

The Coming Day.

JULY, 1895.

THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF ROBERT BURNS.

THE publication of a little book, by Robert Burns' father, has suggested the desirability of bringing together and putting into form the evidence relating to the religious beliefs of the poet. Those beliefs are well known to every reader of his letters edited by Robert Chambers, but we are not aware that any attempt has been made to bring into a focus the rays of light that beam fitfully and sometimes startlingly about them.

The book by Wm. Burnes, father of the poet is, in itself, of little or no value except as furnishing us with a rather suggestive starting-point in our inquiry respecting the beliefs of his son. It consists of a very brief, very simple, and, for his day, a very sensible attempt to find a middle way between Calvinism and humanity, orthodoxy and reasonableness. The attempt is not quite successful, but it is interesting in so far as it gives us a glimpse of a good and thoughtful man trying to hammer out his own creed with his hands tied by the creed of other people, in so far also as it shews us how the application of a little reason and humanity in the father can be developed into free thought and heresy in the son.

The little book is called 'A manual of religious belief, composed by William Burnes, for the instruction of his children.' It was mentioned by Dr. Currie in his life of Burns published in the year 1800, four years after the poet's death. 'There is in Gilbert's hands,' he says, 'A little manual of religious belief in the form of a dialogue between a father and his son, composed by him for the use of his children, in which the benevolence of his heart seems to have led him to soften the rigid Calvinism of the Scottish Church into something approaching to Arminianism.' The MS. is in the handwriting of John Murdoch, a young teacher, who, at the age of 18, taught Robert and Gilbert Burns and the children of four neighbours. Of the father, this Murdoch says: 'I myself have always considered Wm. Burnes as by far the best of the human race that I ever had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with.' Gilbert, his son, also speaks in a similar manner, specially referring to his touching efforts to improve the minds of his children. 'He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us

as if we had been men,' he says, 'and was at great pains, while we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge or confirm us in virtuous habits.'

It was the most natural thing in the world that such a father, living in such times, should do his best to give his children the ideas of religion that commended themselves to him, especially when, as is evident, he did not feel satisfied with the Shorter Catechism which was the only manual then generally available for the young. That catechism he was thoroughly out of sympathy with; and a spirit quite foreign to it, and infinitely higher in every way, pervades the little manual he offered to his children in its stead.

Reading this manual now, a rational believer might fling it aside as too orthodox for modern tastes, but its departure from the old standards can only be perceived by comparing it with them. In fact, Wm. Burnes' manual is 'advanced' as much for its omissions as its assertions. The former are most marked, the latter most mild. The Shorter Catechism, the Church's manual, asserts that there are three persons in one God, and buttresses it up with a text that everybody now knows to be an impudent forgery. Wm. Burnes' manual knows nothing either of the dogma or the text. The Shorter Catechism insists on election and reprobation, the wrath and curse of God, and the pains of hell for ever. Not a word about these barbaric dogmas can be found in the handbook of Wm. Burnes. In their stead we find much made of God's love, and of our duty 'to serve Him out of love': 'for,' says this good man, 'His perfections give us delightful prospects of His favour and friendship, for if we serve Him out of love, we will endeavour to be like Him, and God will love His own image; and if God love us, He will rejoice over us to do us good.' Here the whole hope of the soul is found in that best and blessedest ground of trust—God's 'perfections,' and here also the whole duty of man is comprehended in the serving God out of love. The ugly evil spirits of the Shorter Catechism are all away. It is true that we find in this manual a quaint, old-fashioned reference to revelation, the devil, miracles, prophecy, and an atonement, but they are references of a very mild or vague kind, and sound more like the echoes of the old formal formulas than the first notes of the new faith: and besides, how was Wm. Burnes to know that his minister was only repeating an old lesson he had learnt by rote, having received it only 'by tradition from the fathers'? how could he leap unaided to the conclusion that the old system of theology was based upon a series of assumptions, and that the whole scheme was elaborated only out of human speculations? It is sufficiently striking that, in reply to the question, 'Am I bound to obey all the laws delivered to Moses upon Mount Sinai?' he could flatly say 'No,' and could go on to explain that though 'the moral law' was 'of eternal and indispensable obligation on all ages and nations; laws,' on the other hand,

