

ARTICLE XIII.

CRITICAL NOTE.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MR. ROMANES AND MR. GULICK.

SINCE the article by Mr. Gulick on "Christianity and the Evolution of Rational Life" and our introductory note to it were in print, the preliminary correspondence which called it forth has come into our hands with permission to make it public. The case is so interesting that we can render no greater service to the truth than by availing ourselves of the privilege.

Under date of December 25, 1890, Mr. Romanes wrote to Mr. Gulick a somewhat lengthy letter, devoted for the most part to matters relating to a discussion he was then carrying on with Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace, and in which Mr. Romanes, in support of his side of the contention, was making free use of material furnished him by Mr. Gulick. After concluding the strictly scientific part of the letter, Mr. Romanes turns to thoughts which were even then uppermost in his mind, and writes as follows:—

"For a long time past I have been meditating upon the possibility of putting to you a question which I have feared you might deem unpardonably impertinent, and this in both senses of the word. But on this Christmas day I cannot avoid the 'cumulative' temptation. My only excuse is the twofold statement that the question is not put from any merely idle curiosity, and that it is put on account of the very great value which I attach to the extraordinary analytical powers of your thought.

"The question which—for my own benefit alone—I want to ask is, How is it that you have retained your Christian belief? Looking to your life, I know that you must have done so conscientiously; and, looking to your logic, I equally know that you cannot have done so without due consideration. On what lines of evidence, therefore, do you mainly rely? Years ago my own belief was shattered—and all the worth of life destroyed—by what has ever since appeared to me overpowering assaults from the side of rationality; and yours is the only mind I have met with, which, while greatly superior to mine in the latter respect, appears to have reached an opposite conclusion. Therefore I should like to know in a general way how you view the matter as a whole; but if you think the ques-

tion is one that I ought not to have asked, I hope you will neither trouble to answer it, nor refuse to accept in advance my apology for putting it.

"GEORGE J. ROMANES."

Mr. Gulick's reply was written from Osaka, Japan, March 7, 1891. The part of it relating to the subject in hand is as follows:—

"In response to your inquiries as to my views concerning the main lines of Christian evidence, I have written out a few thoughts which I enclose with this. They only suggest certain methods of approach to the subject which seem to me helpful in reaching right conclusions. If a fuller statement of my thoughts on any point is desired, I shall be very willing to give what I can, though I have the feeling that my best thoughts are crude compared with what is accessible to you in such a center as Oxford.

"Still I know there are some advantages in 'isolation,' and a missionary has some special opportunities for certain lines of direct observation.

'If I knew what part of the subject was engaging your thought, I should possibly be able to make suggestions that would avail more, even if I am not able to give any new light. I shall be very glad to compare notes on any point.

"Yours truly,

"JOHN T. GULICK."

Soon after this correspondence, it is evident from passages in Romanes' volume entitled "Darwin and After Darwin," published in 1892 (pp. 411-418), that his views were undergoing important modifications. Instead of maintaining then, as formerly, that natural science was "a virtual negation of God," he says:—

"Like all previous advances in cosmological theory which have been wrought by the advance of science, this latest and greatest has been that of revealing the constitution of nature, or the method of causation, as everywhere the same. But it is evident that this change, vast and to all appearance final though it be, must end within the limits of natural causation itself. The whole world of life and mind may now have been annexed to that of matter and energy as together constituting one magnificent dominion, which is everywhere subject to the same rule, or method of government. But the ulterior and ultimate question touching the nature of this government as mental or non-mental, personal or impersonal, remains exactly where it was. Indeed, this is a question which cannot be affected by *any* advance of science, further than science has proved herself able to dispose of erroneous arguments based upon ignorance of nature. For while the sphere of science is necessarily restricted to that of natural causation which it is her office to explore, the question touching *the nature of this natural causation* is one which as necessarily lies without the whole sphere of such causation itself: therefore it lies beyond any possible intrusion by science. . . . Such being, as it appears to me, the pure logic of the matter, the proof of organic evolution amounts to noth-

ing more than the proof of a natural process. What mode of being is ultimately concerned in this process—or in what it is that this process ultimately consists—is a question upon which science is as voiceless as speculation is vociferous" (pp. 413-414).

In his earlier volume entitled "A Candid Examination of Theism," by *Physicus*, published in 1878, Mr. Romanes had written:—

"Forasmuch as I am far from being able to agree with those who affirm that the twilight doctrine of the 'new faith' is a desirable substitute for the waning splendor of 'the old,' I am not ashamed to confess that, with this virtual negation of God, the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness; and although from henceforth the precept to 'work while it is day' will doubtless but gain an intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the words that 'the night cometh when no man can work,' yet when at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the only mystery of existence as now I find it,—at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible."

It is as gratifying as it is significant of the trend of modern thought, to learn that this noble mind came at last to see the truth more clearly as foreshadowed in his posthumous volume "Thoughts on Religion," reviewed in our last number. After perusing this volume, one is not surprised to learn from Canon Gore, his spiritual adviser, that Mr. Romanes "returned before his death to that full, deliberate communion with the church of Jesus Christ which he had for so many years been conscientiously compelled to forego." It is significant, also, that a few days after her husband's death, Mrs. Romanes wrote to Mr. Gulick, telling how Mr. Romanes was engaged in literary work until an hour before his death, and then adds: "His unselfishness and patience during these two years was something marvelous; and during the last few months he had seen his way to facing many difficulties, and God had given him light and help."