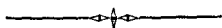


expectation of the coming of the Lord which had such living power for the early Christians, which for us the lapse of time has made more faint, while it has, in fact, brought us nearer to its fulfilment.

So early and independent a witness of these points is surely a distinct contribution to theological information, and an appreciable accession to historic evidence.

T. D. BERNARD.



ART. V.—"ROBERT ELSMERE."

IT is curious, as well as instructive, to note the varieties of attack which in one age or another are made on the Church of Christ.¹ Now it is complained that she is indifferent to the wants of humanity, and the moral evil rampant in the world is charged upon her. Now it is affirmed that her continual interference with men's spiritual lives drives them to rebellion, when they would otherwise obey. It is complained at one time that she claims to exercise an authority which she does not possess; at another, that she possesses an authority which she will not exercise. According to one assailant, she fails because she does not preach the true Gospel committed to her; according to another, she fails because, though she preaches the Gospel committed to her, that Gospel is untrue.

The authoress of the book under review maintains the last-named of these objections. Mrs. Ward nowhere appears to deny that the clergy honestly discharge the duty they have undertaken, but argues that it is impossible to discharge it with effect, because it is in itself falsehood. It is no error belonging to the present times of which she complains, no evil arising out of the ignorance, neglect, or sinfulness of previous generations. Christianity, as it has always been known to men, is, according to her view, *radically untrue*.

This will seem to most men a bold thing to say. A creed which has existed for more than eighteen hundred years, which has been accepted as true by the intellects of the wisest, and has satisfied the inward cravings of the holiest, men whom the world has produced, is hardly a thing, one would have thought, to be assailed by a lady in a three-volume novel. While considering it, we cannot altogether divest ourselves of the frame of mind, with which Lord Exmouth's

¹ It may be said that "Robert Elsmere" is an attack on Christianity, rather than on the Church. But as the whole teaching of the Church, which is identical with Christianity, is assailed, this distinction is here of no consequence.

sailors regarded the unhappy Turks in the harbour of Algiers in the memorable bombardment of 1816, when they put to sea in a few shore boats, cutting crabs at every stroke, to board the admiral's 120-gun ship!

The eager interest with which the book has been received has been appealed to as an evidence of the truth of its main assertion, viz., that the world generally—the intelligent world, at all events—is beginning to discard Christianity as a failure. We are told that vast numbers of persons have ceased, and are ceasing, to believe in Christ. It may be so; but the avidity with which anything that is very strange and very shocking is caught at is evidence of nothing but that the world is ever craving after novelty and excitement. And it may further be remarked that no assertion has been more frequently put forward, than that men were abandoning the Christian belief. This was affirmed by sceptics and worldlings of the times of Charles II., and the literature of that day accords too well with the statement. It was affirmed of the generations that lived during the reigns of George I. and George II.; and they who have studied Lord Hervey's Memoirs and other contemporary writings will hardly question the assertion. It was affirmed of the last years of the eighteenth century, and the Socinianism and infidelity with which that period was largely leavened lend some support to the charge. Let us call to mind again the empty churches and thin communions of the earlier part of the present century. Faithful men of all those eras were loud in their complaints of the neglect of Christian ordinances, and in their warnings of the consequences to the nation which must ensue. But men still profess belief in Christ, notwithstanding the dismal prophecies uttered in those unhappy times. Nay, the churches in this present day are, as a rule, thronged with worshippers, and the ordinances of the Church well attended.

Nor is it on this subject only that wholesale assertions of this kind are habitually put forward. Listen, for example, to what one class of writers assert, and you will be told that the social evil is making such terrible advances that it will destroy all purity in man or woman; listen to others, and you will hear that the demon of drink is fast sweeping away whatever remains of temperance and sobriety may have been left in the world; read what is written about trade and commerce, and you will learn that integrity and fair dealing are things of the past. The men who tell you these things are honest enough; but their excited feeling, which makes them over-keen of sight as regards the faults of their own generation, renders them blind to those of the past.