'that respected the Jewish commonwealth can neither be binding on us, who are not of that commonwealth, nor on the Jews, because their commonwealth is at an end.' It is still more striking that, in discussing the inability of man to perfectly keep the moral law, and of his consequent doubt whether God can justify and accept him, Wm. Burnes significantly says nothing about atoning blood and imputed righteousness, but quietly says, 'It is the glory of the Christian religion that if we be upright in our endeavours to follow it, and sincere in our repentance, upon our failing or shortcoming, we shall be accepted according to what we have, and shall increase in our strength, by the assistance of the Spirit of God co-operating with our honest endeavours.' It is true that 'the Spirit of God' is said to be 'the purchase of Christ's mediatorial office,' and that 'faith' is said to be 'a firm persuasion of the divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ,' but this is more in the manner of the old Unitarians than of the old Calvinists, there being a vast difference between the 'mediatorial office' of a being who procures for us the helpful Spirit of God, and the 'mediatorial office' of a being who suffers agony in the sinner's stead, and acts as a substitute both as a victim and a worker out of righteousness. Calvinism says: We cannot keep the moral law, and, if we are not saved by Christ's blood and merit, we shall be hopelessly lost. Nay, says Wm. Burnes, 'we shall be accepted according to what we have,' much or little, and much will go for much, and little will go for little, but not for nothing, and if we seek God we shall be aided by His good Spirit:—a far more humane, reasonable, and religious view.

As for the phrase, 'the divine mission' of Christ, it is well known that the older Unitarians used it. A person may have a divine mission, and yet be only a man, and, respecting Christ, as Wm. Burnes immediately points out, he is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, and complete redemption,'—God, that is to say, makes him that to us. And what, according to Wm. Burnes, was his 'mission'? He tells us. 'He is represented to us under the nature of a root, and we the branches, deriving all from him; or as the head, and we the members of the body, intimating to us that this is the way or channel through which God conveys His blessings to us.' He calls that 'God's plan of our salvation,' but that is not Calvinism; it is rational Christianity, the difference being that Calvinism presents Christ as a saviour by presenting him as an endurer of penalty or a worker out of a righteousness to be imputed to us, while rational Christianity presents him as a saviour, in the very way described by Wm. Burnes, as 'the channel through which God conveys His blessings to us,' the 'great blessing,' as Wm. Burnes calls it, being the gift of God's helpful spirit, to enable us to serve and please Him. The longest, most original, and most emphatic passages in the book relate to this same practical and moral result of the influence of Christ over us, in enabling us to set the rational above the animal;—a purely rationalistic view of the mission of Christ,

'More than a century has passed away,' says the writer of the preface to this book, 'since the words were written down with child-like affection, and in circumstances of obscurity and extreme frugality, when the battle of life was a mere struggle for existence. . . . The manual is curious for its quaint phraseology and the mould of fashion adopted at that time in similar compilations, and is still more rare as a glimpse of that speculative theology in which the father took such delight.' 'We are not concerned to know,' says this writer, 'how far it comes up to the standard of popular belief taught a hundred years ago, or whether it is better adapted to the thought of a later period; at best, all systems of theology are but "broken lights," and in this spirit,' says this writer, 'we offer our memorial, trusting that the thoughts which William Burnes, in the devotion of his heart, compiled for his children's instruction, cannot be otherwise than acceptable as a record in the family history.'

That last phrase brings me now to what I have already indicated is the chief interest of this manual for us,—the relation of it to the poet's after developments of belief. Robert himself, in writing for Dr. Moore an account of his early life, drew attention to the large influence of his father upon him, and did so in words that seem to reveal the secret of not a little of his own volcanic life. He said of his father, 'I have met with few who understood men, their manners and their ways, equal to him: but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances.' Who shall say how far this combination, in his father, of insight, stubborn integrity, headlong, ungovernable irascibility, and the possibility of a 'manual of religious belief,' added to a fiery forceful genius in himself, must be made responsible for the strange aberrations of his wild and wayward life?

It is curious, for instance, to remember this description of his father, as we read such a sentence as that we find in a letter of Robert's to Mr. Wm. Nicol:—'I have bought a pocket Milton, which I carry perpetually about with me in order to study the sentiments, the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid, unyielding independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship in that great personage, Satan.' A sentence like that reveals, we may be sure, one of the dominant characteristics of the man.

In considering Robert Burns, however, as an advanced religious thinker, we must discharge the melancholy duty of saying that we have no great faith in his ever having been a patient and careful religious thinker at all. He was a man of moods and emotions, sentiments and passions, and religion only took its turn with other objects that claimed a share of his passions or his imagination. In one of his letters to Mr. Robert Muir, there is a rather comical phrase, anent a friend in whom he takes an interest. 'I hope,' he says, 'he is going on and prospering with God and Miss M'Causlin.' That phrase was only too descriptive of Burns himself: he was always 'prospering

with God and Miss M'Causlin,' and varied from grave to gay, from penitence to folly, with astounding speed. What he himself said of his 'Epistle to a young friend,' he might have said of every day of his life, nay! of every hour of his life :—

Perhaps it may turn out a sang,
Perhaps turn out a sermon.

