

PROFESSOR DRUMMOND'S RELIGIOUS  
TEACHING.

IF the influence of a spiritual teacher is to be measured by the number of lives that have been touched to finer issues by his spoken and written word, few if any teachers of the last quarter of the century have been more influential than Henry Drummond. Critics speculate as to whether *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* and *The Ascent of Man* will live. Even should these books be soon forgotten, their author has left behind him a far more enduring monument in the thousands of young men in every part of Protestant Christendom who thank God for the spiritual lessons they learned at the feet of the loved teacher over whose early death they are to-day mourning. Widely read as his books have been, their influence has perhaps been inconsiderable as compared with the influence he exercised upon those who were brought into direct contact with the magnetic force of his personality. His teaching was indeed strikingly fresh and suggestive, but the teacher was greater than the teaching. Those who knew him best were the readiest to confess not only that he was "the best of all the men they had ever known," but also that over and above the beauty of his Christian character he was endowed with a rich and strong individuality that fascinated them as by a subtle, subduing spell. There was a unique impressiveness in his platform speaking; there were beauty of thought and charm of diction in his addresses, but the truest secret of his power as a speaker lay in the thousand subtle influences radiating forth from the personality of the speaker. He did something more than present spiritual truth in new lights, and with a wealth of attractive illustrations; he poured forth of his own rich personality into the hearts of those who hung upon his words.

Dr. Stalker has paid a warm tribute to the personal worth of his life-long friend. This is a theme on which all who were privileged to be inspired by Professor Drummond's friendship love to dwell; it was a theme which evoked perpetual admiration and thankfulness to the Giver of all good; but my object in the present article is to draw attention to his religious teaching with special reference to the development which took place in his grasp of spiritual truth.

Professor Drummond began his career as an Evangelist, and to the end Evangelism was the master passion of his life. He was qualified by the versatility of his gifts to play many rôles—to be an expounder of science, an explorer, a man of letters, a social reformer—but the rôle he deliberately chose and adhered to was that of Christ's Evangelist, especially to young men. It is from this standpoint that his teaching ought to be judged. He never pretended to be a teacher of systematic theology, bound to assign its due place to every theological doctrine in a rounded system. His ambition was to win men for Christ and Christ's service. An Evangelist cannot hope to impress his hearers by truth which he has not himself *seen*, which has not mastered his own heart. One secret of Drummond's success as an Evangelist lay just here—that even at the risk of being misunderstood and criticised, he would not say “what he ought to have said,” but spoke with an accent of intense personal conviction the truth by which he had himself been gripped and held. In the eyes of the systematic theologian, he was necessarily one-sided. There were aspects of Christian truth which fell into the background in his message. But in this sense every successful Evangelist is one-sided. There are diversities of Christian experience; and while there are diversities of Christian experience, Evangelists who speak their message not out of a theological textbook, but “out of the abundance of the heart,” will show diversities in the emphasis they lay on the different

aspects of Christian truth. Critics may be justified in wishing that an Evangelist's Christian experience had been other than it is, but they do not wisely quarrel with an Evangelist for laying emphasis in his preaching on the truth by which he has himself been most strongly mastered. It is true, as has been often pointed out, that Professor Drummond is one-sided in his teaching on Sin. He gives us no such analysis of this side of human experience as St. Augustine. He had no such equipment for this analysis as St. Augustine possessed by his own experience of years of struggle with fierce temptation. He knew little of sore struggle of that sort; beyond any one I have ever known, he bore the white flower of a blameless life through boyhood and youth into manhood; he was one of those "favourites of heaven in point of character" referred to in a passage of great eloquence by Canon Mozley: "How or why have these victors gained their crowns without the disfigurement and alloy of that struggle which leaves its stamp on so many? We know not. It is a mystery to us. But we must recognise the fact that it does please the Almighty to endow some of His creatures from the first with extraordinary graces."

