

MR. FREDERIC HARRISON AS A MAN OF LETTERS

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LAST October it was noted with great satisfaction throughout the republic of English letters that Mr. Frederic Harrison had passed his ninety-first birthday, with his eye so far undimmed and his natural strength still unabated. He is indeed our veteran in the world of criticism. For sixty years his literary work has not known a serious break. Whether even his *Novissima Verba*, so recently concluded, is to be taken as the end, it would be rash to conjecture. But his services to his age must, in the nature of things, be now far spent, and the occasion seems a suitable one for glancing at the significance of a life so notable at once for its span of days, for its variety of achievement, and for the example it sets to those who follow. Mr. Harrison would himself be the first to deprecate an indiscriminating panegyric, and none will here be offered. Of the array of volumes which he has placed upon our shelves we may doubt whether any, or all taken together, assure him a permanent rank of the first class. The fame of even our best essayists and critics is written in sand, nor can one say that among these he ever belonged to that great upper circle which it is hardest to forget. Yet, when we have made all allowances and deductions, there remains much that we would not willingly let die.

Even those who take little sentimental interest in the aged can hardly recall Mr. Harrison's manifold and sustained activities without a thrill of admiration. He is among our best writers of autobiography, as indeed he well might be. Our links with the past are always breaking one by one, and the recent death of Sir Algernon West leaves Mr. Harrison almost without a rival as a *raconteur* of early Victorian days. He can recall being taken as a small child by his father to watch the great procession on the morning when Queen Victoria was crowned. As a boy he played cricket and fished over areas that are now crowded by fashionable London residences. The earliest political struggle still vivid in his imagination was that which swept away the Corn Laws and established free trade. His memory stretches back to a time when England

was traversed by a network of stage coaches and the project of a railroad was scarcely more advanced than the present scheme for an aerial post, when the British fleet consisted only of sailing vessels and its guns discharged only balls of solid iron, when persons were hanged for theft, when chimneys were cleaned by little boys dragging up the brush from the hearthstone and when it was thought a notable reform to substitute an undersized man—generally a dwarf—for the wretched child if the chimney happened to be on fire! Who does not catch his breath at the thought of one still alive who has talked with a naval officer that served on the *Bellerophon* when Napoleon I. was being conveyed to English waters? And who else among us can have spoken with those who saw Dr. Samuel Johnson receive his honorary degree in the Sheldonian Theatre, or has heard from those who heard from an eye-witness about the scenes in Oxford when James II. expelled the Fellows of Magdalen College? Here, if ever, we have a man who owes his reminiscences to posterity.

It has often to be said of those who have lived through great changes that their lack of attention to what was passing, or of power to arrange it in perspective, made them poor narrators to those who come after. This is not Mr. Harrison's case, as all who look into his narrative must agree. It would be hard to name a second book so rich as his *Autobiographic Memoirs* in fascinating reminiscence. He had the advantage of personal contact with many, and of close acquaintance with some, of those by whom not only English but world-wide history was being made. He can thus tell us of British affairs as one who held personal conference with Gladstone and Bright, of continental thought as presented to him in discussion with Comte and Renan, of French republicanism as it was expounded at the fireside by Gambetta, of the German socialists as he studied them in private interview with Karl Marx. This side of his record may well remain, when much of the rest is forgotten, as a source of high value for historians yet to come.

I

The general "man of letters" was a figure better known sixty years ago than he is to-day. In our age of narrow specialism we expect each writer to have a limited province, to be an "expert" on this or that, and amid the obvious gains resulting from such a system the general reader loses not a little. He needs someone to protect his mind, as the family physician protects his body, from the adventurous daring of the specialist. Like the pupil in a school

that has many masters of departments, but no headmaster to correlate their efforts, he must shape the parts of knowledge into a whole for himself, and this is one of the tasks for which the general reader is poorly equipped. Two generations ago Carlyle, Mill, Matthew Arnold, were fulfilling a function which hardly anyone fulfills now, for we have no prophet worthy of that old and venerable name. Mr. Harrison belongs to the earlier tradition, and he was quick to adopt the rôle of general educator to those who would learn from him about the movements of contemporary thought.

