EUROPE'S CRISIS OF BELIEF*

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One of the main objectives that inspired Sayyid Ahmad Khan's religious writings was to save the Muslims of India from a crisis of belief similar to the one experienced by the Christians of Europe in modern times It was, therefore, only natural for him to acquire some knowledge of the European crisis, at least enough for him to draw useful lessons from it. Although he never claimed or acknowledged it explicitly, there can be little doubt that he did do so. There are clear indications in his writings, such as references to modern European works on different aspects of Christianity. Apart from that, it is only reasonable to assume that a man, as avid for knowledge as he was, he must have utilised his association with Europeans, especially missionaries and scholars among them, to learn from them all he could on a subject of such vital interest to him. It will, therefore, help towards a better understanding of Sayyid Ahmad's religious ideas if we preface our discussion of them with a broad survey of the development of Christian religious thought in modern times, highlighting important landmarks in the struggle of Christianity against new scientific discoveries and philosophical ideas.

The doctrinal system of Christianity, whose foundations were laid by the scholars of the first five centuries, was built up into an imposing edifice by the Scholastics of the thirteenth. So strong and solid was this edifice that it stood foursquare to all winds of change until the seventeenth century. From the standpoint of the art and science, the learning, thought and belief of the times, it was the acme of perfection — so comprehensive that it seemed to leave out nothing but unimportant details of man's individual and social life, so logical that once its premises were accepted, there was no escape from its conclusions. It had been through many ordeals, such as the controversies of the early centuries over the nature of Christ and the Trinity, the ignorance, superstition and monasticism of the Middle Ages and, above all, the

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* Being a chapter of the writer's forthcoming book: *Say yid Ahmad Khan: Missionary of Muslim Progress*.

onslaught of Islam. From each of them it had gained something, not least from Islam; for if Islam had wrested some territory and followers from Christendom, it had in return restored to it its lost heritage of Greek learning. The Renaissance of the fifteenth century, for all its adventures in secularism and humanism and its enlargement of the Europeans' intellectual horizons, left the broad structure of Christian doctrine intact. So did the Reformation of the sixteenth century, despite its revolutionising the organisation of the Christian Church.

The basic tenet of the Christian doctrinal system that held the field until the seventeenth century was that the Old and the New Testaments were the Word of God and, therefore, inerrant, final and unquestionable. Although the two Testaments had been heavily expurgated, their surviving text had all along been officially interpreted in a strictly literal manner, all attempts at reducing it to a rational narrative and philosophy with the aid of allegory having been severely condemned. Thus interpreted, it had been elaborated into a dogmatic scheme which, with the addition of Aristotelian science and Augustinian theology, constituted the Christian scheme of things in its entirety — its cosmology, its eschatology, its ethics, its *Weltanschauung*.

Under this scheme of things the Christians believed in a personal God conceived in anthropomorphic terms, who dwelt in a place called Heaven somewhere above the visible sky, from where He ruled the universe with a hierarchy of angels to give effect to His commands. They also believed in a personal Devil named Satan, a rebellious angel,' who had been expelled from Heaven and who had then avenged him-self by tempting Adam, the first man, God's chosen creature, to commit sin by eating of a forbidden fruit. For this, man's original sin, Adam had been exiled from Paradise to earth, where his progeny, mankind, was spending a life of toil and misery, torn between the forces of good commanded by God and His angels and the forces of evil commanded by Satan and his host of infernal creatures. In order to extricate man from this unhappy predicament, redeem him from the sin that is in him, save him from the fire of Hell and enable him to gain entry to Paradise, God had sent to earth His own son, Jesus Christ, who was in a sense God Himself in human guise. By suffering death on the cross for establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Jesus had completed his mission, and he had entrusted his Church with the work of saving souls until his Second Coming, which would be on Judgment Day, when God would award rewards and punishments to men for their deeds according as they had