An Evangelist need not be greatly disturbed by a charge of one-sidedness: in one sense, one-sidedness is a condition of his success. There is a more important question: What is the worth of the aspects of Christian truth on which he *does* lay emphasis? It is not difficult to get at the heart of Professor Drummond's message. It is summed up for us in a beautiful story he tells in *The Changed Life*: "There lived once a young girl whose perfect grace of character was the wonder of those who knew her. She wore on her neck a gold locket which no one was ever allowed to open. One day, in a moment of unusual confidence, one of her companions was allowed to touch its spring and learn its secret. She saw written these words—'Whom having not seen I

*love.* That was the secret of her beautiful life. She had been changed into the same image." From the first weeks of his association with Mr. D. L. Moody, the American Evangelist, on through the twenty-three years that followed, he never ceased to plead with those whom he addressed to form and cultivate a friendship with Christ. "Make Christ your most constant companion"—that might stand as the keynote of his message. "Then you reduce religion to a common friendship? A common friendship—Who talks of a *common* friendship? There is no such thing in the world. On earth no word is more sublime. Friendship is the nearest thing we know to what religion is. God is love. And to make religion akin to friendship is simply to give it the highest expression conceivable by man."

Whatever may be said about the one-sidedness of Professor Drummond's presentation of Christianity, this, at any rate, can surely be claimed for him—that the side of Christianity he does present is one of cardinal importance. "Friendship with Christ" takes us well into the very heart of Christianity. "Friendship with Christ" has been the secret of the enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, and beauty of the Christian life; it has been the secret of the Christian mysticism of St. Paul and of St. John, and of every type of fervent evangelical piety; it has been the power by which the Church has accomplished her mission and achieved her spiritual triumphs. In the sixteenth century the revival of Christianity in western Europe was associated with the proclamation of salvation by faith in Christ—at bottom but another rendering of the formula "salvation through friendship with Christ." In laying emphasis on this element of Christianity, Professor Drummond had got hold of the central force of the whole Christian movement.

His Gospel of Friendship with Christ (or salvation by faith) was eagerly welcomed by thousands of young men on both sides of the Atlantic. The preacher had, it is

true, singular personal qualifications for gaining the ear of educated young men. He was a beautiful speaker, well versed in modern literature, and able to clothe his thoughts in "shining vesture." He had "seen almost all the beautiful things God had made," and "enjoyed almost every pleasure that He had planned for man," and gave his hearers the impression of one who himself, not in spite but in virtue of his Christianity, lived a rich, wide, and sunny life. He was known to be keenly interested in science and modern scientific theories, and had a rare power of freshening his subject with illustrations from the realm of science as aptly chosen as they were exquisitely worked out; and the mere fact that science and religion had at least a personal reconciliation in the speaker, won him a hearing where others would have failed. He had a wide knowledge of human life; he had seen "many men and cities," and with human sympathies as keen as his knowledge was wide, he could readily throw himself alongside of the life experiences of those to whom he made his appeals. Qualifications such as these were his personal equipment, but his success as an Evangelist lay in the message he proclaimed—the power of friendship with Christ for life; "a more abundant life than they have, a life abundant in love, and therefore abundant in salvation for themselves, and large in enterprise for the alleviation and redemption of the world." To young men thirsting for "more life and higher," perplexed with theological doubts, and alienated from mere ecclesiasticism, this message of salvation through friendship with Christ was welcomed as a discovery in religion: to multitudes the reception of the message was the beginning or restarting of their Christian life.