He has taught us a great deal, and perhaps his success has been due more to the pattern he set than to the knowledge he communicated. Learning has shone forth in almost every book he has written, and it has had the effect—even for those who could not keep pace with his own flights—of impressing upon them how much there is to know, how indispensable to sound judgment is the patient labour of the study, how worthless is the rapid decision upon problems of the hour by those who have not consulted past ages and guided themselves by long tested experience. It sounds like a paradox, but it is a plain truth, that he has shown by innumerable magazine articles how foolish it is to take the monthlies and quarterlies as a substitute for books. On the other hand, we can mention few men who of late showed with equal clearness how invaluable is the magazine when its purpose is not mistaken and its service is not abused. He would write, for example, about *The Problem of Constantinople*, not settling that desperate problem for us, but making us a little less incapable of thinking about it intelligently ourselves, by insisting on some essential elements in a settlement that can stand, and driving us back to our sources of knowledge about the Orthodox Greek Church, the Ottoman Caliphs, the Byzantine Empire. He would give us *Paris as an Historic City*, developing a detailed contrast between the Paris of 1789 and the Paris of a hundred years later, and sending us to read again our Voltaire, our Guizot, our de Tocqueville, if we would understand aright the forces with which we have to reckon still. Or he would sketch in some thirty crisp pages *A Survey of the Thirteenth Century*, and the least erudite would rise from it with a new sense of the persisting differences in human thought which call for an ever renewed power of bringing the extremes to a mutual reconciliation. These are samples, and one might fill a chapter with the mere enumerating of many others like them.

Again, although when he speaks of "Humanity"—with a capital letter—Mr. Harrison often loses himself in ecstasies, we must remember with gratitude many a wise and balanced word

which he has had to speak of the same conception written small but bulking large in the wistful dreams of good men. Literature has never been to him a mere source of entertainment, or even of culture, and he stands to-day by the same semi-Puritan principles with which he annoyed Matthew Arnold fifty years ago. For him books are, first and foremost, a means for the moral teaching of mankind. It would be impossible to name another whose faith in education as a solvent of our social problems has been more steadfast or more sanguine. About 1863 he was a moving force in that little band of pioneers who sought to apply this gospel to the disordered world of Labour. The trade-union movement was being greeted with the acclaim of those who saw in it a panacea for all ills, and the derision of those who were sure that it had sprung up in a night to perish in a night. As we look back upon Mr. Harrison's papers, written at the time of that momentous industrial change, we observe indeed that his predictions have not been wholly fulfilled, but we cannot fail to be impressed by the wisdom with which he admonished each of the extravagant groups in turn. His insight into the gravity of what was taking place, his warning to the workmen that merely material improvement would be of little avail unless it were accompanied by the moral and intellectual progress of the working class, his incisive criticism of the old economists who pinned their hope to *laissez faire*, his trenchant exposure of selfish capitalism,—these are enough, if he had left no other memorial, to win him a high place among our seers.

But he was not content with indicating a programme for someone else. He threw himself energetically into the task of making his own remedies effective. Happily placed as he was in the enjoyment of independent means, he set about using his opportunity to act as a social teacher without fee or reward. In tour after tour throughout the industrial centres of England he made himself familiar with the lives of the poor, and acquired a distressingly close acquaintance with some business methods of the rich. In popular halls, struggling against no slight personal unfitness to hold the attention of such audiences, Mr. Harrison delivered series after series of gratuitous lectures on history, on literature, on economics, on every kind of subject which might be used to awaken the dormant intelligence of artizans. He wanted no listeners of the sort he himself described as "mere parasites of the middle classes." Often, as he ruefully confessed, he found that he had "fallen in with strange characters." But he also found the workmen as a whole delightfully receptive to the treasures which were being set before them for the first time. We know to our cost that not every period

of social disturbance is fortunate enough to meet with so wise and self-denying a guide.

II

One should perhaps place first among Mr. Harrison's merits as a thinker the constant emphasis which he has laid upon *the relevance of philosophy and history to life*. He has been at ceaseless warfare with the notion that the threads of knowledge and the ideals of practice should be pursued apart, demanding rather that new synthesis by which the spiritual fragments of our disturbed age may be reorganized into a consistent whole. Perhaps at no other period had this message been more urgently required. The temptation to avoid discord in one's soul by confining its different activities on different sides of an impenetrable barrier is one against which resolute and candid thought has had a hard fight to wage, a fight whose end is certainly not yet seen.

Among his central doctrines has been that of the essential unity in the life of mankind, and the supreme importance which this imparts to historical research. Mr. Harrison is not, indeed, among those great figures who have added in some notable way to our knowledge of the past. In his own merry humour he often tells us that he has not had time to read very widely, though what his conception of width must be, many will be troubled and perhaps humiliated by trying to conjecture. What he has rather done is to bring history in its deepest and most enlightening sense to the knowledge of the average man. His *William the Silent*, his *Cromwell*, his *Meaning of History*, are models of that racy, well-informed exposition which can bring the great significant epochs within the intellectual grasp of readers who have little time and less capacity for following an elaborate treatise.

