

be perfectly compatible with a *quantum sufficit* of rascality towards men. Nothing can be more misplaced and unfounded than the lamentations which we so constantly hear respecting the want of faith now in the world. Credulity, not skepticism, has ever been, and probably will ever be, a leading characteristic of mankind. Neither nations nor individuals ever abandon long-established or hereditary systems of belief, until forced to do so by the pressure of over-ruling circumstances. Even now, when old creeds and old religious theories have, in a great measure, lost their primitive vitality, and whilst so many amongst us are sensible that these ancient institutions are now sustained from views of expediency and from the fear of consequences, rather than from a conviction of their truth, even now we are anxiously sighing for something whereon to pin our faith without compromising our understandings. Every man who reads history with reflection and intelligence, must be sensible that systems and institutions miscalled divine, because connected with religion, although more permanent than political constitutions, are yet not exempt from the principle of mutation and decay attached to everything human. The absurd and incomprehensible dogmas, as well as the selfish and grasping interests that gather around spiritual establishments, never fail to grow and accumulate until they smother and crush their supporters. Thus Heathenism fell under the weight of its fables and its absurdities. Judaism proved unequal to the burden of its rites, its ceremonies, and its priesthood. Ultra-Catholicism yielded under the pressure of the frauds and the follies it was necessitated to uphold, and more than one modification of existing Protestantism gave tokens of a similar catastrophe from like causes. In fact, every system and every institution built upon any other foundation than that of Nature necessarily contains within itself the unfailing causes of decay and dissolution. Methods as unnatural and preternatural as those that gave birth to it must be continually had recourse to, in order to secure it any degree of permanence, and after all there will always remain an appeal against them to the physical laws of nature, which will prove too hard for them at last. In proportion as men advance in art, science, literature and civilization, the uniformity and durability of nature's laws will contrast more and more favourably with materials so frail and fluctuating as the speculations of human beings necessarily are upon supernatural subjects. In every age and country in which the idea is yet unrealized of the sequence of events founded upon the principle of invariable law, we must expect to hear more or less of the appearance of the Deity upon this earthly scene. But as soon as the true scientific principle is generally recognized, the old religious theory of causation will be disregarded, and the direct operation of the Deity will cease to be appealed to. In other words, the religious principle itself, varying with the spirit of the age, will, from having been the most passionate supporter of miraculous agency, ultimately become its deadliest enemy. If divines and theologians will ignore such facts and principles as I am now adverting to—if they will shut their eyes to the palpable changes, and the rapid progress of public opinion, in these matters—if they will persist in treating us like children, or semi-civilized men and women, still doling out to us old worn-out dogmas and threadbare metaphysico-religious subtleties; if they will continue on, regardless of all remonstrance and all entreaty, in this senseless course, they will soon have to face the inevitable consequences; they will be left stranded upon a desert shore, naked of all authority and influence, there to preach up the beauties of their obsolete theology to the tumultuous waves, while the rest of the civilized world, with other