Elijah called the people to the mountain of decision, and we can make clear the moral and spiritual issues that face our people to-day. Elijah built again the altar of Jehovah that was fallen down, and laid the wood in order and the bullock for sacrifice. We too can set the Lord always before us and renew the consecration of our whole lives to Him. We also can wait upon God and pray for the fire from heaven, even as Elijah at the time of the evening sacrifice lifted up his voice and prayed " Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou, Lord, art God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again." Then the fire of the Lord fell.

The Failure of Humanism

THE REV. J. P. THORNTON-DUESBERY, M.A.
Master of St. Peter's Hall, Oxford

THOSE who are about to sit for examinations frequently receive some such counsel as this : " In a certain type of question, before you really begin the discussion, make sure that you have so defined the terms in which the question is set that both you and the examiner will really know what you are talking about. An adequate definition of terms is often the accomplishment of half your task."

To discuss the ' failure of humanism ' is to attempt an answer to a question of precisely this type, and, at least for the clarification of my own mind, if no one else's, it will be well if I begin by practising what I have so often preached to others, namely by attempting some definition of ' Humanism ' from which it will be possible to advance to an examination of the origins and history of Humanism as an intellectual and spiritual force, to probe the nature and causes of its failure, and so, I hope, to prepare in some measure for the lines of constructive action with which as Christian evangelists we are concerned. For ' humanism ' is a protean monster, and it is all-important to decide with which of its changing shapes we are dealing here.

The Oxford English Dictionary provides four such definitions or explanations of the term, and these (or rather the third and fourth of them combined) will come near to giving us what we want, though we may, in passing, slightly regret the fact that ' H ' comes early in the alphabet and consequently that particular volume of the Dictionary is already fairly old. The term has not remained wholly static in the last forty years, and the inclusion of modern instances of its use (since the rise of Barthianism, for example) would have been of real value.

The first Dictionary definition (of ' Humanism ' with a capital ' H ') is " belief in the mere Humanity of Christ." Somewhat fortunately, in the interests of clarity, this use of the term as equivalent to Psilanthropism never became common, and is now obsolete. It is not primarily with Christology but rather with the Christian Doctrine of Man that the explorer of Humanism has to do, though again we may observe in passing that even this obsolete use of the term is not without significance for us. Nestorianism and Pelagianism are justly linked

together in a celebrated epigram and inadequate ideas alike of the Person of Christ and of the nature of Man will always react upon and encourage each other.

Secondly, humanism is described as " the character or quality of being human ; devotion to human interests." This is of no importance for our present purpose. We pass to the third and fourth descriptions, —with which, in combination, we are really concerned. " Humanism," says the O.E.D., " 3. Any system of thought or action which is concerned with merely human interests (as distinguished from divine) . . . the ' Religion of Humanity.' " And again : "4. Devotion to those studies which promote human culture ; literary culture : especially the system of the Humanists. The study of the Roman and Greek classics, which came into vogue at the Renascence." In these extracts we have alike the essential description of humanism as an intellectual force, with which theology must reckon, and a clear indication of its origin and history.

For, reduced to its plainest terms, the ' humanism ' whose failure we are here considering is a system or better (since it is not really systematic) a *mode* or *tendency* of thought to make man and his achievements alike the centre of all interest and the criterion by which to judge both the truth of ideas and the value of material things. It is, in fact, dressed up in garb of modern science, the old sophistic position with which Socrates and Plato had to deal—" man is the measure of all things." " Glory to Man in the highest ! For Man is the master of things."

Socrates and Plato, alike in destructive dialectic and in constructive exposition of the Idea of the Good, gave short shrift to this humanist conception, and it finds no place in the New Testament. The teaching of Jesus Christ, and above all the fact of the Incarnation itself, did indeed give to human personality a wholly new value which Christians in all ages will neglect to their peril. " In my Baptism I was made . . . *the* child of God." " The very hairs of your head are all numbered." But the love and care of Jesus Christ are love and care for *all men*, not for the concept of Universal Man ; not for the abstractions of a " Religion of Humanity," but for each and all of the individual, personal victims of disease and sin whom He met and healed in the hot unhealthy towns of Gennesaret and along the dusty roads of Judæa. It was the utter dependence of a little child which formed the essential qualification for those who would see the Kingdom of God.

