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*Religion and Art*

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



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## About this Title

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## Religion and Art

Ich finde in der christlichen Religion  
virtualiter die Anlage zu dem höchsten  
und Edelsten, und die Verschiedenen  
Erscheinungen derselben im Leben scheinen  
mir bloss desswegen so widrig und abgeschmackt,

weil sie verfehlte Darstellungen dieses höchsten sind.

Schiller, an Goethe

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## Translator's Note

"Religion and Art" originally appeared in the *Bayreuther Blätter* for October 1880, constituting the whole of that number of the journal. The nearest translation of the motto taken from Schiller, would be

"in the Christian religion I find an intrinsic disposition to the Highest and the Noblest, and its various manifestations in life appear to me so vapid and repugnant simply because they have missed expression of that Highest."

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ONE might say that where Religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for Art to save the spirit of religion by recognising the figurative value of the mythic symbols which the former would have us believe in their literal sense, and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal presentation. Whilst the priest stakes everything on the religious allegories being accepted as matters of fact, the artist has no concern at all with such a thing, since he freely and openly gives out his work as his own invention. But Religion has sunk into an artificial life, when she finds herself compelled to keep on adding to the edifice of her dogmatic symbols, and thus conceals the one divinely True in her beneath an ever growing heap of incredibilities commended to belief. Feeling this, she has always sought the aid of Art; who on her side has remained incapable of higher evolution so long as she must present that alleged reality of the symbol to the senses of the worshipper in form of fetishes and idols,—whereas she could only fulfil her true vocation when, by an ideal presentment of the allegoric figure, she led to apprehension of its inner kernel, the truth ineffably divine.

To see our way clear in this, we should have most carefully to test the origin of religions. These we must certainly deem the more divine, the simpler proves to be their inmost kernel. Now, the deepest basis of every true religion we find in recognition of the frailty of this world, and the consequent charge to free ourselves therefrom. It is manifest that at all times it needed a superhuman effort to disclose this knowledge to men in a raw state of nature, the Folk in fact, and accordingly the most successful work of the religious Founder consisted in the invention of [214] mythic allegories, by which the people might be led along the path of faith to practical observance of the lessons flowing from that root-knowledge. In this respect we can but regard it as a sublime distinction of the Christian religion, that it expressly claims to bare the deepest truth to the "poor in spirit," for their comfort and salvation whereas the doctrine of the Brahmins was the exclusive property of "those who know"—for which reason the "rich in spirit" viewed the nature-ridden multitude as shut from possibility of knowledge and only arriving at insight into the nullity of the world by means of numberless rebirths. That there was a shorter road to salvation; the most enlightened of the "Reborn" himself disclosed to the poor blind Folk: but the sublime example of renunciation and unruffled meekness, which the *Buddha* set, did not suffice his fervid followers; his last great doctrine, of the unity of all things living, was only to be made accessible to his disciples through a mythic explanation of the world whose wealth of imagery and allegoric comprehensiveness was taken bodily from the storehouse of Brahminic teachings, so astounding in their proofs of fertility and culture of mind. Here too, in all the course of time and progress of their transformation, true Art could never be invoked to paint and clarify these myths and allegories; Philosophy supplied her place, coming to the succour of the religious dogmas with the greatest refinements of intellectual exposition.

It was otherwise with the Christian religion. Its founder was not wise, but divine (1); his teaching was the deed of free-willed suffering. To believe in him, meant to emulate him; to hope for redemption, to strive for union with him. To the "poor in spirit" no metaphysical explanation of the [215] world was necessary; the knowledge of its suffering lay open to their feeling; and not to shut the doors of that, was the sole divine injunction to believers. Now we may assume that if the belief in Jesus had remained the possession of these "poor" alone, the Christian dogma would have passed to us as the simplest of religions. But it was too simple for the "rich in mind," and the unparalleled intricacies of the sectarian spirit in the first three centuries of Christianity shew us the ceaseless struggle of the intellectually rich to rob the poor in spirit of their faith, to twist and model it anew to suit their own abstractions. The

Church proscribed all philosophical expounding of this creed, designed by her to instigate a blind obedience; only—whatever she needed to give her parentage a superhuman rank she appropriated from the leavings of the battles of the sects, thus gradually garnering that harvest of most complicated myths, belief in which as quite material verities she demanded with unbending rigour.

Our best guide to an estimate of the belief in miracles, will be the demand addressed to natural man that he should change his previous mode of viewing the world and its appearances as the most absolute of realities; for he now was to know this world as null, an optical delusion, and to seek the only Truth beyond it. If by a miracle we mean an incident that sets aside the laws of Nature; and if, after ripe deliberation, we recognise these laws as founded on our own power of perception, and bound inextricably with the functions of our brain: then belief in miracles must be comprehensible to us as an almost necessary consequence of the reversal of the "will to live," in defiance of all Nature. To the natural man this reversal of the Will is certainly itself the greatest miracle, for it implies an abrogation of the laws of Nature; that which has effected it must consequently be far above Nature, and of superhuman power, since he finds that union with It is longed for as the only object worth endeavour. It is this Other that *Jesus* told his poor of, as the "Kingdom of [216] God," in opposition to the "kingdom of the world;" He who called to Him the weary and heavy-laden, the suffering and persecuted, the patient and meek, the friends of their enemies and lovers of all, was their "Heavenly Father," as whose "Son" he himself was sent to these "his Brothers."

We here behold the greatest miracle of all, and call it "Revelation." How it became possible to turn it into a State-religion for Romish Cæsars and Inquisitors, we shall have to consider in later course of this essay; our present attention is claimed by the wellnigh consequential evolution of those myths whose ultimate exuberance defaced the dogma of the Church with artificiality, yet offered fresh ideals to Art

What we understand in general by the artistic province, we might define as Evaluation of the Pictorial (*Ausbildung des Bildlichen*); that is to say, Art grasps the Figurative of an idea, that outer form in which it shews itself to the imagination, and by developing the likeness—before employed but allegorically—into a picture embracing in itself the whole idea, she lifts the latter high above itself into the realm of revelation. Speaking of the ideal shape of the Greek statue, our great philosopher finely says: It is as if the artist were shewing Nature what she would, but never completely could; wherefore the artistic Ideal surpasses Nature. (2) Of Greek theogony it may be said that, in touch with the artistic instinct of the nation, it always clung to anthropomorphism. Their gods were figures with distinctive names and plainest individuality; their names were used to mark specific groups of things (*Gattungsbegriffe*), just as the names of various coloured objects were used to denote the colours themselves, for which the Greeks employed no abstract terms like ours: "gods" were they called, to mark their nature as divine; but the Divine itself the Greeks called *God*, "#####." Never did it occur to them to think of " God " as a Person, or give to him artistic shape as to their named gods; he remained [217] an idea, to be defined by their philosophers, though the Hellenic spirit strove in vain to clearly fix it—till the wondrous inspiration of poor people spread abroad the incredible tidings that the "Son of God" had offered himself on the cross to redeem the world from deceit and sin.

We have nothing here to do with the astoundingly varied attempts of speculative human reason to explain the nature of this Son of *the* God, who walked on earth and suffered shame: where the greater miracle had been revealed in train of that manifestation, the reversal of the will-to-live which all believers experienced in themselves, it already embraced that other marvel, the divinity of the herald of salvation. The very shape of the Divine had presented itself in anthropomorphic guise; it was the body of the quintessence of all pitying Love, stretched out upon the cross of pain and suffering. A—symbol?—beckoning to the highest



pity, to worship of suffering, to imitation of this breaking of all self-seeking Will: nay, a picture, a very effigy! In this, and its effect upon the human heart, lies all the spell whereby the Church soon made the Græco-Roman world her own. But what was bound to prove her ruin, and lead at last to the ever louder "Atheism" of our day, was the tyrant-prompted thought of tracing back this Godliness upon the cross to the Jewish "Creator of heaven and earth," a wrathful God of Punishment who seemed to promise greater power than the self-offering, all-loving Saviour of the Poor. That god was doomed by Art: Jehova in the fiery bush, or even the reverend Father with the snow-white beard who looked down from out the clouds in blessing on his Son, could say but little to the believing soul, however masterly the artist's hand; whereas the suffering god upon the cross, "the Head with wounds all bleeding," still fills us with ecstatic throes, in the rudest reproduction.

