

time have done, the practical importance of the subject, as is shown by the fact that he turned away from metaphysics and philosophical criticism to economics and historical research.

Equally inconclusive and fragmentary is the contribution which appeared a century later and was also posthumously published, John Stuart Mill's 'Three Essays on Religion' (1874). Both Hume and Mill state clearly the difficulties and objections in the way of upholding existing traditional beliefs. With both the negative portion of the argument forms the most important and stimulating contribution. Neither of them ventures to pronounce against religion altogether, and this not from want of moral courage, but probably from two distinct and honourable motives: first, the respect—nay, even the reverence—which they have for opposite opinions if honestly held; and, second, possibly a lurking suspicion that they have themselves not succeeded in thoroughly grasping and fathoming the problem. Having adduced various arguments, mostly of a negative bearing, they leave their readers to form their own final judgment, if not to remain in a state of doubt, perplexity, and confusion.<sup>1</sup>

54.  
Mill's  
'Three  
Essays.'

<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of arriving at a just view of Mill's own position was much accentuated by the passage with which he concludes his third essay. It is there (p. 255) maintained that "to the conception of the rational sceptic it remains a possibility that Christ actually was what he supposed himself to be . . . a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue"; and,

Mill continues, "the influences of religion on the character which will remain after rational criticism has done its utmost against the evidences of religion, are well worth preserving, and that which they lack in direct strength as compared with those of a firmer belief, is more than compensated by the greater truth and rectitude of the morality they sanction." The fairest comment upon Mill's attitude as revealed in this