

CHAPTER THE SECOND

HERESIES; OR THE THINGS THAT GOD IS NOT

1. HERESIES ARE MISCONCEPTIONS OF GOD

Religion is not a plant that has grown from one seed; it is like a lake that has been fed by countless springs. It is a great pool of living water, mingled from many sources and tainted with much impurity. It is synthetic in its nature; it becomes simpler from original complexities; the sediment subsides.

A life perfectly adjusted to its surroundings is a life without mentality; no judgment is called for, no inhibition, no disturbance of the instinctive flow of perfect reactions. Such a life is bliss, or nirvana. It is unconsciousness below dreaming. Consciousness is discord evoking the will to adjust; it is inseparable from need. At every need consciousness breaks into being. Imperfect adjustments, needs, are the rents and tatters in the smooth dark veil of being through which the light of consciousness shines--the light of consciousness and will of which God is the sun.

So that every need of human life, every disappointment and dissatisfaction and call for help and effort, is a means whereby men may

and do come to the realisation of God.

There is no cardinal need, there is no sort of experience in human life from which there does not come or has not come a contribution to men's religious ideas. At every challenge men have to put forth effort, feel doubt of adequacy, be thwarted, perceive the chill shadow of their mortality. At every challenge comes the possibility of help from without, the idea of eluding frustration, the aspiration towards immortality. It is possible to classify the appeals men make for God under the headings of their chief system of effort, their efforts to understand, their fear and their struggles for safety and happiness, the craving of their restlessness for peace, their angers against disorder and their desire for the avenger; their sexual passions and perplexities. . . .

Each of these great systems of needs and efforts brings its own sort of sediment into religion. Each, that is to say, has its own kind of heresy, its distinctive misapprehension of God. It is only in the synthesis and mutual correction of many divergent ideas that the idea of God grows clear. The effort to understand completely, for example, leads to the endless Heresies of Theory. Men trip over the inherent infirmities of the human mind. But in these days one does not argue greatly about dogma. Almost every conceivable error about unity, about personality, about time and quantity and genus and species, about begetting and beginning and limitation and similarity and every kink in the difficult mind of man, has been thrust forward in some form of

dogma. Beside the errors of thought are the errors of emotion. Fear and feebleness go straight to the Heresies that God is Magic or that God is Providence; restless egotism at leisure and unchallenged by urgent elementary realities breeds the Heresies of Mysticism, anger and hate call for God's Judgments, and the stormy emotions of sex gave mankind the Phallic God. Those who find themselves possessed by the new spirit in religion, realise very speedily the necessity of clearing the mind of all these exaggerations, transferences, and overflows of feeling. The search for divine truth is like gold washing; nothing is of any value until most has been swept away.

2. HERESIES OF SPECULATION

One sort of heresies stands apart from the rest. It is infinitely the most various sort. It includes all those heresies which result from wrong-headed mental elaboration, as distinguished from those which are the result of hasty and imperfect apprehension, the heresies of the clever rather than the heresies of the obtuse. The former are of endless variety and complexity; the latter are in comparison natural, simple confusions. The former are the errors of the study, the latter the superstitions that spring by the wayside, or are brought down to us in our social structure out of a barbaric past.

To the heresies of thought and speculation belong the elaborate doctrine of the Trinity, dogmas about God's absolute qualities, such odd deductions as the accepted Christian teachings about the virginity of Mary and Joseph, and the like. All these things are parts of orthodox Christianity. Yet none of them did Christ, even by the Christian account, expound or recommend. He treated them as negligible. It was left for the Alexandrians, for Alexander, for little, red-haired, busy, wire-pulling Athanasius to find out exactly what their Master was driving at, three centuries after their Master was dead. . . .

