

AMERICAN PREFACE.

The effect of the perusal of this book, and the estimate put upon it by a reader, will depend upon his taking with him a right view of its design. That design seems in the mind of the writer to have been very definite and very restricted. If he should be thought to have intended an answer to all the elaborate objections from criticism and philosophy recently or renewedly urged against faith in the Christian revelation, and, still more, if the reader should suppose that the author had aimed to remove all the difficulties in the way of such a faith, he would equally insure his own disappointment, and wrong the writer. The book comes forth anonymously, but it is ascribed to Mr. Henry Rogers, some of whose very able papers in the Edinburgh Review have been republished in two octavo volumes in England, and one of whose articles, that on "Reason and Faith," dealt with some of the topics which form the subject-matter of this volume.

The author seems to have viewed with a keenly attentive and anxious mind the generally unsettled state of opinion, equally among the literary and some of the humbler classes in England, concerning the terms and the sanction of a religious faith, especially as the issue bears upon the contents and the authority of the Bible. That he understands the state of things in which he proposes himself as one who has a word to utter, will be allowed by all candid judges, whatever criticism they may pass upon the effectiveness of his own argument. There is abundant evidence in this book of his large intimacy with the freshest forms of speculation, as developed by the free thought of our age. While he identifies these speculations with the recent writers who have adopted them, he is not to be understood as allowing that these writers have originated any novel speculations, or excelled the sceptics of former times in acuteness, or plausibility, or success in urging their cause. He adopts the method of the Platonic dialogue, and exhibits a dialectic skill in confounding by objections when objections can be made to do service as arguments. His frank admission that he leaves insurmountable objections and unfathomable mysteries still involved in the theme, a portion of whose range alone he traverses, should secure

him from the imputation of having attempted too much, or of boastfulness for what he considers that he has accomplished.

The truculent notice of this book in the Westminster Review for July is wholly unworthy of the reputation and the claims of that journal. Probably a careful perusal of the book is an essential condition for enlightening the mind of the writer, and for rectifying his judgment, so far as information has power to promote candor.

The Prospective Review for August, in an article on the work, for the most part commendatory, though certainly without any warmth of praise, makes the prominent stricture upon it to be, a charge against the author of having evaded "the gravest, and in one sense the only serious difficulty, with which the evidences he supports have to contend." This difficulty is defined to be in the question as to whether our four Gospels are essentially and substantially documents from the pens of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, actual companions and contemporaries of Him whose life and lessons are therein recorded. The Reviewer professes to have satisfied his own mind by an affirmative conclusion on this point. But regarding the question as the very turning-point, the paramount and vital element of the existing issue between faith and unbelief, and not finding it to be dealt with in this volume, the Reviewer considers that it is evaded. It might be urged in reply, that this question is not to other minds of such paramount importance, and that its affirmative answer would not be conclusive, as it would still leave open other questions; such, for instance, as those which enter into the theories of Paulus and other Rationalists, and such as are not even excluded from the incidental adjuncts of Strauss's mythical theory. It might also be urged, that, allowing the question to be paramount in its relation to the whole issue, it is one which is not so judiciously dealt with in the discursiveness of dialogues after dinner, as in the solitary study, with piles of huge tomes, lexicons, and manuscripts that require a most deliberate examination. But to leave the merits and the relative importance of this question undebated, it might have been more generous in the Reviewer to have confined his criticisms to a decision upon what the author has endeavored to accomplish, instead of impugning his judgment in the selection of the points on which to employ his pen. How ever desirable it may be that we should have in another form what Mr. Norton has presented so

thoroughly in his work on the Genuineness of the Gospels, it is enough to answer to the Reviewer in the Prospective, that the writer of this volume addressed himself to a different course of argument, starting from other divergences of opinion, philosophical rather than critical in their relations. He certainly was free to select the method and the direction of his argument, if he candidly represented the answering point of view of those to whom he opposed himself.

