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FOR

THE YEAR 1838.

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P R E F A C E .

OUR annual Preface is always with us a solemn thing ; it tells of another large portion of human existence passed away ; while it reminds us in our public capacity, as well as our readers and ourselves individually, to take account of our stewardship. The closing of the present volume peculiarly suggests these monitory reminiscences ; for it is the first of a New Series ; and its pages have recorded the decease of almost the only survivors who planned or conducted the earlier volumes. The very first Number mentioned the departure of that venerable servant of his Divine Lord, the late Mr. Babington, one of the projectors of the work, and a frequent and highly valued contributor to its early pages. Shortly after, we had to announce the removal of Mr. Macaulay, its Editor and chief writer from the first volume till the year 1816. The subject has again pressed upon us in reviewing the Life of Mr. Wilberforce ; as where he mentions, March 26, 1802, "Talked in the evening about the Christian Observer ; fixed Macaulay should take management ;—he, Pearson, and Babington with us ;"—Mr. Thornton also, and Mr. Stephen had just been named, with an "et cætera," which may have included Mr. Venn and other early friends of the work.

These recollections suggest three questions : What was the design of the publication ? was that design laudable ? and, has it been consistently kept in mind ?

The design was to endeavour to promote the glory of God and the salvation of men, by setting forth the doctrines, and inculcating the precepts, of the Gospel, as understood and received by the Church of England. General discussions, matters of taste, science, and literature, and a brief memorial of the passing events of the day, were proposed to be kept subordinate to the above leading object, and to be rendered ancillary to it. By the doctrines of the Church of England was understood, generally, those tenets in which the whole family of the orthodox Protestant reformation concur with us, as recognized in our Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy ; and, specifically, those points in which we differ from the Church of Rome, and also those in which we differ from some of our sister Protestant churches ; particularly in our adherence to the Apostolical model of Episcopal government. In regard to differences within our own pale, the conductors declared their firm intention, God being their helper, to uphold, with the Bible in one hand, and the formularies of our Church as an invaluable com-

ment on it in the other, the doctrines set forth by our venerable reformers ; the doctrines contended for by our Cranmers, Latimers, Jewells, and Hookers, as opposed to the innovations of that newer school, whose leaders thought the Anglican Reformation had receded too far from Popery, and who, among many other errors of no small magnitude, embodied that which was indeed the foundation of them all, the denial of the scriptural doctrine of Justification by Faith, as set forth in all the Confessions of Protestantism, and the restoration of which, from the overlayings of Popery, was the glory of the Reformation.

To those who believe that the above is a correct estimate of the doctrines of Scripture and of our Church, no other proof can be necessary that it was desirable to establish a monthly periodical publication which should uphold them, than the simple fact that there was no such publication at that period in existence. The doctrine of justification by works, now set forth chiefly in a stealthy and ambaginous manner, which lands us in that conclusion, though avoiding a direct word-for-word contradiction of the Articles, was then unequivocally avowed in volumes for the rich, and tracts for the poor ; in University discourses, and Visitation charges, and, worst of all, in innumerable parochial sermons ; and if the Christian Observer has done no other good, we believe it will be allowed to have had some share in promoting that return to a more scriptural tone of preaching which Secker, and Horsley, and Porteus declared was necessary to save us from being mere " apes of Epictetus."

With regard to the third question, we are not very solicitous to reply to it, because whatever other faults have been imputed to us it has not been said that we are inconsistent ; indeed the main charge is, that we persist in the same errors with which we set out ; and that in opposing certain modern doctrines we are only refurbishing the weapons with which Wilberforce, Thornton, Pearson, Babington, Richmond, Scott, Newton, Simeon, Milner, Farish, and Hannah More, were contending against the lethal writings of too many divines of the last generation. The New Series, it was expressly stated, originated in no change whatever in the principles or conduct of the work, but was solely for the purpose of introducing it with more convenience among new subscribers.

After writing the above, we took up the first volume of the former series, and laid it side by side with the first of the New. We trust that the comparison is not unfavourable in any respect to our present friends and correspondents ; but of this it were fitter that others should judge than ourselves. But we have been struck with the coincidence of many passages to the circumstances of the present day, and we will quote a few lines from the Prospectus, the first

Number, and the first Preface, as bearing upon some particulars above alluded to. The New Series will thus renew, and pledge itself to, the manifesto of the old.

