

Religion:
Past, Present, and Future.

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Man is a dependent being. As far back as we can find any history, authentic or traditional, there is embodied in him a religious or superstitious feeling of love, fear and worship for some Supreme, material or spiritual power. Religion is inseparable from the man; it is a part of his nature, and must in some way express itself in his life. No matter how irreligious he may claim to be, or believe himself to be, there is no man of normal mind, but has this feeling of reverential dependency upon some power above and beyond himself. In spite of this universality of feeling, no two men have the same religious belief, no two men have exactly the same manner of expressing their reverence and devotion.

Many attempts have been made to divide mankind on the basis of religion; to draw a distinct, fixed line between one class and another, and say, "These are religious; these non-religious"; but all such attempts have failed, and must always fail, because our world contains no irreligious class and because the minds of men are never man enough

alike to be distinctly grouped. But while the minds of men differ, if they were arranged as nearly as possible in a series, they would be found to range from the highest to the lowest and from extreme to extreme of religious belief in such imperceptible gradations that it would be impossible to divide them into any distinct classes, creeds, or beliefs. It would be easily seen that there was a great difference between the highest and the lowest; that there were many men whose beliefs were similar, and that their central belief differed widely from the quasi-mutual belief of another group, but between these groups would be found all gradations from the one to the other: They would be bound together in one inseparable class, but with no two individuals of the same identical belief.

Religion is a growing part of man's nature. As man progresses, religion progresses to keep pace with his advancement. In fact we must say, though knowing that the statement will not be fully accepted, that man's religion depends upon his environment. The basis of religion is not acquired; it is born with the man, but the form of expression of this religion is largely determined by the surroundings.

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and teachings of the youth. If a child is born of Mohammedan parents, hears nothing but Mohammedan doctrines, and sees nothing but the world as seen by Mohammedan eyes, he will, in all probability, accept the Mohammedan code of beliefs. If on the other hand, before his mind is molded, he is brought in contact with other widespread beliefs, and is made to see that they are superior to his own, he will gladly accept them. Of course the individuality of every man helps to decide his religion. If his individuality is too strong to be swayed by the common beliefs, he may live a religion practically his own, guided by nature rather than by man, but nevertheless strongly influenced by his environment.

In short, religions are common to all men, are fundamentally the same, but in their exteriority are determined by the individuality of the man and the age and environment in which he lives. With these points in view let us briefly glance at some of the religious movements of the past.

In the earliest days of which we have any history of man we find him worshipping some deity. His form of worship and his conception of

the deity were, naturally, as was everything else, of the most primitive kind. Nature and her universal laws were to him unknown. He saw no relation between the various phenomena about him, but attributed them all to be results of some uncertain, erratic, supreme power or powers. He personified and deified the objects and forces of nature which appeared to him mysterious. This system of deification and worship was continued through many ages, and as new forces of nature were discovered and recognized, new deities were created to assume their control, until at last, even the teachers and preachers of religion could not enumerate all the gods to whom their protection and wellbeing were entrusted.

Very naturally now as the relations of nature began to become manifest, the minds and beliefs of men were turned toward the unification of these deities and the combining of them into one or few gods. Now, of course, sprang up differences of opinion as to the nature and power of these gods, and we begin to have developed sects and denominations with more or less distinct creeds. Such is the history of any tribe or nation of tribes. Different nations had developed religions on entirely different bases and principles, and now,

as they were thrown together by war or commerce, their religions came in conflict and began to battle for supremacy. But before reviewing this strife, let us take a hurried glance at some of these differing peoples, their life, and their religions.

We will first look at Egypt as it was about eleven centuries before Christ. Europe and Asia are still groping in the darkness of barbarism, but Egypt has seen several thousand years of comparatively high civilization. Along the banks of the Nile, city after city rise in vast, gorgeous magnificence scarce exceeded even in modern days. Groups of pyramids, impressive for their mountain vastness, stand as silent sentries rearing their heads in solemn grandeur above the desert plain. Whole cities of temples, grand and majestic, skirt the shores of the sacred stream. Colossal statues and resplendent tombs rise on every hand. All of this must impress one that, "This is the land of religion." Daily religious services are carried on and sacrifices and prayers are almost continually being offered up to some one of the innumerable deities. We find that there are gods of all ranks and for all things. Great triads of gods are worshiped under different names in the different provinces, but all recognize one

supreme being as maker and preserver of all things. They believe in the transmigration of souls, in the efficiency of prayer, and in the judgment day. With impressive ceremonies, they lay their dead to rest in those tombs and temples of solemn grandeur, there to await the judgment day. Religion with them begins with birth and ends never.

