SOME APPROACHES TO RELIGION THROUGH
POETRY DURING THE PAST TWO GENERATIONS.¹

BY C. H. HERFORD, M.A., LITT.D., ETC.

HONORARY PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER.

"To which of the religions do you belong?" Schiller, in a well-known epigram, supposes himself to be asked. "To none of all that you have named," he supposes himself to reply. "And on what ground to none?" "On the ground of religion." Und warum keine?—"Aus Religion." I am concerned with this saying only in so far as it may help to explain what I intend by my title—by approaches to religion through poetry. If we postulate that religion is something vaster and more manifold than any recognized expression of it, we can see that it is always possible for minds immersed in other forms of spiritual experience, "voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone"—or even, like Shelley and Lucretius, fiercely hostile to the established religions of their time, to forge out of their very unbelief instruments of divine discovery which those established religions could not then use or even apprehend. These may be extreme instances; but even Dante, the great Catholic whose sexcentenary the world has recently commemorated, even Dante is not merely the lyric spokesman of the Catholic creed; at a thousand points he recreates it, eliciting harmonies and overtones which are eloquent to the spiritual ear of men whose dogmatic faith is utterly unlike his own. Poetic vision, just because it presupposes individual creative energy, is not favourable, even in the devout believer, to the passivity of devout belief; it does not acquiesce but seizes, and in the act of seizing reshapess; and it is impatient of whatever is mechanical in tradition, of whatever is abstract in system. And it sees fresh things,

¹ An amplification of the lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on 19 October, 1920.
to which mechanism and abstraction, however magnificently enshrined in ritual and dogma, are blind. Poetry sees this grey old world with the fresh intuition of childhood; hears, like the infant Samuel, the voice of the Lord in tones which escape the old and wise; it has sometimes let in upon the perfumed candlelight of the altar the radiance of eternal day. Wordsworth knew what he was about when he "passed unafraid Jehovah and his shouting angels" to prostrate himself in awe before the unfathomable mind of man and before that something far more deeply interfused which rolls through all things. And even in a single poet's genius there may be room at once for the less vital things which he has taken over and for the more vital things which have been reborn with agony and rapture in his soul. There is more religion, as well as more poetry, in Milton's Satan than in Milton's God.

On the other hand, let us freely admit that the poetic "approach to religion" may be no more than approach, a magnificent Pisgah summit from which the further way must be taken under other guidance and by other feet. If the splendour of impassioned vision may rekindle a faith which has degenerated into mere ritual or mere theology, that exaltation of illumined intellect does not make for the lowliness of the devout soul. We may smile when poor Sara Coleridge replied to her husband's sublime rhapsody by begging him to "walk humbly with his God"; but neither Milton nor Wordsworth had much of that humility, and even in Dante, the supreme figure alike in the religion of poetry and in the poetry of religion, it was not the dominant note. There are many meek and saintly souls to whom none of these great poets have anything to say. Yet the history of religion would be poorer and far less intimately wedded with the history of humanity, had they never lived.

I propose, then, in this essay to glance at a few of the contributions of poetry—in the comprehensive sense which excludes no kind of creative literature—to religion made during the last sixty or seventy years. Those who have occupied themselves with the history of ideas, and especially of ideas about religion in Western Europe during this period, will hardly dispute that it falls naturally into three phases, with the years 1880 and 1900 approximately as the points of cleavage. We may say, summarily, that the three phases are dominated by these three characters: scepticism, mysticism, reconstruction. These dominant
characters are particularly apparent in the poetic approaches to religion made during their successive course.

I.¹

The opening of the second half of the nineteenth century found Western Europe in a mood like that in which men who have just been relieved of a load of anxiety, sit down to enjoy a hearty meal. The revolutionary risings which in 1848 and 1849 had perplexed all the monarchies of Europe with fear of change, had failed, and an epoch of settled peace and prosperity appeared to have set in, symbolized and even guaranteed, in the eyes of our comfortable middle class, by the great Exhibition of 1851. The counterpart in the intellectual sphere of this temper was the triumph of scientific materialism.

The magnificent structure of German philosophy, culminating in Hegel, lost authority rapidly after Hegel’s death in 1831, and every kind of philosophic or theologic creed which depended on the faith that Spirit is the ultimate reality suffered by its decline. Not thought but the senses were the channel by which we had access to reality. The men who thrive on facts were in the ascendant, and those who live on dreams had suffered a set-back of which the ruin of revolutionary idealism in 1848 was only the most palpable sign.

Three points in this change are important for our present purpose; the growth of realism in literature; the growing influence and prestige of science, in the large sense which includes history and comparative religion; and the rise, in many varieties and shades, of sceptical, anticlerical, or anti-religious, forms of faith. All three are closely connected.

For the universe which these realists so powerfully rendered was for most of them empty of any higher existence than man’s. Leconte de Lisle offered his hearer the Stoic joy of a heart steeped in the “divine nothingness,” or called him to “that city of silence, the sepulchre of the vanished gods, the human heart, where eternally ferments and perishes the illusory universe”. His chief follower, Sully Prudhomme, resumed, as far as an urbane French academician may, the creed of the lonely prophet Lucretius.

¹ Much of the substance of this and the following section, with some single sentences, and the verse-quotations, will be found, in another connexion, in the writer’s essay on the Main Tendencies of European Poetry (in Main Tendencies of Recent European Thought, ed. Marvin, Clar. Press).
In contemporary England, a more powerful tradition withstood these negations, and our two most illustrious poets were also those whose poetry was in deepest accord with the religious inspiration which each, in their different accents, superbly and memorably expressed. But Tennyson and Browning, who had reached poetic maturity when this generation opened, were not untouched by the infection of its chillier temper. Tennyson, who had nobly sung his faith in In Memoriam, preached it in the Idylls; and Browning, after uttering, as late as 1864, the grandest spiritual song of the century in our tongue, Rabbi ben Ezra, fell to arguing and 'parleying' for what remained to him of the faith that inspired Christmas Eve and Easter Day. Among their younger contemporaries, who began to be of note in the fifties, the sceptical note found less equivocal expression.

Matthew Arnold contemplated with a more wistful resignation than the French Parnassians the passing of the old gods, listening, on Dover Beach, to that "melancholy long withdrawing roar" of the tide of faith "down the vast edges drear and naked shingles of the world," or, at most, surmising in that ebbing tide a faint counter-current of hope,—a something not ourselves, which makes for righteousness. While in more truculent tones, crowning new idols with garlands plucked from the old, Swinburne chanted his dithyrambic hymn to the glory of Man in the Highest, of Man the Master of things, and Carducci his kindred and almost simultaneous Ode to Satan. For Swinburne and Carducci the future was full of glorious hope; even for Arnold it was not wholly dark. But a little later fell upon the ears of a world still basking in its confident prosperity that terrible symphony of omnipotent malignity and resistless doom, the City of Dreadful Night.

Yet the scientific movement itself was destined to undermine these negations. The early life of man, his language, his primitive institutions, his mystic beliefs, were being recorded and explained. Religion, evaded as a creed, was explored as a psychological phenomenon, and found to be relative to infinitely varied conditions of age and people. The religions of the East, the South, and of the North—the Vedas and the Vedantas, Zarathustra, Confucius; the splendid myths of Greece, the kindred world of the gods and heroes of Asgard, became daily more real to the historic and thence to the poetic eye. A poetry which rejected religion as a faith could embrace the stories of vanished religions, without reserve, for the beauty and the terror, the pity, the
sublimity, they shadowed forth. Even the religion of Palestine, compromized as it was by the sanction of orthodoxy, could be accepted as human material by poets who had renounced all relations with the Church. Hence the growth of science had a double effect upon the religious aspect of poetry. It tended on the one hand to denude poetry of whatever force or inspiration it may derive from religious belief. But on the other hand it enriched it with the wonderful myth-creations of the religions once alive. Later on, as we shall see, these newly discovered religions were to fertilise and recreate the spirit of religion itself; for the present they told simply as sources of wonder and beauty, of heroic or tragic story, which the poets reproduced with dispassionate and erudite veracity, in unconscious sympathy with the spirit of science. Leconte de Lisle carves in marble the tragic Norse story of Angentyr's Sword, or the Hebrew story of the doom of Cain, or the Greek story of the Erinnyes.

