
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. V.—ERASMUS.

PART II.

THE career of Erasmus had hitherto been useful and glorious. He had, notwithstanding his poverty, his repudiation by his family, his want of books, and an incurable internal malady, become, by his transcendent abilities and indefatigable industry, the greatest scholar, and in some respects the greatest divine on this side of the Alps. Budæus may have surpassed him in Greek; but he had no rival in Latin. He was equal to or surpassed the most distinguished men in Italy. In wit and satire he was absolutely unrivalled. The Pope and many distinguished prelates united to do him honour. The four or five years ending with 1517, when he was in his fifty-first year, were probably the happiest and most useful of his life. If he had died at this time, he would have been saved much misery, and he would have occupied a higher place than he does now in the good opinion of his fellow-creatures.

But we have now to present a melancholy reverse to this picture. About the time when Luther commenced his career, the ecclesiastics began to oppose him. Those who had assailed him hitherto had been men of an inferior class, monks and friars. We cannot wonder that they should have been so much incensed against him, when, in his "Praise of Folly," and in his "Enchiridion," he had censured their formality, their gross ignorance, and their attachment to the barbarous scholastic philosophy. The following severe and powerful passage from the "Praise of Folly" will illustrate the truth of this last assertion:

> These very delightful men, who are remarkable only for their dirt, their ignorance, their clownish manners, and their impudence, pretend that they are the successors of the Apostles. One will show his paunch stuffed with every kind of fish; another will number up myriads of fasts; another will bring forward a heap of ceremonies, which cannot be conveyed in ten merchant ships; another will boast that for sixty years he has never touched money, excepting with fingers protected by a pair of gloves; another will produce a cowl so dirty and coarse that no sailor would think it good enough for him; another will plead as his claim the loss of his voice from constant singing; another the lethargy occasioned by solitude; another the loss of the power of speech from long silence. But Christ will interrupt them in the recital of their good deeds, which would otherwise never come to an end, and will say, "Whence comes this new race of Jews? I acknowledge one law as really Mine, of which I hear nothing. Formerly, when on earth, without a parable, I promised My Father's inheritance, not to austerities, prayers, or fastings, but to faith and the offices of charity. I do not acknowledge those who make much of their good deeds."

The monks brought the most absurd charges against him.

The following amusing story may serve to show their ignorance and prejudices. A monk, being in a company where Erasmus was highly commended, did not hesitate to express his dissatisfaction by his look and manner. On being urged to declare what fault he had to find with him, he said that he was a notorious eater of fowls, and that he knew it to be the case, not only because he had seen him do so, but because others had told him. "Did Erasmus buy them or steal them?" he was asked. "He bought them," replied the monk. "Why, then," said his questioner, "there is a certain fox which is a greater knave; for he often comes into my yard, and takes away a fowl without paying me. But is it then a sin to eat fowls?" "Most certainly," said the monk; "it is a sin of gluttony, and it becomes the more heinous when it is committed by Churchmen." "Perhaps," said the questioner, "he eats them on fast-days!" "No," replied the monk; "but we, who are ecclesiastics, ought to have nothing to do with delicacies of this description." "Ah! my good father, you have not got that large paunch by eating dry bread; and if all the fowls who now fill it could raise their voice, and cackle all together, they would make noise enough to drown the drums and trumpets of an army."

But the monks were not his only enemies. After 1520, at all times and in all places, but especially from the pulpits, were now heard fierce invectives against him. The reason was that one charge which the monks brought against him was partly a just one, that he had prepared the way for Luther. "Erasmus," as they used to say, "laid the egg, and Luther hatched it."

