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THE "EDINBURGH REVIEW"
AND DR. STRAUSS.

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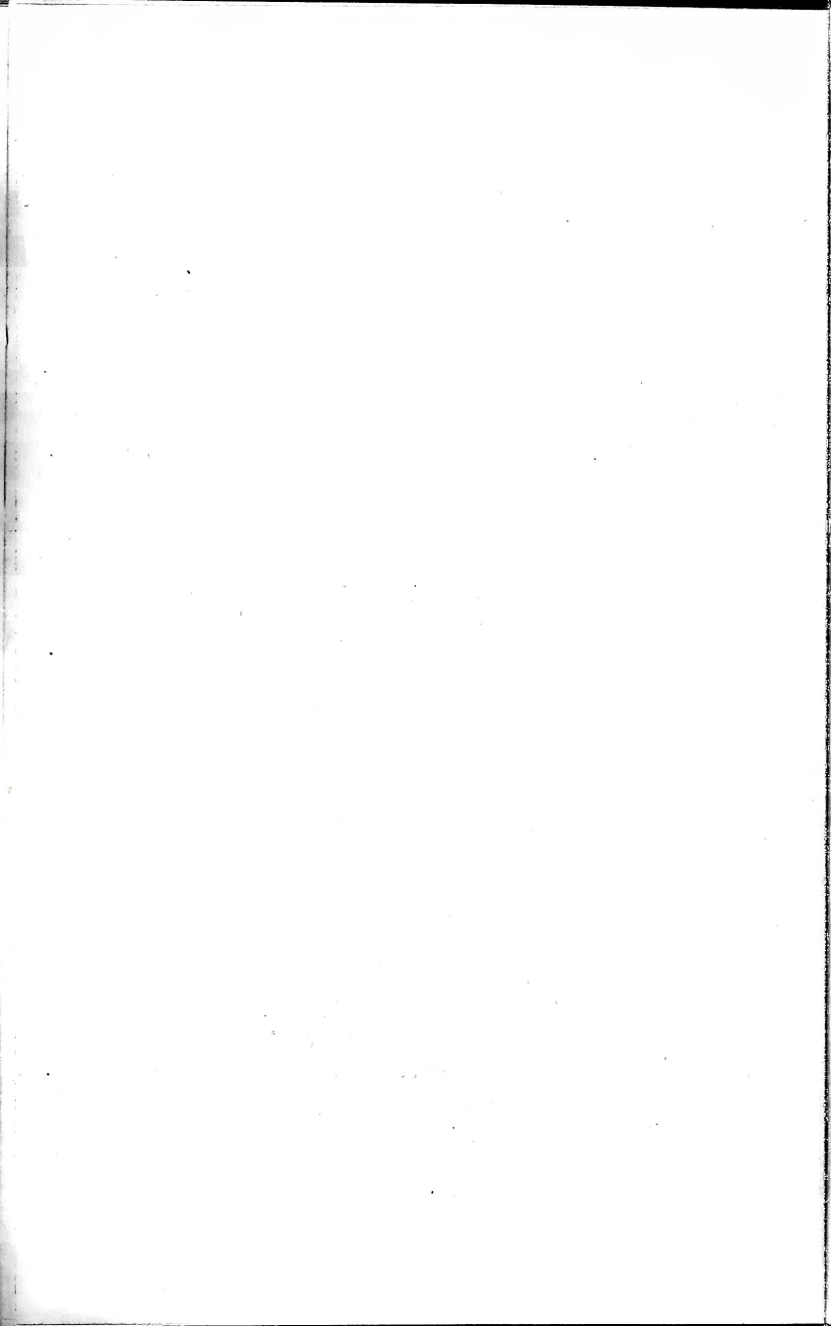
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THE "EDINBURGH REVIEW" AND DR. STRAUSS.

DEAR SIR,—I want to call your attention to an article in the last *Edinburgh* upon Dr. Strauss' *Confession of Faith*, for it seems to me to have a special importance at the present moment, when there is so much of uncertainty and insecurity in Church matters.

"It is not that the thing is rich or rare,
The only wonder is how it got there."

It purports to be a critique upon "The Old Faith and the New," and were this all, I should have had little to say about it. A scrimmage between the *Edinburgh* and the great Arch-Heretic would not be very edifying; though in truth the writer goes into it with a will and something more. Never, I should think, has the Doctor been so savagely pommelled. His critic gives him no rest. It recalls the Flaming Tinman in L'avengro,—“he knocked him down, and he knocked him up again, he knocked him into the hedge, and he knocked him out of it”—words however break no bones, and doubtless the Professor will live to make sport some other day.