Nay! the sang and the sermon often shouldered one another in a somewhat ugly manner. In a letter to Sir John Whiteford, he says, 'I am, I acknowledge, too frequently the sport of whim, caprice, and passion.' In one of his most intensely religious letters, he confesses, 'I am just risen from a two hours' bout after supper.' In another letter he talks of having fought his way through Paisley and Kilmarnock 'against those old powerful foes of mine,' as he calls them truly, 'the devil, the world, and the flesh,' 'so terrible,' he adds, 'in the fields of dissipation.' In one letter, recalling these three foes and their evil work, he says, 'God knows I am no saint—I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for—but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes.' That is so like the man,—the good, the gracious, and the earnest in him felt and known in spite of all. It is easy to cry, 'hypocrite, hypocrite,' but we must find some other word for Burns. It is a difficult problem, when we find him writing to Clarinda about religion on Monday morning, and on Monday evening drinking himself into a miserable Tuesday, only again to come back to Clarinda and religion on Wednesday. But think of his youth, his eager temperament, his intense passions, his ardent affections, his need of human sympathy, his passionate revolt against the only accredited theology of his day. He, with his swift, keen nature, could pass into different or even antagonistic moods with a rapidity impossible to ordinary men: so that which in others would prove hypocrisy only revealed the fearful speed at which he lived.

Having drawn attention, however, to this drawback—and a serious drawback it is—we are prepared to maintain that in Robert Burns there was a genuine religious vein, and that he fought a not altogether ignoble battle against cruel odds. When he died, says Robert Chambers, 'many offended conventionalities brooded and whispered over his grave,' but he was one 'whose brief life was one long hardship, relieved by little besides an ungainful excitement, who, during this singularly hapless career, did, on the whole, well maintain the grand battle of will against circumstances, who, strange to say, in the midst of his own poverty, conferred an inestimable and imperishable gift upon mankind.'

There are passages in his letters which indicate the most profound sense of the importance and value of religion. 'Oh, thou great unknown power,' he exclaims, 'Thou Almighty God, who hast lighted up reason in my breast, and blest me with immortality! I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of thy works, yet thou hast never left

me nor forsaken me.' To Mrs. Dunlop he said, in one of his letters, 'Religion has not only been all my life my chief dependence, but my dearest enjoyment.' 'An irreligious poet is a monster;' and, in that noble poem, entitled, 'Epistle to a young friend,' he has these glorious lines:—

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip,
To haud the wretch in order;
But, where ye feel your honour grip,
Let that be aye your border.
Its slightest touches, instant pause—
Debar a' side pretences,
And resolutely keep its laws,
Uncaring consequences.

The great Creator to revere,
Must sure become the creature;
But still the preaching cant forbear,
And even the rigid feature:

Yet ne'er with wits profane to range
Be complaisance extended,
An atheist's laugh's a poor exchange
For Deity offended.

When ranting round in pleasure's ring,
Religion may be blinded;
Or, if she give a random sting,
It may be little minded;
But, when on life we're tempest-driven,
A conscience but a canker,
A correspondence fixed with Heaven
Is sure a noble anchor.

These elevated lines bring us now to the second and important half of our undertaking, which is to gather together the evidence that Robert Burns was, in many ways, an 'advanced religious thinker.' That evidence will prove he went a long way beyond his Father's 'Manual of religious belief.' We shall, in fact, see him pushing on to the position of modern rationalists, with not a particle of the old barbaric divinity left.

(To be Concluded next Month).

FORCED INTO DISSENT.

(Concluded from last Month.)

I TURN to the great written standards of the church in order to find the barrier which must exclude those who are in sympathy with the true spirit of Nonconformity as I have all along defined it: for the Book of Common Prayer, honestly read and honestly construed, is itself the standing reason for Nonconformity. It is full of survivals, and especially of survivals of the old priestly mind and temper which, ever since the days of Micah, made the prophet and dissent a necessity.

And now, in turning to these documents, I shall at least pay them the compliment of taking it for granted that they mean what they say. The Prayer Book is quite simple and clear in its language, and can hardly be misunderstood.