As though impelled by an artistic need, leaving Jehova the "Father" to shift for himself, Belief devised the necessary miracle of the Saviour's birth by a *Mother* who, [218] not herself a goddess, became divine through her virginal conception of a son without human contact, against the laws of Nature. A thought of infinite depth, expressed in form of miracle. In the history of Christianity we certainly meet repeated instances of miraculous powers conferred by pure virginity, where a metaphysical concurs very well with a physiologic explanation, in the sense of a *causa finalis* with a *causa efficiens*; but the mystery of motherhood without natural fecundation can only be traced to the greater miracle, the birth of the God himself: for in this the Denial-of-the-world is revealed by a life pre-figuratively offered up for its redemption. (3) As the Saviour himself was recognised as sinless, nay, incapable of sin, it followed that in him the Will must have been completely broken ere ever he was born, so that he could no more suffer, but only feel for others' sufferings; and the root hereof was necessarily to be found in a birth that issued, not from the Will-to-live, but from the Will-to-redeem. But this mystery that seemed so plain to the illuminate, was exposed to the most glaring misinterpretations on the part of popular realism when demanded as an article of faith; the "immaculate conception by the Virgin Mary might be phrased indeed, but never thought, still less imagined. The Church, which in the Middle Ages had her articles expounded by her handmaid, Scholastic philosophy, sought at last for means of visibly portraying [219] them; above the porch of St. Kilian (4) at Wurzburg we may see a bas-relief of God the Father transmitting the embryo of the Saviour to the body of Mary by means of a blow-pipe. This instance may serve for thousands like it! Such appalling degradation of religious dogmas to arti ficiality we referred to in our opening paragraph, and this flagrant example will emphasise the redeeming effect of true idealistic art if we turn to their treatment by heaven-sent artists, such as Raphael in his so-called "Sistine Madonna." The Miraculous Conception still was handled in the Church's realistic spirit, to some extent, even when great artists painted its annunciation to the Virgin by an angel, albeit the spiritual beauty of the figures, removed from all materialism, here gives us a glimpse into the divine mysterium itself. But that picture of Raphael's shews us the final consummation of the miracle, the virgin mother transfigured and ascending with the new-born son: here we are taken by a beauty which the ancient world, for all its gifts, could not so much as dream of; for here is not the ice of chastity that made an Artemis seem unapproachable, but Love divine beyond all knowledge of unchastity, Love which of innermost denial of the world has born the affirmation of redemption. And this unspeakable wonder we see with our eyes, distinct and tangible, in sweetest concord with the noblest truths of our own inner being, yet lifted high above conceivable experience. If the Greek statue held to Nature her unattained ideal, the painter now unveiled the unseizable and therefore indefinable mystery of the religious dogmas, no longer to the plodding reason, but to enraptured sight.

Yet another dogma was to offer itself to the artist's phantasy, and one on which the Church at last seemed to set more store than on that of Redemption through Love. The

World-overcomer was called to be World-judge. From the arm of his virgin mother the divine child had bent his searching gaze upon the world, and, piercing all its tempting show, had recognised its true estate as [220] death-avoiding, death-accurst. Under the Redeemer's sway, this world of greed and hate durst not abide; to the downtrod poor, whom he called to free themselves through suffering and compassion, to meet him in his Father's kingdom, he must shew this world in the scales of justice, its own weight dragging it down to the slough of sin. From the sun-drenched heights of those fair hills on which he loved to preach salvation to the multitude in images and parables, whereby alone could he gain the understanding of his "poor," he pointed to the gruesome death-vale of "Gehenna"; thither, upon the day of judgment, should avarice and murder be condemned, to flee at one another in despair. Tartarus, Inferno, Hela, all places of post-mortem punishment of wicked men and cowards, were found again in this "Gehenna"; and to our day the threat of "Hell" has remained the Church's vital hold upon men's souls, from whom the "Kingdom of Heaven" has moved farther and farther away. The Last Judgment: a prophecy here big with solace, there terrible! No element of ghastly hatefulness and loathly awe, but was pressed into the service of the Church with sickening artifice, to give the terrified imagination a foretaste of that place of everlasting doom where the myths of each religion besmirched with belief in the torments of Hell were assembled in most hideous parody. As though in commiseration of the horrible itself, a supremely lofty artist felt impelled to paint this nightmare too: the thought of Christ seemed incomplete without this picture of the final judgment. Whilst Raphael had shewn us God born from the womb of sublimest love, Michael Angelo's prodigious painting shews us the God fulfilling his terrible work, God hurling from the realm of the elect all those belonging to the world of ever-dying death: yet—by his side the Mother whence he sprang, who bore divinest suffering with and for him, and now rains down on those unsharing in redemption the eternal glance of sorrowing pity. There the fount, but here the full-fed stream of the Divine!

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Though we have not been attempting an account of Art's historical development from the religious idea, but simply an outline of their mutual affinities, yet that historic career must be touched upon in dealing with the circumstance that it was almost solely plastic art, and that of Painting in particular, which could present the religious dogmas—originally themselves symbolical—in an ideally figurative form. *Poetry*, on the contrary, was constrained by their very symbolism to adhere to the form laid down by canon as a matter of realistic truth and implicit credence. As these dogmas themselves were figurative concepts, so the greatest poetic genius—whose only instruments are mental figures—could remodel or explain nothing without falling into heterodoxy, like all the philosopher-poets of the earliest centuries of the Church, who succumbed to the charge of heresy. Perhaps the poetic power bestowed on *Dante* was the greatest e'er within the reach of mortal; yet in his stupendous poem it is only where he can hold the visionary world aloof from dogma, that his true creative force is shewn, whereas he always handles the dogmatic concepts according to the Church's principle of literal credence; and thus these latter never leave that lowering artificiality to which we have already alluded, confronting us with horror, nay, absurdity, from the mouth of so great a poet.

Now, in respect of plastic art it is palpable that its ideally creative force diminished in exact proportion as it withdrew from contact with religion. Betwixt those subhimest revelations of religious art, in the godlike birth of the Redeemer and the last fulfilment of the work of the Judge of the world, the saddest of all pictures, that of the Saviour suffering on the cross, had likewise attained to its height of perfection; and this remained the archetype of the countless representations of martyred saints, their agonies illumined by the bliss of transport. Here the portrayal of bodily pain, with the instruments of torture and their wielders, already led the artists down to [222] the common actual world, whose types of human wickedness and

cruelty surrounded them beyond escape. And then came "Characteristique," with its multiple attraction for the artist; the consummate "portrait" of even the vulgarest criminal, such as might be found among the temporal and spiritual princes of that remarkable time, became the painter's most rewarding task; as on the other hand, he early enough had taken his motives for the Beautiful from the physical charms of the women in his voluptuous surroundings.

The last sunset flush of artistic idealising of the Christian dogma had been kissed by the morning glow of the reviving Grecian art-ideal: but what could now be borrowed from the ancient world, was no longer that unity of Greek art with Antique religion whereby alone had the former blossomed and attained fruition. We have only to compare an antique statue of the goddess Venus with an Italian painting of the women chosen to impersonate this Venus, to perceive the difference between religious ideal and worldly reality. Greek art could only teach its sense of form, not lend its ideal content; whilst the Christian ideal had passed out of range of this sense-of-form, to which the actual world alone seemed henceforth visible. What shape this actual world at last took on, and what types alone it offered to the plastic arts, we will still exclude from our inquiry; suffice it to say that that art which was destined to reach its apogee in its affinity with religion, completely severing itself from this communion—as no one can deny—has fallen into utter ruin.

Once more to touch the quick of that affinity, let us turn one glance to the *Art of Tone*.

While it was possible for Painting to reveal the ideal content of a dogma couched in allegoric terms, and, without throwing doubt on the figure's claim to absolute credence, to take that allegory itself as object of ideal portrayal, we have had to see that Poetry was forced to leave its kindred power of imagery unexercised upon the dogmas of the Christian Church; employing concepts [223] as its vehicle (*durch Begriffe darstellend*), it must retain the conceptual form of the dogma inviolate in every point. It therefore was solely in the lyrical expression of rapturous worship that poetry could be approached, and as the religious concept must still be phrased in forms of words canonically fixed, the lyric necessarily poured itself into a purely musical expression, un-needing any mould of abstract terms. Through the art of Tone did the Christian Lyric thus first become itself an art: the music of the Church was sung to the words of the abstract dogma; in its effect however, it dissolved those words and the ideas they fixed, to the point of their vanishing out of sight; and hence it rendered nothing to the enraptured Feeling save their pure emotional content.

