

JOSEPH HENRY SHORTHOUSE.¹

1834-1903.

THERE is something peculiarly attractive in perusing the personal letters of a man who has hitherto been known to the world, almost, if not entirely, as the writer of a famous book. When the writer exhibits, like Shorthouse, an individuality at once full of delicacy and reticence; and the book, like "John Inglesant," appeals to those readers who find delight in the development of a personality which touches them profoundly both in the spiritual and artistic sphere; then, indeed, such letters—indicative, as they must be, of a finely-organized and delicately-nurtured intelligence—come, if not with the power of an intellectual revelation, yet at least with the charm of a moral force. And this is precisely the impression which the "Life and Letters of Joseph Henry Shorthouse" leave upon the sympathies of his readers. There have been, in recent times, biographies and autobiographies, not a few, which are indicative of a wider range of mental culture, or of greater force of personality. That most intensely interesting of all human documents, the "Autobiography of Herbert Spencer," is out of comparison more illuminating as a transcript of a mind's self-evolution and development; the "Letters of Edward Fitzgerald" manifest a far more subtle and incisive attitude of intelligence to certain problems of art and literature that lie deep at the roots of the intellectual life; the "Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley" display a far keener appreciation of those religious and ethical difficulties which pierce to the heart of modern civilization, and are so profoundly indicative of the changed attitude involved, in all speculative questions, by a scientific method rigorously applied to the phenomena both of contemporary thought and of universal history. But in these "Letters of Shorthouse" we are confronted by a wholly different set of conditions. We have not to do with the stirrings and debates of a massive or provocative intelligence, exercising upon the temper of the time a novel influence, whether in the domain of culture or of religion; nor have we to deal with the disconcerting effects produced by a mind which, unaccustomed to the restraints of accepted theories, is itself a determining factor in the evolution of fresh and untried hypotheses. Rather, we have to deal with a mind

¹ "Life and Letters of J. H. Shorthouse." Edited by his wife. In two volumes. Macmillan and Co., 1905. Price 17s. net. (The second of these two volumes contains a selection from writings hitherto unpublished, or published only in magazine form.)

which, while keenly alert to the influences surrounding it on all sides, and zealous to find in those influences food for its own sustentation and progress, draws its main strength from the springs of ancient inspiration.

It would be superfluous here to attempt the task of closely criticising the various spiritual, moral, and intellectual elements that combined to direct the bent of Shorthouse's character. Such elements must be considered in connection with his life as a whole, and sought for, not alone in the private letters which are now published, but in the books in which those elements of character are most truly portrayed. In no other book, perhaps, is his attitude of mind more deftly and delicately intimated than in the book on which his title to fame has hitherto rested, and will continue to rest—"John Inglesant." There was much that went to the making of that unique story. Shorthouse had been brought up among Quakers; and though it was not long before he severed himself from Quakerism, yet the associations, both of thought and feeling which knit themselves into the fabric of his early and more impressionable days, remained constant to the end. The Sacramental ideas of his middle and later life were deeply affected by the very teaching which he had early imbibed, but which he was destined so soon to put aside—at least in its doctrinal entirety. That subtle charm, defying analysis, which we are accustomed to look for (and find) among the Friends, was one he possessed to the fullest degree. And it never left him. It is the charm that hangs about the pages of his books—pervasive, elusive, yet constant; holding the attention of a sympathetic reader in a fashion hard to define, yet easy to feel. Shorthouse's nature was essentially "simpatico," as the Italians say; and thus, without conscious effort, he was enabled to communicate, to spirits akin to his own, a pleasurable sense of the pure joys of existence; and to awake in others that idealism which the beauty of things temporal never failed to inspire. Like Wordsworth, he was thankfully alive to the joys of life, alike in its less as in its more noticeable manifestations.

As regards his own books, we may fairly allow him to speak for himself. He says (vol. i., p. 130): "The main intent of my book" ("John Inglesant") "is to exalt culture against fanaticism of every kind." Specially true of his greatest work, this criticism holds good of all his works. Philosophy (*i.e.*, "Platonism," which, for Shorthouse, almost summed up philosophy) united to romance—herein lies the secret of Shorthouse's success. By the one he appealed to the intellectual, by the other to the emotional, aptitudes of thoughtful readers; and his reverent handling of the *μυστήρια* of existence, whether

as realized through symbols of art, or poetry, or in the Sacramental ordinances of the Christian Religion, not only endeared him to the affections, but gave him a powerful hold upon the rational instincts of such as were prepared to meet his teachings half-way.

Naturally, in a character so constituted, one would expect to find certain strongly-marked prejudices. Noticeable among such prejudices was his detestation of that modern school of fiction which "reports" instead of "creates." He writes (vol. i., p. 283) :

"I loathe it beyond the power of expression : more than that, I believe it to be a passing imposition, adopted because it is *easy*, and, in fact, the only possible school for vulgar and stupid men who have not the smallest particle of genius. The miserable record of everyday life, tedious with the tedium of nothingness, is not what the people want, and they will not respond, save to the call of genius, to something above themselves."

That is well, and indeed wisely, said ; such prejudices even deserve to be cultivated, and themselves form part of a truly philosophical equipment. To assume that the philosophic standpoint is one which excludes the possibility of sound and healthy prejudice, is to under-estimate at once the truth of philosophy and the value of prejudice alike. Only an empty Pyrrhonism would acquiesce in an attitude of mind from which hatred of the false (or the useless), whether in literature or life, was contemptuously banished.

