

THE RELIGION OF FREDERICK THE GREAT.

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SUCH is the unreasonable prejudice regarding the philosophers of the eighteenth century, so strong the general impression of their godlessness, that the title of this article is likely to beget a smile of incredulity in those who have not given the subject more careful consideration. To the narrow orthodoxy of that time all designations of those who could not accept the traditional doctrines of the Church were synonyms: Arian, Socinian, deist, rationalist, atheist, infidel, free-thinker, were but equivalent names of various enemies of the true faith. In large measure, and to the indiscriminating world, this confusion has been preserved until the present day, and certain thinkers of the last century are still thoughtlessly designated as atheists by persons whose own views, judged by the confessional standards of to-day, are less orthodox than those of the ones whom they thus misrepresent. Then as now, however, not to be an adherent of one's sect was as much as being hostile to Christianity, and critical of the Christian hierarchy was as much as having no religion at all. "Every age, every people, every individual," says Von Raumer, "interprets the word 'religious' in accordance with its own convictions, or its whims; and often the gentlest of souls cry aloud and accuse others of atheism because they do not find their own miniature idol of God in every chamber, every book and every heart." Voltaire and Thomas Paine, for instance, have been the bugbears of religious instruction in the evangelical churches of our own time to such an extent that glib tongues would scoff at mention of their religion; yet religion they undoubtedly had, of a very real sort, and their tenets would actually appear conservative if compared with the positive beliefs of not a few of those who still teach in orthodox Christian pulpits. We need not expect it to be otherwise with Frederick the Great, a man whose religious views

were shaped by disciples of Wolff and Leibnitz, by the reading of Epicurus, Locke and Voltaire.



THE YOUNG KING WITH HIS GUESTS AT THE ROUND TABLE.¹ (By Adolf Menzel.)

Strictly original views of religious problems we shall not find in Frederick, as indeed strictly original views are few and rare at

¹ The details of Menzel's picture of the Round Table of Frederick the Great are all strictly historical. The dining-room in which the scene is represented is situated on the ground floor of

any time. But there is no good reason for thinking that the views he expressed were not sincerely his own. He had thought through and lived through his philosophy of life. While even his phraseology borrows freely from that of his masters, yet of his deeper convictions I feel justified in saying, as Lowell said of Parker's words, that they had been "fierily furnaced in the blast of a life that had struggled in earnest."

But if serious thought and deep convictions on the mysteries of the universe and the greater problems of human life and destiny: the existence and nature of God, the nature of the soul and its future, the relation of the creature to the Creator, the right relation of the individual to his fellows,—if convictions on these subjects so deep as to control the course of one's life constitute religion, then Frederick was certainly a religious man. It is true, he had little of the emotionalism and the outward devoutness which with some people seem indispensable manifestations of religion, if not the very essence of it. But Frederick's training and life, if not his nature, inclined him to stoicism, notwithstanding the evidence of a certain lachrymose effusiveness manifested in some of his writings. This manifestation is superficial, and due to the prevailing epistolary tone of his French correspondents.

Baron von Suhm, one of Frederick's most intimate friends, reports in 1736 that he found him "so far gone in materialism as not to hesitate at the denial of all independent and separate soul life." Suhm undertook to cure his friend, and to this end translated into French for his use Wolff's *Vernünfftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele*. Very soon after submitting to this wholesome treatment Frederick wrote: "Gradually I begin to perceive within me the dawn of a new day; it does not yet gleam and glow fully before my eyes, but I see that it is within the possibility of human nature that I have a soul and that this is immortal. Henceforth I will hold to Wolff, and if he can demonstrate the immortality of my individual nature, I shall be content and calm." Very soon the prince was

the chateau of Sans Souci. The King is seen in the midst of his distinguished company. He is engaged in a lively discussion with Voltaire, who is just developing some argument. General Von Stille, who sits between the two, watches Voltaire, and is greatly interested in the discussion. At the corner, on the left-hand side of the picture, Mylord Marischal is engaged in a conversation with his neighbor whose back is turned toward the spectator. One of the famous greyhounds of the King comes out from under the table. Next in order is the Marquis D'Argens, who speaks with Monsieur De LaMettrie. Behind the latter appears Count Rothenburg, who smiles at the remarks of Voltaire. Count Algarotti shows a greater interest still, for he is leaning over the table, anxious not to lose a word of the argument. Marischal Keith leans back in his chair, apparently enjoying the conversation of the witty Frenchman. We need not add that the scene is a masterpiece of composition, and will forever remain one of the best and most classical art productions.

led from Wolff to Leibnitz, and from Leibnitz to Locke, whom he continued to regard as the master of modern thinkers and whose method he endeavored to apply in his own reflexions upon science and religion.

