

COMPARATIVE CHRISTIANITY.

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THE science of comparative religion having of late attained so much notoriety, it is time to inquire whether the comparative method can be applied to one religion in different periods of its life. Is there any common measure applicable to the same religion in succeeding ages to ascertain its variations in quality and amount? The difficulties of doing this are obvious, and have been lucidly stated by the late Professor Mayo-Smith in his works on statistics. Some matters are at once so large and so vague that they burst the bonds of accurate measurement. It is the general observation of explorers that savages in warm countries wear few clothes and worship fetishes, but to express these facts in numbers is beyond the resources at our command. So also in measuring the "culture religions" the double difficulty of selecting a yardstick and of thoroughly applying it renders most attempts nugatory. The endeavor to ascertain the quantity of extant piety by a house to house census would of course be so impractical as to be ridiculous. The selection of any external criterion, such as the seating capacity of the churches, is fallacious. An American town in the throes of a revival which has caught ninety per cent of the inhabitants may well have a smaller *per capita* church capacity than a French village, whose vast and venerable cathedral is frequented only by a few women, the drift-wood left high and dry by the ebbing tide of faith. The test of church membership, too, is unsatisfactory, more on account of individual variation than because of differences between the several sects in counting their constituency. Allowance can be made for the fact that Catholics reckon as members all who have been baptized, whereas Protestants count only those who have passed a second rite like confirmation. But who can tell what membership in a church really means? There have always been a few devout men, like Milton, who do not formally identify them-

selves with any denomination; there are probably many pew-holders who have in their hearts little faith. Only omniscience can do more than guess at their numbers.

But notwithstanding all this I believe that by reducing the number of individuals examined, while at the same time keeping them strictly representative, some common measure can be applied to different societies, or to the same society at divers times. Now there happens to be one class exactly adapted to our purpose, at once small, constant, thoroughly representative, and whose opinions on most subjects are, almost without exception, easily ascertainable—the great men.

No more accurate barometer could be desired, for great men are always representative either of the people as a whole, or of the intellectual class which in the long run dominates and leads the masses. Even in this they are like a barometer, that they register changes in the atmosphere before these are sensible to ordinary observation. When the mercury goes down it is safe to predict rain; the increase in the number of religious great men in the fifteenth century foreshadows the Reformation in the sixteenth. One kind of great man may with perfect accuracy be described as the "demagogue," even if he be as splendid a one as Napoleon. The second kind may be typified by Darwin, who appealed only to a small body of experts, and yet whose thoughts were destined in due time to become the mental stock-in-trade of the masses. In 1860 his theory of the origin of species would have been voted down by a million to one, but because there were a hundred men capable of understanding him, whom, that is, in a sense, he represented, the final triumph of his theory—in gross, not in detail—was assured. Indeed the history of what we call progress is essentially a history of the intellectual class, just as a biography is almost entirely the record of the action of a man's brain. The thinking class is the head also in the sense of being the vanguard, which the vast body, usually with much writhing and reluctance, is bound eventually to follow. In some cases, of course, great men appeal to and represent both the cultured and the popular classes. Luther and Lincoln are examples of this type.

Probably every one will agree that there are no persons in the world whose opinions on all subjects are easier to ascertain than are those of the great dead. If their public utterances are equivocal their private letters and conversations are published and subjected to the minute scrutiny of hundreds of able minds. They are not, as a rule, hypocrites; their very greatness often consists in devotion

to one idea which they are determined to impress on the world at any cost. Sometimes their ruling passion forces them to dissemble their beliefs on what they regard as minor matters, even if these matters be religion and morality,—but how few do they deceive in the end! Chesterfield's remark that a wise atheist would conceal his opinions lights up that wardrobe which he called his mind quite as brightly as anything else he was capable of saying. In averring that "all wise men have the same religion but no wise man tells what it is," Talleyrand told what his religion was, as plainly as did Voltaire. The other epigram of the distinguished diplomat that "language was made to conceal thought," exposed his own thought with almost glaring indecency. It is always the same story: Peter may deny Christ, but in the very act his speech bewrayeth him. Napoleon's elaborate pretence of hearing mass while he was dictating his correspondence may have imposed on a few peasants; it has intrigued none of his biographers.

