THE INFLUENCE UPON MORALITY OF A DECLINE IN RELIGIOUS BELIEF.

FROM 'A MODERN SYMPOSIUM.'

(*In No. 2 of 'The Nineteenth Century.'*)

In the third of the preceding discourses[1] there is so much which I can fully and fervently accept, that I should find it far more grateful to rest in that feeling of admiration and sympathy than to attend to points of difference which seem to me to be of altogether secondary import. But for the truth's sake this must first be done, because it will then be more easy to point out some of the bearings of the position held in that discourse upon the question which is under discussion.

That the sense of duty in a man is the prompting of a self other than his own, is the very essence of it. Not only would morals not be self-sufficing, if there were no such prompting of a wider self, but they could not exist: one might as well suppose a fire without heat. Not only is a sense of duty inherent in the constitution of our nature, but the prompting of a wider self than that of the individual is inherent in a sense of duty. It is no more possible to have the right without unselfishness than to have man without a feeling for the right.

We may explain or account for these facts in various

[1] By Dr. Martineau.

ways, but we shall not thereby alter the facts. No theories about heat and light will ever make a cold fire. And no doubt or disproof of any existing theory can any more extinguish that self other than myself, which speaks to me in the voice of conscience, than doubt or disproof of the wave-theory of light can put out the noonday sun.

One such theory is defended in the discourse here dealt with, and, if I may venture to say so, is not quite sufficiently distinguished from the facts which it is meant to explain. The theory is this: that the voice of conscience in my mind is the voice of a conscious being external to me and to all men, who has made us and all the world. When this theory is admitted, the observed discrepancy between our moral sense and the government of the world as a whole makes it necessary to suppose another world and another life in it for men, whereby this discord shall be resolved in a final harmony.

I fully admit that the theistic hypothesis, so grounded, and considered apart from objections otherwise arising, is a reasonable hypothesis and an explanation of the facts. The idea of an external conscious being is unavoidably suggested, as it seems to me, by the categorical imperative of the moral sense; and moreover, in a way quite independent, by the aspect of nature, which seems to answer to our questionings with an intelligence akin to our own. It is more reasonable to assume one consciousness than two, if by that one assumption we can explain two distinct facts; just as if we had been led to assume an ether to explain light, and an ether to explain electricity, we might have run

before experiment and guessed that these two ethers were but one. But since there is a discordance between nature and conscience, the theory of their common origin in a mind external to humanity has not met with such acceptance as that of the divine origin of each. A large number of theists have rejected it, and taken refuge in Manichæism and the doctrine of the Demiurgus in various forms; while others have endeavoured, as aforesaid, to redress the balance of the old world by calling into existence a new one.

It is, however, a very striking and significant fact that the great majority of mankind who have thought about these questions at all, while acknowledging the existence of divine beings and their influence in the government of the world, have sought for the spring and sanction of duty in something above and beyond the Gods. The religions of Brahmanism and of Buddhism, and the moral system of Confucius, have together ruled over more than two-thirds of the human race during the historic period; and in all of these the moral sense is regarded as arising indeed out of a universal principle, but not as personified in any conscious being. This vast body of dissent might well, it should seem, make us ask if there is not something unsatisfying in the theory which represents the voice of conscience as the voice of a God.

Although, as I have said, the idea of an external conscious being is unavoidably suggested by the moral sense, yet, if this idea should be found untrue, it does not follow that nature has been fooling us. The idea is not in the facts, but in our inference from the facts. A mirror unavoidably suggests the idea of a

room behind it; but it is not our eyes that deceive us, it is only the inference we draw from their testimony. Further consideration may lead to a different inference of far greater practical value.

Now, whether or no it be reasonable and satisfying to the conscience, it cannot be doubted that theistic belief is a comfort and a solace to those who hold it, and that the loss of it is a very painful loss. It cannot be doubted, at least, by many of us in this generation, who either profess it now, or received it in our childhood and have parted from it since with such searching trouble as only cradle-faiths can cause. We have seen the spring sun shine out of an empty heaven, to light up a soulless earth; we have felt with utter loneliness that the Great Companion is dead. Our children, it may be hoped, will know that sorrow only by the reflex light of a wondering compassion. But to say that theistic belief is a comfort and a solace, and to say that it is the crown or coping of morality, these are different things.

For in what way shall belief in God strengthen my sense of duty? *He is a great one working for the right.* But I already know so many, and I know these so well. *His righteousness is unfathomable; it transcends all ideals.* But I have not yet fathomed the goodness of living men whom I know: still less of those who have lived, and whom I know. And the goodness of all these is a striving for something better; now it is not the goal, but the striving for it, that matters to me. The essence of their goodness is the losing of the individual self in another and a wider self; but God cannot do this; his goodness must be something different. *He is infinitely*

great and powerful, and he lives for ever. I do not understand this mensuration of goodness by foot-pounds and seconds and cubic miles. A little field-mouse, which busies itself in the hedge, and does not mind my company, is more to me than the longest ichthyosaurus that ever lived, even if he lived a thousand years. When we look at a starry sky, the spectacle whose awfulness Kant compared with that of the moral sense, does it help out our poetic emotion to reflect that these specks are really very very big, and very very hot, and very very far away? Their heat and their bigness oppress us; we should like them to be taken still farther away, the great blazing lumps. But when we think of the unseen planets that surround them, of the wonders of life, of reason, of love that may dwell therein, then indeed there is something sublime in the sight. Fitness and kinship; these are the truly great things for us, not force and massiveness and length of days.

