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THE PROPHET OF NAZARETH—Notices of the Press—*continued.*

"It is a very serious practical question—what ought to be the result, and what must be the result, to the clergy, if the conclusions reached by some modern enquirers touching the unhistorical character of a great part of the New Testament should prove irrefutable. We refer to such works as Mr. Scott's just completed English Life of Jesus, and to the elaborate and comprehensive work, 'The Prophet of Nazareth,' by E. P. Meredith. This last work would have been more popular, and would have attracted more observation, if it had not been so voluminous. The book is one of vast research and compass; of great ability, earnestness, learning, and impartiality. It is a hard study to master all its varied contents; and the best and ablest among the clergy might think it no disparagement to enter the lists with this formidable Goliath. High priced as the work is, it is cheap in proportion to the amount and variety of the contents."—A. F. M. of the *English Leader*, in an able article—"RESULTS OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM."—Sept. 21st, 1867.

"Never did I feel more covetous of Dr. Johnson's gift of tearing out the heart of a book, than on sitting down to review the elaborate work now lying before me. To the critics described by Theodore Hook, who confine themselves to cutting a page or two, and then smelling the paper-knife, as a substitute for reading the book, 'The Prophet' seems to say:—

*'Procul O! procul esto profani  
Conclamat vates, totoque abstinere luco.'*

Nor is it wonderful that it has become an established principle with critics to lose sight of the book they are professedly reviewing, and to launch out into matters and things in general. Having conscientiously read The 'Prophet,' I shall endeavour to convey to the reader some idea of the work, and my own views thereon. In the first place, I must express my astonishment, and, to say the truth my disappointment, that this book—a Prize Essay, of closely printed demy 8vo. of 650 pages, price 12s. 6d. (which was published in 1864, and has already reached its second thousand)—has called forth no orthodox expression of opinion from Lord Shaftesbury. Possibly his Lordship finds it difficult to improve on his allocution respecting 'Ecce Homo;' for if *that* book be 'the worse book ever vomitted forth from the jaws of hell,' (see *N. R.* Oct. 13th, 1867) what words in the orthodox vocabulary are sufficiently sulphurous to define 'The Prophet'? Mr. Francklin's expressions—'horrible and blasphemous production,' 'pestilent doctrines,' &c., are tame and feeble, when compared with the truly diabolical imagery of Lord Shaftesbury. It is frightful to think what fearful figures of rhetoric may be fulminated against Mr. Meredith's book. It has been my pleasure and my pride to review this writer hitherto in the character of a literary *tirailleur*, an unerring marksman, stalking a bishop, or firing a heavy charge of swan shot into the retreating Lincolnshire Vicar, who, after commencing the fray took the earliest opportunity of showing his back to the enemy. Mr. Meredith now appears in a far grander capacity, as captain of a magnificent iron-clad man-of-war, which with true *British* pluck, he steers right into the midst of the theological squadron, laying his vessel alongside of the largest ships, and challenging a heavy fire from all quarters. And the theological squadron seem in no haste to return the raking broadside which he pours in. They appear inclined to sheer off and give him a wide berth. They seem to argue—logically enough—if the rattle of his musketry has put to flight a bishop and a vicar, what will become of us when he opens fire from his heavy guns! And so, the word is passed to the orthodox captains—(*id est*, the editors of the religious papers)—'Do not return the fire of that strange vessel. Belay there my hearties;' the powder monkeys (printer's devils) are all ready to hand up ammunition, and curses, not loud, but deep, are muttered on 'the *Infidel*.' But the horrible theological carnage is delayed, and ink, shed for a time, ceases to flow. The smoke from Mr. Meredith's guns clears away, and, as the persons behold the black hull and muzzles of the guns protruding from the open port-holes, most devoutly do they hope that it will all end in smoke. Truly, it may

THE PROPHET OF NAZARETH—Notices of the Press—*continued.*

be said, 'the boldest hold their breath for a time.' The pause is ominous, but it cannot last. The conflict between priestism and what priests call infidelity must go on, and the theological policy of a 'masterly inaction' will be found as futile as it is inglorious. To drop metaphor: the orthodox papers, the *Guardian*, *Record*, *John Bull*, *Christian World*, *et id genus omne*, pursue the worldly-wise policy of ignoring this book, which is a magnificent addition to the literature of Free thought, and a powerful effort to substitute *terra firma* in lieu of the pestiferous bogs of superstition, and theological sloughs of despond. I have the more pleasure in stating this, as it is not my intention to plaster the volume or its author with unqualified praise; but all candid persons, orthodox or heterodox, will admit that there cannot be two opinions as to the erudition, the patient industry, and the great moral courage manifested by Mr. Meredith. The writer of this elaborate work manifests great scholarship and great patience; and Buffon has said, '*Le Genie, c'est la Patience.*' The judicial spirit of impartiality is also strikingly manifested in the arguments for and against the orthodox view of the character of Jesus. 'The prefixed advertisement will show the conditions under which the work was written, and will explain the cause that considerable portions of it are written on the Christian side of the argument. The portions of the work devoted exclusively to the advocacy of Christianity are from page 9 to 50, and from 245 to 258. Should any Christian reader be so conscious of the weakness of his faith as to desire to know only what can be said in favour of his religion, he is recommended to confine himself exclusively to the perusal of these pages, and, when he has read them, to shut the book, lest his prejudice be irritated, or his mind roused to critical inquiry.' On first reading the above, I was irresistibly reminded of the polished irony of Gibbon, as displayed particularly in the 15th and 16th chapters of his immortal work. Indeed, there is a good deal, both in the literary style and in the position of this brave Meredith attacking superstition from his philosophic retreat in Monmouth, which recalls those noble lines of Byron, where, after depicting the philosopher of Ferney, he refers to the philosopher of Lausanne. . . . . But on reading the portions referred to, it will be found that our author has fully borne out this statement in his preface. 'These portions which are strictly orthodox are enforced with every possible fidelity and strength of reasoning that the writer could command when he was a sincere believer in the truth of the Christian religion,' &c. On reading Mr. Baillie's advertisement, the reader will see that the Prize Essay is not a desultory discussion of Christianity, but a most pertinent and important inquiry as to whether certain definite prophecies attributed to Jesus have or have not been fulfilled. 'Did Jesus Christ predict the Last Day of Judgment and Destruction of the World as events inevitable during the then existent generation of men?' If this question can be answered in the affirmative, then the non-fulfilment of such a clear and distinct prophecy effectually disposes of the divinity of Jesus. 'For although to utter true prophecies is no proof that the prophet is a deity, or that he has any preternatural communication with deity, yet to utter false prophecies is, in the very nature of things, a positive proof that the prophet is not a deity, and is not in any manner supernaturally influenced by the Supreme Being.'"—AUTONOMOS, in the *National Reformer* of July 12th, 1868.

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