There can be no doubt that the examination of the works of the ancient Greeks, which, in consequence of the fall of Constantinople, were conveyed to Europe, was a most important means of promoting the Reformation. For the effect of the revival of the study of the immortal writers of antiquity was, that the human mind was aroused from its slumber, and pushed its inquiries into that vast and complex system of error which the Roman Catholic Church had declared to be essential to the salvation of its followers. Now, classical students were to be found in various parts of Europe. But Erasmus had been greatly instrumental in promoting the love and study of the works of the ancient writers. I have already described his "Adages," which are a monument of his profound erudition, his amazing industry, and his extensive knowledge of classical authors. He had also translated almost the whole of Lucian, most of the moral works of Plutarch, and several plays of Euripides into Latin, avowedly for the purpose of perfecting himself in the Greek language. He also published

afterwards editions of the works of Aristotle, and Demosthenes, Livy, Terence, Pliny, Cicero's "Offices" and his "Tusculan Disputations," Q. Curtius, the minor historians, Seneca the philosopher, Suetonius, and some minor works. Scholars have expressed their obligations to him, as well as their admiration of the great genius and the amazing learning of a man who, though unaided by lexicons and commentaries, and hindered in his work by the scarcity of books and manuscripts, was able to carry through the press voluminous works, the preparation of which would, even now, when these appliances are available, and when the art of printing has been very much improved, task the energies of the most diligent scholar of the age in which we live.

But we must consider the great purpose to which this scholarship was applied, in order that we may see how he prepared the way for the Reformation. The observations on the New Testament will illustrate this part of our subject. By publishing the New Testament in the original tongue, he enabled theologians to see the purity of the doctrine of the Reformers. The "Paraphrases on the Gospel and the Epistles," published in 1519, also greatly aided the Reformers in their work. His great object in this work was to explain the New Testament by itself. This work was so highly esteemed by Cranmer that he caused it to be translated into English, and to be placed, along with the Bible, in our churches for public use. Moth-eaten copies may still be seen chained to their desks. Erasmus further imposed upon himself the herculean task of bringing out one after another editions of the early Fathers of the Church. He published the works of Jerome, Hilary, Ambrose, Irenæus, St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, part of St. Basil's works, some works of Lactantius and Epiphanius, some treatises of St. Athanasius, and others; thus showing to the world that their doctrines agreed with those of the Reformers, that the Church of Rome had corrupted as well as mutilated the faith once delivered to the saints, and affording us the means of reforming the Church according to the Scriptural model of the earliest ages.

But satire was the most formidable weapon wielded by Erasmus. In his "Praise of Folly" he used it against the Schoolmen, employing very much the same words which I used in speaking of their system in the THE CHURCHMAN article on Dean Colet. He has also shown the barrenness of their system in his more serious works. By these combined methods he did more than anyone else to emancipate the human mind from its bondage to the barbarous scholastic philosophy. He attacked also, with the same weapon, the follies, the vices, and the superstitions of the age in which he

lived. In all probability, if he had condemned them in a graver form, a cry of indignation would have rung through Europe, and he would have been called upon to expiate his offence in the dungeon or at the stake. But his sportive wit ensured his impunity. The authorities in Church and State, even though they might be fully sensible of the danger of his opinions, could not place under ban and anathema works which the world received with undissembled merriment. We have seen how, in his "Praise of Folly," he ridiculed the ignorance, the absurdities, and the formalism of the monks. "The Colloquies," first published in 1519, and afterwards much enlarged, were remarkable for their wit and biting satire. In them he laughed at indulgences, slighted auricular confession, derided the eating of fish on fast-days, and other superstitions of a similar description. The "Seraphic Obsequies," the finest of the "Colloquies" and the most exquisite in its satire, has a humorous description of a rich man assuming the robe of the Franciscan shortly before his death, because he felt sure that the influence of that garment would render the soul secure, so that it should be safe from purgatory. He tells us that the evil spirits have a great dread of that robe, and that crowds of black devils were seen jumping towards that body, but that none dared to touch it. One of the speakers is represented as saying that he had this feeling towards the Fransciscans, that, whenever he saw that holy robe, he felt himself to be in the presence of an angel. He adds, "I shall now live more happily; I shall put on the robe, and then I shall not torment myself with the fear of hell, or worry myself about confession or penance."