Let us, then, begin with it where it would fain begin with us,—at 'The order of Baptism.' Here the first thing that strikes us is the hurry that is enjoined upon parents and clergymen: the baptism is not to be deferred

beyond the first or second Sunday after the birth. The reason for this haste appears in the service, from which we gather that it is by baptism the child is made an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, a baleful superstition which is a pernicious thing for anyone to believe: and yet, if it is believed, I know not why there should be even the trifling delay allowed by the Prayer Book; for, if it is as they say, it seems to me that the priest should, from the first, stand by the bedside with the doctor.

The opening words of the service state the reason for the hurry. The child, it is said, has been 'conceived and born in sin,' hence the need of what is going to be done; and what is going to be done is this,—the child, it is said, is going to be made 'regenerate,' and to be 'grafted into the body of Christ's Church.' The first words uttered by the priest go on to say that 'none can enter into the kingdom of God' except in this way,—by regeneration and by water, both of which he proceeds to impart. We prefer to believe that children are *not* born sinners, that it is not a little unclean imp that you have in your cradle, that God loves your child, priest or no priest, water or no water, and that it is only man's poor blind superstition that deems the priest can open to the child the love of God or the gate of heaven.

The priest goes on to pray that the child may be delivered from God's 'wrath'—a perfectly horrible prayer; and monstrous when we remember how Jesus blest children and said 'of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

The whole theory of substitution, represented by the godfathers and godmothers, appears to be an absolute unreality. Their promises are very great, but they usually end in nothing more than the presentation of a little silver mug. But that is not the worst. They actually are made to act a part, and to speak as though the child were speaking. 'Wilt thou be baptised in this faith?' asks the minister. 'That is my desire' is the reply:—'*my*' desire; that is the child's desire, for it is the child who is to be baptised: and the answerers have to actually speak for it, and say 'my desire,' as though the child were speaking. They promise on behalf of the child, that it will 'renounce the devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy word, and obediently keep His commandments;' but they must know that they have no power to really promise anything of the kind; the utmost they can do is to hope, and then educate: but they solemnly *vow*, and in millions of cases vow only to forget. Then, after the act of baptism, the awful words are uttered (in my judgment, as presumptuous as they are untrue), that the child is now safely 'regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church.' The odious note at the end of the service clinches the doctrine of the service itself; for it says 'children which are baptised, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved;' the inference, of course, being that children dying *unbaptised*, are as undoubtedly lost—or are in peril, a frightful superstition which, for generations and to our own day, has been illustrated in the logical

but brutal refusal to properly bury an unbaptised child. 'Father forgive them; they know not what they do!'

Let us follow the child onward. Presently he is taught the catechism in this Book. Let us examine it. That catechism repeats and enforces the falsehood of the baptismal service. In my baptism, says the pupil, 'I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.' 'In my baptism!' But I do not wonder at the survival of this superstition. The power it gives to the Church is unspeakable; the authority it gives to the priest is too precious to be lost. Once get the people to believe it,—that this man can actually turn a little original sinner into 'a member of Christ,' a 'child of God,' and 'an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,' and who would not resort to him, and almost adore him, and count his Church to be the very ark of the Lord?

Among other serious statements, the candidate for confirmation is made to say that his godfathers and godmothers promised that he would 'believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith,'—according, of course, to the State Church. But what a shocking thing to do, in view of personal responsibility! and how often, when years of discretion are arrived at, the very opposite course is taken! But the priest asks, 'Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe and to do as they have promised for thee?' and the answer set down is 'Yes, verily.' But I say, *No, assuredly*; for no one is bound to believe as somebody else promised he would. The whole scheme is an outrage upon personal responsibility and the rights of conscience, besides being injurious to those who make promises they have no means of keeping.

Confirmation is followed by Communion; and here again the priest is the central figure, with his magical power. There is, indeed, not a little that is impressive and good in the service, but what are we to think of the statement that a wrong taking of the sacrament may be followed by the devil entering into the unworthy communicant, and bringing him to destruction of body and soul? or what of the advice that any one troubled in conscience should go to the priest to 'receive the benefit of absolution'? or what of the warning that if any withdraw from the sacrament they will 'provoke God's indignation against' themselves? or what of the assertion that if any receive the sacrament unworthily, they are 'guilty of the body and blood of Christ,' and 'eat and drink damnation,' and 'kindle God's wrath against' themselves, and 'provoke Him to plague' them 'with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death'? There is too much of this kind of thing in the service; and the whole is consummated by the supreme act of the priest's administering that which is said to result in the veritable life of the soul. Here, again, then, our nonconformity is forced upon us, as those who desire something more simple, rational, natural, and true.