or had not obeyed His commandments as interpreted by the Church. That would be the final act of the drama begun with the creation of the world by God in a week of six working days roughly four thousand years before the Christian era. The central theme of that drama, the epitome of all history, was the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There was no room in this system for the world of nature and temporal history except as a setting for the life of the Church, a life governed by miracles and supernatural events, to which the concepts of reason, probability and law were entirely alien. Nor was there any room in it for an organised body of verified knowledge, which, in fact, did not exist in those days in Europe any more than it did anywhere else.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century the only body of know-ledge in Europe outside the Scriptures and ecclesiastical writings was that derived from the Greek and Latin classics. Together they formed a curious hodge-podge of fact and fable, reason and superstition, truth and hocus-pocus, best illustrated by the so-called science of alchemy. In the earlier centuries only a few isolated attempts had been made to break out of these traditional bounds and explore the realms of nature and mind in a spirit of free inquiry. These had been made by devout Christians, often clergymen or monks or friars, such as Francis (1182-1226) and Roger Bacon (1214-1294), who had been largely influenced by the science and philosophy of the Arabs and who had undertaken the study of God's manifestations in the physical world and in the mind of man as a religious duty, a kind of intellectual crusade. The real beginning was made in the latter part of the fifteenth century. The pioneers were men like the Italian explorer and discoverer of America Columbus (1446?-1506), the Italian painter, sculptor, architect, scientist, natural philosopher and musician Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), the Dutch theologian and humanist Erasmus (1466?-1506), the Polish astronomer Copernicus (1473-1541), the German-Swiss physician and alchemist Paracelsus (1493?-1541), the German botanist Fuchs (150'-1566), the Flemish anatomist Vesalius (1514-1564), and soon after these a whole host of naturalists, biologists, botanists and anatomists.

The discovery of the New World by Columbus in 1492 exposed the incompleteness of biblical and classical geography. Leonardo, a universal genius, who in his eagerness to understand, grasp and re-create everything experimented in many fields, represented the thirst of his age for a more intimate knowledge of the world of sense-perception than was afforded by

the traditional learning of the Church. His experiments marked the transition from superstitious belief and magic to verified knowledge. Erasmus, the patron saint of Christian humanism, combined with his loyalty to the Church as an ordained priest a gusto for pagan literature and thought. His writings on religious questions were characterised by a rational rather than a doctrinal or sacramental approach, and he preached tolerance and free thought. Copernicus advanced a heliocentric theory of the universe, which demoted the earth from the position of cosmic centre to that of a minor planet revolving around the sun. As a corollary of this theory, man, lord of the earth, no longer remained the hero of the whole cosmic drama — a role which the mythology of the Church, based as it was on the geocentric theory of the Greeks, had assigned him. Paracelsus, trying to unravel the secrets of nature in his search after God, practised the ancient art of alchemy in the frame of mind of a modern scientist, although with the fervour of a mystic. According to him, God manifested Himself in nature as a mighty force of destiny and could be experienced through a process of adjustment to nature's laws as they operated in the animal world, in inanimate matter and in the human mind. The naturalists, botanists, biologists and anatomists revealed facts about plant and animal life and about the human body which were different from those made popular by Church authority and booklore.

Of a more fundamental importance to the advancement of knowledge than the discoveries made by these men was the inductive method of drawing inferences devised by the English philosopher, essayist and statesman Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Believing that correct generalisations could be reached only after a large number stressed the necessity of collecting of experiments, he personal observation and verification. about natural phenomena by systematisation of scientific procedure.

He was thus a pioneer in the these early inquirers, however, were not rebels against the Church, intent upon discrediting its age-old teachings. They were believing Christians, who addressed themselves to the investigation of the corporeal world with the object of furthering the work of the Church in interpreting the meaning of God's creation and adding to the Church's store of knowledge. For them, therefore, the accounts of Scripture, the speculations of the early Fathers, the Medieval scholars and the Greek philosophers and the results of their own investigations were all equally valid data for the formulation of new theories. Bacon, for example, reached a practical compromise by making a sharp distinction theology and philosophy.

The former, he held, must be derived between the Word of God and not from the light of nature or the dictates of reason; and the Word of God, he asserted, must be believed, even if it shocked reason.

