

JAMES MARTINEAU, AND THE HETERODOXY
OF THE PAST.

IN turning back to the first half of the last century, the change most apparent to any one who can go so far back, and who is alive to the spiritual influences which change with successive generations, is the loss of that system of accepted belief which we sum up under the name of orthodoxy. It is difficult to bring home to those who have no recollection of the spiritual atmosphere implied in that word the full effect of the subtraction. It affected every one, just as the atmosphere does. People were Christians as they were Englishmen and Englishwomen. Their country had pronounced in favour of a certain type of Christianity, and they participated in this as they participated in their nationality, it was something acquiesced in, just as a person lives in England when he might, if he chose, go to live in France. He must live somewhere. He must, it was thought in those days, come to some decision as to the matters on which the Church pronounces her decision. There were heterodox persons as there were orthodox persons; and to many minds heterodoxy had a strong attraction. I remember well that feeling when Froude's *Nemesis of Faith* came out. But what we may call adoxy—we must coin some such word if we are to express briefly the state of mind that has superseded both heterodoxy and orthodoxy—did not then exist. People who took no interest in the subject-matter of the creeds were generally, in a tepid conventional way, what we may call orthodox. To go now and then to church, to avoid certain amusements and occupations on Sunday, to speak respectfully of the Bible, and a few more habits of the same kind, provided much the most convenient shelter for that indifference to everything spiritual which those who have never either doubted or believed like to dignify with the

name of doubt. Such a state of mind passes at one end into definite unbelief, but at the other it melts into an acquiescence in which there is some sort of belief. It was rather a belief in the wisdom of the State which had expressed its adherence to Christian doctrine, than a trust in God. But it did not exclude this, and often provided a shelter under which it might grow.

The disadvantages of an adoption, by the State, of any religion in such a manner that its profession becomes desirable as a means of getting on in the world are obvious. The temptations thereby afforded to hypocrisy stood at their height when it was necessary to take the sacrament before entering on any civil office; since that time they have gradually declined. But the orthodoxy within the memory of living persons—that of the High Church revival—was like a high wave in an ebbing tide. Its exclusions were still real, the universities, for instance, opened only to those who in some sense accepted them, but every one who marked the signs of the times felt that they were doomed. With these exclusions much else has passed away. In the attempt to reverence nothing but character we have ceased to reverence anything. We have not ceased to value goodness. Gordon roused as much enthusiasm as ever was given to a saint, Gladstone owed much of his influence to the popular belief in his moral excellence, and we might add many names to theirs. But the mere fact that we naturally use another word rather than *revere* witnesses to the change that has come over the world. Enthusiasm has lost that element which made it reverence. The loss of non-moral respect deprives reverence of its seed-plot. In the age of orthodoxy parents were to be respected by their children independently of their personal character. There were disrespectful children then as now, but disrespect to parents and elders was something to blame in other people. Now there is a sense of equality

with an added claim on the side of the child which gives the latter less temptation to disrespect, but which is further removed from reverence than disrespect is. To contemplate a character and decide on its moral worth is an attitude of mind compatible with admiration, with enthusiasm, with strong attraction, but hardly with veneration. Reverence must be common in its lower form of respect before it can blossom and bear fruit in its typical character. It must be prepared by deference before it can develop its true moral aim. It will not be denied that the nursery and the schoolroom in our day neglect this aim. And subsequent life shows the trace of this neglect.

The spirit of reverence, when it enters the world of intellect, becomes reserve. It would be waste of time to point out how much we have lost in this direction; the change as a fact is unquestionable. In every quarter—newspapers, books, conversation—the realm of silence, as compared with what it was, is like a sandbank under a rising tide. We do not always realize the literary influence of this loss. The gifted woman who chose to be known as George Eliot once said to me that she thought Tourgénéieff's stories had gained much, in a literary point of view, from the need of reticence enforced by the Russian censorship; that it was a literary gain to have to understate one's case. That remark is applicable, more or less, to all fiction and biography before a certain date. The selective spirit of literature is different from the selective spirit of orthodoxy, but they are allied. To scrutinize the things that may be said for one reason leads to a like scrutiny for another reason. It is part of a lesson in self-control which penetrated all education and general standards of life in the days of orthodoxy, and now has passed away. I have tried to indicate what we have lost in the change, but I am not endeavouring to strike the balance

of debit and credit, only to dwell, for a moment, on the side that is generally forgotten.