Frederick met Voltaire in 1736, and in a letter to him, less than a year after the one just quoted, he writes: "Metaphysical subtleties are beyond our grasp; my system is restricted to the worship of the Supreme Being who alone is good, merciful, and therefore deserving of my reverence, and to trying with all my power to alleviate and lessen the sorrows of mankind, in all else submitting to the decrees of the Creator, who will do with me as to Him seems good, and from whom, come what may, I have nothing to fear." Whether he was aware of it is not evident, but certainly this beautiful confession of faith comes close to the Gospel requirement of a complete religion, "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God," while the trust expressed in the last phrase suggests Whittier's faith, "No harm from Him can come to me, on ocean or on shore."

While not always expressed with the same gentleness and positiveness, we shall find essentially the same belief in all Frederick's utterances, of whatever date. Seckendorf's report, in the year 1740, "He has the religion of a gentleman: believes in God and the forgiveness of sins," seems for its latter part to lack confirmation, for I nowhere find Frederick referring to the theological doctrine of sin and vicarious atonement. But a selection of passages from various periods of his life on the great topics of religion will show how constant was his interest in them and how consistent his thought on the whole.

Frederick's belief in the existence of God and his faith in the divine wisdom were constant and strong. Only once, perhaps, in the *Epistle to Mylord Marischal* on the death of his brother, is there anything that sounds like faltering. "They tell us that the God whom we adore is just and gentle,—yet we suffer so much! How reconcile paternal feeling in him with the burden of misery under which men struggle?—Cannot the value of the sacrifice move this God? Nor clouds of incense? No, deaf is his ear toward the prayers of the men whom his decree lays low!" But mingled as this is with appeals to the gods and allusions to Fate and Elysium it seems fair to regard it as merely a rhetorical attempt to express the intensity of his grief rather than the statement of a mature reflexion. This presumption is supported by the numerous and explicit declarations of his faith from various periods of his life. The *Ode on the Good-*

ness of God was composed in the year 1737. In a letter accompanying a copy of the ode which he sent to the Berlin preacher, Beausobre, Frederick says: "I have endeavored to depict God as I think of him and as he really is. His character is goodness, and I know him only by his loving kindness. How then could I maliciously distort him and attribute to him a cruel and barbarous character when all that surrounds me proclaims his mercy? I try to make God as lovable to others as he appears to me, and to inspire them with the same gratitude for his benefits as that which fills me." The *Ode* itself is a creditable hymn to the praise of God. A few stanzas of it will appear later. The tone of this letter as well as that of the first stanzas of the *Ode* suggests Whittier's *The Eternal Goodness*, for instance in the lines, "I know not of his hate, I know his goodness and his love," and "Forgive me if too close I lean my human heart on thee." Only a few years before his death Frederick composed the *Verses on the Existence of God*, again strangely suggestive of Whittier's thought in his *Questions of Life*, and especially of the lines, "I am; how little more I know; whence came I? whither do I go? A centered self, that feels and is; a cry between the silences." Some of Frederick's lines run as follows:

"Whence came I? Where am I? And whither am I going?

I do not know. Montaigne admits not knowing.

I, sent into the world but yesterday,

A being anything but necessary.—

This being is, was ever, and must aye,

Body or soul, continue, never vary;

This point, at least, I hear no one deny.

Yet, wretched, very limited creature I,—

E'en though deep insight do the fact reveal

That nought I know,—I think and will and feel,

And weigh my every action's consequence.

Think ye that being of omnipotence,

Author of all, and eke of humble me,

Would without will have worked and without aim?

Who gave me understanding, maker he,

Could give to me and not possess the same?

"Dare not to call the wisdom of God unkind,

But rather feel the weakness of thy mind,

Rebellious atom, thou ambitious man.

