

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

THE GREAT DILEMMA.*

THE REV. SAMUEL EARNSHAW, M.A., a senior wrangler of Cambridge, whose work on "Statics" is well known to mathematicians, some years ago being compelled for two years to keep his room, devoted his time to an exhaustive study of Christian evidences. He was in no way dependent upon his vocation as a clergyman for an income, and was fully prepared to take whatever course these prolonged examinations might indicate to be his duty. He rose from this effort profoundly convinced that the citadel of the faith as held by the Church of England was impregnable. We commend this fact to those who seek to make scepticism a sign of intellectual power and progress. This interesting anecdote was told to Layman by the present Bishop of Manchester, a pupil of Mr. Earnshaw's, who himself won high mathematical honors, and whose apologetic writings are of the highest rank.

We propose to present in two or more papers a brief statement of the argument for the Divinity of Christ, upon the truth of which Christianity has stood for over eighteen centuries. Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses as the Catholic Church gathered during all these ages in defence of this doctrine, our work may seem to some a needless task. But here and there, more probably than ever will be known, some souls are troubled with doubts on this dogma. They know that millions of the wisest, most learned, most holy of men, have so held the faith, that in no period were its deniers more than an insignificant fraction of christendom, that denial of Christ as God-man is a barren plant, while its affirmation has been demonstrated to be the only richly fruit-bearing, self-propagating tree in the Christian orchard. Still there are minds to whom such evidence is as nought, they have the spirit of St. Thomas—may they come to say with him, "MY LORD AND MY GOD!" We ask those of our fellow laymen who have time for a more thoughtful study of the question to read the work whose title we use as a caption. We shall quote freely without obstructing the reader's progress by detailed references to the pages of the author.

Before touching "The Great Dilemma," we, with much diffidence, offer a few words on the initial difficulty of the Incarnation. The subject is mysterious and delicate, but to us it is not more mysterious nor delicate than the phenonema of all human births. The materialist necessarily rejects the Incarnation, for, to him, Matter is the only *force*, or *form*, or *cause* of existence; the mental, moral, spiritual natures of man do not exist at all, as we conceive them. The objection raised by a materialist to the Incarnation is equally applicable to all human births, if a human being is partly material and partly spiritual. Every

babe is an incarnation, every cradle presents the incomprehensible mystery of a spiritual being born in the flesh, a new creation emanating not from any vital chemistry, but from the Supreme source of life. When it has been explained to us how matter and spirit are compounded as they are in man's nature, we will explain the higher, but not one whit more *subtle* mystery of the union of God and Man in Christ Jesus. When it has been explained how a child's faculties, tastes, speech, walk, &c., show a blending of the natures of its progenitors, whom it never saw, whom its parents even never saw, we will explain not the Incarnation only, but every other mystery arising out of the incomprehensible union of matter and spirit. Granting the existence of God and the existence of the creature made by Him in His likeness, part matter, part spirit, the birth of Jesus presents no greater mystery than those that cloud over the entire field of creation. Materialism presents difficulties which in comparison to the dogmas of Christianity are as the darkness of midnight in contrast to the blaze of noonday, or as idiocy to reason. Regard how we may the origin of man, whether completed at once by a Divine fiat, or, as some speculate, by evolution from a germ, is not Man's first existence as "supernatural," as the Incarnation of the Second Adam? Pray, too, how came Philosophy to be incarnated in the brain of Plato? Whence came Wisdom into the brain of Shakespeare? Had these gifts an early parentage? Had He Who made man a living soul, He Who set the stars in their courses, this one curb on His omnipotence, that He could not create a child under supernatural conditions? Atheism we know, agnosticism we know, science so-called, we know, but Unitarianism that believes in God Almighty and yet stumbles at the Incarnation—what is it but the most irrational of religions; it swallows camels in droves, then chokes itself over a gnat. A God manifest only in power is a deity such as savages imagine and dread, but God manifest in the flesh [challenges the homage of every faculty in the noblest of His works; before God-Man humanity is irresistibly drawn prostrate in love and worship! Be atheist if you will, but if you believe in God, *do be reasonable*, pray do not seek to be greater than the Infinite, by trying to build a fence around His Omnipotence.

Having dealt from our own standpoint with an aspect of the Incarnation, generally ignored by apologists, we now proceed to use the work entitled "The Great Dilemma." The author prefaces his argument by a defence of the Gospels as genuine history. This question is no longer an open one, scholarship has ranged itself on the side of Scripture.

Let us then consider what is meant by the challenge of Jesus? "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Such language presents a self-assertion that well has been called "absolutely tremendous." Dr. Moorhouse says: "Must not He who affirms himself to be sinless be either better or worse than all men, *better* if this testimony be true, *worse* in as much as, being sinful, His moral sensibility was too obtuse to

discover it?" The higher and holier the teacher in the eyes of men, the unworthier is he in his own eyes. As men ascend in holiness nearer to God, the keener becomes their consciousness of frailty. But the one exception, the one sinless life, framed this challenge—"Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Mankind echoes Pilate's declaration—"I find no fault in Him." Here comes the Dilemma. *A man without sin is supernatural*, but if, having claimed to be the one perfect being in all time, He can be shown to be not perfect, then He is not truly great in any sense. No attempts to fasten sin upon Jesus have had a trace of success except so far as they have gone hand in hand with a denial of His personal claims. Strauss, for example, thinks it not merely fanaticism, but unjustifiable self-exaltation for a Man to imagine himself so separated from other men as to set himself before them as their future Judge. Strauss is perfectly right if the claim of Christ to judge the world is not strictly based upon fact. But even one of the greatest sceptics admits that "the sublime simplicity of the moral grandeur of Jesus puts the teaching of Socrates and Plato to the blush, and His life was uniformly noble and consistent with His own lofty principles." Mill admits that Christ stands a unique figure in history, and declares Him to have been the greatest moral reformer who ever lived. Another free thinker says that Jesus Christ reached the highest moral elevation man can attain. Consider then that Jesus rebuked self-righteousness with indignation, that He claimed to be meek and lowly in heart; He taught that penitence was the essential to God's favor, yet He never betrayed the slightest consciousness of guilt, nor the faintest trace of personal remorse. What becomes of the sincerity, the unselfishness, the humility, the honesty of Christ, if after considering the language He used about Himself, we should go on to deny His Divinity? Was He, if a man only, *sincere* when He deceived and mystified the people by language that mislead them as to the nature of His personality? Was He *unselfish* when using language of self-assertion, clearly intended to secure Him homage and worship? Was it not intensely selfish to so exalt His own self? How can we honor Him even as a martyr when He brought about His own death by self-conceit—that is if He were a man and nothing more? Was it *honest* to draw so many followers into the life they led and into the danger of being executed which they ran, if He knew that His claims were fanciful? Was it *truthful* of Jesus to answer in the affirmative the tremendous question, whether He was indeed the Christ, the Son of God, when it was not the truth? The dilemma is a pitiless one—either God or imposter. But, if imposter, how then could Jesus be, as infidels admit, "the greatest moral reformer," the "one supreme example of human perfection," "the Being without Whose presence in the mind, perfect piety is impossible?" If we reject His Godhead we might well turn from Him with agonies of wrath and tears. If not being Divine, He yet

*THE GREAT DILEMMA. Christ His own witness or His own accuser. By Rev. H. B. Otley, M.A. Kegan, Paul & Co., London. May be had of Rowsell & Hutchison, or Williamson & Co., Toronto.