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Freethought, again, is too fluid a term to permit its teachings being summarized in a set creed, but it does stand for a certain definite attitude of mind in relation to those problems of life with which thoughtful men and women concern themselves. It is that mental attitude which I aim at depicting. To those who are not directly concerned with the attack on supernaturalism it may also be a matter of regret that so much of this work is concerned with a criticism of religious beliefs. But that is an accident of the situation. We have not yet reached that stage in affairs when we can afford to let religion alone, and one may readily be excused the suspicion that those who, without believing in it, profess to do so, are more concerned with avoiding a difficult, if not dangerous, subject, than they are with the problem of developing sane and sound methods of thinking. And while some who stand forward as leaders of popular thought fail to do their part in the work of attacking supernaturalistic beliefs, others are perfectly compelled to devote more time than they would otherwise to the task. That, in brief, is my apology for concerning myself so largely with religious topics, and leaving almost untouched other fields where the Freethought attitude would prove equally fruitful of results. (viii) After all, it is the mental attitude with which one approaches a problem that really matters. The man or woman who has not learned to set mere authority on one side in dealing with any question will never be more than a mere echo, and what the world needs, now as ever, is not echoes but voices. Information, knowledge, is essential to the helpful consideration of any subject; but all the knowledge in the world will be of very little real help if it is not under the control of a right method. What is called scientific knowledge is, to-day, the commonest of acquisitions, and what most people appear to understand by that is the accumulation of a large number of positive facts which do, indeed, form the raw material of science. But the getting of mere facts is like the getting of money. The value of its accumulation depends upon the use made thereof. It is the power of generalization, the perception and application of principles that is all-important, and to this the grasp of a right method of investigation, the existence of a right mental attitude, is essential. The world needs knowledge, but still more imperatively it needs the right use of the knowledge that is at its disposal. For this reason I have been mainly concerned in these pages with indicating what I consider to be the right mental attitude with which to approach certain fundamental questions. For, in a world so distracted by conflicting teachings as is ours, the value of a right method is almost incalculable. Scepticism, said Buckle, is not the result, but the condition of progress, and the same may be said of Freethought. The condition of social development is the realization that no institution and no teaching is beyond criticism. Criticism, rejection and modification are the means by which social progress is achieved. It is by criticism of existing ideas and institutions, by the rejection of what is incapable of improvement, and by the modification of what permits of betterment, that we show ourselves worthy of the better traditions of the past, and profitable servants of the present and the future. C. C. (9) A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT. CHAPTER I. OUTGROWING THE GODS. One of the largest facets in the history of man is religion. If it were otherwise the justification for writing the following pages, and for attempting the proof that, so far as man's history is concerned with religion, it is little better than a colossal blunder, would not be nearly so complete. Moreover, it is a generalization upon which religions of all classes love to dwell, or even to parade as one of the strongest evidences in their favour; and it is always pleasant to be able to give your opponent all for which he asks—feeling, meanwhile, that you lose nothing in the giving. Universality of belief in religion really proves no more than the universality of telling lies. "All men are liars" is as true, or as false, as "All men are religious." For some men are not liars, and some men are not religious. All the generalization means is that some of both are found in every age and in every country, and that is true whether we are dealing with the liar or with the religious person. What is ignored is the consideration that while at one stage of culture religious belief is the widest and most embracing of all beliefs it subsequently weakens, not quite in direct proportion to the advance of culture, but yet in such a way that one can say there is an (10) actual relation between a preponderance of the one and a weakening of the other. In very primitive communities gods are born and flourish with all the rank exuberance of a tropical vegetation. In less primitive times their number diminishes, and their sphere of influence becomes more and more sharply defined. The gods are still credited with the ability to do certain things, but there are other things which do somehow get done without them. How that discovery and that division are made need not detain us for the moment, but the fact is patent. Advancing civilization sees the process continued and quickened, nay, that is civilization; for until nature is rid of her "haughty lords" and man realizes that there are at least some natural forces that come within the control of his intelligence, civilization cannot really be said to have commenced. Continued advance sees the gods so diminished in power and so weakened in numbers that their very impotency is apt to breed for them the kind of pity that one feels for a millionaire who becomes a pauper, or for an autocratic monarch reduced to the level of a voiceless citizen. The truth is that all the gods, like their human creators, have in their birth the promise of death. The nature of their birth gives them life, but cannot promise them immortality. However much man commences by