

to us "in many parts and in many fashions," even as in old times He prepared men to receive Him, and that to each one of us He commits the care of some part of His counsel, and speaks to each one of us in some appropriate fashion.

The end for which we look and labour may seem to be far off, but the promise which has been justified in the past still remains—"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,"—free because it has vanquished for ever every suggestion of caprice or selfishness. The end may seem far off, but each day brings us nearer to it. Men and nations may be defeated, but it has been most truly said humanity never lost a battle. The loftiest desire we can frame for the world, the loftiest ideal towards which we can strive, is only a faint and

imperfect reflection of the will of God, and with Him power, righteousness, and love are one. The end may seem far off, but to labour for it is to have a foretaste of victory, and to know that the fruits of our service of an hour are garnered in the treasury of God, where every difference of small and great is lost in the sameness of love. "In many parts and in many fashions"—that is the law of man's learning and teaching; and the purpose of God's good pleasure, which it is our privilege to serve, is to sum up all things in Christ—the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. In the prospect of this end, learning, teaching, serving, find their inspiration, their support, and their reward. May God help us in our measure to hasten it!

Alexander Vinet: a Pioneer of the Nineteenth Century.

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WHAT Schleiermacher has been to Germany; what men like Erskine of Linlathen, Robertson of Brighton, and Bushnell have been for various sections of the English-speaking peoples; that Alexander Vinet was, yea and is, for French-speaking Protestants. Each man must here speak for himself. But as the aim of this sketch is to reawaken evangelical Christians at large to a sense of the loss involved in suffering a luminary of the magnitude of Vinet to sink below their horizon, its writer, as one whose lot has been cast emphatically in the present spiritual generation, feels constrained to say quite simply, yet boldly, that there is more permanent light and leading in Vinet than in any one of the highly prophetic souls already named. Schleiermacher was indeed a more masterful genius, and developed under more manifold and brilliant personal influences; though it may be doubted whether, as a religious man and still more as a Christian—rather than a man of consummate culture—he did not thereby lose quite as much as he gained. But if greatness in a Christian thinker be measured by the actual amount of the "mind of Christ" which a man vitally assimilates, and the faithfulness with which he preserves that balance among the Christian principles which constitutes the very *genius* or spirit of the gospel, then it is not too much to say

that Vinet will not suffer by comparison with the greatest "of the school of Christ," to use the phrase applied to him by Sainte-Beuve.

Be this as it may, one thing is certain—namely, that Vinet goes far to explain the noblest elements in French Protestantism of the last half century. So that, if we seek for the secret of the large, sympathetic, progressive, yet assured faith of men like a De Pressensé and a Bersier, we must reckon intelligently with the sensitive, often solitary, thinker of Lausanne, who in his retirement went so deep down into the human soul—universal humanity, as it were, in and beneath the particular—and disclosed the gospel of Christ as implied in its essential constitution, its aspirations, and its needs. Vinet had none of that superficial originality, which consists in realising some truth in so masterful a fashion as to force it out of perspective, and thus convey the impression of novelty. He was original, rather, in the nobler sense that he penetrated to the origins of human life, where the human blends with the divine. Thus his conception of Christianity stands firm, and his spirit is abreast of the most thoughtful Christian spirits of to-day. Moreover, when we remember how Vinet the Christian was one and the same with Vinet the *littérateur*, it is significant of his calibre that so modern a critic as M. Brunetière

has confessed how often he has found his best ideas anticipated by Vinet.

His external life was singularly uneventful. But if it be true that "the decisive events of the world take place in the mind," it is equally true that Vinet's mind was the arena in which met, and only after years of *travail intérieur* came to reconciliation, forces and factors of change that have seldom been equalled in history. The early years of this century were charged with a sense of unrest and revolution, for which the political upheaval of 1789 had created the pervasive atmosphere. In England the outcome of this shaking of traditional conceptions led, in the religious sphere, not so much to healthy development, by absorption of the new fruitful ideas, whether philosophic or historical, as to obscurantist reaction, the outcome of fear rather than of faith. The result being, that the present generation, including the writers of *Lux Mundi*, is struggling with arrears of unreconciled elements in the realm of our higher thought, for which the "ostrich policy" of the Tractarians is largely responsible. Patristic authority, "Church principles," and the antique in ritual were barriers which could not long avail, when conscience and reason were pressing for larger and franker recognition, side by side with faith, under the roof-tree of the Church. It was otherwise on the Continent. There, within the sphere of Protestantism at least, the irrelevancies of authority devoid of inner basis of authentication in the soul itself—which is no religious authority—were not interposed between religious men and the issues. Accordingly, Vinet was fronted by the inevitable problem of the "old" and "new" theology—the theology which was an amalgam of the Protestant doctrine of Justification by Faith and the scholastic or traditional method of "Catholicism," as contrasted with that which was Protestant through and through, appealing to the renewed conscience for verification of the system as well as of its basis.