The seventeenth century witnessed the definite beginning of modern scientific thought with the steady march of astronomy and physics from Copernicus to Newton. The intervening stages were the discoveries of three men, namely, the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), the German astronomer and mathematician Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), and the Italian astronomer and physicist Galileo (1564-1642), all of whom confirmed the truth of the Copernican theory. The greatest of them was Galileo, who, with the help of a telescope he had himself made, observed the stars and planets in the Milky Way and found that they obeyed Copernicus's laws. His most important contribution to the scientific outlook, however, was his analysis of the ideas of motion and inertia. He maintained that a terrestrial body, once moved, continued in a straight .ine unless interfered with. This ran counter to the theory of Aristotle that bodies were set and kept in motion by a mover which did not itself move, namely, God. Galileo held that even if God was the initial mover, once He had despatched a body on its way, it went on moving for ever independently of Him. These revolutionary ideas were stubbornly opposed by the Church. While Copernicus had escaped punishment by declaring that his finding was only a hypothesis, Galileo was condemned by the Inquisition, first privately in 1616, and then publicly in 1633; on the latter date, however, he recanted and promised never again to say that the earth rotates or revolves. Kepler was not so fortunate and was persecuted by the Theological Faculty of the University of Tubingen, in spite of his going into mystical ecstasies over the celestial bodies and calling the sun God the Father. Even less fortunate was the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548?-1600), who was burnt at the stake by the Inquisition for championing the Copernican theory and believing in a plurality of universes, although he declared that they had all been created by God.

Newton, with his synoptic genius, synthesised into a single system the theories of Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler and Galileo, thus completing the mechanics of the heavenly bodies whose foundations had been laid by these pioneers. He formulated a Universal Principle of Gravitation, namely, that every particle of matter attracts every other particle with a force varying directly as the mass and inversely as the square of the distance.. This grand generalisation embraced all the physical phenomena of the universe, which

now became a calculable machine in which the heavenly bodies obeyed the earthly law of gravity. This ended the centuries-old dichotomy between the heavens and the earth, and marked the triumph of naturalism over supernaturalism and of understandable laws over inscrutable mysteries in interpreting the workings of the cosmos.

In giving shape to this mechanistic world-picture philosophy worked hand in hand with science. The French philosopher, mathematician, astronomer and physicist Rend Descartes (1596-1650) evolved a method of reasoning which aimed at making deductions about the truth of things with the certainty of mathematical axioms. Dismissing all pre-conceptions, such as the assumptions of the Schoolmen, he adopted what he called the method of doubt, what involved the provisional denial of whatever was not clearly and distinctly apprehended as true. Whatever, he declared, was so apprehended was in fact true. The one indubitable proposition, according to him, was Cogito ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am"). Having thus established the existence of the thinking self, he proceeded to deduce there from the existence of God. Ideas which were clearly and distinctly apprehended, he argued, could have emanated only from a perfect being, as they were perfect ideas; and since the thinking self was conscious of its own imperfection, that perfect being must be other than it: in other words, it must be God. A corollary of God's perfection was that He had established certain infallible laws in nature and impressed them upon men's minds. In this way Descartes established a new trinity, that of nature, reason and truth, parallel to the Christian Trinity. Although he personally escaped punishment for this mechanistic heresy, his works were officially condemned by the Roman Catholic Church and placed on its Index Expurgatorius (index of banned books), after his death.

The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) went a step further than Descartes in his opposition to supernaturalism: he extended the application of the mechanistic explanation of Descartes and Galileo from physical phenomena to the whole of reality. His thought thus assumed the extreme form of materialism, according to which matter and motion were the only ultimate realities, even human know-ledge being only a product of pressure exerted by matter on the sense-organs. Although he did not deny the existence of God, he asserted that man could have no idea of Him.

It was in the writings of the Dutch philosopher Spinoza (1632-1677) that the naturalism and rationalism characteristic of modern thought found

full expression for the first time. He challenged the Medieval notion of a capricious and despotic God, attributed the belief in miracles to ignorance, and insisted that the Scriptures must be submitted to the same kind of critical examination as any other historical documents He preached tolerance and propounded a universal religion in which Christianity was only one of numerous cults. God and man, be maintained, were alike controlled by nature's immutable laws, and man's duty to himself lay in realising his union with nature. Just as nature's laws were capable of being stated definitely, the principles of ethics could be demonstrated with the same precision as the propositions of Euclidean geometry. Although his philosophy is dominated by the idea of God, he was, curiously enough, regarded by his contemporaries as an atheist.