The boldness of the inquisitive sense to bridle

The Almighty set this barrier in his plan;

Perchance Omniscience by this darkness can

Put thee to shame, and prove thy reason idle."

Who will fail to be reminded here, both by the thought and the style, of Pope's *Essay on Man*?

Frederick's faith in the goodness of God is most touchingly expressed in his repeated declaration that even if God should see fit to extinguish his being with death, that faith would not be shaken. The old theological crux, whether he would be willing to be damned for the glory of God, never occupied him, but this faith



THE ROYAL AUTHOR IN TIMES OF WAR.¹ (By Adolf Menzel.)

comes as near as mortal can to an affirmative answer. In the *Ode on the Goodness of God*, he exclaims :

“Ah, even if my soul, awearied,
 Slave of the body, blotted out
 Goes down into the cavern dreary
 Of death's pale realm beyond all doubt,
 This soul, unfaithful to thee never,
 Thy praise will sing while here forever,

¹ Frederick the Great found sufficient leisure in his campaigns to express his thoughts in philosophical essays and his sentiments in verse ; he wrote in French, believing that language to be superior to his native German, for we must remember that the revival of German literature had not yet set in in his day ; it began with Klopstock and culminated in Goethe.

Ready alike for life or death ;
 Life was no debt thou hadst to pay me,
 And should the endless silence stay me,
 Man ends his sorrows with his breath."

And in the letter to Beausobre he says: "I will venture to undertake the defence of God even in case he should not have thought best to endow the soul with immortality, and finally I infer from the goodness which he is now showing me that which he will show me in the future." The last phrase refers to a stanza to be quoted presently in which Frederick expresses a modest hope for immortality. Before taking up that subject, however, we should complete the summary of Frederick's thought of God. The existence and the everlasting goodness of God are to his mind all that we should attempt to predicate of him. In the *Essay on Self-Love Considered as a Moral Principle*, sent to D'Alembert early in 1770, Frederick says on this point: "The finite cannot grasp the infinite; consequently we can get no accurate conception of the Divinity; we can only satisfy ourselves in a general way of his existence, and that is all. Let us be content to adore in silence, and to restrict the emotions of our hearts to the sentiments of profound gratitude to the Being of Beings in whom and through whom all beings are." The same thought is repeated in a poetic *Epistle to D'Alembert* three years later:

"Let us agree, a reasoning being wise
 Sits at the source whence all these splendors rise ;
 But let my heart adore,—not venture to define."

On the question of the immortality of the soul Frederick's expressions vary more, being, indeed, mostly sceptical, but extending on a few occasions to a faint utterance of "the larger hope." Reference has already been made to the materialism of his youthful views. In a letter to Rev. Mr. Achard, in March, 1776, he writes:

"I ask you whether you have any conception of an intellect without organs or, to make myself clearer, of any existence after the destruction of the body? You have never been dead, consequently you know what death is only from your sad observations. You see when the circulation of the blood stops and when the fluid parts of the body curdle or separate from the solid parts, that the person is dead who lived a moment before. You may philosophise on this fact, but what has become of the mind of this person, and what has become of the being that animated the body, you cannot explain. You were never dead; but as you still live, human pride and vanity flatter you to believe that you will survive the destruction of your body; but I believe, as I tell you frankly, that the wisdom of the Creator gave us reason to be used in the various situations of life where we need it, and that it is

no more inconsistent with the goodness of God to destroy us after death (for if we are destroyed we suffer no more evil) than to permit sin in the world."

In a letter to Voltaire, in 1775, Frederick states very positively his inability to accept the dualistic conception of the individual: "I know that I am a material, animated, organised being which thinks; thence I conclude that matter can think, just as it has the quality of being electrified."