Speaking strictly, the only art that fully corresponds with the Christian belief is Music; even as the only music which, now at least, we can place on the same footing as the other arts, is an exclusive product of Christianity. In its development, alone among the fine arts, no share was borne by re-awaking Antique Art, whose tone-effects have almost passed beyond our ken: wherefore also we regard it as the youngest of the arts, and the most capable of endless evolution and appliance. With its past and future evolution, however, we here are not concerned, since our immediate object is to consider its affinity to Religion. In this sense, having seen the Lyric compelled to resolve the form of words to a shape of tones, we must recognise that Music reveals the inmost essence of the Christian religion with definition unapproached; wherefore we may figure it as bearing the same relation to Religion which that picture of Raphael's has shewn us borne by the Child-of-god to the virgin Mother: for, as pure Form of a divine Content freed from all abstractions, we may regard it as a world-redeeming incarnation of the divine dogma of the nullity of the phenomenal world itself. Even the painter's most ideal shape remains conditioned by the dogma's terms, and when we gaze upon her likeness, that sublimely virginal Mother of God lifts us up above the miracle's [224] irrationality only by making it appear as wellnigh possible. Here we have: "That signifies." But Music says: "That is,"—for she stops all strife between reason and feeling, and that by a tone-shape completely removed from the world of appearances, not to be compared with anything physical, but usurping our heart as by act of Grace.

This lofty property of Music's enabled her at last to quite divorce herself from the reasoned word; and the noblest music completed this divorce in measure as religious Dogma became the toy of Jesuitic casuistry or rationalistic pettifogging. The total worldlifying of the Church dragged after it a worldly change in Music: where both still work in unison, as in modern Italy for instance, neither in the one's displays nor the other's accompaniment can we detect any difference from every other parade of pomp. Only her final severance from the decaying Church could enable the art of Tone to save the noblest heritage of the Christian idea in its purity of over-worldly reformation; and the object of the remainder of our essay shall be, to foreshadow the affinities of a Beethovenian Symphony with a purest of religions once to blossom from the Christian revelation.

To reach that possibility, however, we first must tread the stony path on which may be found the cause of downfall even of the most exalted religions, and therewith the ground of decadence of all the culture they called forth, above all of the arts they fructified. However terrible may be the scenes the journey must unfold to us, yet this alone can be the road conducting to the shore of a new hope for the human race.



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## II

IF we follow up that phase in the evolution of the human race which we call the Historic, as based on sure tradition, it is easier to comprehend why the religions arising in course of this period fell deeper and deeper in their inward spirit, the longer was their outward rule. The two sublimest of religions, Brahminism with its offshoot Buddhism, and Christianity, teach alienation from the world and its passions, thus steering straight against the flow of the world-tide without being able in truth to stem it. Hence their outer continuance seems explicable only by their having brought to the world the knowledge of Sin on the one hand, and used that knowledge, on the other, to found beside the temporal dominion over man's body a spiritual dominion over his soul which fouled the purity of the religion in measure with the general deterioration of the human race.

This doctrine of man's sinfulness, which forms the starting-point of each of these sublime religions, is unintelligible to the so-called "Free-thinker," who will neither allow to existing Churches a right to the adjudgment of sin, nor to the State a warrant to declare certain actions as criminal. Though both rights may be open to question, it would none the less be wrong to extend that doubt to the core of Religion itself; since it surely must be admitted in general that, not the religions themselves are to be blamed for their fall, but rather the fall of mankind, as traceable in history, has brought their ruin in its train; for we see this Fall of Man proceeding with so marked a nature-necessity, that it could but carry with itself each effort to arrest it.

And precisely by that misappropriated doctrine of Sin itself, can this shocking progress of events be shewn most plainly; for proof whereof we think best to commence with the Brahminic doctrine of the sinfulness of killing living creatures, or feeding on the carcasses of murdered beasts.

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Upon probing the sense of this doctrine, with its resultant dissuasion, we light at once on the root of all true religious conviction, and at like time the deepest outcome of all knowledge of the world, both in essence and manifestation. For that teaching had its origin in recognition of the unity of all that lives, and of the illusion of our physical senses which dress this unity in guise of infinitely complex multitude and absolute diversity. It was thus the result of a profound metaphysical insight, and when the Brahmin pointed to the manifold appearances of the animate world, and said "This is thyself!" there woke in us the consciousness that in sacrificing one of our fellow-creatures we mangled and devoured ourselves. That the beasts are only distinguished from man by the grade of their mental faculties; that what precedes all intellectual equipment, what desires and suffers, is the same Will-to-live in them as in the most reason-gifted man; that this one Will it is, which strives for peace and freedom amid our world of changing forms and transitory semblances; and finally, that this assuagement of tumultuous longing can only be won by the most scrupulous practice of gentleness and sympathy toward all that lives,—upon this the religious conscience of the Brahmin and Buddhist has stood firm as a rock till this day. We learn that about the middle of last century certain English speculators bought up the whole rice-harvest of India, and thus induced a famine in the land, which swept away three millions of the natives: yet not one of these starving wretches could be moved to slay and eat his household animals; only after their masters, did they famish too. A mighty testimony to the genuineness of a religious belief, with which, however, the confessors themselves have been expunged from "*History*."

If on the other hand we look a little closer at the human race in its stamp upon History, we can only ascribe its deplorable infirmity to the same mad *Wahn* (5) that prompts the savage



animal to fall upon its prey when no [227] longer driven by hunger—sheer pleasure in its raging strength. Though physiologists are still divided as to whether Man was meant by Nature to feed exclusively on fruits, or also upon flesh-meat, from its first faint glimmerings History shews Man's constant progress as a beast of prey. As such he conquers every land, subdues the fruit-fed races, founds mighty realms by subjugating other subjugators, forms states and sets up civilisations, to enjoy his prey at rest.

Insufficient as are all our scientific data as to the first starting-point of this historic evolution, we may take it for granted that the birth and earliest dwelling-place of the human species may be set in countries warm and clad with ample vegetation. It seems more difficult to decide what violent changes drove a great portion of the human race from its natural birthplaces to rawer and inhospitable regions. At the first dawning of history we believe we find the aborigines of the present Indian peninsula in the cooler valleys of the Himalayan highlands, supporting themselves as graziers and tillers of the soil; from here, under guidance of a religion whose gentleness accorded with the herdsman's needs, we see them return to the lower valleys of the Indus, and thence again resume possession, as it were, of their ancient home, the delta of the Ganges. Great and deep must have been the impressions of this return from exodus upon the mind of races who had now gone through so much: a smiling Nature offered them with willing hand its varied products; fed without care, an earnest contemplation would lead them to profound reflection on that former world wherein they had learnt the stress of need and bitter toil, ay, of strife and warfare for possession. To the Brahmin, now feeling himself re-born, the warrior would appear a necessary guardian of exterior peace, and therefore worthy sympathy; but the hunter to him was an object of horror, and the slayer of man's friends, the domestic animals, unthinkable. No boar-tusks sprang from this people's gums, and yet it remained more courageous than any other race on earth, for it bore each agony [228] and every form of death at the hands of its later torturers in staunchness to the purity of its gentle faith; from which, unlike the professors of all other religions, no Brahmin or Buddhist could be turned away for fear or gain.