For he writes as one who believes with Ezra in using language "understood of the people." Amid the scorn of intellectual aristocrats, Mr. Harrison has aimed at diffusing higher knowledge among the masses, herein pressing upon his age a problem and setting to it a pattern. He has felt that the learned should hold their learning as trustees for the public. He has scorned the selfish notion that culture is a privilege limited to a very few, not to be lightly shared, rather to be guarded in the sacred enclosure of the college, communicated to a select circle who have time to go there in youth, and doled out—if at all—in parsimonious fragments to the great world beyond. With this sort of fault academic men have been justly chargeable, and have need of someone to reprove them. They have not yet sufficiently taken to heart Mr. Harrison's con-

ception of an apostolic office for the high priests of knowledge. One of the wisest and most pregnant ideas which he has sent abroad under his favourite word "Humanity" is just that of a great human brotherhood, not held together by a mere cash nexus, but in which every man puts his services and his labour into a common stock, counting himself honoured by the opportunity of rendering what help he can to all his brethren. None has thundered more perseveringly against the myth that mankind is an aggregate of units in which each is entitled to fight for his own hand, buy in the cheapest market to sell again in the dearest, keep something that he has from everyone else until he can enforce payment at the maximum price. Mr. Harrison has urged the day labourer to sanctify his calling by the thought of the great human family for which he works. He would urge no less upon the learned that their science is not simply theirs to drive a bargain for, but that every word of wisdom which they have to speak is a word which they dare not withhold. If each is thus called upon to do his best according to the gift that is in him, the invaluable gift of insight and breadth of mind is surely the last whose fruits anyone may monopolize.

Thus he has done one man's part to deepen that general appreciation of times and peoples far remote which is the only means by which tolerance may be instilled, prejudice may be corrected, sympathetic understanding of other men's minds may be imparted, and the priceless charity which our own age needs so much may be cultivated on an extensive scale. To "popularize" learning has too often meant a lowering or diluting of its quality, but here at least we have a pioneer who has not thought these artifices needful, and who has never sacrificed thoroughness to superficial entertainment. For instance, Mr. Harrison belongs by various aspects of his thinking to the school of natural science. He had lived much among those evolutionists whose fashion it was to make light of mere records, and who pinned their faith for the advance of knowledge to observation and experiment in the present. But he stood almost alone fifty years ago among the English evolutionary writers in pressing for a genuine historical treatment of social and moral progress, and refusing to ignore those vast tracts of history which his colleagues were wont to dismiss as "dark ages." This protest from within the ranks of Darwinism was more effective than an attack from outside. Mr. Harrison was sometimes embarrassed as he tried to enforce it, for writing about such subjects as mediaevalism was not popular with the evolutionists. He has always hated to forsake his own spiritual kinsmen, and to help in any degree—even by exposition—those theologians whom he looked upon as the common enemy.

Once he apologized to Huxley for a sharp criticism with the quaint acknowledgment that "dog should not bite dog."¹ But he could not be loyal to truth as he saw it without rebuking the foolishness of those theorists about civilization who "passed at a jump from the Bone Age to Diderot." In a letter to a friend, written as far back as 1861, he speaks of his "Sunday School"—the class of men and women to whom he was conveying week by week some smattering of mediaeval thought. They were all Secularists, meeting in an "iconoclast" hall, and it amused Mr. Harrison much to think of the solemn stare with which they heard him expatiate, almost with the unction of a neo-Catholic, upon the greatness of St. Ambrose or St. Gregory. For this mood of discerning charitableness he believed himself indebted above all to the great master of his school. "I took to heart", he tells us, "Comte's pregnant judgment (long years before Ruskin's time) that the mediaeval cathedrals were the most perfect expression of the ideas and feelings of man's moral nature."² One could wish that Comte, or anyone else, had taught him to be equally appreciative of what is best in modern Christianity, so that we might have been spared such passages as that upon "the folly, meanness and selfishness of prayer", or that disagreeable burlesque of Baptism which suggests the very rancour of a sectarian on the war path. But a seceding Protestant freethinker often shows this special tenderness for Roman usage and symbol, even as so many destructive exponents of Comparative Religion tend towards a kindlier interest in Osiris and Mithra than in the Faith of the Christian world.

III

For that Faith Mr. Harrison has devoted much of his time and talent to commending a substitute. The Positivist Church in London is known to comparatively few, but the creed upon which it is built, and which it explicitly defines, is shared by many who have not thought out its implications and have never even stated it to themselves in words.