Men still sit at little desks remote from God or life, and rack their inadequate brains to meet fancied difficulties and state unnecessary perfections. They seek God by logic, ignoring the marginal error that creeps into every syllogism. Their conceit blinds them to the limitations upon their thinking. They weave spider-like webs of muddle and disputation across the path by which men come to God. It would not matter very much if it were not that simpler souls are caught in these webs. Every great religious system in the world is choked by such webs; each system has its own. Of all the blood-stained tangled heresies which make up doctrinal Christianity and imprison the mind of the western world to-day, not one seems to have been known to the nominal founder of Christianity. Jesus Christ never certainly claimed to be the Messiah; never spoke clearly of the Trinity; was vague upon the scheme of salvation and the significance of his martyrdom. We are asked to suppose that he left his apostles without instructions, that were necessary to their eternal happiness, that he could give them the Lord's Prayer but

leave them to guess at the all-important Creed,* and that the Church staggered along blindly, putting its foot in and out of damnation, until the "experts" of Nicaea, that "garland of priests," marshalled by Constantine's officials, came to its rescue. . . . From the conversion of Paul onward, the heresies of the intellect multiplied about Christ's memory and hid him from the sight of men. We are no longer clear about the doctrine he taught nor about the things he said and did. . . .

* Even the "Apostles' Creed" is not traceable earlier than the fourth century. It is manifestly an old, patched formulary. Rutinius explains that it was not written down for a long time, but transmitted orally, kept secret, and used as a sort of password among the elect.

We are all so weary of this theology of the Christians, we are all at heart so sceptical about their Triune God, that it is needless here to spend any time or space upon the twenty thousand different formulae in which the orthodox have attempted to believe in something of the sort. There are several useful encyclopaedias of sects and heresies, compact, but still bulky, to which the curious may go. There are ten thousand different expositions of orthodoxy. No one who really seeks God thinks of the Trinity, either the Trinity of the Trinitarian or the Trinity of the Sabellian or the Trinity of the Arian, any more than one thinks of those theories made stone, those gods with three heads and seven hands, who sit on lotus leaves and flourish lingams and what not, in the temples of India. Let us leave, therefore, these morbid elaborations of

the human intelligence to drift to limbo, and come rather to the natural heresies that spring from fundamental weaknesses of the human character, and which are common to all religions. Against these it is necessary to keep constant watch. They return very insidiously.

3. GOD IS NOT MAGIC

One of the most universal of these natural misconceptions of God is to consider him as something magic serving the ends of men.

It is not easy for us to grasp at first the full meaning of giving our souls to God. The missionary and teacher of any creed is all too apt to hawk God for what he will fetch; he is greedy for the poor triumph of acquiescence; and so it comes about that many people who have been led to believe themselves religious, are in reality still keeping back their own souls and trying to use God for their own purposes. God is nothing more for them as yet than a magnificent Fetish. They did not really want him, but they have heard that he is potent stuff; their unripe souls think to make use of him. They call upon his name, they do certain things that are supposed to be peculiarly influential with him, such as saying prayers and repeating gross praises of him, or reading in a blind, industrious way that strange miscellany of Jewish and early Christian literature, the Bible, and suchlike mental mortification,

or making the Sabbath dull and uncomfortable. In return for these fetishistic propitiations God is supposed to interfere with the normal course of causation in their favour. He becomes a celestial log-roller. He remedies unfavourable accidents, cures petty ailments, contrives unexpected gifts of medicine, money, or the like, he averts bankruptcies, arranges profitable transactions, and does a thousand such services for his little clique of faithful people. The pious are represented as being constantly delighted by these little surprises, these bouquets and chocolate boxes from the divinity. Or contrawise he contrives spiteful turns for those who fail in their religious attentions. He murders Sabbath-breaking children, or disorganises the careful business schemes of the ungodly. He is represented as going Sabbath-breakering on Sunday morning as a Staffordshire worker goes ratting. Ordinary everyday Christianity is saturated with this fetishistic conception of God. It may be disowned in THE HIBBERT JOURNAL, but it is unblushingly advocated in the parish magazine. It is an idea taken over by Christianity with the rest of the qualities of the Hebrew God. It is natural enough in minds so self-centred that their recognition of weakness and need brings with it no real self-surrender, but it is entirely inconsistent with the modern conception of the true God.