Length of days, said the old Rabbi, is measured not by their number, but by the work that is done in them. We are all to be swept away in the final ruin of the earth. The thought of that ending is a sad thought; there is no use in trying to deny this. But it has nothing to do with right and wrong; it belongs to another subject. Like All-father Odin, we must ride out gaily to do battle with the wolf of doom, even if there be no Balder to come back and continue our work. At any rate the right will have been done; and the past is safer than all storehouses.

The conclusion of the matter is that belief in God and in a future life is a source of refined and elevated pleasure to those who can hold it. But the foregoing

of a refined and elevated pleasure, because it appears that we have no right to indulge in it, is not in itself, and cannot produce as its consequence, a decline of morality.

There is another theory of the facts of the moral sense set forth in the succeeding discourse,[1] and this seems to me to be the true one. The voice of conscience is the voice of our Father Man who is within us; the accumulated instinct of the race is poured into each one of us, and overflows us, as if the ocean were poured into a cup.[2] Our evidence for this explanation is that the cause assigned is a *vera causa*, it undoubtedly exists; there is no *perhaps* about that. And those who have tried tell us that it is sufficient: the explanation, like the fact, 'covers the whole voluntary field.' The lightest and the gravest action may be consciously done in and for Man. And the sympathetic aspect of nature is explained to us in the same way. In so far as our conception of nature is akin to our minds that conceive it, Man made it; and Man made us, with the necessity to conceive it in this way.[3]

I do not, however, suppose that morality would practically gain much from the wide acceptance of true views about its nature, except in a way which I shall presently suggest. I neither admit the moral influence of theism in the past, nor look forward to the moral influence of humanism in the future. Virtue is a habit,

[1] By Mr. Frederic Harrison.

[2] Schopenhauer. There is a most remarkable article on the 'Natural History of Morals' in the *North British Review*, Dec. 1867.

[3] For an admirable exposition of the doctrine of the social origin of our conceptions, see Professor Croom Robertson's paper, 'How we come by our Knowledge,' in the first number of the *Nineteenth Century*.

not a sentiment or an -ism. The doctrine of total depravity seems to have been succeeded by a doctrine of partial depravity, according to which there is hope for human affairs, but still men cannot go straight unless some tremendous all-embracing theory has a finger in the pie. Theories are most important and excellent things when they help us to see the matter as it really is, and so to judge what is the right thing to do in regard to it. They are the guides of action, but not the springs of it. Now the spring of virtuous action is the social instinct, which is set to work by the practice of comradeship. The union of men in a common effort for a common object—*band-work*, if I may venture to translate co-operation into English—this is and always has been the true school of character. Except in times of severe struggle for national existence, the practice of virtue by masses of men has always been coincident with municipal freedom, and with the vigour of such unions as are not large enough to take from each man his conscious share in the work and in the direction of it.

What really affects morality is not religious belief, but a practice which, in some times and places, is thought to be religious—namely, the practice of submitting human life to clerical control. The apparently destructive tendency of modern times, which arouses fear and the foreboding of evil in the minds of many of the best of men, seems to me to be not mainly an intellectual movement. It has its intellectual side, but that side is the least important, and touches comparatively few souls. The true core of it is a firm resolve of men to know the right at first hand, which has grown out of the strong impulse given to the moral sense by political

freedom. Such a resolve is a necessary condition to the existence of a pure and noble theism like that of the third discourse,[1] which learns what God is like by thinking of man's love for man. Although that doctrine has been prefigured and led up to for many ages by the best teaching of Englishmen, and—what is far more important—by the best practice of Englishmen, yet it cannot be accepted on a large scale without what will seem to many a decline of religious belief. For assuredly if men learn the nature of God from the moral sense of man, they cannot go on believing the doctrines of popular theology. Such change of belief is of small account in itself, for any consequences it can bring about; but it is of vast importance as a symptom of the increasing power and clearness of the sense of duty.

On the other hand there is one 'decline of religious belief,' inseparable from a revolution in human conduct, which would indeed be a frightful disaster to mankind. A revival of any form of sacerdotal Christianity would be a matter of practice and not a matter of theory. The system which sapped the foundations of patriotism in the old world; which well-nigh eradicated the sense of intellectual honesty, and seriously weakened the habit of truth-speaking; which lowered men's reverence for the marriage-bond by placing its sanctions in a realm outside of nature instead of in the common life of men, and by the institutions of monasticism and a celibate clergy; which stunted the moral sense of the nations by putting a priest between every man and his conscience; this system, if it should ever return to power, must be expected to produce worse evils than those which it has

[1] Dr. Martineau's.

worked in the past. The house which it once made desolate has been partially swept and garnished by the free play gained for the natural goodness of men. It would come back accompanied by social diseases perhaps worse than itself, and the wreck of civilized Europe would be darker than the darkest of past ages.