But in the selfsame valleys of the Indus we think we see at work that cleavage which parted cognate races from those returning southwards to their ancient home, and drove them westwards to the broad expanse of hither-Asia, where in course of time we find them as conquerors and founders of mighty dynasties, erecting ever more explicit monuments to History. These peoples had wandered through the wastes that separate the outmost Asiatic confines from the land of Indus; ravenous beasts of prey had taught them here to seek their food no longer from the milk of herds, but from their flesh; till blood at last, and blood alone, seemed fitted to sustain the conqueror's courage. Stretching northwards from the Indian highlands, the wild steppes of Asia—whither the aborigines of milder climates once had fled from huge disturbances of Nature—had already nursed the human beast of prey. From there, throughout all earlier and later times, have poured the floods destroying every recommencement of a gentler manhood; the very oldest sagas of the Iranian race recount a constant warfare with the Turanian peoples of these steppes. Attack and defence, want and war, victory and defeat, lordship and thralldom, all sealed with the seal of blood: this from henceforth is the History of Man. The victory of the stronger is followed close by enervation through a culture taught them by their conquered thralls; whereon, uprooting of the degenerate by fresh raw forces, of blood-thirst still unslaked. Then, falling lower and yet lower, the only worthy food for the world-conqueror appears to be human blood and corpses: the Feast of Thyestes would have been impossible among the Indians; but with such ghastly pictures could the human fancy play, now that the murder of man and beast had nothing strange for it. And why should the imagination of civilised modern man recoil in horror from such pictures, when it has accustomed [229] itself to the sight of a Parisian slaughter-house in its early-morning traffic, and perhaps of a field of carnage on the evening of some glorious

victory? In truth we seem to have merely improved on the spirit of Thyestes' feast, developing a heartless blindness to things that lay before our oldest ancestors in all their naked horror. Even those nations which had thrust as conquerors into hither-Asia could still express their consternation at the depths to which they had sunk, and we find them evolving such earnest religious ideas as lie at root of the Parsee creed of Zoroaster. Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, Ormuzd and Ahriman, Strife and Work, Creation and Destruction:—"Sons of the Light, have fear of the Shadow, propitiate the Evil and follow the Good!"—We here perceive a spirit still akin to the old Indus-people, but caught in the toils of sin, and doubting as to the issue of a never quite decisive fight.

But yet another issue from the degradation of its innate nobleness was sought by the baffled will of the human race, becoming conscious of its sinfulness through pain and suffering; to highly-gifted stocks, though the Good fell hard, the *Beautiful* was easy. In full avowal of the Will-to-live, the Greek mind did not indeed avoid the awful side of life, but turned this very knowledge to a matter of artistic contemplation: it saw the terrible with wholest truth, but this truth itself became the spur to a re-presentment whose very truthfulness was beautiful. In the workings of the Grecian spirit we thus are made spectators of a kind of pastime, a play in whose vicissitudes the joy of Shaping seeks to counteract the awe of Knowing. Content with this, rejoicing in the semblance, since it has banned therein its truthfulness of knowledge, it asks not after the goal of Being, and like the Parsee creed it leaves the fight of Good and Evil undecided; willing to pay for a lovely life by death, it merely strives to beautify death also.

We have called this a pastime, in a higher sense, namely a play of the Intellect in its release from the Will, which [230] it now only serves for self-mirroring,—the pastime of the over-rich in spirit. But the trouble of the constitution of the World is this: all steps in evolution of the utterances of Will, from the reaction of primary elements, through all the lower organisations, right up to the richest human intellect, stand side by side in space and time, and consequently the highest organism cannot but recognise itself and all its works as founded on the Will's most brutal of manifestations. Even the flower of the Grecian spirit was rooted to the conditions of this complex existence, which has for base a ball of earth revolving after laws immutable, with all its swarm of lives the rawer and more inexorable, the deeper the scale descends. As manhood's fairest dream that flower filled the world for long with its illusive fragrance, though to none but minds set free from the Will's sore want was it granted to bathe therein: and what but a mummery at last could such delight well be, when we find that blood and massacre, untamed and ever slipped afresh, still rage throughout the human race; that violence is master, and freedom of mind seems only buyable at price of seffdom of the world? But a heartless mummery must the concernment with Art ever be, and all enjoyment of the freedom thereby sought from the Will's distress, so long as nothing more was to be found in art: the Ideal was the aim of the single genius, and what survived its work was merely the trick of technical dexterity; and so we see Greek art without the Grecian genius pervading all the Roman Empire, without drying one tear of the poor, or drawing one sob from the withered heart of the rich. Though a broader patch of sunshine might deceive us, as spread in peace above the kingdom of the Antonines, we could only style it a short-lived triumph of the artistic-philosophic spirit over the brutal movement of the restless self-destroying forces of the Will of History. Yet even here 'tis but the surface that could cheat us, making us take a lethargy for healthy calm. On the other hand, it was folly to think that violence could be restrained by howsoever prudent steps of violence. Even [231] that world-truce was based on the Right of the Stronger, and never, since the human race first fell a-hungering for bloody spoil, has it ceased to found its claim to tenure and enjoyment on that same "right" alone. To the art-creative Greek, no less than the rudest Barbarian, it was the one sole law that shaped the world. There's no blood-guiltiness which even this fair-fashioning

race did not incur in rabid hate against its neighbour; till the Stronger came upon it too, that Stronger fell in turn before a yet more violent, and so the centuries have ever brought fresh grosser forces into play, and thrown ourselves at last to-day behind a fence of yearly waxing giant-guns and bastions.

From of old, amid the rage of robbery and blood-lust, it came to wise men's consciousness that the human race was suffering from a malady which necessarily kept it in progressive deterioration. Many a hint from observation of the natural man, as also dim half-legendary memories, had made them guess the primal *nature* of this man, and that his present state is therefore a degeneration. A mystery enwrapped Pythagoras, the preacher of vegetarianism; no philosopher since him has pondered on the essence of the world, without recurring to his teaching. Silent fellowships were founded, remote from turmoil of the world, to carry out this doctrine as a sanctification from sin and misery. Among the poorest and most distant from the world appeared the Saviour, no more to teach redemption as a path by precept, but example; his own flesh and blood he gave as last and highest expiation for all the sin of outpoured blood and slaughtered flesh, and offered his disciples wine and bread for each day's meal:—"Taste such alone, in memory of me." This the unique sacrament of the Christian faith; with its observance all the teaching of the Redeemer is fulfilled. As if with haunting pangs of conscience the Christian Church pursues this teaching, without ever being able to get it followed in its purity, although it very seriously should form the most intelligible core of Christianity. She has transformed it to a symbolic office of her priests, while its proper meaning [232] is only expressed in the ordinance of periodic fasts, and its strict observance is reserved for a few religious orders, more in the sense of an abstinence conducing to humility, than of a medicine for body alike and soul.

Perhaps the one impossibility, of getting all professors to continually observe this ordinance of the Redeemer's, and abstain entirely from animal food, may be taken for the essential cause of the early decay of the Christian religion as Christian Church. But to admit that impossibility, is as much as to confess the uncontrollable downfall of the human race itself. Called to upheave a State built-up on violence and rapine, the Church must deem her surest means the attainment of dominion over states and empires, in accordance with all the spirit of History. To subject decaying races to herself she needed the help of terror; and the singular circumstance that Christianity might be regarded as sprung from Judaism, placed the requisite hugbear in her hands. The tribal God of a petty nation had promised his people eventual rulership of the whole world and all that lives and moves therein, if only they adhered to laws whose strictest following would keep them barred against all other nations of the earth. Despised and hated equally by every race in answer to this segregation, without inherent productivity and only battenning on the general downfall, in course of violent revolutions this folk would very probably have been extinguished as completely as the greatest and noblest stems before them; Islam in particular seemed called to carry out the work of total extirpation, for it took to itself the Jewish God, as Creator of heaven and earth, to raise him up by fire and sword as one and only god of all that breathes. But the Jews, so it seems, could fling away all share in this world-rulership of their Jehova, for they had won a share in a development of the Christian religion well fitted to deliver it itself into their hands in time, with all its increment of culture, sovereignty and civilisation. The departure-point of all this strange exploit lay ready in the historical fact—that Jesus of Nazareth was born in a corner of their little [233] land, Judæa. Instead of seeing in so incomparably humble an origin a proof that among the ruling and highly-cultured nations of that historic period no birthplace could be found for the Redeemer of the *Poor*; that for very reason of its utmost lowliness this Galilee, distinguished by the contempt of the Jews themselves, could alone be chosen for cradle of the new belief,—to the first believers, poor shepherds and husbandmen in dull subjection to the Jewish law, it seemed imperative to trace the descent of their Saviour from