Constantly suspected, often outlawed and violently persecuted, the Christians of the first three centuries were not likely to depart far from their sense of human dependence upon God, and neither the influence of Greek philosophy upon Christian doctrine nor that of the conversion of Constantine upon Christian security made any great difference in this respect. In the ensuing Dark Ages, neither the inhabitants of the Empire, harried by barbarian fire and sword, nor the simple primitive barbarians themselves were likely to set up Man as the equal and supplanter of God. It was only as modern Europe began to take shape in the days of the Schoolmen, and Aristotelian influences made themselves felt in Western lands, that the humanist spirit may be said to have been reborn in Christian circles.

Even the Renaissance itself, however, though often and rightly

described as the starting-point of Humanism, was of a very different spirit from the 19th Century. For the spirit of the Renaissance is that of a boy becoming conscious for the first time of his own strength and capacities, and from such a boy we do not expect the mature ripeness of experienced judgment. A certain carelessness, a certain unselfconscious concentration upon self,—these may well be regarded as natural, almost inevitable stages of growth. The right kind of experience, rightly interpreted and used, will soon supply the necessary correction to this youthful exuberance. It is a very different matter when a man of later middle-age displays similar tendencies. What was excusable and even attractive in youth, becomes repellent in later life. There is a whole world of difference between the Humanism of the Renaissance (to which after all, we owe the thought of Erasmus, Colet, and More) and the intellectual climate of Voltaire, the Encyclopaedists, and " the Religion of Humanity." When we speak of " the failure of Humanism " it is of this latter spirit and its 19th century development that we must think.

That " human wisdom has failed " will be generally admitted in this country to-day even by those who are not as yet prepared to put it in St. Paul's theistic form " The world in its wisdom knew not God." But this was by no means the attitude of the 19th century, and it will be well to examine Victorian humanism a good deal more closely, since it is our business as Christians not merely to recognise the failure of Man but to proclaim the victory of God,—and that in such terms that our contemporaries may accept for themselves the freely offered fruits of that Divine Victory and use them, or be used by them, for the re-building of the New World. For this, it is of great value to realise where and why our grandfathers went wrong,—not for the pleasure of crowing over their failures (for we ourselves are no ' wiser ' than they), but in order that we may not merely avoid their mistakes, but see and follow up the constructive lines of action which the study of history may suggest.

The French Revolution and the (largely abortive) revolutionary movements of 1848 were the natural product of the century of ' Enlightenment ' and the Romantic Movement applied experimentally to the political and social structure of Western Europe. The large measure of superficial overlapping between " Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality" on the one hand and the Christian principle of love on the other. obscured the radical differences between the Revolutionary-Romantic and the Christian presuppositions. For the Christian, love of one's neighbour is the fruit of the primary love of God for man and of man for God. Neither the Enlightenment nor the Romantic Movement saw any such necessary connection. 18th Century Deism had prepared the way by the removal of its transcendent God from the immediate arena of ordinary life. The Revolution decided to do without Him altogether. Man was to be the centre of everything, and good neighbourliness would be the fruit of the new enlightened education.

Nor were the apostles of this mode of thought disheartened by their early failures, though we, looking back on the last hundred and fifty years, may perceive much more than mere accident in the fact that " Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity " soon gave place to anarchy and the Terror, followed in equally inevitable sequence by the " whiff

of grapeshot" and the autocracy of Napoleon. Similarly, the revolutionary movement of '48 was soon succeeded in Germany by the rapid expansion of Bismarck's Prussia and in France by the Empire of Napoleon III, whose fall made way only for the uneasy Republic, with its constant rise and fall of Governments from 1871 till its destruction two years ago. There is deep significance in the instability of political structures based only upon Humanist foundations.

The failure of the Revolutionary-Romantic idealism was due to its defective doctrine of Man, to its refusal to recognise those stark and terrible facts which Christian theology expresses in its teaching of Original Sin. This refusal to face the real corruption of human nature exposed the humanistic idealists to a political disintegration from which Germany and France alike were rescued (if rescue it may be called) only at the price of submission to an authoritarian régime. If England has hitherto escaped more lightly, it has been in a large measure due to the strength of the Puritan tradition of the Commonwealth; for, in this country, the men who fought for and won Parliamentary freedom were not "enlightened" agnostics, but sternly righteous Ironsides who took the Bible as well as the sword on their campaigns and whose battle-psalms were the expression of the passionate conviction that they fought a Holy War, not primarily for Man, but for God.