There has dropped upon the table as I write a modest periodical called THE NORTHERN BRITISH ISRAEL REVIEW, illustrated with portraits of various clergymen of the Church of England, and of ladies and gentlemen who belong to the little school of thought which this magazine

represents; it is, I should judge, a sub-sect entirely within the Established Church of England, that is to say within the Anglican communion of the Trinitarian Christians. It contains among other papers a very entertaining summary by a gentleman entitled--I cite the unusual title-page of the periodical--"Landseer Mackenzie, Esq.," of the views of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Obadiah upon the Kaiser William. They are distinctly hostile views. Mr. Landseer Mackenzie discourses not only upon these anticipatory condemnations but also upon the relations of the weather to this war. He is convinced quite simply and honestly that God has been persistently rigging the weather against the Germans. He points out that the absence of mist on the North Sea was of great help to the British in the autumn of 1914, and declares that it was the wet state of the country that really held up the Germans in Flanders in the winter of 1914-15. He ignores the part played by the weather in delaying the relief of Kut-el-Amara, and he has not thought of the difficult question why the Deity, having once decided upon intervention, did not, instead of this comparatively trivial meteorological assistance, adopt the more effective course of, for example, exploding or spoiling the German stores of ammunition by some simple atomic miracle, or misdirecting their gunfire by a sudden local modification of the laws of refraction or gravitation.

Since these views of God come from Anglican vicarages I can only conclude that this kind of belief is quite orthodox and permissible in the established church, and that I am charging orthodox Christianity here with nothing that has ever been officially repudiated. I find

indeed the essential assumptions of Mr. Landseer Mackenzie repeated in endless official Christian utterances on the part of German and British and Russian divines. The Bishop of Chelmsford, for example, has recently ascribed our difficulties in the war to our impatience with long sermons--among other similar causes. Such Christians are manifestly convinced that God can be invoked by ritual--for example by special days of national prayer or an increased observance of Sunday--or made malignant by neglect or levity. It is almost fundamental in their idea of him. The ordinary Mohammedan seems as confident of this magic pettiness of God, and the belief of China in the magic propitiations and resentments of "Heaven" is at least equally strong.

But the true God as those of the new religion know him is no such God of luck and intervention. He is not to serve men's ends or the ends of nations or associations of men; he is careless of our ceremonies and invocations. He does not lose his temper with our follies and weaknesses. It is for us to serve Him. He captains us, he does not coddle us. He has his own ends for which he needs us. . . .

4. GOD IS NOT PROVIDENCE

Closely related to this heresy that God is magic, is the heresy that calls him Providence, that declares the apparent adequacy of cause and

effect to be a sham, and that all the time, incalculably, he is pulling about the order of events for our personal advantages.

The idea of Providence was very gaily travestied by Daudet in "Tartarin in the Alps." You will remember how Tartarin's friend assured him that all Switzerland was one great Trust, intent upon attracting tourists and far too wise and kind to permit them to venture into real danger, that all the precipices were netted invisibly, and all the loose rocks guarded against falling, that avalanches were prearranged spectacles and the crevasses at their worst slippery ways down into kindly catchment bags. If the mountaineer tried to get into real danger he was turned back by specious excuses. Inspired by this persuasion Tartarin behaved with incredible daring. . . . That is exactly the Providence theory of the whole world. There can be no doubt that it does enable many a timid soul to get through life with a certain recklessness. And provided there is no slip into a crevasse, the Providence theory works well. It would work altogether well if there were no crevasses.

Tartarin was reckless because of his faith in Providence, and escaped. But what would have happened to him if he had fallen into a crevasse?

There exists a very touching and remarkable book by Sir Francis Younghusband called "Within." [Williams and Norgate, 1912.] It is the confession of a man who lived with a complete confidence in Providence until he was already well advanced in years. He went through battles and campaigns, he filled positions of great honour and responsibility, he

saw much of the life of men, without altogether losing his faith. The loss of a child, an Indian famine, could shake it but not overthrow it. Then coming back one day from some races in France, he was knocked down by an automobile and hurt very cruelly. He suffered terribly in body and mind. His sufferings caused much suffering to others. He did his utmost to see the hand of a loving Providence in his and their disaster and the torment it inflicted, and being a man of sterling honesty and a fine essential simplicity of mind, he confessed at last that he could not do so. His confidence in the benevolent intervention of God was altogether destroyed. His book tells of this shattering, and how labouriously he reconstructed his religion upon less confident lines. It is a book typical of an age and of a very English sort of mind, a book well worth reading.

That he came to a full sense of the true God cannot be asserted, but how near he came to God, let one quotation witness.

