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THE
JUDGMENT OF THE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL
IN
THE CASE OF MR VOYSEY.

SOME REMARKS BY
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P R E F A C E.

I AM anxious to state, that in sending the following pages to the press, I do so after the most deliberate consideration. The substance of them has been a constant theme of thought for many years, and the subject of frequent conversation with friends of every shade of opinion.

Many reasons have been suggested both by myself and by others, why I should *not* thus come forward, and I have felt as if some excuse is due for so doing, since it cannot be concealed that any one who attacks what he conceives to be serious popular error, is himself on his trial, and in the public estimation, is already condemned as a disturber of the peace—one of those who would turn the world upside down.

But after all, though satisfied that a good and sound defence of my position is possible, it will perhaps be best to rest entirely on the justice of the cause,—avoid any appeal to complicated reasons which might not convince one person who already thinks I am wrong, and to look steadily to the call of clear duty.

I must, however, before going further, express sorrow that this task is necessary. I grieve when I think of the people to whom this paper will give pain, for I know their real worth, and how sincerely they hold the views here attacked. I am sorry for the alienation which may be hereby caused between myself and some of my brother clergy, men whom I sincerely love and respect, whose friendship I value, and with whom I have hitherto worked in harmony. It is not, however, the first time in the world's history, when a choice has had to be made between even near and dear relations, and the path of duty.

Whether this is mere sentiment, and whether or not I have made a wanton attack on unimportant blemishes in men's faith, can alone be determined by fair and free discussion, and to this I am content to leave it, in perfect confidence that what is superficial will be eliminated, but what is true and sound will stand the test.

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A CLERGYMAN, the rector of a large and important parish, once said to me in the course of conversation, "Is there any passage in the New Testament where Christ declares himself to be God?"

This is a very suggestive question, for there is, absolutely, none. On the other hand, at least one notable passage may be brought forward to the contrary. Christ was once accused by the Jews of blasphemy, of making himself, as they said, equal with God. In reply, he justifies his words by the following argument. These words occur in your sacred writings, "I said ye are Gods;" now there can be no blasphemy in my calling myself a son of God if that term is applied in your own Scriptures to other men.

From this the plain inference is, that Jesus himself disclaimed any other divinity than that which is possible to the rest of mankind, and this is fully borne out by other passages which are, strangely enough, often brought up to prove his exceptional divinity; such as, "I and my Father are one," when his meaning is explained by the parallel passage, in his prayer for his disciples, "That we all may be one as Thou Father art in me, and I in Thee," when this "oneness" in the former is explained, and extended to all who are of a similar mind to himself.

If these simple statements are compared with those

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of the Nicene Creed and much of the popular theology of the day, a marked difference must be observed. The worship of Christ is for the most part the centre of Christian devotion, and to deny to him the title of the supreme God, is to incur the most serious imputation, if not personal harm. On what does this vast structure of the worship of Jesus rest? It rests on ideas which sprung into existence shortly after his death, and for which he himself appears in no way responsible.

His followers were partly of Jewish and partly of Pagan origin. The more educated among the former were imbued with the sublime Platonic philosophy, which was now beginning to influence all thoughtful men, and the latter could hardly be expected to lay aside all the influence of their previous lives. These men pondered on the pure and self devoted life of Jesus with extreme reverence. The Jewish converts saw in him the expected Messiah so vividly described in the then lately published book of Enoch, and the Pagan converts would naturally deify him as they had been accustomed to do the heroes of their own antiquity. The germ of this seed thus early planted has borne its natural fruit, and at this day the worship of the person of Christ, whether under a sensuous substantial form, or the not less subtle forms of an ideal man, who appeared on the earth some centuries ago, is being developed to an extraordinary degree.

That such a state of things can last very long is not probable. The very nervousness with which any discussion on the subject is met by those who affect to be most confident, is a proof that they distrust it in their inmost hearts. Like all other idolatries, this must fall when the true facts of the case are known—when it is thoroughly understood what are its foundations, of what stuff it is made; no chain can be stronger than its weakest link, and when the uncertainty of the origin of the fourth gospel, and, indeed, of much of the New Testament, is admitted, as a fact

which cannot be denied by any competent person, all but the wilfully blind, and ignorant, and superstitious must abandon the present popular view.* The church which would uphold it would be a church to which no honest man could wish to belong, as it would be merely a state engine of the most corrupt kind, to keep things quiet and influence the ignorant. Abandoning truth in the most shameless way, it would take its stand on the quicksands of popular prejudices, and must infallibly fall.

