

EXETER HALL.

CHAPTER I.

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EXETER HALL is a very large building situated near the Strand, one of the principal streets of London. It has accommodation for over four thousand persons, and it is the great Protestant forum and centre of attraction for all those who anxiously desire the spread of the Gospel, the dissemination of Christianity, and the evangelization of the world. It is also the head-quarters and grand rallying-point of those armies of prelates, preachers, professors, missionaries, and other devoted men who, from time to time, assert a renunciation of the world, its pomps and vanities; many of whom, taking their lives in their hand, as eager to suffer in the glorious cause, sever social and domestic ties, and leave home and country, to spread in distant lands and over the dark places of the earth "the unsearchable riches" among the millions yet destitute, of the degraded and perishing sons and daughters of Adam.

Exeter Hall has a fame. Since its erection, about 1831, no other place in the world has attracted such crowds of social renovators, moral philosophers, philanthropists, and Christians. Of late years, almost every great measure for the amelioration of the condition of the human family has here had its inception, its progress, and its triumph. Surrounded as it is by theatres, Shakespearean temples devoted to the drama, or, as many of the religious world assert, to profane, vicious, and ungodly purposes, Exeter Hall alone has the proud distinction of being the great theatre for the concentration of Protestant Christianity. From this great stand-point, the wisdom, intelligence, and power of whole nations have been brought to bear against usages, systems, and laws antagonistic to the pure faith; and a remedy suggested and provided for the moral and religious destitution of the world.

But not altogether are measures purely religious enacted in this great building. Secular schemes of practical benevolence, scarcely second in importance to any other, are here developed; social and national reforms are here patronized; music, science, philosophy, and literature are encouraged; and personal,

national, and political wrongs feelingly depicted; and often some British Demosthenes will here make a stirring appeal before a thousand freemen in behalf of an oppressed people or down-trodden country; and then there is a shout for human rights, and in that shout, as is always the case, the voice of Exeter Hall is heard over all the earth.

But it is in the genial month of May that this great theatre displays its power, and exercises its wonted energies. Like the season, it seems invigorated; there is an infusion of new life for a fresh effort, and in that effort lie the germs which, having been generously moistened by national dew-drops of a peculiar kind, are sure to mature into a bountiful harvest. In May there is, as it were, a flowing of the nations of the world toward its great capital; and at that particular period the rush through the Strand to the immense Hall is wonderful, and its walls resound to the tramp of people of every clime and tongue. Delegates and representatives from almost every nation under heaven then assemble beneath its roof. The language of every capital in Europe is here spoken, and the utterances of far distant tribes here recognized. The once wild natives of Asia, Africa, America and the South Sea Islands here meet in friendly council, and are touched and softened by words of welcome in their native tongue. The children of the world meet and mingle, and lay down their offerings in a common cause, and—glorious result!—mythical ideas of origin and superiority are then forgotten, and *nationality*, the great idol of discord is, happily, for the time, hurled from its desecrated pedestal, and lies neglected or trampled in the dust.

The regular anniversary meetings of Exeter Hall are looked forward to with great interest by the religious world. Protestants of all denominations hail the approach of these periods with the most agreeable anticipation. A spirit of emulation is engendered; and each particular church or society makes a strong endeavor to win pious fame on the great platform where the representatives of so many creeds annually fraternize, and who on the occasion tacitly cease doctrinal bickerings, in order to exhibit to the skeptic and scoffers an exemplary assiduity in the common cause. For months before this stated period the most