

\_Phil\_. But false oaths are still oftener sworn, whereby truth and right are trodden underfoot with the clear knowledge of all the witnesses of the act. An oath is the jurist's metaphysical *\_pons asinorum\_*, and like this should be used as seldom as ever possible. When it cannot be avoided, it should be taken with great solemnity, always in the presence of the clergy--nay, even in a church or in a chapel adjoining the court of justice.... This is precisely why the French abstract formulary of the oath is of no value. By the way, you are right to cite the oath as an undeniable example of the practical efficacy of religion. I must, in spite of everything you have said, doubt whether the efficacy of religion goes much beyond this. Just think, if it were suddenly declared by public proclamation that all criminal laws were abolished; I believe that neither you nor I would have the courage to go home from here alone under the protection of religious motives. On the other hand, if in a similar way all religions were declared to be untrue; we would, under the protection of the laws alone, live on as formerly, without any special increase in our fears and measures of precaution. But I will even go further: religions have very frequently a decidedly demoralising influence. It may be said generally that duties towards God are the reverse of duties towards mankind; and that it is very easy to make up for lack of good behaviour towards men by adulation of God. Accordingly, we see in all ages and countries that the great majority of mankind find it much easier to beg admission into Heaven by prayers than to deserve it by their actions. In every religion it soon comes to be proclaimed that it is not so much moral actions as faith, ceremonies, and rites of every kind that are the immediate objects of the Divine will; and indeed

the latter, especially if they are bound up with the emoluments of the clergy, are considered a substitute for the former. The sacrifice of animals in temples, or the saying of masses, the erection of chapels or crosses by the roadside, are soon regarded as the most meritorious works; so that even a great crime may be expiated by them, as also by penance, subjection to priestly authority, confessions, pilgrimages, donations to the temple and its priests, the building of monasteries and the like; until finally the clergy appear almost only as mediators in the corruption of the gods. And if things do not go so far as that, where is the religion whose confessors do not consider prayers, songs of praise, and various kinds of devotional exercise, at any rate, a partial substitute for moral conduct? Look at England, for instance, where the audacious priestcraft has mendaciously identified the Christian Sunday with the Jewish Sabbath, in spite of the fact that it was ordained by Constantine the Great in opposition to the Jewish Sabbath, and even took its name, so that Jehovah's ordinances for the Sabbath--\_i.e.\_, the day on which the Almighty rested, tired after His six days' work, making it therefore \_essentially the last day\_ of the week--might be conferred on the Christian Sunday, the \_dies solis\_, the first day of the week which the sun opens in glory, the day of devotion and joy. The result of this fraud is that in England "Sabbath breaking," or the "desecration of the Sabbath," that is, the slightest occupation, whether it be of a useful or pleasurable nature, and any kind of game, music, knitting, or worldly book, are on Sundays regarded as great sins. Must not the ordinary man believe that if, as his spiritual guides impress upon him, he never fails in a "strict observance of the holy Sabbath and a regular

attendance on Divine Service,"--in other words, if he invariably whiles away his time on a Sunday, and never fails to sit two hours in church to listen to the same Litany for the thousandth time, and to babble it with the rest \_a tempo\_, he may reckon on indulgence in here and there little sins which he at times allows himself? Those devils in human form, the slave-owners and slave-traders in the Free States of North America (they should be called the Slave States), are, in general, orthodox, pious Anglicans, who look upon it as a great sin to work on Sundays; and confident in this, and their regular attendance at church, they expect to gain eternal happiness. The demoralising influence of religion is less problematical than its moral influence. On the other hand, how great and how certain that moral influence must be to make amends for the horrors and misery which religions, especially the Christian and Mohammedan religions, have occasioned and spread over the earth! Think of the fanaticism, of the endless persecutions, the religious wars, that sanguinary frenzy of which the ancients had no idea; then, think of the Crusades, a massacre lasting two hundred years, and perfectly unwarrantable, with its war-cry, \_It is God's will\_, so that it might get into its possession the grave of one who had preached love and endurance; think of the cruel expulsion and extermination of the Moors and Jews from Spain; think of the massacres, of the inquisitions and other heretical tribunals, the bloody and terrible conquests of the Mohammedans in three different parts of the world, and the conquest of the Christians in America, whose inhabitants were for the most part, and in Cuba entirely, exterminated; according to Las Casas, within forty years twelve million persons were murdered--of course, all \_in majorem