worshipping gods, he sooner or later turns his back upon them. Like the biblical deity he looks at his creation and declare it good, but he also resembles this deity in presently feeling the impulse to destroy what he has made. To the products of his mind man can no more give immortality than he can to the work of his hands. In many cases the work of his hands actually outlives that of his mind, for we have to-day the remains of structures that were built in the honour of gods whose very names are forgotten. (11) And to buy his gods, after all, the only real apology that man can offer for having created them. This outgrowing of religion is no new thing in human history. Thoughtful observers have always been struck by the mentality among the gods, although their demise has usually been chronicled in times of exultation by rival worshippers. Here and there a keener observer has brought to bear on the matter a breadth of thought which robbed the phenomena of its local character and gave it a universal significance. 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consequences of a rejection of Christianity, if one lived in a Christian State, were serious enough. But when the secular State punished the heretic it was a manifestation of good will towards the Church and not the expression of a legal enactment. It was the direct influence of the Church on the State. Church and State were legally distinct during the medieval period, however closely they may have been allied in practice. With the arrival of Protestantism and the backing of the reformed religion given by certain of the Princes, the machinery of intolerance, so to speak, was taken over by the State and became one of its functions. It became as much the duty of the secular officials to extirpate heresy, to secure uniformity of religious belief as it was to the interest of the Church to see that it was destroyed. Up to that time it was the aim of the Church to make the State one of its departments. It had never legally succeeded in doing this, but it was not for the Roman Church to sink to the subordinate position of becoming a department of the State. It was left for Protestants to make the Church a branch of the State and to give religious bigotry the full sanction of secular law. [48] Neither with Catholic nor Protestant could there be, therefore, any relaxation in the opposition offered to independent thinking. That still remained the cardinal offence to the religious mind. In the name of religion Protestants opposed the physics of Newton as bitterly as Catholics opposed the physics of Galileo. The geology of Hutton and Lyell, the chemistry of Boyle and Dalton, the biology of Von Baer, Lamarck and Darwin, with almost any other branch of science that one cares to select, tell the same tale. And when the desire for reform took a social turn there was the same influence to be fought. For while the Roman Catholic laid the chief insistence on obedience to the Church, the Protestant laid as strong insistence on obedience to state, and made disobedience to its orders a matter of almost religious revolt. The whole force of religion was thus used to induce contentment with the existing order, instead of to the creation of an intelligent discontent which would lead to continuous improvement. In view of these circumstances it is not surprising that the word "Freethought" should have lost its actual uses to its general signification of a denial of the place of mere authority in matters of opinion, and have acquired a more definite and precise connotation. It could not, of course, lose in general meaning, but it gained a specific application and became propria associated with a definitely anti-theological attitude. The growth in this direction was gradual but inevitable. When the term first came into general use, about the end of the seventeenth century, it was mainly used with reference to those deists who were then attacking Christianity. In that sense it continued to be used for some time. But as Deism lost ground, thanks partly to the Christian attack, the clear and logical issue between that and Atheism became apparent, with the result that the definite anti-[49] religious character of "Freethought" became firmly established. And to-day it is the opposition to religion that is most prominent in the use of the term. The religious element in the freedom of thought has now disappeared, as well as in connection with the propagation of knowledge. That has always been the case, but the religious element of opposition of to rebellion has been to attack the enemy in his capital. All else has been matter of outpouring skirmishing. I have apparently gone a long way round to get at the meaning of the word "Freethought," but it was necessary. For it is of very little use, in the case of an important word that has stood and stands for the name of a movement, to go to a dictionary, or to appeal to etymology. The latter has often a mere antiquarian interest, and the former merely registers current meanings, it does not make them. The use of a word must ultimately be determined by the ideas it conveys to those who hear it. And from what has been said the meaning of this particular word should be fairly clear. While standing historically for a reasoned protest against the imposition of opinion by authority, and, negatively, against such artificial conditions as prevent the free circulation of opinion, it to-day stands actually for a definitely anti-religious mental attitude. And this is what one would naturally expect. Protests, after all, are protests against something in the concrete, even though they may embody the affirm[50]ation of an abstract principle. And nowadays the principle of pure authority has so few defenders that it would be sheer waste of time, unless the protest embodied a definite attitude with regard to specific questions. We may, then, put it that to us "Freethought" stands for a reasoned and definite opposition to all forms of supernaturalism, it claims the right to subject all religious beliefs to the test of reason, and further claims that when so tested they break down hopelessly. It is from this point of view