John Stuart Mill has dwelt in his *Autobiography* upon the shock of surprise with which he himself first began to appreciate the poetry of Wordsworth. The harsh scientific school of Bentham had no place for poets, and young Mill had been brought up to think, like the wizened atheist in *Allan Locke*, that mankind has "no need of any cultus whatever." Mr. Harrison's youth was spent among surroundings very different from those of Mill, and he pondered

1. Cf. *Philosophy of Common Sense*, p. 269.

2. *Creed of a Layman*, p. 36.

deeply upon the various forces which he had seen at work. To dismiss all the religious enthusiasms as mere superstition is a mistake into which he never fell.¹ He belongs very definitely to those who see that "religious ideas cannot destroy except by supplementing and so superseding one another." Such was the lesson he had learned from watching the changes during his own boyhood and youth,—evangelicalism, the Oxford Movement, F. D. Maurice and the Cambridge Apostles. He saw that science provides only one sort of outlet for the spirit of man, and that if history has taught us anything at all it has made clear the need for a symbol of devotion in which ideals may culminate, round which the feelings may entwine themselves, in whose service shall be found one's perfect freedom.

The current philosophies he dismissed as no less destitute of this essential than the current experimental sciences. For, in the first place, he thought that they reached no result, and that the nature of their enquiry even made a significant result impossible. One can imagine how he must have chuckled over that scornful passage in Anatole France's *La Revolte des Anges* about those thinkers who address themselves to the solution, dissolution and resolution of the Absolute, those who would determine the Indeterminate and define the Infinite! Late in life he declared that he had read through whole libraries of metaphysical dialectic, that he thought he saw what they meant and was quite alive to their subtlety, but could not agree that in the seventy years since Carlyle had written *Characteristics* they had advanced the problem one inch. For the stone of Sisyphus kept rolling back; Oxford called out to Edinburgh, Birmingham challenged Harvard, Glasgow replied to Cambridge, while one and all appealed to Jena, Berlin, Tubingen or Bonn.² On the whole Mr. Harrison seems to agree with that definition of metaphysic which we owe to Michelet, *l'art de s'egarer avec methode*.

Thus on the threshold of manhood he became an heresiarch. He was a young Oxford don, just entering on his tutorial work at Wadham, when Tractarianism after its meteoric impressiveness seemed to have definitely collapsed, and its cynical critics were already speaking of it as a seven days' wonder. The railway boom had displaced it in public interest, for—as Mr. G. V. Cox wittily remarks—people ceased to talk of Broad, High and Low Church,

1 Cf. his own statement in his Introduction to *The Creed of a Layman*. "Many of the most eminent thinkers of the nineteenth century were not bred in the Anglican communion, and certainly never shared in the spiritual associations of a sacerdotal church. It happens to have been my lot to have been born and bred in such a church, to have been saturated as a student with orthodox theology, to have had till full manhood a heart-whole attachment to the sacredota lritual, and a reasoned faith in the Christian creeds."

2 *Philosophy of Common Sense* chap. XVII.

thinking rather of broad gauge, high embankments, and low dividends. But, though the peaceful penetration of the English Church by Roman ideas was looked upon as at an end, the active assault from outside was still a source of terror to some, and Lord John Russell had passed his *Ecclesiastical Titles Bill* amid thunderous rhetoric about the "Roman Aggression." Darwin was not yet the Antichrist of evangelical preachers, and they had enough to absorb them in watching for the next letter *e porta Flaminia* in which Cardinal Wiseman should summon back England to the Roman obedience. But the year 1850 was noted for an event in the world of English religion more serious than the appointment of a Roman archbishop of Westminster. It saw the issue of two books, F. W. Newman's *Phases of Faith*, and W. R. Greg's *Creed of Christendom*. The first argued for a thorough-going rejection of Christianity, not only on intellectual but on moral grounds, and was of interest both for its inherent power and for the strong contrast with the temperament of its author's more celebrated brother. The second was a defence of non-dogmatic Unitarianism, giving up the whole case for an inspired Book, but insisting upon the Christian ethic as a sufficient basis of real faith. Greg was summarily compared in the epigrammatic witticism of Fitzjames Stephen to "a disciple who had heard the Sermon on the Mount, whose attention had not been drawn to the miracles, and who had died before the Resurrection." Such were the chief waves of theological controversy amid which Mr. Harrison's first years of teaching at Oxford were passed, and to which, as we know from his personal memoirs, his mind was keenly sensitive. A fiercer storm was to break in 1859, when the *Origin of Species* was given to the world.

