET.
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M DCCC XLII.

This address was originally prepared for the Society of Inquiry of the Union Theological Seminary, New York, and delivered before that Society at its last Anniversary. It has since been somewhat modified, and delivered before the Boston Young Men's Society for Diffusing Missionary Knowledge. It is now published, with the consent of the Committee of Publication of the Society of Inquiry, in the more complete form in which it was delivered, before the Society for Diffusing Missionary Knowledge.

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ADDRESS.

AT the first promulgation of a system of opinions, that is designed vitally to affect the character and happiness of vast multitudes, there is usually room for much uncertainty, doubt, and unbelief. Its power to effect the objects, for which it is promulgated, is yet to be tested. However fair in theory, it may yet be found, like thousands of other systems of faith, utterly defective in its practical working. But where time has evinced its capacity to accomplish results of the noblest character; when success has given to that, which was once a theory, all the certainty of a law of nature; then the season for doubt is past; then, when the capacity to overcome obstacles has been fairly developed, faith, unappalled by the presence of stupendous difficulties, rises into the calm confidence of perfect assurance. To this stage in her progress has Christianity attained. The conversion of the world, the grand object which it pro-

poses, is not a problem to be solved by future success. Religion has already evinced its capacity to effect so vast a work; it is not a novelty, thrown as a meteor upon the world. We are not launching, Columbus-like, on an unknown sea, in search of an unknown land. Our faith is one of centuries. It has passed through trials of the severest character, and come out of them unscathed. It has effected great things. Its triumphs stand out on the records of the world, like a succession of splendid miracles. The early history of Christianity, anterior to the full development of the papacy, rouses the soul like a clarion.

In judging, however, of the church, as it existed at that day, we are frequently subject to an illusion of the most discouraging character. Distance contracts ages to a point. The bold and splendid *results* are seen, while the *means*, by which they were attained, are either wholly overlooked, or regarded as supernatural, and beyond the reach of the present age. We see the disciples battling with Judaism, and hear the cries of dying martyrs; we see in motion the machinery of gifts miraculous and wonderful; presently the shoutings of victory swell upon the ear, and the empire is the home of our faith. But we forget the ages of toil that elapsed ere that grand event was reached; we overlook the ten thousand humble instrumentalities,—such as the meanest Christian may wield at this day,—through which the victory was main-

ly achieved. The splendor of apostolic gifts, which in fact continued only for a brief period, seems to rest upon the church during the time of her travail; while the faith, the patience, the simple preaching of the Gospel, the toil that knew no weariness, and the love that never faltered, through which the work was actually consummated, are either not regarded at all, or considered to be light-armed auxiliaries to the solid phalanx of apostolic powers. As the natural result of such impressions, there exists an opinion that the first three centuries of Christianity constituted its golden age; that the Church was then in possession of resources vastly more effective than those now in her hands; and that the obstacles which then opposed her progress, were neither so great in themselves, nor so numerous as those which exist at the present day. That such an opinion is not, in every respect, warranted by the facts, we think can easily be shown. This will be manifest from an *attentive comparison of the obstacles to the success of the Gospel in these different periods, and the means possessed by the Church for overcoming them.*

In prosecuting this comparison, it will only be necessary to allude to that deep-seated depravity, which constitutes in itself the greatest obstacle to the advance of the Gospel. This force of evil has lived and worked in every period of man's history. Time, that changes and modifies all else, has wrought no change here. It pervades all hu-

man society; it tenants the rude hut of the savage; it dwells amid the groves of science and the palaces of art; nor is it wholly absent from the temples and the altars of a Christian people. It gives to error its force, to superstition its perpetuity, to all the influences hostile to Christianity, their living vigor. It is peculiar to no age, to no people, to no clime. In it religion expects ever to find a foe unconquerable as death, and immortal as time.

It is equally unnecessary for me to dwell on that spiritual organization—mysterious to the Christian, the theme of ridicule to the world—which the Scriptures announce to us as most powerful in giving scope to human depravity, and in wielding the forces of evil against the cross. In common with the ancient Christian, we fight with principalities and powers in high places, and until the mighty angel shall descend, to bind the prince and scatter his legions, the Church must expect to meet now, as in apostolic times, forces equipped, organized, and led on, by a chief who once shone the morning star of heaven's intelligences.

The power of the Gospel to surmount these prime obstacles has always been the same. The agency of the Spirit and the Gospel are ever with her. And I dismiss this point with the remark, that, as the miracle-working power, in all probability, did not pass far if at all beyond the age of the apostles, the early Church, for the last

two hundred years of its fierce and bloody struggle, was thrown upon precisely the same resources, with those now possessed by the modern Church—the common influences of the Spirit enforcing the Gospel.

Let us now compare the relative situation of the Church to the governments of the world, during the first three centuries of her existence, and at the present time. In looking back upon the ancient Church, we are at once struck by the fact, that she had to do mainly with one immense government. While it is possible that her missionaries may have passed the Euphrates or even the Indus, it is certain that the Roman empire was their great field of conflict. That empire was now in the zenith of her glory. Its boundaries swept around all the mighty kingdoms that live in the ancient records of our race. Her eagle, in its immense gyrations, spread its wing over the civilized world. The empires of antiquity, the world of knowledge and of civilization, all lay panting beneath the foot of Rome.

At this period of her history, the power of the empire had in reality passed away from the Senate. It was all concentrated in a single arm. A single mind directed the movements of this huge government; a single hand wielded the energies of the millions that paid tribute to Rome. So perfect was this power, the slightest whisper of that mind could be heard in the remotest corner of the empire; the wave of that hand was instantly

seen and felt in the forests of Britain, on the sands of Libya, and along the banks of the Euphrates. The mighty despot reached forth ten thousand arms to execute his imperial will. The engines of his power were set up in every province, in every city, in every sequestered vale of human habitation. While, to curb the lawlessness of such colossal greatness, the moral power of the opinion of the world, which now operates so effectually upon the proudest thrones, had then no force. From the decree of this tremendous despotism there was no appeal, save to the high chancery of heaven.