that these pages are written, and the warranty for so defining it should be apparent from what has been said in this and the preceding chapter. [51] CHAPTER IV. REBELLION AND REFORM. Rebellion and reform are not exactly twins, but they are very closely related. For while all rebellion is not reform, yet in the widest sense of the word, there is no reform without rebellion. To fight for reform is to rebel against the existing order and is part of the eternal and fundamentally healthy struggle of the new against the old, and of the living present against the dead past. The rebel is thus at once a public danger and a benefactor. He threatens the existing order, but it is in the name of a larger and better social life. And because of this it is his usual lot to be crucified when living and deified when dead. So it has always been, so in its main features will it always be. If contemporaries were to recognize the reformer as such, they would destroy his essential function by making it useless. Improvement would become an automatic process that would perfect itself without opposition. As it is, the function of the rebel is to act as an explosive force, and no society of average human beings likes explosions. They are noisy, and they are dangerous. For the reformer to complain at not being hailed as a deliverer is for him to mistake his part and place in social evolution. The rebel and the reformer is, again, always in minority. That follows from what has already been said. It follows, too, from what we know of development in general. Darwinism rests on the supreme importance of the minority. It is an odd variation here and there that acts as the starting point for a new [52] species—and it has against it the swamping influence of the rest of its kind that treads the old biological line. Nature's choicest variations are of necessity with the few, and when that variation has established itself and become normal another has to appear before a new start can be made. Whether we take biology or psychology the same condition appears. A new idea occurs to an individual and it is as strictly a variation from the normal as anything that occurs in the animal world. 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beings each of whom must be restrained by direct coercion from murdering the other. In this case, therefore, we have to reckon with both biological and sociological forces, and I do not see that it needs more than this to explain all there is to explain. Human life is always associated life, and this means not alone a basis of mutual forbearance and cooperation, but a development of the sympathetic feelings which tends to increase as society develops, they being, as a matter of fact, the conditions of its growth. And whatever competition existed between tribes would still further emphasize the value of those feelings that led to effective co-operation. The question, then, whether the anti-homicidal feeling is at all dependent upon religion is answered in the negative by the fact that it ante-dates what we may term the era of conscious social organization. That of whether religion strengthens this feeling still remains, although even that has been answered by implication. And the first thing to be noted here is that whatever may be the value of the superstitious [92] safeguard against homicide it certainly has no value as against people outside the tribe. In fact, when a savage desires to kill an enemy he finds in superstition a fancied source of strength, and often of encouragement. Westernmar points out that "savagery carefully distinguishes between an act of homicide committed in their own community and one where the victim is a stranger. Whilst the former is under ordinary circumstances disapproved of, the latter is in most cases allowed and often regarded as praiseworthy."¹⁹ And Frazer himself points out that the belief in immortality plays no small part in encouraging war among primitive peoples,^[19] while if we add the facts of the killing of children, of old men and women, and wives, together with the practice of human sacrifice, we shall see little cause to attribute the development of the feeling against homicide to religious beliefs. We see that Sir James does show of reason to believe that no belief has done so much to retard the economic and thereby the social progress of mankind as the belief in the immortality of the soul; for that belief has led after race, generation after race, to sacrifice the real wants of the living to the imaginary wants of the dead. He says:—It might be due to some show of reason to believe that no belief has done so much to retard the economic and thereby the social progress of mankind as the belief in the immortality of the soul; for that belief has led after race, generation after race, to sacrifice the real wants of the living to the imaginary wants of the dead. The waste and destruction^[93] of life and property which this faith has entailed has been enormous and incalculable. But it can't help concerning with the disastrous and deplorable consequences, the unspeakable follies and crimes and miseries which have flowed in practice from the theory of a future life. My business at present is with the more cheerful side of a gloomy subject. Every author has, of course, the fullest right to select whichever aspect of a subject he thinks deserves treatment, but all the same we may point out that it is this dwelling on the "cheerful side" of these beliefs that encourages the religious to put forward claims on behalf of present day religion that Sir James himself would be the first to challenge. This is indeed very great, and it is to emphasize the darker side of a creed that has hundreds of paid advocates present to a bright side to the public gaze. But what has been said of the nature of the feeling against homicide applies with equal force to the religious. It is true that the public can claim a certain credit for their preservation. If that were all, then there is the reason for their presumption. But when we consider the matter more closely, it is clear that the religious have a far greater claim to the credit than the public. And