The philosophy of the German philosopher and mathematician Leibniz (1646-1716), who was a devout Christian and at the same time a daring thinker, aimed at unifying the religious and scientific outlooks of his time. According to him, material objects had no objective reality and were only appearances within the experience of what he called monads These monads were self-contained atoms of consciousness, the highest in intensity and range being God, the "monad of monads," Who had created the other monads and endowed them with a permanent harmony with one another. It was as if a supremely skilful clock-maker had made and set innumerable clocks to keep time together. This was a compromise between the teleological and mechanistic views of the universe, motivated by a desire to bridge the gap between the emergent materialism of the age and the supernaturalism of Christian belief.

The English philosopher John Locke (1632.1704), the founder of empiricism, held that all knowledge is derived from experience through impressions made on our sense organs by external objects, which the mind combines into ideas. Our sensations are copies of certain primary qualities of objects, but not of certain other qualities which the mind attributes to them subjectively. The result is that we can have no knowledge of real existence, that is, of substances, whether bodies or souls. The only ideas we have outside our sense-experience are those of our own existence, the existence of God and the truths of mathematics and logic. Because of these limitations of human knowledge, and the consequent indefiniteness of our beliefs and opinions, he opposed dogmatism in both religion and science. Locke's theory of knowledge was interpreted by his disciples as a mechanistic explanation of

the working of the mind, which he himself perhaps never intended it to be.

Although these scientists and philosophers, with the exception of Hobbes, hedged their theories with qualifications, which were concessions to orthodox theology, the scientific outlook, in its mechanistic form, gained ground as time passed. By the end of the seventeenth century it had fully established its dominion over the European mind while God, a mysterious First Cause, remained the supreme ruler of the universe, ruling it in accordance with certain laws made by Him, the laws became capable of being ascertained by observation and experiment, understood with the aid of reason, and stated in physical terms with the certitude and precision of mathematical equations. The universe became a huge clock and God a divine clock-maker.

There was also to be noticed an incipient trend towards atheistic thinking. An important representative of it was the French Huguenot Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), who was a severe critic of biblical literalism, belief in miracles, blind conformity and religious bigotry. He declared that atheism was not inconsistent with good morals.

The Irish Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753) spearheaded eighteenth-century philosophy's attack on the materialistic tendencies in thinking generated by the theories of Newton and Locke. He denied the existence of matter and held that material objects exist only through being perceived and that, when not perceived by man, they continue to exist in the mind of God, Who is all-perceiving.

To the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) nothing seemed to be real except a flux of unconnected impressions and ideas to which habitual association gives an illusory appearance of causal connection. His was a philosophy of scepticism which doubted the existence of everything, whether body or spirit, substance or idea. In a treatise entitled *Essay on Miracles* he expressed the opinion that there could never be adequate evidence for such supernatural occurrences.

The German philosopher Kant (1724-1804) attempted to bridge the gulf between the subjective and the objective. According to him, the mind possesses certain forms of intuition and certain *a priori* concepts ("categories"), which it adds to the materials it receives from the outer world through the senses, thus transforming the materials into experience. Such experience is all the knowledge the mind possesses of the outer world: it cannot know "°things-in-themselves". There are, however, certain innate

ideas, certain "ideas of reason," which are not acquired through such experience, e.g. the ideas of God, free will and immortality. But, although they are conceived by the mind with the aid of pure reason, the faculty through which it acquires all knowledge of the outer world, their reality cannot be proved by it. For such proof man has to rely upon another faculty, namely, practical reason, which postulates these ideas as "categorical imperatives" of morality. Kant thus justified religious faith as a prerequisite of good morals. The seed of materialism sown by Hobbes yielded a rich harvest in both Britain and France. The English philosopher Toland (1670-1721) maintained that matter is an active substance and mind nothing but one of its functions. The associationist psychology of the English philosopher Hartley (1704-1757) was virtually a branch of physiology.The English chemist and theologian Priestley (1733-1804) argued that the Christian dogma of God's omnipresence was untenable without assuming His materiality. Most of the French Philosophers were blatant materialists. La Mettrie (1709-1751) asserted that plants, animals and men are different stages of one evolutionary process and that man is a clock that winds up its own springs and, therefore, needs no divine clock-winder. Helvétius (1715-1771), concerning himself mainly with the social uses of philosophy, taught that self-love is the mainspring of all human activity and that everything that promotes the public welfare is legitimate and permissible. D'Holbach (1723-1789) described Christianity as a "sacred contagion" and preached that there are only atoms, gravity and the attraction and repulsion of things. Cabanis (1757-1808) regarded body and soul as identical, described man as nothing but a bundle of nerves, and held that the brain secrets thought just as the liver secretes bile.