Swinburne, similarly, takes inspiration from the Hebrew Psalms; and one of his greatest poems is the application of a saying of Jesus to ruined but glorious France: the speaker is Freedom, her lord, worshipped and then betrayed:

Sweet ointment of thy grief thou hast brought thy master,
And set before thy lord,
From a box of flawed and broken alabaster,
Thy broken spirit, poured.
And love-offerings, tears and perfumes, hast thou given me,
To reach my feet and touch;
Therefore thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee,
Because thou hast loved much.

And what is Hugo's Légende but a procession of the supreme moments in the history of man, the moments in which whatever was for each changing age and people the religion it lived by, uttered itself finally in speech or action.

II.

But this phase passed. The rise of symbolism, in France, in the early eighties, was a symptom of a changed temper of thought and feeling, traceable with local variations throughout civilized Europe. The confident security of the fifties and sixties passes into a vague unrest, a kind of troubled awe. As if existence altogether was a bigger, more mysterious and intractable thing than was assumed, not so easily to be
captured in the formulas of science, or analysed by the phrases of the most consummate literary art.

"Science is bankrupt!" cried the Symbolist leader, Villiers de L'Isle Adam, triumphantly, throwing down a challenge to the whole of the brilliant materialism of the generation just passed. No, science was not bankrupt; but it had to revise its hypotheses, and enlarge its horizons. The rule of materialism was indeed over, and Lange, who in 1874 wrote its History, in fact pronounced its obsequies. But Fechner was at this very time inaugurating the scientific study of soul, and psychology was soon to be recognized as the key to the sciences. Among the poets there was no question of scientific psychology. But they were deeply conscious of an inner life, full of mysterious import. If they looked at Nature, it was to discover everywhere analogies, symbols, of the soul's interior life. A great French poet of the previous generation, Baudelaire, had pointed out this way of suggestion and analogy when he wrote:—

Earth is a Temple, from whose pillar'd mazes
Murmurs confused of living utterance rise;
Therein Man thro' a forest of symbols paces,
That contemplate him with familiar eyes.

As prolonged echoes, wandering on and on,
At last in one far tenebrous depth unite,
Impalpable as darkness, and as light,
Scents, sounds, and colours meet in unison.

There all the inwoven richness of sense impressions is felt as a murmured speech by which we interpret an invisible world of spirit. Not all the symbolists had any defined religion, but their poetry is charged with the sense of mysterious things beyond expression. At moments, in certain minds, the curtain lifts, and like Albert Samain, they

Feel flowing through them, like a pouring wave
The music tide of universal soul,
Hear in their hearts the beating pulse of heaven.

Symbolism, in short, indicates if not a definite return of the tide of spiritual faith, at least a pause in that ebb, which Matthew Arnold had heard in the fifties, by Dover Beach. It is one of the symptoms of a far-reaching idealistic reaction traceable throughout Europe in the eighties and nineties. Here in England, such symptoms are the so-called Celtic poetry of Yeats and A. E., the discovery of Blake and Shelley, the Catholic mysticism of Francis Thompson; in Belgium the
earlier drama of Maeterlinck, in Norway the later symbolistic plays of Ibsen, in Germany the Parsifal phase of Wagner, and the early poetry of Richard Dehmel, finally, in Russia, the creative prose of Tolstoy, Dostoyevski and Andreyev. The kinship of these voices of many tones cannot be disputed; what makes them kin is a temper which continually approaches religion. In our Celtic poetry the haunting sense of spirit is overwhelming. Victorian Anglo-Saxonism, with its cheerful prosperities and efficiencies, falls under a cloud. The visible world itself grows vague and blurred; and the old legend-lore of Ireland, blighted and desiccated by enlightenment and culture, recovers vitality and works its spell on imagination and heart once more. The old Irish hills are again holy with old-world rites, the woods are haunted, and all about them lies the magical twilight and the dewy dawn. There the mystical brotherhood of sun and moon and river and wood, work out their will, there gleams, for ever young and deathless, Eire the mother, in the shining dew and the twilight grey; and there, leading these fairy and mystic presences, and at one with them, stands God, blowing his lonely horn.

The Catholic faith and orient splendour of Francis Thompson seem to remove him far from this hushed twilight world; but no poetry of that day is more charged with mystic suggestions. "To be the poet of the return to Nature is something," said Thompson: "I would rather be the poet of the return to God." Yet it is less a retracing of any path than the discovery of a new. We may even say that Catholicism only supplied the less vital symbols of an imagination which heard the stars shout together and brought offerings to the Sun, "To thee, O Sun—or is't perchance to Christ?" As Christ Himself appears, not in the half-faded guise of convention, but in imagery at once startlingly new and yet primeval, as of the youth of the world—the Hound of heaven, akin somehow to Yeats's hunter God, winding his lonely horn across whatever theological gulfs in the dewy twilight.

In the early drama of Maeterlinck the visionary forms, hardly more palpable than those of our Celtic poetry, are also far less real; they have no support in any living folklore. His link with French Symbolism is rather his intense preoccupation with the inner life, but in him it becomes creative, and he showed that a drama of the spirit, silently and almost imperceptibly performed, may be more tragic than passion and violence. Silence itself is for him, as for the quietist and mystic, a
state rich in spiritual virtue beyond the reach of eloquence; it is a part of the treasure of the humble. In all this side of his mind, Maeterlinck, though he disclaims all positive religion, touches a mood in us which is also touched more subtly by St. Francis and Tagore, whose voices were to find response among us only a little later. But earlier than any of these moderns, earlier than the French Symbolists themselves, in this their disciples, the great Russians had arrested, bewildered and fascinated the world with pictures of strange souls, souls rent by dissonances, tortured by dilemmas, evading our classification by baffling crosslights of inconsistency—the pathological flower of unreason in man. Yet this irrational humanity of theirs is shot through with a spiritual ardour and intensity, which its very unreason occasions and provokes. The problems of right living, of self-fulfilment, of sin and suffering, of love and forgiveness, torment their sick souls and impel them to heights and depths of experience and vision hardly known to those whose blood beats always temperately in time. In Tolstoy and Dostoyevski and the less familiar work of Andreyev and Soloviev, we have, I consider, the most remarkable contribution made by creative genius to the human interpretation of religious ideas in our time.

III.

The life of Tolstoy is commonly conceived, indeed he conceived it himself, as falling into two sharply divided halves. The convert, in the ardour of his new conviction, magnified the division, and saw only the sleep of worldliness in the youth and manhood which preceded the "wakening" of his faith. But it is easy for us to trace in the great creations which preceded the crisis, ideas and dispositions which were thrusting him steadily towards it, and of whose drift and scope he only became fully conscious when they fell into place as elements in the spiritual humanity of his religion. The conviction that salvation for men must come somehow through fellowship and labour and a life delivered from the artifices of caste and creed, is felt fermenting blindly like a yeast in him years before it is proclaimed in the penetrating eloquence of his Confessions. Levin in Anna Karenina is feeling his way, blunderingly, towards the life of simple fellowship with the peasant which Tolstoy was later to approach in his own person, and Pyotr Bezuchov in War and Peace has the air, like Browning's Lazarus, of one who belongs to another world, and moves about,
still a stranger, in this; a half childlike being, whose blunders Tolstoy will one day vindicate as symptoms of a larger insight, and his apparent lapses as signs of a purity unspoiled by experience.

