

THE DEVELOPMENT, AUTHORITY, AND TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY.

The following extracts from the writings of Lord Macaulay and several eminent divines present a variety of facts which are of interest from the forcible manner in which they appear to have presented themselves to the authors:—

In his Essay on Milton, Macaulay says, with reference to religion in general and Christianity in particular: "Logicians may reason about abstractions, but the great mass of mankind can never feel an interest in them. They must have images. The strong tendency of the multitude, in all ages and nations, to idolatry can be explained on no other principle. The first inhabitants of Greece, there is every reason to believe, worshipped one invisible deity. But the necessity of having something more definite to adore produced, in a few centuries, the innumerable crowd of gods and goddesses. In like manner, the ancient Persians thought it impious to exhibit the Creator under a human form. Yet even these transferred to the sun the worship which, speculatively, they considered due only to the Supreme mind. The history of the Jews is the record of a continued struggle between pure theism, supported by the most terrible sanctions, and the strangely fascinating desire of having some visible and tangible object of adoration. Perhaps none of the secondary causes which Gibbon has assigned for the rapidity with which Christianity spread over the world, while Judaism scarcely ever acquired a single proselyte, operated more powerfully than this feeling. God, the uncreated, the incomprehensible, the invisible, attracted few worshippers. A philosopher might admire so noble a conception, but the crowd turned away in disgust from words which presented no image to their minds. It was before deity, embodied in human form—walking amongst men, partaking of their infirmities, leaning on their bosoms, weeping over their graves, slumbering in the manger, bleeding on the cross—that the prejudices of the Synagogue, and the doubts of the Academy, and the pride of the Portico, and the fasces of the Lictor, and the swords of thirty legions were humbled in the dust! Soon after Christianity had achieved its triumph the principle which had assisted it began to corrupt it. It became a new Paganism. Patron saints assumed the offices of household gods. St. George took the place of Mars; St. Elmo consoled the mariner for the loss of Castor and Pollux; the virgin mother and Cecilia succeeded to Venus and the Muses."

The Rev. Dr. Dick says:—"In the second writings we meet with sayings which are neither wiser nor better for being found in them than if they had occurred in ordinary history. It is evident that the Word of God can be given only to a part of the Scriptures, because they contain, besides a revelation, an account of human opinions. . . . Sometimes it is God who speaks, and sometimes it is man."

William Penn, the Quaker pioneer of America, wrote: "I demand of our adversaries (referring to those who positively accept the Bible as divinely inspired) if they are well assured of those men who first collected, embodied, and declared them (the Scriptures) authentic, by a public Canon which we read was in the Council of Laodicea, held 360 years after Christ. I say, how do they know that these men rightly discerned true from spurious? Now, sure it is that some of the Scriptures taken in by one Council were rejected by another for apocryphal, and that which was left out by the former for apocryphal, was taken in by the latter for canonical. Now, visible it is that they contradict each other, and as true that they have erred respecting the present belief."

In his *Rationale of Religious Inquiry*, the Rev. J. Martineau says: "If we could recover the gospels of the Hebrews and that of the Egyptians, it would be difficult to give a reason why they should not form a part of the New Testament. . . . What are Mark and Luke, who are received, more than Clement and Barnabas, who are excluded?"

The Rev. T. H. Horne wrote: "The accounts left us by ecclesiastical writers of antiquity, concerning the time when the gospels were written or published, are so vague, confused, and discordant that they lead to no

certain or solid determination. The eldest of the ancient fathers collected the reports of their own times and set them down as certain truths, and those who followed adopted their accounts with implicit reverence. Thus tradition, true or false, passed on from one writer to another without examination, until at last it became too late to examine them to any purpose."

Dr. Whistow said: "Can anyone be so weak as to imagine Mark and Luke, James and Jude, who were none of them more than companions of the Apostles, to be our sacred and unerring guide, while Barnabas, Thaddeus, Clement, Timothy, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp, who were equally companions of the same Apostles, to be no authority at all?"

In his *Practical Sermons*, the Rev. Dr. Barnes, of Philadelphia, a far-famed man and devoted student of Bibliology, says: "I see not one ray to disclose to me the reason why sin came into the world, why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead, and why man must suffer to all eternity. I have never seen a particle of light thrown upon these subjects that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind, nor have I an explanation to offer, or a thought to suggest, that would be a relief to you. I trust other men, as they profess to do, understand these better than I do, and that they have not the anguish of spirit that I have; but I confess when I look on a world of sinners, and sufferers, upon death-beds and graveyards, upon the world of woe filled with hearts to suffer for ever; when I see my friends, my parents, my family, my people, my fellow-citizens; when I look upon a whole race all involved in this seeming danger; when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned; and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet he does not do it, I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it."

RELIGION AND THE PAPUANS.

Captain Armit, the leader of the Argus expedition to New Guinea, gives the following account of one of the Native tribes:—"These inland Natives have no religion, yet one's property is sacred among them. If you drop anything and they find it, you will have it returned to you immediately. They are far more moral than Europeans. Any breach of the moral law is punished with death. But from what I gathered from Luija, the chief, such breaches are hardly ever known to occur. . . . The Cojari have no idea of a Deity that I can find out after repeated attempts. They are terribly superstitious, and will not speak of dead people for fear that by doing so they will come to life again, and do them some injury for bringing them back from beyond the curtain that divides mortality from immortality. Yet this rude, this primitive people have a very high idea of right and wrong."—*Australasian*, Aug. 25, 1883.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

SIR.—In the discussion which followed the reading of a paper before the Wanganui Freethought Association, entitled "The Divine Origin of Christianity," the author Mr. Grant stated, that even the great infidel writer Strauss had to admit that the resurrection of Jesus was an authenticated fact; and tried to escape from this fact by the lame assumption that Jesus was not dead but only insensible when cut down from the cross. Now I have Strauss's "New Life of Jesus," and can confidently assert, without fear of contradiction, that in no place does he make such an assertion. True, he mentions such an hypothesis as having been advanced in different forms by Herder, Paulus, Schleiermacher, and Hase, but he himself in a masterly manner refutes the explanation as unsatisfactory and fanciful; and shows first, from the inconsistencies and contradictions of the Gospel accounts, how unhistoric is the evidence; and secondly, how natural it was such myths should arise in the early Church; inasmuch as it was necessary to show how superior Jesus was in death to the lesser lights, Moses, Enoch and Elijah.

For Mr. Grant to have made such a statement, shows great ignorance of the writings of what he was pleased to call the "infidel Strauss."

I am, &c.,

R.