Neither the Weimar Republic nor the France of Clémenceau had learned the lessons of these historical events,—which is why Hitler and Laval rule to-day. It is *the* crucial question of the future whether we have really learned the truth (forced home upon us once more by Warsaw and Rotterdam and Hong Kong) that man (even modern, mechanized man) is not an inherently noble and enlightened being, but a fallen creature; whether thinkers and men of action, in sufficient numbers and with adequate conviction, will turn their self-examination to the passions within themselves and recognise the tiger and the ape still lurking in the forests of the mind; whether the contemplation of Nazi or Japanese brutality will rouse within us not the Pharisaic complacency "Thank God, we are not as others are," but the sober recognition of our own personal and national condition: "It *can* happen *here*! There, but for the grace of God, goes England too!"

The watchword of 19th and early 20th century Humanism was Freedom,—but though the *word* is the same, this humanistic freedom is whole worlds removed from that "perfect freedom" which the Christian finds in the service of God. Economically, it expresses itself in the doctrine of "laissez faire"; internationally, in the principle of national self-determination; intellectually, it claimed complete freedom for thought; morally, it was destined to issue logically in free love! Since the vocabulary of the Christian and the Humanist is so frequently the same, it is necessary at every point to differentiate as sharply as may be between their basic pre-suppositions.

Thus "laissez faire," being fortunately freed from the necessity of considering such details as Original Sin, could give first employer and then employee untrammelled freedom to consider first his own interests, and could even hoodwink itself into the delightful belief that if everyone considered first his own personal profit, that must lead

inevitably to the greatest possible profit for all. We are learning now, and shall learn still more bitterly in the future, how hardly the profit-motive, once established, dies.

Internationally, the unrestricted pursuit of national self-determination has been among the major causes of the present war. It left us, after Versailles, with a Europe already falling into disintegration, with a host of small weak states whose helplessness presented an appalling and overmastering temptation to an aggressor. The organisation of the League of Nations was an attempt both to have the cake and to eat it,—to enjoy national self-determination without paying the price. But the root cause of the failure of the League was its assumption that unchanged, unredeemed human nature would behave in nations according to the pattern of the highest personal virtues of the saints. Since the standards of large bodies of men are almost always lower than those of at least the better individuals composing them, this was in any case a dangerous assumption. Had Christian theologians of adequate experience and insight been consulted, they might well have pointed out that nations, whether small or great, were not likely by some mysterious miracle to escape the virus of that avarice against which even the redeemed individual is called to constant battle.

But here we reach what is for us the most important aspect of the whole question, and one from which, in this historical survey, I may seem to have rambled far. The Christian Church of 1919, even if it had been officially consulted about the Treaty of Versailles, would have been wholly incapable of giving adequate counsel, since it was itself so deeply imbued with the very Humanism against which it must fight. Even the events of 1914-18 had not been sufficient to do more than trouble superficially the placid waters of complacent Gradualism,—indeed some (with what truth I do not propose here to ask) might even say that the pre-occupation with " Life and Liberty " characteristic of the Church's life at the close of the Four Years' War, well-intentioned and idealistic though it unquestionably was, was itself a classic example of the Humanist spirit in action,—the belief that problems can be settled by improved organisation and more adequate knowledge without the radical change wrought by the Eternal Gospel in the human heart.

It is, indeed, long—lamentably long,—since the Church of England was able to speak upon any topic with one clear voice—and this, alike in matters of Faith, of Order, and of Common Morality, is the fruit of the humanist claim to intellectual freedom which in practice (whatever it may say in theory) sets Man up as judge over God, His Word, and His Church.

That there is a sacred duty to protest against error, we as Evangelicals and heirs of the Reformation are solemnly bound to maintain. But it is itself a lamentable error to confuse that sacred duty of protest with the claim that every Christian is wholly ' free ' to decide his beliefs and his practices for himself. And this is the error into which at the floodtide of Victorian progress, the Church unhappily fell, as may be seen both in Ritschlian Christology and the Leben-Jesu movement, and in the breakdown of any pretence at uniformity in public worship. We must not, indeed, be over-harsh in our judgment

upon the failures of that age, even though it is we who are largely reaping their fruits in the moral rot which is visibly attacking society to-day.

In the third quarter of the last century, it was natural enough to suppose that history was really on the march for the millennium,—natural, that is, for anyone who has forgotten (as men did forget) that the new Jerusalem is not attained by any human marching at all, but descends direct from God. We who, with far less excuse, equally ignored the facts of human nature in the easy optimism of 1919, should be the last to *blame* our grandfathers, whose eyes were dazzled by the glories of the Great Exhibition and the glowing dawn of Victorian science.

Facts, however, remain facts, and the trouble is that the Church was so carried away on the swift current of scientific optimism that it lost the greater part of its power to direct the set of national thought. For in that age the old Absolutes of the Word of God had largely disappeared, and their place had been taken by a relativity whose main standard was that of increased material comfort.