And if the great artist foreshadows the preacher and the prophet, so not less, conversely, the character of Tolstoy's religious message bears the stamp of a mind which had grown to maturity in concentrated and exhaustive study of the ways of men. His religion is a human religion; it throbs with the passion of one who had seen men winning happiness not in proportion to their accepted creeds or attended services or recited prayers, but in proportion as they won the state of peace which is the fruit of minds completely liberated from the lusts of passion, violence, and self-assertion. Tolstoy's religion and his creative work are not detached halves of his nature, far less its antithetic poles; they are integrally involved the one with the other, and the books and pamphlets and tales in which he has set forth and illustrated his "religion" are not only memorable as literature, but are among the most wonderful contribution made by literary genius in our time to religious ideas.

My Religion is one of the great books of the century. The epithets of "unpractical," "perverse," "fantastic," and the like, fall to the ground before the four-square grandeur and flawless coherence of his vision of eternal life to be lived by man on earth; a life not personal but universal, emancipated from individual desire and from egoistic satisfaction, a life that comprises the life of humanity, past, present, and to come. We may admit that Tolstoy has painted established Christianity, with its orthodox creed and its institutional government and worship, with too stern a brush; that he too peremptorily refuses to recognise the possible worth for religion of dogmas and practices which he condemned. But ever since St. Francis confounded the elaborate ecclesiasticism of his time with the wonder of Christlike simplicity born again, the world has listened to no such whole-hearted and clear-eyed revelation of what, if the thought of Christ were once comprehended aright and followed without fear and without reserve, the life of man on earth might become. In Tolstoy, as in Wordsworth, if with weapons and in modes utterly unlike, poetry helped religion to defeat theology. Such an overthrow was portrayed in one of the most moving and impressive, though not in a literary sense, the greatest of his novels,—that story of spiritual regeneration, of Nechliudoff's change
from the profligate young officer who seduces an innocent girl, to the
man who sacrifices all his worldly prospects to follow her to Siberian
prisons and finally to win her back,—the story to which he significantly
gave the great name of Resurrection—“Voskresënje.” “Great Art,”
says Mr. Yeats in Ideas of Good and Evil, “is the forgiveness of
sin.” That is said in the spirit of Tolstoy; but Tolstoy made for-
giveness only the first step in an energy of soul-saving self-sacrifice
which, like his constructive power, lay outside the horizon and the
compass of Yeats.

IV.

The profound impression made upon Europe by Tolstoy yielded
ground somewhat when in the eighties we made acquaintance with the
work of Immanuel Dostoyevski. We had acquired by that time a
certain curiosity about the “Slav genius” shadowed forth in Tolstoy
and Turgeniev, and the Western culture which had originally com-
mended their work to our unused palates, was now resented as dis-
guising the mysterious oriental fascination of the genuine substance.
And now came one who surely revealed the Russian soul in all its
heights and depths; a man who had lived through all the bitterness
and horror which Russian persecution and poverty could inflict; no
gentleman living at ease in the literary world of Paris, like Turgeniev;
no amateur devotee of simplicity enjoying the secure amenity of a
country house, like Tolstoy; but one who had stood against a wall
expecting instant death, then after a commutation of his sentence at the
last moment to hard labour, had spent years of brutal suffering in
Siberia; finally, after his return, had struggled with want and bereave-
ment, and undergone the more desperate torture of inner division.
Clearly, depths were sounded in this man’s work of which there was
little trace in his great precursors. It meant little that he delved into
the squalor of the slums and low boarding houses and houses of ill-
fame of Petrograd, or that, as his fellow-craftsman, Merezhkovsky
said, and as has been said of our own Gissing, he makes us feel the
unutterable pathos of a street-organ playing in a dirty alley to a ring
of dancing ragged and barefoot children. Little, either, that his
habitual matter is crime and vice. It is possible enough, as we know,
to make stories of these things which scarcely touch, far less penetrate
the surface of life. But Dostoyevski’s murder-and-detective romance
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is like no other. He can make a murderer who is loveable, a harlot who is a saint, an "idiot" who is rich in the wisdom not of this world. This is no mere whitewashing, or shallow compromise. It is the reflex, in these problematic characters, of the dilemma, the inner cleavage, by which he was himself distracted. He saw life on two planes—the plane of the rational intelligence and the plane of mystical apprehension. A profoundly religious temperament tortured by philosophical presentiments which he could neither assimilate nor repel. The problem of self-realization which for him, as for Ibsen, was the fundamental one, presented itself to him in two alternative aspects: the self-realization of the enlightened egoist, and that of the mystic who fulfils himself in utter surrender to God. But if God does not exist? That mystic self-fulfilment then becomes an illusory surrender to a dream. And Dostoyevski never reached complete intellectual assurance. In default of it he flung himself upon a devotion to Christ and the religion of suffering and love. "If anyone could prove to me," he wrote, "that Christ is outside Truth, I would stay with Christ and not with Truth." And with this dilemma he is incessantly preoccupied. It is at the root of his greatest work.¹ The Brothers Karamazov presents both the problem and his imagined solution,—the conflict of intellect and spiritual aspiration in Ivan the second brother, and the ideal unworldliness conquering the world in Alyosha, the third. And it is in this book, and in part through Alyosha, that Dostoyevski sets forth his conception of the future of Christianity, and of the evolution of the Christian Church. He is here fiercely opposed to Tolstoy, and his ideas are far less congenial and intelligible to us in the West, but no reader of Karamazov can deny the impressiveness of the picture there given of the Russian monasticism, a chief agent in that evolution, in his view, or the grandeur and beauty of the figure of the saintly father Zossima, the living embodiment of that ideal. Zossima is no colourless abstraction of saintliness; he is simply the finest growth of the Russian cloister, and we see him ministering to all sorts and conditions of Russian folk who have crowded in from the remotest wilderness, the crowded city, or the country house, for counsel and help; equal to all occasions, yet with no trace in him of the fashionable parson; solving all problems with a security which would have the air of

¹ In this section I am much indebted to Mr. Janko Lavrin's very acute analysis in his book on Dostoyevski.
infallible tact, if it were not inspired by a profound spiritual humility utterly baffling to the mundane intelligence; as when he encounters the paroxysm of Dmitri’s righteous anger with his impossible father by falling at the vicious old man’s feet. From this convent cell in the heart of that Russian orthodoxy which Harnack and the enlightened West regard as the most backward of all the branches of Christianity, Zossima reaches up to eternal and universal religious truth. It is not for nothing that the poet-laureate heard in some noble words of his the intimate voice of the “Spirit of Man”:

“Love will teach us all things: but we must learn how to win love: it is got with difficulty: it is a possession dearly bought with much labour and in long time; for one must love not sometimes only, for a passing moment, but always. There is no man who doth not sometimes love: even the wicked can do that.

“And let not men’s sin dishearten thee: love a man even in his sin, for that love is a likeness of the divine love, and is the summit of love on earth. Love all God’s creation, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of life. Love the animals, love the plants, love each separate thing. If thou love each thing thou wilt perceive the mystery of God in all; and when once thou perceive this, thou wilt thenceforward grow every day to a fuller understanding of it: until thou come at last to love the whole world with a love that will then be all-embracing and universal.”

Moreover, this monastic doctrine of Dostoyevski’s is free from the reproach to which monasticism is most liable in Protestant eyes. The convent is not a retreat to which men fly from the world to save their souls; it is a spiritual garden in which souls are reared to go forth to be the world’s leaven. “It is you laymen who live in isolation,” cries Zossima, “we who live in society.” “They keep the image of Christ fair and undefiled; and when the time comes they will show it to the tottering creeds of the world.” And so young Alyosha Karamazov, the beloved disciple of Zossima, instead of being assigned to conventual life, is sent out into the world. Alyosha is Dostoyevski’s expression of the synthesis he sought between secular intellect and religious faith, between man’s self-realization by his own will and thought, with self-realization by union with the will of God. And the ultimate phase of human evolution to which Dostoyevski looked forward was one in which the entire mundane society would be interpenetrated by the influence of
the Church. This view was sharply contrasted with Tolstoy's, notwithstanding the kinship of their ethical ideals. While Tolstoy repudiated the Church root and branch, and foresaw a Kingdom of Christ on earth from which everything ecclesiastical and dogmatic had been stripped away, Dostoyevski looked to a progressive ascendancy of the Church over the state, in the sense that all secular life would be animated and spiritualized by the ideals embodied in the ecclesiastical ritual and creed.