In the "Praise of Folly" he ridicules those who "derive very great comfort from false pardons and indulgences, and who measure the spaces of purgatory as if with an hour-glass; who, having cast down a small piece of money taken from the vast amount which they have gained unjustly, think that all the guilt of their life is purged away, and that they have purchased the pardon of so many perjuries, so much drunkenness, so many quarrels, so many murders, so much cheating, so many acts of treachery, and so purchased it that they may return afresh to a new circle of wickedness." Again, he speaks of the folly of "worshipping a little image marked with a coal on the wall in the same manner as Christ Himself." Again, in his "Colloquies" he derides the worship and adoration as well of images as of relics. For an illustration of the truth of this assertion we should read his humorous account of his visits to Canterbury and Walsingham Priory.[1] He thus spoke of the

[1] See his Colloquy, "Peregrinatio Religionis Ergo," or "The Religious Pilgrimage."

worship of the Virgin Mary and saints: "Some there are who have prayers addressed to them on all occasions, especially the Virgin Mary, to whom the common people attribute more power than they do to her Son. Now from these saints what, I say, do men ask, excepting those things which relate to folly?"

In the "Shipwreck," while one addressed himself with loud cries to one saint, one to another, there is one calm person, shown to be the only wise man among them, who addressed himself to God alone.

The "Enchiridion" is directed against those who asserted that true religion consisted in the acceptance of scholastic dogmas, or the performance of outward ceremonies. In it he expresses, besides, some opinions which agree with those of the Reformers. He evidently thinks little of the worship of the image of Christ, of saints, and of relics, but he thinks much of the imitation of their holy and blessed example. "No worship," he says, "is more acceptable to Mary than the attempt to imitate her humility; none is more pleasant to the saints than the laborious endeavour to exhibit in your own life a transcript of their virtues. If you adore the bones of Paul, buried in a chest, will you not show respect to the mind of Paul exhibited in his writings?" Look, again, at his attack on the monks:

I think nothing of your vigils, your fastings, your silence, your prayers, and your other observances of the same kind. I will not believe that a man can be in the Spirit, unless I see the fruits of the Spirit. Why should I not declare you to be in the flesh, when, after your exercises of this kind, which are almost worldly, I see in you still the works of the flesh? I refer to your envy, greater than that of a woman; to your anger and fierceness, like that of a soldier; to your inexcusable love of strife; to your railing accusations; to your slanderous tongue, which poisons like a viper's; to your stubbornness, your slippery faith, your vanity, your lying, your flattery.

Look, too, at his condemnation of the distinction drawn in the Church of Rome between sins mortal and venial:

You must take care not to despise any one sin, as if it were of little consequence. In this matter many are deceiving themselves, so that while they freely indulge themselves in one or another vice, which everyone looks upon as venial, they strongly condemn sins of another description.

Consider, also, his exhortations to a diligent study of the Scriptures, as a means of victory in our spiritual warfare:

How, I ask, did Jesus Christ, our Head, conquer Satan? Did He not, when He answered him from Scripture, strike the forehead of his enemy, as David conquered Goliath with stones from the brook?

Examine, also, the following observations on the performance of rites and ceremonies:

You think that a lighted taper is a sacrifice. But David calls the sacrifices of God a broken spirit. Of what use is it for the body to be covered with a holy cowl, when the soul wears a filthy garment? If you have a snow-white tunic, take care that the vestments of the inner man are white as snow. . . . You tell me that you worship the wood of the cross. Follow much more the mystery of the cross. You fast and abstain from those things which do not pollute the man; and yet you do not refrain from impure words which defile your own conscience and the consciences of others. . . . You adorn a temple of stone. You have a reverence for sacred places. What matters all this if the temple of your breast, whose wall Ezekiel pierced through, is profaned with the abominations of Egypt? . . . Can it avail you, with your body to have gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, when your mind within is like Sodom or Babylon? It is not a matter of much importance for you to place your foot in the footprints of Christ; but it is a matter of paramount importance for you to follow them with your affections. If you think much of a visit to the sepulchre of our Lord, should you not think still more of acting out in your lives the mystery of His burial? . . . The more you love Christ, the more will you hate your sins; for the hatred of sin must follow the love of piety, as the shadow accompanies the body. I would rather that you should *once* hate your sins truly within, than *ten times* confess them in the language of abhorrence to a priest.

