

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

history to guide us, I for one cannot doubt that the laity are the "Ecclesia" of the LXX. and of the N.T., and that the "Voice of the Church" (so often talked *about*, but so seldom "heard") is to be sought ultimately in the enlightened conscience of the educated Christian laity, guided by that Holy Spirit whose gifts are promised even to "secular" persons, and whose aid now, as of old, will not be wanting to the prayers of His faithful people.

HENRY MILLER,
Secretary Church Association.

Reviews.

John Ward, Preacher. By MARGARET DELAND. F. Warne and Co.

THIS little book is run on the same lines as "Robert Elsmere." It is slighter and even more superficial, and that authoritative, assertive air of pseudo-scientific criticism, which makes Mrs. Humphry Ward the Jules Verne of theological science, is wanting. There must certainly at the present time be some craving for anything that discusses in an intelligible and attractive way the fundamental truths of Christianity, for both these "religious novels," as we suppose they should be designated, have met with an immense circulation. This is a healthy sign, but it is a matter for regret that works so attractive in style, and interesting in story, should tend either to lead altogether astray, or to leave a mist of bewildered doubt.

The effect wrought by "John Ward" is of the latter description. Mrs. Deland fears to tread where Mrs. Ward rushes in; and though she sets a theological riddle, is very far indeed from answering it, and does not even attempt to do so. In her case the crux is eternal reprobation. It will be remembered that the Divinity of our Lord supplied Mrs. Humphry Ward with the theme for a novel, and that she effectually disposed of it. But the maze of uncertainty in which one is left after reading "John Ward" is hardly less unsatisfactory than the other book's flippant conclusion; in fact, we are led up so carefully to the question, a certain way out is left so suggestively open, that one is almost driven to supply reasons for himself why he should take it; which subtle procedure obviates the sense of deficiency, of floundering about, that a perusal of "Robert Elsmere's" shallow argument leaves. We supply the necessary inference, and the author is saved the trouble of doing so.

John Ward, a Presbyterian minister, becomes engaged to Helen, the niece of Dr. Howe, professedly a clergyman of the American Episcopal Church, but whose opinions are, to say the least, lax, and whose conduct is confessedly non-Christian. Now, this is one of the unfairest methods of the story. This worldly "divine," with his "handsome face," his "big, jolly laugh," and his "good-natured voice," is presented to the outward eye in a very attractive garb, while we are allowed to see the workings of his mind to such an extent that one is inclined to read between the lines so far as to infer that he is a type of the majority of his brethren. Such is possibly the conclusion that the author would wish to be drawn. Dr. Howe shows us those who use religious principles as they use good manners, who think it is gentlemanly to believe the Bible, or at least to

say they do, while their real opinion is a matter for their own private consideration. He is always being driven into a corner, and so skilfully that one at first sight would feel inclined to go in the corner with him; though, on a very small reflection, it would be perceived that no difficulty was involved. But, unfortunately, few do reflect when reading novels. For example:

"If you thought the Bible taught that slavery was right, what would you do?"

"I could never think anything so absurd," the rector answered, a shade of contempt in his good-natured voice.

"But if you did," John insisted; "even if you were unable to see that it was right—if the Bible taught it, inculcated it?"

Dr. Howe laughed impatiently, and flung the end of his cigar down into the bushes, where it glowed for a moment like an angry eye. "I—I? Oh, I'd read some other part of the book," he said. "But I refuse to think such a crisis possible; you can always find some other meaning in a text, you know."

In this weak way the portly figure of the rector looms out all through the story. We are indeed told, when he uses an oath, that it is his first since he took orders; but we are also shown, in perhaps the most finely-written passage of the book, how, when he doffs his usual habit, and dons his clerical, visiting a dying friend, and trying, professionally, to say some words to comfort the soul standing on the river's brink, he is thus met:

"Ah, yes," said the sick man; "but I should like to approach this from our usual point of view, if you would be so good. I have every respect for your office, but would it not be easier for us to speak of—of this, as we have been in the habit of speaking on all subjects, quite in our ordinary way, as it were? You will pardon me, Archibald, if I say anything else seems—ah—unreal?"

We are told that Dr. Howe rose and walked to the window, and there was a tightening in his throat that kept him silent. We don't wonder at it, but we do wonder that the author gives him as a counterfeit presentment of a minister of the Gospel. The blackboard of his character typifies instead in an unmistakable way those who are Christians because their fathers were—because they were brought up in it, and because it would be bad form to be otherwise. What the doctor really believed he knew not, and the Christian's glorious hope was to him a dim mirage.

John Ward, the Presbyterian preacher, on the other hand, is a character of spotless beauty—perfection walking about in a black coat. He marches through life, and temptations wither under his feet. Sin seems to shrink from him. His earnestness and virtuousness are "positively aggressive." It tires your eyes to look at him, and you have to shade your face with your hand. And this saintly and really attractive character holds the most rigid and unbending doctrines of the strictest of Calvinistic sects.