"The existence of an outside Providence," he writes, "who created us, who watches over us, and who guides our lives like a Merciful Father, we have found impossible longer to believe in. But of the existence of a Holy Spirit radiating upward through all animate beings, and finding its fullest expression, in man in love, and in the flowers in beauty, we can be as certain as of anything in the world. This fiery spiritual impulsion at the centre and the source of things, ever burning in us, is the supremely important factor in our existence. It does not always

attain to light. In many directions it fails; the conditions are too hard and it is utterly blocked. In others it only partially succeeds. But in a few it bursts forth into radiant light. There are few who in some heavenly moment of their lives have not been conscious of its presence. We may not be able to give it outward expression, but we know that it is there." . . .

God does not guide our feet. He is no sedulous governess restraining and correcting the wayward steps of men. If you would fly into the air, there is no God to bank your aeroplane correctly for you or keep an ill-tended engine going; if you would cross a glacier, no God nor angel guides your steps amidst the slippery places. He will not even mind your innocent children for you if you leave them before an unguarded fire. Cherish no delusions; for yourself and others you challenge danger and chance on your own strength; no talisman, no God, can help you or those you care for. Nothing of such things will God do; it is an idle dream. But God will be with you nevertheless. In the reeling aeroplane or the dark ice-cave God will be your courage. Though you suffer or are killed, it is not an end. He will be with you as you face death; he will die with you as he has died already countless myriads of brave deaths. He will come so close to you that at the last you will not know whether it is you or he who dies, and the present death will be swallowed up in his victory.

5. THE HERESY OF QUIETISM

God comes to us within and takes us for his own. He releases us from ourselves; he incorporates us with his own undying experience and adventure; he receives us and gives himself. He is a stimulant; he makes us live immortally and more abundantly. I have compared him to the sensation of a dear, strong friend who comes and stands quietly beside one, shoulder to shoulder.

The finding of God is the beginning of service. It is not an escape from life and action; it is the release of life and action from the prison of the mortal self. Not to realise that, is the heresy of Quietism, of many mystics. Commonly such people are people of some wealth, able to command services for all their everyday needs. They make religion a method of indolence. They turn their backs on the toil and stresses of existence and give themselves up to a delicious reverie in which they flirt with the divinity. They will recount their privileges and ecstasies, and how ingeniously and wonderfully God has tried and proved them. But indeed the true God was not the lover of Madame Guyon. The true God is not a spiritual troubadour wooing the hearts of men and women to no purpose. The true God goes through the world like fifes and drums and flags, calling for recruits along the street. We must go out to him. We must accept his discipline and fight his battle. The peace of God comes not by thinking about it but by forgetting oneself in him.

6. GOD DOES NOT PUNISH

Man is a social animal, and there is in him a great faculty for moral indignation. Many of the early Gods were mainly Gods of Fear. They were more often "wrath" than not. Such was the temperament of the Semitic deity who, as the Hebrew Jehovah, proliferated, perhaps under the influence of the Alexandrian Serapeum, into the Christian Trinity and who became also the Moslem God.* The natural hatred of unregenerate men against everything that is unlike themselves, against strange people and cheerful people, against unfamiliar usages and things they do not understand, embodied itself in this conception of a malignant and partisan Deity, perpetually "upset" by the little things people did, and contriving murder and vengeance. Now this God would be drowning everybody in the world, now he would be burning Sodom and Gomorrah, now he would be inciting his congenial Israelites to the most terrific pogroms. This divine "frightfulness" is of course the natural human dislike and distrust for queer practices or for too sunny a carelessness, a dislike reinforced by the latent fierceness of the ape in us, liberating the latent fierceness of the ape in us, giving it an excuse and pressing permission upon it, handing the thing hated and feared over to its secular arm. . . .

* It is not so generally understood as it should be among

English and American readers that a very large proportion of early Christians before the creeds established and regularised the doctrine of the Trinity, denied absolutely that Jehovah was God; they regarded Christ as a rebel against Jehovah and a rescuer of humanity from him, just as Prometheus was a rebel against Jove. These beliefs survived for a thousand years throughout Christendom: they were held by a great multitude of persecuted sects, from the Albigenses and Cathars to the eastern Paulicians. The catholic church found it necessary to prohibit the circulation of the Old Testament among laymen very largely on account of the polemics of the Cathars against the Hebrew God. But in this book, be it noted, the word Christian, when it is not otherwise defined, is used to indicate only the Trinitarians who accept the official creeds.