When we read all these extracts, we must surely admit that there is some truth in those words, "Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it."

Again, when we find him in the "Praise of Folly" thus attacking Pope Julius II., "There you may see decrepit old men, showing all the vigour of youth, incurring any expense, not fatigued by any toil, if only they can overturn law, religion, peace, and throw all the world into confusion. There are not wanting, too, learned flatterers who call this manifest madness real piety, and discover a way in which a man can brandish the fatal sword, and drive it into the bowels of his brother, while he yet possesses that great love which, according to the precept of Christ, he owes to his neighbour;" when we see him in his commentary on Mat. xvi. 18, "On this Rock I will build my Church," expressing his surprise that anyone should have so perverted these words as to apply them exclusively to the Roman Pontiff, to whom indeed they apply first of all, as the Head of the Christian Church, yet not to him only, but to all Christians; when, again, we find him saying on Matt. xvii. 5 that "Christ is the only Teacher appointed by God, and that this authority has been committed to no Bishop, Pope, or Prince;" when we find him animadverting on the royal palaces of St. Peter's Vicar, in speaking of the lodging of Peter with one Simon a tanner, mentioned in Acts ix. 43; when, further, we find him saying in his "Spongia" against Hutton, that he allows the first place among Metropolitans to the Roman Pontiffs, but that he has never defended the extravagant power which they have

usurped for some centuries—we must admit that he has done his best to shake to its foundation the structure of their spiritual and temporal dominion.

I could easily bring forward numerous other passages of the same tone and tendency. We might, however, suppose that though Erasmus is thus outspoken in the expression of his opinions, his books would have a limited sale, and so he would be unable to influence public opinion in Europe. But we shall find that the very contrary was the case. The sale of his works is a perfect marvel in the history of literature. His opinions flew on the wings of the press throughout Europe. We should say that when we take into account that the number of readers in those days was a handful when compared with the number at the present time, and that the resources of printing establishments were very different from what they now are, the sale of his works was far greater in proportion than the sale of those of the most popular author of the age in which we live. The "Praise of Folly" and the "Colloquies" were in every palace, in every house, in every school, and in every monastery. A bookseller at Paris, on giving out that the latter work was prohibited, sold above 24,000 of one impression. Both these works were translated into many of the languages of Europe. A Spanish friend informed Erasmus that in Spain his "Colloquies" were flying through the hands of men and women. The "Praise of Folly" in a few months after its publication went through seven editions. In April, 1515, Rhenanus wrote to Erasmus to say that out of an edition of 1,800 of the "Praise of Folly," just printed by Froben, only 60 remained on hand. After this edition the sale was very rapid, for the notes added to it had made it intelligible to many who had not previously understood the object of the author. The monks, whose ignorance of Latin was so great that they could not understand the Psalms which they read every day, now, when it was translated into modern languages, understood the diatribes against them, and vented their indignation upon Erasmus. Twenty-seven editions of this popular work were published during his lifetime.

His "Adages" also had an extraordinary sale.[1] We shall understand the full significance of the sale of this work with

[1] The first edition, imperfect as we have seen, was printed at Paris in 1500. Two more editions were soon afterwards brought out at Strasburg; and a fourth was printed at Venice in 1508. Froben, without the knowledge of Erasmus, had, before his acquaintance with him, imitated it at Basle in 1513. In 1517 Froben printed a sixth edition of this work, which had now become a thick folio volume. The sale of this edition was, considering the size, very rapid; for it was followed in 1520 by a larger folio edition containing 800 pages.