To this conception of the essence of Christianity as friendship with Christ, Professor Drummond adhered, as I have said, from the beginning to the end. But some of his views underwent considerable change. His first

book, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, no longer represented his position in his maturer years. In examining the growth of his teaching, the interest of this book lies not in the proofs he brought forward from the laws of biological science, but in what he wished to prove. The most valuable chapters in the book are those which deal in the simple fashion of edifying discourse with the experiences of the spiritual life, such as the chapters on Degeneration, Growth, Semi-Parasitism, and Parasitism. But these are not the chapters in which the author was himself interested. The introduction, and the chapters on Biogenesis and Classification, contain the burden of his message, for the sake of which the volume was published. There are two related thoughts in these chapters which were dominant in his teaching for many years—the distinctiveness of the spiritual or Christ life, as contrasted with the highest merely ethical life, and the sudden, inexplicable descent of the spiritual life into a man's soul. Mr. Drummond was aware that these two thoughts, in the somewhat exaggerated form they assumed in his mind, met with no cordial reception even from many Christian teachers. When it dawned upon him that, uncongenial as they might seem, they were vouched for by science itself, he was thrilled (as his friends can well recall) with a sense of the importance of the discovery as a new and unlooked-for defence of what seemed to him a capital part of evangelical religion. Questions were naturally raised by this proposed new apologetic: ought not the laws of the spiritual world to be determined by an investigation of the phenomena of the spiritual world? Can biological science give much help in the interpretation of an experience of which self-consciousness and self-determination are prime factors? Even if the doctrine of spontaneous generation is discredited in favour of biogenesis (*omne vivum ex vivo*), is any additional argument thereby gained for the theory

of the sudden beginning of the Christ life? Must not the question be settled by an investigation of the facts of spiritual experience? Even if it is true that there is a gulf fixed between the inorganic kingdom and the organic, between a stone and a plant, does that constitute an argument for separating the highest ethical life from the Christ life by so wide a gulf as is suggested in *Natural Law*? Questions such as these are inevitably raised, and are not easily answered. But the interest of the book lies, as I have said, in the positions the author wishes to make good by his elaborate and ingenious arguments from biological science. The book is an impressive testimony to Professor Drummond's conviction of the reality and supreme worth of the distinctively Christ life, and to his conviction both of the need and possibility of spiritual conversion.

In later years Professor Drummond had himself lost interest in the line of argument pursued in the chapters on Biogenesis and Classification. On the scientific side, he had come to lay less emphasis on breaks or gaps in the life of the universe; and on the religious side, while he never ceased to adhere to his conviction of the supreme worth of the Christ life and of the need and possibility of spiritual renewal, he had come to recognise a closer affinity between the ethical and the spiritual life. To the question, What is the essential difference between spiritual beauty and moral beauty? he had answered in *Natural Law* that it is the distinction between the organic and the inorganic; and in his theory of conversion he so magnified the Divine action as to suggest that man himself had little to do with the change, and that his old ethical life had little of any causal relation to his new life. This exaggeration of Calvinism passes away in his later teaching. "Where does joy come from? I knew a Sunday scholar whose conception of joy was that it was a thing made in

lumps and kept somewhere in heaven, and that when people prayed for it, pieces were somehow let down and fitted into their souls. . . . In reality, joy is as much a matter of cause and effect as pain." "Try to give up the idea that religion comes to us by chance or by mystery or by caprice. It comes to us by natural law or by supernatural law, for all law is Divine. Edward Irving went to see a dying boy once, and when he entered the room he just put his hand on the sufferer's head and said, 'My boy, God loves you,' and went away. And the boy started from his bed and called out to the people in the house, 'God loves me! God loves me!' It changed that boy. The sense that God loved him overpowered him, melted him down, and began the creating of a new heart in him. And that is how the love of God melts down the unlovely heart in man and begets in him the new creature, who is patient and humble and gentle and unselfish. And there is no other way to get it. There is no mystery about it. We love others, we love everybody, we love our enemies, because He first loved us." So far was he from seeking to empty the ethical life of its significance as in *Natural Law*, that he strove assiduously in later years to read ethical significance into all the old theological doctrines, and several of his friends he urged to undertake the task of restating the old doctrines in terms of their ethical import.

