

# 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 Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

and of all other systems which might be supposed to contribute to the formation of the doctrines of the Church. But all these together could not create the 'Personality of Jesus'; and a 'purely historical understanding of Jesus, His work, teaching, and self-consciousness, is impossible.' On some points Dr. Loofs seems disposed to yield to

critical views, though we gather that he holds the canonical authority of the books of the New Testament, and entirely rejects the Tübingen speculation. His works encourage the hope that the time has come in Germany when the best results of modern inquiry and criticism are to be used in the service of a living Christianity.

## An Anonymous Poem.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REV. F. G. CHOLMONDELEY, M.A., LEEK-WOOTTON, WARWICK.

THE article on 'A Neglected Poem,' which appeared a while ago in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, turned back my attention to another poem of a somewhat kindred character, which is probably not so well known as it deserves to be. It is entitled 'Confessions of a Poet,' and the same sort of interest attaches to it as to the 'Confessions of St. Augustine,' in that it is the honest, fearless avowal of the writer's own inward struggles towards a full acceptance of the Christ. Claiming to be a poet, he has amply vindicated his claim to the title, though one cannot regard the little book as fortunately named; it is not the poet confessing himself we find, but a troubled soul clothing its confessions in the garb of poetry. This soul has gone into revolt for a while with Shelley; has faced the mysteries of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* with Milton; while for motto appears on the title-page a quotation from Plotinus, 'I am endeavouring to bring the God within me into harmony with the God which is in the Universe.' A few pages of preface furnish a link between the motto and the poem itself. A brief notice of its contents may prove not unacceptable, I hope.

The first stage tells of an early delight in Nature, a simple yielding to her charm, as the eye drinks in the varying phases of her beauty. But Nature has other moods; there is more to know than on the smiling surface at first appears, and

the attempt to read her riddle is disquieting. Her fair sights please, but

What avail all these  
Which are as picture-books to children, grown  
Past the old pleasure of the coloured form,  
And hungering for the knowledge and the truth  
Imparabled therein?

Thus questionings arise, perplexities, misgivings. Man finds himself confronted in Nature with contradictions such as he finds in his own being, comminglings of beauty and terror, love and hate. And hence the very sense of sympathy with Nature breeds more and more dissatisfaction and dismay, a sort of unreasonable impatience with Nature for her inability to reveal the inner secrets of her being. Man feels himself the child of Nature, yet can wring no explanation from her of the baffling problems that encompass both. Gazing upon her, he is as one beholding his natural face in a glass. It is himself over again. The frowns, the bad passions, seem only too faithfully reflected there.

These subtle discontents, aggravated by a sense of helplessness and utter imperfection, are recognised as the first stirrings of God within, believed in indeed ('for God to me was never doubt or dream'), but not yet so known as it is dimly realised, that perhaps only saints can know Him. The veil seems but a thin one that is separating him at this point from the light, and there are even moments of partial uplifting when flashes of the light stream through. But it is but an intuition, a presentiment. He stands as it were at the threshold of the Promised Land, yet he must back into the wilderness and wander long, ere that threshold shall be passed and an actual entrance won.

<sup>1</sup> The adjective no longer applies. The author, it now appears, is the Rev. Alfred Starkey. He has quite recently reissued the poem in an expanded form, along with two other poems, and with a new Introduction prefixed, in a little volume, entitled *Religio Clerici* (Elliot Stock, 1895).

Why did not God at this point compel his following? Because, alas! the flesh was strong to lust against the spirit—

My nature, like unto the king's of old,  
Had oft a beast's heart given it,—  
O, nothing but Thy grace,  
My God, Thine unforgetting love, Thy will  
Elective, irresistible, now drew  
The soul, fast sinking into depths of sin,  
Unpurged and hopeless in repeated plunge,  
From bottomless perdition!

The fever left him, and slowly rallied the truer self. The natural purpose of the heart returned. Mid fear and trembling is resumed the quest for truth, 'with larger outlook on the end foretold by the desire prophetic.' And first Science is interrogated, but proves unsatisfying. Her inability to yield the clue is pathetically exhibited in the following fine apostrophe addressed to her:—

Nor may'st thou think to find it, for thy search  
Lies in the second cause, opens all doors  
But that which leads unto the mystic shrine  
Where glows the fire of which true light is born.  
The nature in the nature still eludes thee,  
And thine anatomizing scalpel fails  
To explore the genesis of noblest life,  
The passions, prayers, divine solicitings  
Of human souls, played on like instruments  
By powers beyond our mortal needs;

Ah no!

Thou hast no balance fine enough to weigh  
The worth of human love and happy tears,  
The penitence and sighing shame of hearts  
Veiled from all eyes save of the God within.  
Thou hast no medicine for minds diseased;  
Thou canst not charm away the canker griefs  
Which eat into the soul; thine anodynes,  
That lull the thought of God asleep, are vain  
Against the steadfast and appalling gaze  
Wherewith remorse outwatches the last hours  
Of a defeated, broken life.

Recourse is next had to Philosophy; but she, too, fails to satisfy. The very disorders in man's being must be a bar to reaching any sure conclusions along the track of man's own unassisted thought. The defective nature of the instrument must largely vitiate any results attained. Bewildered systems, broken messages, illusory conjectures, all witness to 'some dread faultiness of sin in us.' Man lacks the single eye, the vision of the pure in heart. The track of thought

wanders on and on, 'but seldom nears the God of whom it asks'—

Alas, the world  
Is full of sin, and torn by adverse powers!  
And man, its finest outcome, wrong himself,  
Sees wrongly, through a troubled atmosphere,  
The awful Form which moves behind the veil  
In light our purblind vision cannot bear.