We think, then, that Mrs. Ward's novel, though a remark-

able sign of the times, is not likely to do serious injury, and the interest felt in it will not be long maintained. But no less is the Church bound to meet the challenge it contains; and the unquestionable ability of the writer to enlist the sympathies of her readers renders this the more imperative. It may be considered in two lights—first, as a simple work of fiction; and, secondly, as a designed and elaborated attack on Christianity.

As a work of fiction, it has great merits and great defects. The authoress has considerable powers of humour and pathos. Mrs. Thornburgh and the Vicar are amusing enough. Lady Charlotte is cleverly drawn. Rose Leyburn, with all her faults, is very lovable and bewitching. Catherine is a noble character, the beauty of which is enough in itself to assign a high place in fiction to the writer who conceived it. The entire history of the fever at Mile End—the gallant and determined struggle against disease and death, in spite of every possible discouragement and opposition—cannot fail to stir every reader's heart. On the other hand, the male characters of the story have little force, and less beauty. Robert himself, though persistently represented as a man of commanding ability—as, indeed, Mrs. Ward is bound to make him out to be—is singularly weak and shallow, and, as it appears to the reader, at all events, capricious. He adopts the opinions of a man whom he loves and reverences, but it is only to abandon them as soon as he is challenged by another to do so. The Squire is an impossible man, made to play his part to suit the exigencies of the writer, but at the sacrifice of all reasonable likelihood. He has neither heart nor imagination. He views everything through a halo of misanthropic scorn and distrust; and yet we are told that he was a follower, and, it is implied, an attached one, of John Henry Newman! It is hard to say whether he would have been more repelled by contact with Newman, or Newman by contact with him. He poses as an earnest and devoted seeker after truth, though the authoress does not conceal the fact that the only thing he does care for is destroying the faith of others. Mr. Langham is a still more unpleasant personage. He, too, is described as a man of powerful intellect and strong character. Yet nothing can be weaker or more contemptible than his conduct. Mr. Grey is better, and if there were more about him in the book, he might redeem the masculine characters from the low estimate which the reader must form of them. But Mrs. Ward kills him when the time comes at which he ought to take a prominent part—apparently for the same reason which is said to have induced Shakespeare to kill Mercutio: because, if he had not done so, Mercutio would have killed *him*. Another fault of the book is that the canvas is too much crowded with

figures, which distract the reader and withdraw him from the main interest of the story. Nor should the authoress's grievous, and, it may be added, wanton, display of the worst possible taste in the interview between Robert and Madame de Netteville be passed over without censure.

It is only fair to say that the main reason why the masculine actors are so uninteresting, or rather disappointing, is that they are made to do things in themselves inconsistent, and sometimes absurd, because these are necessary to carry out the writer's extraordinary programme. Thus the Squire, described as a man utterly indifferent to public opinion, and inflexible in carrying out any purpose on which he had resolved, is made to change his entire course of action, and eat his own words, in a matter which he had fully weighed beforehand, apparently because it is imperative that he should again acquire a strong influence over Robert. Robert himself, having fully counted the cost of what he was undertaking, having put his principles to a severe test which proved, as it is granted to few men to prove them, their truth and blessedness—such an experience as might have brought the coldest-hearted sceptic to believe in them—suddenly abandons them altogether, because the Squire has propounded a theory to him which startles and overthrows his faith. This theory, of which we shall have occasion to speak presently, might indeed startle anyone. But that it should overthrow their faith will surely be to most men a matter of wonder.

But it is as an attack on the Christian faith that the book most concerns us. The two main objections which Mrs. Ward raises to the truth of Christianity appear to be—first, that after eighteen centuries of its teaching, it has failed to convert the world—even the so-called Christian world—to genuine faith and holiness of life; and secondly, because it is based upon, and closely interwoven with, miracle; and miracle being, according to her view, radically false, that which is built upon it must be radically false also. Let us consider these two indictments separately.