VI.

Few men of standing in Russia shared this hope. Even Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900), who during his early maturity looked forward to a transfusion of secular society by the spiritual governance of the Church, died in the belief that the Kingdom of Christ can never be the kingdom of this world. Andreyev and Gorky, the most original of the successors of Tolstoy and Dostoyevski in the next generation, grew up in a society permeated by hostility to every kind of Christianity. That did not prevent these profoundly Russian souls from being haunted by the religious ideas which they intellectually repudiated. To the psychologist these unquenchable glimmerings of spiritual fire among the extinguished ashes are more fascinating than the bright fire and clear hearth of more ordinary intelligences.

Leonid Andreyev was not one of those rationalist sceptics for whom life and the world are perfectly intelligible when once you drop the pretence of religious explanation. He saw them, on the contrary, most usually, as a hopeless enigma, nonsense, and in his grim drama "The Life of Man," he gave as he thought a crucial example of it. "Man" passes from birth to death, wins fame and wealth only to lose them and to perish in a loathsome cellar. If you choose your symbols life may be made as meaningless, and birth and death as terrible, as you will. Yet no one who takes life for a riddle can resist the impulse to read it, and Andreyev again and again hints of shadowy beings beyond the veil. Man's life itself is a lamp malignantly kindled by God, Satan, and Fate. And in the strange vast drama of Anathema he goes far towards suggesting a reconciling solution for the enigmatic nonsense of life.  


2 Anathema was inaccessible to the English reader when this account was written; some degree of detail seemed then in place. A translation has since been published.
Once more we have here the tremendous situation first imagined, so far as we know, by the great poet of the Book of Job, which had fascinated one so utterly otherwise built as the author of Faust; the Power of Evil let loose, with divine consent, to attempt the seduction of man. Satan's game fails, as it does in the great trials of Job and of Faust; even Andreyev's pessimism, which refuses to temper the horror of Man's death (in the Life of Man), stops short of the deadly blow to idealism which would result from an out-and-out victory of Devil over God. To each poet—and though his complete modernism dispenses with diabolic machinery altogether, we may include the author of The Undying Fire in the group,—to each poet the final victory of man means the vindication of something in human nature which is to him godlike or divine. To the author of Job the willingness to suffer everything at God's hands, to Goethe, the unwearied labour in well-doing, to Mr. Wells the "Undying fire" of creative work. To Andreyev, it is the love which gives itself away in limitless surrender for suffering humanity.

Anathema, Andreyev's devil, "the accursed one," is a grey-bearded philosopher, a champion of pure intellect, estimating all things by number, measure and weight, like the Reason which was "anathema" to Blake, and his domed forehead is furrowed with the marks of fruitless thought. The scene opens on a wild rocky mountain-side; huge iron gates, crushing the earth with their weight, bar the way upward; they are the limit of the intelligible world. On guard with a drawn sword before them stands a mysterious, inscrutable figure, "Some One," mediator between the two realms; before it cowers Anathema, no ironical self-assured Mephisto, but a wheedling schemer, genuinely afraid of the awful figure before him, though masking his fear under an air of mockery. The figure remains inexorably silent. Anathema grows bolder, and at length defiant. Then he bursts into laughter. "Name the Name [of thy God]. Everything in the world seeks good,—and knows not where to find it, everything in the world seeks life,—and meets only death. . . ." Then the figure answers: "He of whom thou askest has no name, nor number, wherewith he may be reckoned, nor measure, wherewith he may be measured, nor weight, wherewith he may be weighed. But thou, Anathema, wilt never see, never hear, and never know, Anathema, unhappy spirit, immortal in number, eternally alive in measure and weight, but not
even born as yet for life." Never ? cries Anathema. He bursts out in defiance. "Rise up, Earth! Gird thyself with a sword, Man! There shall be no peace between thee and heaven, and the prince of darkness shall rule now and for ever." And his instrument will be a simple, honest Jew of his acquaintance, one David Leiser. "To thee I will come, David. Thy hapless life I will hurl at proud heaven like a stone from a sling. David, my slave, through thy lips I will announce the truth of human fate."

I can only indicate the plot. The scene changes to the squalid outskirts of a starving Russian town, David Leiser's home. He and his wife, old people, are in the depths of misery. Their little Moses has died of hunger. His wife has already bidden him "Curse God and die." Anathema, a well-dressed gentleman approaches, and informs David that by the death of a brother in America he has inherited a fortune. What is he to do with it? Anathema bids him "return to God what God gave him," and so avoid His curse. "Give thy estate to the needy, give bread to the hungry, and thou shalt conquer death." David feels the glow of renunciation, and announces that he is about to distribute his possessions. The report spreads far and wide, magnifying as it spreads. Vast multitudes flock towards the town, to find the man who will feed the hungry, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead. In vain he declares that his wealth is all given away, and that he is helpless to heal. The exasperated people fight and plunder, and anarchy ensues. David and Anathema fly, pursued by the multitude, who stone him to death for a traitor and a liar. As he falls, Anathema bursts into a shrill laugh of triumph. In the last Act we return to the vast unearthly scenery of the first. Nothing has happened, nothing is changed. Still the grey rocks, the iron gates, the inexorable Figure. Anathema arrives; he no longer cowers, but struts, and asks why he is not received like a conqueror, after the ignominy and ruin of David. But he is told that David has attained immortality. Anathema falls to the ground in speechless rage. "What? that liar in whose name they murder and steal? Has he not shown the impotence of love, and done a great evil, which can be reckoned by number and measured with measure?" "Yes, David has done as thou sayest. But measures measure not nor weights can weigh that of which thou knowest nothing, Anathema. David is ruined in numbers, slain in measure and
weight, but he is immortal in the way of light and fire, and of the invisible fire of love, which have no boundaries and are beyond measure."

Thus, as in *Job* and in *Faust*, Satan is finally baffled, and baffled as in *Faust* when he counts himself completely victorious. Mephisto assumes that Faust is his prey, for has he not succumbed to the pleasure of the moment? Anathema is confident that he has shown the futility of love because David has been ruined by his effort to make a suffering world happy. This world of suffering humanity crowded with halt and sick and blind, who at the vague rumour of a deliverer set forth to march to the far off spot where it is said he will be found, is what most profoundly distinguishes this Russian allegory of good and evil from Goethe’s. To Goethe suffering was a distasteful fact, and it scarcely enters into his poetry save in order to be dissolved in harmony. The nineteenth century learned to feel suffering more intensely than the eighteenth, and beyond all other peoples Russia has made the world understand suffering, as beyond all others she has undergone it: it is not her least gift to European poetry. And this Russian Devil, with the mocking irony of Mephisto, has also the tragic wistfulness, the tragic futility, of Russia in the past. For he seeks truth which God has made for ever inaccessible, and his sleepless thought is forever baffled. He is a fiend of the race of Marlowe's Mephistophiles, not of Goethe's. Of this divine power, not less inscrutably hidden from us than from Anathema, we can only say that it resembles the mysterious God of Faust's confession (so remote from the affable Lord of the Prologue in Heaven)—the spirit who cannot be uttered, who can as little be affirmed as denied, for whom every name is false. There is no trace yet of the twentieth-century transformation of the imperfect, struggling God, man's comrade and ally in the taming of the universe, heralded by William James, and of which the undying fires of Mr. Wells's *Job* romance make men conscious. Here, as in so much else, progressive England and America have diverged from the stricken Russia of yesterday,—a Russia still, to all seeming, when Andreyev wrote, mastered by an inexorable fate, in which there was no shadow of change, so that to return there after the acutest human tragedy was to find, as Anathema found, that nothing had happened, that everything was the same.
We have seen so far, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, a twofold approach to the apprehension of religious ideas through creative literature. We saw how the vast extension of the study of man’s infancy, and of the myth world of his infant dreams, drew into the foreground even of a purely scientific or purely literary interest, the birth and evolution of religion. We saw again how the reaction against the plastic objectivity of science took the form, in poetry, of a mysticism which resolved the frame of material things into the symbolic speech of soul. The first phase derives in the main from the great peoples of the West, from their prosperity, their triumphant science and their finished art; the second from the secular tragedy of Russia or Ireland, and the self-questioning inward gaze of vanquished and humiliated France.

