THE REFLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

IN THE

ESSAYS OF THE 18TH CENTURY.

Presented for the degree of M.A., June 1913 by Eliza Mary Ann Barnes.

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The Reflection of contemporary religious thought in the essays of the 18th century.

1. Introduction.

The 18th century, that golden age of English prose, witnessed the attainment of perfection by two of most popular modern forms of literature, the Novel and the Essay. However ancient the thing itself might be, the name "essay" seems first to have been employed by Michel de Montaigne, whose charming "livre de bonne foi" graced the literature of France in the second half of the sixteenth century. Both he, and his English disciple Bacon, used the word in its natural sense of an attempt as opposed to an accomplishment. In them and in all their successors, it was a term expressing modesty and a sense of the incompleteness, irregularity, mere tentativeness, characteristic of the work appearing under that title. Bacon obviously did not attach much importance to his He wrote them in English instead of in the "universal language", and considered them as nothing greater than mere note-book jottings, "set down reflectively and significantly"; as "grains of salt, which give appetite rather than satiety".

Though earlier in date, the work of Montaigne approaches closer to the later essay than does that of Bacon. It has the same agreeable chattiness and delightful egotism, the same abandon and all pervading charm. Bacon is too uniformly terse and concise, too serious, too unadorned; and it was only by reason of the 17th century craze for Character-writing that the modern essay was so soon evolved.

Cowley and Temple manifest the gradual fusion of the Character and the Baconian Essay, which in them lost much of its rigidity and frequent heaviness, imperceptibly attaining its original elasticity, together with a gentlemanly ease and engaging conversational tone such as constitutes much of the charm of the work of Addison and Steele.

The journalism of Defoe supplied the idea for the periodical manner of publication. In all the early newspapers the predominating item was foreign news, which was at once easier to obtain, and more capable of amplification, downright invention or added interest by a clever and copious admixture of the author's fertile imagination. No wonder therefore that the Tatler, as

first conceived by the ready brain of Steele, fell back upon the inevitable foreign news, which it combined with the latest gossip of the coffee-houses. The earlier papers naturally bore some marks of the crudity of their predecessors, but by degrees Steele grew more accustomed to his work, and more interested in it, so that before long the foreign and political element was thrust into the background, leaving the writer at liberty to treat of subjects whose interest might be for every age and every nation.

According to Steele's own declaration, the purpose of this new project of his was to instruct such men as take an interest in public affairs as to what they ought to think, to report and consider all matters that occurred to him, and to provide entertainment for the fair sex, a task for which the author was well qualified by his knowledge of the world, learnt not from books, but from direct and personal intercourse. Steele was a delightful companion, humourous, gay, and easy—going; the kind of man who is a welcome guest at almost every table. Of good education and of extensive knowledge, he was nothing of a student; he was pre-eminently a man

i. Tatler 1.

of the world, and therefore its fittest delineator, teacher and adviser. Though begun by the unaided hand of Steele, the Tatler was soon enriched by the contributions of Addison, whose high tone speedily awakened the ever susceptible Steele to a consciousness of the moral good which his little periodical might effect, and it was not long before he unwittingly rose to something of the moral dignity of his coadjutor, even while retaining that wonted lightness and graceful charm which endeared him to the hearts of all his readers, and assured the wide-spread popularity of his work.

In all the papers produced by their joint efforts Steele was overshadowed by his more famous colleague, though in reality he was of much greater importance to the success of the work than Addison himself. He planned, and guided; he stimulated, and restrained; how effectually is only seen when his wise control was withdrawn and Addison was left to work alone. The eighth volume of the Spectator was a failure, not because the essays had fallen off in quality, not because the humour was dead or less kindly, but because Addison was ignorant of what was required by the public, because

he was lacking in the nice discrimination displayed by Steele in his choice of subjects, because he preached and moralized for ever, and forgot that his readers might sometimes like a change. The first seven volumes of the Spectator can be read with infinite pleasure and unabated interest; but the eighth very quickly becomes wearisome, and demands either a very strong will, or the pressure of dire necessity to enable one to read it through. The light banter, the friendly conversational tone, the confidential chattiness had disappeared; the popularity of the old Spectator was not revived, and it is significant that the work came to an abrupt conclusion at the end of a single volume.

It was but natural that the success achieved by Steele and Addison's efforts should raise up an innumerable host of imitators, none of whom attained any degree of merit till Dr Johnson appeared with his Rambler and Idler. The reception of these works was not altogether favourable; Johnson fell into much the same error as Addison had done before. He was too uniform, and lacked an adequate knowledge of the requirements of the public for whom it was his business to cater. He had nothing of the sprightly wit and genial bonhomic which had

i Rambler 208.

endeared Steele to all who knew him; his papers were is usually clouded with gloom and melancholy; yet in spite of all his limitations he seems to have given new life to the periodical essay, which flourished more widely and fructified more abundantly after his cultivation than it ever had before.

By the latter half of the century the public had a preconceived notion of what the essay ought to be, and required every writer to conform to it. No one was allowed to follow his own peculiar bent; but each man had to shape himself to suit the prevailing taste. The essayists were blamed for want of originality if they pressed too closely on the steps of the inimitable Spectator; they were charged with presumption if they dared in any wise to wander from the path beaten by his feet. Variety was demanded, and all themes had been treated of before. Their only chance lay in the presentation of the old ideas decked out in a novel dress. Yet however great and manifold might be its drawbacks the Essay as a form of literature took a firm hold on the affections of the nation, a hold which it has never yet relaxed.

The old modest idea of tentativeness was never lost; the essay was still contrasted with the finished

i Rambler 109.

treatise, as requiring less knowledge, less reasoning power, and less book learning. Its subjects comprised the types which Bacon loved, and that character-drawing which had before achieved so wide a popularity. But perhaps its most delightful characteristic was the revival of Montaigne's naive and charming introduction of the ego. The writer often seems to be holding a confidential conversation with the reader, letting him into all his secrets, and entrusting him with all his most private concerns. genial good-fellowship between teacher and taught has an infinitely pleasant effect. Where there is no condescension and no assumption of superiority, it is with pleasure rather than offence that one finds true the admission of the authors of the Connoisseur: "We essay-writers are the greatest egotists, and are consequently most vain and ostentatious." i One could as easily find fault with Chaucer's delightfully humourous treatment of himself as with the charming personal prattle of the 18th century essavists.

i. Connoisseur 88.

The Religious Condition of the 18th Century, as shown in the Essays.

Perhaps no two centuries have ever been more widely different in their moral and religious tone than the 17th and 18th centuries in England. The former had been remarkable for its depth and earnestness. It had witnessed the martyrdom of a king, brought to the scaffold mainly for refusing to disown his religious principles, and the triumph of his equally sincere opponents, Cromwell and the Puritans; it had produced the most exalted and sublime religious epic of which the world can boast, and had abounded in earnest and inspired writers of religious works of every kind. To almost all the nation religion was a very vital thing, forming an essential part of its life and tingeing practically the whole of its thought. the 17th century felt the power of religion as deeply as it has ever been felt in England; the nation pondered over the great truths which it taught them, accepted with reverential awe the inexplicable mysteries of the Christian faith, and its men would as soon have thought of taking their own lives as of questioning a single word of

the Bible narratives. In the whole nation there was something of that temper of Sir Thomas Browne, who, as he himself confessed, loved to lose himself in a mystery.

The effect of the reigns of the two later Stuart kings was to destroy all this spirit of reverence and piety. Immorality and shamelessness were rampant in high places; ridicule of and contempt for all sacred things. Men of genius no longer sang the divine wisdom and goodness, but prostituted their Muse to the low desires of the courtiers at Whitehall. Yet for the state of literature and morality during this period the whole blame must not be laid upon the king and court. In the words of Edward Moore, the Essayist, "During the usurpation of Cromwell, we were a nation of psalm singers; which is the best reason I can give for the inundation of bawdy songs that poured in upon us at the Restoration; for though the king and his court were indefatigable in the propagation of wantonness, they would have found it a very hard task to debauch the whole kingdom, if it had not been a kingdom of enthusiasts". By the mere laws of nature a reaction was inevitable, ii and the recoil was violent in proportion to the previous impetus.

Yet the sympathy of the nation with the miserable code of morality, or rather immorality, now in vogue was

i World 42

ii. Spectator 119; Freeholder 37.

far from a whole-hearted one. As we learn from the instructive and entertaining diary of the humanly faulty Pepys, the country at large, and he himself in particular, was shocked at the lengths to which profaneness and all kinds of wanton and extravagant pleasure had been carried. Under this low and sensual influence, however, religion for the time became a thing of the past, i and the scanty honour which was paid to it during these few short years prepared the way for the severe criticism and hostile questioning to which it was subjected during the succeeding century.

vital religious creed is never more strongly felt than when it is withdrawn. The 18th century, in spite of the constant harping upon the subject of religion was perhaps more than any other period an age of irreligion; iii men prided themselves above all things on gaining the reputation of atheists and free—thinkers, iiii and concealed their natural goodness of heart and religious inclinations as if they were the most heinous crimes. Their supreme ambition was to appear more vivious than they really were

i. Spectator 111; Examiner 42; Guardian 20; Connoisseur 113;
Mirror 3.

ii Guardian 65 11i World 21; 57; Connoisseur 109 etc. iv Tatler 77; 213. v. Spectator 458; Mirror 40

or had any intention of being; and for this purpose they voluntarily accused themselves of every form of wickedness and vile debauchery. Vice was no longer held in horror and detestation, but assumed the gay dress of fashion in and walked hand in hand with all the finest gentlemen and ladies in the land.

It is significant that all through that section of literature which it is here our business to consider runs the melancholy note of the time's depravity. It is struck first by Steele in the Tatler; it recurs with greater frequency and force in the Spectator; vit is not entirely absent from the Guardian; vit is taken up by Johnson in the Rambler vi and the Idler vii and by Hawkesworth in the Adventurer; viii it makes itself heard in the essays of Goldsmith, and in the World of Edward Moore; and finally it is reached in the Connoisseur, in the Mirror, in the Olla Podrida xiii and in the copious essays of Dr Knox xiv. There can be no better proof than is here supplied of the immeasurable influence for good exercised by some strong religious faith. Any

i Spectator 399; World 1; Connoisseur 74. ii Olla Podrida 41 iii. Tatler 12. iv. Spectator 6; 50; 575 etc. v.Guardian 21 vi. Rambler 119; 175. vii. Idler 33. viii Adventurer 106;123 lx Goldsmith's Essays 17. x World 1; ;62; 189. xi Connoisseur 74; 109. xii Mirror 3. xlii. Olla Podrida 29; xiv. Knox 44; 22; ;39.

belief is better than none at all, and in spite or rather because of the general prevalence of irreligion this fact seems to have been amply realised by most of the popular essayists. They defined religion, explained in what it consisted, and pointed out the benefit of trying to live up to its high ideals. According to Addison there are two heads under which religion must be considered. The first, faith, "comprehends what we are to believe:" the second, morality, "what we are to practice". Most men are agreed in their opinion of the necessity of the latter; but with regard to the former there are perhaps but few less creeds than there are men in the world to hold them. It is generally, therefore, in points of faith that various religions differ from each other, and by points of faith that various sects are formed.

England during the 18th century seems to have afforded considerable matter of mirth to such as found it possible to laugh about so serious a matter as religion. The youthful authors of the Connoisseur begin one of their essays with the observation of the French "that a cat, a priest, and an old woman, are sufficient to constitute a religious sect in England"; ii the Earl of Cork declares

¹ Spectator 459. ii Connoisseur 61.

that "there have arisen, within these few years, very numerous tribes of Methodists, Moravians, Middletonians, Muggletonians, Hutchinsonians, etc"; while long before the Tatler had remarked that Great Britain was particularly fruitful in religions "that shoot up and flourish in this climate more than in any other", going on to mention and describe a vast number of them - Protestantism, Popery, Presbyterianism, Judaism, Deism, Anabaptism, Quakerism, Atheism, the creed of the Philadephians, and that small body who called themselves Sweet Singers of Israel..

The infinite variety and flourishing condition of these sects is to be ascribed to the increase of toleration which was now beginning to be extended towards iii them. To a much greater extent than one perhaps would care to own, this wider toleration was primarily due to the general laxity of religious feelings under the second Charles and James. The attacks upon the Roman Catholics and Dissenters take a milder tone, and lose much of their ancient bitterness. Now the poisoned arrows of intolerance are mainly reserved for atheists, deists, and the generality of free-thinkers, not for those who differed but for those who denied. Addison and Steele in particular

i Connoisseur 17 ii Tatler 257 iii Olla Podrida 18.

with their customary large heartedness, warmly espeused the cause of toleration, and expressed the utmost abhorrence of those who persecuted their fellows for conscience sake. Nor is Goldsmith far behind in the advocation of these liberal principles, and though it is true that some of the subsequent essayists, younger and shallower, and lacking in broad-minded sympathy, did not scruple to turn the cruel weapons of their ridicule upon those with whom they disagreed, yet active persecution had for the most part ceased, and generally speaking, men were allowed to go to heaven in their own peculiar way.

It is nearly always true that man talks little about what he feels most deeply. There can therefore be little wonder that in this century of irreligion, religious questions began freely to be discussed among all classes. Hawkesworth mentions these fashionable disputes with the deepest grief. What right or what capacity have ignorant and illiterate men to debate on questions of the greatest moment? Such discussions must of necessity be carried on with irreverence and blasphemy. Colman and Thornton speak of the new mania for theological disputes with their characteristic satire; while again and again

^{1.} Tatler 204; 257; Spectator 185; 459; 516.

ii Citizen of the World 42; 111. iii. Connoisseur 6;86;118 iv Adventurer 10. v Connoisseur 61.

the terrible effects of this wanton and negligent treatment of such vital topics are earnestly insisted on. 1 Questions are raised which would tax the greatest intellect to answer; men familiarize themselves with the ridicule of sacred things; and though sincere Christians at the outset, they will probably before long degenerate into free-thinkers and atheists.

established beliefs was inevitable at a time when religion began to lose its hold upon the minds of men. The nation was no longer spell-bound by the awful mysteries of religion, no longer content to receive in reverential awe the divine truths entrusted to it in the gospel revelation. It began to realise that the basis on which its beliefs had rested for ages was veiled in mystery, and a natural desire arose to pull aside the concealing shroud. Christianity could not now be accepted with the blind and unquestioning faith of former days; it must be able to bear the rigid test of reason, or it was unworthy the credence of a thinking and rational creature.

Rationalism was the keynote of the literature of the 18th century, and especially of the religious literature.

i Adventurer 10; 13: 14;

Hawkesworth, indeed, in one of those sublime and beautiful Eastern stories where his genius seems to soar to its highest pitch, goes a step beyond this, and asserts that "revelation is necessary to the establishment even of natural religion", since "where the divine prescription has either been withheld or corrupted, superstition has rendered piety cruel and error has armed virtue against herself".

i This mode of argument, however, was somewhat unusual; it was more common to base revelation on natural religion, than to think oneself obliged to accept revelation before the truth of natural religion could be established.

Thoughts about questions of this kind were agitating the whole country up till about 1750. The entire nation, not only the small class of literati, took the deepest interest in them; they were the subjects of debate to every intelligent man in his club, his coffee-house, or other usual place of resort. Yet it is characteristic of the English mind that public opinion invariably remained on the side of Christianity and orthodox, belief in spite of the serious and weighty objections which may always be urged against miracles and the mystical tendency of the whole Christian creed.

Even during the time of their greatest strength,

i Adventurer 91.

the Deists, or opponents of revelation, were despised, insulted and attacked by their literary enemies and the nation generally, so that there is little cause for wonder that by the middle of the century their race seemed almost extinct. Bolingbroke, whose death occurred in 1751, was among the last of the professed Deists; and the attitude towards the whole tribe of them is exemplified in Dr Johnson's satiric out-burst. "Sir, he was a scoundrel and a coward; a scoundrel for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality, a coward because he had not the resolution to fire it off himself, but left half-a-crown to a beggarly Scotchman to draw the trigger after his death". The blunderbuss typified the words of Bolingbroke, published posthumously by David Mallet, the "Beggarly But although Johnson thought that the Scotchman". bullets fell quite harmless, and that the time was past when they would have taken good effect, the sect of the Deists began once again to multiply and to become even more threatening and rampant.

The doubts concerning the reasonableness and inspiration of the Biblical narrative naturally led the way to further doubts concerning its historical veracity and genuineness. Accordingly the theologians of the

second half of the century employed themselves in piling up evidences to confound the suspicions of their sceptical opponents, a task for which they were quite unfitted owing to their lack of definite historical knowledge, their inability to gain access to the requisite documents, and their ignorance of the means of adequate historical research. There was however, a growing interest in antiquarian discoveries, and a consciousness of the light which they might throw upon scriptural subjects. History began to take a wider range, and to unite itself at last with philosophy. ii Among other things attacked by the free-thinkers miracles had stood chief. During the earlier part of the century the only answer brought forward was the reasonableness of Christ's miracles. Now the Observer pointed out the historical grounds on which that belief was based. Among the writers of our Lord's own time the miraculous performances were too recent, and their authenticity too notorious to be called in question. Accordingly. instead of attempting the impossible task of confutation. those unbelieving Jews who were eye-witnesses of the marvellous acts ascribed them to the power of the devil: those heathers "who had not ocular demonstration, but could not contest facts so well established", either

i Knox's Essays. 43

ii Lounger 5.

instanced other men whom they declared to have performed deeds of equal wonder, or were completely silent. this latter fact modern unbelievers had drawn their principal cause for scepticism; but is it not more natural to believe that they said nothing because they could not controvert the facts than that the wonders The only fault in all such themselves never happened? arguments as these is that it is universally taken for granted that the Evangelical recorders were contemporary with the events they related. There is no attempt whatever made to enquire into this question, nor into that of when and why the miracles finally ceased. they ceased early was universally admitted, but no one found himself competent to advance and question further. Yet in spite of this limitation, Cumberland was a master of clear and weighty argument, used effectively in the cause of the creed he loved.

