

\_Phil.\_ So it appears. Still, I take a higher point of view, and have before me a more important object, namely, the progress of the knowledge of truth among the human race. It is a frightful condition of things that, wherever a man is born, certain propositions are inculcated in his earliest youth, and he is assured that under penalty of forfeiting eternal salvation he may never entertain any doubt about them; in so far, that is, as they are propositions which influence the foundation of all our other knowledge and accordingly decide for ever our point of view, and if they are false, upset it for ever. Further, as the influences drawn from these propositions make inroads everywhere into the entire system of our knowledge, the whole of human knowledge is through and through affected by them. This is proved by every literature, and most conspicuously by that of the Middle Age, but also, in too great an extent, by that of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. We see how paralysed even the minds of the first rank of all those epochs were by such false fundamental conceptions; and how especially all insight into the true substance and working of Nature was hemmed in on every side. During the whole of the Christian period Theism lay like a kind of oppressive nightmare on all intellectual effort, and on philosophical effort in particular, hindering and arresting all progress. For the men of learning of those epochs, God, devil, angels, demons, hid the whole of Nature; no investigation was carried out to the end, no matter sifted to the bottom; everything that was beyond the most obvious \_causal nexus\_ was immediately attributed to these; so that, as Pomponatius expressed himself at the time, \_Certe philosophi nihil verisimile habent ad haec, quare necesse est, ad Deum, ad angelos et

daemones recurrere.\_ It is true that there is a suspicion of irony in what this man says, as his malice in other ways is known, nevertheless he has expressed the general way of thinking of his age. If any one, on the other hand, possessed that rare elasticity of mind which alone enabled him to free himself from the fetters, his writings, and he himself with them, were burnt; as happened to Bruno and Vanini. But how absolutely paralysed the ordinary mind is by that early metaphysical preparation may be seen most strikingly, and from its most ridiculous side, when it undertakes to criticise the doctrines of a foreign belief. One finds the ordinary man, as a rule, merely trying to carefully prove that the dogmas of the foreign belief do not agree with those of his own; he labours to explain that not only do they not say the same, but certainly do not mean the same thing as his. With that he fancies in his simplicity that he has proved the falsity of the doctrines of the alien belief. It really never occurs to him to ask the question which of the two is right; but his own articles of belief are to him as \_à priori\_ certain principles. The Rev. Mr. Morrison has furnished an amusing example of this kind in vol. xx. of the \_Asiatic Journal\_ wherein he criticises the religion and philosophy of the Chinese.