The transition seems to me to date itself just at the middle of the last century. The "World's Fair" of 1851 takes the aspect, to my recollection, of a landmark, accidental yet not altogether insignificant, of an alteration in the general current of attention and moral estimate. The Exhibition itself seems now a symbol of the overwhelming interest in the visible world which was to colour the coming years. Mr. Maurice, in some address given in that year, spoke of the reflection suggested by the riches there collected—that all the material wealth of the world was insignificant beside the value of a human spirit; and I remember feeling, with the arrogance of youth, that anything so obvious was not worth saying. Now the words come back to me almost with the force of a prophecy. It is in each individual the part belonging to the material world which now occupies the attention of legislators and philanthropists. "A lost soul" is an expression that has for us no meaning. I remember the time when it had a very real meaning, when to talk of a person going to "his last account" was no sign of any particular religious view, but the accredited statement of a fact. And among those who denied the finality of any spiritual change following on the death of the body were many who shrank from expressing their dissent, because the denial was associated with the belief that sin after all was not the supreme evil it had been supposed. For this reason they often let pass some opportunity of protest against the assertion that all hope ended with the grave. "I do not believe that," whispered Thomas Erskine of Linlathen to his neighbour at some religious meeting at Clapham about seventy years ago, on hearing something of the kind, but at that time he did no more than whisper his disbelief. He would have felt then that to declare it aloud would be to loosen the

roots of beliefs not less important in his regard than the eternal possibility of repentance. As long as people felt that the doctrine of Eternal Punishment was the distortion of a truth, so long nothing which affected only this present life was felt to be supreme, though to most people busy in the work of the world ideas about any other were generally dim and unreal then as now.

To children ideas of the future life are very real. I remember well the condition of mind in which the orthodox Hell loomed before me as a terrible *perhaps*. It was only as an orthodox idea that it impressed my childish imagination. I knew that those dearest to me disbelieved it. But in the nursery it was just as discernible as anywhere else that religious persons—i.e. the orthodox—thought they believed it; and exactly the same state of mind which now makes one regard the scientific world as an ultimate authority as to visible things, then made one feel the religious world an ultimate authority as to invisible things. Reviewing in age the experience of childhood we of necessity put childish feelings into mature language, and at the time they could not have been expressed in any language, but they were not only vivid but logical. All religious expression in books or sermons accessible to childhood was associated with the sense of a vast chance here that was lost for ever when we quitted this world; it was just as valid an inference that this was the decision of those who knew best as it is that doctors know best all about disease; and the heterodox belief of those dearest, though yearned after both for their sake and its own, could not wholly dispel this influence. It needs something immensely strong to dispel the influence of an atmosphere. I will mention the tragic circumstance which did this for me. A youth of much promise, but I suppose not particularly religious, lost his life in trying to save that of another. The loss of an idolized son and brother, snatched away in the first bloom of manhood, was

not the bitterest pang in the hearts which that loss made desolate. "Pray for us," so the death was communicated to a dear friend in a letter I saw; "one of us is beyond the reach of prayer." "Do not speak to me of God, speak to me only of him," was the greeting of his heart-broken mother, a deeply pious woman, to this friend, herself unable to believe that an accident, even if it had not been incurred in an act of supreme self-sacrifice, could sweep any human being beyond the reach of prayer. And it was the report of her answer to that appeal which I remember as ending my nightmare horror. But for long I craved confirming reassurance from any of those to whom the world beyond the grave was a vital reality, and this I found when I came, as a school-girl, under the influence of a teacher whose name now will be fresh in the mind of every reader of this journal.¹

The long life of James Martineau covers the change I have been endeavouring to describe. My memory goes back to the years when he was almost a young man, and my latest intercourse with him was not long before the close of his ninety years' pilgrimage. At that time he was much occupied with the reminiscences incorporated in the present volumes, and I recall a few words he said of his intercourse with J. S. Mill, which surprised me by the intellectual sympathy between the two men which it seemed to record. "Afterwards," he continued, "Mill reproached me with having changed some of the convictions we had held in common after I had had to express them in teaching" (at the Manchester New College, a successor of the Warrington Academy), "and I felt it was true that in giving out one's convictions to other minds one is insensibly led to new views of their truth. And I have sometimes thought it was a loss to Mill himself that he had never any experience

¹ *Life and Letters of James Martineau*, 2 vols., by James Drummond and C. B. Upton. Nisbet.