Dei gloriam\_, and for the spreading of the Gospel, and because, moreover, what was not Christian was not looked upon as human. It is true I have already touched upon these matters; but when in our day "the Latest News from the Kingdom of God" is printed, we shall not be tired of bringing older news to mind. And in particular, let us not forget India, that sacred soil, that cradle of the human race, at any rate of the race to which we belong, where first Mohammedans, and later Christians, were most cruelly infuriated against the followers of the original belief of mankind; and the eternally lamentable, wanton, and cruel destruction and disfigurement of the most ancient temples and images, still show traces of the monotheistic rage of the Mohammedans, as it was carried on from Marmud the Ghaznevid of accursed memory, down to Aureng Zeb, the fratricide, whom later the Portuguese Christians faithfully tried to imitate by destroying the temples and the \_auto da fé\_ of the inquisition at Goa. Let us also not forget the chosen people of God, who, after they had, by Jehovah's express and special command, stolen from their old and faithful friends in Egypt the gold and silver vessels which had been lent to them, made a murderous and predatory excursion into the Promised Land, with Moses at their head, in order to tear it from the rightful owners, also at Jehovah's express and repeated commands, knowing no compassion, and relentlessly murdering and exterminating all the inhabitants, even the women and children (Joshua x., xi.); just because they were not circumcised and did not know Jehovah, which was sufficient reason to justify every act of cruelty against them. For the same reason, in former times the infamous roguery of the patriarch Jacob and his chosen people against Hamor, King of

Shalem, and his people is recounted to us with glory, precisely because the people were unbelievers. Truly, it is the worst side of religions that the believers of one religion consider themselves allowed everything against the sins of every other, and consequently treat them with the utmost viciousness and cruelty; the Mohammedans against the Christians and Hindoos; the Christians against the Hindoos, Mohammedans, Americans, Negroes, Jews, heretics, and the like. Perhaps I go too far when I say \_all\_ religions; for in compliance with truth, I must add that the fanatical horrors, arising from religion, are only perpetrated by the followers of the monotheistic religions, that is, of Judaism and its two branches, Christianity and Islamism. The same is not reported of the Hindoos and Buddhists, although we know, for instance, that Buddhism was driven out about the fifth century of our era by the Brahmans from its original home in the southernmost part of the Indian peninsula, and afterwards spread over the whole of Asia; yet we have, so far as I know, no definite information of any deeds of violence, of wars and cruelties by which this was brought about. This may, most certainly, be ascribed to the obscurity in which the history of those countries is veiled; but the extremely mild character of their religion, which continually impresses upon us to be forbearing towards \_every living thing\_, as well as the circumstance that Brahmanism properly admits no proselytes by reason of its caste system, leads us to hope that its followers may consider themselves exempt from shedding blood to any great extent, and from cruelty in any form. Spence Hardy, in his excellent book on \_Eastern Monachism\_, p. 412, extols the extraordinary tolerance of the Buddhists, and adds his assurance that the annals of Buddhism furnish

fewer examples of religious persecution than those of any other religion. As a matter of fact, intolerance is only essential to monotheism: an only god is by his nature a jealous god, who cannot permit any other god to exist. On the other hand, polytheistic gods are by their nature tolerant: they live and let live; they willingly tolerate their colleagues as being gods of the same religion, and this tolerance is afterwards extended to alien gods, who are, accordingly, hospitably received, and later on sometimes attain even the same rights and privileges; as in the case of the Romans, who willingly accepted and venerated Phrygian, Egyptian, and other foreign gods. Hence it is the monotheistic religions alone that furnish us with religious wars, persecutions, and heretical tribunals, and also with the breaking of images, the destruction of idols of the gods; the overthrowing of Indian temples and Egyptian colossi, which had looked on the sun three thousand years; and all this because a jealous God had said: "\_Thou shalt make no graven image\_", etc. To return to the principal part of the matter: you are certainly right in advocating the strong metaphysical needs of mankind; but religions appear to me to be not so much a satisfaction as an abuse of those needs. At any rate we have seen that, in view of the progress of morality, its advantages are for the most part problematical, while its disadvantages, and especially the enormities which have appeared in its train, are obvious. Of course the matter becomes quite different if we consider the utility of religion as a mainstay of thrones; for in so far as these are bestowed "by the grace of God," altar and throne are closely related. Accordingly, every wise prince who loves his throne and his family will walk before his people

as a type of true religion; just as even Machiavelli, in the eighteenth chapter of his book, urgently recommended religion to princes. Moreover, it may be added that revealed religions are related to philosophy, exactly as the sovereigns by the grace of God are to the sovereignty of the people; and hence the two former terms of the parallel are in natural alliance.