Of Shorthouse's attitude to the central problem of religion, the following extract (from an interesting letter "To an Agnostic," vol. i., p. 90 *sqq.*) affords us a valuable indication—more especially as, in certain directions, Shorthouse's teaching, *as a whole*, has points of contact with modern Ritschlianism :

"I do not advocate belief in the Bible ; I advocate belief in Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, and the fundamental principle of His teaching was belief in Himself as God. This seems to be the only explanation of the difference in effect of this teaching and that of Socrates. In many respects the life and teaching (tone of thought) of the Platonic Socrates was, and is, more adapted to human acceptance than that of Jesus. But what has been the result ? With every conceivable advantage—advantages too numerous to mention here—none. . . . A profound study of Greek paganism . . . cannot fail to lead to this conclusion—that it absolutely failed as a controlling power over the life of the masses . . . and that, on the contrary, the influence of Jesus, penetrating into ranks of life which the highest pagans acknowledged to be beyond hope of influence, has raised the poorest and most debased and ignorant to a contemplation of the Divine, and to a belief in the unseen and the future, and has changed the whole aspect of the life of man."

Very striking, in some ways, is Shorthouse's criticism of Bishop Gore's Bampton Lectures (for 1891), in which (see vol. i., p. 304) he says, *inter alia*, that the attack on the

“Establishment” is the fatal flaw in the High Church movement, the germ of all the errors of Sacerdotalism and Dissent (he regards the two things as springing from a common source)—viz., the error that makes the Church of Rome hopelessly narrow and sectarian, the germ of all dissenting sects. I have already spoken of Shorthouse’s *sacramental* convictions; it is as well to guard against the misunderstanding that such convictions naturally eventuated in any sacerdotal inclinations. These two things are perfectly distinct; and Shorthouse was too skilled a thinker to be guilty of confusing them. And in this connection one may usefully quote a passage from a letter of his to Bishop Talbot (vol. i., p. 379), where he says: “I should like to say that I have written *nothing* but what I thoroughly *felt* and *believed*; it was all true to myself; and that what I wished to enforce was the mysticism of the Prayer-Book and the Caroline Divines, on the one side *safe*, on the other *infinite*.”

No brief notice of Shorthouse’s life would be complete without some reference to his own character as revealed in his everyday life and intercourse with others. It says much, indeed, that those who knew him best, loved him most. That is, surely, a rare test of a man’s intrinsic worth. Rare? nay, it is the supreme test. Into his books a man will naturally, and of necessity, put his best, spilling (so to speak) his soul’s wealth upon the pages that, long after he is dead, will yet speak, vibrating to the music of his highest spiritual instincts. That is what we may see for ourselves the wide world over. That a man, however, should, in the meaner (as we deem them) relations of common humanity, in those “little, nameless, unremembered acts” of ordinary work-a-day existence, so transform the drab uniformity of the temporal as to invest it with some gleam of the eternal—this, indeed, is the mark of true nobility of soul; to be able to achieve such is the dower of a character infinitely transcending the mass of human nature; this is surely to find, in life, the sanctity and meaning of a higher, diviner life. It is the “note” of Shorthouse’s own beautiful character. Not the cares of trade, not the harassing routine of business—and of Shorthouse it may be said, with truth, as Ruskin said of his own father, that he was (rarest of all things!) “a perfectly honest merchant”—not the burden of ill-health, were able to shatter the idealism within him, or hinder the realization of that idealism in the daily weariness of common life. His was, indeed, a commanding ideal; it was infinitely beautiful to look upon; would that alone have sufficed? Nay, rather, his life was the reflection of his own

purposeful dream. "Face to face with the idea of beauty and pleasure" lay, like a counter-charm, another ideal—the ideal of "purity, truth, and duty." Simply, quietly, unaffectedly, he lived—*that*.

E. H. BLAKENEY.

THE REFORMATION.

I.

THE salient characteristics of the fifteenth century in Europe are transition and secularity. This must be grasped firmly, if we would understand the course of events in the English Reformation.

Every age is transitional. Even when changes seem most abrupt, there is, in God's providence, a period of gradual preparation in the life of a community as in the life of each member of it individually. But the fifteenth century is more than others essentially an age of transition. It is the deathbed of feudalism, of mediævalism; it ushers in a new condition of things in Church and State. New forces were coming into existence; a new class was being formed between serfs and nobles; towns and townsmen knew and felt their growing importance. The great religious orders, the salt of the earth in their conception, had lost their savours. Not the monks only, but even the friars, a protest at first against the decay of monastic austerity, had succumbed to the world. The most powerful of all the religious orders, the subtlest influence of all, was not yet in being. The twin discoveries of a new hemisphere and of a new way of diffusing literature, with the renaissance of the poetry and philosophy of ancient Greece, made a revolution in men's modes of thought. The new schools of learning springing up everywhere—the Universities of Florence, Freiburg, Treves, Louvain, Caen, Poitiers, Bordeaux, Bourges, Saragossa, St. Andrew's, etc.—provided a congenial seed-plot for the germs floating in the air. The several nations of Europe were claiming, for good or for evil, their independence of the ties which had bound them together into one Christendom under one dictatorial see. The capture by the Turks of the city, which had been the chief centre of Eastern Christianity, widened the gulf between East and West, not merely by breaking off negotiations, which seemed not unlikely to end in reunion, but by withdrawing the Greek Church further from contact with Europe. All over the