the royal house of David, as if to exculpate his bold attack on all that Jewish law. Though it is more than doubtful if Jesus himself was of Jewish extraction, since the dwellers in Galilee were despised by the Jews on express account of their impure origin, we may gladly leave this point with all that concerns the history of the Redeemer to the Historian, who for his part declares that "he can make nothing of a sinless Jesus." For us it is sufficient to derive the ruin of the Christian religion from its drawing upon Judaism for the elaboration of its dogmas. As we before have suggested, however, it is precisely hence that the Church obtained her source of might and mastery; for wherever Christian hosts fared forth to robbery and bloodshed, even beneath the banner of the Cross it was not the All-Sufferer whose name was invoked, but *Moses, Joshua, Gideon*, and all the other captains of Jehova who fought for the people of Israel, were the names in request to fire the heart of slaughter; whereof the history of England at time of the Puritan wars supplies a plain example throwing a light on the whole Old-Testament evolution of the English Church. Without this intrusion of the ancient Jewish spirit, and its raising to an equal rank with the purely Christian evangel, how were it possible to the Church till this day to claim for her own a "civilised world" whose peoples all stand armed to the teeth for mutual extermination, at the first summons of the Lord of War to squander every fruit of peace in methodically falling on each other's throats? Manifestly it is not Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, whose [234] pattern our army-chaplains commend to their battalions ere going into action; though they call on him, they can but mean Jehova, Jahve, or one of the Elohim, who hated all other gods beside himself, and wished them subjugated by his faithful people.

Now if we probe to the bottom of our boasted Civilisation, we find that it really has been made to do duty for the never fully-flowered spirit of the Christian religion, the latter being merely used for hallowing a compromise between brutality and cowardice. We may regard it as characteristic of the onset of this civilisation, that the Church made over her condemned heretics to the Temporal power, with the recommendation that no blood be shed in the execution of her sentence, while she had nothing to advance against their burning at the stake. In this bloodless mode the strongest and noblest minds were rooted out, and, bereft of these, the nations were taken under tutelage of "civilising" powers who, borrowing a leaf from the Church, have substituted what modern philosophers term *abstract* destruction by bullet and cannon-ball for the *concrete* wounds of sword and spear. And as the sight of bullocks offered to the gods had become an abomination to us, in our neat water-swilled shambles a daily blood-bath is concealed from all who at their mid-day meal shall feast upon the limbs of murdered household animals dressed up beyond all recognition.

Though all our States are founded on conquest and the subjugation of the earlier inhabitants, and the latest conqueror has always taken the land and soil as hereditament,—whereof England still affords a well-preserved example,—yet debilitation of the ruling races has also opened the way to a gradual effacement of the barbaric look of so unequal a division of property: money at last could buy the land from its indebted owner and give its purchaser the selfsame right as the whilom conqueror, and the Jew now bargains with the Junior for possession of the world, while the Jurist tries to find a common [235] platform with the Jesuit for the rights of man in general. But alas! this show of peace is shadowed by the fact that no man trusts another, for the right of might still reigns supreme in every mind, and all mutual commerce of the nations is only held possible under the thumb of politicians who wakefully observe the Machiavellian maxim: "What thou wouldst not he to thee should do, that let thy nearest neighbour rue!" And it is quite in keeping with this idea of maintenance of the State, that its embodiments, our sovereign masters, put on a military uniform when grand occasions call for royal attire, however ill its bare utilitarian cut becomes the frame of men more nobly clad throughout all time in robes of highest Justice.

If thus we see that even our complex Civilisation cannot succeed in veiling our utterly

unchristian origin; and if the Gospel, to which we nevertheless are sworn in tenderest youth, cannot be summoned to explain, to say nothing of justifying it,—we can only recognise our present state as a triumph of the foes of the Christian faith.

Whoever has made this clear to himself, will have no difficulty in discovering why an equal and ever deeper decline is manifest in the sphere of mental culture: violence may civilise, but Culture must sprout from the soil of peace, as it draws its very name from tillage of the fields. From this soil alone, belonging only to the busily creative Folk, have sprung in every age all knowledge, sciences and arts, nursed by religions in harmony with the people's spirit for the time being. But the conqueror's brute force draws near these sciences and arts of peace, and tells them, "What of you may serve for war, shall prosper; what not, shall perish." Thus the law of Mahomet has become the fundamental law of all our civilisations, and we have but to glance at our sciences and arts, to see how it suits them. Let there anywhere arise a man of brains, whose heart means honestly, the sciences and arts of Civilisation soon shew him how the land lies. Their question is: "Art thou of use, or not, to a heartless and sordid civilisation?" With regard to the so-called Natural sciences, especially [236] of Chemistry and Physics, our War-offices have been taught the possibility of their discovering any number of new destructive substances and forces, though alas! no means be yet forthcoming of stopping frost or hailstorms. These sciences are therefore petted. The dishonouring diseases of our culture invite our Physiologists to man-degrading experiments in speculative vivisection; the State and Reich protect them, on the "scientific standpoint." The ruin which a Latin renaissance of Grecian art once wrought on all sound evolution of a Christian culture for the people, is aggravated year by year by a lumbering Philology, which fawns upon the guardians of the ancient law of the Right of the Stronger. And every art is coaxed and pampered, so soon as it appears of service to blind us to our misery. Distraction! Dissipation! but no Collection—except at best a monetary one for sufferers by fire and flood, for whom our war-chests have nothing to spare.

And for *this* world men still paint and make their music! In the galleries Raphael is admired, admired and analysed again, and his "Sistine" remains a grandest masterpiece in the eyes of the connoisseur. In the concert-halls Beethoven also is heard; but if we ask what a Pastoral Symphony can possibly say to our public, the question brings us to most serious thoughts. More and more importunately have they pressed on the author of this essay, and he now will try to tell them to his kindly readers,—provided the hypothesis of a profound decline of Historic Man has not already scared them from all further journeying on the path just struck.



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## III

THE theory of a degeneration of the human race, however much opposed it seem to Constant Progress, is yet the only one that, upon serious reflection, can afford us any solid hope. The so-called "Pessimistic" school of thought would thus be justified in nothing but its verdict on historic man; and that must needs be vastly modified, were the natural attributes of pre-historic man so clearly ascertained that we could argue to a later degeneration not unconditionally inherent in his nature. If, that is, we found proofs that this degeneration had been caused by overpowering *outward* influences, against which pre-historic man could not defend himself through inexperience, then the hitherto accepted history of the human race would rank for us as the painful period of evolution of its consciousness, in order that the knowledge thus acquired might be applied to combating those harmful influences.

Indefinite though be the results of our Scientific Research,—and often contradicted in so brief a time that they rather fog, than enlighten us,—yet one hypothesis of our geologists appears established past all cavil: namely that the youngest offspring of the animal population of this earth, the human race to which we still belong, has survived, or at least a great portion of it, a violent transformation of the surface of our planet. A careful survey of our earthly ball confirms this: it shews that at some epoch of its last development great stretches of the continent sank down and others rose, while floods immeasurable poured hither from the Southern Pole, only to be arrested by the jutting headlands of the Northern hemisphere, like monstrous ice-guards, after driving before them all the terrified survivors. The evidence of such a flight of the animal kingdom from the tropics to the rawest northern zones supplied by our geologists in the results of their excavations, such as skeletons of elephants in Siberia for [238] instance, is now well-known. For our inquiry, on the other hand, it is important to form some notion of the changes which such violent displacements must necessarily have induced among the animal and human races of the earth, erewhile brought up in the mother-bosom of their primitive lands of birth.