It was in the bosom of such an empire that Christianity arose. For the first few years, it was suffered to work its way silently and freely. Rome as yet understood not its character. To her it was but one of a thousand religions. Tiberius does not hesitate to provide a niche in the Pantheon for Jesus Christ. The opposition it encountered, sprang from the Jew, the Pagan priest and philosopher, rather than from the imperial government. It was not long, however, before the clamors of the idolatrous multitude entered the palace of the Cæsars. Whatever may have been the proximate causes, which at particular seasons kindled the fires of persecution, the grand cause of their existence is obvious. It consisted in the total opposition existing between the principles of Christianity, and the worship, the customs, the character of the influential por-

tion of the empire. Christianity undeified their gods, dashed down their idols, overturned their altars, anathematized their priests, and cast contempt on whatever was most sacred, most ancient, most admired. Then began to lower those storms, which, with some short intervals of repose, for two hundred and fifty years, flashed and thundered along the Christian's path. From these, escape was impossible. Should the unhappy victim retire into some remote corner of the empire? But the edict of destruction had anticipated his flight, and where he hoped for safety, he met the iron grasp of a Roman prefect. Wherever the Christian turned, the same dark form was frowning upon him; the cries of martyrs, mingled with the shouts of the amphitheatre, ever rang in his ear. There was, then, no sacred home of freedom to which the oppressed might flee. The world was one vast empire, and the tremendous enginery of its power was everywhere in motion, for nearly three centuries, to uproot the cross. Such was the nature of that governmental opposition, against which the feeble band of early Christians fought, and over which they triumphed.

Compare with this the situation of our modern Church. The civilized world is now divided into a number of independent sovereignties. Of these, several are on the side of Protestant Christianity. And when I say they are on the side of true Christianity, it is meant either that their governments explicitly recognise it as the relig-

ion of the state, as in England, or that the great mass of those, who create the government, and of those who constitute it, are avowedly believers in the Christian revelation. Of these nations, Great Britain and the United States are the most powerful, and most decidedly influential, in promoting the evangelization of the world. They embosom the wealth and the piety which are to carry the Gospel to every land, and resuscitate the half extinguished fires of true religion on the altars of nominal Christendom. In general influence upon the world at large, no other nation can come into comparison with them. The commerce of the world, now one of the most effective chains of brotherhood, and destined to exert a mighty influence in the overthrow of superstition, barbarism, and ignorance, is in their hands. Their fleets are in every sea; their warehouses in every port; their representatives are found wherever there is wealth to be gathered, or a government to be influenced by their presence.

Nor is this all. Millions of the heathen world are directly subject to one of these governments. Great Britain, for the last two hundred years, has been advancing in the career of conquest, until her subjects have multiplied from a dozen to more than a hundred and fifty millions; her possessions have expanded from that little central isle until they gird the globe; and, from holding as a feudal lord the throne of England, she has placed her foot upon the neck of empires vast,

populous, and ancient. But yesterday, you heard the roar of her cannon before Beyrout; and every breeze that sweeps westward, bears to us the thundering of her artillery upon the commercial metropolis of China.

The effect of this general influence, we doubt not, is greatly to the advantage of Christianity. That this happy result has been diminished by the presence of great evils, is not to be denied. Commerce, mainly employing as its instruments, those who have no sympathy with the religion of the cross; conquests originating in an all-grasping avarice or ambition; won by the sacrifice of holocausts of human victims on the altar of war; and maintained by a system of oppression, which deliberately weighs the happiness of millions of immortal minds in the balance with gold, all tend, in some respects, to weaken the influence of Christianity on the conscience of the Pagan. Yet, in spite of these counteracting causes, there has gone forth, and is going forth, from this very commerce, and these vast conquests, an influence which is destined, we believe, to revolutionize the world. Already have they brought whole nations, while they feel the force of our arms, to respect our religion. They have opened more extensive fields of labor before the missionaries, and they have also given them security, so that the name of either an Englishman or an American, has been a charm more potent than was anciently that of a Roman citizen.

Casting our eyes beyond the governments directly under the control of Protestant influence, we see a number of states, nominally Christian, yet so sunk in gross superstition as to possess little of Christianity besides the name.

In respect to most of them, one fact is worthy of our notice. The principles of Christian toleration are working their way into their courts, and modifying the whole machinery of their governments. Nations, which a century ago, expelled Protestantism from their shores, now receive it with open arms, or suffer it to carry forward its peaceful work unchecked. The spectacle of religious persecution in any country, no matter what may be the sufferer's faith, now interests and arouses the civilized world. That which, a few years ago, was made a part of the ordinary business of some governments, would now outrage the moral feelings of civilized society. Austria cannot even exile her inquiring peasantry, far less torture them at the rack, or burn them at the stake; nay, even despotic Turkey may not bastinado a poor Jew, on account of his faith, without calling forth indignant remonstrance, long and loud, from every part of Christendom. To this great end also have those political revolutions been working, which of late have shaken so many thrones, and burst so many chains. While they have given to subjects a higher political importance, they have infused into proud rulers a salutary caution how they tread upon

those most sacred jewels of liberty—the rights of conscience.

In this steady advance of the principles of toleration among civilized states, Christianity has reason for present joy and future hope; for the prevalence of such opinions is both the sign of the silent influence she has already gained, and the foundation on which she can proceed to rebuild her decaying temples, and reopen her smouldering fires, among the nations only nominally her friends. What, I ask, has created this power of public opinion, before which the sceptres of kings are lowered? What has brought it about that governments, whose grand argument was the sword in every contest of right, are now compelled to respect the opinion of the great family of Christian states? Neither the increased facilities of national intercourse, nor the progress of civilization, nor the terrific march of revolution, alone or combined, could have effected it, had not a purer Christianity, breathed around the loftiest thrones the mild spirit of religion, inspiring a state of public feeling in which might can no longer pass as the synonyme of right, brute force as the strongest argument of justice.

