

XV.

I WILL endeavor to indicate how the doctrines and teachings of Christianity, the system itself, and not a perversion of it, have been injurious to the progress of civilization.

Christianity gives such prominence to a future life, regards the secular affairs of this world as of so little account, and attaches so much importance to a religious preparation for death, that in proportion to the intensity with which it is believed and realized, it must divert attention from the real concerns of life, and destroy all relish for the physical sciences and useful arts. He who, regarding this world as of but little importance, is almost constantly contemplating the real or imaginary glories of another, or is perplexed and harassed with doubts as to whether he and his friends will be saved or damned; is not the man to give us great discoveries or inventions, or to take a lively interest in the affairs of this world. Fortunately, they who profess Christianity in this practical and comparatively unreligious age, have no deep and realizing conviction of the truth of its teachings respecting the future. Hence its influence in turning the mind from the proper pursuits of life is very small in comparison with the influence in this direction which it exerted when it was fully believed. The Christian, the energies of whose mind are absorbed chiefly in trying to save souls, is alone a true and consistent Christian, and it is impossible that such a frame of mind can be otherwise than unfriendly to intellectual pursuits or practical reforms.

Another of the teachings of Christianity which is hostile to intellectual and moral progress is, that religious scepticism and unbelief are of a criminal nature, or that they imply moral demerit. It deters the mind from investigation. It makes man a moral slave. And it supports and perpetuates old systems of error, which a little fearless investigation would expose, but which, continued from generation to generation, produce the most disastrous results to the cause of human progress. The doctrine that religious scepticism is a crime leads to the belief that scepticism respecting any established time-honored and cherished institution or opinion is criminal. Religious persecution, too, is a legitimate result of the doctrine that certain opinions involve merit, and other opinions involve guilt. Religious persecution is undeniably one of the greatest foes to intellectual advancement as well as to the general happiness of man. The best men are generally its victims. "Who can pretend to say," says Darwin, "why the Spanish nation, so dominant at one time, has been distanced in the race? The awakening of the nations of Europe from the dark ages is a still more perplexing problem. At this early period, as Mr. Galton has remarked, almost all the men of gentle nature, those given to meditation or culture of the mind, had no refuge except in the bosom of the Church, which demanded celibacy, and this could hardly have failed to have a deteriorating influence on each successive generation. During this same period the Holy Inquisition

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