The most noteworthy part of the article lies near the end of it, where the question occurs, "Why is apostacy from Christianity being so lightly treated in our day?" Has any new weapon of assault been ex-cogitated—any weak place in the Christian armour discovered? To this the Reviewer confidently

answers, none. We are as we ever were—heart-whole as a biscuit—sound to the very core—the universal reign of law, and the unhistorical nature of the Gospels notwithstanding. The true answer to the *former* is to remember that “stability of purpose is a standing characteristic of the highest minds,” and that miracle is nothing else than the “outcrop of some previously unknown law,” while the untenableness of the *second* is shewn in “the general reception of the Gospels in the early part of the second century; thus allowing no time for fictitious accounts of our Lord’s life and death to gain currency or circulation.”

These two questions then being settled to his entire satisfaction, the writer proceeds to enquire “what, under present circumstances, is the duty of men of sense and of a true loyalty to Christ and His religion.” Imprimis, “to remember that the future unity and efficiency of the Church entirely depend on the exercise of such prudence and charity among Christians as shall combine together the various elements that create a true Catholicity,” which nobody can deny—“and then in the next place, it appears to him that there are three points to which the attention of all students, and especially of the clergy, ought at the present time to be carefully directed.”

These three points are—well, what do you guess? I defy any man in his sober senses (without the aid of some special Theological intuition or faculty) to read me my riddle. The first, then, is to get rid *in toto* and at once of that troublesome book, yclept the Old Testament, to shelve it now and for ever. “Why should Christian churchmen think it necessary to burden their cause, and to hamper every movement of their strategy, by undertaking the perfectly gratuitous task of making Gentile Christianity responsible for the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures? We are not Jews,” (certainly not, if you count noses.) “and there is no reason in the world why we should

be weighted with this burden of understanding and defending, at all risks, the Jewish Scriptures. It is a burden that was never laid upon us either by Christ, or by His Apostles. Our German race, in particular, as a matter of simple fact, was not trained by them. They were not our 'schoolmasters to lead us to Christ.' We affirm, what appears to us to be a simple historical fact, *viz.*: that the Jewish Scriptures do not belong to us, and that we are in no way responsible for them. It was not by the Old Testament that the Gentile nations were trained; it was not by the Mosaic law that our heathen forefathers were prepared for the reception of Christ. It was by quite another agency. It was by that magnificent Book of God, in which we have read ever since, and are reading to this day, the ever-opening revelations of His wisdom and His power. It is the realm of Nature, which is our own proper inheritance. It is physical science which has hitherto led us—why should it not lead us still?—through Nature up to Nature's God. We earnestly trust, therefore, that the mistake of burdening our Christian cause with needless anxieties and absolutely unprofitable controversies, relating to the Old Testament Scriptures, may gradually be made to cease; and that the clergy will read to us their invaluable lections from the Old Testament, at no very distant day, without either calling upon us, or troubling themselves, to solve the innumerable problems which they raise. Why should we go out of our way to deprive ourselves of that precious 'liberty,' from the law and from the Old Testament—'wherewith Christ has made us free.'"

Now what does all this mean? Suppose this noticeable advice had been given by yourself or by any of your compeers, what would or rather what would not have been said of it? Doubtless, the ship of the Church is labouring heavily in the very trough of the sea, well-nigh water-logged, and the *Edinburgh*

Plimsoll steps forward and tells us that she is top-hampered, deck-loaded to a dangerous degree. Overboard, then, with all that lumber, and she will float like a duck once more, or, in plain words, when a person comes troubling you with questions as to Mosaic cosmogony, universal deluge, Pentateuchal Theories, sun stationary, sun retrograde, food purveying ravens, and the like legendary matters, as the Reviewer styles it, bid him begone and take his queries and his crude impertinencies to those whom they concern—Moses ben Toledoth, or the first Old Clo' he may come across—to them belong these ancient oracles "which are the religious lesson books of a different race from our own, and the sole remaining relics of a national literature with whose very language our own has hardly anything whatever in common." Verily, if this be not a hoisting of the engineer with his own petard, may I die a Dean! For of all the words of ill savour in the nostrils of the "unco-gude," that of Legend stands pre-eminent. How often has it been cast in the teeth of free thinkers that they are an infidel and impious generation, turning the word of God into myths and fables, and yet here you have a champion of the Faith quietly shelving the Old Book for the legendary matter contained in it, its unprofitable controversies, its insoluble problems, whereas Jesus enforced these very legends, these idle tales, when he quoted Lot's wife, Moses at the Bush, the cities of the Plain, Elias' first coming, Jonah and the Ninevites, &c.