Born at Ouchy, "the Piræus of Lausanne," in 1797, Alexander Vinet early found himself in the midst of the conflict between the "old" and the "new." First of all there was his father, Marc Vinet, who was a fine specimen of the intelligent French Puritan of the best eighteenth century type, to whom the tradition of his Church was something so fixed, that re-examination of it by the individual seemed to smack of profanity; while

Holy Scripture was so august *per se* as to be able to guarantee Christ and His gospel *ab extra*, itself being approved, if such a thing were necessary, by its prophecy and miracles rather than by its relation to Christ on His own merits. Trained by such a father he was sufficiently under the influence of the old orthodoxy when he went at the age of twenty-one to teach French literature at Basle, where his spiritual *Wanderjahre* began in earnest. His "innate love of truth and candour" and his "dread lest speech should outrun sincere conviction," together with the rapid enlargement of his mental horizon through his serious study of literature as a revelation of the human soul, caused his sensitive conscience much heart-searching. And it is clear that, absorbed in the study of ideas, he might have become a very Amiel in his all-round self-dissatisfaction, had not his affections found an outlet, leading to a deepening of character and insight, in the pure love that breathes in the correspondence between himself and his future wife. From her he learnt not only something of the nature of true piety, but also, by experience, how "the idea of God is linked with all pure and deep affections"—the germ of his later doctrine of the interpenetration of the truly human by the divine. Already he can say Amen to Schiller's confession, "I own it frankly, I believe in the reality of disinterested love; I am lost if it does not exist, and I renounce belief in divinity, immortality, and virtue;" and he adds, *à propos* of Lamartine's *Meditations*, "If it can be proved that poets are charlatans and that we are dupes, I renounce the study of poetry"—words that give us a glimpse into the serious spirit in which he was prosecuting his study of literature. Already, too, he has felt that "Liberty alone can develop and ripen thought." Accordingly, his spiritual emancipation was in various ways already in process before the coming of De Wette to Basle introduced him to the freer and more historic methods of German theological science. Hitherto theology had forgotten that "exegesis is the parent, and not the maid-of-all-work of dogma" (Astié); and Vinet was quick to note the greater reality of the new exegesis. But he was not to be carried away by any current tendency to divorce Christian morality and positive doctrine based on the Christian facts. Where this latter is set forth in its unargumentative simplicity, he holds it "equally impossible to believe without practising, and to practise without

believing." Briefly speaking, then, this dictum contains the germ of his whole life's problem—namely, How so to grasp and state the ultimate Christian facts that, in relation to them, belief and practice shall be necessary correlatives? From this standpoint he soon saw that faith does not call upon us "to penetrate the mystery of the divine essence, nor to grope our way in the uncertain glimmer of a subtle system of metaphysics," ere we are entitled to be recognised as true Christians. "Religion is not a science: it is not a series of external facts submitted to our reason. . . . It is by the heart we shall learn if the Messiah who appeared in Judæa at a certain period is a Being whose coming was necessitated by the craving of the human soul. It is by the heart that we shall learn to know if the Holy Spirit is really essential to our increase in holiness; and we may say the same with regard to all the other doctrines." These words were written in September 1824, after he had been quickened in his sense for personal religion by the warm and vital piety manifest in some of the finer spirits touched by the *Réveil* movement, and by his own personal experience when face to face with death in the latter part of 1823.¹ They breathe the same spirit as his remark, in speaking of Erskine's *Reflexions on the Intrinsic Evidence of Christianity*, to the effect that "though we cannot conceive the 'how' of the mysteries of religion, the 'why' is perfectly accessible to our reason." To this end, "to study our own heart, and to consult the religious experience of those who have consecrated their lives to the service of Christ—this is the first means. To study the Gospel and some of the books that explain and apply its system—this is the second." Here, then, we have already *in nuce* Vinet's distinctive conception, his Christian *individualisme*, which, as emphasising the moral conscience in preference to consciousness in general, builds upon the most universal elements in man, which in turn involve truths as to the divine nature that have the highest objective validity. Thus its affinity is not so much with Schleiermacher's "Individuality" and his highly subjective *Glaubenslehre*, as with Frank's mode of thought in his *System of Christian Certainty*,

¹ This period is recognised by Vinet himself as marking an epoch in his life; and its significance appears in the fact that what now most strikes him about De Wette is his deficiency in constructive effort.

which makes the experience of regeneration the basis of Apologetic and Dogmatic.