As the logical sequence of this view Frederick's utterances touching the subject of the persistence of personality indicate a more or less definite expectation of annihilation. His *Last Testament*, composed early in 1752, begins as follows: "From the moment of our birth to that of our death our life is a swift transition. During this brief moment man should labor for the good of the society to which he belongs." Thereupon the king declares that it has been his ambition to rule wisely and justly, and proceeds: "Willingly and without regret I render back to kind Nature who gave it the breath that animates me, and my body to the elements of which it is composed. I have lived as a philosopher and wish to be buried as such, without processions, display, or pomp; I wish to be neither dissected nor embalmed; I wish to be buried on the terraces at Sans Souci, in a tomb that I have had prepared."¹

Over and over again the expectation and even hope of personal annihilation is expressed during the dark times of the Seven Years' War. Thus in the *Epistle to His Sister of Bayreuth*, August, 1757:

"I see, man is a plaything in the hand of Fate.
But if a being lives, severe and yielding never,
Who lets the vulgar multitudes increase forever,
He looks upon the world with coldness, calmly sees
How Phalaris is crowned, and fettered Socrates;
Indifferent sees vice, virtue, war's wild woes, the scourges
Which desolate the earth and fill the air with dirges.
And therefore, precious sister, nothing but death's arm
Will be my sole resort, last refuge from all harm."

Again, in writing to the Margrave of Bayreuth after the death of this sister the following year: "After this terrible loss life is more hateful than ever, and there will be for me no happier moment than the one that unites me with those whom the light no longer sees." This, to be sure, may owe something of its form to rhetorical stress. The same might be maintained regarding the following

¹ Strangely enough this last simple and explicit wish was not observed by Frederick's successor.

from a letter to the Lord Marischal Keith, in the same year, on the death of the latter's brother: "Viewing the narrow circle of years I feel anew commingled torment and bitter sadness; when at the close of life my evening falls, Atropos will silently press down my weary lids." But the same could not be said of the deliberate utterance in the *Epistle to the Marquis d'Argens*, written the year before the preceding:

"Death hath, O friend, for us nothing to rouse our terror,
 It is no skeleton to fright our gaze,—all error!
 This phantom dread which drives the color from the face,
 We praise it as the haven rather
 Where the great Romans all did gather
 When ruin faced them and disgrace.

 With Epicurus I agree,
 That soon or late all things which be
 Are by the tooth of Time destroyed;
 That to this breath, life's kindling ray,
 Spark of the fire by which brute matter's purified,
 It is not given to last for aye;
 Together with the body 'tis begot, increases,
 Endures with it its share of woes,
 Then it grows blurred and dark and finally it ceases,
 And surely perishes when the night's shadows close
 To bid the living from this world a last farewell.
 Soon as the soul its flight has taken
 All memory is gone, thought has its home forsaken;
 The state that unto death succeeds
 The inexorable dictate heeds
 Of the same law that ruled the earth
 Before the body came to birth;
 According to this iron law
 All mortals must at last surrender
 What to the elements they owe.
 The power that all impels, whence the quick atoms flow
 Which the reality of life engender,
 And from which Nature's self derived material form."

Aside from his inability to conceive of the phenomena of personality apart from tangible physical organisms, which would perhaps have left his disbelief in immortality rather agnostic than positively sceptical, Frederick's opinions were intensified by his hostility to the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which he regarded as an unsound and ignoble basis for morality. Thus in his *Epistle to Keith*, apropos of the death of the Marshal of Saxony, written in 1750, he exclaims at the close:

"Ah, wretched mortals, if the eternal fires
 Alone can purge your criminal desires,

Your austere virtues are a mere pretence.
 We who reject all future recompense,
 Who spurn belief in endless punishment,—
 Self-interest soils not our pure sentiment.
 With us the common weal and virtue sole are strong,
 And love of duty keeps us from the wrong.
 Yea, let us end in peace and die without regret
 If we may leave the earth some benefit.
 Thus the day-star, before he sinks in night
 On the horizon spreads a gentle light,
 And the last rays he to the zenith darts
 Are his last sighs ere from the earth he parts."

Similarly in the *Eulogy on Prince Henry of Prussia*, 1767, Frederick writes: "I see already the end of my own course, and the moment, dear prince, when the Being of all Beings shall mingle forever my ashes with thine. . . . Death, sirs, puts an end to all men; happy they who die with the comforting assurance that they deserve the tears of those who survive!"