"But John P. Robinson, he
Says they didn't know everything down in Judee."

Startling as this is, point the second takes us a step further. "Is it right," he asks, "is it truthful, is it any longer possible—in the face of all that is now known upon like subjects—to pretend that legendary matter has not intruded itself into the New Testament, as well as into the Old? It is now universally granted

by all competent critics, that the three synoptical Gospels are simply written notes of the oral teaching of the apostolic age. Now, even in what may be called 'regular histories' a certain play of the imagination is unavoidable. Indeed, without it any history would sink at once to the level of a chronicle or an almanac. But in an oral history, used during many years for purposes of religious emotion and edification, some slight admixture of this plastic and poetic element appears to be absolutely inevitable." And more to the like effect.

We are now brought to the third and last point. Hitherto, it must be granted, the writer has been frank and free beyond his kind. Seldom is orthodoxy so candid and outspoken. He takes up his parable, and what do we find written therein, 'Legend here, legend there, legend everywhere.' What more can he say? What more is wanted? But is not this the voice of Jacob? the very words of that old rogue Free Thought. 'Fas est et ab hoste doceri' quoth the Reviewer. And now one would think there was nothing to be done but to shake hands all round, cry we are all miserable sinners, forget and forgive, and live in unity to our lives' end. "Patience, cousin, and shuffle the cards, and I will shew you the veriest hanky-panky trick that ever was played upon board." So far the writer is clear and unshakeable, it is the speech of Free Thought from orthodox lips; but now a change comes over the spirit of his dream, he begins to chide his rash outspoken ways. May he not be going too far? is there no *terra firma*, nothing for the feet to rest upon? is all mist and haze? does the heavy cloud of doubt and uncertainty hang over all alike? is all tainted with suspicion's cruel breath? nothing stable and secure? there must, there shall be,—and once more he takes up his parable, but in how different a strain. "The last point which appears to us to be of incalculable importance for all students of theology to bear in mind at the present

day, is this: The absolute necessity of candidly accepting as 'fact' whatever can honestly be shewn to be such. One feels at a loss to understand, *e.g.*, how any men, calling themselves votaries of science, can pretend to set aside, with a contemptuous smile, 'facts' of such singular interest, and reposing on such an extraordinary accumulation of evidence, as those on which Christianity is built. (Legend, you see, has quite dropt out of sight.) They may not hitherto have been quite rightly explained, they may not yet have been wholly divested of their graceful drapery of fancy, they may not be, so to say, extra-natural, though they may be super-natural events, transcending, that is, the ordinary and accustomed routine of nature." Then he girds at the men of science for their mistakes, rash assumptions and inability to see an inch beyond their nose, and finally settles down upon the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, as a plain historical fact, in these words "the historical proof that accumulates around that one point is so overwhelmingly conclusive, that no honest and really scientific mind, we are bold to say, can escape the conviction that it really happened: If unbelievers would condescend to explain to us (1), How St. Paul's four great Epistles and the Apocalypse (which they all acknowledge to be genuine) can, under any other hypothesis, have come to be written; (2), How the terrified and scattered apostles, can, on any other rational supposition, have suddenly recovered their courage and their hopes; and (3), how, if the basis and key-stone of her whole teaching be a gross imposture or delusion, the christian church can conceivably have grasped, with such a wonderful and permanent force, the reins which govern the human will, and have kept for centuries in the highway of progress the otherwise wild and wasteful powers of the human intelligence; then, and not till then, will we consent to abandon the keep and citadel of the Christian Faith."