And yet, what might not a truly national church be! Its roots sustained in truth, its branches and leaves nourished in charity as in an atmosphere, it would bring blessings to countless thousands who at present ignore or reject it with ill-disguised contempt, it would be the channel of every good to the lowest and poorest, helping forward the weak, and testifying in no faltering tones against sin and oppression—the true mother of all who could claim human brotherhood.

The recent judgment of the Privy Council in the case of Mr Voysey, among other things, declares it to be part of the doctrine of the national Church, 1. That we ought to worship Christ as God. 2. That it is contrary to the articles to hold that God is not wroth with every human being born into this world. 3. That we must hold that God needed to be reconciled to man, not man to God.'

Now, in relation to the first, and to my mind, the most important of these points, the worship of Christ,

* I must refer to Canon Westcott's Introduction to the study of the Gospels (Macmillan & Co.), Tischendorf's origin of the Gospels (Jackson, Walford, and Hodder), and above all, Taylor's Treatise on the Gospel of St John (Williams and Norgate). The facts so clearly stated in the first two, despite the previous opinions of their authors, fully bear out, I maintain, the abovestatement, while the last, a most able and thoughtful essay, by a learned man, and written in a truly reverent spirit, is to my mind conclusive against the authenticity of the fourth gospel.

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it must be observed that, unless the terms are further defined, it is impossible to know how they are to be obeyed, or whether they are infringed or not in any particular case. But they are not defined. "Worship" is an act varying in degree from the most profound respect for a noble and holy person, to what passes under the name, in abject prostration before an idol. How many men "worship" God sincerely and effectually, when their souls are penetrated by his greatness and goodness seen on every hand in nature; nay, how much more worthy of the name of "worship" is that silent adoration of the heart, than the genuflexions of priests and devotees before decorated altars.

But still more important is it to observe that there is no definition of the term "God." Is that term to be taken in the sense in which it is used in the passage, "I said ye are Gods," or is it to represent the eternal, omnipresent Creator, the unseen, in whom we live and move and have our being? Between these two ideas there is an almost infinite interval, and unreservedly to declare that Christ is to be worshipped as God, is to leave us in utter perplexity.

Now, if I am referred to the Articles, is the matter made much clearer? The first Article defines the living and true God to be without body, parts, or passions, whereas Christ in the fourth article is said to have "taken his body with flesh and bones and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature to heaven, where he now sitteth," from which it is clear that the authors of the Articles did not consider Christ as God in the fourth, in the same sense as God is defined in the first. Am I to worship Christ as God as defined in the first, or in the condition described in the fourth?

Theologians may tell me that these are very foolish questions, and show a shallow mind, and I well know how much may be written on them, what elaborate arguments may be spun by way of explanation of them! I have read, I daresay, quite as much as

most men, of this sort of thing ; yet, I must sincerely say, I doubt whether I ever understood it. A young man studying divinity often fancies he does so, that he has got hold of some theological axioms upon which he can construct certain theorems with a kind of mathematical exactness. But when he finds by experience in after years, that his axioms have none of that universal assent and obvious truth which are essential to axioms, his elaborate theories must fall to pieces.

Once more, I am told to worship Christ as God. Is my worship to be of the nature of a sincere affection for the noble character embodied in Jesus, a practical desire, like him to live for the sake of others, and like him to despise all present ease in comparison, or is it to be the prostration of my body before certain emblems of him, and my mind before certain dogmas relating to him—dogmas, for the most part, begotten in times of fierce party warfare and bitter theological zeal, out of the brains of cruel men, and used by them as engines to crush their enemies ? Again, is the object of my worship to be the eternal God, without body, parts, or passions of the first Article, or that Christ who “took his body with flesh and bones to heaven,” spoken of in the fourth ?

These are questions which the Judicial Committee, having introduced an expression not occurring elsewhere in the formularies of the Church, will perhaps have to elucidate by some further declaration of doctrine. In the meantime I must repudiate one kind of worship while I hold to the other. I worship what was divine in Jesus in the sense of profound reverence, and a life's devotion, as far as may be, to the ideal of purity and love which he presents to my mind. Worship in any other sense is reserved for the spiritual, eternal God, such a God as is defined in the first article.

Then, again, with respect to that divine wrath which I am told to believe in, what does it mean ?—Is it a cold, forensic kind of wrath such as a judge

passing sentence on a criminal might be supposed to bear towards him? or is it that of a person highly indignant? It is not easy to imagine wrath except in the latter sense, and yet can anything be more derogatory to the divine character? The Almighty creating men, and then being wroth with them, and requiring some rites to be performed on them by their fellow-men to bring them into favour again with Him. If this, or anything like this, be the doctrine endorsed by the late judgment, my soul rises in indignation against it, and I protest against it as dishonouring God and tending to the grossest superstition.