It is a human paradox that the desire for seemliness, the instinct for restraints and fair disciplines, and the impulse to cherish sweet familiar things, that these things of the True God should so readily liberate cruelty and tyranny. It is like a woman going with a light to tend and protect her sleeping child, and setting the house on fire. None the less, right down to to-day, the heresy of God the Revengeful, God the Persecutor and Avenger, haunts religion. It is only in quite recent years that the growing gentleness of everyday life has begun to make men a little ashamed of a Deity less tolerant and gentle than themselves. The recent literature of the Anglicans abounds in the evidence of this

trouble.

Bishop Colenso of Natal was prosecuted and condemned in 1863 for denying the irascibility of his God and teaching "the Kaffirs of Natal" the dangerous heresy that God is all mercy. "We cannot allow it to be said," the Dean of Cape Town insisted, "that God was not angry and was not appeased by punishment." He was angry "on account of Sin, which is a great evil and a great insult to His Majesty." The case of the Rev. Charles Voysey, which occurred in 1870, was a second assertion of the Church's insistence upon the fierceness of her God. This case is not to be found in the ordinary church histories nor is it even mentioned in the latest edition of the *ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA*; nevertheless it appears to have been a very illuminating case. It is doubtful if the church would prosecute or condemn either Bishop Colenso or Mr. Voysey to-day.

7. GOD AND THE NURSERY-MAID

Closely related to the Heresy of God the Avenger, is that kind of miniature God the Avenger, to whom the nursery-maid and the overtaxed parent are so apt to appeal. You stab your children with such a God and he poisons all their lives. For many of us the word "God" first came into our lives to denote a wanton, irrational restraint, as Bogey,

as the All-Seeing and quite ungenerous Eye. God Bogey is a great convenience to the nursery-maid who wants to leave Fear to mind her charges and enforce her disciplines, while she goes off upon her own aims. But indeed, the teaching of God Bogey is an outrage upon the soul of a child scarcely less dreadful than an indecent assault. The reason rebels and is crushed under this horrible and pursuing suggestion. Many minds never rise again from their injury. They remain for the rest of life spiritually crippled and debased, haunted by a fear, stained with a persuasion of relentless cruelty in the ultimate cause of all things.

I, who write, was so set against God, thus rendered. He and his Hell were the nightmare of my childhood; I hated him while I still believed in him, and who could help but hate? I thought of him as a fantastic monster, perpetually spying, perpetually listening, perpetually waiting to condemn and to "strike me dead"; his flames as ready as a grill-room fire. He was over me and about my feebleness and silliness and forgetfulness as the sky and sea would be about a child drowning in mid-Atlantic. When I was still only a child of thirteen, by the grace of the true God in me, I flung this Lie out of my mind, and for many years, until I came to see that God himself had done this thing for me, the name of God meant nothing to me but the hideous scar in my heart where a fearful demon had been.

I see about me to-day many dreadful moral and mental cripples with this bogey God of the nursery-maid, with his black, insane revenges, still living like a horrible parasite in their hearts in the place where God

should be. They are afraid, afraid, afraid; they dare not be kindly to formal sinners, they dare not abandon a hundred foolish observances; they dare not look at the causes of things. They are afraid of sunshine, of nakedness, of health, of adventure, of science, lest that old watching spider take offence. The voice of the true God whispers in their hearts, echoes in speech and writing, but they avert themselves, fear-driven. For the true God has no lash of fear. And how the foul-minded bigot, with his ill-shaven face, his greasy skin, his thick, gesticulating hands, his bellowings and threatenings, loves to reap this harvest of fear the ignorant cunning of the nursery girl has sown for him! How he loves the importance of denunciation, and, himself a malignant cripple, to rally the company of these crippled souls to persecute and destroy the happy children of God! . . .