Is there not a proverb warning against putting all

our eggs into one basket? Can the writer be serious in his assertion that St. Paul's four great Epistles, the revival of the disciples' hope and the churches' grasp upon the reins that govern the human will, have their basis in nothing but the 'fact' of Christ's Resurrection. *Would not a belief in it have done just as well?* Specially so, when this belief was always accompanied in the minds of the apostles by another—to them equally certain, equally incontrovertible—*viz.*, the speedy return-coming of Christ; yet where is the latter now? I grant fully that these two beliefs formed the *πῶς ἄρα*, from which Christianity moved the world; and likewise that without a future, "human life itself with all its hopes and aspirations would be an imposture." I fail however to see the logic of the following sentence, "If the possibility of our Lord's resurrection be once fairly conceded, as it must be conceded by those who admit the immortality of the soul, then the cause of Christianity is as good as won." But I have no wish to harguffy, specially with so smart a writer as this Reviewer. One word before I quit this part of the subject. The next time he plays Jack on both sides, and holds a brief for both plaintiff and defendant alike, let him drop his mask and appear before the world in *propria personâ*. We shall then know how to class him. If his heart is in his cause, he will never shrink from putting his name thereto, whether that be well known or not at all.

And now, how seems it to you, the appearance of this article in the pages of the "*Edinburgh?*" To me it is as if the "Quarterly" took to patronizing John Bright, and the "Record" to fraternizing with Messrs Holyoake and Bradlaugh. What does it mean? for me *judice* it is the work of no prentice hand; the pen that transcribed it has done yeoman's service ere now. I am hugely mistaken if there were not great thoughts of heart in Paternoster Row before that article was decided upon. Is it a feather thrown up to shew which way the wind is blowing? Surely there must be more

behind. The *Edinburgh* is not celebrated for its Coups de Théâtre, its surprises à la Napoleon III. It seldom travels far out of its accustomed groove. In the whole course of its long career, I doubt if any other article can be mentioned, so isolated, so clearly beside its wonted walk and conversation as this; for it is nothing less than a wilful, deliberate attack upon what the Religious world in England holds most dear, its beloved Bibliolatry, its worship of the letter in every jot and tittle. It is the red rag flaunted in the bull's face—enough to make Dean Alford, that most cautious of commentators, move uneasily in his grave. To call a spade, a spade—to tell Truth and shame the devil; these are new maxims in theological warfare, and mark the altered spirit of the times. What then can have provoked this startling escapade? It is not so much the weight of the blow that stuns one, as its coming from so unexpected a quarter, from a hand whilom so friendly. *Et tu, Brute!* no envious Casca made this rent or vented the bitter taunt that the Church's title-deeds are a mass of idle tales, the time-honoured writings she so venerates not worth defending, a burden not a support. Legend, in short. "I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word"—the outside world has long made up its mind upon the matter; but what can have wrung it from that stubborn breast, or so pricked the heart of dull unbending orthodoxy that it should now come and chant its Palinodia in the ears of all, unasked, uncalled for? what has rent the veil from eyes that have long blinked in the blaze of a light that men were everywhere welcoming and rejoicing in? Can they ever close again? Will it meet with its usual self-satisfied sneer the Truth when it appears not in the writings of the Tübingen school or of English Free thought, but in the respectable pages of the Old Blue and Buff? Shades of Sydney Smith, Jeffrey and Horner! that the nursling of Whiggism should so belie its ancient fame, as to turn

traitor, and hang out the white flag, ere three quarters of a century have passed over its honoured head?

“Point de boucles, Monsieur, tout est perdu!” the *Edinburgh* dallying with rationalism is no less ominous. ‘To your tents, O Israel’—for war is at hand. The Reviewer quotes Bunsen’s well known words, that a religious war is impending, and may soon be upon us, and yet the Church heeds not the tramp of mustering hosts, ‘nor the low wail that bodes the coming storm.’ As proud as in the days of Laud, she will not yield an inch or make the slightest change demanded of her. “I sit a queen,” she saith, “and shall see no sorrow.” Surely this is to mistake porcine obstinacy for manly firmness, to shut the eyes and say, I see naught. What is asked of her? What the demand made each year in tones louder and more menacing than the last? What, but that she should adapt her tone and her teaching to the altered state of the times in which she finds herself, that she should descend from the pinnacle on which her pride has placed her, lay aside her mysterious pretensions, her mumming tones, her priestly gabardine and mock sanctimoniousness, and preach to her fellow men in words that should reach their hearts, and raise them from the littleness, the carking cares and concerns of this world to some thought of the eternal and the invisible, that spirit-land which all dream of and yearn after, fascinating even to those grimy myriads who six days out of seven moil and toil in the dust and mire of earth and its sadly stern belongings. To do this rightly she must free herself from the swaddling clothes of a dead past, which serve but to impede her utterance and check the full use of her powers—that act of a false and impossible uniformity—those Thirty-nine articles, the spawn of an unhappy compromise, which narrow living minds within the soul-enslaving fetters of a bygone generation, cruel as the Tyrrhenian tyrant ‘contemptor

Divûm Mezentius. Mortua quin etiam jungebat corpora vivis.' These are our festering sores, this the heavy load that is bearing down and fast sinking the Church in the yawning depth that threatens shortly to engulf her. Do this and she would find recruits among the most highly educated the most deeply thinking minds of the rising generation and of others yet to come. To neglect this, is to spurn an opportunity that may never occur again. It may be that the Sibyl is offering the book for the last time. If she still set her face against reform and refuse to strip herself of the garb and surroundings of a past age, there are rude hands ready to do it for her.

