

There are few, if any, here, I presume, who would maintain there was anything in the doctrines taught by the reformers more inimical to virtue than were the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. It was the destruction, or partial destruction, of old beliefs and authorities to which the people had been accustomed, and which had been connected with their ideas of right and duty, and it was their inability to harmonize their thoughts and feelings of right and duty with the absence of the old familiar beliefs and authorities, that were the cause of the social and moral disturbances which were appealed to in proof of the wickedness of Protestant teachings.

The intelligent Liberal desires the destruction only of the false, the absurd, the injurious, which is connected with, or a part of, the old system. There is a great deal of the system, especially as defined and interpreted by the more advanced and enlightened Christians, that is true and good, which the Liberal not only has no desire to destroy, but would use all his efforts to maintain and perpetuate, strengthen and intensify. All the old religions have in them a general element that no reasonable iconoclast wishes to see destroyed. I speak now particularly of the ethical element which, although not dependent upon any religious faith, is claimed by the advocates of each as an essential part of their system.

The advocates of orthodox Christianity must not define their religion as one which includes all the principles and precepts of virtue and then expect to reason with us on the assumption that we desire and aim to sweep the whole thing out of existence.

Morality depends not on any system of faith; it requires no miraculous evidence; it is independent of theological dogma; no supernatural halo can heighten its beauty; no ecclesiastical influence can strengthen its obligations; it is confined to no one country, limited to no one age, restricted to no one form of faith, the exclusive possession of no one class, sect, order, nation or race of men; it requires no written decalogue; it needs no single individual authority; theology cannot add to it, neither can it take from it. It has its indestructible basis in the nature of man, as a feeling, thinking, acting being, and in society as an aggregation of such beings, with the manifold relations and the acknowledged rights and duties that spring therefrom. Empires rise and perish; religions grow and decay; special forms of civilization appear and give way to other types; but as, amid all the mutations of human existence, the nature of man remains essentially the same, and as through all these changes the social condition everlastingly persists, morality can never be without a foundation as broad and deep and enduring as humanity itself. It changes not in its essential principles, but, as Cicero says, it is "the same at Rome and Athens, to-day and to-morrow; alone, eternal and invariable, it binds all nations and all times." Its highest standard is the enlightened reason of man. The better man understands his nature, and the more he is capable, by reason of his intelligence and culture, of comprehending the object of society and his relations thereto, the better understanding will he have of the principles of morality.

Theologians could have no ideas of moral qualities unless they had dis-