Eighteenth-century science made rapid strides in many fields — observational and mathematical astronomy, physics (heat, sound, magnetism and electricity), chemistry, descriptive and systematic biology, natural history, botany, geology and medicine. The knowledge gained in these fields made further exposures of erroneous notions about the realm of nature and its laws that formed part of the Christian system of beliefs.

The theories of the new philosophers and scientists were popularised by the French *Philosophers*, just mentioned, who were a coterie of wits, literary men and journalists. Their chief work was an "Encyclopaedia," to which they gave the sub-title of "A Reasoned Dictionary of the Sciences". Its editors were Diderot (1713-1784) and d'Alembert (1717-1783). The central phrase in

their statement of objectives was "pour changer la facon commune de penser" (to change the common way of thinking). They succeeded conspicuously in achieving this objective, for the "Encyclopaedia" heralded a movement called the Enlightenment which gave its name to a whole epoch of European history. It was a declaration of the sovereignty of man's mind over the whole realm of nature and of his readiness to take command of his destiny instead of leaving it in the hands of an unknown and mysterious power. It was also a declaration of war by reason against religious prejudice, by free thought against Church authority and by innovation against tradition. A concrete outcome of the "Encyclopedia" was the French Revolution, which set up a new trinity, that of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, in supersession of the Holy Trinity of Christianity. The *Philosophers*, most of whom, as we have already indicated, were materialists, represented what has been called the low Enlightenment. They exaggerated the role of reason in the cosmic order and in human history to such an extent that they not only reduced the religious ideas of the seventeenth century to a secularised caricature, but had to invent a mechanistic eschatology to replace the Christian eschatology. The result was a new cult of liturgical occultism and puritanism whose high priest was the Jacobin leader Robespierre (1758-1794), who was ultimately executed by a people's tribunal which he had himself set up in order to purify the people's morals, or rather to offer human sacrifice at the altar of the Goddess of Reason, equated with the Supreme Being.

The leaders of the high Enlightenment were two men of a cast different from these men and from each other, namely, the philosopher, historian, wit, satirist, story-writer and dramatist Voltaire (1694-1778) and the philosopher and social theorist Rousseau (1712-1778). Voltaire preached a humanistic deism, consisting in a simple faith which would ensure the freedom and happiness of each individual. Such a faith, he explained, would have its source in reason, would need no organised Church, and would be reflected in the virtues of justice and compassion. Although he died protesting his belief in God, Voltaire was misunderstood to be an atheist on account of his anti-clericalism. Rousseau, while he shared both Voltaire's belief in God and his opposition to the ecclesiastic establishment, expounded a natural religion, which, according to him, had been embodied by God in the Book of Nature and was revealed by Him directly to each individual through his heart. The basic tenet of this religion was that man in his natural state was good — a

tenet which ran counter to the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. One could be virtuous only by following the model of the "noble savage," who was sincere to his feelings and was not misguided by reason, which is essentially selfish and the enemy of religion and morality. This, however, was a discordant note in the Enlightenment's fanfare in glorification of reason.

With the Enlightenment's belief in the omnipotence of reason — in its capacity to unveil all the secrets of nature to man and put him in command of its forces —went a belief in the perfectibility of man and in his capacity for unlimited progress. History was seen as a continuous ascent rather than a decline or a seesaw or a movement on a single plane. Man had regained his central position in the universe, from which he had been deposed by the astronomy of the seventeenth century. Indeed, he was now the potential master of an infinitely vaster universe than that in which the Scriptures had placed him, a universe whose God, if there was one, existed only to serve man's ends and was not, in any case, a capricious despot, but a rational being governing His dominion in accordance with certain fixed and intelligible laws. What man needed to make his mastery effective was more scientific knowledge and technique, better education than the outmoded learning patronised by the Church, and a society organised and run under rational laws.

