

the use of talking any longer of "Providence?" Just as an earthquake will throw down a church or a saloon; just as a storm will sink a missionary ship or a slaver; just as disease kills a sinner or a saint; just as fleas bite parsons or infidels, so a thief may with equal profit and safety (unless he is caught) rob a cathedral or a brewery. The laws of nature, and the laws of human nature, operate with mechanical certainty, quite irrespective of the power "beyond" which is fondly supposed to take an intelligent and ethical interest in the affairs of the universe.

There is another aspect of this matter, in dealing with which we may offend Catholics, though we shall have the sympathy of Protestants. What a system to gull the mob it is which fills churches with dim religious light, and the thick perfume of incense, and carved and painted images of saints, and statues of the Virgin Mother of God tricked out with finery and loaded with the costliest decorations! What a system to tickle the sensuousness of man it is, while pretending to influence his spirituality, which burns candles in daylight, and makes the altars blaze with jewels! It is by such agencies that priests keep their hold upon the multitude. It is so easy to kneel, and sniff, and admire! So hard to stand erect, and think and feel like a man!

No doubt there are plenty of poor people in Toledo whose stomachs might be filled and their backs clothed with the wealth which is lavished upon the wooden image of a woman who perhaps never existed. Where faith is the deepest the people are the poorest, the most abject, and the most miserable. Even in England it is notorious that our cathedral cities, in proportion to their size, have the greatest number of public-houses and brothels, and the biggest army of indigent loafers. All over the world the people are bamboozled and robbed by mystery-mongers, who take all they can in this life and promise their dupes unlimited fine things in kingdom-come. How much better it would be if these clerical drones were extinguished, and if the wealth they consume were spent upon the alleviation of human suffering, the education of the people, and the extirpation of poverty, vice, and crime.

Freethinker.

G. W. FOSTER.

THE REFORMATION: ITS VALUE AND ITS DEFECTS.

WHAT is termed the Protestant Reformation forms an important landmark in the history of the progress of human thought. While we are not prepared to fully endorse Thomas Carlyle's words, "That the Reformation was a return to Truth and Reality, in opposition to Falsehood and Semblance," we readily grant that it was a more advanced step towards greater mental freedom than had previously obtained. The expectations, however, that were formed of its power to revolutionize religious thought throughout the world were never realized, as many Protestants allege. The force which dealt a severe blow at the supremacy of Roman Catholicism soon became exhausted, and what might have been, under different conditions, a practical reformation was reduced to a mere change of policy, which, in some respects, was no improvement at all. The mark to which the progressive tide reached in the sixteenth century is recorded in history as plainly as the action of the ever-moving sea is imprinted upon the rocks. As Buckle remarks, after a hundred and fifty years of religious wars, the countries in which they raged settled down into the various creeds, "which, in the essential point, have never since been permanently altered." For more than two hundred years "all the great Catholic countries remained Catholic, all the great Protestant ones

remained Protestant." He points out the common error "of ascribing all modern enlightenment to the influence of Protestantism," reminding his readers of "the important fact that, until the enlightenment had begun, Protestantism was never required" (Vol. I., pp. 240-1).

It appears to us that the Reformation was the result of the expansion of the mind of man, who could no longer endure the unchanging creeds of the Middle Ages, with their demand of unqualified submission of the intellect to their manifold absurdities. It must be remembered that by the revival of learning—a great impetus and new momentum were imparted to the human mind. The limits beyond which the Roman Church had for centuries prohibited any advance, on pain of the axe, the rack, the dungeon, and the stake, were now overstepped by the aspiring emancipated intellect. Those old landmarks of the limits of former inquiry were justly despised, as the memorials of barbarian ignorance; and an appeal was made from the dogmas of sacerdotal authority to human nature, human science, and human thought. The intellect again asserted its supremacy, as it had in former times in Greece and Rome. A bright and radiant future was before it; it stood, as it were, upon an elevation from which it could take a wide and an enlightened survey of the complicated interests of life. The master-spirits of the age soon proclaimed their deliverance from an irrational and degrading bondage; they invited others to at once emancipate themselves from the degrading and mind-destroying superstitions of the theology of the Roman Church, and to assert their mental dignity and personal freedom.

The Reformation was the necessary outcome of the Renaissance, or Revival of Learning. It really meant a revolt from Rome, a rebellion against sacerdotalism, and the assertion before the world of the grand maxim that thought is free. As we shall presently see, this maxim was not consistently acted upon; that, however, does not alter the fact that the principle was acknowledged. The fault is in its non-application.

Lord Shaftesbury pronounced the Reformation to be a "holy movement inspired by God." If this were so, God selected strange and very questionable characters to initiate the movement. Luther was a believer in polygamy, a determined opponent of science, and a bitter persecutor of those who did not share his views. Earl Russell writes: "The fault of Luther was that, in the very beginning of this mighty contest (the Reformation), he attempted to erect a new Church, to cover it with something like infallibility, and to defend it by persecution" ("History of the Christian Religion," p. 188). Hallam says: "We must not be misled by the idea that Luther contended for freedom of inquiry and boundless privilege of individual judgment." Calvin, another of the Protestant reformers, was a bigot of the severest type. He is thus described by Earl Russell in his work already referred to (p. 242). "In one character or the other he bent to his will the religious observances, the dress, the mode of arranging the hair, the number of dishes at feasts, the regulations for weddings, the jests and idle talk, the belief and the behavior of all the citizens of Geneva. The wife of the captain of the town, who was found guilty of dancing at a wedding, was sent to the common prison with prostitutes and thieves. The gaols were occupied to such an extent that in March, 1545, the gaoler reported that the prisons were full and could hold no more."

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To be continued.