Amid many episodes and interludes of fancy and narrative, it will be found that the volume arrays its force of argument against two of the assumptions alike of modern and of ancient scepticism; namely, that a revelation from God to men through the agency of a book is an unreasonable tenet of belief; and that it is impossible that a miracle should occur, and impossible that its occurrence should be authenticated. There is a vigorous and logical power displayed in the discussion of these two points. The discomfiture of those who urge these assumptions does not of course convince all scepticism, or substitute faith for it, but it is something to discomfit such pleas, and to expose the fallacies which confuse the minds of their advocates. The matters of debate are lofty, and there is no levity in their treatment.

ADVERTISEMENT.

He who reads this book only superficially will at once see that it is not all fiction; and he who reads it more than superficially will as easily see that it is not all fact. In what proportions it is composed of either would probably require a very acute critic accurately to determine. As the Editor makes no pretensions to such acumen,—as he can lay claim to only an imperfect knowledge of the principal personage in the volume, and never had any personal acquaintance with the singular youth, some traits of whose character and some glimpses of whose history are here given, —he leaves the above question to the decision of the reader. At the same time, it is of no consequence in the world. The character and purport of the volume are sufficiently disclosed in the parting words of the Journalist. "It aspires," as is justly said, "to none of the appropriate interest either of a novel or a biography." It might have been very properly entitled "Theological Fragments."

March 31, 1852.

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THE LAST EVENING

THE ECLIPSE OF FAITH.

To E. B****, Missionary in — — —, South Pacific.

Wednesday, June 18, 1851.

My Dear Edward:—

You have more than once asked me to send you, in your distant solitude, my impressions respecting the religious distractions in which your native country has been of late years involved. I have refused, partly, because it would take a volume to give you any just notions on the subject; and partly, because I am not quite sure that you would not be happier in ignorance. Think, if you can, of your native land as in this respect what it was when you left it, on your exile of Christian love, some fifteen years ago.

I little thought I should ever have so mournful a motive to depart in some degree from my resolution. I intended to leave you to glean what you could of our religious condition from such publications as might reach you. But I am now constrained to write something about it. My dear brother, you will hear it with a sad heart;—your nephew and mine, our only sister's only child, has, in relation to religion at least, become an absolute sceptic!

I well recollect the tenderness you felt for him, doubly endeared by his own amiable dispositions and the remembrance of her whom in so many points he resembled. What must be mine, who so long stood to the orphan in the relations which his mother's love and my own affection imposed upon me! It is hardly a figure to say I felt for him as for a son. "Ah!" you will say as you glance at your own children, "my bachelor brother cannot understand that even such an affection is still a faint resemblance of parental love."

It may be so. I know that that love is *sui generis*; and as I have often heard from those who are fathers, its depth and purity were never realized till they became such. But neither, perhaps, can you know how nearly such a love as I have felt for Harrington, committed to me in death by one I loved so well,—beloved alike for her sake and for his own,—the object of so much solicitude during his childhood and youth,—I say you can hardly, perhaps, conceive how

near such an affection may approach that of a parent; how closely such a graft upon a childless stock may resemble the incorporate life of father and son.

You remember what hopes we both formed of his youth, from the promise alike of his heart and of his intellect, How fondly we predicted a career of future usefulness to others, and honor and happiness to himself! You know how often I used to compare him, for the silent ease with which he mastered difficult subjects, and the versatility with which he turned his mind to the most opposite pursuits, to the youthful Theaetetus, as described in Plato's dialogue the movements of whose mind Theodorus compares to the "noiseless flow of oil" from the flask.

He was just fourteen and a half when you left England; he is now, therefore, nearly twenty-nine. He left me four years ago, when he was just twenty-five,—about a year after the termination of his college course, which you know was honorable to him, and gratifying to me. He then went to spend a year, or a year and a half, as he supposed, in Germany. His stay (he was not all the time in Germany, however) was prolonged for more than three years. In the letters which I received from him, and which gradually became more rare and more brief, there was (without one symptom of decay of personal affection) a certain air of gradually increasing constraint, in relation to the subject which I knew and felt to be all-important. Alas! my prophetic soul took it aright; this constraint was the faint penumbra of a disastrous eclipse indeed! He was not, as so many profess to be, convinced by any particular book (as that of Strauss, for example) that the history of Christianity is false; nay, he declares that he is not convinced of that even now; he is a genuine sceptic, and is the subject, he says, of invincible doubts. Those doubts have extended at length to the whole field of theology, and are due principally, as he himself has owned, to the spectacle of the interminable controversies which (turn where he would) occupied the mind of Germany. Even when he returned home he does not appear to have finally abandoned the notion of the possibility of constructing some religious system in the place of Christianity;— this, as he affirms, is a later conviction formed upon him by examining the systems of such men as have attempted the solution of the problem. He declares the result wholly unsatisfactory; that, sceptical as he was and