Under these better influences, the most bigoted governments are relaxing the strictness of their ecclesiastical regimen. Spain, proud and lordly in her rags, whose bigotry reared and perfected the horrid Inquisition, whose fields were fertilized by the ashes, and her broad rivers dyed with the blood of innumerable martyrs, whose records are

a history of intolerance, written in characters of blood and fire, and over whom, as the result of that stern bigotry, there have brooded centuries of dense darkness,—even she has at last burst her chains. The Bible is read on her sunny hills; a highway, broad and free, is rising for the chariot of the Prince of peace.

If now we bring into view the Pagan and Muhammedon world, the same great fact, with an occasional exception, is proved to be true. Governmental opposition is gradually relaxing its strictness under the general influence of the civilized. Egypt and the wide dependencies of Turkey are opening their ports to the Christian missionary. Nor should we be surprised were the decree of death, fulminated by the Koran against the apostate from Islamism, ere long to become a dead statute into which no earthly power dare breathe life. The sceptre of Protestant England stretches over a hundred millions of the worshippers of Brahma. From the Ganges to the Indus, from Travaneore to Cashmere, that vast, populous, ancient land, crowded with villages, teeming with a luxuriant vegetation, is open to correct religious influences. Beyond it is China; an empire which no Christian can contemplate in the greatness of its extent, its high antiquity, the immense masses of immortal beings that swarm in its cities and darken its waters, and in that stubborn exclusion, mingled with affected contempt, of all those foreign influences which

might work out the elevation and salvation of the people, without being moved to wonder, to pity, and almost to despair.

Even here, however, are the dawns of better days. Around that vast empire there are clustering mighty influences, from all quarters of the globe, which, like the atmosphere, she cannot exclude, and before which her iron institutions must ere long be greatly modified, or crumble to utter ruin. It is impossible for the utmost power of the mightiest human will to give eternity to such institutions, when the whole world is rushing by them in a swift and broad tide of improvement. Yield they must to the accumulating pressure. Her only hope, for the perpetuity of her present institutions, is a wall of entire non-intercourse with the whole world; higher, broader, more impassable than that monument of industrious folly reared against the Tartar horde, while millions of her people, beyond her control, are subject to the influence of Christianity; while she, herself, is encompassed with the commerce of civilized states; and while she is obliged occasionally to quail before the barbarian power, so long will she be exposed to a revolution, which will shake her government to the ground. Nor need we wait long for decided changes in her policy. Let the influences which but recently have begun to surround her, operate with constantly increasing force for less than half a century, and we shall not want the pen of heaven-wrapt Isaiah to predict the fall of this greater Babylon.

In whatever light, therefore, we compare the situation of Christianity, in respect to the governments of the world at the present time, with that of the first ages of the Church, we find every thing to encourage us. Here she has gained vastly in the struggle of eighteen hundred years. We have come out of the caves and forests where the ancients were hunted. The mightiest governments are ours. Even the progress of free institutions, the political convulsions and the widespread revolutions, which are giving freedom to rising humanity, are either bearing onward the car of life, or rearing up broad highways, on which it may roll over the world.

Our next point of comparison, between the ancient and modern Church, respects the systems of religion they have respectively to encounter. Two large and ancient religions, the one of the Jew, the other of the Pagan, in the days of early Christianity, as now, resisted the advance of the Gospel, with an uncompromising and vigorous hostility. The Jew was the first great opponent of the cross. The early propagátors of our faith, struck at this system with far greater success than has the Church since that period. The very origin of Christianity *then* gave it a power the course of time has partially destroyed. It sprang out of the bosom of Israel; it grew up beside their altar and their temple; its most thrilling scenes were enacted on that sacred soil, bedewed with the tears and blood of the faithful, vocal

with the inspirations of holy seers, hallowed by the flaming shekinah, the splendid worship, the visible foot-prints of the dread Jehovah impressed on every hill and vale. It was not a foreign religion. It was the offspring of their own worship, the fulfillment of their prophecies, the grand and crowning scene toward which for ages their hopes, their prayers, their joys, their bloody worship, had all been pointing. The prime actor in it was of the kingly house of David. Its great apostles were sons of Abraham. To the Jew, in whose veins flowed the blood of their illustrious sire, with whom they worshipped at the same altar, breathing with them from childhood's hour the inspiration of their glorious history, they could preach of the Messiah with a force hardly to be reached by the Church at this day. Christianity has passed away from the country and the nation of its earliest love. Its dwelling-place is with the Gentile, who for centuries has ground the outcast and saddened Israelite beneath the iron heel of a despotic power. In the view of that down-trodden nation, all the prejudices of an abhorred, a foreign superstition, cluster around the Christian religion.

There was much, also, in the time when Christianity first arose, that then gave it power over this race. It appeared at a time when the lines of a long series of most splendid prophecies, which for ages had been converging, seemed to have reached the point of fulfillment. The power

of Rome hung over the sacred land, and they knew not how soon its black, dense clouds would pour down their sheets of flame. The bosom of the nation, as of one man, throbbed with intense expectation of the speedy manifestation of the great Deliverer. And when Christianity arose, it found a mighty advocate in these powerful sympathies and exciting hopes of the people. It carried with it all the authority of prophecy, such as then lived in the hearts, glowed on the lips, pervaded the worship, and moulded the character of the entire race. Christ stood before them as the fulfillment of this prophecy; and though his lowly condition corresponded not with their lofty expectations, yet every argument he urged in demonstration of his Messiahship, came home to their hearts enforced by all the associations of their youth and manhood. Their ancient prophets seemed to descend from their high abode to bear their testimony to, and shed their homage around, this illustrious being. But with that age, these feelings have passed away. From earliest infancy the Jew has been taught to execrate the Christian's faith, and the anathemas under whose intolerable burden he has groaned have given force to the lesson. For centuries, the ingenuity of wit, the refinements of sophistry, the parade of learning, and the force of authority, have been combined to bring into contempt the Christian interpretation of Messianic prophecies. And, while under the tuition of patriarchs and rabbis,

of the Talmud and Gemara, he has become versed in the tactics of evasion and subterfuge, at the same time the entire force of his education steels his bosom against the religion of the Nazarine.