Christianity, we are told, is to be regarded as "a failure," because its object being to make mankind the faithful followers of Christ, it has not in eighteen hundred years succeeded in doing so. But did its Founder ever promise that it would? The generation to which He preached hated and rejected Him. Was *His* mission, then, a failure? Did He, again, lead His disciples to expect anything else themselves? What were the words He spoke to them? "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you."¹ "Think not

¹ St. John xv. 18.

that I came to send peace on earth ; I came not to send peace, but a sword."¹ "It *cannot be* but that offences will come."² "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"³ These sayings, and many others, were not intended to apply to that generation only to which the Apostles would preach, but to all after-time. Man does indeed make advance in intellectual knowledge as the world goes on. He profits by the labours of previous generations, and the goal reached in one age becomes the starting-point of the next. But it is wholly different as regards his moral and spiritual nature. The victories gained by faith over the world, the flesh, and the devil belong to the victor in that strife, but to the victor only. The fruits of the victory cannot be transferred to another. Every age, every individual born in that age, has the same battle to wage, the same enemies to encounter, the same helps and hindrances, as his predecessors in all previous generations. Temptation may take a different form, but the difficulty of the struggle is the same. The corruption of man's fallen nature is equally strong in the man born in the nineteenth century as it was in the first, and every man must overcome it by Divine grace for himself. Therefore in every age will there be the same warfare, the same loving mercies, the same fallings away, the same blasphemies. Still to the end, because iniquity shall abound, will the faith of many wax cold.

There is no clearer proof of the truth of our holy faith than these predictions of its Divine Author, uttered eighteen hundred years ago ; which assure us that He could indeed read the distant future as clearly as the present. But men will not see this. Impatient spirits are for ever calling out for the reign of truth and peace and perfect love, for ever predicting its appearance, and lapsing into discontent and rebellion, when their fancies prove abortive. They are like children watching eagerly for the blue sky and the bright sunshine on one of those misty, drizzly summer days, which we know so well, when, though the sun is eclipsed, a feeble glimmer of his light is occasionally seen above the clouds. In spite of the warnings of the weatherwise, the cry ever is, that he is coming out in all his fulness. But the gleam disappears ; the mists gather thicker ; the rain holds on ; the children have to give up their vigil. Not till the evening is the sky clear again. Nature has many parables. None truer than this.

The office of the Church is to help men in this protracted strife—to be the channel of grace and help to those engaged in it. If her ministrations are rejected, as by many they ever

¹ St. Matt. x. 34.

² St. Luke xvii. 1.

³ St. Luke xviii. 8.

will be, that is only an additional reason why she should exert herself the more vigorously. But she will never subdue all men to her. Mrs. Ward apparently calls her a failure, simply because she is the Church militant, not the Church triumphant. Does she forget that the tares are not to be rooted out until the Harvest Day?

But the other ground of attack, viz., that Christianity is based on miracle, and that there being no such thing as miracle, Christianity must be fundamentally false, is Mrs. Ward's great point. And here we must *in limine* remark that she seems after all to have but a very inadequate idea of how close the connection between revelation and miracle is. She represents Mr. Grey as being unable to take orders because he does not believe in miracles. But she appears to regard him, and he appears to regard himself, as a sound member of the Church, notwithstanding this unbelief. Yet Christianity is absolutely nothing without miracle. It is founded on the stupendous miracle of the Incarnation. It is built up by the miracles of the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Session at the right hand of God, the Descent of the Holy Ghost. Without these Christianity is a mere morality, no way differing from the other so-called religions of the world, except in its greater purity and higher tone. The Scriptures plainly tell us that our hope is only through these things. Through the Incarnation only can man be reconciled to God. “In Christ Jesus,” writes St. Paul to the Ephesians, “ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh.”¹ Through the Resurrection only is there entrance to Heaven. “If Christ be not risen,” he tells the Corinthians, “then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain.”² The completeness of man's forgiveness is ensured by His perpetual intercession. “He” (Christ) “is also able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”³ But it is needless to multiply quotations. The whole New Testament, from beginning to end, teaches this, and nothing else, as the condition of discipleship and the ground of acceptance. A man who does not believe in the Godhead of Christ may call himself a Christian, if he will; but so might a Buddhist, or a Parsee, or a Mahommedan, or anyone who simply believed that Jesus Christ was a good man. Mrs. Ward appears to be very indignant at being driven to the alternative of believing Jesus Christ to have been either God or an impostor. But *pace* Mrs. Ward's indignation, He *was* either the one or the other. Hear His own sayings. Again

¹ Eph. ii. 13.

² 1 Cor. xv. 14.