“ Their chief object,” said the original Prospectus, as set forth by Mr. Wilberforce and his friends, “ will be to promote the increase of sound theological knowledge, and to delineate the characters of primitive and unadulterated Christianity. As members of the Established Church, they will occasionally examine, in a temperate manner, the principles on which that Church is founded; and they will endeavour to explain and enforce the pious tendency of her rites, ceremonies, and liturgy. But in these, and in all other discussions, they will endeavour carefully to avoid whatever may tend to lessen that Christian love which ought to unite the members of Christ of every denomination.” In reference to some of the party appellations which have divided the Church, the originators of the work expressed their wish to lose them altogether “ in the more catholic term of Bible Christians;” and “ to give the right hand of fellowship, as to true believers and true churchmen, so far as these points are concerned, to all who unequivocally, and with the heart, regard salvation as originating wholly in grace, applied through the instrumentality of that faith which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and which brings the believer into a state of acceptance with God, by making him partaker of the merits of Christ, and prepares him for heaven by maturing him in love and obedience.”

The conductors further expressed their opinion that “ a spirit of forbearance and Christian charity, is perfectly consistent with the strictest orthodoxy;” and they “ indulged a sanguine hope that Christians in general would concur in this sentiment;” but they add, in their very first Preface, that “ their expectation had been considerably disappointed.” Calvinists thought them too Arminian, and Arminians too Calvinistic; “ the cold and formal professor of Christianity stigmatizes,” said they, “ our doctrines as canting and methodistical; while the heated enthusiast denies that spirituality or evangelical truth can be found in our pages; some of our correspondents complain of our manifesting too great mildness and conciliation towards Dissenters;” while “ on the other side some Dissenters have charged us with being bigoted persecuting churchmen, and have not only treated us as adversaries of the Dissenting interest, but as the enemies of Christianity itself.” We quote this passage, because Dissenters have of late eulogised the pristine “ mildness and conciliation ” of the Christian Observer; as though it had latterly changed its tone. Even had it done so, there would have been a reason, if not an excuse, in the altered tone of the Dissenters themselves, who were comparatively quiet when our National Church was in a

state of awful supineness, but have increased in bitterness in the very proportion in which, according to their own admission, our Clergy have become more evangelical in their doctrines, and more devoted in their lives. But the fact that we have changed our tone, is not true, as the above extract proves; for the fathers of the present race of Dissenters charged our predecessors quite as strongly with being "bigoted persecuting churchmen," and "the enemies of Christianity itself," as their sons do us; and as the sons say that our predecessors were mild and candid, the next generation may say that we were so too, when the full effects of the modern schemes of certain Dissenting leaders shall have been fully developed in all their baneful results.

We will quote one short passage more from the Preface of 1802, adopting it as the manifesto of that of 1839. "In respect to doctrines," says that Preface, "WE ACKNOWLEDGE NO SUPREME AUTHORITY BUT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES; approving at the same time [most heartily] of that exposition of them which is contained in the Articles, the Liturgy, and the Homilies of the Church of England. *Beyond this we do not engage to submit to any human authority.*"

We have room only for a few lines more, and the passage which we will select is the following, from the View of Public Affairs in the very first Number, in which the reader will recognize the pen of Mr. Wilberforce :

"Let us remember that we have received from our forefathers, as a sacred deposit entrusted to them from above, OUR CHRISTIAN SABBATH; THE SANCTITY OF OUR MARRIAGE VOWS; and all those laws, habits, and institutions by which practical religion and morals have been so long upheld among us, and the domestic and social happiness of millions has been secured; and let us see to it that we guard them from further violation and disparagement, and endeavour rather to transmit them to our children, together with the principles by which they are to be maintained and confirmed, in renovated strength."

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THE
CHRISTIAN OBSERVER.

NEW
SERIES. } No. 10.

OCTOBER.

[1838.

RELIGIOUS & MISCELLANEOUS COMMUNICATIONS.

THE ORIGIN, INSTRUMENT, AND END OF REGENERATION.

(ST. JAMES i. 18, 21.)

For the Christian Observer.

IN the eighteenth verse of the first chapter of St. James's epistle, taken in connection with the twenty-first, which contains a practical exhortation grounded upon it, we have four weighty and important truths.

I. Regeneration is here resolved into the free will of God, as its sole moving cause: "Of His own will begat He us."

II. The instrument by which God operates the regeneration of a soul is declared to be "the word of truth engrafted" in it.

III. The co-operation on the part of man which God requires, and by His preventing grace effects, is this, that he should cease to do evil, and learn to do well—that he should study to cleanse himself from every pollution of flesh and spirit; and diligently wait upon the Lord, with an humble and docile spirit, in the use of the appointed means of grace. Or, to use the Apostle's words, "that he should lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word." And

IV. The end which the Divine mind contemplates in the whole of this process is twofold, the happiness of man—to save man's soul: and the glory of God—that men might be a kind of first fruits of God's creatures; dedicated, as were the first fruits of the typical dispensation, to the glory and praise of God.