In some respects, however, the modern Church occupies a position of influence over this people, above that of the ancient. This very dispersion, this outpouring of the long gathering flood, that swept them from Judea and strewed them in wrecks on every shore, was minutely described in the sacred records three thousand years ago. On the pages of the New Testament the same dark events are foretold with equal distinctness. The Christian Church, in her efforts for the conversion of Israel, proceeds upon the firm foundation of prophecy fulfilled, such as affords the most indubitable evidence of the divine origin of our faith. Other circumstances combine to heighten the force of this argument. The lengthened darkness of that night, which, in fulfillment of these prophetic denunciations, has brooded over this nation for nearly two thousand years, has not been without its influence for good. As meteor after meteor has flashed across the sky and disappeared, leaving only increasing darkness; as prophet after prophet has reared the standard of Messiah, only to have it lowered in blood and shame, so the hopes of this people have been often raised, only to be dashed to the earth. No star of Bethlehem cheers the hearts of these anxious watchers. Hope is retiring before the increasing darkness of this starless night.

Prophecy, such as Christianity authorizes, so sadly, so sternly fulfilled, is sadly working in multitude, the fearfully joyful conviction, that Jesus of Nazareth is their long expected Messiah. Thus time itself is elaborating an argument, of all others the most powerful, to dispel those bright illusions by which the Jew is blinded to the glory of the cross.

The other great opponent of Christianity was the Pagan. The conflict with Paganism, as it then existed under the forms of Atheism, Pantheism, and Pollytheism, convulsed the whole Roman empire. It was then in its manhood. Poetry praised it; philosophy smiled upon it; the populace adored it; and the entire force of the state was enlisted in its defence. No circumstance was wanting that could contribute to enhance the formidable opposition it made to the cross. It was then in the full maturity of its strength; the passions of the great, the wisdom of the learned, the prejudices of the vulgar, with the immense power of that vast state, constituted the wall of its defence. Yet so mightily did the truth of Christ work, that, in less than three centuries, it set at defiance the omnipotence of Rome, won the emperor, and swept away the worship of the ancient gods. The huge and massive superstition crumbled down before the influence of Christian truth.

At this day more than half the human family are the devotees of the rudest forms of Paganism;

while here, at home, beside the very altars of a Christian people, there is springing up a refined Paganism, beautiful as poetry, profound as mysticism, and corrupt as the most depraved movings of the human heart. This hybrid issue of a spurious philosophy and a degenerate Christianity, after having poisoned the life-blood of one Christian nation, has crossed the ocean to seek the religious empire of this new world. But in this conflict, though it be with new and varied forms of this old error, the Church occupies a position far above that from which she waged war with the Paganism of Rome. Her weapons of offence and defence, have been accumulating for eighteen centuries. They are wielded by the strength inspired in a thousand victories, with the science gained in the war of ages.

Such were the two great systems of religion by which Christianity was then opposed. But, at the present day, she has to meet not only these, but other religions, the growth of subsequent ages, framed for dominion, large in resources, and bitter in hostility to the cross.

In the opening of the seventh century, there sprang up, amidst the deserts of Arabia, a system of religion which, from that day to this, has presented one of the most formidable obstacles to the advance of Christianity. Its theology is one bold, grand truth, enforcing an equally bold lie. "*There is but one God.*" This was the thunderbolt Muhammed hurled among the idols of Mec-

ca. "Muhammed is his prophet." This was the imposition which gave to this *truth* the demonstration of the sword. Here has ever been the great secret of Muhammed's success. He was a prophet, through whom heaven blazed forth its revelations to an idolatrous world. He was a chieftain, commissioned to enforce the will of heaven by the terror of arms. In establishing his system, he brought to his aid two of the most powerful and most permanent passions of our nature. He roused the ardor of war; he awoke the enthusiasm of religion; and, as if to ensure the perpetuity of their union, he consecrated the first, by the authority of the second, and gathered around the unholy alliance all the attractions of sensuality and ambition. Inspired by such a religion, it is not a matter of wonder, that the fiery Saracen, sweeping in a whirlwind over western Asia, over Africa and Spain, should have dashed down the Pagan's idols, trodden in scorn upon the corrupt institutions of a degenerate Christianity, and ended by the establishment of one of the most powerful dynasties that ever swayed the sceptre of dominion.

The situation of this system of religion, which, but a few centuries ago, shook the mightiest thrones in Europe to their base, is full of encouragement to the Christian. Its youth has gone; the signs of decrepid age mark all its movements. The empire shrunk to a tenth of its former extent—rebel provinces resisting successfully the

power of the Sultan,—state after state in quick succession assuming an attitude of independence, while the proud son of Othman is forced to crouch before Christian sovereigns, a royal beggar for the political existence of his people.