COSMIC EMOTION.[1]

By a *cosmic emotion*—the phrase is Mr. Henry Sidgwick's—I mean an emotion which is felt in regard to the universe or sum of things, viewed as a cosmos or order. There are two kinds of cosmic emotion—one having reference to the Macrocosm or universe surrounding and containing us, the other relating to the Microcosm or universe of our own souls. When we try to put together the most general conceptions that we can form about the great aggregate of events that are always going on, to strike a sort of balance among the feelings which these events produce in us, and to add to these the feeling of vastness associated with an attempt to represent the whole of existence, then we experience a cosmic emotion of the first kind. It may have the character of awe, veneration, resignation, submission; or it may be an overpowering stimulus to action, like the effect of the surrounding orchestra upon a musician who is thereby caught up and driven to play his proper part with force and exactness of time and tune. If, on the other hand, we consider the totality of our own actions and of the feelings that go with them or spring out of them, if we frame the highest possible generalization to express the character of those which we call good, and if we contemplate this with the feeling of

[1] *Nineteenth Century*, October, 1877.

vastness which belongs to that which concerns all things that all men do, we shall experience a cosmic emotion of the second kind. Such an emotion finds voice in Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*:

> Stern daughter of the voice of God!
> O Duty, if that name thou love,
> Who art a light to guide, a rod
> To check the erring, and reprove;
> Thou who art victory and law
> When empty terrors overawe;
> From vain temptations dost set free
> And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

A special form of each of these kinds of cosmic emotion has been expressed in a sentence by Immanuel Kant, which has been perfectly translated by Lord Houghton:

> Two things I contemplate with ceaseless awe;
> The stars of Heaven, and Man's sense of Law.

For the star-full sky on a clear night is the most direct presentation of the sum of things that we can find, and from the nature of the circumstances is fitted to produce a cosmic emotion of the first kind. And the moral faculty of man was thought of by Kant as possessing universality in a peculiar sense; for the form of all right maxims, according to him, is that they are fit for universal law, applicable to all intelligent beings whatever. This mode of viewing the faculty is clearly well adapted for producing cosmic emotion of the second kind.

The character of the emotion with which men contemplate the world, the temper in which they stand in the presence of the immensities and the eternities, must depend first of all on what they think the world is.

The theory of the universe, the view of things, prevalent at any time and place, will rouse appropriate feelings in those who contemplate it; not the same in all, for temperament varies with the individual, and the same facts stir differently different souls, yet so that, on the whole, the character of cosmic emotion depends on the nature of cosmic ideas.

When, therefore, the inevitable progress of knowledge has changed the prevalent cosmic ideas, so that the world as we know it is not the world which our fathers knew, the oldest cosmic emotions are no longer found to fit. Knowledge must have been in men's possession for a long time before it has acquired the certainty, the precision, the familiarity, the wide diffusion and comprehension which make it fit to rouse feelings strong enough and general enough for true poetic expression. For the true poetry is that which expresses *our* feelings, and not *my* feelings only—that which appeals to the universal in the heart of each one of us. So it has come about that the world of the poet, the world in its emotional aspect, always lags a little behind the world of science, not merely as it appears to the few who are able to assist at the birth of its conceptions, but even as it is roughly and in broad strokes revealed to the many. We always know a little more than our imaginations have thoroughly pictured. To some minds there is hope and renewing of youth in the sense that the last word is not yet spoken, that greater mysteries yet lie behind the veil. The prophet himself may say with gladness, 'He that cometh after me shall be preferred before me.' But others see in the clearer and wider vision that approaches them the end of all beauty

and joy in the earth ; because their old feelings are not suited to the new learning, they think that learning can stir no feelings at all. Even the great poet already quoted, whom no science will put out of date, complained of the prosaic effects of explanation, and said, 'We murder to dissect.'

I propose to consider and compare an ancient and a modern system of cosmic ideas, and to show how the emotions suited to the latter have already in part received poetic expression.

In the early part of the fifth century of our era the Neoplatonic philosopher Hierokles was teaching at Alexandria. He was an Alexandrian by birth, and had studied with Proklos, or a little before him, under Plutarch at Athens. He was a man of great eloquence, and of better Greek than most of his contemporaries. He astonished his hearers everywhere, says Suidas, by the calm, the magnificence, the width of his superlative intellect, and by the sweetness of his speech, full of the most beautiful words and things. A man of manly spirit and courage; for being once at Byzantium he came into collision with the ecclesiastical authorities (τοῖς κρατοῦσι) and was scourged in court ; then, streaming with blood, he caught some of it in his hand and threw it at the magistrate, with this verse of the Odyssey : '*Here, Cyclops, drink wine, since you eat human flesh!*' For which contempt of court he was banished, but subsequently made his way back to Alexandria. Here he lectured on various topics, foreknowledge, will, and fate, expounding also some of the dialogues of Plato and other philosophical writings.