regard to the progress of the Reformation, when we remember that it not only diffused that knowledge of classical literature which, as we have seen, greatly aided it, but that also it became the means of making known to the world, as I have shown, the indignation which Erasmus felt when he saw the base conduct of the monarchs of Europe, and the vices, the follies, the impostures, and the scandals of the Church and Court of Rome. The sale of the "Enchiridion" was, after Luther began his work, very rapid. The printers could not print it quickly enough to meet the demand for it. A letter to Volzius, attached to a new edition of this work, called for in 1518, in which he censured, with impetuous acrimony, monks, schoolmen, ecclesiastics, and princes, was eagerly read all over Europe, and passed, in a short time, through several editions. Another edition of the "Enchiridion" itself was published at Cologne the next year. Many, even in bigoted Roman Catholic countries, who would have been unwilling to read works written by the leading Reformers, quite devoured the works of Erasmus, and were ultimately led to promote the progress of the Reformation. Multitudes in Spain, where the Pope had more devoted adherents than in any Roman Catholic country, eagerly, but unconsciously, imbibed the heretical poison contained in the "Enchiridion." "There is scarcely anyone," writes Alphonzo Fernandez to Erasmus, "in the Court of the Emperor, any citizen in our cities, or member of our churches and convents, no, not even an hotel or country inn, that has not a copy of the 'Enchiridion' in Spanish." It was read even by the Emperor Charles V. This letter was written on November 27th, 1527. Two separate editions of his letters were printed by Froben, and became the means of propagating through Europe the views expressed to his friends on the corruptions of the Church of Rome.

Thus, then, Erasmus did the work of the Reformers in circles to which they could not have obtained access. The wit with which some of his works were seasoned became like the honey which, as the Italian poet Tasso writes, nurses place on the edge of the vessel in order that children may be led to take the healing medicinal draught. Many Romanists, attracted in this manner, many also who, not caring for the wit, read his works on account of the learning and reputation of the author, when they would not have read those of a leading Reformer, learnt from him the errors of the Church of Rome, and became afterwards the most zealous in conveying a knowledge of them to others. Thus he promoted the progress of the Reformation throughout the continent of Europe.

Erasmus was, of course, reviled by the Romanists. The

Reformers were also much exasperated against him. They had hoped that they should prevent him from aiding their opponents in fighting their battles, and that his powerful arm would assist them in mowing down, like the bearded grain, the hosts confederated against them. But they were disappointed in their expectations. Irritated by his conduct, they began to libel him as an apostate, as a man who might be hired for a morsel of bread for any purpose, and who was ready to pay court to popes, bishops, and cardinals, in order that he might accomplish his own selfish and worldly objects. He became very hostile to the Reformers on account of these incessant attacks. I think that they here showed a great want of judgment; for he was altogether unequal to the work which they wanted him to do. It would have been better if no attempt had been made to drag forth Erasmus as a gladiator into the theological arena. He was not qualified to do the rough work of the Reformation. He was, as we have seen, a good pioneer. Even if they had not assailed him, he would not have joined them in their terrible struggle with their foes. While he agreed with them in condemning many of the dogmas of Romanism, he could not, as we have seen, accept Luther's doctrines of justification and original sin; and he could not unite with them in making their own interpretations of Scripture the rule of faith instead of the authority of the Church. But still, he ought not to have ceased to lift up his voice as a trumpet against the corruptions of the Church of Rome. Here, however, we see a proof of that timidity which has tarnished the fame of services rendered to the cause of the Reformation in the early part of his career. He saw, indeed, fissures in the walls of the vast structure of Romanism. But he thought that they would be repaired, and that the building would continue to stand on a firm foundation. He judged, therefore, that it would be the wiser course not to separate himself from the existing system, and not to cast in his lot with Luther and his associates.