What has happened to these powerful currents of thought and feeling in the literature which has been vocal in the last twenty years? We must resist the illusion that the temper of a new century sets in the moment people begin to write 1700 or 1900 at the head of their letters. None the less, the opening of the twentieth century was attended in many fields of life by that quickening of pulse, that expansion of the horizon, which we habitually experience at the opening of a new day. Among other phenomena it is hardly to be gainsaid that the ideas and temper of religion have won a new vogue and a new significance in our outlook upon life. And as in other such times of transition, we may distinguish two concurrent processes. The old driving forces have in part been expanded and developed. In part they have been checked, transformed, or superseded. Let me say a word of each of these processes in turn.

In the first place, that exploration of the historic religions of man, of which I spoke, has advanced with ever-increasing pace. And the advance has been not only in geographical range and historic compass, but in psychological insight and spiritual sympathy. Out of the soil of a purely scientific interest in objective religious phenomena, there has grown an interest nourished also by recognition of spiritual needs like our own, finding expression through creeds and rituals not fundamentally different. The religions of Egypt and China, of India and Greece, have ceased, not merely for an enlightened student here and
there, but for the entire educated world, to be merely the pardonable extravagant extravagances of pagan man, stammering vaguely, at best, where Revelation spoke loud and clear. It is already possible to augur that the religions will grow in the future by grafting as well as by lopping, not merely discarding their dead matter, the surviving traces of the primitive unreason, the *Ur-dummheit*, but incorporating the discoveries made by the vision of religious genius elsewhere. The gods of Greece have been familiar to poetry since the Renascence. But the Hellenism of our time differs in characteristic ways from that of any previous age. Mr. McDowall, in his fascinating study of Realism, has described the intellectual temper of the present generation as marked by a union of grip and detachment,—vivid intuition of the moment, and its content and import, but openminded scrutiny of its claims and worth, and joyous willingness to chance the hazards of the future. We might term it an imaginative flexibility. It makes less surely for weight of character and power of will than the fierce exclusive fanaticisms of the past, but there is no doubt of its value in liberating and enriching our religious ideas.

The Hellenism of the age of the French Revolution was apt to be fiercely and aggressively pagan. Goethe’s passion of paganism when he escaped in 1787 to his Italian paradise, recalls Rienzi's dream of an actual restoration of the ancient republic of Rome. The Catholic shrines established on that sacred soil he repudiated as barbarous medieval relics. At Assisi he passed by with scorn the great Franciscan churches to which modern pilgrims, believers and unbelievers alike, throng, to prostrate himself before the temple of Minerva. At Rome he did his best to make believe that he was a real pagan, on visiting terms with the pagan gods. Here is one of the famous “Roman elegies” written by him, in the Roman elegiac metre, under the shadow of that St. Peter’s, which for him simply did not exist:

O how joyous I feel in Rome! looking back on the time when
Gray day folded me round far in the barbarous North.
Now on each forehead flames a more radiant aether's splendour,
Phoebus the god awakes colour and form into life.
Glorious is night with stars, and alive with tender music,
More refulgent the Moon's lamp than the Sun's in the North.
Ah, what bliss beyond earth is mine! Do I dream? O father
Jupiter, am I indeed in thy Olympus a guest?
Here, see I lie prostrate, and reach to thy knees imploring
Hands. O incline to my prayer, Jupiter Xenios, thine ear!
How I entered I cannot tell: my steps as I wandered
Hebe stayed and led here to thy heavenly halls.
Didst thou bid her bring to thy heavenly courts a hero?
Did she mistake? Forgive! Leave me the fruit of her fault.
Suffer me, Jupiter, here, and let Hermes later escort me
Gently by Cestius' tomb down to the shades of the Dead.

St. Peter's may be allowed to test rather severely the non-Catholic's
capacity to enter with imaginative sympathy into the enshrining form
of an alien faith. A. H. Clough, we may remember, seventy years
after Goethe's visit, did not ignore the great basilica; but it repelled
him, and he expressed the repulsion in feeling and eloquent, if pedes-
trian, hexameters (in the *Amours de Voyage*):—

Rome disappoints me still, but I shrink and adapt myself to it.
Somehow a tyrannous sense of a superincumbent oppression
Still, wherever I go, accompanies ever, and makes me
Feel like a tree (shall I say) buried under a ruin of brickwork.
Rome, believe me my friend, is like its own Monte Testaceo,
Merely a marvellous mass of broken and castaway wine-pots.
Ye Gods! what do I want with this rubbish of ages departed,
Things that nature abhors, the experiments that she has failed in?
No, the Christian faith, as I, at least, understood it,
Is not here, O Rome, in any of these thy churches,
Is not here, but in Freiburg, or Rheims, or Westminster Abbey.

Finally, some thirty years after Clough, a young Italian poet of
our own day entered St. Peter's, and he has left a record of what he
felt. Gabriele D'Annunzio is as fanatical a Hellenist as Goethe. A
disciple of the ardent classicist Carducci, he has told his life's history
in verse under the symbolic guise of a voyage to his Holy Land, Hellas.
Just as much as Goethe he makes believe to be a real pagan Greek.
On the way he lands at Olympia and offers up a prayer, nine
hundred lines long, to Hermes, the god of energy, whose Praxitelean
statue had shortly before been unearthed by the Germans in the
ruins. But unlike Goethe and Clough, he could find himself also in
the great metropolitan Church of Catholicism. He wrote of it in
another Roman elegy, emulating Goethe's inlyric beauty, and in the
same classic elegiac metre. But its purport could not be more
remote:—
Thro' the vaulted nave, which for ages has gathered so vast a
Human host, and of incense harboured so vast a cloud,
Wanders the chorus grave from lips invisible. Thunders
Break from the organ at times out of its hidden grove.
Down thro' the tombs the roar reverberates deep in the darkness:
The enormous pillars seem to throb to the hymn.
High enthroned the pontifical priests watch, blessing the people.
At the iron gates angels and lions keep guard.
How majestic the chant! From its large long undulations
Rises one clear voice with a melodious cry.
The voice mourns, to the world a sorrow divine revealing;
The notes quiver and sob, warm as it were with tears.
The voice mourns, alone; in his cold vault does he not hear it,
Palestrina? Alone the voice mourns, to the world
Uttering a sorrow divine. Does the buried singer not hear it?
Does not his soul leap up, bright on the heights of heaven,
Even as a dove makes wing aloft into golden turrets?
The voice mourns, alone; mourns, in the silence, alone.

D'Annunzio stands, in natural gift of critical sympathy, as in cosmopolitan range of interest, incomparably below Goethe, and no less decisively apart from Catholic belief. Yet to him, through the changed temper of his time, this instrument of a faith he had long discarded was still clamant; in its played-out tunes there were vibrating chords which could still speak home.

There is here, of course, no question of synthesis. We have to do only with the unconscious modification of temperament out of which the ideals of synthesis might naturally grow. Can we trace any signs of such an ideal elsewhere?