But the matter of one course of lectures is preserved

to us. It is a commentary on a document in hexameter verse belonging to the Pythagorean scriptures, dating apparently from the third century B.C. These lines were called by Jamblichus the Golden Verses; but Gregory of Nazianzum did them the honour to say they were rather made of *lead*. They are not elegant as poetry; the form of verse seems to have been adopted as an aid to the memory. More than half of them consist of a sort of versified 'duty to God and my neighbour,' except that it is not designed by the rich to be obeyed by the poor, that it lays stress on the laws of health, and that it is just such sensible counsel for the good and right conduct of life as an English gentleman might now-a-days give to his son. We need not be astonished that the step from the Mediterranean to Great Britain, over two thousand years of time, should make no great difference in the validity of maxims like these. We might go back four thousand years further, and find the same precepts handed down at Memphis as the wisdom of a hoar antiquity. 'There's some things as I've never felt i' the dark about,' says Mrs. Winthrop, 'and they're mostly what comes i' the day's work.'

There are curious indications that the point of view of the commentator is not that of the verses themselves. 'Before all things honour the immortal Gods, as they are ordained by law,' begin the verses, with the frank Erastianism of the Greeks, who held that every man should worship the Gods in the manner belonging to his city and country; that matter being settled for themselves by the oracle of the Delphian Apollo. But this did not suit the Neoplatonist of the fifth century, whom the law of his country required to worship images of Mary

and her son (to be sure, they might be adapted figures of Isis and Horus) and the miraculous toe-nails of some filthy and ignorant monk. The law named in the verses could not be that which had scourged and banished a philosopher; so it is explained to mean the demiurgic law, which assigns to the Gods their several orders, the law of the divine nature. We are to honour the immortal Gods, says the commentator, in the order which is assigned to them by the law of their being. For Hierokles there is one supreme deity and three orders of angels—the immortal Gods, the illustrious heroes, and the terrestrial dæmons or partially deified souls of men. The bishops, as we all know, multiplied these numbers by three.

As to the kind of worship, our commentator quotes some old Pythagorean maxims. *You shall honour the God best by becoming godlike in your thoughts. Whoso giveth God honour as to one that needeth it, that man in his folly hath made himself greater than God. The wise man only is a priest, is a lover of God, is skilled to pray.* 'For,' he says, 'that man only knows how to worship who does not confound the relative dignity of worshipful things, who begins by offering himself as the victim, fashions his own soul into a divine image, and furnishes his mind as a temple for the reception of the divine light.' 'The whole force of worship,' he says in another place, 'lies in knowledge of the nature of that which is worshipped.'

(It is interesting to compare this last maxim with the proposition of Spinoza:[1] 'He who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his own emotions, loves God, and that the more, the more he understands himself and his own emotions.' For to understand clearly and distinctly is to contemplate in relation to God, to the cosmic idea. When the mind contemplates itself in relation to God, it necessarily rises from a lower to a higher grade of perfection. Now *joy* is the passage from a lower to a higher grade of perfection, and *love* is joy associated with the idea of an external cause. He, then, that rises to higher perfection in the presence of the idea of God, loves God.)

[1] Qui se suosque affectus clare et distincte intelligit, Deum amat, et eo magis, quo se suosque affectus magis intelligit.'—*Eth.* v. prop. xv. Cf. Affectuum definitiones ad fin. part. iii.

But it is in the latter portion of the *Golden Verses* that we find a general view of life and of nature assigned as the ground of the precepts which have gone before. There are in all seventy-one lines; of the last thirty-two I venture to subjoin a translation as nearly literal as is consistent with intelligibility.[1]

'Let not soft sleep come upon thy eyelids, till thou hast pondered thy deeds of the day:

'Wherein have I sinned? What work have I done? What left undone that I was bound to do?

'Beginning at the first, go through even unto the last; and then let thy heart smite thee for the evil deed, but rejoice in the good work.

'Work at these commandments, and think upon them; these commandments shalt thou love.

'They shall surely set thee in the way of divine righteousness; yea, by Him who gave into our soul the Tetrad, well-spring of Nature everlasting.

[1] The text followed is that of Mullach, in the *Fragmenta Philosophorum Græcorum*, Paris, 1860, from the prolegomena to which my information is derived.

'Set to thy work with a will, beseeching the Gods for the end thereof.

'And when thou hast mastered these commandments, thou shalt know the being of the Gods that die not, and of men that die; thou shalt know of things, wherein they are diverse, and the kinship that binds them in one

'Know, so far as is permitted thee, that Nature in all things is like unto herself:

'That thou mayest not hope that of which there is no hope, nor be ignorant of that which may be.

'Know thou also that the woes of men are the work of their own hands:

'Miserable are they, because they see not and hear not the good that is very nigh them; and the way of escape from evil, few there be that understand it.