So much space has been devoted to the growth of Vinet's personal religion and his corresponding convictions, that we can notice his subsequent career only in its relation to modifications in his maturer thought, as indicated by his strictly religious writings. For neither his nobly ethical literary criticism, nor even his strivings for religious and ecclesiastical liberty, fall directly within our present scope. Schérer has thus summarised Vinet's central thought of the vital interpenetration of creed and conduct, faith and action, in the veritable gospel. "Conduct demands a motive power, which cannot be anything but an affection: this affection needs an awakening—an inspiring fact; this fact is realised in redemption, which is only dogma because it is first fact. Such was his conception of Christianity." At various times, however, marked roughly by the *Discourses on Certain Religious Subjects* (1831), the *New Discourses* (1841), and the *Evangelical Studies* (1847), he worked out more fully certain distinct aspects of the subject. The aim of the *Discourses* was similar to that of Schleiermacher's *Speeches upon Religion*, addressed, as he puts it, "to its cultured despisers." Their audiences no doubt differed somewhat. Still each writer believed that the indifference deprecated, had causes other than the inevitable prejudice of the "natural man" against the element of surrender involved in "the obedience of faith." If we may adapt some famous lines, we may say that both held that, in a sense,

"Christ is a master of so gracious mien,
As to be welcomed needs but to be seen;"

that religion, whether as an idea or as a need of human nature, was so implied in the very constitution of humanity, that even the "natural" man could not but feel some responsive emotion in his being awoken, if but for a moment, when the appropriate religious object was immediately presented in native simplicity and purity to his sensibility, apart from all the conventional trappings of a scholastic orthodoxy. Alike, therefore, they restored religion afresh to the language of literature. But the religion which Vinet had at heart was by no means identical with that of Schleiermacher's *Reden*. While sensibility meant to the latter a certain pervasive artistic sense,

to the former it was rather conscience—an intuitive recognition of “whatsoever things are true, worthy of reverence (σεμνά), just, pure, lovely,”¹ such as might deepen into an awestruck sense of personal deficiency and demerit. A sense for beauty might be included, but it was for “the beauty of holiness.” No doubt these conceptions are capable of converging in the idea of the Sublime; but the impression produced is quite different in each case. The atmosphere of the one is Romanticist and philosophic; of the other, ethical and religious. And these differences come out decisively in the prominence accorded to Christ in the two presentations; though the contrast is lessened by the “Explanations” subsequently appended by Schleiermacher to his discourses. Still the tendency underlying both was the same. Thus Vinet relied, for personal or vital conviction, upon the internal self-evidencing power of Christianity; the more so that even if the external evidences led a man to the water of life, they could not give him the desire to drink.² Again he saw the danger latent in the current dualism between the “natural” and “supernatural” as such, a dualism on which Revivalist theology at home and elsewhere was laying undue stress. He saw that there must be some bond between the natural and the regenerate man, other than the mere creative act of God, some point of contact, not totally effaced by man’s sinful estate, which could ensure personal identity even where the “old man” gave place to the “new.” And this he found in the rudiments of conscience in human nature as such, when fairly and sympathetically regarded;³

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

² This was the radical defect of the “orthodox form of rationalism”—an inheritance from both seventeenth and eighteenth century Apologetics and Dogmatics—which Vinet found in the *Revival*, as well as in the current “Moderatism” of the pulpit.

³ No account of Vinet would be complete even in principle, which omitted reference to his affinity with Pascal (whose most sympathetic interpreter he became), especially as regards the harmony of the gospel with the needs and aspirations of the human soul. Yet Vinet maintains his originality even here. For not only did he emphasise man’s sense of sin and duty, rather than that intellectual misery so subtly set forth by Pascal; but he never put faith and reason into the hopeless antithesis, in which the latter gloried to a morbid degree. Rather, he more and more tended to regard them as two distinct functions of the essential rationality of the soul, considered as the correlate of the uniform, though variously mediated, truth of God. Herein “the Pascal of

although the unifying principle of selfhood, rather than filial trust, vitiated the *tout-ensemble*. Hence he recognised implicitly from the first, and explicitly in his *New Discourses*, a moral element in the faith demanded by Christ,⁴ an idea which he set forth in an epoch-making sermon on Faith as a *work*, the “work of God” (John vi. 29). In this and other attempts to do justice to both the divine and human factors in regeneration and in the gospel as a whole, Vinet found his reconciliation of all antinomies in the Person and Work of Christ, in whom the two natures united with obvious harmony *in fact*, whatever difficulty there might be in a theory. Nor was one needed at the experimental stage of moral appropriation by personal trust. Thus he felt his way to the great truth, towards which we have been tending since his day,—namely, that it is the image of Christ, as He stands forth, a spiritual unity, to the look of need, that authenticates Christianity and the sufficiency of Bible and Church as the media through which externally He reaches the individual; while on the inner side the immanent Spirit of God witnesses with our consciences that He is Lord of the conscience and its Redeemer.⁵