The emergence of huge deserts, like the African Sahara, must certainly have cast the dwellers on the once luxuriant coasts of inland seas into such straits of hunger as we can only form an idea of by recalling stories of the awful sufferings of the shipwrecked, whereby completely civilised citizens of our modern states have been reduced to cannibalism. On the swampy margins of Canadian lakes animal species allied to the panther and tiger still live as fruit-eaters, whereas upon those desert fringes the historic tiger and lion have become the most bloodthirsty of all the beasts of prey. That it must have been hunger alone, which first drove man to slay the animals and feed upon their flesh and blood; and that this compulsion was no mere consequence of his removal into colder climes, as those assert who deem the consumption of animal-food in northern parts a duty of self-preservation,—is proved by the patent fact that great nations with ample supplies of grain suffer nothing in strength or endurance even in colder regions through an almost exclusively vegetable diet, as is shewn by the eminent length of life of Russian peasants; while the Japanese, who know no other food than vegetables, are further renowned for their warlike valour and keenness of intellect. We may therefore call it quite an abnormality when hunger bred the thirst for blood, as in the branches of the Malayan stock transplanted to the northern steppes of Asia; that thirst which history teaches us can never more be slaked, and fills its victims with a raging madness, not with courage. One can only account for it all by the human beast of prey having made itself monarch of the peaceful world, just as the ravening wild beast usurped dominion of the woods: a result of those preceding cataclysms which overtook [239] primeval man while yet all unprepared for either. And little as the savage animals have prospered, we see the

sovereign human beast of prey decaying too. Owing to a nutriment against his nature, he falls sick with maladies that claim but him, attains no more his natural span of life or gentle death, but, plagued by pains and cares of body and soul unknown to any other species, he shuffles through an empty life to its ever fearful cutting short. (6)

As we began with a general outline of the effects produced by the human beast of prey upon world-History, it now may be of service to return to the attempts to counteract them and find again the "long-lost Paradise"; attempts we meet in seemingly progressive impotence as History goes on, till finally their operation passes almost wholly out of ken.

Among these last attempts we find in our own day the societies of so-called Vegetarians: nevertheless from out these very unions, which seem to have aimed directly at the centre of the question of mankind's Regeneration, we hear certain prominent members complaining that their comrades for the most part practise abstinence from meat on purely personal dietetic grounds, but in nowise link their practice with the great regenerative thought which alone could make the unions powerful. Next to them we find a union with an already more practical and somewhat more extended scope, that of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*: here again its members try to win the public's sympathy by mere utilitarian pleas, though a truly beneficial end could only be awaited from their pursuing their pity for animals to the point of an intelligent adoption of the deeper trend of Vegetarianism; founded on such a [240] mutual understanding, an amalgamation of these two societies might gain a power by no means to be despised. No less important would be the result, were this amalgamation then to take in hand the so-called Temperance-unions, and elevate the only tendency betrayed by them as yet. The plague of drunkenness, that last destroyer to seize the modern victims of our civilised state of siege, brings revenue of all kinds to the State, to part with which it has never evinced the smallest inclination; yet the unions formed for its suppression look simply to the practical aim of cheaper insurance for ships and freights, and the better guarding of their warehouses by sober servants. With contempt and scorn does our Civilisation regard the efforts of these three unions, each wholly ineffectual in its severance; whilst amazement caps disdain, as at a mad presumption, when the apostles of Peace-societies submissively address their protests to our mighty lords of War. 'Twas but the other day we had an instance and the answer of our famous "Battle-planner" that the obstacle to peace, for the next two centuries or so, was the lack of "religiosity" among the nations. What may here be meant by "religiosity," or religion in general, is at anyrate not easy to clear up; above all, it would be hard to imagine the irreligiousness of the peoples and nations themselves as the real foe of a ceasing of war. Our General-Field-Marshal [Moltke] must surely have meant something other than this, and a glance at recent manifestoes of certain international Peace-societies might explain why one would not give much for their practical "religiosity."

On the other hand, an experiment has lately been made in providing religious instruction for those great Trade-unions which no philanthropist can any longer deem unjustified, but whose actual or alleged encroachments on the established social order could only seem unwarrantable in the eyes of its protectors. Every demand, even the apparently most proper, addressed by so-called *Socialism* to a Society the product of our civilisation, speaking [241] strictly, sets the rights of that Society itself at once in question. Because of this, and since it can but seem infeasible to lawfully propose a lawful dissolution of what exists by law, the postulates of the Socialists must needs appear confused and therefore leading to false reckonings, whose mistakes the ready reckoners of our Civilisation have no difficulty in laying bare. Yet upon strong and inner grounds one might regard even present-day Socialism as well worth consideration by our established Society, if once it entered into true and hearty fellowship with the three associations named above, of the vegetarians, the protectors of animals, and the friends of temperance. Were it possible to expect of men directed by our Civilisation to nothing but a correct enforcement of the most calculating Egoism, that this

last-suggested fellowship could strike firm root among them—with full understanding of the deeper tendency of each of the mentioned groups, so powerless in their present separation—then were the hope of regaining a true Religion, also, no less legitimate. What would seem to have dawned on the founders of all those unions as a mere counsel of prudence, has really flowed, though no doubt in part unconsciously to themselves, from a root which we are not afraid to call the religious sense: at bottom of even the mutterings of the workman, who makes each object of utility without drawing the smallest particle of use from it himself, there lies a knowledge of the profound immorality of our civilisation, whose champions can in truth reply by naught but shameful sophisms; for, granted that it can be easily proved that wealth in itself cannot make men happy, yet none but the most heartless wretch would think of denying that poverty makes them wretched. To explain this sorry constitution of all human things our Old-testament Christian Church reverts to the fall of the earliest pair, which Jewish tradition derives—most strange to say—by no means from a forbidden taste of animal flesh, but from that of the fruit of a tree; wherewith we may couple the no less' striking fact that the Jewish God found Abel's fatted lamb more [242] savoury than Cain's offering of the produce of the field. From such suspicious evidences of the character of the Jewish tribal god we see a religion arise against whose direct employment for regeneration of the human race we fancy that a convinced vegetarian of nowadays might have serious complaints to lodge. But if an earnest communion with the Vegetarian must necessarily teach the Protector of Animals the true meaning of that pity which inspires himself; and if both then turned to the spirit-sodden pariah of our civilisation with tidings of new life through abstinence from that poison taken to benumb despair,—then results might be anticipated such as have followed the experiments already tried in certain American prisons, where the greatest criminals have been transformed by a wisely-planned botanic regimen into the mildest and most upright of men. Whose memory would the groups of this community in truth be celebrating when they gathered, after each day's work, to refresh themselves with Bread and Wine?

If this be a dream whose realisation is forbidden by no rational hypothesis save that of absolute Pessimism, it perhaps may be no less profitable to pursue in thought the acts of such a union, starting from the religious conviction that the degeneration of the human race has been brought about by its departure from its natural food, the only basis of a possible regeneration. The easily ascertainable fact that merely a portion—supposed to be a third—of mankind is involved in this departure, and the example of physical health displayed by the larger half that has stayed true to its natural diet, might fitly teach us the path to strike for regeneration of the depraved but ruling portion. Should the assumption prove correct that animal food is indispensable in Northern climates, what is to prevent our carrying out a sensibly conducted transmigration to those quarters of our globe whose rich fertility is sufficient to sustain the present population of every country in the world, as has been asserted of the South American peninsula in itself? Our rulers leave the luxuriant reaches of South Africa to [243] the policy of English traders, and do no better for the healthiest of their subjects than to let them move away from death-by-starving—at best unhindered, but always left without a helping hand to foreign exploitation. Since this is thus, our unions would have to devote their greatest care and energy to Emigration, perchance with some success: and according to recent experiences it seems not improbable that these Northern lands, now said to positively call for flesh-food, would soon be abandoned to the undivided possession of hunters of boars and big game, who could give a very good account of themselves as destroyers of the somewhat too prolific beasts of prey in the deserted districts, untroubled any longer by a lower populace all clamorous for bread. For ourselves, there surely could be no moral harm in our acting on the words of Christ: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," and leaving the huntsman his preserves while



we cultivate our acres; but the grabbing, grasping money-bags of our Civilisation, swelled by the sweat of our brow—should *they* cry Fie, we'd lay them on their backs and bring them, like the swine, to wondering silence at the sight of heaven, ne'er seen by them before.

In this by no means timid picture of an attempt at regeneration of the hum an race we may neglect, for the present, all objections which friends of our Civilisation are likely to raise. On this side our assumption of most fruitful possibilities rests on the results of honest scientific studies, a clear insight into which has been facilitated for us by the devoted toil of noble minds—whereof we have already mentioned one of the foremost. Waiving all such conceivable objections, we therefore have only to confirm ourselves in one radical persuasion: namely that all real bent, and all effective power to bring about the great Regeneration, can spring from nothing save the deep soil of a true Religion. And now that our general survey has repeatedly brought us within range of vivid hints in its regard, we must turn in especial to this main head of our [244] inquiry; for it is from it, as premised in our title, that we first shall gain a certain outlook upon Art.