The main outcome of the turmoil was at first, for him, merely destructive. For the higher task of construction he soon made up his mind that one European figure, far removed from the chaos of party strife in the Church of England, surpassed all others in grasp, in knowledge, in intellectual and moral initiative. Auguste Comte died in 1857, but his English disciple still speaks of meeting him in Paris much as an early convert to Islam might have recalled the day when he came face to face with the Prophet. When Mr. Harrison parted company with Christian dogma, he did not give up the quest for some systematic conviction which he might put in its place, and it was in Comte's idea of the "Service of Humanity" that this conviction expressed itself for him.

He objects, indeed, to the word "Comtist" as a mere nickname, and has often taken occasion to dwell upon points in which he is a

dissentient from his master's views.¹ But, despite all such disclaimers and qualifications, it is obvious that in the essential things Comte has been Mr. Harrison's oracle. We might break up the most homogeneous school if perfect unanimity were insisted upon, and it would be hard to cite a case in which discipleship has been more clearly shown or more faithfully preserved. That man would be a devout Catholic indeed for whom all roads led to Rome as inevitably as for Mr. Harrison all saving truth is comprehended in the *Philosophie Positive* and the *Politie Positive*. Amid the drawbacks which result from this hero-worship, we must recognise the substantial advantage of having the work of a notable system-builder expounded with such minute knowledge and such illuminating sympathy.

Mr. Harrison has often defined and re-defined for us the essence of the Positivist gospel. One of the forms in which he has put it is this:—

It is a summons to bring our dominant convictions into one plane with our deepest affections and with our practical energies, to correlate our root beliefs with our noblest ambition, so that one great object is ever present to intellect and to heart and to energy.

The objection will at once be raised that herein is nothing specific, for just the same might be said of every faith that is honest and vital and thorough. Mr. Harrison would reply by pointing to the chasm which yawns between the principles of conduct in the modern Christian world and the articles of belief which men verbally acknowledge, or to the reluctance shown by average churchmen to make such change in ancient formulae as will correspond to the undoubted change in human feeling.

He thinks of the modern cultivated mind as having abandoned all significant belief in a supernatural revelation, a personal God, a superintending providence, a life to come, a plan arranged by any other will than that of man himself for mankind's development and destiny. Mr. Harrison will not, indeed, dogmatically deny that some at least of these obsolete or obsolescent convictions may have a basis in fact. What he does deny is that we know or can know anything whatever about their truth or falsehood. The only available knowledge is, for him, knowledge about the inter-connexion of phenomena, and it is reached by scientific research dealing with experience as its material.

But, against many of his scientific friends, he insists that the "experience" of which note must be taken includes the emotional

1. Cf. e. g. *National and Social Ideals*, pp. 97-8. *On Society*, p. 365.

2. *Philosophy of Common Sense*, p. 44.

and moral strivings of human nature. Worship is for him no less a natural fact than the movements of the planetary system. Thus Mr. Harrison became fascinated with Comte's proposal to make a deity out of collective mankind, and to reproduce in this humanized form all that is good in the devotion and ritual of the Church. Comte felt that the higher life of man in western Europe had historically shaped itself round figments of a supernatural kind which in his own time had really passed away. He observed too that the strength of ideals under the old creed depended upon organization, upon sacraments, upon symbolism. He inferred that the new creed of Humanity must have a carefully planned system into which all these elements might enter. So he and his friends combined to erect what his admirers think a reformed and his despisers a caricatured "Church". Mr. Harrison associated himself heart and soul with the English offshoot of this French cult. Among the ordinances and the rites which they adopted was, for example, a "sacrament" corresponding to Baptism. In it an infant is solemnly dedicated in presence of the faithful to the service of Humanity. They have another rite which they call "Vocation", when a young man or woman reaches a certain age, and in presence of the faithful is addressed about the calling he or she means to take up, with solemn admonitions about duty to Humanity. Something similar is observed at marriage, and at the cremation of the dead. Festivals are kept at stated times, when an oration is delivered upon the work of some notable servant of Humanity, and the whole gathering unites in the devotional recollection of the great company of such servants who have passed away.

IV

The Positivist gospel obviously lends itself to satire, and none has satirized its ceremonial side more mercilessly than Mr. Harrison's old friend, John Stuart Mill. Lord Balfour has spoken of it as having sorely tried the fidelity of Comte's disciples and the gravity of his critics. Perhaps the neatest remark of all was that of Mr. W. H. Mallock: "Humanity makes a very poor deity, for it is continually disgracing itself, and is never of the same mind from one week to another."