Further (and here we as Evangelicals will see one of the most serious features in the whole process), the humanist claim to freedom stretched out its hands to embrace the Bible in its all-absorbing grasp. Here again, we must be on our guard against too easily blaming the first exponents of modern ' criticism.' Whether we accept their more radical conclusions or not, we need not accuse them of irreverence or impiety merely because we happen in greater or less measure to disagree with them. Christians have no cause to fear anything in any genuinely scientific search for truth, and truth itself has certainly nothing to fear from such an enquiry. I am in no way here concerned to discuss either the conclusions or the hypotheses of modern scholars ; but I *am* concerned to suggest that it was a very serious defect in much of the earlier work (a defect still to some extent present to-day) that so many scholars did in fact approach the Bible from the essentially humanist position that *they* sat in judgment upon *it*, not *it* upon *them*. Many of them would no doubt have strongly denied that this was so, and indeed their error was largely unconscious ; but for that very reason it is all the more important for us to expose it ruthlessly to the light. For it is never enough for Christians to diagnose a disease ; our business is with cure ; and if we are to overcome the failure of humanism in the past, it is (I submit) absolutely essential that we should make a clean, conscious break with the humanist approach to the Bible which has insinuated itself into the work of so many scholars even down to the present day.

That does not mean that the work even of the most radical critics must be thrown aside without further ceremony or examination ; much that has been put forward will, I believe, stand the test of such scrutiny ; much more, even if ultimately untenable in its present form, will provide starting-points and stimuli for further study yielding the most valuable fruit. But the essential thing is the *attitude* with which the scholar approaches this task,—whether he will sit in judgment on the Word of God, or It on him. Here, between Christian and Humanist, a great gulf is fixed.

This is of special importance in view of the final point which I wish to make, and which is concerned with the nature of Authority. Ultimately, Humanism spells disintegration. That is inevitable in view of its basic assumption that man (by which the humanist finally means personal predilection) is the measure of all things. We are witnessing the breakdown of humanist economics to-day; 'laissez faire' is dead. We may shed a tear for some of the virtues which it incidentally engendered, but there is universal recognition that in some shape or other a 'planned economy' is essential. We are witnessing, too, the breakdown of the humanist international system; a horde of small sovereign states, walled off from one another by tariff barriers and mutual resentments, is a peril which the world will not again be prepared to tolerate.

But we are witnessing, too, the disintegrating effects of humanism upon the moral and spiritual life of individual and nation alike. Black Markets, juvenile crime, lengthening divorce lists and the like are all the outcome of the relativity in morals which Humanism breeds. They are, of course, enormously aggravated by that other Humanist assumption,—the old Pelagian one,—that each man can be not only the Adam, but also the Redeemer, of his own soul.

As the realisation that Humanism has failed spreads across the world, men are turning desperately to one "super-human" remedy after another. The power of National Socialism and Communism alike rests upon the fact that they do in a sense provide such a "super-human" Authority as disillusioned human nature craves. Having drunk the heady wine of humanist freedom (falsely so called) down to the bitter dregs of unemployment, war, and moral rot, men are searching for some more satisfying draught, and in the mood of reaction they turn to the potion of Authoritarianism. That has happened in Germany; it has happened to some extent in France; it might easily happen here in England. But the authority of the ideologies is as false as the perverted freedom which it replaces. Humanism made Man the Equal of God. Totalitarianism reduces him to the level of a cog in a machine. But men are neither gods nor machines. Weak, fallen, sinful,—they yet have not lost the whole image of God from their nature; by His grace, they are capable of the service which is most free when it is most enslaved to Him. To the failure of Humanism we must bring the victory of God; to the broken-down relativities of humanist morals the Absolute Standard of Jesus Christ: to the hopeless defeat of man's attempt to lift himself by his own efforts above his sin and shame, the Gospel of God's Forgiveness and God's Power,—the Cross, the Resurrection, Pentecost.

But it must be the Gospel preached with Authority,—no secondhand interpretation of the scribes. We are sent as physicians and surgeons to God's people in a day when they are sorely sick; we have to decide once for all, whether they can be lightly healed with good advice, or whether redemption means the drastic cure of a major operation. We are sent to bring tidings in a day of perplexity. We have to decide, once for all, whether the message that we bring is the word of man or the Word of God. Humanism has failed. History will judge whether we Evangelicals of this day of crisis have been able to succeed out of the overflowing of God's action in our own lives.