I. In the 13th and 14th verses, the Apostle has taught that all sin is the product of man's depraved will and corrupt affections. He here teaches that all holiness is the product of the Divine will, freely moving in the regeneration of the soul. Thus he settles *to faith* the so long and so much disputed question of free will, by shewing that man's will is free to all evil; impotent to any good. Thus he teaches, in opposition to the doctrine which it has been attempted to force from another passage in this same epistle, that salvation is of grace, through faith; and that, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, for that we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Our Lord has declared that unless a man be born again—of the Spirit, he cannot see, or enter into, the kingdom of God:

ON LA PLACE'S ALGEBRAICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST MIRACLES.

To the Editor of the Christian Observer.

IN an article on "Animal Magnetism," in the Dublin Review (a work dedicated to Popery, and which therefore should be narrowly watched,) I find a translation of a passage in the much celebrated work of the infidel La Place upon Probabilities, which, as it contains matter that has been insidiously employed against Christianity, ought not to pass unnoticed, though it has been abundantly refuted in the replies to Hume's well-known arguments upon miracles. I should however state that the writer in the Dublin Review adduces La Place only against himself, without formally adopting the sentiment which is expressed, or making himself to the full extent responsible for it.

La Place maintains, that the more extraordinary the fact attested, the greater the probability of error or falsehood in the attestor. Simple good sense, he says, suggests this; and the calculation of probabilities confirms its suggestion. There are some things, he adds, so extraordinary, that nothing can balance their improbability.

The position here laid down is, that "the probability of error, or of the falshood of testimony, becomes *in proportion* greater, as the fact which is attested is more extraordinary." Hence, assuming this to be true, as a fact becomes extraordinary in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, &c., or *n*th degree, so it becomes improbable in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or *n*th or highest possible degree. Or, in other words, it becomes so extraordinary that nothing can counterbalance its improbabilities. Now all this would amount to a mathematical demonstration, if you could only shew that the position assumed to be true is an undisputed axiom; namely, that as a fact is extraordinary it becomes improbable, in short that they are as two variable quantities, which vary in a direct ratio to one another. It shall be my endeavour to shew that they do not vary in this manner; that the improbability of a fact depends on other things, not on its being extraordinary; that a very ordinary fact may be very improbable under certain circumstances, and in the same manner a very extraordinary fact may be very probable. Before we judge an extraordinary fact to be improbable, we should consider whether the *circumstances of the case* render it improbable or otherwise. The circumstances of the case may be such as to render it extremely *probable* that something very extraordinary should arise out of them. Great things beget their like, and extraordinary agencies produce extraordinary effects. It falls out contrary to our expectation when it is otherwise:

"Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus."

If, on the contrary, the circumstances, or acting causes, be of a very ordinary and insufficient kind, or of an extremely doubtful kind, such as the system of jugglery and deceit practised by magnetizers, it is very improbable that the extraordinary effects that are said to arise, should be true; and the whole thing should be submitted to the test of competent examiners. The plausible sophistry of La Place has been made much use of to discredit the truth of miracles, and of that Divine religion which is attested by them. Hume goes so far as to say, that a miracle, or a suspension of the laws of nature, is so extra-

ordinary, that no amount of testimony can establish its credibility. In truth, nothing can be more extraordinary than a miracle, except it be a thing inconsistent with nature, and therefore impossible, or, in other words, contradictory to itself. That the human trunk, which has no visual organs, should be able to see, is a plain contradiction. But miracles which do not involve any contradiction are certainly the most extraordinary things that can happen, leaving out of the question the probability or improbability of their having actually been performed.

Now let us examine the circumstances connected with the performance of miracles. They are said to be performed in the attestation of a religion, which, upon the strictest inquiry into it, is found to be in every way most excellent, and worthy of Him who is declared to be its Author, God. Now how could a revelation be proved to have come from God, but by miracles? Paley goes so far as to say, in the introduction to his *Evidences of the Christian Religion*, that he cannot conceive any other way, in which a Divine religion can be attested, than by miracles. We have at least good reason to consider it in *the very highest degree probable* that a Divine religion would be attested in *this most extraordinary manner*: and in point of fact that religion, which may with the justest reason be considered a Divine revelation, from its inherent excellencies and holiness, is declared to have been so attested through the whole course of its development, from the beginning of the world to the appearance of Jesus Christ; and the Bible, which contains the history of that religion through all those ages, is throughout a book of wonders.

