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THE CHURCHMAN

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OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*

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a higher and a better, and one which should include in its embrace not a single favoured people, but the whole world. And this dissolution of the old order, and introduction of the new, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has in his mind when addressing those who were growing weary of their sufferings for the new faith, and were in danger of relapsing into Judaism. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven, Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven; and this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, and those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

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But to leave this reference to the rich fulness of Scripture in its twofold meaning, and to return to the miracle of the Incarnation, which, according to Mr. Arnold, is a "legend"—although he admits that "two of the Canonical Gospels propound the legend seriously," basing their view, in his opinion, "upon an evidently fantastic use of the words of prophecy"—let us remind Mr. Arnold that the author of one of the two Canonical Gospels, to which he refers as "propounding the legend of the Incarnation seriously," had more than a "fantastic use of the words of prophecy" to rest on when applying them to the birth of Jesus. He writes: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a

been enlisted in the cause of infidelity. It is indeed (as Archer Butler remarks) "one proof of the natural alienation of man from God, that his highest qualities, when unsanctified, do not lead him in that direction." They may lead him to religion, but not to God. Of one fault, however, I fully acquit Mill: he has not made, or endeavoured to make, infidelity attractive; he has rather made it repulsive. His autobiography was aptly described, in one of the Oxford papers, as a ghastly memoir. He strips this life of all its flowers, and yet shuts the door of hope in a future life.

I have now come to the end of the limits assigned to me, and perhaps even beyond them. Much, therefore, which I could have said must be left unsaid. I should have liked to have made some remarks about those friends of Sir Henry Taylor, whom I also had the honour of knowing—Lord Monteagle, his father-in-law, Sir Aubrey de Vere, and Sir James Stephen; but want of space, as well as other reasons, compel me to pass them over. So now I must bid farewell to a work which I have performed with pleasure mixed with sadness, a sadness which must cast a still deeper shade over the mind of the writer. He is paying the penalty which all men do pay who live to an advanced age, of seeing his friends fall around him, "like leaves in wintry weather." Of all the illustrious men whose characters he has sketched, Mr. Gladstone is, as far as I know, the only one now living. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

EDWARD WHATELY.

ART. VI.—MR. MATTHEW ARNOLD ON CHRISTMAS.

IN the April number of the *Contemporary Review*, Mr. Matthew Arnold has given us "A Comment on Christmas." He takes as his text an apophthegm of Bishop Wilson, and he apologizes to his readers for allowing so long a time to pass since he quoted that much-esteemed prelate who, he tells us, "is full of excellent things." Mr. Arnold has a special reason for quoting Bishop Wilson now, for, to use his own words, "one of his apophthegms came into my mind the other day as I read an angry and unreasonable expostulation addressed to myself." We believe that Mr. Arnold alludes to an article that appeared in the *Guardian* at Christmas on the great miracle of the Incarnation. However this may be, Bishop Wilson's apophthegm runs thus: "*Truth provokes those whom it does not convert.*"

Now, Mr. Arnold was "angrily reproached" for saying, "Miracles do not happen, and more and more of us are becoming

convinced that they do not happen ; nevertheless, what is really best and most valuable in the Bible is independent of miracles. For the sake of this, I constantly read the Bible myself, and I advise others to read it also"—and Mr. Arnold grows indignant with those orthodox champions of the faith who do not express their thanks to him for "constantly reading" a Bible, and "advising others to read" a Bible, from which he would eliminate the supernatural. What a Bible we should have if all miracles were removed !

We join issue at once with Mr. Arnold when he says, "What is really best and most valuable in the Bible is independent of miracles ;" for we believe that the very foundation of the Christian religion would be shaken to its base ; that the keystone would be removed from the arch of our most holy faith ; that all that stimulates to duty, or proves a check upon sin, would go ; that all that inspires Christian people with a divine enthusiasm in the service of Christ would be taken away, if he succeeded in proving that all that is supernatural and miraculous in the Bible belonged to the realms of legend and myth. We may seem very ungrateful to Mr. Arnold, but we can give him no thanks, nor can we think that he is deserving of any, for his audacious statement that "miracles do not happen"—a statement in which is included the denial that miracles have ever happened, and a denial that the miracles recorded in the Bible are true.

But let us hear Mr. Arnold on the claims that he makes on our gratitude, and on his surprised displeasure that this gratitude has not been accorded as he had anticipated :

One would have thought [he writes] that at a time when the French newspapers are attributing all our failures and misfortunes to our habit of reading the Bible, and when our own Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal is protesting that the golden rule is a delusion and a snare for practical men, the friends of the old religion of Christendom would have had a kindly feeling towards anyone—whether he admitted miracles or not—who maintained that the root of the matter for all of us, lies in the Bible, and that to the use of the Bible we should still cling. But no ; *Truth provokes those whom it does not convert* ; so angry are some good people at being told that miracles do not happen, that if we say this, they cannot bear to have us using the Bible at all, or recommending the Bible. Either take it and recommend it with its miracles, they say, or else leave it alone, and let its enemies find confronting them none but orthodox defenders of it like ourselves.

