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# TWENTIETH CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

BY

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

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“The object of the American Unitarian Association shall be to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity; and all Unitarian Christians shall be invited to unite and co-operate with it for that purpose.”

*(The General Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches, passed the following vote at Saratoga, N. Y., in 1894.)*

“These Churches accept the religion of Jesus holding, in accordance with his teaching, that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man.”

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## TWENTIETH CENTURY CHRISTIANITY.

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The universal acceptance of the theory of descent with modification since "The Origin of Species" was published in 1859, the recent triumphs of chemistry and physics, especially in their biological connections, the rapid progress of democracy since the American Revolution, and the carrying into effect not generally, yet frequently, of the doctrine of human brotherhood, have modified profoundly the thinking world's religious conceptions. Thoughtful people have dismissed the anthropomorphic ideas of God as monarch, king, or Lord of Hosts, with all the imperial and feudal-system ideas of God which have so long prevailed not only among the masses of mankind, but among the intellectual leaders of the race. No ideas about God have changed so much, however, as the ideas about him as creator. The doctrine of evolution represents creation, whether of the heavenly bodies or of plants and animals, not as a piece of work done once for all by an infinite artificer in a short time, and then left to run automatically on a predetermined scheme called natural law, but as growing or gradually developing, and having an immense historic past, a fluent present, and an unmeasured future. No thinking person now accepts as anything but primitive myth or fanciful poetry the story of the Garden of Eden, or the portrait of God in the second chapter

of Genesis as a being who formed man out of the dust of the ground, as a child fashions an image out of snow or clay. The Creator is for modern men a sleepless, active energy and will, which yesterday, today, and forever actuates all things, as the human spirit actuates its own body, so small and yet so inconceivably complex.

By savage man the gods were recognized chiefly in the irresistible catastrophes of nature, in the lightning, the earthquake, the flood and the drought, the volcano, and the mighty wind. Twentieth-century people recognize God chiefly in the wonderful energies of sound, light, and electricity, in the vital processes of plants and animals, in human loves and aspirations, and in the evolution of human society. Through the application of the inductive method the human race has within a hundred years gained the power of applying prodigious natural forces to beneficent human uses. In so doing it has obtained great spiritual advantages in new conceptions of God and nature. The thought of God as monarch or king is inconsistent with the nineteenth-century revelation of him through the achievements of natural science. He now appears as incessant workman, as universal servant, as tireless, omniscient energizer. Is this thought of God, unchristian? Not if we accept literally two sublime sentences in the New Testament, one uttered by Jesus and the other by Paul,—“God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,” and “In him we live and move and have our being.”

Democracy has produced a great change in the popular conception of the human ruler. So long as the ruler held his place by right of strength and prowess or by right of birth, he was often deified by the multitude, and so became the type of the god or gods. All through the Middle Ages the feudal system supplied the popular conception of the kingdom of heaven; and indeed, to this day the commonest conceptions of God's kingdom are based on feudal-system creations and practices. The intimate connection between Church and State, which has come down through unnumbered centuries and exists today in most nations, was natural and inevitable, so long as rulers held by divine right and God was only a magnified human ruler.

Into this obdurate mass of inherited opinion and tradition has burst democracy, and particularly American democracy, with its complete separation between Church and State. Democracy regards its rulers as selected servants. It respects them because they represent for the time being the mind and power of the nation. It loves them only if they turn out on trial to be worthy of love; that is, serviceable, honorable, humane, and inspiring. It thinks of them as leaders rather than rulers, and is heartily glad when they turn out to be capable of leadership. Democracy thinks of government as an agency it has itself created for directing and performing various kinds of work for the people's benefit, and not for the special benefit of any ruling class or fraction of the community. Government is, or ought to be, a per-

vasive, incessant, industrious promoter of the common welfare. The real power behind government in these days is what is called public opinion, and that government is best which is so constructed that it can give effect to the genuine, well-considered opinion of the mass of the thinking people. Hence the supreme importance of universal education in a democracy. This conception of government and of public opinion as the spring of governmental action is inconsistent with the ancient thought of God, but perfectly consistent with the modern thought of him.