is with regard to the truth of Christianity, he is not even sceptical with regard to these theories; and he declares that if 'the undoubtedly powerful minds which have framed them have so signally failed in removing his doubts, and affording him a rock to stand upon, he cannot prevail upon himself to struggle further.

And so, instead of stopping at any of those miserable road-side inns between Christianity and scepticism, through whose ragged windows all the winds of heaven are blowing, and whose gaudy "signs" assure us there is "good entertainment within for man and beast," — whereas it is only for the latter, — Harrington still travelled on in hopes of finding some better shelter, and now, in the dark night, and a night of tempest too, finds himself on the open heath. To employ his own words, "he could not rest contented with one-sided theories or inconsequential reasonings, and has pursued the argument to its logical termination." He is ill at ease in mind, I hear, and not in robust health; and I am just going to visit him.

I shall have some melancholy scenes with him; I feel that. Do you remember, when we were in Switzerland together, how, as we wound down the Susten and the Grimsel passes, with the perpendicular cliffs some thousand feet above us, and a torrent as many feet below, we used to shudder at the thought of two men, wrestling upon that dizzy verge, and striving to throw each other over! I almost imagine that I am about to engage in such a strife now, with the additional horror that the contest is (as one may say) between father and son. Nay, it is yet more terrible; for in such a contest there, I almost feel as if I could be contented to employ only a passive resistance. But I must here learn to school my heart and mind to an active and desperate conflict. I fear lest I should do more harm than good; and I am sure I shall if I suffer impatience and irascibility to prevail. I shall, perhaps, also hear from those lips which once addressed me only in the accents of respect and kindness, language indicative of that alienation which is the inevitable result of marked dissimilarity of sentiment and character, and which, according to Aristotle's most just description, will often dissolve the truest friendship, at all events, extinguish (just as prolonged absence will) all its vividness. So impossible is it for the full sympathies of the heart to coexist with absolute antipathy of the intellect! Nay, I shall, perhaps, have to listen to the language which I cannot but consider

as "impiety" and "blasphemy," and yet keep my temper. I half feel, however, that I am doing him injustice in much of this; and I will not "judge before the time." It cannot be that he will ever cease to regard me with affection, though, perhaps, no longer with reverence; and I am confident that not even scepticism can chill the natural kindness of his disposition. I am persuaded that, even as a sceptic, he is very different from most sceptics. They cherish doubts; he will be impatient of them. Scepticism is, with them, a welcome guest, and has entered their hearts by an open door; I am sure that it must have stormed his, and entered it by a breach.

"No," my heart whispers, "I shall still find you sincere, Harrington; scorning to take any unfair advantage in argument, and impatient of all sophistry, as I have ever found you. You will be fully aware of the moral significance of the conclusion at which you have arrived, — even that there is no conclusion to be arrived at; and you will be miserable, — as all must be who have your power to comprehend it."

Accept this, my dear brother, as a truer delineation of my wanderer than my first thoughts prompted. But then all this will only make it the more sad to see him. Still it is a duty, and it must be done.

I have not the heart at present to give more than the briefest answers to the queries which you so earnestly put to me. No doubt you were startled to find, from the French papers that reached you from Tahiti, and on no less authority than that of the "Apostolic Letter of the Pope," and Cardinal Wiseman's "Pastoral," that this enlightened country was once more, or was on the eve of becoming, a "satellite" of Rome. Subsequent information, touching the course of the almost unprecedented agitation which England has just passed through, will serve to convince you, either that Pio Nono's supplications to the Virgin and all the English saints, from St. Dunstan downwards, have not been so successful as he flattered himself that they would have been, or that the nation, if it be about to embrace Romanism, has the oddest way of showing it. It has acquired most completely the Jesuitical art of disguising its real feelings; or, as the Anglicans would say, of practising the doctrine of "reserve."