Mr. Arnold is displeased with those who do not sufficiently recognise the compliment he pays to the Bible in constantly reading it himself, and recommending others to read it too ; but his Bible is not our Bible—or rather, it is ours stripped of all that makes it valuable and dear. We confess that when Mr. Arnold tells us he is "a lover of the Bible," and that "to

the use of the Bible we should still cling," and when he speaks of it in other complimentary terms, there passes involuntarily before the mind's eye the thought of that disciple who betrayed his Master with a kiss. Indeed, as we read the *Contemporary* article, and its attack, however euphoniously expressed, on the foundation of our faith, and Mr. Arnold's determination to regard the Incarnation and Resurrection as "miraculous legends," we are reminded again and again of Bishop Wilson's apophthegm—Mr. Arnold's own text—"Truth provokes those whom it does not convert."

Let us now examine Mr. Arnold's "Comment on Christmas," and see what it is worth. He writes :

What is Christmas, and what does it say to us? Our French friends will reply that Christmas is an exploded legend, and says to us nothing at all. The *Guardian*, on the other hand, lays it down that Christmas commemorates the miracle of the Incarnation, and that the Incarnation is the fundamental truth for Christians. Which is right—the *Guardian* or our French friends? Or are neither the one nor the other of them right; and is the truth about Christmas something quite different from what either of them imagine? The inquiry is profitable; and I kept Christmas this last winter by following it.

Mr. Arnold then takes the prophecy of Isaiah read in church as one of the Lessons for Christmas Day, and justly eulogises "the roll and march of those magnificent words" which we have been taught to regard as the grand and wonderful prediction of "the miracle of the Incarnation." He then quotes the familiar words, and follows them up by the interpretation received by all Christendom: "The Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, until he shall know" (revised version, "that he may know") "to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." Mr. Arnold adds the orthodox interpretation, "Immanuel is Jesus Christ, to be born of the Virgin Mary; the meaning of the name Immanuel, *God with us*, signifies the union of the divine nature and ours in Christ—God and man in one Person. 'Butter and honey shall he eat'—the Christ shall be very man; he shall have a true human body; he shall be sustained while he is growing up with that ordinary nourishment wherewith human children are wont to be fed. And the sign that the promised birth of Immanuel, God and man in one Person, from the womb of a virgin, shall really happen, is this: the two kings of Syria and Israel, who are now in the eighth century before Christ threatening the kingdom of Judah, shall be overthrown, and their country devastated. 'For before the child shall know'—before this

promised coming of Jesus Christ, and as a sign to guarantee it, the kings of Syria and Israel shall be conquered and overthrown—and conquered and overthrown they presently were.” So far Mr. Arnold on the orthodox interpretation, and so far well. “But then,” in Mr. Arnold’s words, “comes the turn of criticism.” He alters the received version, which he says is “obscured by slight errors,” and gives us a version of his own, which he pronounces to be clearer, and which is as follows:

The Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold the damsel shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Milk-curd, and honey shall he eat, when he shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land shall be forsaken, whose two kings make thee afraid.

He then modestly assures us that Christendom has been wrong in the interpretation it has put on this prophecy, and he kindly proceeds to give us the real meaning of the passage, and to shed the light of his scholarship and intellect on the prediction. Christendom, he informs us, has been labouring under a delusion for all these centuries; and he assures us that he and “a number of learned, patient, impartial investigators” (of course implying that all preceding students of the prophecies have not been learned, patient, and impartial) have now read and examined the prophets, and have discovered that Isaiah spoke with no reference to Christ whatever, and that we may now, therefore, give up our belief in “the Christian legend of the Incarnation.” He is good enough to explain to us “what the prophets really mean to say.” “It becomes certain that in the famous words read on Christmas Day the prophet Isaiah was not meaning to speak of Jesus Christ to be born more than seven centuries later. It becomes certain that his Immanuel is a prince of Judah to be born in a year or two’s time. It becomes certain that there is no question at all of a child miraculously conceived and born of a virgin; what the prophet says is, that a young woman, a damsel, at that moment unmarried, shall have time before certain things happen to be married, and to bear a son, who shall be called Immanuel. There is no question in the name Immanuel of a union of the human and divine natures, of God and man in one Person. “God present with His people and protecting them” is what the prophet means the name to signify. In “butter and honey shall he eat,” there is no question of the Christ being very man, with a true human body. What the prophet intends to say is, that when the Prince Immanuel, presently to be born, reaches adult age, agriculture shall have ceased in the desolated realm of Judah; the land, overrun by enemies, shall