This second controversy had little interest except for those who were personally engaged in it. It did not deal with a vital question as the Djist controversy had done. The masses cared little whether the sacred

i Observer 10; 11; 65.

ii Observer 32.

stories were written by the persons by whom, and at the times at which they were represented to have been; they had temporarily routed their Deistical foes, and were now content to enjoy in peace the fruits of victory without advancing to a further struggle.

At all times and among all peoples, theology and morality have gone hand in hand .God's will, and his power of reward and punishment, have supplied the reason for, and a stimulus to, virtue. But when men began to lose their belief in an anthropomorphic God, and to substitute in his place an all-pervading spirit or essence, a great over-ruling force, or other indefinite power; when they ceased to give credit to the records in which he had plainly expressed his will and issued his commands; when they began to doubt the existence of a heaven or a hell, what motives to morality then remained?. The 18th century was primarily an age of moralists, and its theology generally took a moral turn. Parties of different religious beliefs adduced different reasons for a moral life. The Intellectual School identified the divine law with the national law; the School of Shaftesbury held the doctrine that "whatever is, is right", and utterly disbelieved in the existence of evil; Butler and the

i Olla Podrida 41.

Common Sense School insisted on the supremacy of conscience, and enthroned it as an infallible judge between good and evil; the Utilitarians maintained that utility should be the end of morality, and the greatest happiness of the greatest number the aim of all institutions and individuals. Accordingly they claimed that man's duty, so far as he was able, was to promote the welfare and happiness of the whole human race even at the expense of his own private happiness; alleging at the same time that the best and only means of effecting this world-wide felicity was by virtue of life, by refraining from the transgression of any of the moral laws. There was, however a coarser form of Utilitarianism than this; a form wherein the motive to morality was the fear of hell and the hope of heaven; a form whereby man was to be virtuous merely to secure his own personal happiness. Degrading as this moral system seems, it was nevertheless well suited to the temper of that profligate and abandoned age, and apparently constituted the general and orthodox idea. The doctrine is exactly expressed in the clear and concise statement of Paley:- "Virtue is the doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness".

Some form or other of this low utilitarian

policy was everywhere prevalent. Moralists of every type set forth the pros and cons of virtue and vice, weighed them against each other, and in consequence of the rewards of the former and the punishments of the latter decided that virtue was to be chosen and vice shunned. Those who realised that virtue and happiness were not synonymous terms on earth, urged men to virtue and deterred them from vice by opening out before their eyes the glorious prospects of immortality; those who considered that even in this world virtue was most frequently rewarded and vice punished, added that in default of any material benefits the innate satisfaction felt at the completion of a virtuous action was quite sufficient to compensate for whatever petty annoyance it might bring in its train. Nevertheless even these promises and threats were found insufficient to work a reform in the moral life of the Men became no better than they had always been; indeed it was uncertain whether they did not become worse. On all hands it had to be admitted that the age was a shamefully immoral and profligate one, and that the prudential considerations of future and even present recompense had failed to stem the tide of the prevailing It was under the full realization of this that wickedness. the Evangelicals and Methodists began to change the preceding tactics and to insist that man was not to be saved by good works, of which indeed his sinful nature was incapable, but by a living faith in the atonement of his Saviour Jesus Christ; he must be converted by the direct agency of the holy spirit, must feel the power of God within his soul, and throw himself upon the divine promises of help and guidance for the future conduct of his By the end of the century the time had come for a partial subversion of the old rationalistic theory, and for the substitution in its place of a complete though no longer a blind faith in the inscrutable mysteries of the Christian creed.

24.

111. Attitude of Essayists towards religion. - The Essayists as Religious and Moral Reformers.

In the 18th century, no less than at the present day, it was necessary for the editor of a periodical, if he wished to attain popularity, to make a careful study of contemporary affairs, to discover the likes and dislikes of his fellows, and to treat of subjects which would be of interest to the world at large. At a time when religious questions occupied so much of the popular attention, it was inevitable that the periodical essays should contain a large admixture of theological work. Some readers would be pleased to find their own thoughts set down in writing in the daily papers, others would find consolation in having their doubts and fears combatted away by men whom they could regard as their intellectual superiors. Generally speaking the essayists were deeply and sincerely religious, and would have despised themselves for ever if they had debased themselves to the assumption of that appearance of irreligion affected by so many foolish young beaux of the time in accordance with the fashion under Charles 11.

In their attitude towards religion they were for

the most part strictly orthodox. The sentiments expressed by them were the sentiments entertained by the whole English nation. It would have been unwise, at least financially, for the periodical essayists to have shocked their readers by the setting forth of strange and unorthodox opinions; it was their best policy to express the thought of the age they lived in rather than to attempt to guide it, and to draw a veil over such of their ideas as were at variance with those of the majority. Such hypocritical silence and concealment, however, were seldom needed. Atheists and free-thinkers knew themselves too heartily hated to expect success in periodical work, and accordingly left it to those who had no need to suppress their true beliefs. Addison, the model of all subsequent 18th century essayists, clearly voiced his preference for the religion of his native land, and urged his readers to conform to it. Most of the essay-writers had a firm and unshakeable belief in the truth of the whole Bible narrative, and gave absolute credence to "the war in heaven, the condition of the fallen angels, the state of innocence, the temptation of the serpent, and the fall of man", as related in Paradise Lost. The

¹ Spectator 287; 459. ii Spectator 315.

story of man's origin was still received with the profoundest faith, and among the orthodox with no idea of an allegorical or symbolic meaning. They still maintained the direct inspiration of the Bible i, and hence its immense superiority over the most sublime and excellent productions of the ancients. The Scriptures were to them the sacred writings, to be loved, admired and honoured as the words of God himself.

These essayists for the most part brought an inimitable wit and delightful humour to the service of religion, and deservedly reaped the reward they longed for, the diffusion of a wide-spread influence for good. It was the expressed purpose of them all to effect reforms in the social, moral and religious conditions of their fellows, and to leave their country better than they found it. At the opening of his Tatler, Steele was too modest to aim very high. "I shall take upon me", he writes, "only indecorums, improprieties and negligencies in such as should give us better examples"; but later he gained in boldness, and proudly stated his intention to stem, as far as he could, "the prevailing torrent of vice and innocence ignorance"," and "to recommend truth, honour, and virtue,

i. Spectator 273; Idler 89. (ii Spectator 483; Tatler 238 &c (Adventurer 67; 108; 140. iii Spectator 160; Guardian 21; 86 &c.(iv.Tatler 233. (Guardian 111 etc v Tatler 39.

as the chief ornaments of life". The expression of some such purpose became a fashion; a fashion which was rigidly adhered to throughout the century. All future essayists felt it incumbent upon them to follow in the steps of their leader, and like him to impress upon the world the noble end for which they worked. Nor were they satisfied merely with the utterance of this ambition; they worked earnestly and zealously to attain it, never ceasing to attack the vices they saw about them, nor to eulogize the virtues. They tried to inculcate religious truths, and to induce men to live up to them. They attempted to reform the literature of the time, and to remedy the low condition They laboured ardently and indefatigably of the stage. in the cause of virtue and of truth, and sufficient honour cannot be paid to them for the elevated and ennobling tone which marks their works.

Yet this their lofty ambition had one great fault, apparent especially in the lighter and more satirical of the essays. The authors of the World and Connoisseur prefessed themselves desirous of ridiculing men out of their vice and folly; Swift and even the wise Addison found something to say in favour of such a use of laughter,

i Tatler 271. ii Spectator 34; Guardian 116; Rambler 208
Adventurer 60,137Intelligencer 1;
World 1;61;104; Connoisseur 1;71;94;Mirror 1;
94; Lounger 101; Observer 86; Microcosin 1;40
Looker-on 1;7 etc. iii World 1;61; iv Connoisseur 71;
v Intelligencer 3; vi Spectator 249.

forgetting that ridicule was a weapon which might be employed just as effectively by their opponents as by themselves, and that the more prudent and graceful course, as Steele and Knox both pointed out would have been to shun it altogether. In questions too trivial for serious treatment, the most effective attitude is silent contempt, unbroken even by a pitying smile.

The most important work the essayists had set themselves was the vindication of Christianity against infidelity and superstition. Though nothing they said had any special depth in it, their arguments were such as were required at a time when the masses were only just beginning to take an interest in literature and religious controversy. Their ideas were expressed simply and intelligibly; the chain of their reasoning was clear and uninvolved; their thoughts were ordinary and familiar. Profundity and abstruseness were not desired, and in consequence were seldom offered. Common sense reigned supreme in the province of religion as well as of literature Theology had ceased to be theology at all, and had narrowed itself down to internal and external evidences of the reasonableness of Christianity. The usual speculative

i Spectator 302. ii Spectator 495.

tone had vanished, the ecstasy of direct personal intercourse with one's maker, the self-abandonment in his worship and the complete surrender to his infinite love and mercy. Religion had become a very tame and spiritless thing, even that true religion which Addison so loftily extolled. Yet colourless and matter of fact as it might be, the essayists advocated it with apostolic zeal. They saw how feeble was the hold which Christianity retained upon the public mind, and they felt it their simple duty to use their most potent efforts in its behalf. Accordingly they tried to show how its truth was supported by the fulfilment of the Jewish prophecies, and by the incomprehensible miracles and manifest divinity of our Saviour Christ himself. represented it as a religion of peculiar excellence and one worthy the support of every rational creature - Of all religious creeds Christianity supplies man with the noblest and most sublime ideas of the divine nature; it holds out the inducement to virtue of an eternity of unutterable happiness, and terrifies from the practice of vice by threats of everlasting punishment; it lays down the simplest and most unmistakeable rule of conduct in man's dealings with his fellows; it regulates the

i. Spectator 302. ii Spectator 495. iiiWorld 94. iv. Spectator 634. v. Spectator 633; Guardian 55 etc. vi. Rambler 81.

that time sunk. A decrease in devotional fervour had been the inevitable result of the religious decay. It was accordingly the aim of the essayists to revive the fainting body of religion by reanimating it with a fervent spirit of devotion. Addison spoke of the devotional habit as natural to the mind of man, although the ever recurrent appeals for the practice of this habit either contradict his statement, or show that man had wandered very far from his original nature; since that which is natural for a man to do is also easy for him to do, and is usually done by him without the necessity of constant exhortation. Arguments drawn from the restraining and ennobling influence of devotion upon the human character were frequent. Yet despite its wonderful power of comfort and elevation, its spirit had long been dead, and so the outward form of it was nothing but a lifeless mask. All true Christians felt the necessity of a more frequent and zealous exercise of the devotional instincts, and constantly urged the justice of a man's giving up a portion of his life to the service of his maker. It is, however, a well known fact that what may be done at any time is seldom done at

i Spectator 201. ii Spectator 201; 571; Rambler 44 etc

passions and directs them to "valuable well-chosen objects"; it settles the various and interfering interests of mortal men; it gives a man room to play his part and make full proof of his abilities; it animates to truly laudable actions; it inspires rational ambitions, correct love; and elegant desires; it ennobles and enlarges the mind beyond all other professions and sciences; in times of trouble it alleviates distress, and when afflictions wound the heart too grievously for happiness, it pours out plenteously the balm of patience and resignation of that "peace of God, which passeth all understanding"; it assures us of the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ upon the cross, and suggests the only means whereby man's guilt may be taken away, and his imperfect obedience accepted; it is, in short, so generously, transcendently and heroically disposed for the public good that the "Christian is as much inclined to your service when your enemy as the moral man when your friend".

The very frequency and force of these struggles in the cause of Christianity witness more plainly than anything else to the low ebb to which religion had at

i Spectator 224. ii Guardian 70. (iii. Idler 41; (Knox's Essays 150 iv Spectator 513. v. Guardian 20.

that time sunk. A decrease in devotional fervour had been the inevitable result of the religious decay. It was accordingly the aim of the essayists to revive the fainting body of religion by reanimating it with a fervent spirit of devotion. Addison spoke of the devotional habit as natural to the mind of man, although the ever recurrent appeals for the practice of this habit either contradict his statement, or show that man had wandered very far from his original nature; since that which is natural for a man to do is also easy for him to do, and is usually done by him without the necessity of constant exhortation. Arguments drawn from the restraining and ennobling influence of devotion upon the human character were frequent. Yet despite its wonderful power of comfort and elevation, its spirit had long been dead, and so the outward form of it was nothing but a lifeless mask. All true Christians felt the necessity of a more frequent and zealous exercise of the devotional instincts, and constantly urged the justice of a man's giving up a portion of his life to the service of his maker. It is, however, a well known fact that what may be done at any time is seldom done at

i Spectator 201. ii Spectator 201; 571; Rambler 44 etc

all: so that it is in nowise remarkable that the essayists did not content themselves with a vague appeal for some time to be granted to devotion, but went on to indicate a definite period for this loving contemplation and adoration of the Lord. Addison recommended the spending of all leisure time in an "intercourse and communication" with the great author of our being, i and was an advocate of frequent retirement from the world to enjoy the divine society, and to be entertained with the wonder of his works. Johnson also cherished high idea of the religious use of solitude in turning away man's thoughts from worldly joys, and fixing them upon the loveliness of virtue and the rewards of heaven.

This abundance of leisure and constant retirement into the "province of nature", are however beyond the power of all but the wealthy. Accordingly the essayists more frequently insisted on the necessity of devoting to the particular exercise of pious acts, that Sabbath day set apart and consecratedfrom the beginning of the world. At the same time they were careful to make clear the fact that the piety of a single

i. Spectator 93.

ii Spectator 465.

iii. Rambler 7.

day did not allow "an unlimited licence for wickedness all the rest of the week", but was intended merely to strengthen man's virtue and give an air of religion to his whole conduct.

In the Mosaical law, dictated upon the heights of Sinai, the seventh day was commanded to be a day of But during the 18th century, as now, the divine command was openly violated, and our holy day had become "a day of business with some, of pleasure with others, but of rest with none." It was no longer devoted to the adoration and worship of the Supreme Being, but was wasted in card-playing, phaeton driving and other popular amusements. Even going to church had been wrested from its original purpose, and was made "a mere matter of diversion to many well meaning people", who appeared there from the same motives with which they frequented any other public place some to see their acquaintance, and to be seen in turn by them, some to study the fashions and to display their own good taste in dress, some to enjoy the beautiful organ music, some for appearance sake, and some because there was no where else to go. When the motives were

i. Adventurer 28. iii Connoisseur 109. v Connoisseur 26

ii Connoisseur. iv Knox's Essays 131

so much at fault, it is scarcely to be wondered that little reverence was shown either to the sacred building, or to the deity who presided over and dwelt Whatever actions might without inpropriety be in it. performed in places of amusement, were just as freely introduced into the house of God. Sometimes the audience was silently indifferent, sometimes more iii childishly and vulgarly offensive in constant giggling. bowing, saluting, nodding, loud talking and taking snuff. iv However appropriate and gratifying the men's perpetual and prolonged staring upon the women might have been in a theatre, it was hardly suitable for the interior of a church. Such inappropriate behaviour must necessarily have done much harm in retarding the more devout among dissenters from conforming to the established usage, and must have proved a frequent stumbling block to all who loved their God, and wished to see him honoured and adored.

The reason of the essayists for their arduous and spirited defence of religion and devotion, was not so much because they realised the beauty and desirability

i. Citizen of the World 41; Connoisseur 134. ii. Tatler 241 iii. Spectator 158; Lounger 89. (iv. Tatler 140. Spectator 460 (Connoisseur 26

v. Spectator 259.

of them for their own sakes, as that they saw the tremendous moral power these two might wield. The age was pre-eminently an age of moralists, and religion was valued chiefly for its influence upon morality. Addison. at once the chief exponent and most able leader of the general thought of the nation among these essay-writers. gave to morality outright the superiority over faith and considered the excellencies of the latter as depending almost entirely on the motives it supplied to the former.1 By him and all his fellows themere moral man was accounted far above the mere believing man, both as being more beneficial to the world in which he lived, and as having · surer hopes of happiness in the world to come, since "it is generally owned there may be salvation for a virtuous infidel, but none for a vicious believer".

The main argument for the superiority of the Christian creed above all others was drawn from its peculiarly effective contributions to the heightening of morality. Most religious creeds issue commands for the practice of virtues exalted far beyond mere moral obligations; but in this, as in all other points, Christianity stands supreme. As the 18th century essayists

i Spectator 459.

ii. Spectator 186.

pointed out, it inspires in its votaries a universal love for mankind, urging them even to forgive and love their enemies. ii and inculcating a spirit of charity and tenderness towards the outcast and the needy. a religion, manifested correctly, without the old sanctimonious, solemn, lugubrious air affected by Cromwell and his Puritans, but with a mild and happy cheerfulness, ought to attract rather than to repel, and to produce a nation of true Christians and perfect gentlemen. Steele who identified the Christian with the gentleman, iv and thus adduced an argument for Christianity, which must have carried with it extraordinary weight at a time when gentility and politeness held such undisputed sway. is one more instance of that deep insight into mankind and extensive knowledge of his age which caused him to attain so great a measure of success in periodical writing.