Another advance upon his earlier teaching is marked by his increased appreciation of the spiritual worth of the social organism and his increased emphasis upon social duty. "Natural Law" represents individualism in religion. The relation of the individual to God, the friendship of the individual with Christ, the growth of the individual in Christlikeness—these are the topics which filled the sphere of his vision in his earlier years. He carried over this conviction of the supreme importance of

the spiritual life of the individual into his later teaching. "It is here, he says in *The City Without a Church*, "that the older, the more individual conception of Christianity did such mighty work for the world—it produced good men. . . . Good men even with small views are immeasurably more important than small men with great views. But given good men, such men as were produced even by the self-centered theology of an earlier generation, and add that wider outlook and social ideal which are coming to be the characteristics of the religion of the age, and Christianity has an equipment for the reconstruction of the world before which nothing can stand." To his earlier individualism he himself added this "wider outlook and social ideal." Nor is it difficult to trace the origin of this growth in his outlook—in loyalty to Christ and Christ's teaching. It was at Christ's feet that he learned the impressive lessons on the Kingdom of God and social service he has read us in *The Programme of Christianity* and *The City Without a Church*." The Socialism—if I may use this word not in its technical but general meaning—of his later years is in striking contrast to the extreme individualism of his earlier years; but his socialism was deeply rooted in his individualism—in his personal loyalty to Him whose watchword was the Kingdom of God, and who said to His disciples, Whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant.

If *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* was an apologetic for his early individualism, no less is the *The Ascent of Man* an apologetic for his later socialism. *The Ascent of Man*, whether we have regard to its literary style or its intellectual power, is unquestionably his greatest book. Here again, for the study of his religious teaching, the chief interest of the book is not in its proofs, but in what it seeks to prove—that love, or the struggle for the life of others, is a law deeply embedded in the whole life of

the universe. Love, service, sympathy, sacrifice, co-operation, brotherhood—these were dominant thoughts in his own “wider outlook and social ideal.” One may question whether it is necessary to appeal to “nature” for a sanction to the law of love in our social life, and one may question whether the author is successful in obtaining from “nature” the sanction of which he is in search; but no one can read this brilliant volume without being impressed by the social enthusiasm which lies behind its reasoning and eloquence.

It has been said that Professor Drummond had already given the world the best work he was likely to achieve before he was struck down in the prime of his manhood. It seems to me that there are indications in *The Ascent of Man* that, had he been spared, he would have given us work of a still higher quality. The concluding chapter on Involution shows an appreciation of the import of an idealistic philosophy which is a new feature in his thinking. “Are we even quite sure that what we call a physical world is, after all, a physical world? . . . The very term ‘material world,’ we are told, is a misnomer, that the world is a spiritual world, merely employing ‘matter’ for its manifestations.” “Evolution is not progress in matter. Matter cannot progress. It is a progress in spirit in that which is limitless, in that which is at once most human, most rational, most divine.” “Evolution is Advolution; better, it is revelation—the phenomenal expression of the divine, the progressive realization of the ideal, the ascent of Love.” I cannot help feeling that Professor Drummond hampered himself needlessly by seeking arguments for the laws of the spiritual world in Nature. The sentences I have quoted show how he was beginning to work himself free of this hampering influence by recognising that spirit is the prius of matter, that nature is itself only interpretable through the mind of man, or (to use his own phrase) the spiritual

world. No one could have adopted a more hospitable attitude towards new truth. Had he lived to follow out the hints contained in the last chapter of *The Ascent of Man*, he had it in him to do work as an Evangelist to the scientific and cultured classes for which the great work he has already done would have seemed but a preparation.

Thy leaf has perished in the green,  
And, while we breathe beneath the sun,  
The world which credits what is done  
Is cold to all that might have been.

So here shall silence guard thy fame,  
But somewhere out of human view,  
Whate'er thy hands are set to do,  
Is wrought with tumult of acclaim.

D. M. Ross.