Other nations around, and mingled with this race, are rapidly advancing in science and power; the Greek, the Jew, the Arminian, are daily rising in intelligence. Muhammedanism alone is sinking into an atrophy. Her efforts to rise, are the struggles of a man in a morass, which serve only to show her own impotence and the impossibility of her rescue by foreign hands. Unlike Christianity, which, in the sixteenth century,—when the world was breaking loose from her intellectual bondage,—with the giant vigor of youth shook off the incumbent mass of superstition, and took the lead of science in the disinthralment of the human mind,—Islamism embosoms no elements of revivification. Its religion and its customs are all stereotyped after the pattern of the days of darkness. And as the courage, the enthusiasm, the hardihood of its mountain and desert nourished youth, vanish under the influence of luxury and repose, there remains no vital force to rebuild her mouldering walls, to prop her falling buttresses, to hold her up in the struggle for advancement with the great powers of Christendom.

Muhammedanism is thus retiring before the onward march of the civilized world. Change she cannot without outraging the piety of every

true Mussulman; for her religion forbids those changes of government and manners which are necessary to her advancement. If she clings to her ecclesiastical polity, her political damnation is inevitable. If, breaking away from these trammels, she launches forth upon the wild sea of political experiment, then her religion must founder and go down forever. How long it will be before the cannon which have desolated the fairest towns of Syria, and curbed the iron spirit of the rebel Pacha, shall be pointed at the seraglio of the Sultan, man cannot predict. But the voice of Providence, borne to us on every breeze, declares that the decree against this once terrible power has gone forth. The allied power of all Europe may retard, but it cannot stop the descending bolt. The haughty and cruel Ottoman, whose tread of death has crushed the minds and hearts of millions, whose sway has consigned to solitude and decay the garden spots of earth, whose presence is a moral upas beneath which science dies, and the living vigor of the immortal spirit withers, that power which has sought only to enslave, never to deliver; to destroy, never to build up; is hastening to dissolution. And when the empire of Othman falls, when once the throne of the Sultan, like that of the Caliph, crumbles, then assuredly cometh the jubilee of Christianity over prostrate Islamism. Far and wide as the religion of Muhammed is diffused, its professors, from every quarter of the globe, from

the sands of Ethiopia, the mountains of Tartary, and the distant shores of China, all turn their eyes with anxious gaze to Constantinople, as the last refuge of their faith. When once the stone cut out from the mountain without hands, shall strike this colossus, when once its mosques shall echo to the voice of Christian worshippers, the death knell of Islamism will be sounded over the earth. Not more surely will the arch fall whose key-stone is rent away, than will this huge edifice of religious imposture tumble into ruins, when once the empire of the Turk is overturned. It was the Turk who came to the succor of this religion, when the dynasty of the Caliphs was in ruins at his feet. This young, bold, hardy race of Tartars, infused new life into the religion of the conquered Saracen, when it was rapidly tending to decay. And as the Sultan falls into the same grave his ancestors dug for the Caliph, what new power will arise to bid the decaying tree flourish green again over their sepulchres?

About the same period in which Muhammed appeared, another religious system, equally corrupt and still more formidable to true Christianity, sprang up in her bosom. The influences which originated the Papacy had been operating since apostolic days. But amidst the fire and the sword of persecution, the system could not reach its full development. It waited for the installation of Christianity as the state religion of the civilized world. That great event gave to the

Church splendid temples for its worship, princely wealth and power for its ministers. Amidst the sudden splendor that encompassed her, as she emerged from the caverns and the lairs whither persecution had driven her, ambition, lordly, corrupt, and all grasping, wove that triple crown, which, within little more than a century, pressed the brow of the bishop of Rome, and before which the crowns of Europe's proudest sovereigns have often been lowered. I need not dwell upon the character of this spiritual despotism. Suffice it here to remark, that of all the forces of evil arrayed against the early Church, not one can be compared with this.

Yet, with this terrible power, Christianity has already fought, under circumstances the most unfavorable to success, and triumphed. The same weapons which then won the victory, are now in our hands; the energy, which then shook down so many pillars of this vast structure, still lives to carry onward the work of reformation. Nor is it true, as it has been asserted, that the relative positions of Protestant Christianity and the Papacy, are nearly the same as they were left by the Reformation. It may be true that the Pope wields a sceptre over as many millions now, as he did then; but who is ignorant of the fact, that this power is, in many cases, little more than nominal. Slowly, indeed, as moral forces usually work, until they reach the crisis of sudden development, but no less surely has the spiritual des-

potism of Rome been losing its hold upon the conscience of mankind. Government after government has broken its political power, until the old man on the Tiber has become an enthroned cypher, amidst the gigantic powers of Europe. Nor is it a small matter in our favor, that this religion, ever clinging to the thrones of despotism and courting their darkness, is failing before the march of revolution and the progress of free principles. The advance of human society is against the power which reached its giant height only amidst the darkness of the middle ages. Hence it is, that the states of South America throw off the tyrant, they grow weary of this religion. Hence, in every part of the world, where the principles of liberty and the elements of science are the common property of the people, this system makes no advance. True it is, that in both this land and in that of our fathers, it has exhibited, within the last few years, an unwonted vigor. But what religion ever yet died without exhibiting signs of returning animation? The wick, just ready to expire, flashes up for an instant with singular brightness; the body, from which life is fast departing, is convulsed to its extremities ere the fainting heart ceases to beat. Muhammedanism itself, now that its death knell is about to be rung, is going forth on missions of propagandism to central Africa. And can any one suppose, that a religious despotism of this tremendous power, will die as an infant falls asleep, and not

as a giant tosses and heaves his unwieldy frame, before his cry of agony is hushed forever?