Though there can be no doubt that a complete moral reformation would have been effected by the universal practice of Christianity, yet, as a few writers, however sincere and earnest, could not possibly accomplish so great a work, it was necessary for them constantly to attack

i. Adventurer 132; World 23; Winter Evenings 87. ii. Adventurer 48; 105; Observer 125; Microcosm 20 iii. Winter Evenings 48; Freeholder 19. iv. Spectator 75.

the prevailing follies and vices, and by various methods try to root them out. Moral essays, therefore, bulked most largely in the whole mass, and ranged from laughing condemnation of the outrageous fashions in dress, to severe and solemn denunciations of the greatest sins. All the essayists, with Johnson at their head, had a strong moral The great moralist indeed, unlike most of his colleagues, seldom gave the theological reasons why we should live good lives; he troubled little about speculation, but centred all his interest in the application of his beloved ethics to practical life. He himself, realised that he "seldom digressed from moral subjects"; but he was preeminently a moralist, and can hardly be blamed for writing as one. Moreover at that time literature seems to have been highly valued for its moral use. Steele thought that "kingdoms might be better for the conversion. of the Muses from sensuality to natural religion;" Addison warned writers against "committing anything to print that might corrupt posterity"; Johnson considered that stories might be made of inestimable use in conveying the knowledge of vice and virtue to the young: Hawkesworth, himself a practiser of his doctrine, declared

i Rambler 119. ii Guardian 51. iii Spectator 166 iv. Rambler 4.

that in a work of fiction the author "should principally consider the moral tendency of his work, and when he relates events he should teach virtue." Such were the ideas of all the essay-writers; it they gave no thought to the doctrine - "art for art's sake", and seem to have quite forgotten that moralising may be too obtrusive, and may tend to repel those particularly in need of reform.

The essayists also entertained an ever growing idea of making the stage more conducive to virtue and morality. The 18th century theatre, though no doubt an improvement upon that which had flourished under Charles 11, still left plenty of room for reform. Whenever a comparison was drawn between the modern drama and that of ancient Greece and Rome, a not infrequent subject in the essays, it was always unfavourable to the former as far as morals were concerned. It is contemporary drama was obviously in a very debased state, and popular opinion for the time being prevented any great measure of reform. Verel's play "The Lying Lover" was "dammed for its piety"; the deep, earnest thoughts that underlay the light-hearted manner were out of tune with the character of the time. Warton felt that the

i Adventurer 16.

ii Guardian 21; Lounger 20; World 104;111; Knox's Essays 99 etc iii Spectator 39; 446; Adverturer 105; Connoisseur 47; Lounger 50 etc. iv Knox's Essays 108.

refined sentiments of Menander, inserted in a modern comedy, would be rejected with disdain and disapprobation. As he sadly pointed out, an English and a Christian audience laughs at adultery as a jest, thinks obscenity, wit and debauchery amiable. "The murderer, if a duellist, is a man of honour, the gamester understands the art of living, the knave has penetration and knows mankind, the spendthrift is a fellow of fine spirit, the rake has only robbed a fresh country girl of her innocence and honour; the jilt and the coquette have a great deal of vivacity and fire; but a faithful husband is a dupe and a cuckold, and a plain country gentlemen a novice and a fool".

Edward Moore considered that half the comedies of the age "ought to be damned for wickedness and indecency", and Steele showed that the players must be ashamed of the words they have to say and must despise the audience for being pleased therewith.

All those writers who spoke of the immorality of the English Stage, realised how very beneficial an effect would result to the morals of the nation from a reformation in the morals of the stage. Yet, since its capacity for doing harm was conversely equivalent to its

i. Adventurer 105. ii World 9. iii Tatler 8.

iv. Spectator 446; Guardian 43; Knox's Essays 123. etc.

capacity for doing good, Steele, even in defiance of Milton's Areopagitica, thought that "the theatre ought to be shut up or carefully governed in any nation that values the promotion of virtue, or guard of innocence among its people." i

was a gigantic one; nay rather an infinite one. To reform the morals of England! Truly an ambitious undertaking, needing both patience and courage to the utmost. No wonder that at times a heart-weary complaint breaks forth; no wonder that at times their spirit flags, and shrinks from further struggle. Yet they went on working bravely, and though the progress of reform was slow, even imperceptible to earthly eyes, they might console themselves with the joyful thought that no sincere and earnest toil could be in vain, and that there were other eyes whose sight was not so dim, eyes which could discern results of which themselves were ignorant and a hand which would hold out to them an exceeding great reward.

i Guardian 43.

IV. THE INFIDELS.

England up till the time of the Restoration of Charles 11.

Men had belonged to the Church of England, to the Church of Rome, to the Presbyterian Church, or to some one of the numerous sectarian Churches flourishing in their time. A sect of infidels was hardly dreamed of. Infidelity never attained vigourous life in Britain until it came under the patronage of Charles' vicious court at Whitehall. But now the wickedness of so many of the nation gave rise to the desire that there was no God or future retribution, and the desire produced the belief that there was not. Hence the rapid spread of that doctrine of no-religion or atheism, so pleasant to minds delighting in evil and in the mean gratification of all their sensual appetites.

Atheism had enjoyed its most palmy days during the latter years of the 17th century, and even at the opening of the 18th that decay which was rapidly undermining its system was not apparent. Its flourishing condition, and the train of new ideas it inevitably involved, supplied the early essayists with a fruitful topic of discourse. Théir own attachment to the Christian faith caused them to view with deep concern and grief the hold which scepticism had taken upon the public mind; their anxiety for the nation's welfare induced them to use their essays as a medium for

the confutation of the infidel and the confirmation of the believer.

Before the 18th century most of the sceptics had been content to regard themselves as nothing more than atheists. The name atheist explains itself. An atheist was one who resolutely denied the existence of any God, and persuaded himself that the world and all its wonders were the product of a blind chance. Addison has given a brief summary of the principal ideas of the atheists who flourished in his time. These ideas, the natural result of a disbelief in a Supreme Being, consisted of "the causal and eternal formation of the world, the materiality of a thinking substance the mortality of the soul, the fortuitous organization of the body, and the Motions and gravitation of matter". All religion they regarded as a creature of the state, as a supporter of the national law and constitution. I To such the Bible records were nothing, and the Christian doctrine, with its insistence on a future state, was less than nothing. Thus all the bonds of morality were rudely broken, and a loose was given to the wildest and most degrading passions. With respect to this, however, a clever use of the argumentum ad hominem was made by the youthful writers of the Connoisseur. when they cautioned these atheists to consider " whether,

i. Spectator 185. ii Examiner 21; 29; Winter Evenings

if we were made by chance, the world was made by chance, and everything else was made by chance, there may not also be a hell made by chance."

Addison voiced the general belief in the impossibility of chance being so delicate and uniform in her operations as she must needs be if the works we see around us originated from her. ii It was as difficult then as now, to look upon the universe and all its wonders, and to deny the being of an infinitely wise Those who still adhered to the and good creator. religion of their ancestors naturally raised furious voices against such flagrant incredulity, and made it possible for Addison to write in October 1711, "Infidelity has been attacked with so good success of late years, that it is driven out of all its outworks. The atheist has not found his post tenable, and is therefore retired into Deism, and a disbelief of revealed religion only". 111 Though there still were men who professed and gloried in their athesitical principles among companions at the coffee-houses, they were in a very small minority and were growing fewer every day. The greater number of the modern infidels agreed in the existence of a God, of a supreme and omnipotent being, and merely denied the

i Connoisseur 109. ii. Spectator 543. Freeholder 14. iii. Spectator 186.

truth of revelation - the divinity of Christ and the mystical doctrines revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

From this they took their name of Deists. The sect soon a attained a wide-spread popularity, and the expression and confutation of its principles formed the great Deist controversy, which occupied the minds of many during the greater part of the 18th century.

The orthodox majority so detested all types of unbelievers that it would not take the trouble to distinguish between the various degrees of infidelity they manifested, but usually classed them all together under the general title of freethinkers. The defenders of Christianity pretended to see no difference between the Deists who were often willing to be convinced and reasoned out of their unbelief, and the atheists who prided themselves on holding the same opinions as those which had prevailed at the licentious and godless Restoration court, who thought it a fine thing to show their courage in scoffing at God and at religion and in turning to mockery all sacred things. They refused to confess that many of the Deistical objections were quite reasonable, or that there could be any force in

scepticism with regard to miracles. They forgot that neither they, nor any one else, especially in that age of common sense, could supply an adequate or satisfying answer. Yet at the same time their intolerance may claim some justification. The list of their opponents comprised many who disbelieved merely for singularity's sake, in the mistaken pride of superior understanding, or through fear of crediting a future punishment.

It is a great pity, however, that in the 18th century essays, we have presented to us only one side of the question. The ideas of the free-thinkers cannot fail to be somewhat distorted in the relation of their enemies. If we wish to have their thoughts first hand, we must turn from the periodical papers to their own set discourses, in which they had a fair chance of giving utterance to their true sentiments and the reasons for their adoption.

During this period, reason became the test of all things, and the Deists compelled religion to submit to its merciless scrutiny. Collins, one of the strongest pillars of the fabric of infidelity, defined

free-thinking as "the use of the understanding in endeavouring to find out the meaning of any proposition whatsoever in considering the nature of the evidence for or against, and in judging it according to the force or weakness of the evidence." 1 Truly a laudable undertaking, the adequate carrying out of which must have been of infinite service to the cause of all religion. great fault lay in the fact that it was not adequately The deists ruthlessly rejected all they carried out. could not understand, ii and without giving a single thought to the fallibility of human reason, iii enthroned the intelligence of each man as supreme arbiter in Thus, setting aside as superstition religious matters. and nonsense the Bible truths, iv they embraced a doctrine which they proudly, though perhaps erroneously, termed natural religion.

In spite of the boast that they had founded their creed on reason, if we may believe the essayists, it was a curious creed at which they finally arrived. The difficulty lies in the fact that we cannot believe the essayists. They did not indeed intentionally deceive, but fell into the general mistake of confounding deistical notions with atheistical. "The Unbelievers' Creed" with its wild contradictions and extravagant mixture of

i. Discourse on Freethinking. ii. Looker-on 27. iii. Idler 89; World 112; Knox's Essays; 90; 129; 179 etc iv Winter Evenings 62; Olla Podrida 13.

v Connoisseur.

servile faith and bold infidelity, was rather the concoction of orthodox hatred and intolerance than of rational deism. Berkeley, the great bulwark of orthodoxy versus deism, among the essayists of the first half of the century, is right when he says there is no room in the freethinker's mind for a miracle or prophecy, but when he adds among their ideas those of. "worlds formed by chance" i, the corporeality of the mind of man, and the mortality of the human soul ihe limits down his freethinking to pure and simple atheism. When Deism is stripped of all the excrescences due both to its friends and foes, it is found to be nothing more that its name implies, a belief in God, unsupported by the revealed doctrine of Christianity. As Waterland writes in his "Christ Vindicated against Infidelity -" The word deist or theist, in its original signification, inplies merely the belief of a God, being opposed to atheist, and so there may be deists of various kinds, according to their respective religions which they receive over and above that prime article. There may be Pagan deists, and Jewish deists, and Mahometan deists, and Christian deists; meaning such persons as respectively embrace those several religions above the belief of a God. But those who reject all traditional religions, and yet profess to believe in God, are merely deists, or

i. Guardian 39. ii Guardian 83.

emphatically such without any additional epithet to distinguish them; or, if an epithet must be added, they should be called Epicurean deists, or Infidel deists, or something of the kind. To call them Christian deists is a great abuse of language; unless Christians were to be divided into two sorts, Christians and No-christians, or Christians and Anti-Christians".

which the essayists considered inherent in the beliefs of the free-thinkers were a favourite subject of discussion. Their foolishness proved in Steele's estimation how far "reason abandons men that would employ it against religion", while Addison held that freethinking notions were full of impossibility, and would require for their adoption "an infinitely greater measure of faith than any set of articles which they so violently oppose". Their system certainly contained numerous incongruities, partly due to the early stage of theological enquiry, and partly due also to the ignorance and imperfection of human nature.

The essayists, however, like all other orthodox Christians, preferred to attribute the faults

i. Guardian 9. ii. Spectator 185.

of the tenets of free-thinking to the personal character of the free-thinker himself, and to believe that infidelity could never be arrived at by the philosopher in his search for truth, but lay only in the path of the base and the unlettered among mankind. Indeed the chief point in his character was stated by his foes to be his ignorance. He was looked upon as exemplifying further the adage that " a little knowledge is a dangerous thing". has remarked in several parts of his works", writes Addison, "that a thorough insight into philosophy makes a good believer, and that a smattering in it naturally produces such a race of despicable infidels as the little profligate writers of the present age, whom I must confess I have always accused to myself, not so much for their want of faith as their want of learning".1 Berkeley, whose tireless pen was always ready in the struggle against the wretched infidels, expresses the opinion that they are " a set of poor ignorant creatures", not capable of penetrating "into the causes and consequences And the miserable Collins comes in for of things." an undivided share of the same abuse - "the poor man is certainly more a blockhead than an atheist". iv Nor had

i Tatler 267. ii Guardian 55. iii.Guardian 62 iv. Guardian 3.

the character for ignorance been lost by the latter part of the century. It is referred to by Monro with characteristic satire, while Knox represents them as attacking the Scriptures and other sacred work which they had not tried to read and could not have understood. ii

In so far as the accusation of ignorance is true, the second quality of narrowness inevitably follows. The indefatigable Berkeley, in an analogy between a freethinker and a fly upon one of the pillars of St Paul's Cathedral, points out how "the thoughts of a freethinker are employed on certain particularities of religion, the difficulties of a single text, or the unaccountableness of some step of Providence or point of doctrine to his narrow faculties, without comprehending the scope and design of Christianity, the perfection to which it raiseth human nature, the light it hath shed/in the world, and the close connection it hath as well with the good of public societies, as with that of particular persons." going on to speak of the free-thinkers' claim to superiority, his enthusiasm carries him to heights of eloquence usually attained only in ages of the deepest and most intense religious feeling. "I leave it to any impartial man to judge which hath the nobler sentiments, which the greater

i Olla Podrida, 5;16. ii Knox's Essays 16.

views; he whose notions are stinted to a few miserable inlets of sense, or he whose sentiments are raised above the common taste by the anticipation of those delights which will satiate the soul, when the whole capacity of her nature is branched out into new faculties?. He who looks for nothing beyond the short span of duration, or he whose aims are co-extended with the endless length of eternity? He who derives his spirit from the elements, or he who thinks it was inspired by the Almighty?"1 There can be no doubt that the freethinkers had gone the wrong way to work. How could they expect to overthrow the noble structure of Christianity by their insignificant cavils, doubts and scruples," such as might be started against anything not capable of mathematical demonstration. Their views must indeed have been short and their capacities narrow, or they would have taken a wider range, and though never succeeding in their design of subverting Christianity would have done a useful work for British and Christian theology.

The alliance between pride and ignorance has always been remarked as a close one. "Pride, and a very silly kind of pride", declared Knox, "such indeed as arises from narrow views of things, and an ignorance of

i. Guardian 70.

ii. Spectator 186.

iii. " 3; 55.

human nature, is the foundation of infidelity," This had been the notion entertained about free-thinking from its very origin. It was thought and stated that the free-thinkers had taken up their creed from vanity, and the desire of differing from the rest of mankind. They wished to appear more wise than their fellows, and knew no other way than by dissenting from them and declaring themselves unbelievers. No one took into account that class who had fallen into the depths of infidelity through serious thought and anxious questioning, and whose prevailing emotion was not pride or vanity, but black despair.

The freethinkers showed themselves made of the same stuff as other men in their desire to extend the sway of their doctrines, and to substitute their conflicting ridiculous notions in the place of the noble system of Christianity. It was this attempt at propagating infidelity which roused such a storm of indignation and abuse. Like all other sects the infidels were sure of being in the right, and in their enthusiasm for their cause, looked upon the whole body of believers as hypocrites or fools, iv to be converted

i. Knox's Essays 114; ii Guardian 39; Knox's Essays 16;179.

"with as much fierceness and contention, wrath and indignation, as if the safety of mankind depended on it". They did not realise how little their teachings had to offer in place of the Christian doctrine, what mean advantages they must propose to the world as a recompense for the glorious promises abandoned with the Christian faith.

In that age of moralists Christianity had been prized chiefly for its moral power, wielded by the pledge of a future state of retribution. The freethinkers who wished to banish this moral creed, without substituting in its place another of equal efficacy, naturally drew upon themselves the odium of the greater part of the They pretended to regard with scorn the Christian doctrine of a life hereafter, affected contempt for "the mean and mercenary motives of reward and punishment", and sneering at the "priestly notions of heaven and hell", urged the adoption of virtue for its own pure sake. Such a doctrine, however, will not adapt itself to all capacities. In spite of that dignity of human nature on which the essayists so loved to dwell, it is to be feared that the human race is acted upon more strongly by fear of punishment than by innate

i. Spectator. ii. Guardian 55 iii. Guardian 55; Observer 60.

love of virtue. The removal of this fear must tend to loose the shackles of restraint, and to subvert morality, as the Adventurer is never tired of pointing out. The evil effects of infidelity are wonderfully and graphically exemplified in the story of Opsinous, and with an exquisitely delicate touch in the story of Fidelia by Mrs Chapone. Yet the fact that all the criminals of the day were not these outcast infidels shows that there was some innate generosity still in the race of men, and that many of the free-thinkers were sincere in their professions of doubt, and had not embraced the ideas they held merely as a cloak for sin and villainy.

Nevertheless to say the very least about their doctrines, instead of being an advance upon Christianity they were merely a reversion to those heathen notions from which the civilized world had long ago emerged, and which the more enlightened among the heathen had even then felt to be erroneous. At that time it was an honour to human nature for a man to proclaim his free—thinking and disengage himself from his native—lands idolatry. By so doing he was approaching as nearly as his human blindness would permit him, to the doctrines brought to light by divine revelation. His ancient

i. Adventurer 12;13;14. ii. Adventurer 77.

iii. Guardian 88.

iv Freeholder 88.

wisdom had instructed him in the moral efficacy of a belief in the soul's immortality, and he had tried by fables and conjectures to instil that belief in the minds of his fellows. And yet, as Berkeley sadly writes, this same doctrine, with the light of revelation full upon it, "is now most inconsistently decried by a few weak men, who would have us believe that they promote virtue by turning religion into ridicule".

