

Let us pass over the records of a few generations, and stand by the side of Paul as he reasons in the light of a more cultivated age. He has told us all about predestination, how God from the commencement of the world doomed millions of his yet unborn creatures to the unquenchable flames, how God's anger with the world's wickedness could only be appeased when men had murdered his own son, how "the powers that be are ordained of God" (the Borgia Popes for instance), and that he who loves not the name of Christ is condemned already. Then, while we stand aghast to hear the threatenings, the terrors and the dismal folly of such a representation of a Divine Being, suddenly from the dry blasted trunk of this grim Creed breaks forth a blossom of human kindness, a flower of human brotherhood—"If I give my body to be burned but have not Love, it profiteth me nothing." "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

Above the sophistries of his intellect, the mysticism of his dreams, he rose to the Higher Law, his mind taught unforgiveness and eternal fire to all who differed from him and would not accept his propaganda, but the light flashed into him and he cries—"Love, love, and pity for all poor suffering men." Thus too he labored with his hands, an honest independent man, living on no alms or contribution plate, disregarding personally the "lilies of the field" argument; and he is far above any consideration of "turning his cheek to the smiter" when contending with Peter or arguing concerning Apollos or Alexander the Coppersmith, or recounting his shipwrecks and fights with wild beasts at Ephesus—through broken sentences and half contradictions we have glances down into the inner Paul, and see the great force of Humanity lifting him up to us and to all who live. How little would the frozen creed of Buddha seem to promise to those with whom the sense of individuality is strong—a path leading nowhere, an enduring only of the ills and pleasures of life. Strip off those earthly desires, those longings of the flesh, says the great Teacher of Asia, rise above the follies and the weakness, the aspirations and entanglements which make up to most the sum of existence. And the crown, the victor's prize is Nirvana—Nothingness—Negation. How can a creed like this have been bread to the hungry souls and light to the weary eyes of the countless millions who have followed the teachings of Prince Siddartha for so many centuries, and be even now the comfort and consolation of millions who cry "We lose ourselves in Buddha!" The answer comes that it is because the great loving sympathy of the creed's founder glowed through the ice of his doctrine, and shone in words like these. "The succouring of father and mother, the cherishing of wife and child is the greatest blessing."—"Day by day dwell merciful holy and just, kind and true."—"Lay up lasting treasures of perfect service rendered, duties done in clarity, soft speech and stainless days."—"Never will I accept private individual salvation till every soul from every star has been brought home to God."—So we see that though experience and observation made him certain that there was only one way in which the individual could attain the serene peace; which was by the avoidance of all which could produce sorrow, and rising into a lofty atmosphere of isolation—"the high Nirvana-way"—the heart of Buddha knew that so long as men existed, that delightful network of affection for parent and child and wife and friend would do more to keep men pure and holy than all the rending apart of the passions which fitted men for his snowy Paradise. The creed of Islam spread by the sword would never have carried the Crescent to victory so often had it not held within its secret a force to touch the weak and to bind the strong. More is needed than the drunkenness of victory before a Belief can rear its head in sovereignty above the other opinions of mankind; it has to speak comfort to its wounded, and solace to its bereaved, help to the strong brain in the maze of doubt, and guidance to the seeker after wisdom. Without such teaching it could not hold its own for a generation. So Mahomet speaks to his people in words that seem to him divine. "Every good act is charity; your smiling in your brother's face; your putting a wanderer in the right road; your giving water

to the thirsty is charity."—"A man's true wealth is the good he has done in this world to his fellow men."—"There is no piety in turning your faces to the east or west, but he is pious who giveth his wealth to the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer; who is faithful to his engagements and patient under hardships and in time of trouble." Having thus cited evidence in support of the position, let us take account of the apparent discrepancy which some might take objection to, between a mere outburst of human feeling in the great religious leaders and that divine law "Nothing of good is lost." This stirring, this sparkling of humanity through intolerant creeds, is the manifestation in a practical way of that Higher Law. Moses in exhortations to brotherly kindness and justice recognizes in a blind way the rights of the patriot Canaanites he would treat as dogs; Paul by his honesty and independence proclaims the goodness in those sinners his creed calls depraved and fit for eternal fire; Buddha knows that Nirvana will never stimulate men to be kind and tender-hearted, but appeals to that sympathy of mortal desire and earth-born affection which unites mankind in one great family. So with Mahomet, Cromwell and all other religious leaders, their doctrine is intolerant, high-flown, idealistic, but the soul of each of them saw in flashes the eternal evolution of Good out of Evil, and that those who differed from them were not beings of the outer darkness.

Of all men, Freethinkers should take new courage and hope in considering this. The constantly heard taunt that we are those who break down and not those who build, that we destroy but give the world nothing in place of the thing destroyed, is repeated so often that in bitterness of soul we half begin to believe it ourselves. But though never granting that if such accusation were true we should be altogether wrong (for a lie should be struck down whatever may follow) still there is a way. Let us be glad there is a way. A hope and a faith that as in the past the Truth has always been to be found, has been near the hearts even of the intolerant, it may be seen clearer and purer with every passing age, and that the future triumph of Happiness above Pain is a matter of certainty and a spring of delight. A hope that reaches beyond the grave; not built upon old documents, variously interpreted, quarrelled over, and cavilled at, but a faith born in research and nurtured in observation. Not reaching beyond the grave for each separate individual with a promise of a selfish crown and a golden city, but an utter trust in the fact that the amount of suffering in the world is daily diminishing and will diminish, that the forms of evil triumphing for a time must fade out before the stronger elements of the good which cannot be destroyed, and that the ultimate of the Scheme of Things is the perfection of our race beyond the wildest dreams of modern men. If in the very founders of religions there could beam forth a recognition of the law of universal love, far more should those who have risen above the draperies and formalities of creeds acknowledge the debt of human kindness and the bond of mortal brotherhood. In the words Zoroaster wrote in the Zend Avesta thousands of years ago—"Let us then be of those who further this world."

EDWARD TREGEAR.

THE VIRTUOUS

Salt of the earth ye virtuous few,
Who season human kind!
Light of the world, whose cheering ray
Illumes the realms of mind!

Where misery spreads her deepest shade,
Your strong compassion glows;
From your blest lips the balm distils
That softens mortal woes.

By dying beds, in prison glooms,
Your frequent steps are found;
Angels of love! you hover near,
To bind the stranger's wound.

You lift on high the warning voice,
When public ills prevail;
Yours is the writing on the wall
That turns the tyrant pale.

Mrs. Barbauld.