What a future—what a glorious vocation is in store for the Church, if only she could see it—nothing less than to lead the van in that fierce strife which is drawing each day nearer and nearer—not the petty war of rival sects, of this and that doxy, but between the unchristian, worldly spirit which is gradually leavening men's minds, finding its expression in those sad, scornful words: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die;" and the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy. This is the tribulation that awaits the Future—the fire that shall try every man's work what it is—as yet it slumbers, gathering force—it is but in its cradle, as it were. Would that some infant Hercules was there to strangle it. Increased prosperity, the wealth that each year is pouring into our laps, the upward movement of the lower strata upon which the State reposes, the general spread of education and intelligence, the crude speculations of men who have only just begun to use their reasoning powers, and forbear not to criticise all things in heaven and earth in the most approved fashion of modern Positivism—"fools that rush in where angels fear to tread." All mark the advent of that materialism which

is now informing and moulding society, that love of the carnal and earthy, that care only for what can be realized and appreciated by the bodily senses, the loathsome disrespect for everything that brings not money in its train, the mammon-worship and glorification of success, no matter how obtained, the impatience of all but worldly gains and gratifications, the contempt for the meek and poor in heart who shrink from trumpeting their own wares, and putting a false value upon their works. "These be thy gods, O Israel?" the idols of the hearth in many a fair English household. "As in the sweetest bud the eating canker dwells," so lurks this danger in the jewelled cup of our greatness; the more to be dreaded that it does not openly renounce its allegiance to God, whom it professes to know, while in works it denies Him, being abominable, disobedient, to every good work reprobate.

I ask the judgment of any sober man if herein I exaggerate, or aught set down in malice. The hand goes slowly round the dial, pointing ever to the same old figures—the spirit of selfish pride and superstition, that has overturned nation after nation, that never slumbers or sleeps, never lets its victim go when once encircled in its folds. Was it ever so deeply engrained in our hearts as now? and who should be the first to oppose the fiend, to throw themselves into the struggle with all utter self-negation and forgetfulness—but those who owe all they most prize to Jesus of Nazara, whose commission they execute, in whose ranks they fight? These are the very men who are squabbling about days, and observances, and vestments, and the like, who would, if they could, stifle the very breath of Free Thought, and throw us back into the mediæval past of superstition and subservience to the power of Sir Priest who rules over men's hearts, only to fill them with the twin demons of bigotry and spiritual pride. "It is a sight to make angels weep,"

but it is the old tale, the Jews tearing and rending each other, and Rome thundering at the gates.

May a wiser heart be ours ; the church of God in this land might become a power for good such as the world never yet saw ; embracing in a loving fold the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands who now never worship at all ; yet turn a wistful look to the churches of their ancestors, and their green hillocky graves. Years of mutual neglect and coldness have ripened into distrust and dislike.

“ They stand apart, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs that have been rent asunder,
A dreary sea now flows between,
But neither heat, nor rain, nor thunder
Can ever do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been.”

She might be the spiritual friend and comforter of a race which has never been surpassed for solidity and thoughtfulness, for mental and bodily energy in all their forms—that still loves and worships God, still respects religion, still asks for guidance and support. But when it finds its natural leaders vain and busied about things that it looks upon as trifles or something worse, when it sees them turning a deaf ear to warning or remonstrance, blind to the light that shines all around them, fiercely opposed to truths which others have long recognised, caring only for that which lies within their own magic circle, distrustful of everything in the shape of change or progress, can it be wondered at that men are turning to other leaders ; that, sick of the strife of tongues, and the weary jargon of ecclesiastical disputes, they are ready to cry a plague upon both your houses—to follow any Jeroboam who shall set up his calves at Dan and Bethel, and spurn the altar at Jerusalem ?—Yours truly,

G. WHEELWRIGHT.

THOMAS SCOTT, Esq.
10th Dec. 1873.