In concluding this comparison of the religious influences hostile to the ancient and modern church, it is necessary to notice the opposition of infidelity and erroneous forms of Christian doctrine. In the first ages of Christianity, the great conflict was with Paganism. A system which denied the truth of Christianity, of Paganism, and of Judaism, which, while it trod upon the Bible, laughed at the rites of the Pantheon, existed indeed; but it was an esoteric doctrine, hidden within the groves of the philosopher and the cloister of the priest. That bold and shameless infidelity, which since the reformation has struggled so fiercely to sweep Christianity from the earth, had not yet appeared. It was the offspring of a later age. The mental agitations, the amazing intellectual activity, to which the efforts of the reformers in leaving off the superstitions of Rome had given birth, in connexion with the frightful licentiousness engendered by the operation for centuries of a corrupt religion, quickened into life, and gave character and force to the delusion of modern infidelity. The influence of the Reformation, in awakening the intellect, extended far beyond the counteracting influence of its doctrines. The public mind was everywhere aroused by the exciting nature of the contest. The old channels of thought were forsaken, the old landmarks of doctrine swept away, and the great deep

was broken up. Nor is it a matter of surprise that, in countries where the truths of the Reformation were not suffered to root themselves, or where they could grow only in the hot-house of state patronage, infidelity should have reached up to so lofty a height.

With this fierce, proud and malignant opponent, Christianity has been obliged to grapple in circumstances, than which none could be more favorable for the total rout of her forces. Against her, were arrayed the highest powers of wit and science. Heaven suffered minds of the first order to waste their energies in the support of this negation of truth. There is scarcely a single department of intellectual labor, in which infidelity has not had distinguished advocates. It has gone down into the subterranean depths of metaphysics, and labored with the energy of a Hume to upheave the foundations of human belief. It has traversed the sunny fields of literature, and breathed its poison on the page of history. It has ascended the rostrum of the statesman, and in the costume of liberty has employed the force of eloquence to subvert the noble truths of Christian freedom. It has sat on the high places of sacred literature, corrupting the fountains of religious influence, and prostituting the acquisitions of learning to the horrid work of debauching the teachers of men. It has even gone up into the pulpit, and wielded the heavenly sympathies, attractions, and powers, of that sacred place, against the life

of that religion which gave them existence. Not satisfied with this wide range of effort, it has descended into the styes of human corruption, and there, by ribaldry, by falsehood, by pandering to all the licentious desires of man, it has toiled with insane energy to shut the door of reformation upon the criminal, and extinguish forever the still glimmering spark of hope in the breast of the abandoned.

In conducting these wide spread operations, it brought to its aid all the then present and well remembered corruptions of a most degenerate Christianity. The infidel wielded the corruptions of the Church against the very life of the Church. The pride of the hierarchy, the licentiousness of the priesthood, the bigoted ignorance of churchmen, the blood of heroic martyrs, and the contemptible fooleries by which the multitude were deluded, which had defiled the history of the Church for centuries, gave to a keensighted infidelity an immense advantage over its opponent. The former boasted of its tendency to disenthral the mind; it was about to introduce the jubilee of knowledge, refinement, liberty, and equality. The latter, wherever it turned, was met by the hideous form of that corruption which had preyed for ages upon the peace, morality, and liberties of men. The tendencies of the former were not yet fully developed. It had not yet enjoyed space and opportunity for the manifestation of its character. The latter, for a

cycle of years, had been the dominant religion of Europe, and partially of Asia and Africa. Around the former clustered all the attractions of novelty, and large hope; around the latter, the damning persecutions, corruptions, hypocrisies, and failures of centuries. Under such circumstances the conflict began, and with such weapons it was carried forward.

For a time these vast efforts portended the ruin of the Christian cause. But it was only for a brief season. These hordes of the infidel ravaged, but they did not conquer; they passed over the land with fire and sword; but they roused the ardor of Christian zeal. They taught the Christian the discipline of their arms. Momentary defeat became the means of the more complete and permanent triumph of the cross. A thousand intellects concentrated their keen vision upon the evidences of Christianity. The fields of sacred history and science were trodden in every part by men of robust understanding, boundless learning, and profound judgment. With infinite toil, with inexhaustible patience, with superhuman energy, they labored at the defence of our faith. Around Christianity they reared bulwarks, high, massive, impregnable to the assaults of irreligion. They did still more than this; they entered the domains of the infidel. History was met by history, philosophy by philosophy, research by still deeper research. At every step the arms of infidelity were turned against itself.

Meanwhile the mask fell from this mockery of religion. It stood forth disclosed in its naked ugliness before the world. Heaven suffered it to occupy a noble theatre on which to act out its true character in the view of all coming time. From that scene of raging passion, wild uproar, legalized hate, lust and butchery, I need not draw the veil. The memory of that time fills the soul with horror. That scene inspired courage into the Christian, while it covered the face of the infidel with paleness. His chosen vantage ground was wrested from him. Where are now the boasts, the jubilations, the pæans of triumph in anticipation of the speedy fall of Christianity, which then deafened the ear of heaven? Where is now that host of philosophers, wits, poets, historians, statesmen and crowned heads, which little more than half a century ago licked the dust trodden by the feet of the strumpet goddess of infidelity? The song of triumph has ceased; the loud huzzas are hushed. The swellings of that wretched atheism, instead of engulfing, have borne the ark of Christian truth high on the solid earth. Doubtless this opponent will still continue to resist the advance of the cross. We know not, indeed, but that he is even now summoning his energies for another fearful struggle. Nor is it improbable that with him, Christianity is destined to grapple most vigorously in the conflict which is to chain the prince of darkness and usher in the millennial morn. Yet she fights with

an oft conquered foe ; around her are the trophies of victory and the impregnable defences of our faith. The Church has reached a position which commands the entire field.

In addition to this great obstacle, Christianity has to contend with others, springing up in her own ranks. There is, in the breast of the impatient, a spirit hostile to the humiliating truths of the Gospel, while at the same time conscience, unable to find repose in a system of barren negations, impels to the adoption of correct religious principles. To satisfy the demands of conscience, the costume of religion is preserved ; to gratify the spirit of infidelity, the life of religion is refined away. To the joint influence of these forces, is mainly due the production of numerous errors, adorned, outwardly, with the blazonings of true religion, but exhibiting, to the attentive observer, only an emasculated Christianity.