We will turn from this scene of religious splendor to look at India. Here we find another people with another origin, the Hindus, who have brought with them, presumably from central Asia, their worship of the elements; The Sun, Dawn, Fire, and other common but mysterious phases of nature. Their religion is nothing short of fanaticism. Men torture themselves even to death in the hope of getting a glimpse of God. They shut themselves off from the world and live and act only for the spirit of the universe; think only of eternity.

Leaving this time, and coming to about the fifth century before Christ, we find Greece in the prime of her political and religious power. It is just preceding the age of Pericles; the great tragic poets are at work; Socrates is beginning his teaching; Anaxagoras and Aspasia are

beginning to promulgate their beliefs, that there is but one God of the universe. But the established religion is too strong, men are not prepared for such teachings and they are cried down. The Grecian ceremonies are no less impressive than those of the Egyptians; but while the Egyptian worship was sombre and mysterious, making death and the future world the central idea, the Grecian ceremonies were everywhere marked by gaieties and happy festivals.

At this same time we find in Persia, the great empire founded by Cyrus one hundred years before, the old religion of Zoroaster as modified by one thousand years of existence. Fire is believed to be a god that cleanses from all sin. Life is regarded as but a battle between good and evil. Ormuzd the creator of every thing good and pure meets in daily battle with Ahriman the god of evil. The followers of Zoroaster erect no temples, palaces, or altars, but offer up their sacrifices and prayers from the mountain tops. Life to these Persians is not, as to the Greeks, a gay festival, nor as to the Egyptians, only a single step in the soul's transmigration, but it is regarded as a never ending conflict.

Four centuries later, we see Christ and his

apostles spreading abroad the seeds of that great religion which has ever since held such an exalted position among the religions of civilized nations and seems destined to take and hold its place as the supreme religion of the world.

But perhaps we are going too fast, for before this time the simple Buddhist faith which had been driven from its birthplace in India, had been quietly but rapidly spreading over Asia, until by the time of Christ it had converted millions of these Oriental people and had become the ruling religion of that land. The teaching of Buddha is often called atheistic; yet it is characterized by elevated humanity and morality. Transmigration of souls through all phases of life is one of its characteristic beliefs. Although this is a religion that is very quietly taught and is little known outside of Asia, still more than 400,000,000 human beings claim faith in one or other of its several related branches.

About six centuries after Christ, we see the last of the great religions of the world initiated in the deserts of Arabia. At this time this country is inhabited by nomadic tribes who have no fixed form of religion. But now

there appears among them, a man with a religious faith for which he is willing to give his life's work to see it brought before his people; a faith in one Supreme Being, one Great Master who controls the universe. Mohammed after years of ceaseless toil, succeeded in spreading his belief and uniting these children of the desert into mighty armies that swept over Asia and Africa in an irresistible conquest that shook the world. The religion of Mohammed was a modern religion, monotheistic, high and ambitious in purpose and in principles, and easily overcame the antiquated and less progressive ethnic religions with which it came in contact, being checked only by the invulnerable ranks of its great sister religion, Christianity, and by the overpowering numbers of its passive but formidable rival, Buddhism.

There are many other widely different religious beliefs that might be spoken of, such as the old Chinese religion, Judaism, the religion of the Druids, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, and those found on the continent of America, but probably enough has been said to verify the point first made, that religions differ in their exteriority according to the age and environment.

in which they are formed and in which they thrive.

As the form of religion is determined by the nature and development of the people so, inversely, by the study of the religion we can form a very close conception of the advancement and condition of any nation or race.

At the present time there are but four religious faiths that need occupy our attention as the religions of the world. These are the Brahman, the chief surviving polytheistic belief, which embraces about 175 000 000 followers; then the Buddhists, numbering about 470 000 000; the Mohammedans with 220 000 000; and the Christians, with about 400 000 000.