'Like rollers they roll to and fro, having endless trouble; so hath fate broken the wits [1] of mortal men.

'A baneful strife lurketh inborn in us, and goeth on the way with us to hurt us; this let not a man stir up, but avoid and flee.

'Verily, Father Zeus, thou wouldst free all men from much evil, if thou wouldst teach all men what manner of spirit they are of.

'But do thou be of good cheer; for they are Gods' kindred whom holy Nature leadeth onward, and in due order showeth them all things.

'And if thou hast any part with them, and keepest these commandments, thou shalt utterly heal thy soul, and save it from travail.

'Keep from the meats aforesaid, using judgment both in cleansing and in setting free thy soul.

[1] 'My brains are broken.'—Sir Walter Raleigh.

'Give heed to every matter, and set Reason on high, who best holdeth the reins of guidance.

'Then, when thou leavest the body, and comest into the free æther, thou shalt be a God undying, everlasting, neither shall death have any more dominion over thee.'

It is worth while to notice the comment of Hierokles on the self-judgment enjoined in the first of these lines.

'The judge herein appointed,' he says, 'is the most just of all, and the one which is most at home with us; namely conscience itself, and right reason. And each man is to be judged by himself, before whom our bringing-up has taught us to be more shamefast than before any other. (As a previous verse commands; of all men be most shamefast before thyself: *πάντων δὲ μάλιστ' αἰσχύνεο σαυτόν.*) For what is there of which one man can so admonish another, as he can himself? For the free will, misusing the liberty of its nature, turns away from the counsels of others, when it does not wish to be led by them; but a man's own reason must needs obey itself.'

Whether the clear statement of this doctrine of the conscience, *dominans ille deus in nobis*, as Cicero calls it, is originally Stoic or Pythagorean, must be left for the learned to decide. Hierokles, however, says expressly that the image of Reason guiding the lower faculties as the charioteer guides his chariot was derived by Plato from the Pythagoreans.

Very remarkable indeed is the view of Nature set forth in the subsequent verses. 'Know, so far as is permitted thee, that Nature is in all things uniform' (*φύσιν περὶ παντὸς ὁμοίην*). This conception of the world as a great cosmos or order is the primary con-

dition of human progress. In the earliest steps of primitive men in the simplest arts of life there is involved a dim recognition and practical use of it to the extent of its application in that stage. Every step forward is an increase in the range of its application. In the industrial arts, in the rules of health, the methods of healing, the preparation of food, in morals and politics, every advance is an application of past experience to new circumstances, in accordance with an observed order of nature. Philosophy consists in the conscious recognition of this method, and in the systematic use of it for the complete guidance of life. Aberration from it is the death of the rational soul; not, says Hierokles, that it ceases thereby to exist, but that it falls away from harmony with divine Nature and with reason. This fatal falling away brings about endless waste and perversion of strenuous effort; a hoping for things of which there is no hope, an ignorance of what may be; a perpetual striving to clamber up the back stairs of a universe that has no back stairs. The Neoplatonists were not wholly spotless in this regard. They had learned evil things of the Egyptians: magic, astrology, converse with spirits, theurgy, and the endeavour by trances and ecstasies to arrive at feelings and ideas which are alien to the healthy and wakeful mind. And so the uniformity of nature gives our commentator some little trouble, and requires to be interpreted.

'Know *so far as is permitted thee* (*ᾗ θέμις ἐστί*),' say the verses. 'For we ought not to yield to unreasoning prejudice, and accommodate the order and dignity of things to our fancies; but to keep within the bounds of truth and *know all things as it is permitted*, namely,

as the Demiurgic law has assigned to every one its place.'

So the commentator, reading into the verses more than the writer put there, not without edification. We, then, on our part, may read into them this—that it is not 'permitted' to regard the uniformity of nature as a dogma known with certainty, or exactness, or universality: but only within the range of human conduct, as a practical rule for the guidance of the same, and as the only source of beliefs that will not lead astray. For to affirm any general proposition of this kind to be certainly, or exactly, or universally true, is to make a mistake about the nature and limits of human knowledge. But at present it is a venial mistake, because the doctrine of the nature of human knowledge, *Erkenntniss-theorie*, Ken-lore, is only now being thoroughly worked out, so that our children will know a great deal more about it than we do, and have what they know much better and more simply expressed. It is almost infinitely more important to keep in view that the uniformity of nature is practically certain, practically exact, practically universal, and to make this conception the guide of our lives, than to remember that this certainty, exactness, and universality are only known practically, not in a theoretical or absolute way.

How far away is the doctrine of uniformity from fatalism! It begins directly to remind us that men suffer from *preventible* evils, that the people perisheth for lack of knowledge. 'Miserable are they, because they see not and hear not the good that is very nigh them; and the way of escape from evil, few there be that understand it.' The practical lesson is not that of

the pessimist, that we should give up the contest, recognize that life is an evil, and get out of it as best we may; but on the contrary, that having found anything wrong, we should set to work to mend it; for *the woes of men are the work of their own hands.*

'But be thou of good cheer, for they are of Gods' kindred whom holy Nature leadeth onward, and in due order showeth them all things.'

