The essence of Christianity

Feuerbach Ludwig
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ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

LUDWIG FEUERBACH.

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THE

ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY

LUDWIG FEUERBACH.

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BY

MARIAN EVANS,
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THE

ESSAY

ON

THE

EXISTENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

By

LUDWIG TRENKEL

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PREFACE

to

THE SECOND EDITION.*

The clamour excited by the present work has not surprised me, and hence it has not in the least moved me from my position. On the contrary, I have once more, in all calmness, subjected my work to the severest scrutiny, both historical and philosophical; I have, as far as possible, freed it from its defects of form, and enriched it with new developments, illustrations and historical testimonies,—testimonies in the highest degree striking and irrefragable. Now that I have thus verified my analysis by historical proofs, it is to be hoped that readers whose eyes are not sealed will be convinced and will admit, even though reluctantly, that my work contains a faithful, correct translation of the Christian religion out of the oriental language of imagery into plain speech. And it has no pretension to be anything more than a close translation, or, to speak literally, an empirical or historico-philosophical analysis, a solution of the enigma of the Christian religion. The general propositions which I premise in the Introduction are no à priori, excogitated propositions, no products of speculation; they have arisen out of the analysis of religion; they are only, as indeed are all the fundamental ideas of the work, generalizations

* The opening paragraphs of this Preface are omitted, as having too specific a reference to transient German polemics to interest the English reader.
from the known manifestations of human nature, and in particular of the religious consciousness,—facts converted into thoughts, i.e., expressed in general terms, and thus made the property of the understanding. The ideas of my work are only conclusions, consequences, drawn from premises which are not themselves mere ideas, but objective facts either actual or historical—facts which had not their place in my head simply in virtue of their ponderous existence in folio. I unconditionally repudiate absolute, immaterial, self-sufficing speculation,—that speculation which draws its material from within. I differ toto caelo from those philosophers who pluck out their eyes that they may see better; for my thought I require the senses, especially sight; I found my ideas on materials which can be appropriated only through the activity of the senses. I do not generate the object from the thought, but the thought from the object; and I hold that alone to be an object which has an existence beyond one's own brain. I am an idealist only in the region of practical philosophy, that is, I do not regard the limits of the past and present as the limits of humanity, of the future; on the contrary, I firmly believe that many things—yes, many things—which with the short-sighted, pusillanimous practical men of to-day, pass for flights of imagination, for ideas never to be realized, for mere chimeras, will to-morrow, i.e., in the next century,—centuries in individual life are days in the life of humanity,—exist in full reality. Briefly, the "Idea" is to me only faith in the historical future, in the triumph of truth and virtue; it has for me only a political and moral significance; for in the sphere of strictly theoretical philosophy, I attach myself, in direct opposition to the Hegelian philosophy, only to realism, to materialism in the sense above indicated. The maxim hitherto adopted by speculative philosophy: all that is mine I carry with me, the old omnia mea mecum porto, I cannot, alas! appropriate. I have many things outside myself, which I cannot convey either in my pocket or my head, but which nevertheless I look upon as belonging to me, not indeed as a mere man—a view not now in question—but as a philosopher. I am nothing but a natural philosopher in the
domain of mind; and the natural philosopher can do nothing without instruments, without material means. In this character I have written the present work, which consequently contains nothing else than the principle of a new philosophy verified practically, i.e., in concreto, in application to a special object, but an object which has a universal significance: namely, to religion, in which this principle is exhibited, developed and thoroughly carried out. This philosophy is essentially distinguished from the systems hitherto prevalent, in that it corresponds to the real, complete nature of man; but for that very reason it is antagonistic to minds perverted and crippled by a superhuman, i.e., anti-human, anti-natural religion and speculation. It does not, as I have already said elsewhere, regard the pen as the only fit organ for the revelation of truth, but the eye and ear, the hand and foot; it does not identify the idea of the fact with the fact itself, so as to reduce real existence to an existence on paper, but it separates the two, and precisely by this separation attains to the fact itself; it recognises as the true thing, not the thing as it is an object of the abstract reason, but as it is an object of the real, complete man, and hence as it is itself a real, complete thing. This philosophy does not rest on an Understanding per se, on an absolute, nameless understanding, belonging one knows not to whom, but on the understanding of man;—though not, I grant, on that of man enervated by speculation and dogma;—and it speaks the language of men, not an empty, unknown tongue. Yes, both in substance and in speech, it places philosophy in the negation of philosophy, i.e., it declares that alone to be the true philosophy which is converted in succum et sanguinem, which is incarnate in Man; and hence it finds its highest triumph in the fact that to all dull and pedantic minds, which place the essence of philosophy in the show of philosophy, it appears to be no philosophy at all.