Some famous passages in nineteenth-century literature are inspired by it. Heine, long ago, with the Greek clarity radiating from his intellect, and the Hebraic passion throbbing in his heart, struck out the thought of a "Third Kingdom," to be one day evolved from the kingdoms of Christ and Moses, which in him, as in the great actress Rachel, "clashed, contending powers." And we know how the great Scandinavian dramatist, inheriting the traditions of Young Germany, but trained in the sombre Christian piety of the North instead of in Judaism, was stung by the intoxicating splendour of Rome to his cognate dream of a "Third Kingdom," which the Greek ideal of sensuous beauty and the Christian ideal of spiritual self-surrender, would one day combine to create. Heine died, and Ibsen's inexorably closed lips never expounded that oracular utterance. Matthew Arnold,
nearly at the same time, was evolving from the complex of modern mentality his polar opposites, Hebraism and Hellenism. But those opposites, inevitably in the hands of one who shared in both, drew insensibly together, and became more and more clearly indispensable components of a single supreme ideal, the secret of spiritual fulness of attainment in this life. And so, in this generation, Adolf Harnack, from the side of Protestant theology, finds the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love insufficient unless supported by the secular virtues of the Greeks. “If, in science, as well as in the life of feeling, we could succeed in uniting the inwardness and depth of Augustine with the bright clear mood of the ancients, we should attain the highest.” 1 And, yet more explicitly, Mr. Lowes Dickinson, in a phrase of memorable beauty: “For what shall we call?” asks Vivian at the close of his Symposium. “Pagan? Christian? For neither, and for both. Paganism stands for the men in Man, Christianity for the man in men. . . . It is only in the soil of Paganism that Christianity can come to maturity, and Faith, Hope, Charity are only seeds of themselves till they fall into the womb of Wisdom, Beauty, and Love.”

But even from the heart of the Hebrew world, so utterly alien as we think the temper of Hellenism, we have in recent literature a cry for reunion with it,—the longing of a Hebrew poet in modern Russia for the beauty of the Greek world and the joyousness of the Greek temper. The savage persecution of the Russian Jews during the thirty years before the Revolution provoked a great burst of poetry in the sacred mother-tongue of the afflicted people. As their earthly temple was laid waste, the indestructible possessions of the soul were more vividly seen and more passionately and lyrically grasped. The Hebrew faith broke out in song, sometimes in Russian, most often in Hebrew. But on some of these poets the misery of the Jewish people told in a different way. Highly educated in the culture of Europe, they felt the power of those strains in it in which Hebraism had no part,—not least of the “Greek,” to whom the finest flower of Hebraic genius had been foolishness. Tchernechowsky, in particular, uttered the longing for the blithe and joyous simplicity in which we are fain to imagine them, lived. For him Greece was “a land of marvel where beauteous goddesses walk for ever in strange charm and

1 Quoted by Höfdding, Phil. of Rel., p. 370.
blooming in eternal spring, . . . the sacred splendour of marble in their countenances, a fire alight in their hearts. . . . The mortals too are of good cheer, and strength is in their loins, wisdom and force meet in them, and godlike they appear."

To utter these Greek longings, moreover, Tchernechowsky uses a Greek metre,—compelling his stubborn Hebrew into the mould of the hexameter. More than this, he feels in the Greek divinities the eternal youth which Keats and Shelley felt, and which in the God of his own people, helpless to protect them, had passed into an effete old age; and so in the impassioned verses called Towards Apollo he offers his homage to the glorious god of light whom the Gentiles worshipped and the Jews abhorred:

I come to thee, long-forgotten God,
God of forgotten and by-gone ages,
I come to thee. Dost thou know me?
I am the Jew—thine ancient enemy;
My people's faith from that of thy votaries
Is distant as heaven from earth.
My nation has aged, and God with it.
God's light give me; God's light; every sinew calls
Life, oh life, every bone, every vein,
God's light and life.—
And I am come to Thee!¹

With this longing cry of a Hebraism oppressed and outworn to the Hellenism of its radiant dreams, I leave the record, fragmentary as it necessarily is, of efforts to enrich the substance of religious ideas by synthetic additions from without. I have now to speak of the more radical, even revolutionary transformations, from within.

VIII.

The ideas which determined the direction of these transformations are most clearly expressed in the work of two famous thinkers, both of whom have been arraigned by their critics as poets wearing the mask of philosophy—Nietzsche and Bergson. I can only touch in the briefest way the relevant points. "Superman" and "Creative Evolution" have become common catchwords, almost the slang of journalism. Both phrases mark attitudes of mind alien from religion as currently understood. Alien is indeed a tame word for the frenzied hatred displayed

¹The translations are taken from a lecture by my friend Mr. Isaiah Wassilevsky on Hebrew Poetry of To-day.
by Nietzsche for Christianity,—the religion of the herd, of the slave. Christianity, Goethe said, was founded on reverence for that which is beneath us, for the humble. Nietzsche, on the contrary, was consumed with scorn for the mass of man. But his scorn was the reverse side of a fierce, insatiable idealism. He reaches out after a perfection beyond humanity as it is, and only to be won by ruthlessly trampling on men as they are. If he refuses to call that perfection divine, or to invoke divine aid in reaching it, it is because all gods hitherto conceived by man fall short of his ideal. He rejects gods, not because he has no sense of the divine but because, if one may say so, no god is divine enough for him. Between the rottenness of man as he is and the immeasureable heights of a possible existence, a gulf yawns, and the glory of the Superman, vaguely descried on the further brink, was rather a menace than a hope, for the pigmy population on the hither side.

Bergson, on the other hand, by his doctrine of creative evolution, drew into close and intimate fellowship with man the shaping forces by which, if ever, a superhumanity is to be won. His God is "continually being formed and for ever renewed," and our mind, by being re-absorbed into the swift current of the divine life, becomes possessed of the same evolutionary power of movement."¹

Both writers concur in dismissing the notion of progress as a continuous organic development, almost an axiom of nineteenth-century thought. "You have set aside a thousand years of orderly logical development," wrote his old school-fellow, Wilamowitz, bitterly, to Nietzsche, on the appearance of his first book, The Birth of Tragedy (1872), an eloquent pean of impassioned impulse against philosophic calm. While with Bergson, evolution—one of the great words of the nineteenth century—became a formula not of mechanic struggle for existence or organic change, but of vital impulse, of creative purpose. And its other word, the will to live, became a formula of hope and progress.

It is clear that systems of thought so stimulating, so in tune with the temper of the time as those of Nietzsche and Bergson, could not fail to influence the shaping and re-shaping of religious ideas. I think we may distinguish two such lines of influence corresponding to two moods or tempers which they tend to stimulate and fortify: the temper of the

craftsman and the temper of the adventurer. The note of the first is creation, the note of the second is romance. The first has behind it more seriousness and weight, more passion for progress, more readiness to renounce passing joys for the sake of the work to be done, and more definite resolve to do that work. The second, not less daring or hardy than the first, not only delights in hazard and chooses hazard for its own sake, but is inclined to assume that hazard is so to speak the only salvation, and that truth is something which only escapes by a hairbreadth from being a lie. Each of these "varieties of religious experience" has been made his own by an imaginative writer of repute in our day.

IX.

Religion as romance, orthodoxy as an exciting, perhaps breakneck adventure, has found its apostle in Mr. G. K. Chesterton. At the outset of his essay on "Orthodoxy" he compares himself to an English yachtsman who, having miscalculated his course, has landed in England, under the impression that it was an unknown island in the South Sea. This man has in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again. And this union of suspense and satisfaction seems to Mr. Chesterton the ideal experience, which it is the main problem of life to maintain and renew. How, in other words, can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world, and at home in it?