have returned to a wild state; the inhabitants shall live on the produce of their herds and on wild honey. But before this come to pass—before the visitation of God's wrath upon the kingdom of Judah, and while the Prince Immanuel is still but a little child, not as yet able to discern betwixt good and evil, "to refuse the evil and choose the good"—the present enemies of Judah, the kings of Syria and Israel, shall be overthrown, and their land made desolate. Finally, this overthrow and desolation are not, with the prophet, the sign and guarantee of Immanuel's coming. Immanuel is evidently intended as a sign; all the rest is accompaniment of this sign, not proof of it." This, Mr. Arnold says, is "the true and sure sense of those noble words of prophecy which we hear read on Christmas Day."

"This legend of the Incarnation," Mr. Arnold goes on to explain—the story of Christ's being born of a virgin—"is the people's genuine translation for the fact of his unique pureness." "The legend of the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus was the popular homage to a high ideal of pureness." And then Mr. Arnold tells us there was an Athenian story of Plato's miraculous conception and birth which was a homage "to his signal and splendid pureness," and that, "had he founded a popular religion, a world-famous miracle of the Incarnation would have invested his origin"—and all this Mr. Arnold propounds seriously, and for our belief!

But to return to Isaiah. In granting, as we do, that our "learned, patient, and impartial investigator" is so far correct in his interpretation that there was presently, as Isaiah declares, to be born a child whose mother was a damsel then unmarried, and that before this child should be able to discern betwixt good and evil, the enemies of Judah, the kings of Syria and Israel, should be overthrown, and their land made desolate, we would ask, "Does this explanation of the passage completely fulfil the prediction?" And we cannot help remarking here on Mr. Arnold's inconsistency. Mr. Arnold, we see, admits prophecy, and the truth of prophecy. He allows that a damsel, at that moment unmarried, was, according to Isaiah's prediction, to be married, and bear a son who should be called Immanuel, and that before this prince reached adult age, the present enemies of Judah should be overthrown, and their land made desolate. And we would ask Mr. Arnold, Is it less difficult to credit a prophecy which should be fulfilled in a few years, than a prophecy which should not be fulfilled till after the course of centuries? To concede that Isaiah prophesied at all, is surely to concede that supernatural element in the Bible which Mr. Arnold so positively denies. And if we admit the miraculous in the Bible, why stumble at any miracle, even at so stupendous a miracle as that of the Incarnation? It has for its

authority the same basis as any other miracle—the sure Word of God.

And with the full admission that Mr. Arnold has given a correct interpretation of this prophecy of Isaiah, we would ask again, Has not all prophecy a double accomplishment? There is a twofold fulfilment: the nearer event contains, just as the bud contains the flower, the more remote and important. Such a Biblical student as Mr. Arnold cannot be unaware of this fact, although he ignores and passes it by without any hint or mention. There are many instances of this double fulfilment of prophecy both in the Old Testament and the New. For example, in Jeremiah xxxi. 15, it is written: "Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." There can be no doubt that these words refer, in the first place, to the sorrow of Jerusalem, personified as Rachel, as she thought of her captive children in a strange land, and pictured them as they wept by the waters of Babylon, and hung their unstrung harps on the willows that overshadowed the stream. But we learn from St. Matthew that this primary reference of the passage by no means exhausted its whole signification. The Evangelist applies it to the massacre of the Innocents, and tells us that in this was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying: "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not." Without this comment on Jeremiah's words, we should not have thought that they had a reference to events which were not to happen till centuries had run their course. So again, what a new light the comment of this same Evangelist throws on the words of Hosea: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt"! St. Matthew tells us that this statement of the prophet refers in its fullest sense to the flight of Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus into Egypt, and their return from thence to the Holy Land, after the death of Herod, "who sought the young child to destroy Him." And so again, with regard to our Lord's own prophecy on the Mount, on which Mr. Arnold makes some characteristic remarks at the close of his article in the *Contemporary Review*. Mr. Arnold sees nothing in this prophecy but an announcement (with the turbid figures familiar through prophecy to his hearers' imagination—figures of stupendous physical miracle) of "the end of the age," "the close of the period." Now there can be no question that our Lord did foretell "the end of the age," the close of that dispensation—the dissolution of the Jewish economy, which was to be succeeded by

a higher and a better, and one which should include in its embrace not a single favoured people, but the whole world. And this dissolution of the old order, and introduction of the new, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has in his mind when addressing those who were growing weary of their sufferings for the new faith, and were in danger of relapsing into Judaism. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven, Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven; and this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, and those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

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