Let us still follow this young person ; and trace his career in the Church which fails not to meet him at every great crisis in his life. Here at length is 'The form of solemnization of matrimony.' Among a variety of statements, some of which are not decent, and others of which are not true, I find an ugly survival of the old barbarism that woman is property, to be conveyed. 'Here it is called *given away*. I find also the absurd untruth that the bridegroom endows his wife with all his worldly goods,—a cruel jest, the very reverse of which was true, until lately ; the property of the wife passing by marriage to the husband ! The whole service has an unpleasant air about it, and, though very many wholesome things are said in it, I cannot understand how any sensitive, reflecting woman can submit to it, now that nonconformity has provided a way of escape.

A time of sickness comes : and here an ' order ' for the priest's ' visitation ' is provided, the chief feature of which is the assertion once more of the power of the priest, who says plainly, ' Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences : And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' We utterly repudiate this dangerous claim, and think that if only for the sake of shaking ourselves free from it, nonconformity is a duty : for who or what is this state-appointed officer, that he should assume such tremendous functions as the very absolution of the sinner ? But this is not the only superstition in this ' order for the visitation of the sick.' The priest endorses the old error that God sends disease. ' Whatsoever your sickness is,' he says, ' know you certainly it is God's visitation,' when all the while the poor fellow may be suffering from the carelessness of a driver, or the rascally negligence or cupidity of the maker of a sewer ! The priest also endorses the superstition that sickness may be caused by the devil as well as by God, for he prays, ' Renew in him, most loving Father, whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil.' We prefer nonconformity to complicity in these legalised superstitions.

Then we come to the ' last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history '—' The order for the burial of the dead.' The chief thing to be noticed here is that this service is not to be said over anyone dying unbaptised or excommunicated. This will explain why, in it, the dead person is buried ' in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.' The theory of course is that the ' regenerate ' babe, once made ' a member of Christ,' a ' child of God,' and ' an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,' is now in possession of the unspeakable blessing conveyed to him by the priest. The whole scheme is coherent and consistent, and the truest churchmen are the men who obey the Prayer Book, who have all along refused to use the service for the unbaptised, who advocate the application of the excommunicating canon

laws, and who desire to maintain the sacramental efficacy of the Church's offices from the cradle to the grave.

The creeds are as full of superstition as the offices. The so-called 'Apostles' Creed' (which is no more the Apostles' than it is mine) is the least objectionable; but, even in that tiny creed, you have the monstrous assertions that Jesus was born of a virgin, and that the body will rise from the grave. The Nicene Creed is as great a puzzle as the Athanasian Creed, which only surpasses it in its utter insolence and wickedness when it attempts to dissect the Deity, and when it damns all who will not believe in the ridiculous result. 'Without doubt,' it says, 'he shall perish everlastingly who does not thus think of the Trinity.' And how are we to think of it, on pain of damnation, if we do not believe? Believe what? A string of hopeless incoherencies and inconsistencies,—a mixture of tricky catches and subtle contradictions, spiced with insolent threats. If you are frightened you can submit; if you are awed you can believe; but we who are neither frightened nor awed refuse either to submit or believe, and are forced to stand outside and take our chance.

I shall conclude my examination of the Book of Common Prayer by glancing at 'The form and manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests, and deacons,' and at two or three of the Thirty-nine articles which enforce their authority. The office of a bishop or archbishop is the last stage, that of a deacon the first, in a process, the real purport of which is found in the order set forth for 'making, ordaining, and consecrating of priests;' to which, therefore, I shall confine my attention. Amid much which is admirable, I turn to the really vital part of the appointed order or service, and what do I find? I find that the bishop and priests present are instructed to lay their hands upon the head of the candidate, while the bishop says, 'Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven: and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of His holy Sacraments; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' After which, he adds, 'Take thou authority to teach the Word of God, and to minister the holy sacraments in the congregation where thou shalt be lawfully appointed thereunto.' Now here we have the kernel of the whole system, and, though it is contained in a comely shell, we are bound to judge the whole thing by it; for if the kernel is bad it matters nothing that the shell is graceful or good. Decorate it as you like, and play as much music to it as you will, the whole thing remains unsound, based on a brazen lie. Yes, it can be nothing else while one man actually professes to impart to another 'The Holy Ghost;' as though the spirit of God could trickle from the fingers of a man. For that, monstrous as it appears, is the theory. An appointed functionary, coming, as is supposed, in the order of apostolic succession, is actually represented as the channel of this supreme gift; for the words are

plain : 'by the imposition of our hands' 'receive the Holy Ghost.' We object to this as a popish superstition, as a survival of that terrible sacerdotalism which at one time threatened to take into its own keeping every faculty of man and every gift of God. We object to it because we believe that the only 'call' to the ministry of religion is the call of the Divine Spirit, and that the only consecration is the consecration of the heart's desire to help, and teach, and guide.

