

obtain assurance of absolution only from Savonarola.

In each eclipse of religious faith there has prevailed, at once a nemesis and as a spiritual make-shift, a charlatan superstition. In the case of Hellas it was soothsaying; in that of Rome astrology and the thaumaturgic mysteries of Isis; in the Catholic decadence astrology again, at the present day it is spiritualism, while even astrology has, or recently had, its votaries in England.

Once more European morality was renewed by a revival of religious faith. It is needless to say that there was a Catholic as well as a Protestant Reformation, though the disparity between the two in point of moral efficacy was great. In England, during the latter half of the eighteenth century, religious belief in a large section of society had again declined, and morality with it, when both were restored by the evangelical movement, which was unquestionably a moral reformation as well as a religious revival.

It will be said that all this time social science did not exist, the hour for its appearance in the course of intellectual development not having come, and that if it had existed it might have superseded these efforts to find for morality a new basis in religion. We desire to bear this constantly in mind. But the present question is, in the case of a collapse of religious belief, what, according to the indications of history, is likely to happen, unless social science is ready at once to step in and fill the void?

A collapse of religious belief, of the most complete and tremendous kind, is apparently now at hand. At the time of the Reformation the question was, after all, only about the form of Christianity; and even the sceptics of the last century, while they rejected Christ, remained firm theists; not only so, but they mechanically retained the main principles of Christian morality, as we see very plainly in Rousseau's *Vicaire Savoyard* and Voltaire's letters on the Quakers. Very different is the crisis at which we have now arrived. No one who has watched the progress of discussion and the indications of opinion in literature and in social intercourse can doubt that, in the minds of those whose views are likely to become—and in an age when all thought is rapidly popularized soon to become—the views of society at large, belief in Christianity as a revealed and supernatural religion has given way. Science and

criticism combined have destroyed the faith of free inquirers in the Mosaic cosmogony, in the inspiration of the Bible and the genuineness of many books of it, in large portions of the history of the Old Testament, and in the history of the New Testament, so far as it is miraculous or inseparably connected with miracles. The mortal blow has been given by criticism in disproving or rendering uncertain the authenticity of the historical books of the New Testament. Reasonings as to the antecedent probability or improbability of miracles are wholly inconclusive; to Hume's argument that experience excludes miracles the ready answer is that miracles, if they occurred, would be a part of experience. It is simply a question of evidence. To prove a miracle, everybody but a mystic would say that we require the testimony of eye-witnesses, and those numerous and good. But unless the authenticity of the historical books of the New Testament can be certainly established, we have no eye-witnesses of the Christian miracles at all; and in the absence of such testimony the adverse arguments derived from the uniformity of nature and from mythological analogy, which traces the belief in miracles to the universal propensities of uncritical ages, rush in with overwhelming force. In fact, in almost any book written by a learned man who feels himself at liberty to say what he really thinks, you will now find the miracles abandoned, though it may be with evident reluctance and with faltering lips. Mesmero-miraculism, such as is introduced into some popular lives of Christ, is palpably enough invented for the purpose of breaking the fall.

Not supernatural religion alone, but the existence of a Deity itself, has for many minds, and those the minds of good, able, and highly instructed men, ceased to be an object of distinct belief, if it has not become an object of distinct disbelief. The emancipated and emboldened lips of science have met the theist's argument of Design with the apparent evidences of the absence of design, waste and miscarriage in the heavens and the earth, seemingly purposeless havoc and extinction of races; while philosophy has breathed doubt upon the logical validity of the reasonings which satisfied the apologists of former days. The argument of Beneficence is encountered by the perplexing array of the cruelties—