To all appearance the country is more indomitably Protestant than before.

Nor need you alarm yourself—as in truth you seem too much inclined to do—about the machinations and triumphs of the Tractarian party. Their insidious attempts are no doubt a graver evil than the preposterous pretensions of Rome, to which indeed they gave their only chance of success. The evil has been much abated, however by those very assumptions; for it is no longer disguised. Tractarianism is seen to be what many had proclaimed it,—the strict ally of Rome. The hopes it inspired were the causes of the Pope's presumption and of Wiseman's folly; and, by misleading them, it has, to a large extent, undone the projects both of Rome and itself. But even before the recent attempts, its successes were very partial.

The degree to which the infection tainted the clergy was no criterion at all of the sympathy of the people. Too many of the former were easily converted to a system which confirmed all their ecclesiastical prejudices, and favored their sacerdotal pretensions; which endowed every youngster upon whom the bishop laid hands with "preternatural graces," and with the power of working "spiritual miracles." But the people generally were in little danger of being misled by these absurdities; and facts, even before the recent outbreak, ought to have convinced the clergy, that, if they thought proper to go to Rome, their flocks were by no means prepared to follow them. Except among some fashionable folks here and there,—young ladies to whom ennui, susceptible nerves, and a sentimental imagination made any sort of excitement acceptable; who turned their arks of embroidery and painting, and their love of music, to "spiritual" uses, and displayed their piety and their accomplishments at the same time,—except among these, I say, and those amongst the more ignorant of our rural population whom such people influenced, the Anglican movement could not boast of any signal success. In the more densely peopled districts, and amongst the middle classes especially, the failure of the thing was often most ignominious. No sooner were the candles placed upon the "altar" than the congregation began to thin; and by the time the "obsolete" rubrics were all admirably observed, the priest faultlessly arrayed, the service properly intoned, and the entire "spiritual" machine set in motion, the people were apt to desert the sacred edifice altogether.

er. It was a pity, doubtless, that, when such admirable completeness in the ecclesiastical, equipments had been attained, it should be found that the machine would not work; that just when the Church became perfect, it should fail for so insignificant an accident as the want of a congregation. Yet so it often was. The ecclesiastical play was an admirable rehearsal, and nothing more. Not but what there are many priests who would prefer a "full service," and an ample ceremonial in an empty church, to the simple Gospel in a crowded one; like Handel, who consoled himself with the vacant benches at one of his oratorios by saying that "dey made de music sound de ner." And, in truth, if we adopt to the full the "High Church" theory, perhaps it cannot much matter whether the people be present or not; the opus operatum of magic rites and spiritual conjuration may be equally effectual. The Oxford tracts said ten years ago, "Before the Reformation, the Church recognized the seven hours of prayer; however these may have been practically neglected, or hidden in an unknown tongue, there is no estimating what influence this may have had on common people's minds secretly." Surely you must agree that there is no estimating the efficacy of nobody's hearing services which, if heard by any body, would have been in an unknown tongue.

I repeat, that the people of England will never yield to Romanism, — unless, indeed, it shall hereafter be as a reaction from infidelity; just as infidelity is now spreading as a reaction from the attempted restoration of Romanism. That England is not prepared at present is sufficiently shown by the result of the recent agitation. Could it terminate otherwise? Was it possible that England, in the nineteenth century, could be brought to adopt the superstitions of the Middle Age? If she could, she would have deserved to be left to the consequences of her besotted folly. We may say, as Milton said, in his day, to the attempted restoration of superstitions which the Reformers had already cast off; "O, if we freeze at noon, after their easy thaw, let us fear lest the sun for ever hide himself, and turn his orient steps from our ungrateful horizon justly condemned to be eternally benighted." No, it is not from this quarter that England must look for the chief dangers which menace religion, except, indeed, as these dangers are the inevitable, the uniform result of every attempt to revive the obsolete past. The principal peril is from a