The best observers of the social revolution which has been going on in Europe and America during the past hundred years agree that democracy has been the most powerful force in the great movement,— a force disintegrating, dissolving, and in some sense destructive, yet in high degree constructive, fore-reaching, and vitalizing. It wars against ancient authorities and traditions, but sets up a new and better authority of its own creation. Its attitude towards religion has been generally unfriendly, because the official Christian Church has been for many centuries an ally of the governing classes, and has been organized in the largest Christian bodies on lines of aristocracy or privilege, or in ranks or orders which exercise a sacred domination. Ever since the Protestant Reformation the Christian Church, considered as an institution possessing legal privileges and a special authority over the minds and lives of its members, has been in a declining state as regards power or influence; but the rate of this decline has been greatly

quickenèd during the past century of democracy,—and the end is not yet. With any established church democracy is inevitably at war; but under democratic institutions churches supported by voluntary contributions and endowments may flourish exceedingly in great variety, as they do in the United States. It is not, therefore, religion against which democracy contends, but the ancient establishments of religion which have long been in possession of special privileges and peculiar authorities. The most democratic nation may be profoundly influenced by a church which, possessing no privileges, knows how to stir the hearts of the common people.

The American democracy, which is to a large extent unchurched, manifests a remarkable indifference to many dogmas, formulas, observances, and rites which have had great historic significance in the development of Christianity. The democracy feels no interest whatever in the old dogmas about transubstantiation, predestination, vicarious atonement, or apostolic succession. It takes no side in these discussions, and is incapable of being interested in them. In this respect the mass of young democrats in any Christian country closely resemble the thinking Chinese and Japanese, who find it quite impossible to understand or take any interest in the theological discussions which still seem important to many Christian missionaries in those fields. Dogmas or creeds which have been matters of life and death in Christian lands for centuries seem to the Chinese or Japanese who are thinking of becoming Christians to be matters of no im-

portance and no interest. In like manner a democratic society turns its back on the Christian propaganda which gradually took form in the first five centuries of the Christian era, and then came down from generation to generation without essential change for nearly thirteen centuries more.

The spirit which actuates men of science reinforces the spirit of democracy in modern society. As a rule, men of science have scant respect for tradition or for any authority which is founded on age or acceptance by former generations. They are intensely individualistic, and have little sympathy with the privileged classes or with the traditional or consecrated systems of crystallized or deposited truth. As a rule, men of science have no faith in magic or miracle. They have a passion for truth and fact, but no liking for mere speculation or for theories based solely on men's intuitions. Nevertheless, they are liberal and comprehensive in their ideas of truth and fact; and so they put religion itself, the history of mankind, and the history of language into the region of truth and fact, where men of the most scientific spirit and perfect candor may labor with profit. In this sense the religions of the world are a legitimate field for scientific investigation. Of course, that religion will be most sympathetically explored which seems to the explorer to have been of most service to human society. Men of science also include, among proper fields for scientific investigation, the whole field of man's mental operations, emotions, and passions in regard to their sources, inter-relations, and reciprocal effects. Cau-



tious experimenters, therefore, study with increasing amplitude and success the reactions of mind and body, of mind on mind, and of one will on another will. In other words, science affirms rationality, and believes that man's whole nature is attuned to the nature of the universe and its God.

In these two prodigious forces—democracy and the spirit of scientific inquiry by the inductive method—there is a common element which is of fundamental importance,—the element of freedom, a freedom which is more than a personal right to think or speak as one pleases. It is the primary condition of existence for both democracy and science and for all their devotees. It is the condition of all scientific and all democratic achievement. It is both the condition and the result of finding the truth. No prophetic utterance can ever be more completely fulfilled than the prophecy, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” has already been. For four hundred years the real advance of the white race has been towards freedom, freedom of all sorts, in the family, in industries, and in government,—more and more freedom for the child, the woman, and the man; and the two great servants of freedom have been democracy and science. The Christian churches as organized in hierarchies, synods, councils or convocations, though never a unit in action, have heretofore counted for the most part on the other side; but, since the Protestant Reformation, several Christian churches or denominations have been undergoing a process of

evolution which will soon land them frankly and completely on the side of freedom.