of this kind of testing and transforming influence of teaching." The words are illustrated by my own recollections; I am sure that the sense I retain of a living, growing, spirit in his lessons to us (his pupils at his sister's school) had some connexion with his sense of learning and teaching together. I venture to give two instances of what I mean. The first is a lesson on botany, which has remained ever since for me a sort of prelude to the "Origin of Species." He referred to the sometimes slight differences which constituted species; setting the primrose and the cowslip side by side, and forcibly suggesting the apparently natural origin of the peculiarities of each, and went on to ask how we were to account for affinities which bore the aspect of something that human intellect might account for. "To that question," he concluded, "we can give no answer except the will of the Creator." Those words are the only ones perfectly distinct to me, but he said much more, and to my recollection it is as if he had added—"This is in fact little more than a confession that our present science stops here. It is a provisional state of mind, merely reasserting the conviction that the universe owes its origin to Divine will, and coupling it with the indication of a boundary line where second causes seem to fail us." Of course he did not say exactly this to a class of school-girls; perhaps he would not have said it if the audience and the subject had been suitable, but that is the description, as nearly as I can give it, of the effect on my mind of the few words I am sure of. Almost always when I think of the "Origin of Species" I remember the very pattern of the oil-cloth at the long table and him at its head, leaning forward with the earnest gaze that might have been bent on a set of learned and mature men instead of a few school-girls, and I hear the deep, rather hollow voice that seemed, though perfectly distinct, not to bring all its sound from the lips, but as it were to express a thought as much

as an utterance, and once more I catch the nuance of a latent surprise—so it seems to me—in the voice I still hear as of a speaker only just silent.

One more fragment I will excavate from the mine of recollection, less significant, perhaps, of the particular aspect of teaching which he recalled at our last conversation, but more strictly in connexion with the main current of his thought. It was in a lesson on the Gospels and referred to the words of Christ (John ii. 19-21), "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Under the light of any critical attention the comment "But this spake He of the temple of His body" would be felt, if we allowed ourselves to read it critically, as hardly relevant to the context. Mr. Martineau did not shrink from putting before his class the possibility that the course of ages might have revealed to us something invisible to St. John. "Do away with this Temple service," so he taught us to read the words of Jesus, "abolish this ceremonial of sacrifice and liturgy, and at once I will erect the ideal Church on the ruins of the Pharisaic temple." I remember then how meaning seemed to flash into the words as he spoke—a meaning emphasized by History with a terrible significance in the actual destruction of the Temple, and rise of the Church. He gives the same interpretation somewhere in the *Life and Letters* which have revived these recollections, but they cannot come home to any reader as they did to a child who heard them from his lips fifty-eight years ago, and recalls the very gestures and tones associated with new ideas—new, and permanently abiding as a seed of thoughts larger than themselves.

James Martineau, a type of heterodoxy in the middle of the nineteenth century, was before its close a representative of those beliefs which orthodoxy exists to guard. Yet his own beliefs remained unchanged, or changed only with that gradual expansion of intellectual limit which led him

further from the old orthodoxy. But as the course of thought opened new issues it became evident that the divergence between those to whom the invisible world was everything and those to whom it was nothing admitted in comparison of no other divergence. He was, before he passed away, the ally of all spiritualistic churches. It never occurred to any one as a courageous step that Jowett made him his guest at Balliol, or that the University of Edinburgh conferred on him a degree in Divinity. Every one who cared for him, that is every one who knew him and most who knew anything about him, must have rejoiced that his life was prolonged into an epoch when the ashes of controversy were cold and the glow of a common faith was strong. But the fact that his life began in heresy and ended in union did not prevent its being a lonely one. There was a long period in his long life when the range of intellectual sympathy which made him at last the exponent of two bodies of conviction divided him from both. Take his own account of his unsuccessful candidature for the Professorship of Philosophy at University College in 1866 given in the volumes which should now be in the hands of all readers of the *EXPOSITOR* (*Life*, etc. i. 409). "My previous work having been so much within sight of University College, I sought no testimony of competency except from two or three eminent 'experts' in the subjects of the chair, who could speak with some authority on technical matters not likely to be familiar to the electing body. I was aware, from correspondence or personal intercourse, that F. W. Newman, J. S. Mill, and Dr. Thomson, Archbishop of York, had knowledge of such occasional writing as I had put forth on logical and metaphysical topics; and I asked them whether they would object to record their judgment of these, so far as they indicated fitness or unfitness to teach. Mr. Newman's answer was immediate, cordial, and exact. Mr.