In every place where the name of freethinker is mentioned, we find apparent a spirit of hatred and bitterness. However widely the toleration which the essayists so often advocated was to be extended, the freethinkers were always outside the limits. Never once is there any limit of allowing the freethinker to do his freethinking unmolested. Punishment of some kind he richly deserved and it was agreed by all that he must not escape it. Addison divided the infidels into two classes, and proportioned their punishments to their respective degrees of guilt. The former class consisted of poor, ignorant creatures meriting rather bity than contempt; the latter of grave and learned disputants, who "ought to be whipped out of a government as a blot to civil society and defamers of mankind". 11 Contempt and scorn

i Guardian 55.

ii Tatler 111.

and infamy was the usual measure the poor freethinker gained. He was looked on as the pest of the community and the blasphemer of almighty God; his conversion was regarded as almost hopeless, and his salvation as well-nigh impossible. Berkeley, hard-hearted only where freethinkers were concerned expressed his utter contempt and detestation towards them, had his purpose of endeavouring to render their persons as despicable and their practices as odious, in the eye of the world, as they deserve, the much-enduring Collins, if ever man deserved to be denied the common benefits of air and water, it is the author of a Discourse of Freethinking.

The later essayists were no more gentle and tolerant in their treatment. The World could find no better epithet for them than conceited fools, while the old attitude of contempt had lost nothing of its pristine popularity. The Adventurer with characteristic warmth and zeal for morality, declared that "to oppose these corrupters by argument rather than contempt, is to parley with a murderer, who may be excluded by

i Tatler. ii Guardian 93. iii Guardian 88. iv. Guardian 89. v Guardian 3 vi World 44.

shutting a door". Knox spoke of them as "low and contemptible wretches", and though all rejected persecution as favourable to the promotion of their cause, they advocated the perhaps severer punishment of contempt.

It may be true that "the ridiculous notions maintained by the freethinkers in their writings, scarce iv deserve a serious refutation," but, as has been seen before, the employment of ridicule in the cause of religion must always have very serious objections. There is no question about the justice of turning the infidels' "boasted weapons of ridicule" against themselves; the only doubt is that of its expediency. Ridicule has power to prevail in the war against truth, as well as against error, and it is as well to make no use of an engine which may so easily be reversed.

The supporters of Christianity for the most part went the wrong way to work in their fight against the deist. They were content to stand on the defensive, when they had both strength and skill to adopt the

i. Adventurer 14.

ii Knox's Essays 55

iii. Knox's Essays 16; Observer 60 etc. iv.Comnoisseur 9.

v. Connoisseur 71.

offensive. It was their policy to push home the grounds of their own belief and the impracticability of Deism, "rather then to spend time in solving the objections of every opponent." The faults of this method are clearly shown in Hawkesworth's story of Opsinous, who, in disputes against his subtle infidel cousin, failed to press home the "positive arguments on which religion is established", and, making a futile search after answers to his cavils, in his ignorance of argumentation necessarily succumbed. ii

Deism as opposed to Atheism had attained its youthful vigour about the time of the publication of the Guardian, that paper which lashes it with so unmerciful a hand. It had begun to sink into its decay about 1750, but, in spite of the scornful words of Johnson and the dogmatic assertion of Goldsmith, the appearance of Bolingbroke's posthumous works had put new life into its aged veins. The spirit of infidelity began to spread its boundaries, and to take into its fold numbers of the lower classes, the ignorant and hitherto thoughtless supporters of Christianity. These also determined to hold their societies and to discuss thereall holy things. That the effect of these institutions was

i. Goldsmith's Essays 17. ii Adventurer 13. iii. Connoisseur 9. iv. World 189; Winter Evenings 47 v Adventurer 10;13; Connoisseur 9; 35.

harmful could not fail soon to become apparent. Men with no learning and little judgment thought themselves competent to decide the most tremendous questions, and without understanding the religion they attacked, lent their puny strength to the attempt at overthrowing Christianity. They learned almost by heart the works of the chief infidel writers, Toland, Tindal, Collins, Chubb and Mandeville, and, armed with the arguments they found there, had no difficult task in routing any innocent, unwary believer who happened to be so unfortunate as to venture into their atheistical circle. The Connoisseur speaks of the way a raw Christian, attending these societies, inevitably ripens first into a Deist, then into a Freethinker, and finally by a very short step into an Atheist. This phase of the movement perhaps shows itself most clearly in the wild, savage, but earnest work of Tom Paine. Johnson had mistaken the sleep of Deism for its death. Soon it awoke refreshed, and set out on a career of wider conquest, , taking by storm the hearts of the unintelligent, and showing that the present Christian theology had ceased to satisfy the minds even of the vulgar and the ignorant.

i Connoisseur 9. ii Connoisseur 35.

V. THE DIVINE NATURE.

Hume, sceptic though he was, threw in his lot with neither atheists nor deists. He stood alone and unshakeable in the midst of a thousand warring passions, endowed with a courage great enough to confess the full measure of his doubt. He did not glory in it like the atheist, not try to conceal it, like the deist. He was both historian and philosopher, and even when his views must be rejected, they always have inherent in them a valuable element of truth. Though concurring alike with Christians and Deists in his fervent belief in the being of a God, yet his God is not the Christian God, nor the divinity of the Deists. He pointed out, once and for all, the fallacy of the Deistical claim to that creed which was termed Natural Religion, showing how the Deists had adopted the idea of God as the maker of the world from the Christian records, had won for it the support of their own reason, and had from this its reasonableness inferred that Deism was the natural religion of mankind. But surely a natural religion signifies a religion held by men in a state of nature or savagery. Historical enquiry will at once make clear

the fact that Deism was never this religion. In almost all discovered nations the first religion entertained was Polytheism. When the light of civilisation began to dawn upon them, their religion was still Polytheism, and it was only by a gradual development that Theism was finally evolved. So great an advance both in rationality and sublimity is Theism upon Polytheism that it is quite impossible to believe that any nation could have first arrived at Theism and afterwards sunk to Polytheism. It would be supplying to the degradation of barbarity, an amount of reason gained only by lengthy culture and civilisation.

Such reasoning as this of Hume, must necessarily strike a stunning blow both at the Deists and at the Christians, since the latter, especially in that peculiar century, held the same ideas as their opponents, with the mere superimposition of the Christian doctrine, and were content quietly to assent that Deism and Natural Religion were indeed synonymous. Yet, as Hume had gone on to point out, when once the notion of God, the maker, has been suggested, and when at last the mind of man is competent to grasp such a vast idea, rejection is almost impossible.

"A purpose, an intention, a design, is evident in everything, and when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the firstrise of the visible system, we must adopt with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause or author". It is not therefore strange that men unskilled in history, and knowing little of philosophy, as was the case with the majority of 18th century theologians, should have attributed the arguments which they themselves employed to races and to times when argument and reason were alike well-nigh unknown.

Leaving out of count the small class of the atheists, the belief in a God was at that time truly a national belief, and seemed not to admit of a particle of doubt. With the Biblical Genesis before their eyes the favourite ides of God to every class was that of the contriver, or maker of the world and all its wonders. The usual argument was the obvious and simple one of Paley. The watch needs a maker; therefore the world needs a contriver. The majority of 18th century divines thought with Addison that the supreme being had made "the best arguments for his own existence in the formation of the heavens and the earth;" if and it

i. Natural History of Religion.

ii. Spectator 465.

was this almost incontrovertible idea of God as the author of the universal wonders, which led to the frequent mention of the natural world as suggesting thoughts about the deity.

So little faith was attached to the infidel denials of the atheists that in the greater number of the essayists little attempt was made to prove the existence of a God, but the fact of his being was taken for granted, and the main interest centred upon the divine The multiplicity of ideas entertained attributes. concerning God's nature, by men of different religious beliefs is witness of the difficulty of answering the question What God is? "Dim at best", writes Henry Grove, "are the conceptions we have of the Supreme being," but in spite of this, or perhaps because of this, the essay-writers continually urged the expediency and even the necessity of a frequent contemplation of his nature. Vague and imperfect our ideas needs must be, but the speculation is ennobling and purifying and therefore not unprofitable. We may not be capable of more explicitness than the enthusiastic rhetoric of Henry

ii. Spectator 121; 571; 590; Looker-on 51 etc

ii. Tatler 100; Spectator 489; 543 etc.

iii. Spectator 635.

Grove, when with a touch of the strange Bibical beauty he declared that the divine nature "is something that never entered into the heart of man to conceive; yet what we can easily conceive will be a fountain of unspeakable, of everlasting rapture;" perhaps it is as well that we should be incapable of more. Addison's clear mind led him to make a fuller analysis, but his treatment of the Almighty is generally unsatisfactory. He had no notion of things too vast for human expression; he thought with Johnson that all things ought to be expressed, and did not realise his own incapacity. Of imagination he possessed but little, and saw no incongruity in an attempt to define the deity. Knox. who often loudly heralds the coming change, had a fuller realisation of the value of obscurity in the conception of celestial beings. "What mortal hand", he writes, "shall presume to paint him in a mortal form, and a material vestment, who is diffused over all space and who clothes himself with light as with a garment". Addison, wavering between a knowledge of the incomprehensibility of the supreme being, and the desire to convey an adequate idea of him to his readers,

i. Spectator 635.

ii. Winter Evenings 44.

fell back upon the faulty method of dividing the divine nature into attributes. He began indeed, by speaking vaguely of the infinity of God's perfections, but soon he abandoned the indefiniteness so alien to his character, and went on to treat of individual qualities.

It is true that we can only judge of the divine nature by analogy with our own, that we can only conceive of God as possessing our own attributes in an exalted degree. Abstract perfection indeed we grant him, but it is more than our weak minds can comprehend. The lack of true poetic feeling, and the incapability of endowing the world with a picture which, though not delineating the infinity of God, should at least suggest it, led all the matter of fact theologians of the 18th century, of which the essay writers were often but copies in miniature, to follow the defective plan of Addison. The usual method was to deal shortly with some particular attribute of the divine nature, and to give one or more proofs in support of its veracity. Among the orthodox there was no idea of any fault in the character of the The old notion of his cruelty and the necessity of propitiating Him by bodily penance and bloodshed

i. Spectator 531, 565 etc.

was long ago outworn; the difficulty of reconciling the tyrranous, revengeful disposition of the Hebraic Jehovah with the modern idea of divinity was admitted to be a difficulty by the freethinkers alone. mere light of reason was deemed sufficient to make perfectly clear the existence of a large proportion of the divine perfections. "The divinity is a boundless ocean of bliss and glory", wrote Hume, the sceptic, concurring with the most orthodox of his fellows in regarding the Deity as an infinite advance upon any of his Addison's was the dominant note - The supreme creatures. being is eternal, uncircumscribed by the narrow limits of time, without either beginning or ending. ii moreover omnipresent, filling the whole immensity of space and actuating the material world with all its living creatures. Even with regard to man himself, "the divinity is with him, and in him, and everywhere about him", irradiating his understanding, rectifying his will, purifying his passions and enlivening all his powers.iv Thus early in the 18th century there was a faint foreshadowing of that all-pervading spirit, that anima mundi, which Wordsworth so loved to celebrate.

i Hume's Essays 17. ii. Spectator 489;531;etc iii. Spectator 489; 531; 565 etc. iv. Spectator 571.

The deity is also deemed omniscient, privy to all that happens in the world of nature, and to all that passes in the mind of man. He is no less an omnipotent of the creator and the ruler of all things. He is wise, with a boundless and unerring wisdom, manifested in the formation of all living creatures, but preeminently in the wonders of the human mind.

Such are the attributes supposed to be discoverable merely by the light of reason. They are indeed interwoven with the ideas of divinity entertained by the heathen, and are plain to any mind which will grant the being of a God and consider him intelligently. An abundance of proofs for them is little needed. "Dost thou ask a torch to discover the brightness of the morning? dost thou appeal to arguments for proofs of Divine perfection? Look down to the earth on which thou standest, and lift up thine eye to the worlds that roll above thee. Thou beholdest splendour, abundance, and beauty; is not he who produced them mighty? Thou considerest; is not he who formed thy understanding But the orthodox and Christian God is possessed of qualities which far surpass all these. The inspired writings of the Bible reveal that he is not only great

i. Spectator 531; 565; ii Spectator 489;531 etc iii. Adventurer 128; Rambler 110; Mirror 44 etc. iv. Goldsmith's Essays 16 etc. v Adventurer 72 vi. Adventurer 72.

and glorious, but that he is infinitely kind and just in his dispensations towards men. He is just with a justice which requires for its exertion the awful qualities of omniscience and omnipotence; yet he is not only a God of justice but even more a God of mercy, a God who delights to pardon his erring creatures, iv and who has extended to all the hope of forgiveness by sending into the world his only son to die as a propitiation for our sins. We does not leave his children to fight and struggle on alone, but directs and supervises his whole creation. It is true he no longer interferes with his work and performs miracles as he did of old. yet for all that he is not indifferent to any of his vi They are all under his perpetual and creatures. almighty care, and even what may to them seem casual is often by Him directed for ends ultimately kind and viii merciful.

The essayists of the 18th century characteristically lent their aid to the theologians in the attempt to prove that the very evil of the world did not belie the wonderfully kind and merciful attributes of the

i.Spectator 531. ii. Guardian 99.

iii. Spectator 531; Olla Podrida 13 etc.

iv. Rambler 110; World 182. v. Looker-on 51. vi. Spectator 571; Adventurer 76. (vii. Adventurer 107 viii. Rambler 184;011a Podrida 26 (Winter Evenings 29 etc

Deity. Goldsmith's strange imaginative Eastern story of Asem justifies the divine wisdom in the moral government of the human race, and points out the inevitable wretchedness of a world of virtue untouched by vice. To those who look upon this life as their all, who believe that after death comes complete annihilation, God's goodness and even justice may seem nothing better than a joke and an unmeaning fable. They see around them many who have sacrificed all earthly pleasures for the sake of truth and virtue; they see on all sides innocence and misery walking hand in hand, and wickedness thriving in the passession of all the world holds dear. as Warton points out in a very fine Bastern story. man' idea of this world's misery and human lifes affliction is often the result of his own ignorance and blindness. He cannot see that the apparent evils and distresses he complains of are really the unutterable bles ings of an all-loving Providence, who in his divine wisdom knows what is best for his erring children, and in his divine goodness, grants it to them even against their will. Still more must every murmur cease in the realisation of the fact of the soul's immortality.

i Goldsmith's Harays 16. ii. Adventurer 76.

Revelation, whose promise is so plain, supplies the assurance of a future retribution, when earthly sorrows will be lost in heavenly joys, and what seemed dark here below will be made clear in the light of the great hereafter.

Such were the attributes of the Supreme Being as He appeared to the eyes of 18th century orthodoxy. Slight as must be the objections to their individual truth, great fault may indeed be found with the entire conception. There was nothing very deep or very imaginative in the ideas entertained about the Deity. He was made little different from glorified and perfected There was no great insistence upon that essentially spiritual nature inseparably connected with the modern idea of divinity. Except for his omnipresence, his all pervading power, a doctrine but slightly removed from Pantheism, their God seems to have been almost anthropomorphic. The divine nature will be a mystery, intangible, incomprehensible, so long as man is confined to his mortal body; no human mind will be able to form any adequate idea of it. Add together all the abstract qualities known to man, multiply them to

infinity, and call the result a description of the This is what the 18th century essayists divine nature. But after all this work, is one any the have done. better acquainted with that nature? Surely, it is impossible. Mathematical calculation can never arrive at anything approaching the divine character. The means are too cold and heartless. The imagination is frozen Never will plain commonsense be capable and lifeless. of fathoming the unfathomable depths of divinity. task needs the vital warmth of a poet's soul, and even then the idea will fall far below the reality. At a time when speculative activity had ceased, when Johnson's was the dominant attitude, what can we expect from attempts to portray the infinite? It is one more instance of how egregiously common sense can fail, when unsupported by the fuller, deeper qualities of imagination.

V1. HUMAN NATURE.

The treatment of human nature in the 18th century essayists was coloured to some extent by their unfaltering orthodoxy. They firmly believed in the earlier chapters of the Bible, and paid little heed to the new doctrine of evolution. Dr Knox, learned as he was, expressed an utter disbelief in man's connection with the ape or monkey. By all the essay-writers the story of the creation, together with the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve, was taken as true history, and not as allegory or myth. Accordingly there was little idea of that essential progress of the species from nothingness towards perfection, which a belief in evolution necessarily The orthodox and ordinary view was that man involves. had been created a perfect being, formed in the image of God, in and designed by Him. to be the noblest portion of his handiwork; but he had made use of the capability of sinning with which his Maker had endowed him, had by his grovelling appetites and wild courses of passion, fallen from his high estate, and had degenerated to the base and sinful creature he so often shows himself today.iv

i. Knox's Essays 22. ii Rambler 6. iii. Guardian 56. (iv. Citizen of the World 23; Knox's Essays 85; 115 etc.