The truth was that, as he said to Pace, "he had no inclination to die for the sake of truth." He was conscious that he had, by his satirical publications, rendered himself obnoxious to a large proportion of the clergy. He, therefore, lost no opportunity of securing the goodwill of the Pope and his cardinals. Thus, when Clement VII. was raised to the Papal throne, he congratulated him in the most flattering and artful manner. It gave him the greatest satisfaction, he said, to hear of his advancement. He was a man possessed of the qualities, both mental and bodily, which the turbulent times required. In regard to himself, he could venture to swear that if his Holiness did only know how he had been solicited to join the

Lutheran conspiracy against the Roman See, and how steadfastly he had resisted motives of every sort, he would not think him undeserving of his protection.[1]

The following is one out of many proofs of his timidity, and of his wish to accommodate matters. When he heard that Berquin, a French gentleman, whom a study of his writings had led to separate from the Church of Rome, had suffered martyrdom, he not only concealed his share in his death, but even thus expressed himself: "I often endeavoured to persuade him to disentangle himself from that matter; but he deluded himself with the expectation of victory." He here refers to advice such as that given to him in one of his letters: "Remember," he said, "not to provoke the wasps, and peaceably enjoy your own studies. Above all, do not mix me up with your affairs, for this would be of no service to you or me."

But he did not wish his connection with the Reformers to be altogether dissolved. He endeavoured for some time to pursue a middle course between the contending parties. Thus we find that, in a letter to Zwinglius, written at the same time as the letter to Pope Clement, he is as little pleased with the Pope as with Luther, and inveighs bitterly against the tyranny and cruelty both of bishops and kings. What strange words are these from one who had just written in the above strain to Pope Clement!

This tortuous course into which Erasmus was led by the fear of persecution is very discreditable to him. If he had lived in the present day, when persecution in its worst form is not the portion of God's Church, he would have probably been happier in his own mind, more useful to the community, and would have occupied a higher place in the good opinion of succeeding generations. Living in a period of fierce controversy, he endeavoured for a time to satisfy both the contending parties; to-day identifying himself with one of them, to-morrow with the other, till at last he lost the esteem and confidence of both, and all, both Romanists and Protestants, believed him to be insincere; and till he became so perplexed in his views of religious truth that he was unable to give a very distinct account of them, or to say very decidedly on what foundation he was building for eternity. Formerly he had condemned the sacrifice of two Augustinian monks, and had the courage to foretell that the blood of the martyrs would be the seed of the Lutheran Church. But he had been

[1] Some people, he said, had selected a number of half-sentences from his works, and had most impudently misrepresented them. *Undoubtedly, if he could have foreseen the sectarians of the present day, he would have suppressed many things which he had said.* On all occasions he submitted himself and his writings to the Roman See.

gradually receding farther and farther from the position which he then occupied. The trumpet now gives an uncertain sound. He speaks with a hesitating utterance. He fears that he shall involve himself in difficulty and danger, thus presenting a remarkable contrast to Berquin, whom he has described as exhibiting a holy tranquillity, even when death approached him in his most forbidding form, heralded by the dark executioners of his mandates.

But at length Erasmus abandoned this feeble neutrality, and became the inveterate enemy of the Reformers. He was induced, by the Pope and some leading monarchs and distinguished men in Europe to take the field against Luther. He selected the subject of Free-will on which he differed from the latter, because he was limited in his choice, having condemned in the strongest terms the corruptions of the Church of Rome and many of her doctrines. This was a feeble production. He gave offence to both parties. The Lutherans were much exasperated. The Papists revenged themselves for the failure of their champion by the violence with which they attacked his former works. He could not by his recantation satisfy them, for they declared that he had, by his publications, inflicted great injury on the Church. A doctor at Constance kept his picture for no other purpose than that, when he passed, he might spit upon it; and on being asked why he treated him with this contempt, answered that Erasmus was the cause of all the mischief in the world. It appears, from a letter of Henry VIII. to him, that he was in danger of his life from his enemies, and that he was nowhere safe from their malice.

We can easily imagine that Erasmus suffered severely from this opposition. He loved popularity, and yet he was more abused than anyone in Europe. He loved peace, and yet he had the din of angry controversy sounding in his ears. He went heavily all the day in the bitterness of his soul. A dense and dismal darkness brooded over his spirit. "In the morning he said, Would God it were evening! and in the evening he said, Would God it were morning!" His wan and wasted countenance, his dejected air, his sleepless nights, his neglect of his daily food, his downcast look, the longing for death which he often expressed to his friends, afforded sad evidence that an anguish had taken possession of his soul which surpasses all description. How different would the case have been if he had sought God's grace to enable him to conquer that "fear of men which bringeth a snare," and to act up to his convictions! He would then have possessed a holy serenity of soul which would have formed a strange contrast to the storm raging around him. When abandoned by those

whose friendship he prized so highly, he would have been sustained by the sympathy of his Almighty Saviour; he would have been cheered by the assurance that He would support him by His presence as he passed through this world of trial and temptation, and at length avenge his cause before an assembled universe.

