

## THE MORAL FREEDOM OF MAN.\*

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No part of the philosophy of history is more important than that which teaches us to study the history of opinion, and to separate, in each theory of man and of the world, that which demands our consideration as the result of pure thought from that which may be set aside as the mere expression of feeling produced by the circumstances of the time.

Thrice, at least, since man became conscious, or partly conscious, of his spiritual nature, and of the dignity of his being, a sort of despondency, the result in part of political disaster, has come over the moral world. Such a despondency followed on the fall of that narrow but vigorous political life, compounded of patriotism and Stoicism, which was embodied in the Roman Republic. It followed on the tremendous religious wars and revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It has followed on the terrible, and to a great extent fruitless, revolutionary struggles through which Europe passed in 1848. The abandonment of those social aspirations of man which are so intimately connected with his spiritual hopes gave birth in the first instance to Cæsarism, in the second instance to the absolutism of the eighteenth century, which was typified by Louis the Fourteenth, and erected into a Chinese Utopia by Voltaire. In the recent instance it has given birth to Imperialism, which has naturally triumphed most signally in the country where the decay of religion, as well as the political lassitude arising from abortive revolution, is most complete. The loss of religious faith has in each of the three instances been attended by the prevalence of a materialistic superstition. The Roman materialist was the slave of astrologers: the last century hung on the lips of Cagliostro and his brother quacks; and we fill the void of spiritual life with mesmerism and spirit-rapping.

At the same time the religious life of the present age is attacked by a powerful influence of a different kind. The pressure of false authority, reigning in old dogmatic establishments, has kept religion in an irrational state, as any man may easily convince himself by comparing the identity of the Christian character and

\* Abridged from an article in the *Daily News*, in reply to the criticism of the *Westminster Review*, on Professor Smith's lecture on the "Doctrine of Historical Progress."—ED.