Mill was even more appreciative, and said what could hardly fail to be decisive, if produced in evidence; but he added that, as he could not miss the opportunity of planting, if possible, a disciple of his own school in a place of influence, he must throw his weight into the scale of Mr. Croom Robertson's candidature, of whose competency he was well satisfied. His attestation, therefore, privately so generous to me, must be withheld from use. The Archbishop of York sent me a reply, twelve months after the affair was all over, apologizing for his silence, and candidly explaining it as a result of a theological scruple; for, if he had said what he thought true of my personal qualifications for the vacant office, he would have been helping to a place of influence one who did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. In this spectacle, of Mr. Mill and the Archbishop moving hand in hand, under the common guidance of a sectarian motive, there is a curious irony." The man who was rejected both by an Archbishop and John Stuart Mill had indeed to stand alone!

Perhaps beside the loneliness of his position, there was something solitary in his nature. There is a pathetic letter in his Biography alluding to this characteristic in himself: "I know not how it is," he writes to an American correspondent in his fifty-first year (*Life*, etc., i. 292), "but a certain shy habit of mind, affecting my pen as well as my tongue, has persecuted me from childhood, and made me the worst of companions to friends whether distant or near." No friend of his would have used these words about him, but most would recognize the quality he meant by them. What different things we mean by coldness! It does not always imply any lack of warmth somewhere in the nature. "How cold you are!" we say sometimes to a person come in from a windy walk in whom the exertion has left nothing cold except the hand we have just grasped. The spiritual chill is not, alas! so transient, but

it may be equally partial. He was capable of even romantic friendship. A letter written in his old age (*Life*, etc., i. 32) records such a one between himself and a fellow-student at the "Manchester New College." "He and I," Dr. Martineau wrote nearly fifty years after the early death of the youth who had been the object of such strong feeling, "were like two lovers, and had not a thought kept from each other. After he left College and turned to legal studies he came to look upon our life together as an enervating romance, and severely condemned it as an unworthy surrender to sentiment. He gathered up his inward force into a Spartan rigour of self-suppression and reserve, adopted a prosaic estimate of men and things, content with small expectations from them, and objected to any utterance or recognition of feeling, though he retained in action and judgment the high faithfulness of conscience which had always distinguished him. Often have I feared that I was the unconscious cause of this, by putting too great a strain, through my own fervours, upon a nature capable indeed of being wrought up to their temperature but normally less intensely pitched. His was probably the wiser level, or at least was a warrantable recoil from a foolish and untenable one. With his small allowance of years he had to learn his mistake quickly; while we"—the other fellow-students I suppose—"through our long probation could afford to be slow pupils of experience and come to a sober mind by insensible fading of the colours once too bright." No reader of the *Biography* will object, I think, to reperuse this touching reminiscence written in 1882, when Dr. Martineau was in his 78th year, of a kind of friendship possible only in early youth. Had he been a poet the name of Francis Darbishire might have stood beside that of Arthur Hallam and Edward King, a third in the doublet of lives whose brief span of earthly existence stands out in striking contrast to their immortality of

fame. As it is, the record, touched with the poetry inseparable from love and early death, is cited here for its pathetic hint at a disappointment in human sympathy and a consequent fear of trusting to it, of which much that is here given seems to me to bear the trace.

Through a large part of his life it may be said of him that he was "struggling between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." He was not, after his early years, much at home in his own communion, and the union he dreamt of, which would have given a larger scope and freer exercise to his religious affinities, was but a dream. He could not, like his pupil and dear friend Richard Hutton, join the English Church; to the last he remained distinct in his opposition to her creeds, and yet one feels as if his true sphere were a National Church; this, at all events, was what he himself yearned for. There were some ways in which he was a better defender of the central truths which form the citadel of all Churches than an orthodox Churchman could be. When one who looks upon the Bible as a purely human record of events which themselves may or may not be supernatural comes forward to testify to the reality of supernatural principles, he occupies a vantage ground inaccessible to those who are pledged either to or against supernaturalism. But the path opened too late for the energies of noon, and never upon the domain he sought. He craved to belong to a Church recognized by his country—a Church unbulwarked by civil tests, but solidified by a central attraction. His ideal in some respects was much the same as that of Dr. Arnold, to whom, however, I do not remember that he ever refers. It is curious to remember that Arnold withdrew from the college which rejected Martineau—an institution in the founding of which he took a strong interest—from the fact that at its start it repudiated any distinctively Christian character. The State, in Arnold's view, should look with impartiality on all