The twenty-third Article declares that 'It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of publick preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same ;' the meaning of which is that no one has a right to teach religion but those whom the State or the officials of the State call thereto, a view which non-conformity has long made antiquated, in spite of the efforts of Church and State to treat all teachers of religion outside of the Church as the merest intruders, poachers, or rebels. The State Church, aided by the civil power, long fought against the sacred rights of the individual conscience, but the result was never really uncertain. The right to teach is a right that God alone can give, and that right comes, not by the giving of any credential by conclave or dignitary, but by the possession of a sincere desire to do good.

The thirty-third Article spitefully and tyrannically says that if any person is 'excommunicated' by the Church, he 'ought to be taken of the whole multitude of the faithful as a heathen and publican ;' a species of ecclesiastical trade unionism which would be reprov'd in working men, in relation to the trade unionism of the workshop,—a species of boycotting which I commend to Mr. Balfour.

The thirty-seventh Article declares that the civil ruler may rightfully govern in things ecclesiastical as well as in things temporal, 'and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil doers ;' a plain assertion of the pernicious doctrine that the civil ruler may interfere with the people in matters pertaining to religion and the church,—a doctrine that has cursed the world with innumerable persecutions, and that, in this very England, led to the repression and punishment of nonconformity, till nonconformity got too strong to be either repressed or punished.

I need add no more. We do not conform because we cannot. With us it is a solemn matter of principle and sacred conviction. We are not rebels and schismatics, we are loyal seekers after the truth ; and what we do we do because we cannot do otherwise. Let every man speak for himself. For my own part, I find no summing up of my reasons for nonconformity more simple, more full, more vivid than old Martin Luther's noble saying :—' My conscience is a captive to God's word, and it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. There I take my stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me !'

THE OPENING OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

PUT INTO THE LANGUAGE OF TO-DAY.

AN EXPERIMENT.

I.

ALL things began with Reason: and Reason began with God: and God Himself was Reason: and, in the beginning, Reason began. From Reason all things proceeded, and, without Reason, nothing became. From Reason came Life, and Life was man's Light: and the Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness could not grasp it.

II.

From God came a man named John. As a witness he came, to bear witness to the Light, that, through it, mankind might believe. He was not the Light, but the witness to it. The Light itself was that which is for the enlightening of all who come into the world. In the world it was, and through it the world came forth, and yet by the world it was not known. To its own it came, and by its own it was not welcomed; but those who did receive it were able to take up their right as children of God, and as believers. And these were not born of flesh and blood and mortal will, but of God.

III.

And Reason appeared as man, and pitched his tent amongst us: and we saw his splendour,—splendour as of a firstborn of the Father, full of grace and truth.

To him John bare witness, and said 'This is he of whom I said, "He who shall follow me will pass on before me, for he is before me," because of his fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For through Moses came law, but through Jesus the anointed one came grace and truth.'

By no one hath God been seen; but he who is as the firstborn, and who is in the Father's bosom—he has made Him known.

IV.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to John, to ask him who he was, he confessed that he was not the anointed one. Then they asked him, 'Are you Elijah?' and he said 'No.' 'Are you the expected prophet?' and he answered, 'No.' So they asked him, 'Who are you? Tell us, that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say of yourself?' And he said, 'I am a voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the Lord's way," as the prophet Isaiah said.'

And they who were sent from the Pharisees asked him, 'Why do you baptise then, if you are not the anointed one, nor Elijah, nor the expected

prophet?' And John answered, 'With water do I baptise, but there is already one among you, whom you do not know, who will follow me, whose sandal-thongs I am not worthy to unloose.'

In Bethany, beyond Jordan, where John was baptising, these things were done.

V.

The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, 'See, God's offering, who will take away the world's sin! This is he of whom I said, "After me there will come a man who will pass on before me, for he is before me." I did not know him; I only knew that he would appear, and for this reason I came baptising, and he who sent me to baptise said unto me, "Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descend and remain, that will be he who shall baptise with the Holy Spirit." And that I saw, when the Spirit descended as a dove out of the sky, and remained upon him, and I bare witness that this is the chosen of God.'

The day after, John was standing with two of his disciples, and, looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, 'See, God's offering!' And the two disciples heard this and followed Jesus.