On the other hand, there is no lack in Frederick's writings of expressions that show that he, too, sometimes cherished the thought of immortality as "a pleasing hope, a fond desire." In the *Ode on the Goodness of God*, already quoted, and just following the verses which express the faith that annihilation of our personality is quite consistent with the eternal goodness, occurs the following:

"But if, enduring on, my spirit
 The shears of Atropos survive,
 And, purified, it have the merit
 From the tomb's sleep to wake alive,
 How sweet the promise of that waking!
 I die content, and without quaking.
 I hasten to the infinite heart.
 My God, if filled with love supernal
 My soul, like thee, should prove eternal,
 Eternal joy would be its part."

Twenty years later, in the *Epistle to Mylord Marischal* on the death of the latter's brother, which followed quite closely the death of Frederick's mother and sister, the king writes with perhaps more rhetoric than reflexion in his expression: "O when shall I burst my heavy, golden fetters! When shall I escape this vale of tears, to near the moment that seems to me so sweet because it will unite me with thee forever, sister, dear! Then, by the grace of the gods, yonder in Elysium, in its green fields, with its happy inhabitants, our shades, freed from fear, will comfort each other for the much sorrow experienced here, and our hearts, true to the eternal laws of friendship, will then in peaceful delight cultivate this union, sur-

rounded by eternal light." However, hope and doubt are equally balanced here, for Frederick continues, "But what! What illusion of Elysian fields does the deceitful picture show me? Yes, reason, anxious for clearness, destroys the dear fancy of an eternal life;



FREDERICK THE GREAT IN HIS PRIME. (By Adolf Menzel.)

what Atropos and her shears promise us is but deep forgetfulness and eternally sound repose."

But while Frederick inclined to the doctrines of Epicurus in this respect, in his theory of ethics he mingled with Epicureanism

a strong element of the categorical imperative, and his life and example were rather those of a Stoic and Puritan. His repeated characterisation of himself as "the first servant of the State," sprang from profound and practical conviction. His most stirring appeals to the fulfillment of duty are supported by example rather than by argument, as in the case of the famous *Address before the Battle of Leuthen*. The king details briefly the desperate nature of the situation; he expresses his confidence in the patriotism and courage of his officers, and then simply proceeds: "I have to say that I shall attack the army of Prince Charles with its threefold greater strength wherever I find it. We must beat the enemy or be buried by his batteries. Thus I think and thus I shall act. You are Prussians, and will certainly not make yourselves unworthy of that honor. . . . Farewell, gentlemen; we shall soon have beaten the enemy or we shall never meet again." Similarly he writes to Voltaire, in 1757:

"But I, beset by threatening storm,
Defiance bid to every stress
And as a king must think, live, die."

In his theoretical writings on ethics, as the *Moral Dialogue for the Use of the Youth of Noble Houses*, and his *Essay on Self-love regarded as a Moral Principle*, Frederick insists on the right and the reason of appealing to self-love, or self-interest, as the only sound mainspring of human action. But this self-love is not to be blind, not to involve the gratification of the senses at the expense of others; it is to be "enlightened selfishness." The royal philosopher recognises that the real value of such a principle depends wholly upon the view held of the strongest, longest and highest gratification which self-love may seek. This he does not find with Epicurus in a temperate gratification of the appetites and passions, nor with Zeno in living in harmony with the laws of Nature, but in the approval of the reason and the conscience. Further than this, to the analysis and origin of the conscience, he does not go in theory, but treats it practically in the spirit of Kant. The *Moral Dialogue*—begins by declaring virtue to be "a fortunate frame of mind which impels us to fulfil our duties to human society for our own advantage." "But what advantage would you derive from doing all this for society?" asks the interrogator after some specifications have been made. "The sweet satisfaction of being what I wish to be: worthy of having friends, of the esteem of my fellow men, and of my own approval," is the reply. But the questioner asks whether the philosopher would be sure to think thus if he could safely do wrong unpunished. "Would I be able to stifle the

voice of my conscience and of tormenting remorse? Conscience is like a mirror; I would appear in my own eyes an object of abomination! No, never will I expose myself deliberately to this humiliation, this pain, this torment!"