subtle unbelief, which, in various forms, is sapping the religion of our people, and which, if not checked, will by and by give the Romish bishops a better title to be called bishops in partibus infidelium than has always been the case. The attempt to make men believe too much naturally provokes them to believe too little; and such has been and will be the recoil from the movement towards Rome. It is only one, however, of the causes of that widely diffused infidelity which is perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon of our day. Other and more potent causes are to be sought in the philosophic tendencies of the age, and especially a sympathy, in very many minds, with the worst features of Continental speculation. "Infidelity!" you will say. "Do you mean such infidelity as that of Collins and Bolingbroke, Chubb and Tindal?" Why, we have plenty of those sorts too, and — worse; but the most charming infidelity of the day, a bastard deism in fact, often assumes a different form, — a form, you will be surprised to hear it, which embodies (as many say) the essence of genuine Christianity! Yes; be it known to you, that when you have ceased to believe all that is specially characteristic of the New Testament, — its history, its miracles, its peculiar doctrine — you may still be a genuine Christian. Christianity is sublimed into an exquisite thing called modern "spiritualism." The amount and quality of "faith" are, indeed, pleasingly diversified when come to examine individual professors thereof; but it always based upon the principle that man is a light to himself; that his oracle is within; so clear either to supersede the necessity — some say even possibility — of all external revelation in any sense of that term; or, when such revelation is in some sense allowed, to constitute man the absolute arbiter how much or how little of it is worthy to be received.

This theory we all perceive, of course, cannot fail to recommend itself by the well-known uniformity and distinctness of man's religious notions and the reasonableness of his religious practices! We all know there has never been any want of a revelation; — of which have doubtless had full proof among the idolatrous barbarians you foolishly went to enlighten and reclaim. I wish, however, you had known it fifteen years ago; I might have had my brother with me still. It is a pity that this internal revelation — the "absolute religion," hidden, as Mr. Theodore Parker felicitously phrases it, in all religions of all ages and nations, so strikingly avouched by the entire

history of world—should render itself suspicious by little discrepancies in its own utterances among those who believe in it. Yet so it is. Compared with the rest of the world, few at the best can be got to believe in the sufficiency of the internal light and the superfluity all external revelation; and yet hardly two of the flock agree. It is the rarest little oracle! Apollo himself might envy its adroitness in the utterance ambiguities. One man says that the doctrine of "future life" is undoubtedly a dictate of the "religious sentiment,"—one of the few universal characteristics of all religion; another declares his "insight" tells him nothing of the matter; one affirms that the supposed chief "intuitions" of the "religious faculty"—belief in the efficacy of prayer, the free will of man, and the immortality of the soul—are at hopeless variance with intellect and logic; others exclaim, and surely not without reason, that this casts upon our faculties the opprobrium of irretrievable contradictions! As for those "spiritualists"—and they are, perhaps, at present the greater part—who profess, in some sense, to pay homage to the New Testament, they are at infinite variance as to how much—whether 7 1/2, 30, or 50 per cent of its records—is to be received. Very few get so far as the last. One man is resolved to be a Christian,—none more so,—only he will reject all the peculiar doctrines and all the supernatural narratives of the New Testament; another declares that miracles are impossible and "incredible, per se"; a third thinks they are neither the one nor the other, though it is true that probably a comparatively small portion of those narrated in the "book" are established by such evidence as to be worthy of credit. Pray use your pleasure in the selection; and the more freely, as a fourth is of opinion that, however true, they are really of little consequence. While many extol in vague terms of admiration the deep "spiritual insight" of the founders of Christianity, they do not trouble themselves to explain how it is that this exquisite illumination left them to concoct that huge mass of legendary follies and mystical doctrines which constitute, according to the modern "spiritualism," the bulk of the records of the New Testament, and by which its authors have managed to mislead the world; nor how we are to avoid regarding them either as superstitious and fanatical fools or artful and designing knaves, if nine tenths, or seven tenths, of what they record is all to be rejected; nor, if it be affirmed that they never did record it, but that somebody else has put these matters into their mouths, how we can be