Again, it is reiterated in the judgment that it needed the sacrifice of Christ to reconcile God to man; but it has been maintained by the Dean of Westminster that such a statement is as contrary to Scripture as to all just views of the relation of God to man, made known to us. I shall not do more than insert here a passage from a letter by Dean Stanley which appeared in the *Guardian* of May 3d, in relation to this subject, as no arguments of mine could strengthen the position taken in this controversy by that learned and able divine. "To take a single instance of the charges against Mr Voysey by way of illustration. He is condemned for having contradicted a paragraph in the Second Article, which declares, that the object of the Redemption was to reconcile the Father to mankind. I need hardly say that this contradiction is one which appears not only in the writings of the greatest divines of the early Church, but also in some of the most eminent of our own. It appears in the statements of theologians as far removed from each other as Alexander Knox and Dr Arnold, Dr Mason Neale and Dean Alford, and was set forth not many years ago with the utmost precision, in a sermon (to which I have often referred) by the late Professor Hussey, preached at Oxford before the present Bishop of Winchester, published at his desire, and

dedicated to him by his permission. I have myself repeatedly stated this doctrine in my '*Commentary on the Corinthians*,' in speeches delivered in Convocation, and in sermons preached before the University."

It may be objected to what has been said, that the most distorted phases of the doctrines in question have been brought forward; that it is not fair to hold up the exaggerated and often immoral excesses to which ignorant men push them, as an objection to them. It would not, I admit, be fair to charge these distorted views on all the supporters of these doctrines, yet, when the words used by the Judicial Committee are such as, in the popular sense, might sanction what would seem to be idolatry, the only resource left to those who see and feel the evil is to protest strongly against it. To speak of the worship of Christ as God, and of the wrath of God, may with some have a very innocent meaning; but with others, and those the most ignorant, they are the channels of superstition. Worship, in the popular sense of the term, is not the act of a life, but that of a set time offered up in a particular place. The wrath of God means in ordinary language the flames of hell fire and eternal tortures; so that to say God is wroth with every child till it is baptized, is to say that if it died then it would go to hell. And this is the way infidels and atheists are made—no one believes that God is so bad as that: and so being taught that these ideas are inseparable from Him, they are compelled to ignore or disbelieve in Him altogether.

Once, in a school, I heard the master put the following question to the head class: "How many Gods are there?" The answer to which was "three;" and this was taken as quite orthodox and correct. Perhaps it did really signify little to the poor child whether he believed in three or in one God, so confused are often the notions current on the subject; but the answer makes one reflect whether

we have advanced so very far beyond Polytheism after all? Can it be affirmed that children are always taught to "believe in one God;" and if this is not the case, at whose door will the dishonour lie?—at that of the schoolmaster ignorant of the nice subtleties of theology, or of the heads of the church who tell him to worship Christ as God?

Nor is the foregoing a solitary instance; my own limited experience could supply others of the same kind; and from what school inspectors have told me, they could supply a large number to show what a distorted caricature of religious knowledge has often been taught in schools, a fact which fully accounts for the outcry which has of late arisen for purely secular instruction; since it must be felt that the effect of such teaching on the minds of any thoughtful young person must be the very reverse of religious.

Perhaps some may object, that, with the views I have here advanced, it is inconsistent in me to continue reading the church service: it certainly would be so if these immoral and superstitious meanings were distinctly declared by sufficient authority to be essential to certain words and expressions in it. But though the late judgment has apparently taken a step in this direction, it remains to be seen whether it can be maintained. It is hard to believe that a permanent retrograde movement has been made under the sanction of the highest authorities towards heathenism; whether the clergy are henceforth to teach and believe in two gods; whether Manichæism is again to be revived, and the world is to be held as under the control of a demon, from whom, however, a merciful *Æon* will deliver them. Expressions which favour these views no doubt lurk in our Articles and formularies; for it must not be forgotten that they were the compilations of comparatively very unenlightened times, and it would only be surprising if they had been altogether free from the errors in the

theology of the age in which they were composed. But it is almost incredible that these expressions, so long allowed to lie unobserved, are now to be disinterred and dragged to light to quench that more liberal and purer interpretation of the ancient dogmas which was beginning to make itself felt—as incredible as that the thumbscrew and the boot should, in this 19th century, be brought from the glass-cases of a modern museum to eke out the decision of a court of justice.