We have no reason, however, to discredit the account of these wonders because they are so extraordinary; but, on the contrary, we have reason to consider it *highly probable* that God would accompany a revelation coming from himself with miracles: and when we come to examine the Christian religion, we find it to be so holy, so just, and so good; and the Teacher of it concentrating in himself every thing that is excellent and glorious; and withal so full of grace and truth, that we are constrained to think that this holy religion, and He who taught it, must have come from God: we then are no longer astonished that God should confirm his word with signs from heaven, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost.

It may be said, that a religion which is so holy that it *proves itself* to be from God, needs not the aid of miracles. In some respects it does not; for "miracles are for a sign, not to them that believe but to them that believe not." The aid of miracles is required, in order to call the attention of those who do not believe, or whose faith is weak, to that religion in attestation of which they are wrought. An extraordinary fact, if well supported by good and credible witnesses—if it be a fact which in any way concerns our welfare—should lead us to examine the circumstances attending it; and so a well-attested miracle should lead the careless to think, and examine the religion which it bears testimony to. This was the effect it had in our Saviour's days upon many who saw them; they immediately began to think not so much of the miracles as of him who wrought them; how holy and how Divine He must be, and how true and excellent that doctrine must be which he taught. When he rebuked the winds and the sea, they were astonished, and said, "What manner of man is this?" When, at his command, they let down the net, and enclosed

a great number of fishes, so that their nets broke, Simon Peter was overpowered at the thought of the holiness of Him who wrought the miracle, and, by comparison, at the thought of his own sinfulness; and he fell down at Jesu's feet, and said, "depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." When Jesus was *teaching* at Capernaum, there was a man which had an unclean spirit; which when Jesus had rebuked, and had commanded to come out of him, they were all amazed, and said, "What thing is this, what *new doctrine* is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him." On others his miracles had not this good effect of calling their attention to him and his doctrine; for which reason he rebuked the Pharisees, and said, "If ye believe me not, yet believe me for the work's sake: the works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." Miracles, so far from being incredible, are for the most part, if not *always*, of such a palpable nature, that there is no mistaking them; and were intended to be so, in order that they might be an *evident* sign and witness to the truth of religion, which could not be so clearly attested in any other way.

It has been said, that the probability of error, or of the falsehood of testimony, becomes greater in proportion as the fact which is attested is extraordinary. Now let us examine any one of the extraordinary facts spoken of in the Bible, as to whether any error or falsehood of testimony is *at all* probable, and we shall see the fallacy of this assumption. First, as to the probability of error. One of the extraordinary facts is related as follows, in Matt. viii. 24: "And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; and his disciples came to him, and awoke him, and said, Lord, save us, we perish: and he said unto them, why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith: then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." Now what possible supposition of error or mistake can be imagined in any one of the circumstances attending this miracle? Is it possible for any individual, who is sailing in a vessel, to doubt whether he sees a great storm, and the waves beating over the ship; or, on another occasion, when there is a perfect calm, to have any doubt about it whether his eyes deceive him? Both these are ordinary events at sea, and palpable to the senses: and yet the astonishing fact that at the voice of a man, apparently like ourselves, the raging of the tempest should immediately cease, and there should be a great calm, is equally palpable to the senses: *nor is there one tittle more probability of error* in the one case than in the other. The same may be affirmed of every other miracle said to have been performed. They who witnessed them could not be mistaken as to whether they were true or not.

As to the probability of their giving a designedly false account of what they saw, we cannot entertain the notion, when we consider the faithful and upright character of the witnesses. When John sent two of his disciples to Jesus, saying, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" he wished to have his faith confirmed by the testimony of Jesus himself to the truth, that he was the Messiah that should come: he rested his faith entirely upon that testimony, never for a moment doubting that two of his disciples, whose character for integrity he well knew, would faithfully report the answer of Jesus; nevertheless the answer they returned was of the *most extraordinary* kind. When Jesus said to them, "Go and shew John again what

things ye do see and hear : the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up, the poor have the Gospel preached unto them, and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." The relation of these astonishing wonders, combined with the holy and merciful character of Jesus as the preacher of the Gospel to the poor, fully confirmed his faith in Jesus : while, at the same time, we may be sure that not even the thought passed in his mind, that the disciples who brought back this report could have fallen into an error, much less have been guilty of a falsehood. These two honest faithful witnesses were as his two eyes and his two ears, by whose testimony he was now fully assured that Jesus was he that should come ; the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Even so let us believe. Amen.

