

Jesuit and an Atheist. His books narrowly escaped being burned by the hangman ; the fate of Vanini was dangled before his eyes ; and the misfortunes of Galileo so alarmed him, that he well-nigh renounced the pursuits by which the world has so greatly benefited, and was driven into subterfuges and evasions which were not worthy of him.

"Very cowardly," you may say ; and so it was. But you must make allowance for the fact that, in the seventeenth century, not only did heresy mean possible burning, or imprisonment, but the very suspicion of it destroyed a man's peace, and rendered the calm pursuit of truth difficult or impossible. I fancy that Descartes was a man to care more about being worried and disturbed, than about being burned outright ; and, like many other men, sacrificed for the sake of peace and quietness, what he would have stubbornly maintained against downright violence.

However this may be, let those who are sure they would have done better throw stones at him. I have no feelings but those of gratitude and reverence for the man who did what he did, when he did ; and a sort of shame that any one should repine against taking a fair share of such treatment as the world thought good enough for him.

Finally, it occurs to me that, such being my feeling about the matter, it may be useful to all of us if I ask you, "What is yours ? Do you think that the Christianity of the seventeenth century looks nobler and more attractive for such treatment of such a man ?" You will hardly reply that it does. But if it does not, may it not be well if all of you do what lies within your power to prevent the Christianity of the nineteenth century from repeating the scandal ?

There are one or two living men, who, a couple of centuries hence, will be remembered as Descartes is now,