In the *Essay on Self-Love* he first reviews the motives to which various religions and philosophies have appealed. He objects, as already shown, to future rewards and punishments. He also finds the Christian appeal to the love of God inadequate, because we cannot "expect of untutored souls that they shall love a being whom they cannot grasp in some tangible form." Finally he proceeds: "The powerful motive which we are seeking is self-love,—this guaranty of self-preservation, this founder of our happiness, this inexhaustible source of our vices and virtues, this secret spring of all human action. I could wish that this motive should be appealed to to show men that their true advantage demands that they be good citizens, good parents and good friends, in short, possess all the moral virtues; and since this is indeed so, it would not be difficult to convince them of it. . . ." "The difficulty of reconciling the happiness which I connect with good actions and the persecutions which are suffered by virtue is overcome if we restrict our conception of happiness to perfect peace of mind. This peace of mind depends upon the approval of our own conscience. I repeat, there is no other happiness than peace of mind or soul; wherefore our own advantage must bring us to seek such a precious possession, and from the same motive to subdue the passions which disturb it."

Frederick seems to have been well aware that such a conscience as that upon which he depends owes much, to say the least, to early training, wherefore he urges: "We ought to begin by following the example of the ancients, and give all encouragement for the improvement of the human race; give preference in the schools to the teaching of morals above all other learning, and devise some easy method of giving instruction therein." And in another place in the same essay he writes: "We ought perpetually to be appealing to men: Be gentle and humane, because you yourselves are weak and need aid! Be just to others in order that the laws may protect you, too, against all violence from others! In a word, do not do to others what you do not wish them to do to you!" The same Confucian form of the Golden Rule occurs in the *Moral Dialogue*. "Nothing is more evident," the *Essay* continues, "than that society could neither exist nor continue without morality in those who constitute it. Corrupt morals, offensive and inso-

lent vice, contempt of virtue and of those who respect it, dishonesty in trade, perjury, treachery, selfishness which ignores the welfare of the Fatherland, are the forerunners of the ruin of states and of the downfall of empires, because as soon as the notions of right and wrong are confused there are no longer praise or blame, punishment or reward."

Such is the tone that inspires Frederick's spirited poetic appeals to patriotism in the *Ode to the Germans* and the *Ode to the Prussians*. In the first, written in 1760, after depicting the disunion and decay of Germany, he addresses the Prussians:

"Come on, my Prussians, from this country let us turn,
Where wrong is aye triumphant and where dread wars burn;
Where madness now has made your German brothers blind.
Germany to the foe her bulwark has surrendered,
Betrayed her freedom, fetters on herself to bind,
Herself as victim to the foreign tyrant tendered.
These fools be to the fate resigned
To which they clearly are abettors,—
It seems that they were born for fetters,
In tyrants' smiles their joy to find."

This stanza reflects the same despair of improvement at home which made the innumerable imitations of *Robinson Crusoe* so popular in Germany during the first half of the century. The German *Robinsons* were nearly all content to stay in the paradises which they found in foreign climes. But Frederick does not rest in such a mood; and in the fact that he did not do so, either in word or in deed, lies much of the secret of his influence over all the life of his time. This is why the century deserves to be called The Age of Frederick the Great. The *Ode* goes on:

"No, no, my friends, a noble soul must all things stake,
Not loll in idle ease and rest ignoble take;
Low purposes be stifled ere distinctly thought.
Our honor we'll maintain, and face whatever danger.
Already the just God his thunderbolt has wrought;
Themis, to keep the peace, will find her own avenger.
On, then, and plunge into the fray
With souls of fire, my gallant yeomen!
Wash with the red blood of your foemen
All the long-gathered stains away!"

Another interesting utterance on this subject is found in the *Eulogy on Prince Henry of Prussia*. "Does the greatness of states consist in the widening of their borders? No; it consists in the great men whom Nature from time to time begets in them. If we turn the pages of history, we see that the times of elevation and

glory of states are those in which lofty spirits, virtuous souls, men of extraordinary talent have flourished in them, lightening the burdens of government by their exertions.—You, sirs, know that absolute unselfishness is the source from which all virtue flows; this it is that leads us to prefer an honorable name to the advantages of wealth; the love of right and justice to the impulses of unbridled desire for possessions; the public welfare and that of the state to one's own and that of his family; the safety and preservation of the Fatherland to his own health and life; in a word, it is this which raises man above the human and almost fits him to be a citizen of heaven." The special interest here is in the use by Frederick of the word "unselfishness." It is plain, however, that self-love, in the high sense defined by him, is quite consistent with unselfishness.

