

ing them is to incur the charge of ignorance, of a disposition to cavil, or even of downright dishonesty.

I propose to examine in this lecture some of these assumptions of the advocates of Christianity, and to inquire whether its influence has been altogether good, and whether the world is largely indebted to it for its present advanced condition.

In the first place, the Christian who affirms that intellectual and moral greatness is incompatible with the absence of Christianity, forgets, in his zeal for his faith, that civilizations of a high type preceded, by many centuries, the advent of the Christian religion. Not to speak of other nations, ancient Greece may be referred to as a familiar illustration of the fact that man has been able to attain to a very high degree of advancement independently of any revealed system of faith. The Greeks were certainly a great people. To them historians trace the beginnings of our intellectual civilization. "Like their own goddess, Athenæ, the people of Athens," says Max Muller, "seem to spring full-armed into the arena of history, and we look in vain to Egypt, Syria, and India, for more than a few seeds that burst into such marvellous growth on the soil of Attica" ("Science of Language," 2nd series, p. 404).

The Greeks found the world in a state of comparative darkness, with despotic governments, with the oriental forms of society, with hereditary and powerful priesthoods, with art graceless and grotesque, with a literature only of the poorest kind, with but little science, no drama, no oratory, no history worthy the name; and yet they were able to lay the foundations of the intellectual culture of all the succeeding ages, and even to carry some of the higher arts to a degree of perfection which has never been surpassed and has hardly been equalled in the ages that have followed. Five centuries before the Christian religion appeared, there was a glory in Greece, lit up by the rays of the arts of peace and war converging there, which shone through all the nations and made it the brightest spot on earth. The greatest and noblest minds of every succeeding age have looked back upon that period with wonder and admiration. During the 2,300 years that have followed, literature in its most flourishing period has rekindled her torch at the altars of Greece, and art has gone back to the age of Pericles for her purest and noblest models. Of all the epic poems ever written, the Iliad of Homer, composed far back in the twilight of history, is probably the greatest. To-day we regard the heroic odes of Pindar as models of their kind; the orations of Demosthenes as the finest specimens of eloquence extant. The works of Plato are yet carefully studied by the profoundest and most philosophic minds. The old Greek plays are still valued for their many excellencies. The histories of Herodotus, Xenophon and Thucydides possess great merits as compositions, and are prized for the light which they throw upon the past. The statues of Greece still stand forth, after the lapse of ages, in unrivalled beauty. Modern architects have not improved on the proportions of Athenian architecture; and some of