A PRIMER OF EVOLUTION.*

This is a wonderful little book—in its way; and only a pastmaster could have produced it, as a condensed summary of many books. In making such condensations there are many pitfalls, but Mr. Clodd seems to have avoided them all, though, of course, he has had to squeeze out all feeling and all the poetry. What he gives us is a scholarly digest of up-to-date knowledge concerning the becoming and growth of the universe, the origin of the solar system, the origin of life, the origin of life forms, the origin of species, and connected subjects. A careful reading of this small book will put any one in possession of the facts, as far as the poor little creature called 'man' has gone.

But Mr. Clodd has a personal bias which is deterrent as to inquiry beyond gas and water; and yet, oddly enough, his book gives, in an exceptional way, the impression that gas and

water and all related substances are only the material counters used by subtle powers behind,—that the products of the game may be suns, and solar systems, and habitable worlds, and struggling men, but that some amazing player or players are somewhere—in whom we 'live and move and have our being.' But no; Mr. Clodd sponges out 'theories about gods and all other spiritual beings,' and advises us to solely occupy ourselves with our duty one to another. Mr. Clodd pays the usual penalty demanded of the man who is absorbed in the study of material forms. He sees only the dance of death in the manifestations of life. After the manner of his craft, Mr. Clodd assures us that 'the certain result is that all the energy of the universe will be dissipated, and that all the matter of the universe will become cold, solid and inert under the aggregating and

* A Primer of Evolution. By Edward Clodd, London: Longmans, Green & Co.

unopposed action of Force.' He also says that 'life is only a local and temporary arrest of the universal movement towards equilibrium,' or, in other words, that life is only a local and temporary bubble on the ultimate dead sea. Mr. Clodd might as well have added, 'so far as we can see;' for that is the fact: and he himself confesses that the mystery of life is impenetrable, that there is a 'barrier,' and that 'beyond the barrier we cannot go.' Be humble and modest, then; and be as hopeful as you can, Mr. Clodd! You give us a thousand reasons for cherishing the belief that behind and within this seeming dance of death there is an unimaginable

universe of life, and that if the game, as we see it, were played out, and the board and the 'men' were put away, the wonderful players would not be dead. But what if the end of the game is life of a more inward kind? What if this apparent exhaustion of energy is only its passing on to more occult uses? What if this seeming death is only a stage in the far-reaching process of creation? The wonder and mystery and grandeur of it all suggest or justify the largest inferences—the liveliest hopes. Is there not an evolution into the unseen? That cannot be a baseless hypothesis, since from the unseen all the life forces flow: and the secret of all is there.

NOTES ON BOOKS.

'Electric Lighting and Power Distribution.' An elementary manual for students preparing for the preliminary and ordinary grade examinations of the City and Guilds of London Institute. By W. Perren Maycock, M.I.C.E. (6s.) London: Whittaker & Co. Mr. Maycock is well known as an industrious teacher and painstaking writer. In this useful work he has combined a series of three volumes, and, in doing so, has made many corrections, bringing the book up to date. It is what it professes to be, and rather more; for, while a clever lad of sixteen, with any knowledge of the subject, ought to be able to easily understand every page of it, there are many 'masters and men' who might with great advantage study it. The pages are about half occupied with illustrations and diagrams, of which there are 282. A good index adds to the practical usefulness of the book. One very excellent feature of the work is its plentiful supply of 'exercises,' in the form of questions following every chapter, the questions, sometimes being over forty in number. A solidly useful Polytechnic and

science class book.

'Gain or loss? an appreciation of the results of recent Biblical criticism.' By the Rev. B. J. Snell, M.A., B.Sc. London: J. Clarke & Co. It is difficult to keep pace with these keen and ardent spirits. Some of the good old-fashioned Unitarians must look to it. Here are these bright 'orthodox' brothers going ahead of them in strong criticism of the Bible. It is true there is a pretty little protesting that they mean no harm, and that the Bible will be all the better for an airing; but the fact remains, that men like Mr. Snell, of the Brixton Independent Church, are presenting the Bible as a purely human book, and a human book abounding in human imperfections and ignorances. We cordially commend the little work. It is a book of strong sincerity and fresh knowledge, giving, in a condensed form, the best results of modern criticism. It is a cheap book, and is as bravely and plainly printed as it is bravely and plainly written.

LOWELL LINES.

1.—GET but the truth once uttered, and 'tis like
A star new-born that drops into its place,
And which, once circling in its placid round,
Not all the tumult of the earth can shake.
Glance Behind the Curtain.