According to the received Christian notions God is a purely spiritual being; the animal is purely material; man is a connecting link between the two. His material body he shares with the beasts that perish; his spiritual soul allies him to his God. It was the possession of this earthly body which had caused the first great sin, and the consequent depravity of human nature. It was this earthly body which made man an imperfect being, and, during this life at least, prevented him from imitating fully the divine goodness and wisdom. And yet again it was this material part which clogged and hampered all his faculties, which rendered him incapable of understanding the divine nature or of forming a just estimate of the divine attributes. By the mere formation of his body man is necessarily a finite and transitory Then how can he grasp the idea of his Lord's Since he is essentially so frail and weak, infinity? how is it possible for him to understand the divine omnipotence? Since his knowledge is of necessity so restricted and his vision narrowed down to but a moment, how may he comprehend his God's omniscience? he thinks and says and does she shows his limitations, and makes quite clear the fact that perfection is not to

Hume's Essays 5 etc.

i. Spectator 565.

ii. Idler 4; Adventurer 107.

iii. Goldsmith's Essays 19; 25; World 143 182; Lounger 7;61

iv Goldsmith's Essays 25; Adventurer 70;76;137; etc.

be found in human affairs.

But at the same time as man's material part broughtabout his fall, and the perpetual corruption it entailed, his spiritual part prevented him from sinking to the level of the brutes, which have "no higher faculties or more extensive capabilities than the preservation of themselves or their species requires" The essayists entertained no doubts about their soul's existence, and despised the small class of materialists iii They believed that who denied man his superior power. by it man, even after he had lost his pristine innocence. retained the relics of his former dignity, and had in him the capacity of repairing the damages consequent upon his sin by an earnest endeavour to do right, by a steadfast faith in the saving power of Christ, and by carrying out to the best of his ability the laws laid down for his guidance in the holy Scriptures. This idea is expressed by Steele with more than wonted sublimity and grandeur. "Notwithstanding", he writes, "the degeneracy and meanness that are crept into human nature, there are a thousand occasions in which it breaks through its original corruption, and shows what it once was and what it will be hereafter. I consider

i. Idler 4; Adventurer 30; World 162; Connoisseur 131; Olla Podrida 5; Winter Evenings 19 etc;

ii. Rambler 41. iii Knox's Essays 140;

iv. Rambler 6; Connoisseur 131 etc.

the soul of man as the ruin of a glorious pile of buildings; where, amidst great heaps of rubbish, you meet with noble fragments of sculpture, broken pillars and obelisks, and a mangnficence in confusion. Virtue and wisdom are continually employed in clearing the ruins, removing these disorderly heaps, recovering the noble pieces that lie buried under them, and adjusting them as well as possible to their ancient symmetry and beauty."

There is a prospect of this glorious work being continued to infinity in the doctrine of the soul's immortality, the wonder and magnificence of which affords the best if possible proof of the innate dignity of human nature.

This natural and inherent dignity of man - for that it is natural and inherent is shown by its presence even among the savage and unlearned portion of iii mankind— was a subject which the essayists, as Church—of—England men distinguished from Methodists, contemplated with the greatest pleasure, both as it flattered their vanity, and for the moral effects deriveable therefrom. "The dignity of man", said Goldsmith, re-echoing in slightly different accents the words of his friend and iv master Johnson, "is a subject that has always been the favourite theme of humanity"; so that it is not

i. Tatler 87; ii. Spectator 537; Rambler 6. etc. iii Tatler 87; Spectator 215. iv; Idler 87. v. Citizen of the World. 115.

surprising to find the essay-writers either openly avowing their delight in the contemplation, or tacitly expressing it by the frequency of their insistence upon that dignity.

The beneficial moral effect of a belief in the dignity of human nature was characteristically a subject on which the 18th century essayists loved to dwell. A man's reverence for himself, according to John Hughes, "is a great guard of innocence, and a spring of virtue." It inspires in him a love of all that is fair and noble, and a desire to live up to his natural greatness. It has power to remedy all petty feelings by pointing out the folly of suffering perturbation and uneasiness. from causes unworthy of his notice. V It animates to loftier efforts by holding out the hope of success without which no attempt will be made and man will be content to sink into a state of lethargy and complete stagnation. Goldsmith alone raises a dissenting voice, declaring that man is more apt to err by having too high than by having too despicable an opinion of his nature. most ignorant nations have always been found to think mosthighly of themselves; their ignorance had led them to believe all conceivable actions capable of performance

vi. Adventurer 81 77.

and had thus brought about the erection of demigods and heroes; it had tended to an erroneous exaltation of human nature, and a consequent depreciation of the divine, had made men so satisfied with the imaginary greatness of their race that they considered their own exertion unnecessary. Such an objection however, apparently applies only to times of barbarous ignorance, not to an age of civilization and advanced refinement like that in which he wrote.

The soul of man, since it constitutes an alliance between himself and God, and is presumably of the same nature as the divine essence, was of course regarded as his most excellent possession; far superior to any of his bodily perfections. Though necessarily clogged and hampered, his faculties are not so limited as those of the brutes. In spite of the impossibility of attaining omniscience, his soul loves to contemplate the great and it unlimited, and to seek on every side matter on which it iti may be employed. Though the prescience of man is slight enough, his soul is often capable of divining/dreams, either through its own latent power or from a communication with the Omnipotent. Indeed the human soul shows traces of all the divine attributes, which, though they may be faint and at

i. Citizen of the World 115. ii. Spectator 413 iii. Rambler 41 iv. Spectator 488.

times almost invisible, will shine forth in their full splendour when freed from bodily impediments in the glorious eternity which is to come.

While the complete perfection of man is rendered impossible by the presence of a material body, God in his goodness and mercy has provided means whereby many of the necessary bodily evils may be remedied, namely - the gift of the faculty of reason and the never failing care of the Almighty. Of these two the 18th century mind placed reason in the foremost place. Though it is impossible to give any adequate explanation as to why such supreme importance was attached to this faculty during the century, why it was regarded as the primary factor in every branch of literature and thought, there can be little doubt that it was partly due to the prevailing French influence, partly to the peculiar aspect of the native English temperament, and partly to the unique social and historical conditions of the At any rate men valued themselves upon their reasoning capabilities in a way they have never done before or since, constantly drawing comparisons between this wonderful power of theirs, and the total or at least partial lack of it in the brute creation. Animals were only allowed the faculty of instinct, which they possessed

i. Rambler 129; 162; 185; Adventurer 100, Mirror 94, Observer 47 etc.

ii. Tatler 169; 170; Spectator 121 etc

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in a larger degree than mankind; but instinct in mankind was supplemented by reason, and was thus raised high above the quality of beasts. It is however rather difficult to tell where instinct ends and reason beginw; whether the beasts do not at times show a glimmering of reason, and whether many of man's actions, generally considered as prompted by his reason, are not due to this lower faculty of instinct.

Yet after all it is very necessary for a man to have some quality beyond those of the brutes, for he has been gifted with the capacity of distinguishing right from wrong, and with the power of free-will in the choice between them. His reason is the faculty bestowed on him to help him to decide rightly. He may please himself whether he rules his life according to its dictates or whether he lets himself be governed by his bodily passions. Throughout his whole life he will find iii the struggle between the two raging fiercely. His passions, though capable of affording pleasure and of rousing to noble actions when under the control of reason, are cruel and relentless tyrants when allowed to attain the mastery. Should he listen to the promptings of reason his life will be a virtuous one;

i. Spectator 121; 181. ii. Spectator 571;
Adventurer 47 etc; Observer 4;
iii. Tatler 172; Rambler 111; Idler 52; Adventurer 108;
Citizen of the World 47 etc.iv. Spectator 255;554;
v. World 196; Knox's Essays 2; 4; 162 etc.

should he shut his ears to its injunctions and submit himself to the sway of passion, he will live a life of vice and infamy, ruined for all eternity.

In spite of the objections of the Deists that reason and revelation were incompatible, the orthordox essayists do not seem to have found the same difficulty. They called upon reason to declare the truth of those beliefs which the Deists had maintained were most unreasonable. According to Addison reason alone was capable of manifesting the truth of the whole doctrine of Christianity, for Socrates had be nable to predict the coming of our Saviour, recognising by the light of reason "that it was suitable to the goodness of the divine nature to send a person into the world who should instruct mankind in the duties of religion, and in particular teach them how to pray"

Not only then is reason sufficient of itself to induce morality, but it is capable also of proving the credibility of that Christian faith which inculcates the highest form of morality. But although something more than reason is necessary to make religion a truly living thing, and although that which we believe by

i. Spectator 207.

faith always seems worth more than that whose truth is forced upon us by our reason, yet, since such paramount importance was then attached to this reasoning faculty, it is not surprising that numerous valiant attempts were made to put orthodox religious doctrines beyond a doubt by showing not only that reason did not contradict them, but even assisted them with its support.

In spite of 18th century prejudice the continual care and protection of the Almighty must be of more efficacy than this so much vaunted reason. It is indeed possible that a man may feel himself independent, may receive the support of providence without request and without acknowledgement; but should the all-powerful relax for a moment his loving care and turn away his face in wrathful indignation at the ingratitude that meets his benefits, this man would find that all his boasted independence was vain, and that without the omnipotent's sustaining arm he would at once sink back into nothingness. Everything that happens is with the knowledge and connivance of God; man is ignorant of the futureand often fearful of it, but he need be under no apprehensions for God has power to prevent the dreaded evil from falling upon him or may even take him out of the world to avoid it.

"Our own schemes or prudence have no share in our i advancement", but God directs and manages all contingencies, "knows the assistance we stand in need of, and is always ready to bestow it on those who ask it of him".

In order that man should not fall into the error of having so high an opinion of his own abilities as to consider himself beyond the need of divine support, or of having so low an opinion as to believe himself incapable of overcoming his passions and rising above the level of the brute creation, it is essential that he should get to know himself, consider what kind of a creature he is, what are his excellencies and what his imperfections, "by what evils he is most dangerously beset and by what temptations most easily overcome". The study is a difficult one, for men are naturally apt to indulge more "favourable conceptions of their own virtue than they have been able to impress upon others". "and to become the willing dupes of their own prevailing passions and inclinations." Moreover it is often a disagreeable one, for " very few can search deep into their own minds without meeting what they wish to hide from

<sup>i. Spectator 293.
ii. Spectator 441.
iii Idler 27.
iv. Lounger 7.
v Rambler 28.
vi. Mirror 55</sup>

themselves". But for all that it is a very necessary one, by reason of its efficacy in preserving man from crime and in securing "to him the approbation of that Being to whom he is accountable for his thoughts and his actions, and whose favour must finally constitute his total happiness". In judging men's characters, a difficulty frequently arises from the fact, so plain and yet so often forgotten, that "there is no such thing as a person entirely good or bad", that "virtue and vice are blended and mixed together in a greater or less proportion in everyone", that there is "no character so sanctified that has not its failings, none so infamous but has somewhatto attract our esteem," and that a good quality will often be found in its most eminent degree of perfection,"in a mind where it is darkened and eclipsed by a hundred other irregular passions" The difficulty is augumented also by the possibility of a virtuous man falling from his lofty pedestal, and of a vicious man struggling out at last from the deep abyss in which he had been plunged.

Since the obstacles to a correct decision are so numerous, it is not surprising that many and varied

i. Idler 27 ii. Rambler 28. iii Goldsmith's Essays 27 iv. Spectator 564 v. Spectator 349.

ideas have be-n held about man's nature. Some thinkers have considered him as entirely vicious, and others as almost god-like in the splendour of his attributes. Everything depends upon whether the comparison is drawn between man and a superior class of beings or between man and an inferior, since all abstract qualities must to some extent be relative. Neither comparison, according to Hume, is the correct one. The selfish and vicious principles in mankind itself should be weighed against the social and the virtuous, and the decision given in favour of the preponderating scale. There can be little doubt that the balance will be almost evenly maintained. It is often with the utmost difficulty that man prevails upon himself to forsake the evil and embrace the good, but he does frequently do so, even in the face of contempt and ridicule and misery. He is a lover of truth and justice, desires that virtue shall be rewarded and vice punished, and delights to exercise the virtue of benevolence and good will towards Indeed, generally speaking, "human nature his fellows. is virtuous and well-disposed, and little merits the abuse that peevish or unfortunate men are inclined to bestow

i. Hume's Essays 11. ii. Mirror 55.

iii. Mirror 77. iv. Spectator 588.

There appears, however, in spite of all Grove's arguments to the contrary, and in spite also of the philosophic view of Hume "that a man feels pleasure in doing good to his friend because he loves him, not loves him, for the sake of that pleasure," to have been abroad a general idea that all the actions of mankind commonly began and ended in self, that no one was indifferent to the interests of the world or performed his part merely for the service of mankind without the least regard to himself. Even Steele inclined a little to this mean view of human nature, declaring it to be his opinion that everyone was pursuing some end for himself "though indeed those endsdiffer as much as right and wrong. most graceful way that I should think would be to acknowledge that you aim at serving yourselves, but at the same time make it appear it is for the service of others that you have these opportunities."

If man is indeed so entirely selfish and ungenerous, it is not difficult to understand the reason of those constant complaints about the misery of human

i. Mirror 82. ii. Spectator 588. iii. Hume s Essays 11. iv. Adventurer 29; World 115 etc. v. Tatler 62.

life, which make themselves heard throughout the works of nearly all the essayists, and in particular of Johnson. In spite of the truly delightful humour which charms the reader of the Lives of the Poets, Johnson's view of life and of man's position in the world was distinctly pessimistic. To him this earth of ourswas a place full of pain and sorrow, and the condition of all men was of necessity most miserable. It was no use advising him to look on the bright side of things; to him there was no bright side and all that man could do was to make the best of this sed and wretched world in which he had been placed. He realised that whining and complaints were incapable of mending matters, and he could only recommend patience and fortitude. Throughout the entire collection of his essays he recurs time after time to the subject of man's wretchedness on earth, not complainingly indeed, but sadly and with a pitiful resignat-He looked upon misery "as inseparable from our present state", and upon pain as necessarily more "fixed and permanent than pleasure". He could not agree with those Stoic philosophers who refused the name of evils to

i. Rambler 109; 165; 196; Adventurer 69;111;120;138. ii. Rambler 52. iii Rambler 78.

all those calamities which inflict such pain, and inspire such sorrow in the minds of men. To him the evil and infelicity of the world was a very vital thing, demanding all the powers of human resolution. There is a mournful melancholy note about the entire Rambler and Idler. The author seldom digressed into light and mirthful subjects. The world was too serious a place for frivolity or idle laughter, Man ought to open his mind to a realization of the unhappiness and affliction which surround him. "Misery is the lot of man and our present state is a state of danger and infelicity". This is Johnson's favourite theme. Whenever one comes across an essay opening with a reference to the miseries of life, one may be almost sure it is the work of this pessimistic but gentle-hearted moralist.

He is not however quite alone in his idea of this life's sadness and calamity. It is mentioned even by the gay satiric World, iii and several times by the severe and earnest moralist Dr Knox. Such men cannot have felt so strongly as Addison did the power of a firm trust in the wisdom and love of God to mitigate the horror of this universal misery. In his religious beliefs Johnson was strictly orthodox, and seems not to have fully realised

i Rambler 32. ii Adevnturer 120. iii World 167 iv Knox's Essays, 51; 80 etc

the logical conclusions to which his gloomy opinions might be carried. He was nothing of a speculator, and did not go on to consider what kind of a God it was who allowed his creatures so to suffer, and seldom gives utterance to the idea that all this wretchedness will be compensated after death. He believed that a man was at liberty to try to better his condition, and drew a very wide distinction between corwardice and patience. At the same time his orthodoxy impressed upon him a belief in God's wisdom and goodness, the tendency of all things to man's good, and the possibility of turning miseries into happiness by receiving them rightly, and of blessing the name of the Lord whether he gives or takes away.

Perhaps chief among the miseries of life to a non-religious man is the knowledge that the existence he now enjoys must soon come to an end, and the apprehension of what must follow. Indeed even true Christians have not always been free from the same dread. Johnson, in spite of his upright and blameless life seems to have had a very great fear of death and hell. He assented without hesitation to the idea that death is an evil, "of dreadful ii things the most dreadful". But in this he stood almost

i. Rambler 32.

ii. Rambler 114.

alone among his brother essayists. Like them he was truly and sincerely religious, had no fears about complete annihilation, and tried to live such a life as might render him confident of enjoying eternal bliss.

Yet while he was often assailed by gloomy and terrific fears, they regarded death not as an object of terror and abhorrence but of joy and happy anticipation. Death is man's lot in common with the brutes, but he shares an eternal hereafter with his omnipotent maker and king. Life, as Johnson never tired of saying, was full of misery and disappointment, but how slight the grounds of complaint, when the recompense will be a whole eternity of happiness.

Vll. (a) Immortality of the Soul.

The doctrine of the soul's immortality, so glorious and so flattering to human nature, has naturally been always dear to the hearts of earnest Christians; nay, even to many infidels as well, for though the downright atheist could not of necessity cherish any hopes of a resurrection from the dead, yet the deist, disbelieving only the divinity of Christ, and the doctrines set forth in revelation, could, if he wished, subscribe thereto, since he assented to a God's existence, and with nearly every God, worshippers have believed that "all things are possible".