But are there no exceptions to this rule? Cannot one find arguments to prove that Shakespeare was a royalist and a democrat; a Protestant, a Catholic and a skeptic; showing that there is difficulty in ascertaining his true personal views? Yes; but in the immense literature of the subject we can also find it proved that he was a lawyer, an alienist, a criminal, a degenerate, and Francis Bacon. Notwithstanding the paradoxes advanced on all sides I think there is a consensus of reliable opinion to the effect that Shakespeare was Shakespeare, that he was a rational and law-abiding citizen, that he was a playwright, and that in matters of both politics and religion he was supremely indifferent. Had he been otherwise, he well could, and surely would, have expressed himself, either in the sense of Montaigne or in that of Milton. But indifference stamps a man just as categorically as does the most passionate partisanship.

Admitting the possibility of getting an approximately accurate estimate of the religiosity of most eminent persons, it is plain that the comparative method can be applied, and that interesting results as to the proportion of religion in different ages will be forthcoming. The problem is now to draw up a list of men and formulate some standard of religion to apply to them. Evidently the matter of greatest importance in making a list is that it shall be without bias. It is not so necessary that the two hundred names here selected should be absolutely the greatest for the last eight centuries, as it is that they should be chosen without *parti pris*. I believe that I have attained that result by making the basis of my

list the biographical material in the last edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Those Englishmen of the nineteenth century, and those only, whose biography occupies three or more pages in the *Encyclopædia*, are included. Feeling that the editors were naturally favorable to Englishmen, and seeing that my list was far larger for recent than for preceding ages, I have shaded this standard by including some recent foreigners, and men of all nationalities for the earlier centuries, to whom a smaller space is accorded, but always progressively and regularly, by a fixed method, not by personal preference. On the whole the list agrees well with what I should independently have drawn up, though not always. Had I relied solely on my own judgment, for instance, I should have included Nietzsche and excluded Ruskin. So I believe the roster here presented will be nearly identical with any possible one made by historians, differing here and there in detail, but not substantially altered. The point that I insist upon, however, is not that this selection is the best possible from all points of view, but simply that, being made without bias, it may be assumed to be perfectly representative. For present purposes I have thought it advisable to take into consideration only the nations of western European culture, which knows only two religions, the Jewish and the Christian. The great Asiatic conquerors, and even oriental philosophers and savants, like Averroes and Avicenna, had they been included, would only have confused the issue.

In formulating categories and applying them to individuals, I have been obliged to rely on my own judgment. Before criticizing my methods, I hope the reader will take into account my definition of the terms used. By "religion" I do not mean the broadest sense of the term, to include all religions, or as philosophically defined, "man's emotional reaction to the not understood," or the like. I use the word in a narrower, but perfectly legitimate sense, perhaps best covered by the old-fashioned term "revealed religion," although some modern earnest Christians and Jews explain away the revelation or supernatural portion of their faiths almost to the vanishing point. The designations "established" or "popular religion," would, on the other hand, have been too restricted, for many of the most devout men have attacked the church, as did Huss and Luther. Conversely my use of the word "skepticism" is not the philosophical one designating complete Pyrrhonism, but is simply the opposite of religiosity. If, in his own consciousness, a man stands outside of all the recognized forms of organized religion of his age, he is, in my sense of the word, a skeptic. As Voltaire made it his object

to destroy Christianity, his deism cannot entitle him to be regarded as devout. Spinoza may have been drunk with God, but as he was a total abstainer from the practice of his own early faith, and acquired no Christianity, he is, in the present use of the term, a skeptic. In a statistical inquiry rigid definitions are not only legitimate but necessary.

According to these general principles I have adopted a four-fold classification of men as Religious, Pious, Indifferent and Skeptical. I attach no importance whatever to the terms, which are simply intended to designate different degrees of religiosity. In the first class I include those persons who have devoted the best part of their lives to the support and propagation of religion. In the second class are placed those who, while living for a more secular vocation, have given evidence of their full belief in the Christian creed, and their incidental support to it. The Indifferent are those whose interest in religion is at a minimum, the cares of the world having sprung up and choked the seed of piety. Shakespeare, for instance, as Emerson has emphasized, showed practically no interest in the beyond. In others, doubtless, a non-committal attitude is assumed from prudential motives, but had the interest been really strong it would have burst the barriers of reserve. In the last category, the Skeptical, I have placed all who have deliberately and confessedly taken a stand outside of Christianity (or, in a few cases, outside of Judaism). Their attitude varies from the cool, and even sympathetic criticism of Gibbon and Renan, to the implacable hostility of Voltaire and Shelley.