It is not to be denied that the early Church was greatly injured by the prevalence of numerous forms of error among her own disciples. Aside from the causes already assigned, which had peculiar force over minds wholly strangers to genuine piety, there were others which operated to lead astray the truly pious. It was an age of much popular ignorance. With the exception of the Greek and the Jew, the great mass of the people dwelt on the confines of barbarism and civilization. In such circumstances, it was to be expected that error would spring up, even under the

preaching of the most enlightened and cautious teachers. But, besides the general ignorance of the people, their best educated and most intelligent instructors were, in many instances, imbued with a philosophy as unlike that of the Cross, as paganism is unlike the law of Moses. The influence of this false philosophy was deplorably bad. The ignorance of a people unaccustomed to draw nice moral distinctions, and the scarcity of the Word, under the slow transcriptions of the scribe, gave full scope to the workings of this philosophy. The results are everywhere visible in the errors which mar almost every page of the early and subsequent history of the Church. Nor is it extravagant to affirm that these, almost as much as the power of heathenism itself, clogged the chariot wheels of salvation. If the battle-axe of a pagan Celsus now and then dashed an embrasure, the weapons of a philosophic Origen were fire-brands scattered within the sacred city.

In the conflict with errors of this character, the modern Church has, in some respects, the advantage over the ancient. The mental collisions, and accumulated research, of eighteen hundred years, have given greater definiteness both to the views of truth, and the perceptions of error. While it is undoubtedly true that the early Christians seized hold of the grand truths of the Gospel, it is no less true that the *system* of truth it embodied was but dimly apprehended. The minor points of doctrine, the relation of the different

parts of the system to each other, were not understood. The main points of a system may be easily apprehended, while their relations to each other may demand the investigations of centuries fully to unfold them. It is here that there is room for advancement in the knowledge of Christianity; science cannot, indeed, better the Bible, but it may aid us in bringing out what is in the Bible. It cannot prune and alter, and modify, and practically annihilate any of the truths actually to be found therein; but it may contribute to the more perfect development of their relations to each other. Without arrogance, no one can affirm that, in the mode of interpreting the sacred Oracles, he has reached perfection in theory and in practice. Far less can this be asserted of the ancients. We know that some of the principles on which they reasoned are false. Nor is it too much to say that, in this respect, there has been a great advance since the days of the Fathers. Indeed, the circumstances of the early Church were, in the main, unfavorable to the profound investigation and calm discussion of the minor truths. It was an age of persecution, when men were obliged to cling to the strong points of truth. It was an age of missionary action, when the energies of the church were mainly directed to the propagation of the Gospel. There was little opportunity for quiet meditation, except in the cell of the monk, and the cave of the hermit, to which the latter part of this period gave rise.

In addition to the advantages enjoyed by the modern Church, in more definite perceptions of the system of truth, there is a familiarity with the character and workings of error, which enables her to devise and execute the measures necessary for its overthrow. The incessant warfare with it, in which she has so long been engaged, has given her a keen perception of its multiform character and protean aspect; an experimental acquaintance with the operations by which it is ever attempting to subvert the truth. It would be passing beyond the limits of rational conjecture to assert, with one of the most original writers of this age, that the fields of error have all been sown, the harvest reaped, and that, for the future, it can only re-produce antiquated and exposed dogmas. It is not improbable that such vast systems of imposture, as that of the papacy, have all appeared. In this late age of the world, it seems hardly probable that other systems will arise to rival the deadly influence of this. Such elaborate and systematised errors are the result of the silent workings of centuries; their power is only overthrown after ages of conflict. But with this exception, as society advances, as the relations of the different parts of truth become more fully developed, as each age bears an impress peculiar to itself, we must expect that error will throw off its antiquated costume and adapt itself to the character of the times. It is always one in essence; diversified in its manifestations, as the firmament;

yet, even on this supposition, the knowledge possessed by the Church, of the past appearances and operations of error, is of immense advantage. The mind of the Church has been disciplined to a rapid detection of the advance of error and the means best adapted to meet it. The past has made her wary, deliberate, skillful.

The only remaining point of comparison, between the ancient and modern Church, which I shall notice, is the literature of their respective times. When Christianity arose, the science of the world was in the hands of its opponents. The canonized shades of Plato and Aristotle frowned upon it; the eagle-eyed philosophy of Greece, which then swayed the sceptre of science, despised the Gospel as the babblings of insanity. While a Tacitus, and a Juvenal, could turn away from it with the contemptuous exclamation—"An execrable superstition." The great masters in the realm of literature, the minds disciplined to thought, and rich in human lore, the philosophic historian, the brilliant poet, the astute dialectician, the powerful advocate, the large minded statesman, with scarcely a single exception, out of Judea, poured their fire upon the fisherman of Galilee.

Look now abroad upon the domain of the heathen world! The orbs of its pagan glory have all set; the very stars which, in such luminous constellations, then flamed in the firmament, have all gone down to rise, in fresh, undying radiance,

upon the institutions of a Christian people. There is darkness settling, like a pall, over the wide pagan land. While around the Cross is gathered the mind, the knowledge, the intellectual enterprise of the world. It is not asserted, indeed, that men of science are uniformly Christian in their convictions, or their practice. Yet it is true that Christianity embosoms the multitude of those who are carrying forward, with indomitable vigor, the triumphs of mind; she breathes into them the spirit of inquiry; she calls them from airy and evanescent dreams, to the practical, the real, the true. On her history, time is continually engraving, with a vividness that shall defy the lapse of ages, names as bright, as radiant, as powerful, in the influence they gave to the advance of truth, as any to be found in the scroll of this world's record. Nor is this all the truth. She seizes hold of, and appropriates to the advance of her own great objects, the discoveries, the toils of her most bitter foes. She domesticates the gifted minds of pagan Greece and Rome, in the groves of her academies and the halls of her colleges. She wrests from the hands of infidelity, the weapons for which it has toiled, with wonderful patience, amidst the mausoleums of Egypt's grandeur and Egypt's fame, and plants them as buttresses around the truth of God. Go, single out the warrior champion of infidelity, a Voltaire, a Hume, a Diderot, a Gibbon; and I will show you one from the triumphs of whose genius Christian-