The expression (ἱερὰ προφέρουσα . . . δείκνυσιν ἕκαστα) belongs to the rite of initiation into the mysteries. Nature is represented as the hierophant, the guiding priest by whom the faithful were initiated into the divine secrets one by one. The history of mankind is conceived as such a mystic progress under the guidance of divine Nature. It has been sometimes said that the ancient world was entirely devoid of the conception of progress. But like most sweeping antitheses between *ancient* and *modern*, *East* and *West*, and the like, when we come to look a little closely into this assertion it becomes difficult to believe that any definite meaning can ever have been assigned to it. Certainly in the matter of physical science there is no case of firmer faith in progress than that of Hipparchus, who having made the great step of determining the solar and lunar motions, and having failed to extend the same methods to the planets, stored up observations in the sure and certain hope that a more fortunate successor would accomplish that work; which indeed was done by Ptolemy. And it is very important to notice that the exact sciences were regarded as the standard to which the others should endeavour to attain, as appears by the commentary on a subsequent passage in these

very verses. On the phrase 'using judgment both in *cleansing* and in *setting free* thy soul,' Hierokles explains that the *cleansing* or *lustration* of the rational soul means the mathematic sciences, and that the upward-leading liberation (ἀναγωγὸς λύσις), the freedom that is progressive, is *scientific inquiry*, or *a scientific view of things* (διαλεκτικὴ τῶν ὄντων ἐποπτεία), the clear and exact vision of one who has attained the highest grade of initiation. Accordingly, the medical sciences never lost the tradition of progress by continuous observation impressed on them by Hippocrates; and in the Alexandrian museum were trained that galaxy of famous physicians and naturalists which kept the school illustrious until the claims of culture were restored by the Arab conquest. Nor is it possible to deny the conception and practice of political progress to the great jurists of Rome, any more than that of ethical progress to the Stoic moralists. To the best minds, with whatever subject occupied, there was present this conception of divine Nature patiently educating the human race, ready to bring out of her storehouse good things without number in the proper time.

Nor was this hope of continued progress altogether a vain one, if we will only look in the right place for the fulfilment of it. Greek polity and culture had been planted in the East by Alexander's conquests from the Nile to the Indus, there to suck up and gather together the wisdom of centuries and of continents. When the light and the right were driven out of Europe by the Church, they found in the far East a home with the Omaiyad and Abbasside Caliphs, whose reign gave peace and breathing time to the old and young civilization that

was ready to grow. Across the north of Africa came again the progressive culture of Greece and Rome, enriched with precious jewels of old-world lore; it took firm ground in Spain, and the light and the right were flashed back into Europe from the blades of Saracen swords. From Bagdad to Cordova, in the great days of the Caliphate, the best minds had faith in human progress to be made by observation of the order of nature. Here again the true culture was overridden and destroyed by the development of the Mohammedan religion; but not until the sacred torch had been safely handed on to the new nations of convalescent Europe.

If the singer of the *Golden Verses* could have contemplated on these lines the history of the two thousand years that were to succeed him, he would have seen an uninterrupted succession of naturalists and physicians, philosophers and statesmen, all steadily reaching forward to the good things that were before, never losing hold of what had already been attained. And we, looking back, may see that through overwhelming difficulties and dangers and diseases holy Nature has indeed been leading onward the kindred of the Gods, slowly but surely unfolding to them the roll of the heavenly mysteries.

Of course, if we restrict our view to Europe itself, we meet with a far more complex and difficult problem; a problem of pathology as opposed to one of healthy growth. We have to explain the apparent anomaly of two epochs of comparative sanity and civilization separated by the disease and delirium of the Catholic episode.

Just as the traveller, who has been worn to the bone

by years of weary striving among men of another skin, suddenly gazes with doubting eyes upon the white face of a brother, so, if we travel backwards in thought over the darker ages of the history of Europe, we at length reach back with such bounding of heart to men who had like hopes with ourselves; and shake hands across that vast with the singers of the *Golden Verses*, our own true spiritual ancestors.

Well may Greece sing to the earth her mother, in the Litany of Nations:—

> I am she that made thee lovely with my beauty
> From north to south:
> Mine, the fairest lips, took first the fire of duty
> From thine own mouth.
> Mine, the fairest eyes, sought first thy laws and knew them
> Truths undefiled;
> Mine, the fairest hands, took freedom first into them,
> A weanling child.[1]

Let us now put together the view of Nature and of Life which is presented to us by the *Golden Verses*, with a view to considering its fitness for cosmic emotion. We are taught therein to look upon Nature as a divine Order or Cosmos, acting uniformly in all of its diverse parts; which order, by means of its uniformity, is continually educating us and teaching us to act rightly. The ideal character, that which is best fitted to receive the teaching of Nature, is one which has Conscience for its motive power and Reason for its guide. The main point to be observed is that the two kinds of cosmic emotion run together and become one. The macrocosm is viewed only in relation to human action; nature is presented to the emotions as the guide and teacher of

[1] Swinburne, *Songs before Sunrise.*

humanity. And the microcosm is viewed only as tending to complete correspondence with the external; human conduct is a subject for reverence only in so far as it is consonant to the demiurgic law, in harmony with the teaching of divine Nature. This union of the two sides of cosmic emotion belongs to the essence of the philosophic life, as the corresponding intellectual conception is of the essence of the scientific view of things.

