

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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ON

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There is one remark in the learned Doctor's lectures which we appreciate and commend to the attention of our Hindu countrymen, and that is how little we really know of the Philosophy of Christianity. If this is so, it is not the fault of the Hindu, but of those Professors and Propagandists of Christian Religion in the East who pay so little regard to the subject, and waste more time in dwelling upon the purely dogmatic and personal and ceremonial aspects of Christianity, and by exciting the purely sectarian questions succeed more in alienating the feelings of Hindus, than in drawing them towards their fold. Years ago, we took the occasion of a Review of *Robert Elsemere* and *Shaik Sadi* to show how much of real and genuine philosophic lore was to be found in the expositions of Christian and Mahomedan teachers. It is with this view also we have opened our columns to our respected Missionary friend The Rev G. Bartoli. We need to know not only what our religionists tell us of our own great truths but also what other great religionists conceive to be true, and how our truths strike them. And no little credit is due to those great elucidation of Eastern religions and philosophies, and who have done so much for the spread of truth and knowledge and science as conceived by them. No doubt they have been selfish in doing all this, namely, to convert the heathen, it may be said, but this is a conception of selfishness which is more commendable in spirit than otherwise. No man's conviction is worth anything, if he could not feel that that is a conviction worth possessing by all his fellow beings; and the satisfaction which one feels, when he can convert another to unison with himself in thought and conduct, is really genuine and highly commendable, especially when the evident object is to lead man to a higher and better life. And we think the Rev. Doctor is for once wrong when he would not credit the Hindu and His Religion with this feeling of reciprocity and desire to impart to others his own great truths. We once before look objection to a Rev. Gentleman's observation that the Hindu keeps his light under a bushel, and quoted to him the words of our Saint Thayumanavar, which we have elsewhere quoted this day in inviting the whole world to share in his eternal joy and bliss; and the reply of the Missionary gentleman is well worth quoting: - "All that I meant to convey by the use of it, is the fact that India's truest and best things are hidden from the eyes of the multitude there, and where students in England and zealous propagandists have catalogued the sects and the idols of India, they have not seen how much truth is in the land. The truth is known to those in India who take pains to know it, to these it is as not latent but manifest."

Christ himself has declared, "Don't throw pearls before swine," "Let those who have ears, hear; let those who have eyes, see." Superficial critics of Hinduism wonder at the great gulf which they fancy divides so called popular Hinduism from Philosophic Hinduism; and herein consists the unique character and glory of Hinduism. We demur to the definition of Universal Religion given by the Haskell Lecturer; and here is what we conceive to be the Universal Religion.

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இதுவாகு மதுவல்லதெனும் பிணக்க தின்றி
நீதியினா னிவையல்லா மோரிடத்தே காண
நின்றதி யாதொரு சமயமது சமயம்.

“That Religion is the true which does not conflict with this religion and that, and yet reconciles all and stands supreme in the conscience of man.”

Whose supreme Ideal is such that, once seen, every Religionist can exclaim, “what is there here of sect and creed, All is His Supreme Glory and Bliss”, and perceiving which, even the hardest heart can melt in love and joy eternal. It is the historical personality, with its accidents of time, place, race and language, which tends to narrow the views of religion and God, and leads to the formation of sects and creeds, though this personal element may be necessary for the multitude from time to time to look up to and follow. These great leaders of men are necessary, whether in purely secular and political movements or in religious movements. They are the salt of the earth; they, by their great personality and power for good attract the ignorant masses, and control them and prove a veritable beacon-light to them. They furnish watchwords which, however, in course of time when the spirit is forgot, degenerate into mere unmeaning shibboleths. If we can watch the life-history of every great seer or leader, we may notice how infinitely careful he was himself to hide his own personality from the public gaze, and did all his best to reveal the Face of Truth and Justice; but the curious crowd has been more intent on observing the face of the seer himself, and seeing the reflection of Truth and Justice in his face, than in looking up or comprehending Truth and Justice by itself. As such, historical personality may be important and useful to the particular place and time and race, but when such a particular historical personality is held up to the whole world and for all time, as the only panacea that can cure all ills of humanity, this will be overshooting the mark. In Hinduism itself, we find many historical personalities exercising very great influence from time to time; and modern Saivism or Vaishnavism is more marked by their votaries adhering to the personalities of their great Saints or Acharyas; and we have the worst effects of this personality, exhibited when devout and enthusiastic Vaishnavas break each other’s heads in proclaiming the superiority of Manavala Muni or Vedanta Desikar.

And we accept the Rev. Doctor’s view of True Religion also in that, “A True Religion was a great moral force. It contributed to social unity (we omit that in reference to political unity; each of the great nations of Europe are keenly fighting for this honour). A religion that lacked such humanising influences, and only created class distinctions, and a spirit of racial superiority, and proud exclusiveness, stood by itself thoroughly discredited.” But our Reverend Doctor is evidently anxious that Christianity should not be judged by its association with European nations and Christian Government; and so would every other religionist desire that his religion should not be judged by the idiosyncrasies, social and political, of the people themselves. It is not true to say that the Eastern had no truth in his soul; but impartial observers say that there was truth, not only in the east but also in the west, among even the Greeks, and Romans, who occupy such a low estimate in our Doctor’s eyes so much in fact as to surprise him and gladden his heart, and sometimes even to put him to the blush before the birth of

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Christ. For what says a father of the church? : - “Let us admit with shame and sorrow that some among these heathens showed themselves to be nobler, loftier, holier, freer from insanity, freer from meanness, freer from special pleading, freer from falsehood, more spiritual, more reasonable, on some points even more enlightened than many among ourselves. The very ideal of Christian life seems to have been dwarfed to a poor, vulgar and conventional standard.” * [* Farrars’ “Seekers after God.” P. xii] But Christian bigotry and sectarianism can also go so low as not to recognize that there could be any truth or morality which is not derived from Christianity. And Dr. Farrar himself meets the view of M. Flenry, as regards the Greeks and Romans; and Dr. Muir deals with Dr. Lorinser’s peculiar views, so far as they deal with the truth in Hinduism, in his excellent introduction to *His Metrical Translations from the Sanskrit writers*. † [† The publishers ought to make this excellent volume available to every Hindu student. The cost of the book is almost prohibitive.] Even liberal thinkers would not call such truths by their own name, but will dub them as truths of the Christianity of Nature, much in the same style, as modern Theosophists speak of any truth, Christian or otherwise, as a great truth of Theosophy.