Christian churches ; it should " put no difference between Christian and Christian,"—a view, we must remember, considerably broader than was acceptable to the orthodoxy of his time—but should put a decided difference between Christian and non-Christian, and it brings home to us the distance we have travelled since his early death that he does not seem to have contemplated the difficulty of deciding who is and who is not a Christian. It would in his day (and yet he was only ten years older than Dr. Martineau) have been so great a relaxation of existing barriers to admit all Christians to the universities that those who contemplated such a reform had not to ask themselves how they should define the difference they were prepared to make civilly important. This difficulty came vividly home to Dr. Martineau. Of course the civil question did not occupy him ; he could not desire to impose even the widest tests, but the Church he desired to see established was to be centred in those convictions which Arnold desired to barricade, and the difficulties invisible to one who left the world some sixty years before him occupied no small part of his thoughts. I could wish that their record occupied a smaller space in his Biography ; all that is futile should surely be recorded briefly. However, I am not attempting to criticize the book, and it cannot be said that the space given to Dr. Martineau's hopes for the formation of a National Church in any degree exaggerates the space they occupied in his mind. He always strongly opposed any attempt to label the body to which he himself belonged as Unitarian. He was, he quite distinctly asserted, a Unitarian himself. The epithet, he says here (ii. 70) is like necessarian or Republican, an expression applicable to persons, not to congregations or churches. He wanted the body in which he was a teacher not to be labelled even by those negations which he himself personally thought important, but to be a union of believers in God and followers of Christ open to such views of the

central truths they asserted as the progress of thought would bring them, and he longed for a National Church which should absorb all such bodies. The position of a sect was what he yearned to escape: he craved for a religion which should be co-extensive with the life of a people. He knew that this could not be attained without some sacrifices of what he felt valuable, or at least that a national Church as he conceived it could not be in the fullest sense of the words a spiritual church. But he recoiled from the divorce of sacred and secular life, and he hoped this union might be found in a common affirmation too vague and wide, as far as appears, ever to provide a basis for a Church. Those who follow in these volumes his patient and persevering efforts after such an ideal will feel that they could not have been wholly wasted. But they bore no fruit in any outward form.

The foregoing remarks are an attempt to estimate a character, not to criticize a book. If I had attempted the latter task, I should have expressed my belief that the record might have been more various, also that the arrangement is somewhat bewildering. But I close the volumes with gratitude, and with a desire to bear witness to the author's candour on some points where candour was not easy—a candour never for a moment divorced from warm admiration and reverence. I had marked many pages for extract which would have given valuable illustration to the views here put forward, but I shall better fill what space remains to me by inserting the following letter in answer to one from me on the death of his wife, which has not been previously printed.

. . . We have not been taken by surprise. Failing memory and ebbing strength had long foreannounced the parting that must come, and enabled us, in one sense, to welcome the dear sufferer's rest. But when the real severance comes, bringing back, as it does, the image of our companionship in its brightest years, this kind of preparation goes

for very little; and the solitary way would be but a pathetic desolation were its only comfort that the beloved sleeper was safe from its frosts and storms. Happily, the moments of deepest sorrow are those which most reveal to us the beauty and sanctity of the soul that has passed from us, and which, therefore, best assure us that the affections and conscience are an enormous over-provision for the exigencies of this life, that the whole spiritual possibilities of our nature are computed to the scale of a transcendent existence, so that the mortal darkness generates its own undying light. It is vain to tell me that the mourner's estimate of what he has lost is *ideal*. It is so; and is *therefore* the only true one, penetrating to the inmost essence, and passing by the superficial specks of shadow which veiled the real being as the storms obscure the sky. I own, however, that I cannot reach the ultimate ground of this immortal faith: it lies too deep. The reasons given for it do not bring it to me; the reasons against it flow off from me without effect. It comes, in some way, from the whole experience of life, and the spectacle of death does not disturb it. I did not choose it; I cannot help it. My reason ratifies it, but did not discover it. It is woven into the very tissue of all thought and love. Only it is undoubtedly dependent on the prior recognition of *Personal Relations* with the "Father of Spirits." It is too true that the Everlasting Hope does not lift us, as it ought, to its own high level, and adequately discriminate those who hold it from those who do not; or we may put it the other way, and say that those who reject it do not descend to the level apparently suitable to so great a sacrifice of moral power. But when once an ideal of character and feeling has been formed, it will persist long after the forming influences have changed. With some, this belief is traditional and inoperative; with others, the affections and admirations it has helped to create survive its departure; and the two classes present a middle ground of character in which the real tendencies are indistinguishably mixed. Yet I think that, beyond this middle ground, the two types of mind *do present* themselves in very marked contrast. . . .

The foregoing extract will, I think, be felt by all who care for this memoir a worthy conclusion to the record of a lofty and a lonely soul.

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