Each man is taken at his word, not according to the effect of his work in the estimation of others. Nietzsche and the Catholics argue that Luther did more than any other man to hurt Christianity. Bernard Shaw has asserted that all the real religion of to-day has been made possible by materialists and atheists. There seems to be something more than paradox in both these positions, but they are irrelevant to the purpose of the present study. Here, only the attitude which a man himself desires to take, is estimated. If he devotes his whole life to the reform and propagation of religion he is religious, even if thereby he rends Christianity in twain. If he shouts *Ecrasez l'infame!* on all possible occasions, he is irreligious, even though the total effect of his work on Christian thought is salutary.

Men are not always consistent, and are hardly ever subject to easy classification, because the degrees and shades of opinion are infinite. Was Jeanne d'Arc primarily a prophetess or a patriot?

Was it Milton's chief end, or only an important subordinate one, to justify the ways of God to man? What shall we say about Swift? He was a high ecclesiastic, and occasionally expressed himself in devout language; but on the other hand was religion ever more effectively satirized than in *The Tale of a Tub*, or in that passage in *Gulliver's Travels* where the Jilliputian sects fight over an egg? Goethe

- Dürer, 1471-1528. p.
 Copernicus, 1473-1543. i.
 Ariosto, 1474-1533. i.
 Michelangelo, 1475-1564. p.
 Wolsey, 1475-1530. p.
 More, 1477-1535. p.
 Titian, 1477-1576. i.
 Loyola, 1491-1556. r.
 Raphael, 1483-1520. p.
 Luther, 1483-1546. r.
 Zwingli, 1484-1531. r.
 Del Sarto, 1487-1531. i.
 Holbein, 1493-1554. i.
 Correggio, 1494-1534. i.
 Rabelais, 1495-1553. s.
 Melanchthon, 1497-1560. r.
 Cellini, 1500-71. i.
 Knox, 1505-72. r.
 Xavier, 1506-56. r.
 Calvin, 1509-64. r.
 Tintoretto, 1512-94. i.
 Coligny, 1517-72. p.
 Camoëns, 1524-79. i.
 Veronese, 1528-88. p.
 Montaigne, 1533-92. s.
 Scaliger, 1540-1609. p.
 Tasso, 1544-95. p.
 Oldenbarneveldt, 1547-1619. p.
 Bruno, 1548-1600. s.
 Henri IV, 1553-1610. i.
 Spenser, 1553-99. i.
 Francis Bacon, 1561-1626. s.
 Shakespeare, 1564-1616. i.
 Galileo, 1564-1642. i.
 Marlowe, 1564-93. s.
 Kepler, 1571-1630. i.
 Jonson, 1574-1637. i.
 Rubens, 1577-1640. p.
 Harvey, 1578-1637. i.
 Fletcher, 1579-1625. i.
 Grotius, 1583-1645. s.
 Beaumont, 1584-1616. i.
 Jansen, 1585-1638. r.
 Richelieu, 1585-1642. p.
 Hobbes, 1588-1679. s.
 Descartes, 1596-1650. s.
 Cromwell, 1599-1658. p.
 Van Dyke, 1599-1641. i.
 Velazquez, 1599-1660. i.
 Calderon, 1600-81. p.
 Mazarin, 1602-61. i.
 Corneille, 1606-84. p.
 Rembrandt, 1606-69. i.
 Milton, 1608-74. p.
 Murillo, 1617-82. p.
 Colbert, 1619-82. i.
 La Fontaine, 1621-95. s.
 Molière, 1622-73. i.
 Pascal, 1623-62. p.
 Sévigné, 1626-96. p.
 Bossuet, 1627-1704. r.
 Bunyan, 1628-88. r.
 Dryden, 1630-1701. p.
 Locke, 1632-1704. s.
 Spinoza, 1632-77. s.
 Racine, 1639-99. p.
 Penn, 1644-1718. p.
 Leibnitz, 1646-1716. p.
 Newton, 1647-1727. p.
 Marlborough, 1650-1722. i.
 Fénelon, 1651-1716. r.
 Swift, 1667-1745. i.
 Addison, 1672-1719. p.
 Peter the Great, 1672-1725. p.
 Walpole, 1676-1745. i.
 Bach, 1685-1750. p.
 Pope, 1688-1744. s.
 Swedenborg, 1688-1772. r.
 Montesquieu, 1689-1755. s.
 Voltaire, 1694-1778. s.
 Wesley, 1703-91. r.
 Edwards, 1703-58. r.