This philosophy has for its principle, not the Substance of Spinoza, not the ego of Kant and Fichte, not the Absolute Identity of Schelling, not the Absolute Mind of Hegel, in short, no abstract, merely conceptional being, but a real being, the true Ens realissimum—man; its principle, therefore, is in the
highest degree positive and real. It generates thought from
the *opposite* of thought, from Matter, from existence, from the
senses; it has relation to its object first through the senses, *i.e.*, 
passively, before defining it in thought. Hence my work, as a
specimen of this philosophy, so far from being a production to
be placed in the category of Speculation,—although in another
point of view it is the true, the incarnate result of prior philo-
sophical systems,—is the direct opposite of speculation, nay,
puts an end to it by explaining it. Speculation makes religion
say only what it has *itself* thought, and expressed far better
than religion; it assigns a meaning to religion without any refer-
ence to the *actual* meaning of religion; it does not look beyond
itself. I, on the contrary, let religion itself speak; I constitute
myself only its listener and interpreter, not its prompter. Not to
invent, but to discover, "to unveil existence," has been my sole
object; to *see* correctly, my sole endeavour. It is not I, but re-
ligion that worships man, although religion, or rather theology,
denies this; it is not I, an insignificant individual, but religion it-
self that says: God is man, man is God; it is not I, but religion
that denies the God who is *not* man, but only an *ens rationis*,—
since it makes God become man, and then constitutes this God,
not distinguished from man, having a human form, human feel-
ings and human thoughts, the object of its worship and veneration.
I have only found the key to the cipher of the Christian religion,
only extricated its true meaning from the web of contradictions
and delusions called theology;—but in doing so I have certainly
committed a sacrilege. If therefore my work is negative,
irreligious, atheistic, let it be remembered that atheism—at
least in the sense of this work—is the secret of religion itself;
that religion itself, not indeed on the surface, but fundamentally,
not in intention or according to its own supposition, but in its
heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and
divinity of human nature. Or let it be *proved* that the his-
torical as well as the rational arguments of my work are false;
let them be refuted—not, however, I entreat, by judicial
denunciations, or theological jeremiads, by the trite phrases
of speculation, or other pitiful expedients for which I have no
name, but by reasons, and such reasons as I have not already thoroughly answered.

Certainly, my work is negative, destructive; but, be it observed, only in relation to the unhuman, not to the human elements of religion. It is therefore divided into two parts, of which the first is, as to its main idea, positive, the second, including the appendix, not wholly but in the main, negative; in both, however, the same positions are proved, only in a different or rather opposite manner. The first exhibits religion in its essence, its truth, the second exhibits it in its contradictions; the first is development, the second polemic; thus the one is, according to the nature of the case, calmer, the other more vehement. Development advances gently, contest impetuously; for development is self-contented at every stage, contest only at the last blow. Development is deliberate, but contest resolute. Development is light, contest fire. Hence results a difference between the two parts even as to their form. Thus in the first part I show that the true sense of Theology is Anthropology, that there is no distinction between the predicates of the divine and human nature, and, consequently, no distinction between the divine and human subject: I say consequently, for wherever, as is especially the case in theology, the predicates are not accidents, but express the essence of the subject, there is no distinction between subject and predicate, the one can be put in the place of the other; on which point I refer the reader to the Analytics of Aristotle, or even merely to the Introduction of Porphyry. In the second part, on the other hand, I show that the distinction which is made, or rather supposed to be made, between the theological and anthropological predicates, resolves itself into an absurdity. Here is a striking example. In the first part I prove that the Son of God is in religion a real son, the son of God in the same sense in which man is the son of man, and I find therein the truth, the essence of religion, that it conceives and affirms a profoundly human relation as a divine relation; on the other hand, in the second part I show that the Son of God—not indeed in religion, but in theology, which is the reflection of religion upon itself,—is not a son in the natural,
human sense, but in an entirely different manner, contradictory to Nature and reason, and therefore absurd, and I find in this negation of human sense and the human understanding, the negation of religion. Accordingly the first part is the direct, the second the indirect proof, that theology is anthropology: hence the second part necessarily has reference to the first; it has no independent significance; its only aim is to show, that the sense in which religion is interpreted in the previous part of the work must be the true one, because the contrary is absurd. In brief, in the first part I am chiefly concerned with religion, in the second with theology: I say chiefly, for it was impossible to exclude theology from the first part, or religion from the second. A mere glance will show that my investigation includes speculative theology or philosophy, and not, as has been here and there erroneously supposed, common theology only, a kind of trash from which I rather keep as clear as possible, (though, for the rest, I am sufficiently well acquainted with it,) confining myself always to the most essential, strict and necessary definition of the object,* and hence to that definition which gives to an object the most general interest, and raises it above the sphere of theology. But it is with theology that I have to do, not with theologians; for I can only undertake to characterize what is primary,—the original, not the copy, principles, not persons, species, not individuals, objects of history, not objects of the chronique scandaleuse.

If my work contained only the second part, it would be perfectly just to accuse it of a negative tendency, to represent the proposition: Religion is nothing, is an absurdity, as its essential purport. But I by no means say (that were an easy task!): God is nothing, the Trinity is nothing, the Word of God is nothing, &c.; I only show that they are not that which the illusions of theology make them,—not foreign, but native mysteries, the mysteries of human nature; I show that religion takes the apparent, the superficial in Nature and humanity, for

* For example, in considering the sacraments, I limit myself to two; for, in the strictest sense (see Luther, t. xvii. p. 558), there are no more.