

THE CRISIS.

That to-day is a judgment-day, or "crisis," no thoughtful person can doubt. We are passing through a great world-crisis in social life and in religious life. "Creative evolution" moves us to leave our father's house and seek a new home, or rather create for ourselves "a new heaven and a new earth." Or to change the metaphor, in the language of the New Testament, "At midnight there is a cry. Behold, the Bridegroom! go ye forth to meet Him."

The social life and the religious life are inseparable. They stagnate or advance together. We are beginning to see that a new social democratic organisation is inevitable, though our conception of what this means is often dim and crude. But how many take no thought for the religious life, or imagine that a "revival" of dead bones, or a careful pruning of the old tree, are all that is demanded to re-create religion! They do not realise that "the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint," and that, as in the days of Jesus, the dead "right hand" of the past has to be "cut off," painful though the operation is, and "the eye" plucked out and cast from us, which hamper or cause ourselves and our fellowmen to stumble in the ascent to a higher, wider, more spiritual stage of religious evolution, like that to which Jesus called His fellow-religionists.

A radical change in our conceptions of earthly government, rendering ancient conceptions of kings, emperors, despots, impossible, is taking place. Democracy, once spoken of with bated breath, is on everyone's lips. But religious people do not realise that one department of human life cannot be altered without altering the whole—that democracy stands for an ideal of personal freedom, value, responsibility, and of brotherhood, which must react upon religion; while, on the other hand, the new conception of religion born of the critical study of the Bible, the study of the religions of the world, the study of Church history, modern science, and deeper insight into the soul of Christian religion, reacts upon our conception of social life, and leads to the demand for a new and more brotherly form of social life.

We are thus passing through a revolution at once social and religious. "The Kingdom of God" can no longer be thought of under forms or metaphors borrowed from Jewish Apocalyptic or from Roman Imperialism and Law. The hard and fast line of distinction between the Divine and the Human, drawn by ancient Deism, and forming the basis of mediæval Christianity, is being effaced. Law and love, as Browning says, are felt to be one. The life of God and the life of man must both be thought of as "Love."

The old theology is thus hopelessly undermined; for it came from an aristocratic age, and while undoubtedly it expressed and had in it a leaven of love, the lump was only partially leavened, and the conception both of divine love and of human was very narrow. Law and love, justice and love, were pitted against each other. God, and even Christ, were great emperors, and the Church was an "Ark of Safety" from the Flood of Divine Wrath

and the primeval curse of Eden—a quite miraculous Ark of Safety, a kind of "City of Refuge," like the cities of refuge in ancient Israel. Christianity was "a new Law," like the "Law of Moses," a new edition, as it were, of the "Law of Moses." Even St. Paul never thoroughly shook off legal forms of expression; though he it was who so powerfully helped to emancipate religion from law and bondage, and to transform it into the Spirit of "Sons and Daughters of God," "heirs of God," "workers together with God," "Faith that works through Love," the Life of "Charity," the "glorious liberty of the sons of God," "Christ the Spirit" in man's heart "substituted" for the old Adam, the death and burial of the fleshly man with Christ, to rise with Him to "newness of life," both spiritually and bodily, God "reconciling the world to Himself."

It is not this or that dogma merely that are being whittled down, but the whole external religion of dogma that is being dissolved. The inner and spiritual are claiming to be the real Christian Religion, the flower and fruit long hidden, or only partially revealed, in leaf and bud, but now struggling to be born. A new and nobler form of Christian Religion and Church, it is claimed, is thus emerging—a Religion whose root and self-evidence are in the soul, in the very constitution of man's nature, and whose ritual is Life, social and personal—and a Church of Brotherhood, whose "deposit" is not a "deposit" of dogma and infallible authority, but a "deposit" of spiritual life and inspiration, to be passed on from generation to generation—a Church which is the Tree of Life, "whose leaves are for the healing of the nations."

We have thus reached a great crisis, when Conventional Christianity must either ascend to a higher stage of development, or be cast out like salt that has lost its savor. Which is it to be?

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