Pass then, Philosophy! Thy foot is lame,  
Thy wings are of their captain pinions stript,  
The illusion of the world's sin cheats thy light,  
The misery of the world's woe starves thy thought.

When intellect has thus retired crestfallen from the baffling quest, there remains the inclination to trust by preference the quicker apprehensions of the heart; but these in their outgoings seem doomed to sharper disappointment yet. For on the threshold a great doubt uprises, enveloping in its dark shadow God Himself, or at least 'the great story told of Him, His nature and His ways, in ancient writ.' The familiar moral difficulties of the Old Testament are brought forward here, though the whole subject is handled reverently as by one who is forced reluctantly to find in them an impeachment of God's love. The impeachment is overruled by stronger considerations on the other side enforcing an attitude of wise suspense; but it is a heavy burden laid on faith, since no theory of an evolution seems fit to meet the case. These apparent cruelties in the divine dealings refuse to fall into place as lower stages in an upward development, but stand outside discordant altogether. But for all that a development is there. The labouring soul still onward pressing finds that these Old Testament Scriptures can show their justification as from God. The hampering theory of verbal inspiration once discarded, there open out larger views of a revelation progressing evermore towards a fuller light, a growing purpose of divine love not to be arrested or diverted by any opposing forces. He concludes by characterising the Bible thus—

A wondrous Book

Terrible in good and evil mixed, like man,  
Nay, like the world, and, if indeed like that,  
Stream from the same amazing fountain, work  
Of the one creative force which rules in time,  
And lifts aloft the sceptre of the Good,  
Triumphant even in its worst defeats.

Scripture, Man, Nature, all these are linked by subtle analogies to each other. The same discords

and contradictions appear in each; and if Scripture has now justified itself to the heart that would assure itself of God's self-revelation there, the two other books still call for closer investigation, and the old misgivings re-emerge with acuter force. For Nature appears so callous, so merciless, so indiscriminating, so inexorable, so little instinct with moral purpose in her ways. Can this be God's world? and are these, indeed, God's ways? And man again, how cruel is he in his selfishness, how pitiless in his greed! How intolerable are the wrongs and the oppressions which mark his social state, wherein the victims are so many, stunted of all spiritual and intellectual growth!—

In vain, in vain, we tell ourselves this scene  
Of sin, vice, wrong, of sorrow, shame, and death,  
Whose mortal touch is first on murdered souls,  
Has providences somehow with it mixed,  
Which sets the curse to work out final good.

Then shortly he resumes—

Aye! I do well to voice my discontent,  
Since God Himself, dissatisfied, proclaims  
Aloud by Christ, this world a scene of wrong,  
Slave for redemption, death in need of life.

The great discovery reached through Christ is, that the soul in its pained sense of all the evil encompassing it, both without and within, has been all the while in sympathy with the heart of God. Doubt yields in contemplating the healing mission of the Incarnate Son, who came to lift off the curse from nature and from man. Many a Lot in Sodom has been vexing his righteous soul from day to day. Now Christ has set His seal to that vexation as divine. And what then of the origin of evil? The most here possible may be the recognition that in its essence it is 'Self opposed to God.' The fall of Lucifer is depicted, and the desperate malignity whereby he schemed to involve God's new creation in his fall. If such was the root of the rebellion, it accords with all the phenomena of rebellion that as matters of woeful experience we deplore. And then how

rapturously may we hail the appearance of the great Felon's Vanquisher in Christ, well fitted to be God's Champion and ours, being both God and Man. One Figure only fills the poet's vision now—

One Figure only, of incarnate truth  
And love and will victorious, Christ, who holds  
The keys of death and hell, their Vanquisher,  
Whose foot, advancing, treads the mysteries  
Of Nature's sin and shame to nothingness;  
Whose hand, uplifted, swears the Covenant  
Of God's eternal peace, with all the worlds  
Established, in the mighty heart of man  
The bond first sealed and witnessed by His blood.

How the clue thus given in Christ is applied to the solution of the old difficulties in detail, it would take too long to indicate. For the man himself but one more step remains, the step of personal self-surrender to the Saviour; for even sublimest thought has no adequate sustaining power apart from whole-hearted consecration of the life. Will it provoke a smile, to learn that this cultured, meditative soul found grace for the final step at a Salvation Army meeting? It was to his own surprise, in despite of all that was repelling to his natural tastes. But he felt Christ's hand laid on him there, and his whole being responded, and the result was peace.

It has been difficult to do justice to this little volume by quotation, for as a poem it commends itself, not so much by the occurrence here and there of brilliant passages, as by the uniformly high level that is sustained throughout,—a rarer excellence! The occasional irregularity in the structure of the lines hardly constitutes a serious defect. It deserves attention, for, though traversing in the main well-beaten tracks, it has all the freshness of reality; it is pathetic in its honesty, and always reverent in tone. Its chief value is as a record of felt experiences. From many a tangled maze of doubt the soul at length emerges to find fulness of satisfaction for all its yearnings laid up for it, along with infinite sympathies, through Christ in God.