2.—THE way to be original is to be healthy.
Essay on Chancer.
3.—DEATH himself abridges not
The tenures of almighty thought,
The titles of the wise and brave.
The Landlord.

4.—**DEMOCRACY** in itself is no more sacred than monarchy. It is man who is sacred; it is his duties and opportunities, not his rights that nowadays need reinforcement.

Letters.

5.—**HE** who waits to have his task marked out Shall die and leave his errand unfulfilled.

Glance Behind the Curtain.

6.—'Tis as easy to be heroes as to sit the idle slaves
Of a legendary virtue carved upon our fathers' graves;
Worshippers of light ancestral make the present light a crime.

The Present Crisis.

7.—**WE** are inhabitants of two worlds, and owe a double, but not a divided, allegiance. In virtue of our clay, this little ball of earth exacts a certain loyalty of us, while in our capacity as spirits we are admitted citizens of an invisible and holier fatherland.

Biglow Papers.

8.—**A FRIEND**, whene'er he dies, has died too soon.

Agassiz.

9.—**LIFE** is a leaf of paper white
Whereon each one of us may write
His word or two, and then comes night.

For an Autograph.

10.—**OUR** day for Him is long enough,
And when He giveth work to do,
The bruised reed is amply tough
To pierce the shield of error through.

Above and Below.

11.—**SORROW** in our happy world must be Love's deepest spokesman and interpreter.

Sonnets.

12.—**KNOWLEDGE** is power in the noblest sense, that it enables us to benefit others and to pay our way honorably in life by being of use.

Letters.

13.—**DESTINY** is but the breath of God still moving in us.

Glance Behind the Curtain.

14.—**GOD** sends his teachers into every age.
To every clime and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth
And shape of mind, nor gives the realm of truth

Into the selfish rule of one sole race.

Rhoccus.

15.—To seek to be natural implies a consciousness that forbids all naturalness for ever.

Essay on Thoreau.

16.—**GOD** works for all. Ye cannot hem the hope of being free
With parallels of latitude, with mountain-range or sea.

On the Capture of Fugitive Slaves.

17.—**WE** all have our difficulties—that's what we are put here for, and they are put here with us to test our doughiness.

Letters.

18.—**GOD'S** law, since the starry song began,
Hath been and still forevermore must be,
That every deed which shall outlast time's span
Must spur the soul to be erect and free.

Sonnets.

19.—**BLEAKER** than unmossed stone
Our lives were but for this immortal gain,
Of unstilled longing and inspiring pain.

Memoria Positum.

20.—**EARTH'S** noblest thing, a woman perfected.

Irené.

21.—**SCIENCE** was faith once; faith were science now,
Would she but lay her bow and arrows by,
And arm her with the weapons of the time.

The Cathedral.

22.—**THE** brave makes danger opportunity,
The waverer, paltering with the chance sublime,
Dwarfs it to peril.

The Washers of the Shroud.

23.—**A WEED** is no more than a flower in disguise,
Which is seen through at once if love give a man eyes.

Fable for Critics.

24.— A MAN'S right hand,
A right hand guided by an earnest soul,
With a true instinct, takes the golden prize
From out a thousand blanks.

Glance Behind the Curtain.

25.—WEALTH and rule slip down with fortune
as her wheel turns round;
He who keeps his faith he only cannot be
discrowned.

Mahmood.

26.—EVIL springs up, and flowers, and bears
no seed,
And feeds the green earth with its swift decay,
Leaving it richer for the growth of truth.

Prometheus.

27.—LIFE may be given in many ways,
And loyalty to truth be sealed
As bravely in the closet as the field,
So bountiful is fate.

Harvard Commemoration Ode.

28.—WHAT a poet God is! He says the same
thing over to us so often and always new.

Letters.

29.—NOBODY knows what's in him till it is
knocked out by his running against some
granite post of necessity.

Letters.

30.—IN heaven's wide chambers there is room
For love and pity, and for helpful deeds;
Else were our summons thither but a doom
To life more vain than this in clayey weeds.

On the Death of Channing.

31.—THE greatest truths may not be wholly
true.
Who would have sunshine must have shadow
too.

Letters.

MY CROSS.

I made the cross myself whose weight
Was later laid on me.
This thought is torture as I toil
Up life's steep Calvary.

To think mine own hands drove the nails
I sang a merry song,
And chose the heaviest wood I had
To build it firm and strong.

If I had guessed—if I had dreamed
Its weight was meant for me,
I should have made a lighter cross,
To bear up Calvary.

Annie R. Aldrich.