³ Hebr. vii. 25.

and again in the Gospel history does He use the words "I am" of Himself—the expression chosen by Almighty God Himself to denote His Divine nature¹—directly claiming, as the Jews well knew, to be God and nothing less.² What were His words to the beloved disciple? "I am the first and the last. I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death." Or, as St. John again reports Him, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."³ If this is not a distinct claiming of the Godhead, it would be impossible to put such a claim into words. Mrs. Ward may be assured that the idea of eliminating miracle from the Gospel history is as impossible as it would be to remove the vital organs from the human frame, and yet leave a living man.

But to pass on. We have two things now to consider—the historic testimony on which the Gospel miracles rest, and their intrinsic reasonableness. As regards the first, Mrs. Ward has, of course, to encounter the fact that the first ages of Christianity did accept as true the Gospels which are full of miracle. Attempts have indeed been made to prove that the Gospels were not written in the first century, but the attempt has been more courageous than successful. If they were not, a mass of testimony would have to be discredited, heathen as well as Christian, which it is bewildering to think of. So widespread and general a conspiracy to force forged documents on the world, so widespread and general a consent to accept them as true, has no parallel in history. But Mrs. Ward, if we understand her, does not take this ground. She admits that the men of the first century did accept the miraculous histories of Jesus Christ, but argues that this acceptance was worthless, because that was an age in which men were not only willing, but anxious and eager, to believe any marvellous tales that might be foisted upon them. Theirs was, according to the Squire's theory, a generation so voracious of miracle, that they greedily swallowed anything that partook of that character. It is a pity that this idea did not occur to Archbishop Whately, when he was writing his famous "Historic Doubts respecting Napoleon Bonaparte." It would have supplied him with an admirable additional reason for doubting the existence of the great French Emperor. The French,

¹ Exod. iii. 14.

² See St. John viii. 58. The phrase frequently occurs throughout the Gospels. Note particularly St. John xviii. 5, when its utterance caused the whole body of His captors to fall to the ground. It is, unhappily, rendered almost everywhere "I am *He*" by the E.V.

³ Rev. i. 8-18.

he might have argued, were so eager for military renown that they readily believed in the existence of a mythical personage, who satisfied all their longings! But on this point Mr. Gladstone's review, in the *Nineteenth Century*, is so full and searching as to leave little for anyone else to say. To represent an age in which mankind had lost all religious belief, “which did not like to retain God in its knowledge,” as one so thirsting after spiritual revelations as promptly to credit any idle tale which professed to bestow them, does indeed require a courage which may well surprise us. But, as we have said, Mr. Gladstone's exposure of the Squire's theory is too exhaustive to require to be supplemented.

Then as regards the intrinsic reasonableness of miracles. We have, of course, no idea of entering upon a subject of this magnitude, except so far as is necessary to answer Mrs. Ward's attack. She adopts the old argument of Hume. Miracles, he affirms, are violations of the laws of nature, and as the laws of nature are never violated, there can be no such things as miracles. But here there is a twofold assumption—first, that there are fixed and immutable laws of nature; and secondly, that even God could not alter these. This is what the heathen believed. Destiny, according to them, was stronger than God. He could not Himself escape it, much less could He reverse it.¹ But the Christian does not allow that the world is governed by immutable laws, but by an All-wise and All-powerful God, Who is for ever at work in His Providence, Whose watchful care overlooks no portion of the universe, marking the fall of the sparrow, and numbering the very hairs of the head. The order of the universe is indeed harmonious and regular, but only because its Maker and Ruler is Himself both law and harmony. And we know that He does consent to vary it in accordance with that great source of miracles, human prayer. It would not be enough for Mrs. Ward to deny the Bible miracles, she must deny those of human experience also, when men seek and obtain, through Christ's intercession, some special mercy that would not otherwise be accorded them. Along with the destruction of an Incarnate and a saving Christ, there must be the destruction of an interceding Christ also. And then, without union *with* Christ, without worship *of* Him, without reliance *on* Him, without intercession *through* Him, what sort of a Christian life does she suppose would be left to men?

Again, even were we to admit the fixity of laws ordained by God for the government of the world, how does she know that these were violated when miracles occurred? The word

¹ Æsch., *Prom. Vinct.* 527; Herod. i. 91.