There were other parts of the Pythagorean conception of Nature and Man which we cannot at present so easily accept. And even so much as is here suggested we cannot hold as the Pythagoreans held it, because there are the thoughts and the deeds of two thousand years between. These ideas fall in very well with the furniture of our minds; but a great deal of the furniture is new since their time, and changes their place and importance. Of the detailed machinery of the Pythagorean creed these verses say nothing. Of the sacred fire, the hearth of the universe, with sun and planets and the earth's double antichthon revolving round it, the whole enclosed in a crystal globe with nothing outside—of the 'Great Age' of the world, after which everything occurs over again in exactly the same order—of the mystic numbers, and so forth, we find no mention in these verses, and they do not lose much by it, though on that account Zeller calls them 'colourless.' But a remembrance of these doctrines will help us to appreciate the change that has come over our view of the world.

First, then, the cosmos that we have to do with is no longer a definite whole including absolutely all

existence. The old cosmos had a boundary in space, a finite extent in time; for the Great Age might be regarded as a circle, on which you return to the same point after going once round. Beyond the crystal sphere of the fixed stars was nothing; outside that circle of time no history. But now the real universe extends at least far beyond the cosmos, the order that we actually know of. The sum total of our experience and of the inferences that can fairly be drawn from it is only, after all, a part of something larger. So sings one whom great poets revere as a poet, but to whom writers of excellent prose, and even of leading articles, refuse the name:—

> I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
> And all I see, multiplied as high as I can cipher, edge but the rim of the farther systems.
> Wider and wider they spread, expanding always expanding,
> Outward and outward, and for ever outward.
> . . . . . .
> There is no stoppage, and never can be stoppage;
> If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their surfaces, were this moment reduced back to a pallid float, it would not avail in the long run;
> We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
> And as surely go as much farther—and then farther and farther.
> A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not hazard the span, or make it impatient;
> They are but parts—anything is but a part.
> See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that;
> Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that.[1]

Whatever conception, then, we can form of the external cosmos must be regarded as only provisional and not final, as waiting revision when we shall have pushed the bounds of our knowledge further away into time and space. It must always, therefore, have a character

[1] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*.

of incompleteness about it, a want, a stretching out for something better to come, the expectation of a further lesson from the universal teacher, Experience. And this not only by way of extension of space and time, but by increase of our knowledge even about this part that we know of. Our conception of the universe is for us, and not for our children, any more than it was for our fathers.

But again, this incompleteness does not belong to our conception of the external cosmos alone, but to that of the internal cosmos also. Human nature is fluent, it is constantly though slowly changing, and the universe of human action is changing also. Whatever general conception we may form of good actions and bad ones, we must regard it as quite valid only for ourselves; the next generation will have a slightly modified form of it, but not the same thing. The Kantian universality is no longer possible. No maxim can be valid at all times and places for all rational beings; a maxim valid for us can only be valid for such portions of the human race as are practically identical with ourselves.

Here then we have two limitations to keep in mind when we form our cosmic conceptions. On both sides they are provisional; instead of picturing to ourselves a universe, we represent only a changing part; instead of contemplating an eternal order, and absolute right, we find only a changing property of a shifting organism.

Are we then to be disappointed? I think not; for if we consider these limitations a little more closely, we shall perceive an advantage in each of them.

First, of the external cosmos. Our conception is

limited to a part of things. But to what part? Why, precisely to the part that concerns us. The universe we have to consider is the whole of that knowledge which can rightly influence human action. For, wherever there is a question of guiding human action, there is a possibility of profiting by experience on the assumption that nature is uniform; that is, there is room for the application of science. All practical questions, therefore, are within the domain of science. And we may show conversely that all questions in the domain of science, all questions, that is, which have a real intelligible meaning, and which may be answered either now or at some future time by inferences founded on the uniformity of nature, are *practical* questions in a very real and important sense. For the interrogation of nature, without and within him, is a most momentous part of the work of man on this earth, seeing how all his progress has depended upon conscious or unconscious labour at this task. And although the end of all knowledge is action, and it is only for the sake of action that knowledge is sought by the human race, yet, in order that it may be gained in sufficient breadth and depth, it is necessary that the individual should seek knowledge *for its own sake*. The seeking of knowledge for its own sake is a practical pursuit of incalculable value to humanity. The pretensions of those who would presume to clothe genius in a strait-waistcoat, who would forbid it to attempt this task because Descartes failed in it, and that one because Comte knew nothing about it, would be fatally mischievous if they could be seriously considered by those whom they might affect. No good work in science has ever been done under such conditions; and

no good worker can fail to see the utter futility and short-sightedness of those who advocate them. For there is no field of inquiry, however apparently insignificant, that does not teach the worker in it to distrust his own powers of prevision as to what he is likely to find; to expect the unexpected; to be suspicious of his own accuracy if everything comes out quite as it 'ought to;' but not to hazard the shadow of a guess about the degree of 'utility' that may result from his investigations. Man's creative energy may be checked and hindered, or perverted from the truth; but it is not to be regulated by a pedantic schoolmaster who thought he could whip the centuries with his birch broom.