So absolute, steadfast, and unstayed has been the march of freedom, civil, religious, and social, during the past one hundred years, that we may safely infer, concerning the future, that those authorities and forces, old or new, which are inconsistent with essential and disinterested freedom will in long process of time undergo liberal modifications or even cease to be used. There will be from time to time reactions in favor of authority and privilege, but they will surely be temporary and ineffectual. In the same way the influence of trades-unionism and socialism, agencies which cherish democratic ideals and on the whole have furthered the democratic movement in the nineteenth century, may decline in the twentieth, because some of their policies and methods are clearly inconsistent with a rational individualism and an unselfish liberty, and the despotic and oppressive elements in these organizations may come to dominate the liberal. For a like reason monopolies in industries and trade will be successfully resisted, since they cripple free competition and block progress. In like manner those churches will survive which best organize free co-operative good-will for beneficent action in this world. Christianity, renouncing its connection with governments and oligarchic institutions, will become the cordial ally of intelligent democracy and progressive science, and the most effective promoter of freedom, truth, justice, individualism, and human brotherhood. How far society has already come on this road towards liberty

we realize when we recall that all the ancient civilizations were founded on human slavery, and that force was in them the one source of authority. As liberty has increased, the use of force has diminished, until we begin to understand that the force used in the society of the future will be the force which protects ignorance and feebleness, resists evil propensities in individuals or groups, and defends man against adverse nature and his own injurious impulses. Those who delight in force, and in the manly virtues which are often developed in using force, need not fear that the civilization of the future will dispense with force and its hardy virtues. Man's conflict with nature and with his own defects and vices will forever give ample employment for many kinds of protective force, and for human daring, endurance, and self-sacrificing comradeship.

A third doctrine which is fast modifying the religious conceptions of mankind is not new, but newly applied, the doctrine of human brotherhood. Jesus taught it explicitly and implicitly, and the Christian Church has talked a good deal about it, but never put it into effective practice until democracy began to come to its own. It is expressed with wonderful perfection in the following sentence which Lowell quotes from Robinson and Brewster: "We are knit together as a body in a most strict and sacred bond and covenant of the Lord, of the violation of which we make great conscience, and by virtue whereof we hold ourselves strictly tied to all care of each other's good, and of the whole;" but this solemn teaching of Robinson

and Brewster did not come to perfect fruition in the Plymouth Colony, and has never yet been realized in any human society. The past fifty years, however, have witnessed more progress toward the realization of the brotherhood of man than all the preceding centuries of the Christian era. This progress is seen in the wide-spread interest in all the means of improving the moral and physical health of all classes of the community, in the better distribution of the products of faithful industry, in the ethics of all business, large and small, productive and distributive, and in the purpose to give the entire people a sound and effective education. A sympathetic, merciful, and disinterested regard for the less fortunate members of the race, carried into action and affecting politics, government, and industries, has characterized all the progressive peoples in Europe and America during the last fifty years, whatever their form of government, and promises to bring in a new era of peace and goodwill. As yet, the Orient has scarcely felt this new impulse towards carrying into practice this sentiment of brotherhood. The many social forces which are working to give effect to this prevailing sentiment are scattered and often not well organized; but they are all benevolent, and they work to one end. The organizations which foster the sentiment of brotherhood have leaders, seers, and prophets, but not rulers. They proceed from the loving emotions of multitudes. They take gradual effect on multitudes, and these effects will tell more and more on the social organization of mankind as time goes on. It is a

work which goes forward without haste, without rest, just as we think the work we call God's goes on. It is, indeed, a part of God's incessant beneficence, a comparatively new part.