"miracle" does not imply the breach of any law. It simply denotes a wonder, and points rather to something unusual than something abnormal. There are beyond doubt occult laws in nature, rarely employed, imperfectly understood, it may be not even guessed at, by man, yet still existing, and brought into operation when there is need for them. When our Lord saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, he being out of the range of human sight, that is accounted as a miracle, yet why should any law of nature have been violated thereby? There is the clearest evidence that men have seen persons and occurrences by some strange, but real, faculty, when these were far beyond the bounds of human vision, or, it may be, long before what they saw actually took place.¹ Are men to doubt the truth of these occurrences, however well they may have been attested, because they would be "violations of the laws of nature, and the laws of nature are never violated"? Is it not a more reasonable belief that they take place in conformity with some law of which we have no knowledge, but which, nevertheless, exists? Such things must, of course, be matters of speculation, and we have no wish to press the argument. But when men claim to lay down absolute and unerring rules of their own, it may be well to remind them how little ground they have for doing so.

We have little disposition to criticise Mrs. Ward's *New Brotherhood*, which, of course, is having a brilliant and successful career, enlisting numerous and ever-increasing masses of adherents. It is simply the latest of a long series of similar experiments which have attracted large multitudes, have enlisted, for a while, enthusiasm and devotion, and then have perished and been forgotten as though they had never been. Christianity without Christ, the watch without the works, the body without the life, the flower without the root, is no new idea in the present age. Mrs. Ward's own description of her cherished institution contains the indisputable evidence of its speedy decay and dissolution.

There is one remark we should like to make before concluding, and that is, that the writer, though always professing to conquer by argument, is careful to employ argument as little as possible. We are told that Robert was a man of considerable ability and learning, that he had deeply studied the questions at issue, that he was warmly devoted to his clerical work, and found the most profound satisfaction in it; and yet when told that all that he had fully and earnestly believed was a baseless illusion, he had nothing whatever to say in its behalf. A novel and extraordinary theory of the Squire,

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 17.

which seems to most minds one of the craziest fancies ever broached, is sufficient to slay his belief at a blow. Why, again, if the Squire's arguments were so unanswerable as against Christianity, were they of no avail against the far weaker creed of Theism, to which the Squire is equally opposed, but to which Robert still continues to cling? So it is in the scenes with Mr. Grey; so it is in the scenes with Mr. Langham. The book is a curious contrast in this respect to Newman's tale, "Loss and Gain," written to prove—not the untenableness of Christianity, but of the position of the Church of England. There the arguments on both sides are given at considerable length, and without any evasion of difficult points. No doubt the author makes his own champion win the victory. But he is at least fair to antagonists, and states their case as clearly and forcibly as he can. Of course we cannot expect Mrs. Ward to write with Cardinal Newman's power, but she might have imitated his fairness.¹ If she was capable of arguing Robert's cause clearly and vigorously, she ought to have done so. If she was not capable of doing so, she ought not to have written the book at all.

H. C. ADAMS.

ART. VI.—HOME RULERS AND THE PAPACY.

AMONG the most pardonable of the ambitions which we may suspect Leo XIII. of cherishing is that of restoring the Papacy to the position of arbiter in the world's quarrels. The reference of the Philippine Islands dispute to his decision had quite a mediæval flavour about it, and the recent Rescript on Irish affairs, though ostensibly published only for the direction of the clergy in a case of morals, and with a distinct repudiation of any political bias, is a decisive condemnation of the methods essential to the success of the agrarian revolt in that country. Indeed, so long as political acts have their moral side, the infallible guide in morals cannot disclaim the political consequences which must flow from his decrees, and the more active the Pope becomes within the proper sphere of his jurisdiction, the greater must be his practical interferences in matters outside of it. But it is one thing to aspire, and another thing to achieve. The compliment paid by Prince Bismarck in the Philippine reference was graceful enough as an act of courtesy, but it did not really bring him a

¹ Especially we have a right to complain, when she handles matters of well-known controversy, but has not troubled herself to examine what controversialists of acknowledged weight and credit have said on the subject, or at all events has not noticed it.