But, apart from the question of spiritual value in Positivism, it must at least be pointed out that the persistence with which Mr. Harrison everywhere obtrudes it upon us is very wearisome, a distinct blemish upon otherwise first-class literary work. What was pardonable in the glow of young discipleship passes into provoking obstinacy when we are forced to listen to the same re-iteration

for fifty years, and when so little note is taken by the prophet of the devastating criticism to which his message has been subjected. No matter what the immediate subject might be, we learned to fear that Mr. Harrison would not let us go until he had drawn some moral about the Religion of Humanity, just as an evangelical preacher turns everything into an apologetic for the Faith. One of Wesley's sermons does not lead more surely to the enforcing of a scripture text than an address at Newton Hall to the quoting of some winged word from Auguste Comte. Anticipations of Darwinism are found in the *Philosophie Positive* by the same sort of exegesis which Greek pedants sometimes use to represent Heracleitus as an evolutionist before the time.¹ Huxley himself, it appears, should have belonged to the Positivist Church, if he could only have seen the upshot of his own doctrine.² Ruskin's criticism of the economists is "distinctly parallel if not identical" with that by Comte, although alas, Ruskin refused to absorb Comtism!³ Mill in reality, though without intending it, taught the very same fundamental principles. Time after time, when theology and naturalism have been presented as refuting each other, and when the reader has been thus conducted to his wits' end, one finds that the intellectual *impasse* has been dexterously arranged to prepare for the Positivist reconciling idea, almost as a third party lies in wait at a boxing match to fight the winner. Even when the disciple admits some provisional truth in some other system, this is commonly to clear the ground for a proof that what others saw partially Comte saw in all its fulness, and that that what others so mis-stated as to do more harm than good Comte stated with such precision as to conserve the value, correct the errors, expand the pregnant suggestions of all that had preceded.⁴

This sort of advocacy may be trusted to serve as its own refutation. But it is not the only fault of over-emphasis by which our author's work has been marred. Mr. Harrison in later life has cultivated the dangerous habit of reprinting papers which he had published twenty-five or thirty or even fifty years before, and appending a note to the effect that he sees nothing to change in the opinions he then set forth. No doubt this indicates a rare tenacity of conviction. Few can endorse in old age all the views of a hot and a keenly controversial youth. Lifelong mental stability may have

1. *ibid.* p. 271.

2. *ibid.* p. 269.

3. *Autobiographic Memoirs.*

4. Even Cotter Morrison felt driven to complain in 1886 of this apotheosis of Comte prevailing in Positivist circles. He wrote in a letter to Mr. Edward Clodd: "Great harm has been done to Positivism by forcing Comte, crude and simple, down people's throats, and winding up every paragraph, like the prayers in the liturgy, with 'through Auguste Comte our Lord.'"

more than one cause, and in some cases at least Mr. Harrison's consistency seems to have been due less to lack of evidence by which old convictions can be disturbed than to a mental consolidation upon which new evidence spends its strength in vain.

One might find traces too of this contaminating influence in some of his studies in literature. A critic shows himself impartial, first, by keeping a watchful eye for error in each view which on the whole he shares; second, by constant readiness to acknowledge the element of truth in each view which on the whole he repudiates. These tests are perhaps most easily applied when we examine those personal estimates of men that are most liable to be perverted by the prejudice of either sympathy or resentment. When Ruskin suggested that John Stuart Mill was a congenital *cretin*, and Carlyle thought John Keble "a little ape", one feels the same sort of amused disgust as when Nietzsche declared Frederick Hohenstauffen to have been the first of human beings, or when a recent panegyrist of George Meredith says that no other single man has ever made such a difference to the thought of Europe! In the same province Mr. Harrison has exposed a very large front to our scrutiny, because he has written so much about both the heroes and the villains of his own imagination. Moreover, those whom he has enshrined in his Valhalla and those whom he has relegated to his Inferno have in many cases been subjected to the searchlight of criticism quite different from his, for they have stood the inexorable judgment of time by which every man's work is tried.

It is at least a little curious that those writers and statesmen who were Comtist in their religious outlook meet with so much higher praise for their artistic and world-moving gifts than those who had the disadvantage of being definitely Christian. How many will agree, for example, that Francis W. Newman was intellectually far superior to his brother, the Cardinal? We may pardon the exaggerated estimate of Comte himself, for the bias of a religious devotee belongs to an order apart. But compare the glowing panegyrics upon George Eliot and Gambetta with the satire upon Carlyle and the grudging appreciation of Gladstone. One wonders why the tortuous ways of Cavour in the Crimean War should be treated with so much more indulgence than the prevarications of English imperialist Ministers, until one recalls that Cavour was preparing to overthrow the Pope, while men like Disraeli were seeking only the advancement of England. Whence, too, it may be asked, comes that curious friendliness towards the Turk, and that sharply critical view of the Christian races in Asia Minor?