when Sir James says that the task of government has been facilitated by the superstition that the government belongs to a superior class of beings, one may safely assume that the statement holds good only of individual government, or of particular forms of government. It will be well that when a people are led to believe that a certain individual possesses supernatural powers, or that a particular government enjoys the favour of supernatural beings, there will be less inclination to [94] resentment against orders that there would be otherwise. But government and governors, in other words, a general body of rulers for the government of the tribe, and the admitted leadership of certain favoured individuals, would remain natural facts in the absence of superstition, and their development or suppression would remain subject to the operation of social or natural selection. So again, with the desire for private property. The desire to retain certain things as belonging to oneself is not altogether unnoticeable among animals. A dog will fight for its bone, monkeys secrete things which they desire to retain for their own use, etc., and so far as the custom possesses advantages, we may certainly credit savages with enough common-sense to be aware of the fact. But the curious thing is that the institution of private property is not nearly so powerful among primitive peoples as it is among those more advanced. So that we are faced with this curious comment upon Sir James's thesis. Granting that the institution of private property has been strengthened by superstition we have the strange circumstance that that institution is weakest where superstition is strongest and strongest where superstition is weakest. The truth is that Sir James, Frazer seems here to have fallen into the same error as the late Walter Bagehot, and to have formed the belief that primitive man required breaking in to the "social yoke." The truth is that the great need of primitive mankind is not to be broken in but to acquire the courage and determination to break out. This error may have originated in the civilization of the savage to obey our rules, or it may have been a heritage from the eighteenth century philosophy of the existence of an idyllic primitive social state. The truth is, however, that there is no one so fettered by custom as is the savage.^[95] The restrictions set by a savage society on its members would be positively intolerable to civilized beings. And if it be said that these customs required formation, the reply is that inheriting the imitativeness of the pre-human gregarious animal, this would form the basis on which the tyrannizing custom of primitive life is built. There was, however, another generalization of Bagehot's that was unquestionably sound. Assuming that the first step necessary to primitive mankind was to frame a custom as the means of his being "broken in," the next step in progress was to break it, and that was a far more difficult matter. Progress was impossible until this was done, and how difficult it is to get this step taken observation of the people living in civilized countries will show. But it is in relation to this second and all important step that one can clearly trace the influence of religion. And its influence is completely the reverse of being helpful. For of all the hindrances to a change of custom there is none that act with such force as does religion. This is the case with those customs with which vested interest has no direct connection, but it operates with tenfold force where this exists. Once a custom is established in a primitive community the conditions of social life surround it with religious observances, with which the savage is surrounded. And so soon as we reach the stage of the establishment of a regular priesthood, we have to reckon with the operation of a vested interest that has always been keenly alive to anything which affected its profit or prestige. It would not be right to dismiss the discussion of a subject connected with so well-respected a name as that of Sir James Frazer and leave the reader with the impression that he is putting in a plea for present^[96] religion. He is not. He hints pretty plainly that his argument that religion has been of some use to the race applies to savages times only. We see this in such sentences as the following: "More and more, as time goes on, morality shifts its grounds from the sands of superstition to the rock of reason, from the imaginary to the real, from the supernatural to the natural.... 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And so far he is correct, he is only wrong in assuming it to have been of a beneficial nature. The main function of religion in sociology is conservative, not the wise conservatism which supports an institution or a custom because of its approved value, but of the kind that sees in an established custom a reason for its continuance. Urged, in the first instance, by the belief that innumerable spirits are forever on the watch, punishing the slightest infraction of their wishes, opposition to reform or to new ideas receives definite shape and increased strength by the rise of a priest[97]hood. Henceforth economic interest goes hand in hand with superstitious fears. Whichever way man turns he finds artificial obstacles erected. Every deviation from the prescribed path is threatened with penalties with tenfold force where this exists. Once a custom is established in a primitive community the conditions of social life surround it with religious observances, with which the savage is surrounded. And so soon as we reach the stage of the establishment of a regular priesthood, we have to reckon with the operation of a vested interest that has always been keenly alive to anything which affected its profit or prestige. It would not be right to dismiss the discussion of a subject connected with so well-respected a name as that of Sir James Frazer and leave the reader with the impression that he is putting in a plea for present^[96] religion. He is not. He hints pretty plainly that his argument that religion has

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