The most influential exponent of this outlook was Helvetius, who wove around his theme of self-love as the main motivating force behind all human actions a scheme for the reorganisation of society through legislation and education aimed at achieving the maximum well-being and happiness of human beings. This euphoria of confidence in human powers continued into the nineteenth century and found expression anew in the utilitarian philosophy of Bentham (1748-1832) and his school.

As regards religion, while the masses, unaffected by the changed climate of opinion, and the higher classes, sharing with the Church an interest in preserving time-honoured privileges, remained practising Christians, the new intellectual and cultural elites, forerunners of the industrial middle classes, were for the most part hostile, or at any rate indifferent, to Christianity. When not frankly irreligious — atheists, sceptics or agnostics — they invented pseudo- or quasi-religions of their own. Some of them were coldly rationalistic, others mystical with a vague warmth of feeling: a common feature of all of them was anti' clericalism and emphasis upon a lay morality as a substitute for the Christian code of conduct. Three examples of these

surrogate religions have already been mentioned, namely, Voltaire's humanistic deism, Rousseau's cult of the noble savage, and Robespierre's liturgy of the Supreme Being. Two other examples are worth citing. One is the utopian socialism of the French nobleman Count Claude de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), according to which the Church was to be organised as a technocracy in order to put the Gospel into practice in industry for the benefit of the poor.

Another example is the Religion of Humanity propounded by the French positivist philosopher Comte (1798-1857) with its church of scientists consecrated to the service of the *Grand Etre*, humanity, the proper object of man's devotion and worship instead of an unknown and unknowable God, remote from the daily lives of men. The scientists would promote social and economic progress by acquiring, propagating and applying scientific knowledge.

By and large, the most fashionable cult among the intellectual and cultural elites — scientists, philosophers, writers, the new bourgeoisie produced by the French Revolution — was deism, which was a natural religion based upon reason. It accepted so much of the truth of Christianity as was not in open conflict with the new scientific know-ledge and thought and was not detrimental to human progress, moral as well as material. It, however, did not subscribe to revelation as the source of such truth and maintained that reason was by itself adequate to apprehend it. The clearest exposition of deism was perhaps made by Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), who is generally regarded as its father. He described Christianity as the highest historical form of natural religion, which latter is prehistoric and non-ecclesiastical in character; and the Bible, according to him, was a republication of the principles of natural religion, which are known to man through his reason without the aid of revelation. These principles are: that God exists, that He exists to be worshipped, that He is best worshipped by virtuous living, man can reform himself, and that there is reward for good and punishment for evil deeds after death. By saying that these principles, which form an integral part of Christian doctrine, are self-evident to man in the light of nature, Herbert swept aside the basic Christian dogma that all knowledge of God, good and evil, and life hereafter was imparted to man through the Word of God revealed in the Bible. Deism, to which Descartes' concept of the thinking self and Locke's theory of the sense-bound understanding had been misinterpreted into lending support, reached its

height in Matthew Tindal (1653-1733). Carrying Herbert's natural theology a step further, Tindal asserted that, since Christianity was only a historical embodiment of universal natural religion, which was as old as mankind, everything in its doctrines which was an addition to the principles of natural religion and which did not stand the test of reason should be dismissed as superstitious stuff introduced by the priests.

Thus, in trying to provide rational justification for Christianity, deism reduced it to a corrupt copy of the book of nature. Indeed, it made questionable the very *raison d'etre* of Christianity as a self-contained system of beliefs. While it was possible to justify some of the metaphysical and ethical ideas forming part of Christian doctrine by an appeal to reason, no such justification could plausibly be attempted with regard to those parts of that doctrine which had been squarely contradicted by the new discoveries of science. The only thing to do about them was to explain them away, that is, to show that they did not really mean what they *prima facie* seemed to mean, or that the extant record of them was not authentic and reliable. This is how what is called Higher Criticism originated. A few outstanding examples will suffice to show how the authenticity of the Gospels and even the life-story and character of Jesus Christ according to them were challenged. They are all from Germany, which took the initiative. The theologian Reimarus(d. 1814) said that Christ was nothing but a moral teacher; as regards the miracles attributed to Christ, he dismissed them as self-delusion on his part and trickery on the part of Paul. The dramatist, critic and man of letters Lessing (1729-1781), who edited and published the writings of Reimarus, held that his time was a golden age in which humanity had outgrown irrational systems of belief like Christianity; he prophesied the coming of a Third Kingdom of Enlightenment, of which, he chiliastically hinted, he might himself be the Messiah. The philosopher and theologian Schleirmacher (1768-1834) maintained that Christian theology had to be made to suit the spirit of the times and, examining the Gospels in the light of this view, found them to be a mixture of texts of different periods, interpolations and corruptions. In the opinion of the philosopher Hegel (1770-1831) Christianity, although the highest of religions, was a presentation of the truths of philosophy in the form of myths. The theologian Strauss in his *Life of Jesus* (1835) eliminated the supernatural element from the life of his subject, describing him only as a remarkable man. The theologian Baur (1702-1860), rigorously applying the criteria of literary criticism to the New Testament, reached the conclusion