Much might be said, too, about our critic's lack of fairness

towards the liberal movement in English theology.¹ Mr. Harrison has many a mirthful but rather biting anecdote, like that about one of his own early friends who had no creed of any kind, and who when asked what thoughts were in his mind at his ordination replied that the words of Tennyson's *Northern Farmer* had kept ringing in his ears:—

Do godamoighty know what a's doing a-taakin' o' mea?²

He is still quite proud of the paper with which, as far back as 1861, he made his debut in theological debate. *Neo-Christianity* was indeed a vigorous polemic, intended as an exposure of the Broad Church, very effective at the time for the indictment *coram populo* of the Essayists and Reviewers. Its author now thinks of that little group as having begun a movement whose later evolution has borne out all that he then said in diagnosing its character, and of the Broad Church to-day as having fulfilled his earliest predictions. The truth seems to be that in this particular his rare gift of insight has most signally failed him.

Perhaps the nearest analogue to his attitude on this matter is that of Harriet Martineau towards the Unitarianism in which she had been brought up. Miss Martineau, whose confidence in her own transcendent wisdom is known to all readers of her autobiography, thought it quite clear that once the doctrines of Christianity were left to the interpretation of each individual the whole must "cease to be a faith and become a matter of speculation or spiritual convenience, till it declines to the rank of a mere fact in the history of mankind."³ Nor does it appear to have puzzled her in the least that her own brother, whose superior powers of mind even she might have recognized without any bias of sisterly affection, found this inference by no means clear, or that the Protestant Churches, which must surely have contained from time to time a few persons worthy of her intellectual respect, had for three centuries assumed the reverse. Mr. Harrison was indeed safe from absurdities like this. But he too thought that the Broad Church had given up the Christian case, that *Septem contra Fidem* was no mere taunt, but the bare statement of a fact, and that the progress to complete scepticism was only a question of time.⁴ In his harsher mood he declared that

1. A particularly gross example of his misunderstanding of Christian apologetic is in his paper "The Basis of Morals", reprinted in *The Philosophy of Common Sense*. He there speaks of the argument that ethics must be grounded on theology as implying that "we cannot decide if any action be 'good' or 'bad' until we have a knowledge of the designs of the Creator." What would Mr. Harrison say if he were represented as teaching that no moral judgment is possible except for Positivists?

2. *Creed of a Layman*, p 27.

3. *Autobiography*, Vol I., p 116.

4. *Creed of a Layman*, p. 31.

the old motto *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* had been replaced by *Intra ecclesiam nulla veritas*. He naturally expected that so transparent a swindle would soon be found out, though why under such circumstances, he should have subscribed to Jowett's defence fund is not satisfactorily explained.

It is, no doubt, arguable that he was essentially right, but it is plain that the time of final exposure was destined to be far more remote than Mr. Harrison anticipated when he wrote *Neo-Christianity*. One recalls how when Disraeli lowered the franchise in 1867 Carlyle gave England just fifty years to complete her doom, and how R. H. Hutton aptly remarked that even if the forecast of her downfall was correct the Chelsea prophet was at least wrong in thinking that she had suddenly put on the pace of the Gadarene swine.

How, again, can we understand Mr. Harrison's amazing disregard of those follies by which the last decade of Comte's career was made so ludicrous? He has little to say about the self-conceit which amounted almost to a megalomania, about the seer's refusal to acquaint himself with the work of contemporary thinkers, about the glorification of such futile arrogance under the name *hygiene cerebrale*, about the craze for a phrenology which even at that time was falling into the contempt it so amply deserved, about the idea that women are the sole source of religious influence and the proposal that two hours of each day should be set aside for devout adoration of one's mother, one's wife, and one's daughter! The absurdities of the new religion as Comte preached it are indeed beyond all calculating. Even if one should imitate Mr. Harrison's playful wit, and speak of his own discreet tempering of the system as "neo-Comtism", the incoherences would still be very apparent. No man ever struggled harder to pour new wine into old bottles without either spilling the liquid or bursting the receptacle. The failure of the Humanitarian church to achieve, not indeed the sweeping triumph which its founder predicted, but even the modest success which has been the lot of so many other social movements, is a striking proof that the "morality touched with emotion" which Comte above all other men tried to erect into a cult is no faith for the modern world. The reason is not, as Positivists think, that old prejudice remains too stubborn to appreciate it, but rather that the unconscious logic of the average man is too strong to be misled by it. What Mr. Harrison has constantly in view is the preservation of Christian ideals apart from that basis in Christian faith which has given the ideals all their power, and in whose absence the hope of realizing or even of preserving them becomes vain. It is of no avail to disguise this by a