Addison divided immortality into two kinds firstly, "that which the soul really enjoys after this
life", and secondly "that imaginary existence by which
men live in their fame and reputation". This second kind
of immortality may be altogether neglected, since not
even the most hardened atheist could venture to deny it,
and would most probably desire to live therein as ardently
as any of his fellows. It was the former kind which
was so fiercely attacked and which called for such a

i. Tatler 81.

hot and spirited defence. Addison was the great bulwark of this doctrine among the essayists, and supported it with the same constancy and vigour as Bishop Berkeley showed in discharging the arrows of his abhorrence and contempt against his Deist foes. Again and again he expressed the delight with which he always contemplated man's immortality, a delight arising from his confident belief that there was such a thing as a future life, and that the time was not far off when he himself would be enjoying it. It seemed to him dike the pleasure which a man takes in hearing "all the discoveries and conjectures relating to a foreign country which he is at some time to inhabit". No doubt that after all they may be mistaken ever entered the minds of these 18th century Christians; the soul's immortality was to them the most certain and reasonable thing in the world. Byrom, one of Addison's coadjutors in the eighth Volume of the Spectator, spoke of the soul as "that divine part in our composition that will last for ever"; Pope, whose religious beliefs were so vague as to be almost unintelligible, and who by reason of the Essay on Man came to be linked with Bolingbroke and the Deists, tacitly

i. Tatler 156; Spectator 111; 600 etc. ii. Tatler 156. iii. Spectator 593.

accepted the doctrine of the soul's immortality by comparing man with the brutes, the condition of whose nature renders them "incapable of receiving any recompense in another life for their ill-treatment in this:" the excellent Bishop Berkeley enthusiastically declared that he could easily overlook any present momentary sorrow when he reflected that it was in his power to be happy a thousand years hence; Dr Johnson tried to alighten the gloom of his pessimism with this grateful doctrine of future joy: Hawkesworth affirmed himself content with a humble expectation of that time in which "everything that is crooked shall be made straight, and everything that is imperfect shall be done away"; even the gay, light-hearted Edward Moore became grave for once and asserted that he could not consider death as the final end of being; while the thoughtful Dr Knox laconically laid it down "this life is short, but there is another; this world is the place of probation, and the next of reward".

The idea of life as probation, of man as but a sojourner in the world was a necessary result of this doctrine of the soul's immortality. Addison declares

i. Guardian 61. ii. Guardian 89. iii.Rambler 120 Idler 41.

iv. Adventurer 10. v. World 73.

vi. Knox's Essays 112.

"that he is not to set up his rest here, but to keep an attentive eye upon that state of being to which he approaches every moment, and which will be for ever fixed and permanent". Similarly Hawkesworth asks, in those terse questions of his which often imply so much, "Is not the human mind a stranger and sojourner upon earth? has it not an inheritance in a better country in that is incorruptible and undefiled?"

The 18th century essayists, with the single exception of Hume, who could discover no proof other than iii divine revelation, did not regard man's immortality merely as one of God's most glorious promises revealed in the Holy Scriptures; but concurred even with the Deists in looking upon it as man's natural inheritance, quite conformable to the dictates of reason, and so obvious as to be beyond the need of definite proof. Yet so keen must have been the controversy concerning it, and so many must have been dull and phlegmatic enough to prefer the thought of annihilation before it, that essay after essay was devoted to the task of piling up evidence in support of that, which the writers had before declared really needed

i. Spectator 289. ii. Adventurer 24.

iii. Hume's Essay on the Immortality of the Soul.

no proof at all.

They began by saying that almost every nation, whatever its antiquity, and whatever its religious belief, had had some idea of an after life; that the most ignorant and unenlightened portion of mankind had as great a propensity to believe it, as the most profound philosophers and the sincerest Christians; that "the Pythagorean transmigration, the sensual habitations of the Mahometan, and the shady realms of Pluto" all agreed in the continuation of man's existence; and finally that it was hardly possible for the entire world thus to have been deceived.

In addition to the assent of all the best and wisest of mankind to this their birthright, and its ratification by an express revelation, there is in every mind a kind of secret sense, concurring with the other proofs of the soul's immortality. The natural notion of an eternity to come is an unanswerable argument that man iv was a being designed for it, or as Addison says "Who can imagine the existence of a creature is to be circumscribed by time, whose thoughts are not?"

i. Looker-on 32. iv. Spectator 628

ii. Guardian 89. iii. Spectator 210 v. Spectator 471.

The immateriality of the soul furnished one of the strongest arguments in favour of future immortality. John Hughes, in direct opposition to the idea of Hume, pointed out that as unthinking matter is endued with a natural power to last for ever, unless annihilated by Omnipotence, it would be absurd to imagine a superior being not endowed with the same privilege. According to the Looker-on, the Observer, and the most generally received opinion, the soul and body are each of different substances and are entirely independent of each other. constant changes in the human body, the loss of members and the approach of age do not necessarily have any ill effect upon the soul, which still remains in all its strength and vigour. Hume's notion is a very differnet He knows little of immateriality, believes the soul is developed together with the body, and that it is intimately connected with it.

The soul's love of existence afforded another vi. convincing proof that it would not be destroyed at death.

It has naturally a horror of annihilation, and, as John vii

Hughes calls it, "an appetite to duration" This causes

i. Hume's Essay on the Immortality of the Soul.

ii. Spectator 554. iii. Looker-on 32. iv. Observer 63

v. Spectator 111. vi. Spectator 210. vii. Guardian 27

a man, as fast as his time wears away, to look for something beyond. No wandering passion has been planted in the soul, no desire which has not its proper object. Shall then "that appetite to immortality natural to all mankind be alone misplaced or designed to be frustrated"?

An argument which seemed to commend itself to Addison with peculiar force, and which he expanded as fully as a single essay would allow; was "drawn from the perpetual progress of the soul to its perfection, without a possibility of ever arriving at it". While a brute soon arrives at a point of perfection which it can never, pass, a thinking being travels on from perfection to perfection, and improves perpetually. Can we believe that after having looked around him for a few short years, having made but a few discoveries, attained but a particle of knowledge and merely begun to subdue his passions, a man is to be hurried away, and utterly to Such an idea to Addison is impossible. He delights to picture the soul striving to reach perfection, and day by day approaching nearer to it; to consider it as shining for ever with new accessions of glory, and brightening to all eternity; still adding virtue to virtue and knowledge to knowledge; ever beautifying in the

eyes of God, and drawing closer and closer to him by greater degrees of resemblance.

Such a belief as this necessarily depends upon the nature of the Supreme Being. Indeed to Christian men the whole doctrine of the soul's immortality nearly concerns the divine justice, goodness, wisdom, and In the revelation of his will and purpose veracity. He has held out to men the hope of a future life, and his truth demands its fulfilment. His infinite wisdom would have forbidden the creation of such glorious creatures as man for the mean purpose of living and dying like brutes. He would never have given them talents which were not to be exerted, nor capacities which were never to be gratified. He would not have qualified the soul for so much happiness unless he had designed it for future enjoyment. Indeed as Grove declared. "Either man was made in vain, or this is not the only world he was made for: for there cannot be a greater instance of vanity than that to which man is liable, to be deluded from the cradle to the grave with fleeting shadows of happiness". If he is intended for a future

i. Spectator 111. ii. Spectator 600. iii. Spectator 626.

life, he is the most remarkable instance of the divine wisdom; if death is the end of all things, he is the most wonderful and unaccountable composition in the whole creation". Nor is the divine goodness less involved in the question since men would be more miserable than beasts were their hopes confined to this life only", for while beasts can be afflicted only by the pressure of the present evil, men often suffer both by the reflection of what is passed, and the fear of what is to come. Berkeley with his usual emphasis gives expression to the same sentiment, when he writes, "Were it not for the thought of my immortality, I had rather be an oyster than a man, the most stupid and senseless of animals than a reasonable mind, tortured with an extreme innate desire of that perfection which it despairs to obtain". To every thinking creature the misery of human life seemed to demand an after-time of happiness, a recompense for earthly infelicity. Goldsmith, in an essay whose pathos is almost unsurpassed in 18th century literature, voices this great world sorrow. "If we are to experience no other felicity but what this life affords, then are we miserable indeed; if we are born only

i. Spectator 635.

ii. Spectator 505; Citizen of the World 44.

to look about us, repine and die, then has heaven been guilty of injustice. If this life terminates my existence, I despise the blessings of providence and the wisdom of the giver".

This indeed was the proof which found most favour in the eyes of the 18th century. All men felt the necessity of a time when reparation should be made for the unmerited misfortunes suffered by the good, when punishment should be inflicted on the successful evil Steele with his wonted impetuosity of the wicked. declared that the great evils which so often overtake the virtuous, would convince him, even were he an infidel, that there must be an hereafter. There is in the world a "promiscuous and undistinguishing distribution of good and evil", and all "those who believe a future state of rewards and punishments act very absurdly if they form their opinions of a man's merit from his successes". It might be so, if this life concluded everything, because then the Almighty could have no opportunity of rewarding virtue; but otherwise to look

i. Citizen of the World 22. ii. Tatler 94. iii. Spectator 483. iv. Spectator 293.

upon misfortunes as the divine vengeance, is both erroneous and cruel. Afflictions must never be looked upon as judgments; they are often a proof of the affection of the heavenly Father "who would have his sons exercised with labour, disappoinment and pain, that they may gather strength and improve their fortitude". All the calamities which have befallen vicious men have befallen the virtuous as well; while our ignorance renders it impossible for us to know what are calamities and what are blessings. Many apparent misfortunes have turned to man's prosperity, many disappointments have saved a man from ruin. Could we see into the effects of things "we might be allowed to pronounce boldly upon blessings and judgments; but for a man to give his opinion of what he sees but in part and in its beginnings is an unjustifiable piece of rashness and folly." has not only suffered undeserved calamities but has even incurred them; we have often seen the distress and penury of men of whom the world was not worthy", and even the Redeemer of mankind was himself " a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief".

Such an argument is one which carries weight; but the essayists themselves have tended to weaken it by trying at various times to show that all men are treated

i. Rambler 178; Adventurer 120. World 11 etc ii. Spectator 237 iii Rambler 52. iv Adventurer 120 v. Guardian 54.

quite fairly in this life, and that no future life is required to bring about a balance of accounts. himself tells us that God has not distributed good and evil unequally, and that in spite of our constant repinings and complaints we would not willingly change our condition in every particular for that of any other From this it would follow that if a good man is quite satisfied with his present state compared with that of another, there seems no reason why the omnipotent ruler of the universe should not be satisfied for himas well. Dr Knox too declares that Providence has established a kind of equilibrium of happiness, but Hawkesworth pours out his contempt upon all such, shows the fallacy of the doctrine, and points out how right and wrong are thereby confounded, and the barrier by iii which appetite and passion are restrained is broken down. Virtue is not of itself sufficient to produce happiness on earth; man must look for his reward hereafter.

There is, however, a third view, which lies iv midway between these two. Hume, together with the author of the Looker-on, regarded virtue as generally productive of happiness and vice of misery here on earth;

i. Guardian 54. ii. Knox's Essays 35. iii. Adventurer 10. iv. Hume's Essays on Impudence and Modesty.

but instead of concluding that a future state was thereby unnecessary, the Looker-on had from the fact drawn an analogous argument for the soul's immortality. There is enough of justice here below to declare the divine equity, and to show that the perfection of justice will be exercised by Him hereafter.

Such is the mass of argument whereby the truth of the soul's immortality was sufficiently established during the 18th century. There are enough proofs given to convince anyone willing to be convinced. But there were a few who then as now formed to themselves a sullen satisfaction in thinking it a myth, who were inspired with the inverted ambition of hoping for annihilation. Their unbelief sprang merely from their fear; through this they were very willing to resign their pretensions to immortality and "to substitute in its room a dark negative happiness in the extinction of their being". ¹¹

i. Looker-on 42.

ii Spectator 210.

vll (b) Conceptions of a Future State.

The attentive contemplation of the life to come, so favourite a topic in the 18th century essays, was the natural result of the confident belief in the soul's immortality. The heathen, destitute of all promise of a future state, naturally gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the present; but all who have embraced the Christian doctrine, and have thus become acquainted with the hopes and fears of eternity, ought to restrain their corporeal passions and prepare themselves for death and the world to come. They know that their life on earth is short and transient, that their after-life is permanent and lasting; and that it is their interest to neglect the former so as to make provision for the latter, to sacrifice the pleasures of a few short years to those of an eternity.

Many of the ancient philosophers, heathen though
they were, had discovered by reason's light the wonderful
fact of the spirit's immortality.

From this
they had been led to a consideration of their

i. Rambler 29.

ii Spectator 575.

The Homericheroes merely continued their earthly life elsewhere; the Pythagcreans held the doctrine of the transmigration of souls; the Platonists considered the soul as retaining its earthly appetites; the Mahometans as suffering the unspeakable pains of hell, or wandering through the beautiful gardens of Paradise, quaffing its unintoxicating wine, clad in a glorious raiment, and attended by troops of dark-eyed maidens. Valuable as such notions must have been to those who held them, modern ideas are raised infinitely above them "in proportion to ithe advantages of Scripture and revelation".

In spite of the wide difference between these heathen thoughts about eternity, they all agreed in regarding the hereafter as a time of happiness or misery according to man's life on earth. This consideration had always constituted one of the strongest motives to morality and had given the greatest impetus to a virtuous life. It was for its moral and retributive bias that the Pythagcrean doctrine commended itself so strongly to one of the occasional 18th century essayists, Soame Jenyns, sometime a sceptic, but later a polemic

i. Spectator 146.

supporter of the Christian faith. He expounds the system plainly and at length; but whether his paper was written with complete good-faith; or whether he was merely amassing arguments for a mostrine which touched him little, it is impossible to say. At any rate, it is a pattern of clear and fofcible reasoning in harmonious language, and in an easy and graceful style.

The idea of the future as a time of retribution is quite as prominent in the Christian faith as in the creeds of the heathen. All who interpret the Bible literally, as did the majority in the 18th century, look forward to a Day of Judgment in which man's life will be examined by the Supreme Being and his doom If a future life is granted pronounced accordingly. at all such/retributive doctrine is most reasonable. Its rationality, manifested chiefly by its world-wide acceptation, and by a secret sense in the mind of every man, caused it to appeal especially to an age in which reason held such undisputed sway, and in which religion was vested with importance only through its capability of inducing a high tone of morality. The

i. World 163. ii Spectator 513.

conscience of every Christian, Steele thinks, will inform him that according to the good or evil of his actions here he will be translated to the mansions of eternal bliss or misery, a knowledge endowed with peculiar force in the gloomy and superstitious mind of a man like Dr Johnson. In the face of such a view life seemed a very small and paltry thing. The orthodox attitude towards it is summed up in the magnificent words of Hawkesworth, "To the sojourner on earth", he writes, as he draws a moral from one of his incomparable Eastern stories, "it is of little moment whether the path he treads be strewed with flowers or thorns, if he perceives himself to approach these regions in comparison of which the thorns and the flowers of this wilderness lose their distinction, and are both alike impotent to give pleasure or pain".

It is significant of the temper of the age, that age in which politeness and good-breeding were regarded with almost religious veneration, that there is much less insistence upon hell and its terrors than upon the pleasures reserved for the souls of good men in heaven. All through the century there was something of the same

i. Guardian 18.

ii. Adventurer 114.

whimsically alludes to in one of his Guardian papers.

"I remember about thirty years ago an eminent divine who was also most exactly well-bred, told his congregation at Whitehall that if they did not vouchsafe to give their lives a new turn, they must certainly go to a place which he did not think fit to name in that courtly audience".

It happens therefore that the punishments destined for the wicked are usually but vaguely alluded to as the converse of virtur's rewards, or more frequently are left to the fearful imagination of the reader. There is however an infinite amount of speculation with regard to the joys of heaven. What or where this heaven might be were questions which, then as how, had necessarily to remain in obscirity. All that could safely be affirmed, both as having the united assent of almost every age and all religions, and as being strengthened by the divine revelation of the Scriptures, resolved itself into the single fact that heaven was the habitation of the deity. Beyond this it was imposible to penetrate much further, except to declare that it must be a place of transcendent

i. Guardian 17.

ii. Spectator 580

glory and of unspeakable joy and happiness.

In spite of the great similarity between the various ideas of a future state, it must be owned that in all the heathen notions "there is something gross and improbable, that shocks a reasonable and speculative mind; but nothing could be more rational and sublime than the Christian ideas of heaven, nothing greater or nobler than the Biblical descriptions thereof. But it is characteristic of the tendency to symbolize and allegorize all things, a tendency which proved itself hostile to revealed religion as allowing all men to please themselves what portions of the Scriptures they interpreted literally, that Bishop Berkeley speaks of the symbolical meaning of those material things mentioned by the evangelists as constituting the pleasures of heaven. "It is in order to gratify our imagination", he declares, "and by way of condescension to our low way of thinking, the ideas of light, glory, a crown etc are made use of to adumbrate that which we cannot directly understand. If however, such happy descriptions are only stories to appeal to the simple minds of children and child-like men and women, in

i. Idler 41; Observer 59. ii. Guardian 89. iii. Guardian 89.

what spiritual and immaterial things do the joys of heaven consist? Perhaps the very uncertainty enhances their value, for at any rate it is impossible to give an answer at the same time fully adequateand sufficiently The various speculative ideas entertained by definite. different minds would be sufficient to fill many a volume. Each man, unconsciously it may be, endows his imaginary heaven with all those pleasures which attract him most. Many have managed to give themselves up so entirely to the love of that God whom they have as yet seen only through a glass darkly, that they are content to look forward to an eternity passed face to face in the divine presence, and engaged in the further contemplation of the divine attributes. Though our earthly senses are too gross to apprehend him, and we can see his graciousness only by his influence upon our minds, hereafter we shall always be sensible of our Maker's presence, and shall enjoy the pleasure of an extended knowledge of "the divine wisdom in the government of the world, and a discovery of the amazing steps of providence from the heginning to the end of time."

Others, whose affections have twined themselves too closely about their earthly friends, who have not loved

i. Spectator 237.

their fellows through the divine admonition and as a result of their love to God, but have been led to the love of God through a love of their fellows, have pleased themselves with regarding heaven as a place of meeting with those from whom they have been "parted by i the inexorable hand of death".

Some, whose lives have passed in the midst of strife and turmoil, who have been buffetted by all the adverse winds of fortune, whose souls have been tossed upon the cruel ocean of uncertainity and despairing doubt, have wished for nothing more than an eternity of rest, at length to lay aside their weariness in the peaceful mansions of heaven.

Addison tells us that the West Africans had believed that the souls of good men would be happy in the ii enjoyment of whatever kind of pleasure they desired.