that it is not a con-temporary account of the events it relates and that, therefore, it is of little historical value. Historical criticism of the Bible thus tended to destroy even the rationalised supernaturalism which was the Enlightenment's substitute for religious faith.

In England a powerful attack was launched upon the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment (and simultaneously on the soulless formalism of the Church, which was its counterpart) by the Methodist movement of John Wesley (1703-1791). The movement, which was a revival of the old-time enthusiastic evangelicalism, preached a "vital Christianity," combining a high degree of piety — Bible-reading, church-going, observance of the Sabbath Day, abstention from frivolities and vices like gambling — with a profound religious feeling and a passion for saving souls. Originally intended for the poor and the unsophisticated, the movement brought about a revival of religious living among them; but, becoming fashionable among the richer classes, it lost its vital impulse after some time. It also suffered a setback owing to a schism in its leadership. At the turn of the century, however, it re-gained its vigour under the leadership of the Clapham sect. It then addressed itself once again in right earnest to its mission of spreading the Gospel. Side by side with that and, in fact, more conspicuously, it threw itself into the humanitarian work of social and political reform. Thus, by a strange turn of events, it became an active ally of a purely rationalistic and materialistic school of thought, to wit, utilitarianism, whose aim it was to achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number through rational laws and sound education. Doctrinally it was from first to last a reactinary movement, which rejected all scientific theories and intellectual ideas which were not in accord with the Scriptures literally interpreted. But by swimming against the tide it could not reverse it. Liberalism was relentlessly on the march, carrying everything before it in every field--social, political, economic, intellectual and, not least, religious.

The spirit of free inquiry that was abroad in the wake of the Enlightenment could not but influence religious thinking even in ecclesiastical circles. Before the advanced thought of Germany reached England to provide a foundation for scholarly studies of the Bible as a historical document, anti-traditional and anti-dogmatic ideas began to make their appearance in theological writings, including those of churchmen. The Oxford movement launched about the middle of the nineteenth century by some of the most powerful intellects of the time, such as Newman (1801-

1890) and Keble (1792-1866), with the object of restoring Church authority and the unquestioning acceptance of tradition and dogma met with no more success than had evangelicalism in checking the growth of liberal ideas in theology. Dramatic developments in geology, archaeology, biology and historical research made it increasingly difficult for men to retain religious faith based upon literal acceptance of everything contained in the Scriptures and in ecclesiastical traditions. Charles Lyeil (1797-1875) in his three-volume Principles of Geology (1830-33) put forward a mass of facts about the earth's surface which did not fit in with the Biblical story of the earth's sudden creation four thousand odd years before the birth of Christ. His study of the stratification of rocks pointed, instead, to a long and slow upheaval followed by denudation. Moreover, the fossils he found in the rocks ruled out the Biblical view that global catastrophes, such as Noah's flood, had repeatedly interrupted the succession of living creatures on the earth. They also contradicted their order of creation as described in Genesis. Archaeology soon followed by bringing to light in 1857 stone implements and other objects that left no room for doubt that men had lived in Great Britain when animals extinct for many thousands of years had flourished in that land and long before the time of Adam according to Mosaic chronology.

