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THE ESSENTIAL IN RELIGION.

BY all students of history it has been recognized that in the religious spirit is to be found one of the most potent of the forces which have determined the character and the destiny of nations. Nor is it less evident, on the other hand, that among many of the leading peoples of the world, the sections of society most distinctively intellectual and progressive are largely composed of individuals who have passed beyond the influence of the religious tenets held by their fathers, either adopting toward such religion a directly hostile attitude, or passively ignoring it, because they regard its dogmas as too dubious to be accepted by them as the rule of faith and duty.

One may regard this scepticism of the more cultivated minds in Italy, France, Germany, and England, with distaste or with satisfaction, one may look upon it as an indication of intellectual growth, or as a proof of moral obliquity, but its existence in various forms and degrees it is impossible to deny. It is little wonder if, in view of this fact, the question at times presses upon us, as to what part, if any, religion is to play in the future story of civilization. Is it a force that has nearly spent itself, or that at least is diminishing, and is destined to diminish further, and at last to disappear? Or are its roots so closely interwoven with the deepest instincts and needs of the human soul, that its reign must be as enduring as humanity itself? Or is it possible that religion is a permanent factor in the life of our race, but that it is destined to pass into wholly new forms, and to express itself in