Frederick cannot be claimed as an adherent of organic Christianity. Yet in its purity he esteemed the religion of Christ highly, though, to be sure, from the same basis as all other religions. He regarded Jesus as a philosopher and reformer, but rejected all claims for his supernatural origin or authority. In his essay *On Religion Under the Reformation* he says:

"Nothing compares with the ethics of Christianity in its beginning. But the evil inclinations of the human heart soon corrupted it in practice. Thus the purest springs of good became the occasion of all sorts of evil for men; this religion, which taught humaneness, mercy and meekness, established itself by fire and sword; the priests of its altars, whose lot should have been sanctity and poverty, lead a shameful life; they accumulated wealth, became ambitious, and some of them became powerful princes."

He continues:

"Religion changed as well as morals; from century to century it lost more and more of its natural simplicity and became quite unrecognisable because of its outward mask. All that was added to it was the work of men, and could but perish."

Therewith Frederick begins a *résumé* of Church history, emphasising the history of dogmas, which he plainly disapproves. It would not be profitable to enumerate all these. The outline of them closes:

"In short, all sorts of deceptions were devised to deceive the simple faith of the multitude, and false miracles became almost every-day affairs."

"However, changes in the objects of worship could not bring about the reformation of religion; of thinking people the majority apply their whole keenness in the direction of self-interest and ambition; few concern themselves with abstract notions and still fewer think profoundly about such important subjects."

After outlining the work of the Reformation, Frederick resumes as follows :

“ Religion now assumed a new form and approached its primitive simplicity. This is not the place to consider whether it would not have been better to have left it more pomp and outward show, whereby to make a greater impression on the people, who judge only according to the senses; it appears that a purely spiritual worship, especially such as that of the Protestants, is not adapted to rude and material men who are incapable of rising in thought to the adoration of the loftiest truths.”

This would seem to be sufficient to show that a pure and primitive Christian church might have found in Frederick a warm adherent. He did not himself desire to be recognised as an orthodox Christian; whether the founder of Christianity would have condemned him as without religion, those who read may judge. He wrote in 1737 to Colonel Camas: “ Living faith is no affair of mine; but Christian ethics are the rule of my life.” And in his age he wrote to D’Holbach: “ How can any one declare that Christianity has been the cause of all the misfortune of the human race? If in the whole New Testament there were but the one commandment: ‘ Do unto others as ye would that they should do to you,’ one must admit that this contains the summary of all ethics.”

Like Nathan the Wise, Frederick recognised good in all religions, and tried to see it in all sects. He judged them all from the standpoint of their ethics, and said in the *Essay on Self-love*: “ The Christian, the Jewish, the Mohammedan, and the Chinese religions have almost the same moral code.” Yet he recognised that it was with Christianity that he had to deal, and wished to reconcile his philosophy to it. In the same essay he writes :

“ I declare that all the means that can be adopted to improve persons of such character (freethinkers whose morals rebel against the stiff yoke of religion) but conduce to the greater advantage of the Christian religion, and I venture to believe that self-love is the most powerful motive that can be appealed to to save men from their errors. As soon as a man is really convinced that his own advantage requires him to be virtuous, he will do commendable deeds, and when he finds that he is in fact living in accord with the ethics of the Gospel it will be easy to persuade him that he is doing from love of God what he was already doing from love of self; this is what the theologians call converting heathen virtues into virtues sanctified by Christianity.”

While, like Voltaire; whom he eulogised for this very fact, Frederick endeavored to be fair toward those members of the clergy whose virtues were really an ornament to the Church, he distrusted and assailed the hierarchy as a whole. He, too, desired to *écrasser l’infame*. This was owing partly to the unfounded pretensions of the clergy, and partly to the dogmas which they taught. We have

already noted his criticism of Christian creeds as containing "such abstract doctrines that every catechumen must needs be changed into a metaphysician in order to comprehend them." In his eulogy



A. CLOUGH & SONS, STUCCO

"DER ALTE FRITZ." (By Adolf Menzel.)
Frederick the Great in advanced years.