The *coup de grace* was dealt to the Biblical story of man's origin — his sudden and special creation as he is today — by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) with his *Origin of Species* (1859). In that epoch-making book he showed, on the basis of twenty years' sedulous collection and study of thousands of specimens, that man is the final product of an evolution of animal species from lower to higher forms by natural selection over millions of years. Although this theory in a way discredited the mechanistic view of the universe and by suggesting an immanent goal behind the creation of living things supported the teleological view held by Christian theology, its attack upon the literal veracity of the Bible evoked a violent opposition on the part of the Church. The opposition was led by the Bishop of Oxford, Wilberforce, the son of one of the important leaders of the evangelical revival. While the controversy over the *Origin of Species* was still in its incipient stages, seven talented churchmen brought out a volume of essays under the title of *Essays and Reviews* (1860) designed to rid Christianity of what they described as "incrustations" and calling for a restatement of Christian doctrine in consonance with the new intellectual insights. The essayists were sharply rebuked by orthodox clergymen, and two of them were officially

condemned by the Church of England's Court of Arches. At the same time they were severely criticised by positivists and secularists for not going far enough.

Popularised by advanced thinkers like the biologist Huxley (1825-1895) and the positivist philosopher Spencer (1820:-1903), Darwin's theory of evolution, along with its corollaries, the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest, became a part of the general thinking of the British. It was extended to many other fields of intellectual activity, such as anthropology, sociology, ethics, law, ancient history, the history of civilisation. The leaps forward made in these and other fields became tributaries to the stream of progressive thought that was increasingly eroding religious faith. At the time of Sayyid Ahmad's visit to England (1869-70) Christian thought there was in a state of turmoil. To begin with, there was a fast dwindling number of men who, unquestioningly retaining their faith in the Bible as an infallible book and in the Church as a divinely appointed authority, either remained totally indifferent to the challenge of science or resolutely defended Christianity against it, by merely denying that it had any force in it. Then, there were those who, though they experienced intense moments of honest doubt, clung to a belief in the eternal truth of Christianity and sought to rediscover that truth with the help of the new insights of science and philosophy. For them the conflict between the two was only apparent and only needed to be resolved. Then, again, there were those who felt that Christianity had outlived its day and should give way to the religion of humanity, which they conceived of as a genuine religion demanding acts of worship, but completely free from superstition and irrational beliefs. Finally, there were those who believed in a religion of duty rather than of faith, that is, in no religion in the accepted sense of the word, but in morality; some of these found a satisfactory code of morality within Christianity, while others looked for it elsewhere, the criteria in either case being those dictated by the cult of progress.

Optimistic believers in the march of mind prophesied the final triumph, in the near future, of science over religion, of reason over faith, and of free thought over dictated beliefs. But they overlooked two important factors: man's inherent need for belief in a transcendent power and the essential religious-mindedness of the common people in Britain no less than in any other country. The latter fact, indeed, was of special importance in the case of the Victorians who, with their sanguine temperaments, felt a deep-seated

need for something to believe in and were, therefore, constantly in search of something worthy of their belief When the initial glamour of material progress faded, thoughtful men began to wonder if science was by itself any more adequate than they had found religion to be and if it told the whole truth about things any more than religion did. Gradually they settled down to the acceptance of science and religion as two equally necessary and important spheres of man's life which, even if they were mutually competitive, were not mutually exclusive or contradictory. This *rapprochement* was facilitated, if not dictated, by the establishment of a working partnership between science and religion in the tasks of empire. Christianity, credited with the ability, and charged with the mission, to spread the benefits of modern civilisation, the civilisation of the West in the scientific age, was considered to be as helpful in the fulfilment of the imperial assignment as science undoubtedly was by virtue of the technological power it endowed. The dialectic of history thus enlisted Christianity in the service of its adversary, namely, secular progress through the instrumentality of reason. From being a backward-looking, tradition-bound, authority-ridden and other-worldly system of ideas and beliefs Christianity became an agency for the modernisation of outmoded societies all over the world. What was even more interesting than this metamorphosis in the character and role of Christianity was the fact that modern Western civilisation began to be described as Christian civilisation, as if it were a peculiar product of Christianity. The propagation of Christianity and the dissemination of Western institutions and ideas thus became two integral parts of the imperial assignment; they also became the dual moral justification of empire. Whether or not the builders and rulers of the colonial empires and the Christian missionaries consciously collaborated with each other — some of them, it is known, did — they never lost sight of the fact that they were partners in one great undertaking. A third partner in the undertaking was a band of Orientalists whose writings were designed to make the people of the East, especially Muslims, feel dissatisfied with their own religious and cultural systems and admire those of the West.