He himself thought there was some probability in this notion, for, as the soul consisted of many faculties, it was capable of a variety of pleasures. In a state of perfect and unalloyed happiness it was but reasonable to suppose that all these faculties would find employment and would consequently provide each its own peculiar pleasure. In

i. Mirror 90. ii Adventurer 120.

this earthly life many of man's faculties serve only for his torment; he is importuned by desires which never can be satisfied, feels many evils which he has no power to avoid, and fears many which he will never feel. Infinite benevolence would never have created a being capable of enjoying so much more than is here to be enjoyed, were not this present state only "a preparation for some better mode of existence, which should furnish employment for the whole soul; and where pleasure should be adequate to his powers of fruition". This natural idea of a variety of pleasures is, as Addison states, confirmed also by revelation. The description of the throne of God represents all those objects which are able to gratify the senses and imagination; the understanding will receive all possible happiness in a state where all things will be revealed, and "we shall know even as we are known"; we shall likewise feel all" the raptures of devotion, of divine love, the pleasure of conversing with our blessed Saviour, with an innumerable host of angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect;" we shall be placed in the station most proper for us, and, instead

i. Idler 37.

of envying the position of another, shall think our own the happiest of all. Such are the gratifications Here also we made manifest in the Holy Scriptures. find that our delight in harmony will be fulfilled, and that instead of having to suppress our desires as now we must, we shall find our happiness in the gratification of them. We shall probably find satisfaction in extending the boundaries of our knowledge, and in approaching nearer amd nearer to the infinite wisdom of the deity". capability of infinite perfection will prevent us from resting satisfied in any acquisitions whatever without endeavouring further, so that it is quite conceivable that the blessed will be perfectually employed in fresh searches into nature, and eternally advancing into the fathomless depths of the divine perfections.

Thus all the 18th century essayists, with Addison at their head, have expended infinite pains in trying to give some account of what happiness man may expect to enjoy after death. They probably all realised that their ideas fell far short of the reality; that when the everlasting doors of heaven should be open, the

i. Spectator 600.

ii. Spectator 580.

iii. Spectator 634.

iv. Spectator 626

pleasures and beauties of the place would infinitely transcend their present hopes and expectations and that its glories would rise infinitely beyond what their weak minds were able to conceive.

The purpose of this constant consideration of an hereafter was without doubt a moral one. The essayists wished if possible, to induce men to give up their faults and to live such a life as would secure for them these wonderful and everlasting pleasures. They forgot however, that the joys of heaven have never been so effective morally as the pains of hell, and that fear guides thousands to their duty, who care little about a future reward and would be very willing to give themselves up to the gratification of all their worldly desires if they could adequately confirm their minds in a belief of death as complete annihilation. Moreover there is also a question whether the rewards the essayists promised were sufficiently tangible and realizable by the masses of their uneducated fellows. What pleasure can an ordinary artisan see in perpetual contemplation, or the despiser of learning in the acquisition of an infinity of Yet such men as these have quite as much knowledge?

i. Spectator 580.

ii. Whig-Examiner. 5.

chance of attaining by virtue of life to the delights of heaven, whatever these may be, as any among the most learned part of the community. Essays are not written merely for philosophers. yet it is to such that this section of them seems to be addressed. The majority of men wish something warmer, perhaps even more sensuous, than they have presented here. The ideas the Essayists express are reasonable enough no doubt, probable enough it may be, but who would not prefer to look forward to the material glories of the Biblical heaven than to such an indefinite, philosophical place as they make known. If this was capable of appealing to the mind of the 18th century workman, nay, even to the fine gentleman and fine lady, it must have been a very different class of people from those of the present day. idea of heaven must always be a vague one, but surely a poetical, allegorical vagueness is preferable to such a poor attempt to draw aside the veil and reveal a glory which is not in man's power to utter. To us it seems a kind of desecration to pry too closely, and to endeavour the debasing of everlasting splendour to the mean level of our human comprehension.

V111. THE CLERGY.

It is by no means difficult to form a comparatively just idea of the religious character of any period from the treatment meted out to the clergy. they are honoured and respected the nation has a strong religious bias; where they are ridiculed and scorned, irreligion has begun to make its inroads and impiety to prevail over devotion. It is therefore an easy matter to pass judgement upon the 18th century by a mere consideration of the attitude towards the ecclesiastics. Time after time, the essayists tell us of the disrespect paid to the clergy and the mean position they held among their fellows. At the beginning of the century this attitude was far from general; a sharp distinction was drawn between those who discharged and those who neglected their duty; but by 1750 the contempt had become more widespread and had embraced almost the entire body of the ministers of God. The essays dealing with all the affairs of the contemporary clergy are very numerous. The orthodoxy of the writers made them for the most part staunch supporters of the professors of divinity, and even where faults are pointed out

and rebukes administered, the spirit is one of sorrow rather than of anger.

From the frequency and virulence of the attacks upon the orthodox clergy by the foes of the established church, it is clear that there must have been some ground for a scorn and enmity seldom excited without Satire, if it is to gain polularity, must provocation. treat of existent, not imaginary faults, faults recognised and felt by all the nation; and though exaggeration necessarily distorts the picture it must not distort it beyond all knowledge. Consequently there must have been a very real and wide spread dissatisfaction with the Chruch's ministers; the nation must have felt itself neglected and agrieved or satires against the clergy would never have evoked such loud applause and universal encouragement. Obviously ministers were not attempting to perform the work expected of them, or were performing it very dilatorily and imperfectly. They must have been as faulty specimens of humanity as any of those whom they professed to teach, must have taken up the noble profession from base and unworthy motives, must have lived lives

totally unsuited totheir holy office; or at least must have been completely unfitted for the work, to awaken such a storm of indignation as raged for many years against them.

One would naturally expect that the very sacredness of their calling would have protected them in some measure from the frequent buffets aimed at them; that they would have been looked upon with respect and sometimes even with reverence. But it was not so. The profound deference paid to the Roman Catholic priests was not extended to the ministers of the Church of England. One has only to read Thackeray's Esmond, and notice the difference in the attitude to Father Holt and Dr Tusher, to realize how low was the opinion entertaine of the Anglican clergy.

Several causes might be adduced to explain this prevailing contempt. The chief is probably to be found in the method of appointment. Most of the livings were in the hands of patrons who could confor them upon whomsoever they desired, whether the object of their choice was fitted for the work or not.

It is possible to divide the clergy into five classes according to the manner in which they acquired their benefice. Firstly there were the relations of men in high office or of noble birth, young rakes and fine gentlemen, who took up the profession merely as a means of getting money, confident of preferment to pluralities through the influence of their connections, and desirous of shinking in all public places but their own pulpits.

Secondly came those who owed their preferment neither to talent nor to powerful relations, but to a servile flattery of the great, to a fawning, toadeating attitude to those who had in their hands the bestowal of a living. As known pointed out, "Many more have risen to ecclesiastical emolument and dignity by studying throughout their lives to make connections than by superior piety or theological attainments."

It was not ability or goodness, but "parliamentary iv interest which procured mitres, stalls and livings".

Those/were not so fortunate as to find a patron who should bestow a benefice upon them freely,

i. Knox's Essays 147; Citizen of the World 41.

ii. Knox's Essays 88. iii. Winter Evenings 134.

iv. Knox's Essays 131.

but who found themselves enabled to enter the Church by
the frequent venality of its offices, constituted a third
class. Here again, there was no question of
competency. The man who could bid most highly naturally
ousted a worthier but poorer applicant.

Fourthly there was the class whose patrons had been aware of the responsibility upon them, and had been governed in their choice by intrinsic merit and sanctity alone. This class of worthy parsons was no doubt a small one or it would have tended more to mitigate the censure of the whole body of the English clergy.

The fifth class was a product of the base but common practice of conferring pluralities upon a favoured few. One clergyman could not possibly preach in a number of pulpits at the same time; indeed he often pleased not to preach in any; so he used to hire out his various benefices to the lowest bidder who would do his work for a fraction of his pay. Many men were appointed to preside over churches which they never ii visited, and were content to receive the money, while others did the good, if any good was done. These clergymen,

i. Winter Evenings 81. ii. Winter Evenings 134. iii. Citizen of the World 41.

together with many of the two preceding classes, were usually in the lowest depths of poverty, a poverty which seems to have increased as the century passed by. Of all the earlier essayists the warm-hearted, generous Steele alone, refers to the scanty remuneration which many of them received, and points out how absurd and unjust it is to expect perfection for so paltry a salary as fell to the lot of numbers of the English preachers. These references become more numerous in the second half of the century. The frequent poverty of the parsons is spoken of by the peet Cowper in the single essay he contributed to the Connoisseur. Knox is especially bitter on the subject. "The worthy curate", he writes, "who spends all his days in preaching praying, and in visiting the sick, shall earn less, and be less respected than a smith or a carpenter." He is often suffered to go hungry and in rags, causing the common people to despise religion and morals when the see the teachers of them poor, mean and neglected."

The system of Tithes, introduced as a beneficial v reform by Swift, was the root of much evil. It caused

i. Guardian 65. ii. Connoisseur 134. iii. Knox's Essays 147. iv. Knox's Essays 131 v. Examiner 25.

a violent dislike of the clergy who exacted them, and hence a vast diminution of their influence for good. The age was an age of scepticism, and the laity begrudged their dues to an ecclesiastical body whose use they refused to recognise. They called it avarice in a minister to bargain for those tithes the law allowed him, even though he was driven thereto by the necessity of providing for a wife and family. They would not understand that a clergyman had to work for his living as they did, and like them was justified in expecting a competent reward.

During the second half of the century a new class of clergy sprang up, or at least attained a considerable share of notoriety. These were the sporting parsons, enthusiastic fox-hunters, but incapable preachers of the word of God. The first mention made of them in the more important essays is by Cambridge in one of his contributions to Moore's World. He speaks of a parson who though of mean education "was a thorough sportsman and so good a shot that the late squire took a fancy to him, made him his constant

i. Looker-on 3. etc. ii. Knox's Essays 10. iii. Knox's Essays 109; 140 etc.

companion and gave him the living". The popularity of this unworthy method of conferring benfices is attested later in the same year by the writers of the Connoisseur, "I have known several who by uniting the opposite qualifications of jockey and clergyman, have rode themselves into a living in a good sporting country". A minister who "was allowed to be the best bowler in the country, a dead short rode like the devil, and was a sure hand a finding a hare" could consider himself a man "of the most complete education". No wonder the masses complained about their pastors and rejoiced in attacks made upon them. A clergyman in the livery of a sportsman may thereby recommend himself to his patron, but he must of necessity be degraded among his parishioners, and render his order contemptible.

When such base motives led to advancement, and the virtuous part among the clergy were stigmatized with the disgrace of poverty, for poverty is a disgrace in the eyes of the rich vulgar, it is not to be wondered at that the protests of a few essayists failed to bring about a more respectful treatment. Berkeley, the well-beloved Bishop, might declare that "persons who have devoted

i World 56. ii. Connoisseur 41. iii.Lounger 40 iv. Knox's Essays 54.

who fear him", and that the whole order should not be i vilified because some few misbecome their function;

Steele might print his fiery papers against the Examiner's disrespectful treatment of the clergy; and Addison might express his hearty sympathy with the chaplain dismissed by his patron for daring to remain at table during the sweetmeats; but little could be done when the contempt originally arose from the behaviour of a considerable portion of the reverend men themselves.

To ensure a suitable deportment in his afterlife, it is essential for a man to take up the
ecclesiastical profession from right motives, not for
earthly gain or honour, nor because his incapacity
iv
seems to unfit him for other work, but with a firm
determination to do the will of the Master whom he
professes to serve. Then it will follow that his life,
instead of disgracing his holy office, will be one of the
strongest arguments he could employ for the conversion
of sinners and the convincing of his flock.

In spite of the vast numbers of unworthy clergy the majority were apparently men of good education.

i. Guardian 3.

ii Guardian 80.

iii. Tatler 255.

iv. Winter Evenings 82.

The Tatler tells us that "the clergy of Great Britain .. are the most learned body of men now in the world", and Goldsmith adds that they "receive a more liberal education and improve that education by frequent study more than any other of the reverend profession in Europe". Indeed their vast learning and excellent scholarship was admitted on all hands. It did not however procure them any large share of reverence; a dignified and virtuous behaviour is worth more than all the masses of theological or classical knowledge in a minister of the word of God. "Improper levities, compliances, or negligencies diminish that dignity which their office, their labours, their learning and their manners would otherwise maintain. When Swift's picture of a clergyman was a well-known and common one, it was not strange that parsons as a class should be unkindly and satirically treated. What would anyone think of the Christian religion when its expounders were accustomed to frequent the bowling green instead of the church, to visit their parishioners only in fine weather and to stay at home in bed when wet, to sleep in church when their curates were preaching

i. Tatler 66. ii. Goldsmith 17.

iii. Knox 114. iv. Knox 10.

in the afternoon, and to refuse to go to the sick a second time, if they did not return their visits.

It was but seldom that a worthy parish priest was found "performing his duties with conscientious regularity, and diffusing comfort all ii around him". More often the clergy were pleased to assume the character of liberties and rakes, to take the leadin public diversions, to shew themselves iii eminently careless and immoral, so that "the public have long remarked that some of the most distinguished coxcombs, drunkards, debauchees and gamesters, who figure at the watering places, and all public places of iv. resort are young men of the sacerdotal profession".

There was, however, a brighter side to this unpleasing picture. Knox, in spite of all his censure, declared his firm belief that the majority of church dignitaries preserved their character and were respectable vi f nothing more, while descriptions of good parsons and vii chaplains are frequent; partly because of the intrinsic worth of many, and a desire in the minds of just men to see them honoured as they deserved.

Perhaps the first and most important requisite

it. Knox 66 iii Knox 10.
iv. Knox 18. v. Knox 10 vi. Spectator 106, Conn: 84
vii. Spectator 2; Tatler 72; Adventurer 112.

in a parson is the love and practice of virtue and If there be any truth is our well-known morality. proverb, he would find the example set by an upright and blameless life a more powerful incentive to virtue than all his learned and impassioned exhortations. It is the first rule in oratory that a man must "appear such as he would persuade others to be; and this can be accomplished only by the force of his life". He cannot expect his hearers to obey the precepts he inculcates, if he himself sets the example of disobeying them. As Steele senten--tiously observes _ Speeches or sermons will ever suffer in some degree from the characters of those that make A clergyman holds a position of great responsibility; he is a public character and his actions are examined more than those of ordinary men. A greater degree of virtue will naturally be expected from him, and the earnest part of his parishioners will look to him as a pattern and a If he had a fuller realisation of this, he would use his utmost efforts to make his example a good one, and thereby to lead others into the way of truth. A worthy priest ought to be "the father of his parish, the guardian of the poor, the instructor of the ignorant, the protector of the injured, and the friend of all." He should display

i. Adventurer 12. ii. Tatler 70. iii Guardian 43.

iv. Knox 18, 153. v. Knox 10.

a devotion at once rational and manly, habitual and fervent, should inspire a contempt of this world, and a hopeful expectation of the next, and should defend, earnestly though not violently, the divine truths which he professes. He should however refrain from engaging in party disputes, or from giving himself up to the vehemence and intolerance of controversy. Steele who had an unfeigned affection towards the clergy exhorts them above all things to abstain from affectation. Hence he declares, and there is serious purpose underlying the bantering manner, "I have a long time with much concern, observed abundance of A man well bred and pretty fellows in sacred orders. well-dressed in that habit, adds to the sacredness of his function an agreeableness not to be met with among the laity I therefore earnestly desire our young Missionaries from the Universities to consider where they are, and not dress and look and move like young officers. It is no disadvantage to have a very handsome white hand, but were I to preach repentance to a gallery of ladies, I would, methinks, keep my gloves on". That the race of pretty preachers had

i. Adventurer 12. ii. Spectator 2, Tatler 72. iii. Tatler 114; 141; Goldsmith 17. iv. Spectator 38. v. Tatler 270.

attested both by the writers of the Connoisseur,
and by Dr Knox, who likewise advises young and fashionable
divines "not to be so solicitious in the display of a
white hand, as of a pure heart, of a diamond ring as
ii
of a shining example".

Far the greatest importance however was attached to a preacher's manner of delivery. A good appearance and a pleasant voice seem to have been regarded as of the utmost consequence, and certainly occupied far more of the writer's attention than the expediency of a virtuous life. A man cannot change his appearance nor even his voice; and if all failing in these respects were to be banished the ministry, the church would lose many of its most earnest and devoted The defect of St Paul should have been more clearly remembered, and the excellent result he nevertheles attained. In some cases, however, the fault was due to carelessness rather than to nature, and left both room and capacity for great improvement. importance which Addison attached to these matters is plainly shewn in his eulogy of Sir Roger's chaplain

i. Connoisseur 126. ii. Knox 133

The worthy knight had chosen out " a clergyman rather of plain sense than much learning, of a good aspect, a clear voice, a sociable temper, and a man that understood a little of backgammon". "I no sooner saw this venerable man in the pulpit", Addison remarks, "but I very much approved of my friend's insisting upon the qualifications of a good aspect and a clear voice; for I was so charmed with the gracefulness of his figure and delivery, as well as with the discourses he pronounced, that I think I never passed any time more to my satisfaction". Addison is certainly right in saying one finds greater enjoyment in listening to a fine voice and in gazing upon a go d figure, but one does not usually go, or ought not to go, to church for this kind of pleasure; earnestness and sincerity in a preacher should easily compensate for any vocal or bodily defect.