ity has gathered, and is gathering, the materials of science, wherewith to swell her last great triumph over the downfall of error throughout the world. She fears not the development of truth, or the march of science. While Rome threatens Copernicus, and imprisons Galileo, she cheers on her Bacon, rejoices in the triumphs of her Newton, and with a force, as gentle as it is irresistible, compels the votary of science to bring his offering to her shrine. She believes that all truth is one in its source, harmonious in its relations, and one in its end. The progress of true learning, she regards as in perfect harmony with that of true religion. In the widening circle of science, she beholds a wider field for the triumphs of the Cross. Hence it is that, standing on the mount of truth, the science of the world becomes her servitor.

The advantage we enjoy, in this respect, above the ancient Church, is obvious. We are qualified to be the teachers of the heathen world in science, as well as in religion. The learning of the mass of the followers of Muhammed, is limited to the rhapsodies of the Koran; for the light that shone around the palaces of the Moor in Spain, had gone out long before he was swept from her shore. And, aside from the flickering flame that may yet burn in Arabia the Happy, the entire science of that religious imposture would not equal that of a Christian schoolboy. As for the heathen world at large, it has done nothing, for ages, but stereotype the errors of its antiquity. Mind is

stagnant. The mental vigor which marked the ages of Plato and Cicero, is nowhere to be found. There is no bursting away from the eternal round of hoary puerilities and childish superstitions. But the grand fact, here to be noticed as most favorable to the success of Christianity, is that their systems of science are all interlocked with those of religion. The explosion of their systems of learning must rend their systems of faith. And as our schools, with the miracle-worker of the modern Church, the press, upheaves the absurdities which constitute their literature, the towering fabric of superstition, reared upon it, must come down.

I have thus taken a hurried view of some of the principal forces arrayed against the ancient and modern Church, in connection with the resources in their possession to overcome them. With these facts before us, who, in order to secure the ultimate and most enlarged success of missionary effort, could wish to place the Church in the position she occupied when Stephen harangued the Sanhedrim; when Paul preached to the most intelligent of the pagans, from the steps of the Areopagus, amidst the temples, the altars, the statues, the splendid monuments of Grecian prowess, piety and science—beneath the shade of Nero's palace, in view of the Coliseum, crowded with its scores of thousands of the most enlightened and refined of Roman citizens, gloating over the dying agonies of his noble coadjutors, and at the heart of that

colossal empire, whose shadow darkened not only over the whole civilized, but of vast portions of the barbarian world? To effect such a change in the position of the modern Church, would be to transfer the mind, the intellectual enterprise of the world, from her friends to her opponents—to blot out all that advance of science which has given such tremendous power to Christianity, over the absurd systems of heathen literature—to annihilate the press, thereby sweeping away the multiplied facilities, of this age, for the diffusion of truth, the overthrow of error, and bringing back upon the Church the night when the simple word of God, the world's great conservator, was dependant upon the slow pen of the scribe for multiplication, at the cost of a rich man's fortune, and the gains of a poor man's life—to break up the mighty chains of commerce, foundering your ships, blowing up your steamers, giving back the needle to the mine, and the ocean to its old masters, the un blessing winds and storms—to consolidate the various nations of the world, whose very rivalry and jarrings are hastening the political emancipation of man, into one vast despotism; its energies swayed by one mind, and that mind filled with exterminating rage toward the Christian Church. But I need not complete the picture. It is enough for us to know that there is little in early Christianity, of which we regret the loss; that there is nothing in present difficulties, to appall; and we have everything necessary, in the outward cir-

cumstances of the Church, both to inspire hope and check presumption. There is but one thing wanting, at this day, in connection with these advantages, which the ancient Church possessed in a most remarkable degree, to ensure the most rapid, wide-spread, and permanent success—I refer to the devotion, the faith, the zeal, with which the Church herself should engage in this work. It is true, and it is a truth to be deeply pondered by men of enlarged minds, who may be skeptical respecting the ultimate triumph of our religion, that in no period of the world's history, has there existed a greater amount of intelligent, well-balanced, devoted piety, than in this age. With all the corruptions in doctrine, and extravagance in measures, of this day, before us, the assertion is hazarded, that religion has never, on the whole, embraced less of fanatacism, more of intelligence, wealth, and enterprise, than at this moment. Let the Church, then, but awake to the vigorous prosecution of the great object before her, and, imitating the self-consecration of the early Christians, throw herself into this great enterprise, with all her vast resources, the energy, divine and resistless, will be infused into her exertions, and the day of triumph will quickly come. In the formation of this association, as well is in the marshalling of the Christian host, abroad through the world, I behold the sign of the rise of that spirit which, when it shall generally fill the heart, and waken the zeal of the re-

newed on earth, will level alike the throne of the despot, and the time-cemented superstitions to which they cling; before which the Crescent will wane into darkness, the funeral pile, and bloody idols of the Hindoo, flee away; the intolerance, the corruptions, the fierce contentions of nominal Christendom, vanish, while the song of redemption, which it first breathed forth on the plains of Bethlehem, will swell up, in grand chorus, from every altar and temple, every cottage and palace, every hill and vale. The voices of ten thousand new-born sons of Zion fall upon my ear from the isles of the Pacific, and the shores of India. Hail them as the prelude of that universal anthem, which will enwrap the world, when the Gospel shall illumine every dwelling, and kindle the fire of a pure religion on every altar, and in every heart beneath the whole heaven.

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