These new forces which have so deeply affected the religious conceptions of modern men may seem to tend to take individuality and personality out of our conception of God. They are vast imaginings of omnipresent energy, far removed from the anthropomorphic conception of God as magistrate, enthroned potentate, and God of Battles. It is to be observed, however, that during the period which has witnessed all this progress in science, democracy, and the sense of brotherhood, the regard of mankind for individual persons and mankind's sense of obligation to persons of rare merit have not diminished, but increased. We of today recognize our obligations to leading spirits more clearly and comprehensively than our ancestors did. We have quite as strong an admiration as they felt for the prophets, seers, and saints of the past, and quite as strong a gratitude towards our own heroes as they had towards theirs; and we have the advantage of being grateful to many more persons, because universal education enables the passing generation to include great writers of any generation among their benefactors and guides. Human love goes out now as ever to esteemed persons in the family, the state, and the race. The sense of personality, the belief in personality, is an inherent part of our nature, which always has been and always will be, intense and irresistible. Therefore, so long as man is man, God

will be thought of as a person, and will have a name significant beyond all other names. Taking into consideration all the new demonstrations of science with regard to the attributes of God, no name so well describes him as *Our Father* among all those peoples who conceive of a father as the loving head of a family.

None of the advances of science and government have any adverse effect on the conception of Jesus as teacher and exemplar. The sciences have their own prophets, martyrs, and heroes, for whom all worthy scientific men feel profound reverence. Literature and art have their great masters, whose works survive for centuries, and long continue profoundly to influence select human spirits. Jesus, the amazing product of the Hebrew race and of the Hebraic history and tradition, is the supreme teacher of religion, whose teachings, imperfectly transmitted by the groups of simple people to whom he spoke in the language and the atmosphere of an obscure province, and soon corrupted in the great Greek and Roman world, have, nevertheless, proved to be the undying root of all the best in human history since he lived. For this personality the love and reverence of mankind are always ascending and always glowing with greater warmth and brilliancy, as the clouds which gathered out of paganism round his doctrines are gradually dispelled.

The Church of the future will reverence more and more the personality of Jesus, and will dwell on the extraordinary qualities of his teaching, as proved by their historical effects during nineteen centuries. He

laid down ethical principles of the purest worth which are good for all time, but which were so crushed and overborne by the existing currents of thought and the social institutions of his day that they have been struggling for recognition ever since they were uttered, and still lack their intended fruition. To strive patiently towards their just fruition is the mission of the Church of the future.

You perceive that I have been giving you reasons for the belief that the form of Christianity most likely to be accepted widely in the generations to come is the form familiar to the churches represented in this Conference,\* and expressed in the formula "The fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the leadership of Jesus." This is a form of Christianity which prefers liberty to authority; sees neither deities nor demons in the forces and processes of nature; deifies no human beings; is not propitiatory, sacrificial, or expiatory; relieves man from irrational terrors; relies on reason and hope; has ministers and pastors, but no mediatorial priests; recognizes and resists sins, wrongs, and evils; and looks death in the face; but dwells chiefly on goodness, life, and love. I am thinking, of course, not of present external appearances and immediate issues, but of strong undercurrents of thought and feeling, and of age-long movements in which countless minds and wills, and many religious bodies will take part.

On those who have inherited, or won for them-

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\*General Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches, at Buffalo, N. Y., October 6-9, 1913.

selves, this blessed faith, are there not laid certain clear obligations towards fellow-men? We Unitarian laymen, and our predecessors in the liberal faith, have generally been content to let our reverend preachers and writers penetrate the dark places of traditional theology, and to trust the Unitarian doctrine and practice to leaven the inert mass of archaic religious opinion. The penetration has been accomplished, and the leaven has worked wonderfully. Not only exact science and politics give support to our view of religion, but also recent economics, the new historical writings, and most of recent literature in both prose and verse, including all the greatest. These influences are silent and undemonstrative, but effective. They work without effort or sacrifice on our part. Does not the spirit of the times call on us for vigorous collective action in propagating the faith that is in us? Let us here highly resolve that we will teach our descendants carefully the doctrines we value; that we will maintain and secure to the future, so far as the shifting conditions of American life permit, the churches which have been already established as centers of toleration, freedom, and simplicity in religion; that we will plant new churches wherever a promising group of adherents can be gathered together; that we will take vigorous part in every public-spirited, well-directed movement to promote co-operative goodwill among men; that we will provide for the thorough education of our ministers, and see to it that they have a dignified maintenance in the country as well as in the cities; that we will welcome to our churches the



ministers and laymen of other denominations who have seen the light that shines for us; and that we will set before inquirers in foreign lands where Christianity is comparatively unknown the Christian gospel as we understand it.