The cosmos, then, which science now presents to our minds, is only a part of something larger which includes it. But at the same time it is the whole of what concerns us, and no more than what concerns us. Wherever human knowledge establishes itself, that point becomes thenceforward a centre of practical human interest. It, and whatever valid inference can be connected with it, is the business of all mankind.

So also, if we consider the limitation imposed on our idea of the internal cosmos by the changing character of human nature, we shall find that we have gained more than we have lost by it. It is true that we can no longer think of conscience and reason as testifying to us of things eternal and immutable. Human nature is no longer there, a definite thing from age to age, persisting unaltered through the vicissitudes of cities and peoples. Very nearly constant it is, practically constant for so many centuries; but not constant through that range of time which it practically concerns us to know about and

to ponder. But, on the other side, what a flood of light is let in by this very fact, not only on human nature, but on the whole world! It is impossible to exaggerate the effect of the doctrine of evolution on our conception of man and of nature. Suppose all moving things to be suddenly stopped at some instant, and that we could be brought fresh, without any previous knowledge, to look at this petrified scene. The spectacle would be inensely absurd. Crowds of people would be senselessly standing on one leg in the street, looking at one another's backs; others would be wasting their time by sitting in a train in a place difficult to get at, nearly all with their mouths open and their bodies in some contorted, unrestful posture. Clocks would stand with their pendulums on one side. Everthing would be disorderly, conflicting, in its wrong place. But once remember that the world is in motion, is going somewhere, and everything will be accounted for and found just as it should be. Just so great a change of view, just so complete an explanation, is given to us when we recognize that the nature of man and beast and of all the world is changing, is going somewhere. The silly maladaptations in organic nature are seen to be steps towards the improvement or discarding of imperfect organs. The *baneful strife* which *lurketh inborn in us, and goeth on the way with us to hurt us*, is found to be the relic of a time of savage or even lower condition.

It is probable that the doctrine of evolution fills a somewhat larger space in our attention than belongs to its ultimate influence. In the next century, perhaps, men will not think so much about it; they will be paying a new attention to some new thing. But it will

have seized upon their minds, and will dominate all their thoughts to an extent that we cannot as yet conceive. When the sun is rising we pay special attention to him and admire his glories; but when he is well risen we forget him, because we are busy walking about in his light.

Meanwhile, the doctrine of evolution may be made to compensate us for the loss of the immutable and eternal verities by supplying us with a general conception of a *good* action, in a wider sense than the ethical one.

If I have evolved myself out of something like an amphioxus, it is clear to me that I have become *better* by the change; I have risen in the organic scale; I have become more organic. Of all the changes that I have undergone, the greater part must have been changes in the organic direction; some in the opposite direction, some perhaps neutral. But if I could only find out which, I should say that those changes which have tended in the direction of greater organization were good, and those which tended in the opposite direction bad. Here there is no room for proof; the words 'good' and 'bad' belong to the practical reason, and if they are defined, it is by pure choice. I choose that definition of them which must on the whole cause those people who act upon it to be selected for survival. The good action, then, is a mode of action which distinguishes organic from inorganic things, and which makes an organic thing more organic, or raises it in the scale. I shall try presently to determine more precisely what is the nature of this action; we must now merely remember that my actions are to be regarded as

good or bad according as they tend to improve me as an organism, to make me move further away from those intermediate forms through which my race has passed, or to make me retrace these upward steps and go down again. Here we have our general principle for the internal cosmos, the world of our own actions.

What now is our principle for the external cosmos? We consider here again not a statical thing, but a vast series of events. We want to contemplate not the nature of the external universe as it now is, but the history of its changes; not a perpetual cycle of similar events, with nothing new under the sun, but a drama, whose beginning is different from its middle, and the middle from the end. For practical purposes, which are what concern us, the solar system is a quite sufficient cosmos. We have certainly a history of it, furnished to us by the nebular hypothesis; and the truth of this hypothesis is a matter of practical interest, because the failure of the inferences on which it is founded would modify our actions very considerably. Still the great use is to show that the life upon the earth must have been evolved from inorganic matter; for the evolution of life is that part of the history of the cosmos which directly concerns us. Now here we have the enormous series of events which bridges over the gulf between the smallest piece of colloid matter and the human organism; this is our external cosmos. Must we leave it as a series of events? or can we find a general principle by which the series shall be represented as a single event constantly going on? Clearly we can, for the single event is a mode of action which distinguishes organic from inorganic things, and which makes