That a reasonable and edifying meaning may be attached to the expressions in the church service, if they are not pressed too literally, I would still fain believe. With its general spirit I agree; since through it I can worship, and ask others with me to worship God. That is its central idea. I should, however, in candour, except the Athanasian creed, the damnatory clauses of which are so directly contrary to what I hold as true, that I have not for many years, and could not, use that formulary. But as on the whole, the church service is to me a real help, I shall not, by my own act, separate myself from the church which has appointed it. Besides, be it observed, that when I entered into my engagements as a clergyman, there was not that rigid definition of these abstruse doctrines, there was not this new formula which has now been introduced, and which unquestionably modifies, by making more precise and stringent, those tenets to which I gave my assent.

To some who may read this paper, it will doubtless give considerable pain, and they may ask, Why write it? Why incur the risk of so much trouble, and perhaps serious loss, to yourself and others? My answer is, That I am not accountable for this pain; its existence is no proof that these discussions are not necessary. It is caused rather by the admission, than by the existence of certain facts which have hitherto been kept in the background, but are now getting to be pretty generally known. But is there

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not something unseasonable in this? The *opinions* of one or of any number of persons about these facts, would not be any cause of concern if the facts themselves could be disproved; but if they are true, it is madness not to give them their due weight and prominence. I am not accountable for facts. A fact is the property, not of an individual, but of the world, and those rush to certain shipwreck who would blindly dash themselves against it. Is it *e.g.* true or not, that the origin of the gospels is such as Tischendorf and Westcott have stated it to be, viz., that there is no direct evidence of the existence of any one of them until the end of the first quarter of the second century? Is it, or is it not true that, in Mr Westcott's words,—“Hitherto all the evidence which can be gathered from the circumstances of the early church and the traditions of the origin of the gospels has tended to establish the existence of an original *Oral Gospel*, definite in general outline and even in language with that which was committed to writing in the lapse of time in various special shapes, according to the typical forms which it assumed in the preaching of different apostles.” For if it be so, it is obvious that, for the purpose of proving *exact* words or *exact* events, such records fail; that even under the most favourable circumstances, that is, supposing that every one who transmitted this oral gospel was influenced by the most conscientious motives, many variations and errors must creep in; but when there is no security against this, when it is well known that these books were compiled in the days of the marvellous, and that there was every temptation to exaggerate, then it is a clear duty, as we value the truth, to scan them with care and to eliminate what is untrustworthy from them.

Again, is it, or is it not a fact that the sense in which Christ is said to have claimed divinity for himself, was such as I have drawn attention to in the be-

ginning of this paper? for if so, it is certainly inconsistent with the popular views on the subject. Once more, is it not a fact that the worship of Jesus as God, has been a development, a growth in the Christian Church, till in the present day it has assumed a proportion never witnessed before, which obscures the worship of the spiritual God, which cannot be justified by the "sure warranty" of Scripture, and which is directly opposed to that essential article of the Christian faith, without which it must be one-sided and false, namely, the "*inferiority*" of the *Son*; that, in short, his complete humanity is lost sight of and practically denied in the contemplation of his divinity. And this last remark will be a sufficient answer to an objection which has often been made, that these views are destructive of the Christian faith. What is in the present day popularly called the Christian faith is not the faith of Jesus or of Paul, nor even of the early Church. What is here advocated is no subversion of that faith, but of the errors which have overshadowed it, and is indeed a return to its purity.

I cannot, therefore, apologise for thus coming forward; it has been in some sort a necessity. Of course it is most distressing to give pain, let us trust that like all other pain in this world it may be the transition to a more healthy state of things than has hitherto been. I do not think that anything can be more melancholy than the kind of arguments or reasons for letting things alone with which one is generally met. Even leading journals, which might be expected to use something like sound argument, have nothing better to oppose to such views as are here put forth than the wishes and inclinations of the unthinking multitude, as if that indolence, to which all are but too prone, is to be the measure of truth. This is indeed to degrade the minister's office, to bring it to the level

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of that of the public performer, whose life is spent in catering for the entertainment of the multitude.

Against this I earnestly protest. The clergy cannot justify their existence unless they unflinchingly tell the truth, discreetly indeed, but frankly and sincerely. Such is the only means whereby that hollow religion which all good men deplore, and which, there is to reason to fear, has, in some instances, eaten into the very core of society, can be expelled, and the church can address herself to the elevation of our race.

J. D. LA TOUCHE,
VICAR OF STOKESAY, SALOP.