Erasmus was now often painfully reminded of that solemn hour when his own dilapidated tabernacle would fall into ruins. He saw his friends fleeting like leaves before the autumnal blast. He makes a touching allusion to the death of four of them:

> The present time has been very cruel to me, for it has deprived me of greatly valued friends—William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury; William Mountjoy; the Bishop of Rochester; and Thomas More, whose breast was whiter than snow, to whom, in point of genius, England never has produced, nor ever will produce, anyone who bears the least resemblance.

Soon afterwards he foresaw that the time of his own departure could not be far distant. At last the end came at Basle, where he had been residing since 1521, with the exception of six years at Friburg, in Brisgau. He breathed out his soul in these ejaculations: "Mercy, sweet Jesus, how long? Jesus, fountain of mercy, have mercy on me!" He died calmly at midnight, on July 12th, 1536, without one prayer to the Virgin Mary or to any of those saints whom the Church of Rome has taught her followers to regard with a superstitious reverence.

I trust that, in these papers, I have given a just and impartial review of the character and work of Erasmus. English writers have not paid very much attention to him. In foreign languages there have been "Lives of Erasmus." But till my own and Mr. Drummond's "Life" were published a few years ago, there has been no complete "Life" in our own language since Knight's and Jortin's in the last century, and Butler's, published about fifty years ago, all of which are, for various reasons, unsatisfactory. The authorities at the University of Cambridge have shown their sense of the importance of this subject of Erasmus by fixing it as one of the subjects of examination in the Theological Tripos for January, 1884. I have now only space to add that the mind of Erasmus was essentially sceptical. He had doubts about everything excepting the existence of God and the obligation of the moral law. He wished the articles of faith to be brought within a very narrow compass. I have endeavoured to indicate his position in regard to the Reformation. It was because he opposed the great doctrines of original sin

and justification by faith in Christ, because he hoped by peaceful means, by literature and cultivation, to accomplish his object, that he failed hopelessly in his scheme for the regeneration of European society. Of what use is the mere knowledge of literature and science, independently of religious truth, in taming the passions, in quenching pride, in moderating ambition, in stifling envy and all the malignant passions of the natural heart? How, too, can it preserve a man from those crimes and excesses which degrade human nature, and place him on a level with the beasts that perish? But union to Christ by faith necessitates the renunciation of every known sin; attraction to God by Christ prevents the deliberate omission of any acknowledged duty. Having laid the foundation in faith, then, enjoins the Apostle, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue." The mere knowledge of science and literature, unconnected with the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, cannot "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." It may shed a gleam of light over "the cloudy and dark" day of adversity, and minister consolation during the weary moments of languor and disease; but it cannot cleanse us from that moral pollution with which our nature is infected; it cannot deprive death of its sting, and the grave of its victory; it cannot speak peace to the man who is troubled with a sense of his sinfulness; it cannot give us the assurance of pardon and reconciliation with our Maker; it cannot ensure us approval on the day of judgment; it cannot "minister unto us an entrance abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Then only can we be instrumental in saving the souls of others around us, and in promoting the peace and good order of human society, when we constantly exhibit Christ as the sole atonement for known and forsaken sin, and as the best example of virtuous and holy living; Christian morals as founded upon Christian doctrine, and Christian principles as leading to Christian practice; to "the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

ARTHUR R. PENNINGTON.

ART. VI.—THE AGITATION FOR DISESTABLISHMENT.

THE preparations for a new Parliament on an extended franchise have brought the question of Church and State into sudden and excessive prominence. Whilst professing to