- Franklin, 1706-90. s.
 Fielding, 1707-54. i.
 Chatham, 1708-78. i.
 Johnson, 1709-84. p.
 Hume, 1711-76. s.
 Rousseau, 1712-78. s.
 Frederick the Great, 1712-86. s.
 Diderot, 1713-84. s.
 Gray, 1716-71. i.
 Alembert, 1717-83. s.
 Adam Smith, 1723-90. s.
 Kant, 1724-1804. s.
 Goldsmith, 1728-74. i.
 Catharine II, 1729-96. s.
 Lessing, 1729-81. s.
 Burke, 1730-97. i.
 Washington, 1732-99. p.
 Gibbon, 1737-94. s.
 Jefferson, 1743-1826. s.
 Goethe, 1749-1832. s.
 Mirabeau, 1749-91. s.
 Fox, 1749-1806. s.
 Talleyrand, 1754-1838. s.
 Mozart, 1756-91. p.
 Hamilton, 1757-1804. s.
 Robespierre, 1758-94. s.
 Nelson, 1758-1805. i.
 Pitt, 1759-1806. i.
 Burns, 1759-96. i.
 Schiller, 1759-1805. i.
 Fichte, 1762-1814. s.
 Malthus, 1766-1844. p.
 Chateaubriand, 1768-1848. p.
 Napoleon, 1769-1821. s.
 Wellington, 1769-1852. i.
 Beethoven, 1770-1827. i.
 Wordsworth, 1770-1850. p.
 Hegel, 1770-1831. s.
 Scott, 1771-1832. p.
 Metternich, 1773-1859. i.
 Schelling, 1775-1854. s.
 Turner, 1775-1851. i.
 Webster, 1782-1852. i.
 Bolivar, 1783-1830. i.
 Byron, 1788-1824. s.
 Peel, 1788-1850. i.
 Schopenhauer, 1788-1860. s.
 Shelley, 1792-1822. s.
 Meyerbeer, 1794-1864. p.
 Carlyle, 1795-1881. s.
 Ranke, 1795-1866. s.
 Keats, 1795-1821. i.
 Heine, 1797-1856. s.
 Schubert, 1797-1828. i.
 Michelet, 1798-1874. s.
 Comte, 1798-1857. s.
 Balzac, 1799-1850. s.
 Macauley, 1800-59. i.
 Moltke, 1800-91. i.
 Hugo, 1802-85. s.
 Dumas, 1802-70. s.
 Emerson, 1803-82. s.
 Sand, 1804-76. p.
 Disraeli, 1805-81. i.
 Mill, 1806-73. s.
 E. B. Browning, 1806-61. p.
 Longfellow, 1807-82. p.
 Darwin, 1809-82. s.
 Mendelssohn, 1809-47. p.
 Lincoln, 1809-65. p.
 Tennyson, 1809-92. p.
 Gladstone, 1809-98. p.
 Cavour, 1810-61. s.
 Dickens, 1812-70. i.
 R. Browning, 1812-89. p.
 Wagner, 1813-83. s.
 Bismarck, 1815-98. s.
 Ruskin, 1819-1900. s.
 Spencer, 1820-1903. s.
 George Eliot, 1820-80. s.
 Grant, 1822-85. i.
 Arnold, 1822-88. s.
 Renan, 1823-92. s.

Huxley, 1825-95. s.

Rossetti, 1828-82. p.

Ibsen, 1828-1906. s.

Taine, 1829-93. s.

Tolstoy, 1828-1910. p.

Grouping these men by centuries (counting in each period those born in its first half and in the last half of the previous century) we get the following results:

CENTURY.	RELIGIOUS.	PIOUS.	INDIFFERENT.	SKEPTICAL.
12th	5	0	0	0
13th	5	1	0	0
14th	4	2	3	0
15th	6	3	2	0
16th	7	11	10	4
17th	3	14	16	8
18th	4	5	7	18
19th	0	16	18	32

Reducing this table to percentage:

CENTURY.	RELIGIOUS.	PIOUS.	INDIFFERENT.	SKEPTICAL.
12th	100	0	0	0
13th	83	17	0	0
14th	44	22	33	0
15th	54	27	18	0
16th	22	34	31	13
17th	7	34	39	20
18th	12	15	21	53
19th	0	24	27	48