The preachers of the seventeenth century had been accustomed to aim both at length and at originality; and for the sake of these had been willing even to ii decommendation. Brevity of discourse had become

i. Spectator 106. ii. Winter Evenings 38.

fashionable in the eighteenth century; and the practice of reading the sermons of others had grown common Addison showed himself an ardent advocate of this new custom of a preacher's reading the most excellent sermons of his predecessors or contemporaries, instead of trying to compose his own. He tells us how Sir Roger on engaging his chaplain had made him a present of all the best printed sermons, and merely required him to pronounce one every Sunday in the pulpit, 'I could heartily wish, Addison comments, "that more of our country clergy would follow this example, and instead of wasting their spirits in laborious compositions of their own, would endeavour after a handsome elocution, and all those other talents that are proper to enforce what has been penned by greater masters. This would not only be more easy to themselves, but more edifying to the people".

Sermons delivered ex tempore were not common among the orthodox church of England preachers. A few of the most earnest and capable clergy got their sermons by heart and preached from memory, but the greater number were accustomed to perform the easier task of iii reading. Yet even this was done inefficiently; the

i. Spectator 106. ii Tatler 66.

clergy probably regarded good reading as far beneath their notice, a lesson fit for children, and did not consider its power of rousing suitable emotion in the minds of their hearers. All the world assents to the beauty and fitness of the Book of Common Prayer. Its sublime and matchless prayers possess the capability of awakening the most fervent devotion towards the Deity; but frequently their inherent power was all annulled by the slovenly way in which they were so often read. The clergy would not realise the power for good such prayers could wield if delivered witha due emphasis, and apposite raising and variation of voice, the sentence concluded with a gentle cadence, and in a word with such an accent and turn of speech as is peculiar to prayer.

On all hands it seems to have been admitted that the English clergy were no orators; that whatever their learning, virtue or sincerity, they did not know how to speak. The common dispute about the superiority of the ancients or moderns was no dispute so far as oratory was concerned. Everyone agreed in awarding the victorious palm to Greek and Roman

i. Spectator 147; Guardian 65. ii Spectator,147.

eloquence. Among modern preachers the art of speaking, with the proper ornaments or voice and ii gesture, was wholly neglected. Demosthenes' idea that the requirements of an orator were summed up in the single workd "action" was disregarded. The learned clergy of Britain made less use of gesture or action than those of any other country, standing stock iv still in the pulpit, and delivering their excellent discourses with such coldness and indifference that the unintelligent many of their congregations inevitably vefell asleep.

Yet at the same time as they advocated a more frequent use of action and a more impassioned fervour, the essayists did not wish their orthodox preachers to go to the other extreme and imitate the enthusiasm of dissenters. "As too little action is cold, so too much is fulsome..... Harsh and irregular sound is not harmony, so neither is banging a cushion oratory". As far as he himself was concerned, Dr Johnson was no friend to rhetorical action, as he shewed in a passage specially marked by his excellent satiric humour. "We have be n encouraged to believe",

i. Adventurer 127. ii Tatler 66; Idler 90; Goldsmith 17. iii. Connoisseur 35. iv. Goldsmith 17 Spectator 407; Connoisseur 126.

v. World 63. Tatler 70

he writes, "that our tongues, however feeble in themselves, may, by the help of our hands and legs obtain an uncontrollable cominion over the most stubborn audience, animate the insensible, engage the careless, force tears from the obdurate, and money from the avaricious. If by sleight if hand or nimbleness of foot, all these wonders can be performed he that shall neglect to attain the free use of his limbs may be justly censured as criminally lazy." But at the same time he saw, as who could help seeing? thar the vulgar and uneducated could be touched far more easily through their senses than through their intellects, that those who would be lulled asleep by solid and elaborate discourses of piety "would be warmed and transported out of themselves by the bellowing and distortions of enthusiasm." Accordingly he wisely exhorted those whose audience consisted of the common and unlearned, and the greater part of every audience consisted of such, to lay aside their dignified passionlessness and cold indifference, and to adopt the trifling but innocent means of persuading by enthusiastic voice and manner, since "compared with the conversion.

i. Idler 90 ii Spectator 407. iii. Connoisseur 27.

of sinners, propriety and elegance are less than In this Johnson was certainly more tolerant and more far-seeing than his youthful contemporaries, the authors of the "Connoisseur". It pleased them to draw a sharp distinction between preaching and oratory, to condemn inflamed eloquence and wild gestures in a clergyman as unsuitable to the place and his function, and to commend sobriety and temperance, even in the most earnest parts of his discourse; for, add the writers in the intolerance of their youth, "though such vehement heat may perhaps kindle the zeal of a few enthusiastic old beldams in the aisle, it has a very different effect on the more rational part of the congregation". Johnson is more right in recommending any means which have been found efficacious for the conversion of sinners.

The refraining from gesture and all other signs of excitement or enthusiasm was due to the violent hatred of dissenters and to the fear of being confounded with them. The orthodox clergy no doubt thought the best way to escape such a charge was to remove iii themselves as widely as possible from Methodistical rant.

i. Idler 90. ii. Connoisseur 126.

iii. Spectator 147.

Yet at the same time, as Goldsmith senteniously points out, "Folly may sometimes set an example for wisdom to practice, and our regular divines may borrow instruction, even from Methodists, who go their circuits and preach prizes among the populace. Even Whitfield may be placed as a model to some of our young divines: let them join to their own good sense his earnest manner of delivery". Goldsmith, indeed, confines the excellencies of a preacher to "proper assurance, earnestness and openness of style", and asserts that the peculiar graces of oratory are superfluous. "Common sense is seldom swayed by fine tones, musical periods, just attitudes, or the display of a white handkerchief". All the talents really requisite to become a popular preacher are a just sincerity and a manly assurance. If the British clergy would remember these things and temper their reason with enthusiasm, they would not lose so many of their hearers to the nonsense of dissenting congregations. But the more learned part of the nation resolutely shut its eyes to the valuable qualities possessed by its opponents. It delighted to pour out its satire and contempt upon them, and probably

i. Goldsmith 17. ii. Tatler 66; 72.

did much to terrify the church of England clergy into that state of apathy and dulness of which it afterwards A spirit of wider tolerance would have complained. remedied all the evil. But it was realised that affected oratory and extravagant delivery were first practised by those who varied from the established church, that "irregular tremblings of the voice and contortions of the person" constituted the eloquence of Quakers and Presbyterians, "who pour forth their extempore rhapsodies in a torrent of enthusiastical oratory". "An inspired cobbler", adds the writer, "will thunder out anathemas, with the tone and gesture of St Paul, from a joint stool; and an enlightened brick-layer will work himself up to such a pitch of vehemence, as shall make his audience Instead of copying this hot and quake again". extravagant manner of preaching, the sober English divines should have tried to reform it and adhered to the w ornamented simplicity noticed by Voltaire.

Yet in so doing, they were wittingly shutting the:
eyes to the desires and even the requirements of those
it was their business to teach. They were obviously

i. Tatler 69. ii. Connoisseur 126.

playing into the hands of the dissenting preachers, and all their satire and contemptuous laughter was vain to check the ever increasing popularity of the sects. That the devotion of the audience depended rather on the soundness of the preacher's lungs than on the soundness of his doctrine, was but a half truth; that sighs and groans, were in themselves efficacious in gaining followers was a palpable fallacy. The dissenting ministers frequently shewed a gravity of manners, and a judiciousness of conduct no way inferior to the Church of England clergy and had thereby deservedly procured a considerable share of the public estimation. Even the more vehement and nonsensical among them obtained a popularity not wholly undeserved, and managed to "grow fat by voluntary subscription", while the parson of the parish often had to go to law for half his dues. "Ordinary minds are wholly governed by their eyes and ears and there is no way to come at their hearts but by power over their imagination". The "superior illumination" to which they pretended was not wholly feigned, and it would perhaps have advanced their cause if the orthodox clergy could have claimed a little more.

i. World 136. ii. Connoisseur 47. iii. Knox 10.

iv. Tatler 66.

v. Knox 18.

To a certain extent this prevailing sober manner of delivery was due to the subject matter of the discourses pronounced. It was considered proper to address the reason of the hearers in preference to their passions, to bring forward the objections urged by infidels, to discuss them at length and to conclude by triumphantly refuting them. The free-thinker Collins at the very beginning of the century realized the fallacy of this method of procedure. As he declared no one had ever dreamed of doubting the existence of a deity until the Boyle lectures undertook to prove it. This position is again taken up by Dr Knox many years He points out that the majority who frequent the established churches are obviously Christians, and that therefore it is very strange in the divines to act as if attempting to convert an audience of heathers. Not only is such a practice ridiculous; its effects are singularly disastrous. From their earliest years the congregation had acquiesced, unthinkingly perhaps, but heartily and unhesitatingly in the existence of a God, in the doctrine of the Trinity, in the divinity of our Saviour, in the resurrection from the dead, and in the

i. Knox 42.

immateriality and immortality of the human soul. Then why disturb this strong though child-like faith and present doubts which otherwise would never have insinuated themselves?

This method, however, was usually called an address to reason, the making of converts from conviction, and had won for itself so great a measure of popularity as to obtain a very high eulogium from the accomplished and discerning Addison. Goldsmith shows himself more knowing in this instance, declaring with truth that men "seldom reason about their debaucheries till they are committed", and that "those who attempt to reason us out of our follies, begin at the wrong end, since the attempt naturally presupposes us capable of reason. Passion must be opposed to passion, or the war with vice will be a losing one.

Sometimes polemic disputes in the pulpit gave way to moral dsicourses. With the majority of hearers these were very popular, though their moral effect was hardly proportionable to their intrinsic excellence.

i. Tatler 66. ii. Goldsmith 17 iii. Knox 22.

Christian divines should rather preach "Christ and Him crucified" than harangue on moral subjects. They would find their hearers capable of deducing lessons for themselves, and of applying to their own lives the moral consequences of Christianity. age which delighted so much in morality, however, such a practice is not remarkable, and it is with no surprise that we find a parson taking credit to himself for teaching the moral duties of Christianity rather than explaining its mysteries. No wonder the vulgar flocked to the congregations of dissenters, where, too simple to perceive the frequent absurdity, the unmeaning utterances and nonsensical jargon, they felt themselves moved towards holier things and inspired with a love of the Master who had died to save them. It was not what Knox calls "frothy preaching", pleasing for the time being, but with no permanent goodeffect, which orthodox divines had cause to fear. The cant of "ignorant and hypocritical "pretenders would never have induced the sensible to desert the pulpit of modest and regularly

i. Knox 133.

ii. World 31.

educated men. The followers of Wesley and Whitefield had imbibed some of their master's true fervour and passionate enthusiasm, and it was qualities such as these which endowed them with their sway over the hearts of men. In English churches the inclinations and requirements of the poor were grossly neglected. The divines would seldom stoop to their mean capacities, and they who needed instruction most, found least in the orthodox religious assemblies.

It was this neglect of the poor and ignorant which had originally called for the work of Wesley and the Methodists. They carried the gospel to classes which the church was powerless to reach and adopted a method which could not fail to rouse them from their lethargy. Instead of reasoning with their audiences and combatting prejudices which often existed only in the preacher's imagination, they brought home to each individual man the awful fact off his soul's immortality, and the consequent misery of his condition. From this they went on to preach the gosepl of Christ's redemption, and to change the emotions of anguish and terror to a deep and ecstatic joy. The sighs and groans and tears which their sermons drew from

i. Goldsmith 17.

the entranced listeners witness the degradation in which the reformers found them. The message which they delivered, strange and sad as it may seem, was a new one. It went straight home to their hearts and filled them with an overwhelming joy. Ridicule was not the spirit in which to treat its outward manifestation, but an infinite pity. Faults, Methodism undoubtedly possessed, but its work was a great one. well and conscientiously performed.

1X CONCLUSION .

From an intelligent perusal of the essays of the eighteenth century, one may gain an idea of the life and character of the time quite as true and definite though not so full and detailed as from a careful study of all its long, elaborate treatises on specified subjects. The theologians themselves do not shew a clearer insight into contemporary religious affairs than is to be met with in the works of the essayists. The social life of the period is as well and as amusingly reflected in these terse and elegant compositions as in the drama of Sheridan and in the novel of Miss Burney or Richardson. The concise and pregnant criticism of the essayists upon the literature of their own and bygone ages is as valuable, or perhaps even more so since its appeal is wider, as the discourses of those who devoted themselves to this special literary form.

In almost all the themes affected by the eighteenth century essayists, Addison acted as the pioneer. This was especially the case in religious subjects, to which he devoted essay after essay with

unwearied zeal for truth. The subsequent essayists felt themselves constrained to follow him here as elsewhere and a portion of the work of almost every of them treats of the holiest things. Cnly "the World" with its mockery and ironic laughter held aloof, though the the reason Moore adduced was not without some weight "A weak advocate may ruin a good cause"____"And if religion can be defended by no better arguments than some I have late ly seen in the public papers and magazines, the wisest way is to say nothing about it". Right on to the end of the century, the fashion retained its vogue, and"the Looker-on" with more than a trace of the old Spectatorial humour in its secular papers, gave up an occasional essay to religious and moral affairs. Though at times the religious papers had little intrinsic value or originality, yet their presence tended to raise the tone of the whole mass of periodical essays and to give both the authors themselves and the public who perused them a more exalted opinion of the vehicle employed.

The object of such papers, as has already been pointed out was a moral one, and that they attained a partial degree of success is attested by the writers themselves. Dr Knox in one of his enthusiastic eulogiums

^{1.} World 1.

of the great work performed by his master Addison,

declared that thousands and even tens of thousands had

been benefitted and delighted by him.

Yet in spite of this it is certain that the excellent religious papers in the Spectator and its successors did not meet with the result they undoubtedly deserved. They could have appealed only to the educated and thoughtful among men, and would have been well-nigh unintelligible to those who were in the greatest need of spiritual guidance. This was the fault of all orthodox church teaching during the eighteenth century.

Wesley and Whitefield had found the lower classes in England little short of infidels, not intentionally but through lack of teaching. Religious thought and feeling was at a low ebb throughout the whole century, though never so deep in infidelity as France. The English have always been a religious nation, deeply affected in all they think and do by their beliefs. If religious life were dead on one side, it sprang up with increased vigour on another. Through innumerable and subtle influences at work, the whole tone of English thought and literature underwent an immense change,

^{1.} Winter Evenings 91.

and emerged very different from what it had ever been before. The eightemnth century was not a Romantic age nor a mystical age; it was an age of reason and common sense. Religion did not escape the general infection, ans though at the time the disease seemed a malignant one, there can be little doubt that it left the entire organism in a stronger and healthier condition than before. The Romantic revival constituted the remedy for religion no less than for poetry. The profound spirituality of Coleridge revived the old interest in and love for the mystical portion of the Christian creed, sweeping away all the poor mechanical substitutes for theology and reawakening the contemplative and speculative temper of the seventeenth century.

He undertook the task of shewing that the Christian faith was the perfection of human intelligence; that far from being opposed to reason, it was easily to be reconciled with it; that though there were mysteries in the Christian faith, those mysteries were reason, reason in the highest form of self-affirmation.

Religion was to him no longer a mere contrivance for purposes of morality, but was itself far greater and higher than morality could ever be.

The substitution of reason and common sense in place of the old speculative theology had therefore its own special utility. Mere speculation, untempered by the restraining influence of common sense, is apt to transcend all reasonable limits and to lose itself among the clouds of mysticism. Even mysticism must have some element to bind it to reality or like much of the peotry of Blake it will become unintelligible and therefore valueless. When religion was tending to become ridiculous through the fanaticism and superstition of many of its votaries, it found itself bound by the iron bands of reason and compelled to submit to all its stern dictates. Religious literature accordingly attempts no more high flights; its raptures and ecstacies are over; inspiration no longer receives any credence, and therefore is seldom to be found; every man relied exclusively on his own common sense and reasoning power, entertained no doubt of his own intellectual competence and believed faculties like his own capable of producing the highest form of literature and an adequate theological creed. Extraordinarily good moralising was put forth in abundance, but little that can be classed with Browne's "Religio Medici" or Taylor's "Holy Dying". It was the

same with religious literature as with every other branch. The eighteenth century produced hardly anything which may be placed among the great masterpieces of English literary art. The temper of Dr Johnson was the usual one at that time. Everyone has noticed how egregiously he has failed through all his criticism to appreciate much of what was best in literature, merely through trying to analyse it according to common sense Neither he himself nor any of that coterie which looked up to him with eyes of admiration, would ever have written a line the thought in which they realised was not prompted by their own common sense and intelligible to the common sense of others. None of them understood the existence of a kind of sense other than common sense and nonsense; that uncommon sense which gives its value to all great imaginative work. In Johnson and in al. the characteristic eighteenth century writers, is demonstrated how far common sense unallied with higher qualities will carry a man; it will assist him in producing good, sound work, and will prevent him from trying to satisfy the world with rubbish, but it will at the same time put out of his power the attainment of true

sublimity, of idealistic beauty or of imaginative soarings beyond the dull atmosphere of earth. But the abuse of so many poetic qualities in the seventeenth century had called for a stringent reform. If numerous beauties were lopped away together with the ugly excrescences, these beauties had the power of self revivication, and after a period, and that a very precious period, of death-like stillness, like the corn-seed during the winter frosts, sprang into a new life of abundant fructification.

This much maligned eighteenth century, then, was a time of the utmost value in the growth to perfection of our literature. Though the conclusions attained by common sense cannot have the same interest or variety as those attained by the more fertile imagination; though one may be constrained to own that the most readable portion of its literary produce is that genially himourous delineation of the fashions and foibles of an age in which fashion was made something of a fetish; though one may be inclined to dismiss the serious characteristic literature with but a half hearted glance, and turn away to the fore—runners of the great Romantic revival, yet this

period is deserving of a fuller and more loving study as a necessary time of tilling and watering and waiting, preparatory to a rich and glorious harvest. Then there would be fewer ungrounded sneers, displaying ignorance rather than discrimination, and a more thankful acceptance of the work this century has to offer us.

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