Christian priestcraft turns a dreadful face to children. There is a real wickedness of the priest that is different from other wickedness, and that affects a reasonable mind just as cruelty and strange perversions of instinct affect it. Let a former Archbishop of Canterbury speak for me. This that follows is the account given by Archbishop Tait in a debate in the Upper House of Convocation (July 3rd, 1877) of one of the publications of a certain SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CROSS:

"I take this book, as its contents show, to be meant for the instruction of very young children. I find, in one of the pages of it, the statement that between the ages of six and six and a half years would be the

proper time for the inculcation of the teaching which is to be found in the book. Now, six to six and a half is certainly a very tender age, and to these children I find these statements addressed in the book:

"It is to the priest, and to the priest only, that the child must acknowledge his sins, if he desires that God should forgive him.'

"I hope and trust the person, the three clergymen, or however many there were, did not exactly realise what they were writing; that they did not mean to say that a child was not to confess its sins to God direct; that it was not to confess its sins, at the age of six, to its mother, or to its father, but was only to have recourse to the priest. But the words, to say the least of them, are rash. Then comes the very obvious question:

"Do you know why? It is because God, when he was on earth, gave to his priests, and to them alone, the Divine Power of forgiving men their sins. It was to priests alone that Jesus said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." . . . Those who will not confess will not be cured. Sin is a terrible sickness, and casts souls into hell.'

"That is addressed to a child six years of age.

"I have known,' the book continues, 'poor children who concealed their sins in confession for years; they were very unhappy, were tormented with remorse, and if they had died in that state they would certainly

have gone to the everlasting fires of hell." . . .

Now here is something against nature, something that I have seen time after time in the faces and bearing of priests and heard in their preaching. It is a distinct lust. Much nobility and devotion there are among priests, saintly lives and kindly lives, lives of real worship, lives no man may better; this that I write is not of all, perhaps not of many priests. But there has been in all ages that have known sacerdotalism this terrible type of the priest; priestcraft and priestly power release an aggressive and narrow disposition to a recklessness of suffering and a hatred of liberty that surely exceeds the badness of any other sort of men.

8. THE CHILDREN'S GOD

Children do not naturally love God. They have no great capacity for an idea so subtle and mature as the idea of God. While they are still children in a home and cared for, life is too kind and easy for them to feel any great need of God. All things are still something God-like. . . .

The true God, our modern minds insist upon believing, can have no appetite for unnatural praise and adoration. He does not clamour for

the attention of children. He is not like one of those senile uncles who dream of glory in the nursery, who love to hear it said, "The children adore him." If children are loved and trained to truth, justice, and mutual forbearance, they will be ready for the true God as their needs bring them within his scope. They should be left to their innocence, and to their trust in the innocence of the world, as long as they can be. They should be told only of God as a Great Friend whom some day they will need more and understand and know better. That is as much as most children need. The phrases of religion put too early into their mouths may become a cant, something worse than blasphemy.

Yet children are sometimes very near to God. Creative passion stirs in their play. At times they display a divine simplicity. But it does not follow that therefore they should be afflicted with theological formulae or inducted into ceremonies and rites that they may dislike or misinterpret. If by any accident, by the death of a friend or a distressing story, the thought of death afflicts a child, then he may begin to hear of God, who takes those that serve him out of their slain bodies into his shining immortality. Or if by some menial treachery, through some prowling priest, the whisper of Old Bogey reaches our children, then we may set their minds at ease by the assurance of his limitless charity. . . .

With adolescence comes the desire for God and to know more of God, and that is the most suitable time for religious talk and teaching.

9. GOD IS NOT SEXUAL

In the last two or three hundred years there has been a very considerable disentanglement of the idea of God from the complex of sexual thought and feeling. But in the early days of religion the two things were inseparably bound together; the fury of the Hebrew prophets, for example, is continually proclaiming the extraordinary "wrath" of their God at this or that little dirtiness or irregularity or breach of the sexual tabus. The ceremony of circumcision is clearly indicative of the original nature of the Semitic deity who developed into the Trinitarian God. So far as Christianity dropped this rite, so far Christianity disavowed the old associations. But to this day the representative Christian churches still make marriage into a mystical sacrament, and, with some exceptions, the Roman communion exacts the sacrifice of celibacy from its priesthood, regardless of the mischievousness and maliciousness that so often ensue. Nearly every Christian church inflicts as much discredit and injustice as it can contrive upon the illegitimate child. They do not treat illegitimate children as unfortunate children, but as children with a mystical and an incurable taint of SIN. Kindly easy-going Christians may resent this statement because it does not tally with their own attitudes, but let them consult their orthodox authorities.

