13th century and the beginning of the 14th, Innocent III., Innocent IV., Boniface VIII., mark the apogee of this era of conquests. The laws of the Church were the laws of the State. The Papacy was the arbiter in the quarrels between sovereigns and their subjects. The unity of Christian society was as complete as one could wish here below.

But success intoxicates, and rivalries rend asunder. And, as though it were written that peoples as well as individuals should, after reaching the summit, aspire to descend, the culminating point of the ascendant power of the Papacy was the starting-point of the revolt of peoples against it. And no wonder. Had not the Holy Ghost foretold, by the mouths of Simeon, that Christ was "set up for the fall and the resurrection of many and for a sign which shall be contradicted"? (Luke ii., 34.)

The Renaissance would have been irreproachable had it confined itself to require, from Latin and Greek antiquity, models of artistic beauty and literary perfection; but with literature and art, pagan morals and the elegant scepticism of ancient society, brought into the Renaissance the leaves of corruption and revolt. Luther, on the plea of "reforming" the Papacy and the Church, broke with both. In lieu of the principles of obedience to authority divinely constituted—the safeguard of Catholic unity—he substituted the principle of "free inquiry," the agent of dislocation and revolution.

The era of decadence set in: follow its stages.

Protestantism, the negation of the divine authority of the Church, pretended nevertheless to maintain the integrity of dogma and unity of belief, under the invisible breath of the Holy Spirit. But, for want of authorised direction and judicial supremacy, doctrinal differences fatally degenerated into irreducible conflicts, to the profit of unbelief and indifference. To-day there is not a single dogma on which all Protetant denominations agree. There is not one professor of theology in the Lutheran universities of Germany that believes in the Divinity of Christ.

Naturalism, in the intellectual order, is more especially called Rationalism. In the moral order it is Independent Morality; in the social order, Liberalism. It is the inheritor of pagan Renaissance and Protestant rebellion. Originally it was not atheistic. Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau paid homage to the Deity: the French Revolution rejected the Supreme Being, and, about the year 1850, Jules Simon, in his *Religion Naturelle*, Victor Cousin, in his work *Du Mal, du Beau, et du Bien*, wrote impressive pages in honor of the God of reason.

But reason, without faith, is short-sighted; the will, without grace, is lame. Human nature, left to its own weakness, slides down the slope of decadence; philosophers, oblivious of the social mission assigned to them by Plato, in the government of public affairs, yielded to the vanity of exalting the originality of their own thought, instead of devoting it to the service of truth. Many mockingly said with Pilate: "What is truth? Does truth exist?"

In the moral, intellectual, family, and social domain we touch, it seems, the extreme limits of the desertion of order. The official constitution of States is atheistic. The ethics of public instruction are morality independent, not only of Christ and His Gospel, but avowedly independent of God. Education is determined to be godless. A word has been forged, "laicisation," to translate (very awkardly indeed) this systematic exclusion of the divine authority from all domains. So the stability of the family is shaken; marriage becomes an association of pleasure or interests; caprice breaks it up just as it made it; paternity and maternity are irksome burdens; the married couple dread the birth of a child, and, if they consent to have *one*, it is an object of vanity or caprice. Hence the awful outbreak of general immorality and blasphemy. Legion are those who, in the novel or the novelette, on the stage, in popular songs in the newspapers, the books, nay, in the most solemn works of philosophy, dream of the absolute emancipation of individual liberty. Hence the immoral talk so prevalent, like current daily coin: "I want to live my life"; "I want to live"; "youth must have its day"; "nature must have its own"; "I must have a good time"—and so forth.

Live your life! That is, grow up a human tree! Spread out. Away with any limitations! Away with the gardener to lop off the greedy branches! To set the stem in a determined direction . . . to guide the sap into splendid fruit!

The tree exists for the tree, and not for its fruit. Man exists for man: neither religion, nor his neighbor, nor goodness, nor society has any right to set barriers to his appetites! Hence the alarming desertion of religious duties: hence the unbridled passion for pleasure, the abuse of the sacred laws of matrimony, the upheavals, of rebellion in the lower strata of society.

Popular good sense used to say: "that can't last." No, that cannot last, and that has not lasted; the arm of the offended Almighty has stricken the world. Man fancied that life was a continuous feast, and organised themselves for enjoyment, respectable, if you like, but still enjoyment. The war has taught them the law of sacrifice: its teaching was stern but invaluable.

In the domain of doctrine we were living, or rather we were dying, of conventions, that is, compromises. Man spoke of religious "opinions"; man refrained, for the sake of others, from affirming their convictions; the atmosphere of good society was composed of a benevolent neutrality, which put domestic truth to silence, let in error alongside of it, and made it as respected as truth. Man went on the high road to practical atheism, not only in private life, but in the home and family.

The great culprit in this universal decadence, the great perverter of nineteenth-century ideas, was the German philosopher, Kant. There are two parts in his philosophy the speculative and the moral. His speculative philosophy ends in this conclusion: the existence of God and the truths resting thereon cannot be demonstrated. Consequently, man, determined to stand on his reason alone, can serenely do so without God. Hence that widespread mentality of the pretended "knowing ones": Religion is good for sentimental souls, for women, for children, for peasants: superior minds, to which they, of course belong, have got above the popular level, and have come to the decided conviction that, if they have not to deny God, they have still less to affirm Him. They wrap themselves up proudly in a systematic abstention, which they confound with a scientific mind, and call "agnosticism."

From this theory of scientific inaccessibility in the religious province proceed the ideas of necessary neutrality, of 'secularisation," of religious effacement, now deeply prevalent in the intellectual movement of societies, even devotion.

The *practical* section of Kantian philosophy vigorously asserts the law of duty: but duty powerless to find in God, banished from our convictions, either its origin or its support, takes its rise in the human subject himself who is conscious of it. Man is self-dependent in the moral order. He is his own lawgiver—himself the ideal, himself the end to which liberty is subordinate. A moral personality finding in itself its own law—that, according to Kant, is the whole of man.

The tempter had said to our first parents: Eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and you shall be as God. Kant says to man: Thy greatness is in thy morality. Of this morality thou thyself art the principle and the end. Thy greatness arises from thyself—thou art God. Behold the triumph of human pride!

Never was carried to this length the cult of self, the pagan exaltation: for paganism is nothing but the exaltation of human nature, the affirmation of its sufficiency and independence.

No doubt this moral beauty of pure disinterestedness is but an ideal, and Kant asks himself whether there ever was on this planet an act of unmixed moral purity; but that is precisely one of the characters of moral conception in vogue to-day, that is, that duty appears to consciences far more an ideal, to which it