We started with the theory of a corruption of pre-historic man; by the latter, however, we in nowise mean primeval man, of whom we can have no definite knowledge, but those races of whom we know no deeds, though their works we do know. These works are each invention of that culture which Historic Man has only trimmed to suit his civilising ends, by no means renovated or increased; above all Speech, which shews a progressive degeneration from Sanskrit to the newest European amalgam. Whoever rightly weighs these aptitudes of the human race,—so astounding to us in our present decline,—must come to the conclusion that the giant force which shaped this world by testing every means of self-appeasement, from destruction to re-fashioning, had reached its goal in bringing forth this Man; for in him it became conscious of itself as *Will*, and, with that knowledge, could thenceforth rule its destiny. To feel that horror at himself so needful for his last redemption, this Man was qualified by just that knowledge, to wit the recognition of himself in every manifestment of the one great Will; and the guide to evolution of this faculty was given him by Suffering, since he alone can feel it in the requisite degree. If we involuntarily conceive of the Divine as a sphere where Suffering is impossible, that conception ever rests on the desire of something for which we can find no positive, but merely a negative expression. So long as we have to fulfil the work of the Will, that Will which is ourselves, there in truth is nothing for us but the spirit of Negation, the spirit of our own will that, blind and hungering, can only plainly see itself in its un-will toward whatsoever crosses it as obstacle or disappointment. Yet that which crosses it, is but itself again; so that its rage expresses nothing save its self-negation: and this self-knowledge can be gained at last by Pity born of suffering—which, cancelling the Will, [245] expresses the negation of a negative; and that, by every rule of logic, amounts to Affirmation.

If we take this great thought of our philosopher [Schopenhauer] as guide to the inexorable metaphysical problem of the purpose of the human race, we shall have to acknowledge that what we have termed the decline of the race, as known to us by its historic deeds, is really the stern school of Suffering which the Will imposed on its blind self for sake of gaining sight,—somewhat in the sense of the power "that ever willeth ill, and ever doeth good." According to what we have learnt of the gradual formation of our globe, it has once already brought forth races like to man, and, by a fresh upheaval of its crust, destroyed them; as regards their successor, the present human race, we know that at least a great portion thereof was driven from its primal birthplace by some mighty transformation of the surface of the Earth, the last till now. No paradisiac ease can therefore be the final answer to the riddle of this violent stress, whose every utterance remains a source of fear and horror to our minds. Before us still will lie the same old possibilities of havoc and destruction, whereby it manifests its actual essence; our own descent from the germs of life we see the ocean's depth

bring forth anew in hideous shapes, can never more be hidden from our awe-struck thought. And this human race, endowed with faculty of knowledge and of meditation, and thus of laying the Will's tumultuous storm,—is it not founded still, itself, on all the lower grades where incomplete attempts to gain a higher step, obstructed by mad hindrances in their own will, have stayed immutable for us to see, abhorrent or with pity?

If this outlook filled with sorrow and dismay the noblest races of mankind, brought up to gentleness and lapped in a tender Nature's mother-bosom, what grief must seize them at the dreaded sight of their own fall, their degeneration to the lowest foregoers of the human race, with no defence but patience? The history of this falling off— already broadly outlined—should teach us, when regarded [246] as the human race's school of suffering, in consciousness to remedy an evil springing from the headstrong blindness of the world-creative Will, and ruinous to all attainment of its own unconscious goal; to rebuild, as it were, the storm-wrecked house, and ensure against its fresh destruction.

That all our machines are of no avail for this, might soon be brought home to the present race; for those alone can master Nature, who understand and place themselves in line with her; and this would first be effected by a more reasonable distribution of the people of the earth upon its surface. Our bungling Civilisation, on the contrary, with its puny mechanical and chemical appliances, its sacrifice of the best of human forces for their installation, delights in waging almost childish war with the impossible. But we, supposing even that a cataclysm should shatter our earthly dwelling-place, for all time should we be secure against the possibility of the human race's falling back from its attained development of higher morals, had the experience of the history of that former fall established in our minds a true religious sense—akin to that of those three-million Hindus of whom we spoke before.

And to guard against all re-subjection to the blindfold Will, must a new religion first be founded? Already in our daily meal should we not be celebrating the Redeemer? Could we need the huge array of allegories wherewith all religions hitherto, and in particular the deep Brahminical, have been distorted to a mummery? Have we not the actual documents of life set down for us, in our history that marks each lesson by a true example? Let us read it aright, this history, in spirit and in truth; not by the lie and letter of our university-historians, who know but actions, sing their pæans to the widest conqueror, and shut their ears to manhood's suffering. With the Redeemer in heart, let us recognise that not their actions, but their sufferings bring near to us the men of bygone days, and make them worth our memory; that our sympathy belongs not to the victor, but the vanquished hero. However great may be the peace of mind resulting from regeneration [247] of the human race, yet in the Nature that surrounds us, the violence of ure-elements, the unchanged emanations of the Will beneath us and on either hand in sea or desert,—ay, even in the insect, in the worm we tread upon unheeding, shall we ever feel the awful tragedy of this World-being, and daily have to lift our eyes to the Redeemer on the cross as last and loftiest refuge.

Well for us if then, in conscience of pure living, we keep our senses open to the mediator of the crushingly Sublime, and let ourselves be gently led to reconciliation with this mortal life by the *artistic teller* of the great World-tragedy. This Poet priest, the only one who never lied, was ever sent to humankind at epochs of its direst error, as mediating friend: us, too, will he lead over to that reborn life, to set before us there in ideal truth the "likeness" of this passing show, when the Historian's realistic lie shall have long since been interred beneath the mouldering archives of our Civilisation. Those allegorical accessories which hitherto have overlaid the noblest kernel of Religion to such a point that, now that their literal credibility is conclusively refuted, this kernel itself is found corroded; that theatrical hocus-pocus by which the so easily gullible fancy of the poor, especially in southern lands, is turned from true religiousness to a frivolous playing with things divine,—no more shall we need these proved debasers of religious cults. We began by shewing how Art's greatest genius had been able to

save for us the old exalted meaning of those allegories themselves, by moulding them to the Ideal; and how the selfsame art, then turning to the material side of life as if sated with fulfilment of that ideal mission, had been dragged to its own downfall by the worthlessness of this reality. But now we have a new reality before us, a race imbued with deep religious consciousness of the reason of its fall, and raising up itself therefrom to new development; and in that race's hand the truthful book of a true history, from which to draw its knowledge of itself without all self-deception. What their great Tragedians shewed the decadent Athenians once in sublimely shaped [248] examples, without being able to arrest the frenzied downfall of their nation; what Shakespeare held before a world that vainly thought itself the renaissance of art and man's free intellecta—its heartless blindness striving for a beauty all unfelt,—the wondrous mirror of those dramatic improvisations in which he shewed that world its utter emptiness, its violence and horror, without the bitter undeception being even heeded in his time: these *works* of the Sufferers shall now be ever present with us, whilst the deeds of the "makers of history" shall in them alone live on. So would the hour of redemption of the great Cassandra of world-history have sounded, of redemption from the curse of finding no one to believe her prophecies. To us shall all these poet-sages once have spoken; to us will they speak afresh.

It hitherto has been a commonplace of heartless and thoughtless minds alike, that so soon as the human race were freed from the common sufferings of a sinful life, its state would be one of dull indifference, (7) —whereon it is to be remarked that they consider a mere freedom from the very lowest troubles of the Will as lending life its varied charm, whilst the labours of great thinkers, poets and seers, they have always densely set aside. We, on the contrary, have learnt that the life essential to us in the future can only be freed from those cares and sufferings by a conscious impulse, whereto the fearful riddle of the world is ever present. That which, as simplest and most touching of religious symbols, unites us in the common practising of our belief; that which, ever newly living in the tragic teachings of great spirits, uplifts us to the altitudes of pity,—is the knowledge, given in infinite [249] variety of forms, of the Need of Redemption. In solemn hours when all the world's appearances dissolve away as in a prophet's dream, we seem already to partake of this redemption in advance: no more then tortures us the memory of that yawning gulf, the gruesome monsters of the deep, the reeking litter of the self-devouring Will, which Day—alas! the history of mankind, had forced upon us: then pure and peace-desiring sounds to us the cry of Nature, fearless, hopeful, all-assuaging, world-redeeming. United in this cry, by it made conscious of its own high office of Redemption of the whole like-suffering Nature, the soul of Manhood soars from the abyss of semblances, and, loosed from all that awful chain of rise and fall, the restless Will feels fettered by itself alone, but from itself set free.