One must distinguish clearly here between what is held to be sacred or sinful in itself and what is held to be one's duty or a nation's duty because it is in itself the wisest, cleanest, clearest, best thing to do. By the latter tests and reasonable arguments most or all of our institutions regulating the relations of the sexes may be justifiable. But my case is not whether they can be justified by these tests but that it is not by these tests that they are judged even to-day, by the professors of the chief religions of the world. It is the temper and not the conclusions of the religious bodies that I would criticise. These sexual questions are guarded by a holy irascibility, and the most violent efforts are made--with a sense of complete righteousness--to prohibit their discussion. That fury about sexual things is only to be explained on the hypothesis that the Christian God remains a sex God in the minds of great numbers of his exponents. His disentanglement from that plexus is incomplete. Sexual things are still to the orthodox Christian, sacred things.

Now the God whom those of the new faith are finding is only mediately concerned with the relations of men and women. He is no more sexual essentially than he is essentially dietetic or hygienic. The God of Leviticus was all these things. He is represented as prescribing the most petty and intimate of observances--many of which are now habitually disregarded by the Christians who profess him. . . . It is part of the evolution of the idea of God that we have now so largely disentangled our conception of him from the dietary and regimen and meticulous sexual rules that were once inseparably bound up with his majesty. Christ

himself was one of the chief forces in this disentanglement, there is the clearest evidence in several instances of his disregard of the rule and his insistence that his disciples should seek for the spirit underlying and often masked by the rule. His Church, being made of baser matter, has followed him as reluctantly as possible and no further than it was obliged. But it has followed him far enough to admit his principle that in all these matters there is no need for superstitious fear, that the interpretation of the divine purpose is left to the unembarrassed intelligence of men. The church has followed him far enough to make the harsh threatenings of priests and ecclesiastics against what they are pleased to consider impurity or sexual impiety, a profound inconsistency. One seems to hear their distant protests when one reads of Christ and the Magdalen, or of Christ eating with publicans and sinners. The clergy of our own days play the part of the New Testament Pharisees with the utmost exactness and complete unconsciousness. One cannot imagine a modern ecclesiastic conversing with a Magdalen in terms of ordinary civility, unless she was in a very high social position indeed, or blending with disreputable characters without a dramatic sense of condescension and much explanatory by-play. Those who profess modern religion do but follow in these matters a course entirely compatible with what has survived of the authentic teachings of Christ, when they declare that God is not sexual, and that religious passion and insult and persecution upon the score of sexual things are a barbaric inheritance.

But lest anyone should fling off here with some hasty assumption that

those who profess the religion of the true God are sexually anarchistic, let stress be laid at once upon the opening sentence of the preceding paragraph, and let me a little anticipate a section which follows.

We would free men and women from exact and superstitious rules and observances, not to make them less the instruments of God but more wholly his. The claim of modern religion is that one should give oneself unreservedly to God, that there is no other salvation. The believer owes all his being and every moment of his life to God, to keep mind and body as clean, fine, wholesome, active and completely at God's service as he can. There is no scope for indulgence or dissipation in such a consecrated life. It is a matter between the individual and his conscience or his doctor or his social understanding what exactly he may do or not do, what he may eat or drink or so forth, upon any occasion. Nothing can exonerate him from doing his utmost to determine and perform the right act. Nothing can excuse his failure to do so. But what is here being insisted upon is that none of these things has immediately to do with God or religious emotion, except only the general will to do right in God's service. The detailed interpretation of that "right" is for the dispassionate consideration of the human intelligence.

All this is set down here as distinctly as possible. Because of the emotional reservoirs of sex, sexual dogmas are among the most obstinately recurrent of all heresies, and sexual excitement is always tending to leak back into religious feeling. Amongst the sex-tormented priesthood of the Roman communion in particular, ignorant of the extreme practices of the Essenes and of the Orphic cult and suchlike

predecessors of Christianity, there seems to be an extraordinary belief that chastity was not invented until Christianity came, and that the religious life is largely the propitiation of God by feats of sexual abstinence. But a superstitious abstinence that scars and embitters the mind, distorts the imagination, makes the body gross and keeps it unclean, is just as offensive to God as any positive depravity.