That union was already accomplished in Mr. Chesterton's own temperament,—a man "at home in the world," if ever man was, a good liver, a boon companion, denouncer of teetotalers and all other enemies of cakes and ale, of the heretics in general who spoil good company; yet also, quite as genuinely, declaring that there is in this very familiar reality itself, seemingly so established and secure, something queer, fantastic, magical, and that miracle, banished by rationalist common sense, is just the one indefeasible fact, the one thing that is happening everywhere all the time. One might say, in Mr. Chesterton's vein, that he would not feel "at home in the world" unless he felt "astonished" at it, unless his eyebrows, so to speak, were permanently raised. He joins heartily in the reaction against intelligence and its methods, so pronounced in Bergson and Nietzsche; but for quaintly opposite reasons. Bergson disparages intelligence because it is halting
and cautious, Mr. Chesterton because it is so smooth and regular. Bergson exalts intuition because it is swift and certain, Chesterton because it is so gloriously incalculable and insecure. It is not hard to see what aspects of Christianity would appeal to a mind of these proclivities. It will attach itself to that vein of transcendent unreason which was at the outset foolishness to the Greeks, and which culminated in Tertullian's "I believe because it is impossible". In his fable of *The Ball and the Cross*, a rationalist and a Christian believer meet in the apex of St. Paul's, and it is explained that the ball, a smooth uniform curve, without excrescence or adventure, symbolises rationalism, while Christianity is naturally and aptly expressed by the Cross, in its very form a contradiction in terms. Christianity is the richer because it is paradoxical, and the seeming contradictions at which the simple believer stumbles and the simple unbeliever scoffs, become clinching proofs that it is the right faith for man. It is right, indeed, precisely because man is wrong. The flaws in man's nature, and the misfit between him and the world, are the very grounds which justify optimism, because here is Christianity waiting as it were to be the saving faith of just such a being. "The modern philosopher had told me that I was in the right place," he declares, and I had felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the wrong place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring." (One may note in passing how Mechnikov devoted his great book on the Nature of Man precisely to a demonstration of the misfit between Man and Nature, drawing thence a very different conclusion).

Yet the excitements of this romantic "Orthodoxy" are quite distinct from the spiritual wrestlings of the lonely mystic. They have their sociable, companionable sides, befitting their exponent. This Christianity is indeed a house of many mansions, no lonely cell like the bare simple faith of the Puritan, but a big genial hostelry, crowded with paradoxes, whose very extravagance makes them the best of company. The lonely faiths, where one man stands against the world—*unus contra mundum*—are obnoxious precisely because of their unsociable estrangement of the devotee from his fellows; and the doctrine of the Trinity is defended as a kind of divine committee, admitting of discussion and play of character,—one pleading justice, another mercy,—against the lonely unsociable autocracy of the theistic god.
Yet the time, as we have seen, had sterner needs; blitheness of romance danced in its blood, but it craved also the tense muscle and the shaping hand and brain, and these needs, also, struck out their counterparts in religious conception. The author of *Creative Evolution* has so far only vaguely adumbrated his conclusions on religion. But to the kindred mind of William James we owe the most trenchant sketch yet attempted of the religion postulated by a universe which is being constantly created, but where nothing is absolute, fixed, or secure. If there is a divine power, it too must, then, be finite and limited, a god who grows and who strives; and James is never weary of de-ridding what he calls the “full-dress, white-chokered” Absolute of Hegel, which is implicitly complete from the beginning, so that the continuous struggle by which it is supposed to be evolved is an unreal conflict in which both sides are at bottom right. James declared that not only is the conflict real, with a foe,—the “wildness” of the universe, which may prevail,—but that we and the finite striving god take part in it together, and share the chance of success or failure. We understand how this “variety of religious experience” should appeal to minds on fire with the passion of creation.

“*My central interest is a yearning for divine efficiency and divine ecstasy,”* says Mr. Wells, and this is the root both of his theory of conduct, and of his religion. It provides the substance of his novels, and his ultimate theory of the world. That a man of his training and proclivities should have come forward at the height of his career, not confessing himself an agnostic or an atheist, or entertaining theism as a not improbable hypothesis, but proclaiming God his invisible King, and the God of his salvation, could hardly have happened before our time; nor could it have happened now unless the God he proclaims had also been refashioned to the time’s measure. Wells’s theism marks no surrender, no retracing of his steps; it is rather a translation into theological terms of his own inmost aims. The Wellsian God is of the twentieth century, like his worshipper, and stamped with its genius and with its limitations, no less than he. Of the theism familiar to our fathers, and to our childhood, there is no trace. The infinite Being, almighty, all-knowing, all-benevolent, rewarding good and punishing ill, who satisfied theological logic perhaps better than religious emotion, has
given place to a fighting and striving God, ally of man and needing man's alliance, who urges man to join in the conflict "without consolations and without reward". This striving God is revealed not to the serene contemplation of the optimist, nor to the devout quiescence of the mystic, but to the heart aflame with iconoclastic zeal, burning to create and to destroy. This flaming zeal is the "undying fire" by which men live their highest life, and by which they find God. "There exists an undying fire in the hearts of men," says the hero of the book so named. "By that fire I live. By that I know the God of my salvation. His will is service. He urges me to conflict, . . . the essence of religion is resistance to what is, . . . a fight against the Dark Being of the Universe who seeks to crush us all. . . . It is a fight against Disorder. . . . The end and substance of education is to teach men and women of the Battle of God . . . to draw all men together out of themselves into one common life and effort with God."

XI.

Here we see the passion to transform the world, actually begetting a religion, and a religion of fiery intensity, in a mind by training and intellectual habit highly insusceptible to it. In the French poet, Paul Claudel, we find the same urgent practical need bending to its purpose the dogmatic faith of an ardent Catholic believer. Claudel had been a pupil of Bergson at the École Normale, and wrote in 1903 an essay on "Poetic Art" permeated by Bergsonian ideas. The tremendous crisis of the war evoked all the Manichean in him. He might have said with Wells: "The essence of religion is a fight against the Dark Being of the Universe who seeks to crush us all". Listen how the storm of militant rage sweeps away this fanatical Catholic's veneration for the imposing fabric of ecclesiastical and military aristocracy.

Victory is the first need, he declares, and for that we want the young men, and the naked simplicity of the days of Christianity:—

To-morrow the candles and the dais and the bishop with his clergy coped and gold-embossed,

But to-day the shout like thunder of an equal, unofficered host,

Who, led and kindled by the flag alone,

With one sole spirit swollen, and on one sole thought intent,

Are become one cry like the crash of walls shatter'd and gates rent:

Hosanna unto David's Son!
Needless the haughty steeds marble-sculptured, or triumphal arches, or chariots and four,
Needless the flags and the caparisons, the moving pyramids and towers, and cars that thunder and roar,—
'Tis but an ass whereon sits Christ:
For to make an end of the nightmare built by the Scribes and the Pharisees,
To get home to reality across the gulf of mendacities,
The first she-ass he saw sufficed!

Eternal youth is master, the hideous gang of old men is done with, we
Stand here like children, fanned by the breath of the things to be,
But victory we will have to-day!
Afterwards the corn that like gold gives return, afterwards the gold that like corn is faithful and will bear,
The fruit we have henceforth only to gather, the land we have henceforth only to share,
But victory we will have to-day.¹

And Claudel makes his God a party in the struggle, and hecters Him for imperfectly supporting the French cause.

XII.

In all that I have said so far of the religious ideas evolved or transmuted in the literature of our time, we have seen the working of dominant forces or ideals, which I called, in their lighter aspect, "romance," in their more strenuous, "creation". They did not imply any sharp severance from the religions of the past; they did not prevent Claudel from being Catholic, or Mr. Chesterton from being "orthodox". But they inevitably relaxed the weight of tradition, dissolved the spell of the past, put a premium as it were, upon setting sail from the shore, upon summarily reshaping the given block; and a discount upon all the processes of continuity, where the future is involved in the past, as the flower in the leaf. Yet it is certain that, were the sense that we are somehow one both with the past and with all the rest of humanity which has, like ourselves, grown out of it, to perish, both humanity and religion would grievously suffer. And I have to ask, finally, whether any substitute or compensation for that largely discredited conception of organic continuity has found its way into the impassioned intelligences which have made poetry and felt religion in our time. Certainly there

¹ Claudel’s poem has already been quoted (in the present version) with others, in the writer’s essay "On the Main Tendencies in Recent European Poetry" (Main Tendencies in Recent European Thought, ed. Marvin, Clar. Press). It is still more apposite here.
are signs that, alongside that violent shattering of ties which culminated in the tragedy of the Great War and the hardly less tragic Peace, there has been "slowly flooding in the main" of a growing consciousness of oneness among the peoples of the world. We grasp the solidarity of man more intimately than was possible to those who proclaimed it a century ago, and if its lacerations are more grievous we also feel them more acutely. Socialism, which has become a power in our time, is to-day one of the main bulwarks of the solidarity of man. It has asserted more wholeheartedly than any of the religions the faith in the brotherhood of man. Socialism for the most part discards religious ideas. But many deeply religious minds have embraced Socialism, and even found support for its energetic affirmation of fellowship in their faith that the divine spirit is nearer where two or three are gathered together, than to those who have no such attachments. The thought that community of feeling itself has in its nature something divine, as resembling the compassionate awareness of all our woes and wants which we ascribe to God, inspired a contemporary French poet, Jules Romains, to a development remarkable for the daring logic which clothes this thought in flesh and blood. His roots are not in Christianity, but in the strong French tradition of Comte and Le Playe, which found something divine in the bond of family and in the more impalpable bond which makes us one in humanity. What is least divine in us is for Romains our capacity to be happy when others are suffering, even during the horrors of a battlefield provided it is sufficiently far.