The Brahman religion is a faith that belongs to ages past, it has not changed its form to keep pace with the advancement of the world, and as would be expected, we find its followers far in the rear of other nations in the matters of civilization and enlightenment.

The Buddhist religion is higher in its teachings, but does not lead men to believe that by their works they shall be judged; but on the other hand, leads them to dependency by its promises of rich reward. The nations

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of this faith we find made up of slow, inactive, dependent and impassive stoics.

The Mohammedan teaching is definite and far reaching in its purpose, but is much tinted with the personality of its founder who was ambitious, violent, licentious, and often gave way to bloodthirsty moods. Likewise we find its followers as a class ambitious and energetic but not of the highest moral and intellectual character.

Crowning all is Christianity, the religion of the civilized world. Its teachings and precepts are of the highest. The ideal Christian if realized, would be ethically and morally perfect. Christianity is not stationary, but keeps pace with the times. It teaches that a man must not only believe, but must live his religion. Christianity commands respect wherever it goes. Whether or not one believes in the divinity of Jesus Christ, he must reverence the man for the pure beauty and spotlessness of his character, for the unassailable sanctity of his life, for the love for his fellow men, and for his high aspirations and hopes for the future of mankind as shown in his teachings. As would be expected of a religion with such

high and progressive principles, it is found among the most advanced and enlightened people of the world. Christianity and enlightenment go hand in hand.

In Christianity we find the element of unity so essential to the permanency of any belief. The old nature worshipers of Greece had, perhaps, just as good moral doctrines as those of the Christians, but they lacked the unity that comes from the high principles and mutual purposes of the monotheistic belief, and so became "divided against themselves" and were trampled under as the world advanced.

But yet, as great as is our Christian religion, it is far from perfect. Although it has perfection for its purpose, and is progressive enough to mold itself to the needs and demands of the times, yet it must pass through many changes before it will be universally accepted. But can we say it is the religion that is at fault? Can we not better say that it is the teachers and believers that are at fault rather than the fundamental basis upon which they stand?

In this as in every other widespread belief, we find innumerable differing creeds: One

Class or denomination will claim that it is following the only true interpretation of the inspired word and that all other beliefs are of necessity wrong. Creed battles with creed; sect is arrayed against sect, denomination against denomination; and science steps in to combat them all. But is there any true cause for this clash? In most cases, "No". A man or group of men will interpret some of the Scriptural teachings, and will set these interpretations up as infallible. Another group of men make another interpretation equally as good which, in their eyes, is also perfect. The two interpretations agree in substance, but differ in detail; and upon these details as a basis, sects are formed that regard each other as enemies almost as deadly to what each deems its true religion as are the non-believers.

Men of science step in and demonstrate by undeniable truths that what were taken as basic principles in these interpretations were falsely grounded, and from this they argue that the whole religion is untrue and without foundation. The champions of religion are unwilling to concede anything to science, and will not admit that there is anything in their belief

that is untrue or that might be different from the interpretation they have chosen to put upon it. They think that it is showing unfaith to admit that certain phenomena are governed by fixed and inexorable laws of nature, instead of being governed by divine will as they have misconstrued the scriptures to say them to be.

So science goes on battling not with religion, but with its interpreters. Science is not necessarily an enemy of religion, but would be a helper, if they would but cooperate, for science is but a study of the truths of nature and their relations. It is the business of science to question all seeming interruptions and misinterpretations of the course of nature, and to refer phenomena, not at first as was the old religious idea, but as the last resort, to divine will. There is no reason for this warfare between religion and science, for science does not attack the principles and basic elements of religion, but only the superficial interpretations that man has made. Religious ideas should advance, and whenever the opinions of scientists differ from those of religious men, these opinions should be

weighed, decided and treated as friends and not as enemies; for whenever science can bring out a truth that is related to religion, the religion should gladly accept it, embody it, and conform to it.