Perhaps the climax of his progress towards a complete innerness of conception, to which “faith” ceases to anything short of a receptivity of the whole personality,—reason, emotion, will,—uniting the believer really, if implicitly, in a spiritual union with God in Christ which itself constitutes salvation or eternal life—this climax is reached in

Protestantism” has seen further into the significance of the Incarnation than even the Evangelical Catholic who wrote the *Short Life of Jesus*. Thus he says: “The glory of the gospel is not only to be found in its having made truth *divine*, but in having made it *human*. It touches by its two extremities the mystery of the divine essence and the mystery of human nature. The two elements, human and divine, are *not the two terms of an antinomy, but two poles of truth*” (“Theology of the *Pensées*”).

⁴ For an attempt to draw out this thought exegetically, see *Expositor*, June 1892.

⁵ “There are,” says Vinet, “two modes of conceiving Christianity—(1) as the reign of visible authority; (2) as the reign of the Holy Spirit. This latter says, ‘You are all taught of God.’ . . . In the judgment of some persons, all this is rationalism; for others it is pure mysticism; in our eyes it is simply the gospel. . . . The gospel can be nothing else than *spiritual*, otherwise the principle is denied which Jesus Christ established at great cost—the principle of the immediate relations of man with God . . . of *religious individuality*.”

one of his latest meditations, entitled "Looking." *Croire c'est regarder*, is the legitimate outcome of his whole development. This, while recalling the chaste mysticism of William Law, has yet more direct affinity with those mystical passages in which Paul's thought finds its most personal utterance, apart from the Jewish setting in which he is often obliged to frame it, as well as with the characteristically Johannine attitude.¹ Mysticism is a term at which many look vaguely askance. But that mysticism which is the mature outcome of the assimilation of all the earlier phases of Christian experience, comes to us not only as the last word of a Paul and a John, but also with a certain suggestion of absoluteness on its very face. For it yields a point of view from which justification and sanctification melt away into one another, as the implicit into the explicit form of one supreme consciousness of divine fellowship or community of life. In it he at last transcended the "orthodox rationalism" of the older theology, whether in its method of external "proofs," or in its idea of salvation by dogmas, some of which were conceived as the arbitrary contents of justifying faith, some as the bare sanctions of the requisite degree of virtue to be attained by the believer, but all very imperfectly homogeneous with the human spirit to be regenerated and transfigured by their aid. In it, then, his idea of a really "vital Christianity" found its final fulfilment.

Now that we are less likely to misunderstand his true meaning, let us hear Vinet speak in his own inimitable way. "Revealed truth is only human, because it is divine, and only divine on condition of being human. Man carries within him the twofold need of giving himself wholly to God and of remaining wholly man. All heresies which are born in the bosom of Christianity belittle either man or God. The religion of the heart, which is a living faith, maintains an admirable equilibrium between these two extremes; while

¹ In justifying his mature judgment that "Antinomianism" was "one of the weaknesses of the *Revival*," he wrote a few days before his death: "It would ill become the disciples of the gospel to take from St. Paul only that which distinguishes him from his companions, and not that which they all have in common. As a fact, all St. John is to be found in St. Paul; but how many students of the Bible seem never to have made the discovery." Surely this is a "biblical" or "exegetical theologian" before his age!

theology has great difficulty in preventing itself from inclining to one or the other. Why? Because it remains always below the summit of the angle; while living faith, throned on the apex, commands the two sides, or two slopes, of truth without inclining to one more than the other. It is the work of the theologian to distinguish between the two . . . and theology belittles by turns divinity and humanity. . . . This conflict takes many different names; but its identity remains the same. It is in philosophy the inexhaustible question of the subjective and the objective. Philosophy has not yet understood that the Incarnation of the Word is the supreme and unique solution of the problem. For *ipso facto* it is face to face with *impersonal reason*. The Christian believes in personal and supreme reason, which is Jesus Christ." We confess that Ritschl does not seem to us to have improved on this position either in balance or in truth.