of Voltaire he attributed the persecutions of him by the clergy to the fact that Voltaire had told the truth about them. Thus they maliciously accused him of denying the existence of God who had

employed all the resources of his genius to prove it. In the Preface to the *Abridgement of Fleury's Ecclesiastical History*, 1766, Frederick writes: "Church history is the tourney-place of politics and of the ambition and the selfishness of priests; divinity is not there, but only the most blasphemous misuse of the divine name, employed by the priests, who possessed the respect of the people, only as a cloak for their criminal passions." The same charge is repeated in the essay *On Religion under the Reformation*, and Frederick is at first inclined to make no distinction between Luther and the organisation which he attacked. He explains as the basis for Luther's action:

"The Augustines were in possession of the traffic in indulgences; the Pope commissioned the Dominicans to preach it also, which aroused a furious quarrel between these two orders. The Augustines denounced the Pope; Luther, one of their number, attacked violently the abuses of the Church; with bold hand he tore away part of the bandage from the eyes of superstition; soon he became the head of a party, and since his teachings deprived bishops of their income and took from the monasteries their wealth, the princes followed the new reformer in numbers."

But later, in the *Preface to Fleury's History* the king evidently tried to do greater justice to Luther, as follows:

"A Saxon monk, brave to rashness, of mighty imagination, shrewd enough to utilise the general spiritual unrest, became the head of a party which declared itself against Rome. (Here follow some comments on Luther's rude style). But if we consider the work of the reformers as a whole, we must concede that the human mind owes part of its advance to their efforts. They freed us from a mass of errors that overshadowed our ancestors. By making their opponents cautious they stifled the germs of new superstitions, and being themselves persecuted they became tolerant. Only in this sanctuary of toleration introduced into the Protestant states was it possible for the human reason to develop, for philosophers to cultivate wisdom, and for the borders of our knowledge to expand. If Luther had done no more than free princes and people from the yoke of Rome, he would have deserved to have altars erected to him as the liberator of the Fatherland; and even if he tore but half of the veil of superstition away, what recognition of the truth do we not owe to him!"

It is plain that the reference to "half the veil" is a hint at the errors still remaining in the Lutheran Confession. Frederick could not tolerate theological creeds. In the letter to Beausobre, already quoted, he says of the *Ode on the Goodness of God*: "You may find passages in it which are not in harmony with the Augsburg Confession; but I hope you believe, sir, that one can love God without the aid of either Luther or Calvin." One of these passages was aimed at the doctrine of eternal punishment, and this may be the proper place to introduce it.

"And ye whose fierce and gloomy error
Enkindles your fanatic zeal

To paint for us a God of terror,
 Wrathful and deaf to all appeal.—
 More like a Fury's image he,
 The product of your blasphemy !
 His anger ye do well to shun.
 If there be devils for our sneering,
 For hating God, for cursing, swearing,
 Ye are such devils, ye alone."

A king with such views could not have been otherwise than tolerant, if sincere and filled with the courage of his opinions. And Frederick's courage was as great in the world of thought as on the field. The maxim with which he began his reign, "Every one shall be saved here in his own fashion," was adhered to, and found many repetitions and pleas in the king's writings. In the review of the Reformation he congratulates the world on the division of the Church, because the existence of several sects compels toleration. He speaks with pride of the policy of his house in this respect, adding :

"All these sects live here in peace, and alike contribute to the welfare of the State. There is no religion which deviates much from the others in point of moral teaching; therefore government may treat them alike, and leave to each man the liberty of pursuing his own favorite way to Heaven; all that is asked of him is that he be a good citizen. False zeal is a tyrant who depopulates lands; toleration is a tender mother who fosters and cultivates them."

In brief, then, Frederick's beliefs were: The existence of goodness of God; the sufficiency of the motive of the highest happiness as the spring of action, supported by the categorical imperative of the conscience; the excellence of the Christian ethics, as well as that of all great religions; the duty of service to mankind and the State. He denied: All dogmatic affirmations regarding the independent existence of the soul and of the persistence of the personality; all dogmas regarding the supernatural character of Jesus; future rewards and punishments. He indulged on occasions some hope of meeting his friends after death. He firmly held the right and duty of religious toleration. He lived a life so great and honorable and consistent with these principles that those who find themselves in possession of many more positive beliefs than he had may well hesitate to cast doubt upon the reality or aspersions upon the character of his religion.