The result is too striking to need comment. The religious class has been reduced by enormous amounts in the 13th, 14th, 16th, 17th and 19th centuries, and from one hundred percent of the whole to zero. Whereas all the men who attained the highest distinction in the 12th century made it their lifework to serve Christianity, none of those in the 19th century have done so. The class of those who, though in secular callings, evinced sincere piety shows much less striking variations, it may figuratively be said to gain from one side what it loses on the other. The class of those who showed slight interest in religion first appears in the 14th century, declines in the 15th, and rises to its maximum in the 17th. The two hundred years following the Protestant revolt were a period of transi-

tion from the fervent piety of the Middle Ages to the secularity of modern times. It was then, consequently, that the two middle classes reached their maximum, at the expense of the extremes. Great men on the whole hostile to religion are absent from the four centuries preceding the Reformation; are a small group in the 16th century, gain markedly in the 17th, and reach their maximum, the enormous figure of more than half the total number, in the age of Voltaire and the "enlightenment." In the last century this class loses a trifle, though a slightly smaller per cent than that of the indifferents gains. The 18th century was that in which the warfare of science and theology was hottest, and consequently both the extreme classes gained at the expense of the moderates. In the 19th century men began to feel, as Osler phrased it, that the battle of Armageddon had been fought and lost; their attacks on an institution which had ceased to be dangerous, and which some regarded as moribund, lost part of the fierceness of the battle waged by their grandfathers.

Notwithstanding some fluctuation, the most impressive generalization which can be drawn from the whole table is its constancy. With the exception of the fifteenth century, every period shows a loss for the conservatives and a gain for the radicals. The general trend of ebbing faith, at least among the intellectuals, is still more strongly emphasized by a combination and consolidation of the figures given above, taking two centuries at a time and fusing the four classes into two. This procedure is certainly legitimate. Religion would not long survive if nobody cared for it more than apparently did Shakespeare and Walpole. They may have been unwilling to attack it, but neither would they labor for it or risk much in its cause. The grouping under two classes, known by the names of the extremes, is then as follows:

CENTURY.	RELIGIOUS NO.	SKEPTICAL NO.	RELIGIOUS %	SKEPTICAL %
12th and 13th	11	0	100	0
14th and 15th	15	5	75	25
16th and 17th	35	38	48	52
18th and 19th	25	75	25	75

The regularity of this table is remarkable. Beginning with 100% the devotees of religion lose almost exactly 25% every two centuries, beginning with 0, the skeptics increase by about 25% each two hundred years.

Speculation as to the future is the most fascinating of idle pas-

times. It is difficult to believe that the forces which have been steadily at work for at least eight centuries should suddenly stop, or greatly alter their direction and velocity. If they do continue to operate at approximately the same speed, it is plain that practically all of the distinguished men born between 1850 and 2050 will be indifferent to and skeptical of, popular Christianity. And if this is so the masses will slowly but surely follow their leaders. Thought is a fermenting yeast, which, even in the small quantities the world has yet been able to produce, has always in the long run leavened the inert mass of common dough. Great is the spirit of the people, and powerfully does it color the thought of even the greatest minds, but it in turn is eventually tinged with the color of its deepest thinkers. Perhaps it would be truer to say that the mind of the masses and that of the intellectuals react on each other, so that their content, while always a little different, constantly tends to approximate. It is therefore impossible to see in democracy, the triumph of the average man, a force permanently conservative of religion. It may not even be a retarding force, for the last two centuries have been both the most democratic and the least devout, and the socialists, those radical democrats, are also inclined to be hostile to the churches, in which they see champions of outworn privilege.

But, barring those unpredictable factors which usually play a large part in the course of events, there are two ways in which we can conceive how the decline of religion may be stopped. The example of France lends color to the theory that little faith and a low birthrate go together, though, to be sure, the example of teeming Germany contradicts it, for the Teuton is almost as rationalistic as the Frank. If, however, this rule were found to be generally true, it is plain that the religious nations would supplant the infidel ones. This is but another way of stating that by selection nature will conserve those attributes of a race which are most useful to its preservation, without regard to the abstract question of whether those attributes conform to alien standards, such as those of science. Many men have called love a delusion, but if so, it is one so necessary to the preservation of the race that it must always be a powerful operative force. So it *may* be with religion—among the masses. Again it is imaginable that Christianity may conquer in Asia as much as it loses in Europe and America. But speculations as to the future are as inconclusive as they are alluring. At present almost all that can be done is to make a careful survey of the past.