But we should be sorry to convey the idea that Vinet did not linger long at many transitional points on the way towards this goal. For such was not the case. And, further, had it been so, those who have learnt to occupy the same position themselves, would have had less confidence in its permanence than they now feel, seeing that a man of Vinet's noble conservatism of temper has been with infinite patience over the road from beginning to end. No "neologian" he; but one in whose pure and humble person the new theology was born out of the old with travail-pangs that witness to the full continuity of life. This should serve to embolden some who hesitate to commit themselves to the liberty of sole and immediate dependence upon God in Christ, attested by the Spirit of Regeneration and Holiness energising in the pulses of the soul's needs and satisfactions, both in their own persons and in those of dutiful, saintly, and self-forgetful men from the first even to the last "bondservant of Jesus Christ." It may also serve to give pause to any inclined hastily to acquiesce in certain rather jejune and "positivist" conceptions of Christianity and of life as seen in its light. For the Vinet, whose breadth of view and large humanity made his criticisms welcome to the *littérateurs* and thinkers of his day, was an eminently sane Christian, and no fanciful enthusiast. At a time, then, when the exact type of Christianity to be approved is often a matter of some doubt to even pious souls, "the spirit of

Alexander Vinet," which endears him to many others besides M. Astié, his faithful interpreter, may well be recommended to thoughtful Christians everywhere. It may be gathered not only from the excellent sketch of his *Life and Writings* by Miss Lane,¹ but also from his *Vital Christianity and Gospel Studies*, or again from the *Outlines of Theology*,² an anthology gathered from his works by the master-hand of Professor Astié.

Vinet died in May 1847 at Lausanne, where he spent the last decade of his life, a powerful factor in the life of his native Canton, not only by his professorial lectures and literary productions, but also through the leading part played by him in the formation of the *Église libre*. Its creed and constitution—even as they stand—are an abiding monument to his enlightened, catholic, and profoundly Christian piety. Yet touching both, his ideal was in advance of what he could get his brethren to adopt. As to Constitution, he desired even fuller recognition of the laity, wishing that pastors should be consecrated with the aid of the elders; for "it is the Church that consecrates, not the clergy." As to the creed, he would have had it yet more religious

¹ Edinburgh, 1890: T. & T. Clark. The classical French biography is that by E. Rambert. Other Vinet literature is given by Miss Lane.

² This includes some of the profoundest and most suggestive remarks on Christian Ethics—"the morality which abounds in the gospel itself"—which was eminently Vinet's forte.

and experimental than was even the simple form finally adopted. "If," he writes, "it be necessary that the Church confess its faith, it is certainly essential that the form of this confession be accessible to the humblest servant, the most ignorant workman, if only they are Christian, and that each article should find an echo in their hearts. Every other system leads us unconsciously . . . to the *faith of authority* and to the *principle of tradition*."

But, after all, the spirit of Vinet cannot be really conveyed by an epitome. For as a writer he was eminently *distingué*. There is an incommunicable charm in the fine way in which he throws out his lucid and suggestive ideas. Take the following as samples:—Conscience, as a primitive fact of our nature, is "a necessity to make our actions harmonise with our convictions." "Repentance is a grace." "The morality of the gospel is known only by him in whom it has produced the need of something more." "Christianity is morality planted in the soil of grace." Accordingly, as well as for the deeper reason that the part is only true when seen in the light of the whole, no man can appreciate Vinet at his true worth who has not handled some of his writings. And he who has communed with him, in the *Outlines of Theology* for instance, will ever after be at once a deeper, a more courageous, a more balanced thinker; and, what is even higher, a nobler Christian.

The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Christ.

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How are we to understand the idea of the kingdom of God when we pray, "Thy kingdom come!" or when we enforce on others or ourselves the precept, "Seek first the kingdom of God?" There is great danger in explaining this idea either that we satisfy ourselves with certain general expressions, like "Christianity," "Christian Church," "Christian state of salvation," which yet reproduce the idea but inaccurately, or that in attempting a more precise definition we import thoughts which harmonise more with our own religious conceptions

than the conceptions of Jesus. In our days an important part has been assigned to the idea of the kingdom of God, both in the scientific and the popular statement of Christian doctrine. It is used to describe comprehensively the final aim of God's eternal saving purpose, of His working in creation, redemption, and sanctification, and also the highest end of man, his highest good and duty. How easy it is for us to read our own ideal conception of this "kingdom of God" into the utterances of Jesus respecting it; whereas plainly the