The basis of Romains' poetry is his wonderfully acute sense of community. The bond which we lightly talk of as binding a man to his family, to his village, to his fellow-men, is for him a religion; there is in it something divine, and when such a bond is formed, a divinity is created. Wherever men quit absolute solitude to enter into contact with one another, something divine comes into existence, a something which is of the substance of Deity. The culminating stage in the evolution is man's feeling for entire humanity. He feels acutely how far even he himself is as yet from the instant response to suffering in other parts of the world, and looks forward to a time when each of us will react to such appeals as we react to a hurt done to our own nervous system. This is powerfully expressed in his poem "During a War" (Pendant une Guerre). In the first part he describes with absolute candour and precision the state of mind—without which the
last five years would have driven us mad—of those, far from the battle-
field, honest and feeling men, who yet contrive to go about their day's
business with apparent unconcern:—

Yonder, on shuddering humanity
Death is descending like the autumn rain . . .
Here, nature dreams not of it, nor my soul;
Calm is the dawn, and calm my reason is;
I do not smell the far-off massacre,
The war seems as remote as history . . .
Surely these dead are of another world,
Seeing my blood runs not cold when theirs is spilt!
I who so fain would suffer torture for
The pangs of every bleeding soul or body
Must I feel nothing of all these deaths? I know
That others suffer, suffering not myself.
Sorrow refuses my wide opened arms.

Then he turns upon himself with the thought:—

O when our race begets a stronger breed,
When Flesh divided melts into a single
Flesh, indivisible, imperishable,
Traversed by the same tunnel of force and thought;
When, sated with the passion for existence,
Humanity will cling and cleave to Earth . . .
And Earth from one pole to the other, feel.
Then will a battle, a lost cry of pain,
Make continents vibrate, like a pebble cast
Reverberating along the waves. Then, suddenly,
Without our thought or knowledge, we shall know
That somewhere some one has been slain.

But the transition is slow, and the consummation far off:—

I hunger! Not for an ideal; ideals
Disgust me, but for Being! We need a god!
We need gods! Not gods hidden away in heaven,
Pallid First Causes, but gods of flesh and blood,
Alive, ourselves, whose substance we can grasp,
Who suffer with our frames, see with our eyes;
Divine animals whose limbs we are,
Who hold all things, body and space, enclosed
Within their real and palpable unity.
We must some day become Humanity.

—La Vie Unanime.

Such a conception of the growth of man towards the divine may
well seem crude and crass: it is significant only as an attempt to find
religious expression for an acute sense of the need of human community.
But as in some of our earlier examples, the most moving witness to the power of the surging tides of tendency in our time has been given by their impact upon minds deeply imbued with the old religions. As the stress of the war passion turned the Catholic Claudel into a scoler of ecclesiasticism, and his omnipotent God into a struggling imperfect partner in the defence of France, so another great French Catholic poet, Charles Péguy, was drawn by his profound sense of the solidarity of man to revolt against the Catholic dogma which condemned the mass of men to eternal banishment in hell. In his earliest version of the Jeanne d'Arc mystery, he tells how Jesus, on the Cross, grieved only for Judas, because he could not save him. He

Saw not his Mother in tears at the cross-foot
Below him, saw not Magdalen, nor John,
But wept, dying, only for Judas' death.
The Saviour loved this Judas, and though utterly
He gave Himself, he knew he could not save him.

Péguy was not tolerant of evil, nor did he revolt, like the humanitarian modern critics of the dogma, against its savagery; he revolted against the futility of disposing of evil by damning it, instead of fighting it. Here the mind of the modern democrat is seen remoulding the doctrine of damnation under the impulse of two human inspirations,—the solidarity of all men, good or bad, and the power of good to shatter the power of evil. Solidarity with him was no sentimental harmony; you might have to do battle, precisely in order to vindicate it. And Péguy met his death very early in the war, September, 1914, the very last man to fall in the battalion he led; sustaining single-handed the solidarity of Frenchmen in the cause of France.

It is hard to find any parallel among ourselves to the democratic Neo-Catholicism of Claudel and Péguy. Protestantism, one would be inclined to say, has lost since Milton the capacity to produce great poetry. But we have one poet among us to-day who has seen Evangelical religion through the medium of a faith in the solidarity of man as deep-rooted as Péguy's. Mr. Masefield has felt with wonderful intensity the greatness of the supreme situation of evangelical theology,—the sinner saved by grace; and as Péguy made Christianity pity Judas, so Masefield has gathered about his sinner to be saved all the squalid and sordid traits of modern slum life, and used a speech magnificently and fearlessly democratic in reach and scope. And the
democratic soul of Christianity has never been expressed in terms of more imaginative power and more penetrating truth than in the words in which the converted sinner tells of the new vision which that Ever-last ing Mercy had brought him:—

I did not think, I did not strive,
The deep peace burnt my me alive;
The bolted door had broken in,
I knew that I had done with sin.
I knew that Christ had given me birth
To brother all the souls on earth,
And every bird and every beast
Should share the crumbs broke at the feast.

That is the voice, speaking out of a rude and untutored mind, of that universal brotherhood, passing the bonds of nations, implied in the Church of Christ, which official Christianity has so gravely perverted in the supposed interest of nationality.

I have attempted, in the fragmentary survey which I now close, to indicate some of the forms of religious thinking and feeling which the basal tendencies of our time have generated in the rich transfiguring or distorting medium of poetic mind. How varied they are we have seen; but they have one pervading trait: they bring divine things very near to human, and in their revolt against the colourless abstractions of dehumanized theism, making God often such a one as we ourselves. A derisive critic might say that the authentic vision of God being obscured, or having faded finally away, we had clothed His effigy with garments borrowed from the most efficacious virtues of men, only of stronger fabric and superior cut,—their pity and love, their struggle with limitations, their sense of solidarity. Outside literature, too, the same humanization of the divine is apparent: the Christian Church of to-day draws its strength not from dogma or ritual, but from the person of Christ and labour for humanity, while the infinite and transcendant God fades for the popular consciousness towards the far off horizon of Olympus and Asgard. Now this humanization of God does not fully express the natural temper of poetry. Nothing that is near and human is foreign to poetry. But poetry also pierces through them to transcendant and ineffable things beyond. It leaps up with a cry of exultation when infinite and impossible things people its dream or swim into its ken; like the noble horse of Plato's charioteer, it sniffs
the air from afar that breathes from the ideal region of the things that veritably are. Poetry has its way in conceiving the divine not when Milton introduces God the Father scholastically vindicating His ways to Man, but when Dante at the height of the Paradiso has the vision of the glory of Him who moves all things, and whose splendour penetrates the universe, irradiating one part more and another less; or when Shelley, at the close of the Adonais, utters the indwelling divineness of things in language which seems to be that divineness veritably breaking into speech:—

That light whose smile kindles the universe,
That beauty, in which all things live and move;
That benediction, which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
In man, and beast, and earth, and air, and sea,
Burns bright or dim as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now burns in me,
Consuming the last cloud of cold mortality.

That is how poetry would like to see the universe. But the weight of the incumbent hour is on her, and she has to dream of the things that are given her by the Time she dwells in, and the men for whom she sings.