

Surely a people like the ancient Greeks, a people that spoke and wrote a language remarkable for its affluence and finish, with a literature of marvellous richness and beauty, works of art never surpassed and systems of philosophy which this age alone has been able to add to and advance beyond, a people that gave to the world great models of moral excellence, whose national history is replete with accounts of patriotic devotion, moral heroism, disinterestedness, and self-sacrifice, as well as great achievements of an intellectual character which have left "a lingering glory on the historic page which centuries have not been able to eclipse or dim,"—surely such a people were not devoid of the essential elements of greatness; and, although they were "heathens," but few modern nations have attained to so high a civilization. When such a people flourished ages before Christianity had its birth, can it be truthfully or candidly maintained that this religion is necessary to national greatness or personal virtue, that the absence of Christianity among us would be followed by the destruction of everything which makes life desirable, or that distinguishes the civilized man from the brutal savage?

We would not intimate that antiquity was free from great evils, that Greece herself, or even Athens, did not have her full share of them, nor would we intimate that great progress has not been made, in many respects, since the age of Pericles. The advocates of Christianity would certainly find no nation in the nineteenth century entirely civilized, if they made the absence of great evils and wrongs an indispensable condition of civilization. The practice, however, of raking together all the crimes and vices of pagan nations, and contrasting them with the virtues of Christian lands, in order to show the indebtedness of the world to their faith, is quite as unfair as would be an effort to show the superiority of pagan Rome over modern nations, by drawing dark pictures of the latter without one bright spot, and dwelling in contrast, on the noble lives, the sublime sayings, and the splendid achievements which have shed an undying lustre on the old pagan nation.

II.

Nor is it any proof of the enlightening influence of Christianity that in many respects we are, in this age, in advance of the Greeks. It would be strange, indeed, if in more than 2,000 years no nations had arisen, able, with the rich heritage Greece and Rome left to the world, to add to the achievements of those nations, and to advance beyond the position which they occupied.

The clergy, as a class, have used all their influence to make the uneducated masses believe that pagan antiquity was without any firm principles of morality, and that the beautiful precepts found in the New Testament were taught by Jesus for the first time. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There is not one moral precept in the New Testament which was not taught ages before Jesus lived. The doctrine of love, which by many is considered the chief merit of the "system" of