specious borrowing and "re-interpreting" of the old religious phrases, with the thought that the old dynamic energy will remain in the mere words, even as Augustus borrowed and re-interpreted the forms of republican Rome to popularize his Principate. George Eliot, for example, in her famous Comtist stanzas, spoke of the "life to come" as that of those who "live again in lives made better by their presence". But why this sort of immortality should not belong just as much to those whose pattern has made others *worse*, and why Shakespeare's Mark Antony should be judged quite wrong in saying that it is men's *evil* deeds that live after them, no Comtist has ever succeeded in explaining. What ground is there for Mr. Harrison's devout assurance that "the evil alone are the really dead"?¹ To most of us it seems that this radiant faith has had a rude shock in the revived barbarism through which the world has of late been called upon to pass, and that the unclean things of long ago have manifested an appalling power of resurrection. How can Humanity be adored by those who have watched humanity's evolutions within the last decade, unless we believe in an over-ruling Providence by which faults may yet be cleansed, failures made good, and the break-down turned to the accomplishing of a larger purpose?¹ Such a faith is indeed difficult enough, but it is not the preposterous *naivete* that Comtism would impose upon us. Has it not become more and more obvious that the human race, distraught and discomfited in increasing degree as it seeks what it calls its ideals, must anchor itself again—if it is to stand at all—upon a Power beyond? There is no other reply to pessimism, and the deeply pessimistic development of a secular theory of life, for all who boldly grasp the theory's implications, is the answer to every apostle of Mr. Harrison's creed. Of those who would found a new religion independent of all dogma, we may say what Renan said of the liberal theologian, comparing him to a bird with its wings clipped. Its attitude is perfectly natural so long as the bird remains still, but embarrassment begins as soon as it tries to fly.

But to press these reproaches against Mr. Harrison is to say of him much that would be at least equally applicable to a great many who have been obsessed by an ardent and uncompromising creed. The enthusiasm of the hierophant is in a class by itself, and its mistakes are fully escaped only by those who take care not to be enthusiastic at all. Mr. Harrison can stand the test much better

1. *ibid.*, p. 331.

2. Lord Balfour has touched the exact spot of weakness: "While the Positivist faith professes to base itself upon Science, its emotions centre in humanity, and we are therefore treated to the singular spectacle of a religion in which every advance in the doctrines which support it dwarfs still further the dignity of the object for which it exists." (Address to the Church Congress in Manchester, Oct. 1888, reprinted in *Essays and Addresses*.)

than other eminent people whom one could name, for of his resolute endeavour to be impartial there is no doubt at all. If the Positivism in which he glories has been his mental handicap, it was at least a determined effort to think out a consistent position, fearless of even the most monstrous consequence to which the logic of the case seemed to lead. Not a few who have never heard the name of Auguste Comte act to all intents and purposes upon this as a creed, and what Mr. Harrison has done is just to declare upon the house-tops the carefully thought-out theory upon which such conduct must repose. It would be well indeed if the exponents of a better doctrine were equally thorough, equally coherent, equally devout.

To thresh out this high problem would, however, carry us much too far afield. The present writer is at the polar extreme from Mr. Harrison in his own essential attitude towards it. For that very reason he is all the more called upon to be appreciative of the seriousness and the candour which have conducted another to conclusions which he cannot himself share. So he will close by falling back upon the words of a great writer whom we have lately lost. In her beautiful dedication of *Robert Elsmere* to the memory of Thomas Hill Green and Octavia Mary Lyttleton, Mrs. Humphry Ward spoke of these two friends as "separated in my thought of them by much diversity of circumstance and opinion; linked in my faith about them to each other and to all the shining ones of the past". There are two other names which may be united in a like reverence and a like charity. It is the expressed wish of Mr. Harrison that on the urn containing his ashes there shall some day be inscribed the legend, *He found peace*. And it was the desire of Cardinal Newman that his own memorial slab should bear the motto, *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*. No two men could have been more sharply at variance than these in almost every intellectual conviction which they held and prized and fought for. They taught no single lesson in common, save only the most important lesson of all, that—like him of old who went out not knowing whither he went—the soul on its pilgrimage must still be satisfied to go with singleness of purpose where the finger of God or of Truth shall beckon. As we stand by the grave of any prophet who, whatever else he may have believed or have disbelieved, has helped his age to trust more explicitly, more sincerely, and more steadfastly in this, we take off our shoes from our feet, for the place where we stand is holy.