C. E. P.

* * * There is an able reply to Hume's argument in Dr. Chalmers's *Evidences of Christianity*, lately reprinted in the third volume of his collected works. It contains some points not included in the reasonings of Campbell, Paley, &c. Mr. Babbage also, in what he calls *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, has adduced some very striking mathematical arguments to demonstrate that testimony is adequate to the proof of miracles ; and that the largest induction which can be made, is not sufficient to shew that a deviation from what are considered the laws of nature may not take place, as in the case of the scriptural miracles of raising the dead to life, however improbable such an event antecedently appeared.



ON THE CREDULITY OF SOME RELIGIOUS PERSONS.

To the Editor of the Christian Observer.

THE credulity, as to supernatural interferences with the laws of nature, which occasionally appears in religious persons, is a fertile subject of ridicule to the scoffer, and a source of painful embarrassment and trial to reflecting persons, friendly to religion. The temptation to deny or evade the fact, presses heavily on this latter class ; and like all temptations affecting large bodies of men, very frequently prevails. But, as in temporal matters, so also, and much more emphatically, as regards higher interests, "Honesty is the best policy." It is far better, and more Christian, to admit the whole truth, and then obviate the resulting difficulty, or even leave it unexplained, than to "speak deceitfully for God," and shelter ourselves from our perplexities behind some "refuge of lies," built upon the sand, and sure to fall when the flood shall come, and the storm beat upon it.

The following observations, while they admit that religious feeling may, in particular instances, indirectly foster one species of credulity, are intended to shew that no argument can be drawn from this circumstance, unfavourable to the claims of religion.

A knowledge of the most common phenomena of the material world, is the very first result of experience, and precedes, by a considerable interval, the conception of an intelligent Creator and Governor. This is doubtless one reason why these phenomena strike the mind simply as facts, instead of raising it to the contemplation of the Intelligence from whose will they must be supposed to proceed. Another springs indirectly out of the harmony and permanence of natural laws, and the uniform operation of similar causes. Not that this, which is

indeed the highest evidence of wisdom, would of itself tell unfavourably even on the imagination; for it would be quite as natural to refer irregular occurrences to blind chance, as to see in uniformity and order the mere result of necessity. But the vacillation, inconsistency, and contradictions which characterize the results of volition as exhibited amongst mankind, become almost incorporated with our idea of that attribute, and lead us to overlook the evidence of its existence where these concomitant imperfections are wanting; the effect of these causes, concurring with others which must be sought in the moral condition of our species, is to render the ordinary conception of deity so vague and unreal, as to amount to little more than a poetical personification of the laws of the material universe. This state of mind is undoubtedly unlikely to lead men to expect a suspension of those laws; but it tends directly to atheism, and those who are completely under its influence are virtually *αθεοι εν κοσμω*, "without God in the world."

Now if these feelings, in any particular case, be replaced by a distinct impression of the personality and active agency of the Deity, the causes we have been considering will act in an opposite direction. The laws of nature will lose something of their apparent stability, when resolved into acts of volition; since these, in our ordinary experience, are subject to continual change from caprice, enlarged knowledge, or altered circumstances. This relaxation in our views is even reasonable, so far as concerns the admission of moral analogies as elements in our calculations respecting the immutability of physical laws, (an important principle, and fatal to Hume's argument against miracles); but it may easily be carried to an excess which implies a forgetfulness of the plainest dictates of experience, and a disregard of *all* analogy, moral as well as physical. This error is preferable to the former, because it implies a distinct persuasion of the personality of the Deity, and may co-exist with just apprehensions and feelings, respecting his moral attributes; or, in other words, with genuine religion. But as it involves no particular views respecting this latter subject, it may also be found amongst persons whose opinions are so fundamentally erroneous as to make them, in effect, worshippers of a false and imaginary Divinity. Neither Deism, commonly so called, Manicheism, nor even Polytheism, is exempt; except so far as the virtual Atheism of most Deists may operate as a preservative. It will spring up as a casual weed wherever a belief is entertained of the existence of a Being, good or evil, superintending human affairs, and controlling the material universe. Hence, it is found occasionally in most sections of the Christian church, though least frequently in those whose coldness repels or chills the zealous and warm-hearted. It may, perhaps, be expected to thrive best in the neighbourhood of Antinomianism; for he who has persuaded himself that the moral government of God is suspended in his favour, may reasonably hope for an exemption from the consequences of physical laws. Even scriptural views respecting special grace, may by some weak minds be thus perverted; but in no case can an argument be drawn for the falsehood of a doctrine, from circumstances which might be expected to attend its reception, even on the supposition of its truth.