The battling of sect against sect which a few years ago was so prevalent, we are glad to see is rapidly disappearing as men begin to take a more impartial view of the beliefs of other men as related to their own. The fallacy of the old belief that was once so common, "There is no true religion except the one taught by my sect, all others are wrong," is so obvious to thinking men that it hardly need be mentioned; for the world is coming to see that these differences of sect are but mole-hills upon the same mountain base. The statement, "There is no true religion but mine," shows only narrowness of view of the man making it. We have no hesitation in saying that in the broadest sense, all religions are true religions; or if viewed from the same narrow point as the man who regards sectarian creed as religion, we will make his own statement one step broader, make it universal, and say "There is no true religion",

for we can say without fear of contradiction that there is no sectarian belief that will stand, unaltered, as the accepted belief, through the coming ages.

Another serious fault proceeding from this same narrowness of view is the taking of one of these interpretations or misinterpretations and building upon it a creed to which everything else must conform and be subordinated; as, for instance, some our zealous Christians in their fervor of trying to impress the essentiality of faith, close their eyes to all but the doctrine "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," (Mark-16:16) and distort this into a Scriptural proof that all who embrace the faith and acknowledge the Christ are entitled to the Kingdom of Heaven, while all who do not worship God and Christ according to their creed are doomed to eternal punishment. They go so far as to step under the shadow of the gallows and take the most loathsome criminal, guilty of the most heinous crime even of murder, and while his mind is wrought to the highest pitch by the thought of his coming fate, they unremittently hold

before him a mental picture of his soul's salvation until he very naturally passes into that Clairvoyant state where he can say truly that he sees and believes; and then, without further ado, he is anointed and, at the execution, as his life goes out to pay the penalty of his misdeeds on this Earth, his snow-white spirit-soul ascends to its golden throne to sit among the angels forevermore. All this they claim to be able to do, although the Bible plainly says "Murders, drunkenness, revelling and such like, of which I have told you before, as I have told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Ga. 5:21.) On the other hand these expounders of faith claim that "He who does not see God as we see him must go down to eternal punishment." Even though a man may go through life doing daily deeds of kindness, and is known to all his fellow men as a martyr for the cause of virtue, love and truth, yet if he cannot conscientiously say "I believe as you believe", he must suffer eternal damnation. They seemingly do not see, or seeing do not believe, "that by works a man is justified and not by faith only" (Jas 3:24.)

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:26), but they say "Embrace our faith and no matter what your sins, all will be forgiven": they ignore the words, "I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent: according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God." (Ez. 24:14.) "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10).

"But", the reader will probably say, "if as you claim, these interpretations are but the opinions of different individuals as to what the true doctrines should be, has not one the right to accept what interpretations he pleases, and to ignore what he pleases?" Certainly he has; and we will make the statement just one step broader and say that all men have this right and can do the same with your belief. If others see it in some other light which they think is better, they are entitled to this belief and if they live up to their belief and it is productive of good works, it is a good and true religion.

We will return to our primary statement, "All religions are fundamentally the same." By this we do not wish to convey the impression that there is no difference in religions, or that the difference is all fanciful: nor do we wish to say that one religion is essentially just as good as another and that they should occupy the same rank throughout the world; for on the other hand we believe as we said before, that a religion is a growing institution, and is governed by the ^{native} intelligence and advancement; that the principles and teachings of one religion may be far above those of another, and that a progressive people should and do demand a progressive religion. What we do wish to set forth and maintain is, that all religions spring from the same source in man's nature; that one religion may be just as good as another of an entirely different creed; and that no matter what a man's religion may be, if he conscientiously lives up to his belief, and makes his daily life accord with his sense of right and justice, in short, if he lives up to the Golden Rule, he is entitled to the kingdom of his God, whether or not he sees as you see.

With such an evolutionary view of religion,

we cannot help but foresee a great change in religious forms for the future. As the high principles of the Christian faith have carried that religion around the world, and planted it firmly in every corner of the globe, so we expect to see it continue to spread and inculcate its moral teachings among the advancing nations. But we expect to see it grow as nations grow; to drop its old primitive forms and outworn faiths; to draw men to it, not by threats of eternal punishment for non-belief, but by the recognized superiority of its principles; to teach as a basic principle, that it lies in the power of man to bring mankind to perfection, and that this can be done by living up to your own ideal. The day of believing that men can ever be taught to think alike, or that they must think alike to attain their souls' salvation, is past, and men are beginning to see that, you have but to live as you believe, and "He shall reward every man according to his works." (Matt. 16:27)