The children of a parish-priest in new-converted Sweden once heard a Nixie singing to her harp upon the shore: "Sing as you will," they cried to her, "you'll never get to heaven." Sadly the fairy sank her head and harp: the children heard her weep, and ran to tell their father. He counselled them, and sent them back to greet the Nixie with good tidings. "Come, Nixie, dry your tears," they cried: "Father bids say, you yet may hope for heaven." Then all night through they heard the waters echoing with songs so sweet, that never man heard sweeter.—The Redeemer himself has bidden us sound and sing our longing, faith and hope. Its noblest legacy the Christian Church has left us in the all-uttering, all-expressing soul of the Christian religion: wafted beyond the temple-walls, the holy strains of Music fill each sphere of Nature with new life, teaching redemption-starved mankind a second speech in which the Infinite can voice itself with clearest definition.

But what have even the divinest works of music said to our modern world? What can these sounding revelations from the redeeming dream-world of purest knowledge tell to a concert-public of to-day? To whom the unspeakable bliss has been vouchsafed of taking one



of the last [250] four Symphonies of Beethoven into his heart and soul without alloy, let him conceive the constitution of a whole great audience prepared to receive an effect from any of these works in perfect correspondence with their nature: perhaps he might be assisted by an analogy from the remarkable devotions of the Shakers in America, who, after solemn attestation of their heartfelt vow of abstinence, all join in song and dance within the temple. If this is but expression of a childlike joy at innocence regained, for our part, after celebrating in our daily meal the Will's sure triumph over itself through knowledge wrung from manhood's fall, we might view the plunge into the waves of those symphonic revelations as a religious act of hallowed cleansing. Glad shouts ascending to divinest rapture. "Divin'st thou thy Creator, World?"—so cries the Poet, obliged to hazard an anthropomorphic metaphor for That which words can ne'er convey. But, above all possibility of concrete thought, the Tone-poet Seer reveals to us the Inexpressible: we divine, nay, feel and see that this insistent World of Will is also but a state that vanishes before the One: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"



"Have you ever had to rule a State?" asked Mendelssohn Bartholdy once of Berthold Auerbach, who had been indulging in reflections on the Prussian Government, apparently distasteful to the famed composer. "Do you want to found a new religion?"—the author of the present essay might be asked. As that person, I should freely admit that it would be just as impossible as that Herr Auerbach could have deftly ruled a State, if Mendelssohn had managed to procure one for him. My thoughts have come to me as to a working artist in his intercourse with public life: in that contact it must seem to me that I [251] should light upon the proper road if I weighed the reasons why even considerable and envied successes have left me uncontented with the public. Upon this road I grew convinced that Art can only prosper on the basis of true Morals, and thus could but ascribe to it a mission all the higher when I found it altogether one with true Religion. Any judgment of the history and future of the human race must remain beyond the artist's reach while he approached it in the sense of Mendelssohn's question, and had to view the State as something like a mill in which the human grain, already bolted on the threshing-floor of War, must be ground before it could be relished. As on my path I had felt a wholesome shudder at this drilling of mankind to barren aims, at last it dawned on me that another, better state of future man—conceived by others as a hideous chaos—might well arise in comely order, if Religion and Art not only were retained therein, but for the first time gained their right acceptance. From this path all violence is quite shut out, for it merely needs the strengthening of those seeds of Peace which all around have taken root, though scant as yet and feeble.

But things may turn out otherwise, should Wisdom more and more recede from rampant Violence. What this last can do, we note with the same astonishment once humorously expressed by Frederick the Great when a royal guest, after witnessing a field-mancœuvre, declared his wonder at the soldiers' matchless discipline: "Not that's the greatest marvel," he replied, "but that the knaves don't shoot us dead." Considering the elaborate springs which are set in motion for military Honour, it fortunately is not to be anticipated that the war-machine will consume its own vitals, and collapse in such a way as to leave the great Frederick with no more marvels of his kind. Nevertheless it can but rouse our apprehension, to see the progress of the art-of-war departing from the springs of moral force, and turning more and more to the mechanical: here the rawest forces of the lower Nature-powers are brought into an artificial play, in which, for all arithmetic and mathematics, [252] the blind Will might one day break its leash and take an elemental share. Already a grim and ghostly sight is offered by the armoured Monitors, against which the stately sailing-ship avails no more: dumb serving-men, no longer with the looks of men, attend these monsters, nor even from their awful furnace-holds will they desert: but just as in Nature everything has its destroying foe, so Art

invents torpedoes for the sea, and dynamite cartouches, or the like, for everywhere else. 'Twere thinkable that all of this, with art and science, valour, point-of-honour, life and chattels, should one day fly into the air through some incalculable accident. When every pledge of peace was thus exploded in the grandest style, it would only need the outbreak of a general famine — already slowly, but infallibly prepared: then should we stand once more where world-Historical development began, and it really might look "as if God had made the world that the Devil might take it," as our great philosopher found stated in the Judæo-Christian dogma.

So reign the Will there in its full brutality. Happy we, if we have turned us to *the Fields of hoary eld!*



## Notes

### Note 1 on page 7

"Ihr Gründer war nicht weise, sondern göttlich"—evidently in answer to Nietzsche's "The founder of Christianity, as is self-evident, was not without the greatest defects and prejudices. . . . Socrates excels the founder of Christianity by his buoyant type of earnestness and that *wisdom full of roguish ruses* which constitutes the best state of mind for man. Moreover he had the greater intellect."—*Menschliches*, vol. ii. "Wanderer," aphor. 83 and 86.—Tr.

### Note 2 on page 8

Schopenhauer, *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book III. § 45.—Tr.

### Note 3 on page 9

In his *Welt als W. u. V.*, Book IV. § 70, Schopenhauer says: "The Christian doctrine symbolises *Nature*, the *Affirmation of the Will-to-live*, by Adam.... *Grace*, on the other hand, the *Denial of the Will*, *Redemption*, by the God become Man; who is free from all sin, i.e. from all life-willing, and neither can have issued from the Will's most positive act of affirmation, as we have, nor have, as we, a body through and through but concrete Will; born of a pure virgin, he has but a seeming body." And in his *Parerga*, § 167: "The woman's share in procreation is more guiltless than the man's; for he bestows upon the child its *will*, which is the first sin, and therefore the root of all evil; the woman, on the contrary, bestows its intellect, which is the pathway to redemption. . . . So that in conception the Will is given afresh the possibility of redemption." On this hypothesis the absence of a father, who bestows "Affirmation of the will," would be the "necessary miracle" conducting to birth of the true redeemer.—Tr.

### Note 4 on page 9

The Marienkapelle in the old Marktplatz.—Tr.

### Note 5 on page 13

See footnote to page 13, Vol. IV.—Tr.

### Note 6 on page 20

The author here refers expressly to a book by A. Gleizès, "Thalysia, or the Healing of Mankind," most admirably translated from the French and edited by Robert Springer (Berlin, 1873; publisher, Otto Jahnke). Without a close acquaintance with the results, embodied in this book, of the most diligent researches which seem to have occupied the whole lifetime of one of the most amiable and profound of Frenchmen, it will be hard to win the reader's assent to the conclusions I have attempted to draw from its contents as to the possibility of a regeneration of the human race.—R. WAGNER.

### Note 7 on page 24

Another allusion to Nietzsche's *Menschliches*, where Aphorism 235 begins as follows: "The Socialists want to bring about the Well-living of the Greatest Number. If the lasting home of this Well-living, the perfect State, were actually attained, then this Well-living would

have destroyed the soil whence grows the powerful intellect, the mighty individual in general: I mean, the force of Energy. Mankind would have grown too torpid, when this State arrived, to be able to beget a genius. Ought one not, therefore, to wish that life may retain its violent character, and that savage forces and energies may ever be called forth afresh?"—Tr.