HAVE never seen any persons who met anxiety, pain, sorrow, or death more calmly, more bravely, or with more resignation or more serenity than the Unitarians. ¶The Unitarian faith is dear to me because I was born into it, and educated in it; and because I have found it to be in my own personal experience, and in my observation of others, the most cheerful faith in the world in times of ease and prosperity, and the surest reliance of any faith in the world in times of trial and adversity. . . . If I am thankful for anything in this world, as I often am for the many privileges of my lot, I am thankful I was born into and have always lived in the simple, fundamental convictions of our Unitarian faith. To propagate that faith is, to my thinking, a holy thing, a sacred duty.

CHARLES W. ELIOT,

*President Emeritus of Harvard University*

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## PIONEERS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN AMERICA

Being the Great and Thursday Lectures Delivered in Boston in Nineteen Hundred and Three

Size, 5 1-2 x 8 inches; pages, 396; price, \$1.50 *net*; postage, 13 cents.

**T**HE purpose and scope of this volume cannot be better shown than by giving the subjects and authors of the thirteen chapters which make up its contents. These are: I. "William Brewster and the Independents," by Edwin D. Mead; II. "Roger Williams and the Doctrine of Soul Liberty," by W. H. P. Faunce; III. "Thomas Hooker and the Principle of Congregational Independency," by Williston Walker, IV. "William Penn and the Gospel of the Inner Light," by Benjamin B. Trueblood; V. "Thomas Jefferson and the Influence of Democracy on Religion," by Thomas R. Slicer; VI. "William Ellery Channing and the Growth of Spiritual Christianity," by William W. Fenn; VII. "Horace Bushnell and Progressive Orthodoxy," by Washington Gladden; VIII. "Hosea Ballou and the Larger Hope," by John Coleman Adams; IX. "Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Teaching of the Divine Immanence," by Francis G. Peabody; X. "Theodore Parker and the Naturalization of Religion," by James Eells; XI. "Phillips Brooks and the Unity of the Spirit," by Samuel A. Eliot.

The chapters making up this book were delivered as lectures in Boston in the spring of 1903, and attracted much attention. The purpose of the lectures and of the book is to set forth some of the great principles through which religious freedom in this country was achieved, and the connection with these principles of the great men who advocated them and gave them their power and enduring vitality. These thirteen champions of religious freedom were truly pioneers in the work in which they became so conspicuous, and no one can so fully realize the significance of our present freedom of thought in religious matters as by reading these accounts of the inception and growth of the religious principles which constitute so valued a part of our religious inheritance.

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

25 Beacon Street, Boston

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THE American Unitarian Association is the working missionary organization of the Unitarian churches of America. It seeks to promote sympathy and united action among Liberal Christians, and to spread the principles which are believed by Unitarians to be essential to civil and religious liberty and progress and to the attainments of the spiritual life. To this end it supports missionaries, establishes and maintains churches, holds conventions, aids in building meeting-houses, publishes, sells, and gives away books, sermons, tracts, hymn-books, and devotional works.

A list of free tracts will be sent on application. A full descriptive catalogue of the publications of the Association, including doctrinal, devotional and practical works, will be sent to all who apply.

The Association is supported by the voluntary contributions of churches and individuals. Individuals desiring to co-operate with this Association may receive a certificate of Associate Membership by signing an application card (sent on request to the Associate Department) and the payment of one dollar. Address communications and contributions to the Secretary at his office, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.

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## FORM OF BEQUEST.

*I give and bequeath to the American Unitarian Association, a corporation established by law in the State of Massachusetts, the sum of .....dollars, the principal to be securely invested and the income to be used to promote the work of the Association.*