Of course he dies; a great deal of fine, sentimental work is introduced, as in the scene of Robert Elsmere's death. And Helen, Dr. Howe's niece, and the preacher's wife, is shown to us as a singularly pure and noble-minded woman, who, as she gazes on the rigid and impossible virtue of the one, and the revolting inconsistency of the other, wavers, loses her balance and falls. So naturally, too, that it would seem to be the inevitable result. First, doubt creeps into her mind, then despair, and then denial. Despairing of rising to the exalted height of her husband's righteousness, and doubting the value of a Christianity as set forth by the easy hypocrisy of her father, she becomes an Agnostic.

This is the conclusion of the whole matter. Not a word about the true Christian life of faith and humble endeavour—not a hint of the future solution of mysteries now veiled.

Helen Ward is used in just as unfair a way as Dr. Howe. In many respects her character is very lovable—in most respects—and evidently she is intended to approach as near to the unapproachable—a perfect woman

—as possible. But she behaves in a deplorably weak manner. Fresh from the relaxing atmosphere of her uncle's "religious" opinions, she is plunged into the icy and wind-swept region of Calvinism. No wonder that it takes her breath away at first; but, then, she never seems to breathe freely again. Surely her faith must have been faithless to collapse so miserably and so soon. In fact, she confesses so:

"If I had ever been intensely religious it would be different, I suppose. I should care for it as a sacred past; but it was never more than pleasant. What I called my spiritual life had no reality to me."

(Christianity "pleasant"! It will be called "pretty" in the next religious novel, we suppose.)

In fact, the rise, progress and fall of what poor Helen called her spiritual life are equally distorted and unreal. It begins on shadows—a few wreaths of misty religious truth seen in a dim, unnatural light to the languid strains of a mock organ. When this little collection of vapour is blown upon by the blast of adverse doctrine, it is scattered to the winds, and no particle of solid rock appears. Nor are any means taken to stay this dispersion.

To begin with, Mrs. Deland seems to confuse eternal reprobation with eternal punishment. The latter she admits in a reluctant, unwilling way (it is, indeed, an unavoidable admission to anyone who accepts Holy Scripture), and she repeats, under several connections, that the consequences of sin are eternal. But although we are not directly informed by God's revelation in what unending retribution consists, she thrusts before Helen's eyes without alternative a species of torture founded on Jonathan Edwards. The fact remains, however, that we do not know, have not been informed, in what the punishment of the other world consists; and joined with this we have the blessed fact of deliberate opportunity of option for every human soul. Yet the author slurs this over, and hides it with the harsh and crude idea of eternal reprobation in such a way that the two seem to be inseparably commingled.

Again. In the "hour of trial," when we pray for Jesus to stand by us, Helen flees from Him. She does not seem to offer one prayer. As for the Bible, that is an unknown quantity. Here, indeed, the author is unfortunately true to life. It is marvellous how people will read any quantity of books and theories on the Bible, but will never dream of searching *in* the Bible. Helen seems never to have looked on its glorious promises during all her life.

And so in her fall—she falls with suspicious ease. No one having really had in his possession the pearl of great price would let it roll away so unconcernedly, and watch it vanishing with such an absence of effort to recover it. The patent fact is that Helen never was a Christian, and the hidden fact is that a true, humble and sincere Christian life is not even distantly approached in this book, except in the unfortunate instance of John Ward. No one can serve as an example of a Christian who is armed with prayer by proxy and a dust-covered Bible, but anyone can who tries, in however lowly a way, to serve his Lord, and to maintain "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father." Of this the author seems ignorant, or, as is more likely, she shirks it.

Poor Helen is left in an unhappy state of collapse and uncertainty—verily in Professor Huxley's "dark and trackless forest," peering ahead for the hand that is by her side, and saying sadly, "I will not comfort myself with little candles of memory or desire, and say, 'This is light.' Perhaps light will never come to my eyes, but I will wait, for I believe there is light somewhere." But it is not books like "John Ward, Preacher" that will bring light to any darkened soul; nor could Helen hope to evolve it out of her own imagination.

But is it upright and frank of the author to leave her sitting idly there,

with her hands folded, waiting for light, when a box of matches and a lamp stand beside her in the Word of God? Why did she not turn to St. Paul's vivid words, for advice, "Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light?" What is the use of pondering over mysteries, the solution of which, if arrived at, would not help us an inch on our way to salvation, when we know that we must be up and doing our best, feeble though it is, for the Master's sake? And at any period when life's dismal realities overpower for a moment our weak strength, surely then is the time to look forward with longing relief to the Christian's bright hope of a season when all will be clear.

Not so with Mrs. Deland—all the hope of futurity is summed up in words which seem to portray the acme of her religious meditations: "It is too late for anything—any religious aid, I mean—when a man comes to look death in the face. I suppose all one can do is to say: 'Let my friendship go with you through it all—all this unknown to us both.'"

Any thoughtful person, well grounded in the faith, would see through our author's thin shreds of philosophy; but the danger lies in thoughtless perusal and careless acceptance. W. A. P.

Mohammed and Mohammedanism Critically Considered. By S. W. KOELLE, Ph.D. Sc. S. Rivingtons.

YET another Life of Mohammed! was our exclamation, as we took up this volume, but we rise from the perusal of it with the conviction that the author was fully justified in presenting it to the notice of the reading public. He writes—which is an inestimable advantage—as one who has an intimate personal acquaintance with his subject; not derived merely from the study of books, or from casual intercourse with Mohammedans whom he has met with in the social circle. He has been, as he tells us, some forty years acquainted with them, first on the west coast of Africa, then in Egypt, Palestine, and European Turkey; he knows not only their creed, but also those traditions with which it is associated, and is further fully cognizant of the effect which their faith has upon the life. In his preface he makes a very just remark with reference to the comparatively small success of missionary labours: "What a mass of superstitious rubbish has to be swept away from the path of the pious Moslem, before his vision can become unimpeded and free enough to perceive the all-surpassing spiritual majesty of Him who could say, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'!" This view of the case is almost entirely ignored by many who speak so slightly of efforts made for the conversion of Moslems to the Christian faith. They forget how much has to be unlearned; they fail to remember that, whilst in some points the Mohammedan creed may seem to be in unison with the truth of the Word, yet it is so overlaid by tradition as to present few points of real unison. Let us take, for instance, the following passage translated from the Rawzet ul Ahabab: "When Adam had been sent out of Paradise to this earth, he became exceedingly sad and downcast, and thus made complaint to God: 'O God, I am distressed because I can no longer hear the voice of the angels.' The Most High gave him this answer: 'O Adam, I have sent a house to the earth which the angels compass about, just as they surround My Throne in heaven; therefore turn towards it, and become familiar with it.' Upon this Adam, who at that time was in India, walked to the House of the Kaaba, God sending an angel with him to show him the way. Every one of Adam's steps was 50 parasangs long, and every spot upon which he trod was destined to become a city, as also the space between his feet to become cultivated. In a very short time he reached the Haram, where he found a temple, consisting of a single celestial hyacinth, with two doors of greensmaragd,

"one on the east side and the other on the west side. Then God sent an angel to teach Adam the ceremonies of the pilgrimage." This quotation speaks for itself, but if any of our readers entertain any doubt as to the nature of the traditions so current among Moslems, we can but refer them to the second book in our author's work, entitled "Mohammed Viewed in the Moonshine of Tradition," with the full assurance that they will agree with the conclusions arrived at, viz. : "It is mainly this un-naturally magnified, this unhistorical and fictitious Mohammed, who sways the heart of the Moslems, and keeps them from recognising in Jesus Christ the true Saviour of man, the Way, the Truth, and the Life in the full sense of the word."

In the first book of this work the historical Mohammed is brought before us, with which we are necessarily more familiar. Here we may observe that Dr. Koelle frankly states that he writes from the standpoint of a Christian, and for our part we can hardly understand how a devout believer in the credentials of the Christian faith could do otherwise. He is, however, careful to bring before us the authorities on which he relies for the statements he makes, and we are only expressing what we believe will be the verdict of all candid readers of the volume before us, that if the various visions with which Mohammed avers he was favoured had been as fully brought under public notice as in the present case, a different estimate would have been formed as to his claim to be styled a Prophet of God.

One main point of interest in the survey of Mohammed's life is the relation subsisting between the Meccan and Medinan periods, in which there has been a great conflict of opinion. Many writers consider that in the former period he was animated by a sincere religious spirit, whilst in the latter he was led astray and became a base apostate, and a carnal worldling. This our author very strongly condemns, and asserts in very plain words: "This ardent preacher, this zealous reformer, the austere prophet of Mecca, pleading amidst annoyances and opposition for more toleration and the bare recognition of his teaching, is in reality the seed and precursor of the military commander, the insatiable conqueror, the despotic autocrat of Medina." This we believe to be undoubtedly true, and that the Meccan period was the germ of the Medinan. Our space will not permit us to enter more fully into the reasons for the foregoing conclusion, but an attentive reading of the author's work will show that he has good grounds for the opinions he has formed on this and other facts of Mohammed's life. In this age, when the undisguised attempt is openly made to exalt unduly the false faiths of the world, it is refreshing to find a man of real ability, who has the courage of his opinions, coming boldly forward to express his honest convictions, even though they may be opposed to the current tone of modern thought. We do not doubt that Dr. Koelle will be taken to task by those who hold the advanced opinions of the day, but if he is met by fair argument, and not by mere declamation, we are much mistaken if he will not be able thoroughly to hold his own and to gainsay his opponents.

W. E. RICHARDSON.

