

ART. VII.—THE LATE DR. PHILIPPS BROOKS, BISHOP
OF MASSACHUSETTS.

THE undoubted fact that Philipps Brooks, at his death, was the greatest of American preachers, is in itself sufficient reason that the man and his work should excite more than ordinary interest and call for more than passing notice. The future of the English speaking race is too closely bound up with the fortunes of the United States; the Reformed Faith has too much at stake in that New World to admit of our being indifferent either to its material or its moral welfare. That a man of the type of Philipps Brooks should exercise for Christ and His kingdom the influence which in America he most certainly possessed, must be a source of profound thankfulness, however we may dissent from certain points—rather negative than positive—in his theology. That he was not moulded in orthodox English fashion is matter neither for regret nor for surprise. God works by means best adapted to His all-wise ends. Mr. Bryce, in his "American Commonwealth," writes: "America is no doubt the country in which intellectual movements work most swiftly upon the masses, and the country in which the loss of faith in the invisible might produce the completest revolution, because it is the country where men have been least wont to revere anything in the visible world." Grateful indeed to God should we be that the same impartial critic feels constrained to add, "Yet America seems as little likely to drift from her ancient moorings as any country in the Old World." Must we not therefore confess, that under God, it is to religious leaders, like him of whom we now write, that this blessed result is largely due? At Boston, for at least the last twenty-five years of his life, the lot of Philipps Brooks was cast, as minister of Trinity Church. About two years ago he was consecrated Bishop of Massachusetts, amid the strongly expressed disapproval of the extreme High Church party, with whose views and practices he had no sympathy whatever. A man of wide and varied culture, he had been offered, some time previously, a professor's chair, but declined to abandon pastoral work. In America the Church seems to possess a much wider and more true conception of her sphere and duty than is common amongst ourselves. It was not, therefore, altogether owing to the magnetic influence of her great minister—far-reaching though it was—that Trinity Church proved an active centre of social, intellectual, as well as religious life. At the commencement of Philipps Brooks' ministry, the Unitarian Creed held the field in Boston, as also in many other parts of New England. To-day, largely owing

to his many-sided power, the Christian Faith is there vital and progressive. This fact should never be forgotten in estimating his way of looking at things and the *proportion* of doctrines in his writings. His chief aim in his own city was to vindicate historical Christianity apart from any particular aspect of it. He was persuaded—a belief which thoughtful apologists are coming to hold more and more—that the moral miracle of the life of Jesus, when fairly looked at, must be powerful to convince of His divinity, even in the case of those who instinctively shrink from the evidence of His supernatural signs. Philipps Brooks' strong point lay—if one may be allowed the expression—in *applied* rather than in *theoretical* Christianity, *e.g.*, his application of some of the words and works of our Lord to the wants and difficulties of the present day. In England he is probably chiefly known by his sermons. He preached from MSS. with a rapidity of utterance which sorely tried the reporter's skill. His "Sermons Preached in English Churches" are models of their kind; not indeed as ordinary parochial addresses, for they apply to the thoughtful few rather than to the impressionable many, but on account of their wealth of suggestiveness and deep views on the relation of the Faith to the needs and woes of this restless, unsatisfied age. It was his custom in later years to spend his holiday, at least in part, in England, and thus many to whom hitherto he had been but a distant voice were privileged to see and hear him face to face. Never shall I forget one summer evening in Westminster Abbey, when it had been announced that Philipps Brooks was to preach. The gray old church was filled from end to end. Men of every grade were there, from the Primate to the humblest curate, the merchant prince and the artisan. His text was taken from the wondering reply of the boy Jesus to His virgin mother, upon whose soul was gradually dawning the mystery of the life He bore. When the sermon was ended and the benediction given, all felt constrained to say, "This man is a preacher indeed." The towering massive form, the kindly intellectual face, the brilliant eloquence, the Christ-like spirit of each thought and word, all combined to hold us as though beneath a spell, as he spoke to us of the great possibilities of life, lived in the love of God by the grace of Christ. But apart from his sermons there are two books by which Philipps Brooks must ever be remembered; his "Yale Lectures on Preaching," and "Bohlen Lectures on 'The Influence of Jesus.'" So fresh and unconventional are they, so full of strong spiritual force, so abounding in common-sense, that they leave one braced and cheered, convinced—if it were possible—yet more and more, of the inherent *reasonableness* of Christianity. To Philipps Brooks was it given, as to few

others, to extract the living kernel from the too often dry husks of theology, to summon us back from the changing accidentals of the Faith, to its abiding realities, to be himself a perfect specimen of the completest union between culture and religion, deemed irreconcilable by so many. His "Lectures on Preaching" are full of striking, pregnant phrases. "We cannot all be great preachers, for we are not all great men, but we may all be good preachers, if we be good men." "There are many preachers who are always discussing Christianity as a problem, instead of announcing it as a message." "To apprehend in all their intensity the wants and woes of men, to see the problems and dangers of this life, then to know all through us that nothing but Christ and His redemption can thoroughly satisfy these wants; that is what makes a man a preacher." "The best thing in a minister's life is the action of his faith and his works on one another, his experience of the deeper value of the human soul making the wonders of his faith more credible, and the truths of his faith always revealing to him a deeper and deeper value in the soul." Few such champions of toleration has our age witnessed, albeit his own faith was deep-set in the very foundation of his being. His toleration was not the offspring of mere fashion or sentiment; as in all his actions, a principle lay beneath. "To see the positive truths that underlie the Roman Catholic errors, that is the only way to be cordially tolerant of Romanism, and yet to keep clearly and strongly one's own Protestant belief." Philipps Brooks insisted on the oft-forgotten truth that it is our duty to love and serve God not only with heart and soul, but with the understanding also—that it is the want and not the fulness of faith which shrinks from the use of the powers that God has given us. He advocated Christianity in practice much more than in theory, and so he valued action, not emotion, as the true test of spiritual life. "One's influence in life," he says, "is his 'idea' multiplied by and projected through his personality." The Christian's 'idea' is that he is a son of God, redeemed by Christ, and so his influence must be the power of that conception uttering itself through the varied forces of his individual life. In the "Influence of Jesus" Philipps Brooks discusses the sway of the Master over the moral, intellectual, emotional and social life of man. "To tell men that they were, and to make them *actually to be*, the sons of God; that was the purpose of the coming of Jesus, and the shaping power of His life." This book is certainly in entire contrast with much of the light and superficial religious literature of the day. He writes, not to say something, but because he has something to say. It is a book worthy of deep and repeated study; indeed, only to such

does it yield its wealth of harvest. We feel that we are in the company of a sincere, masculine, Christian mind, steeped through with love to his Lord, with an earnest desire to make all men know and love Him better. He shows that all life can be divine, and no department of its many-sided activity need necessarily be kept apart from the influence of Jesus. Thus he sums up all he has to say on this great theme: "The idea of Jesus—the relation of childhood and fatherhood between God and man—is the illumination and inspiration of existence. Without it moral life becomes a barren expediency, and social life a hollow shell, and emotional life a meaningless excitement, and intellectual life an idle play, a stupid drudgery. Without it the world is a puzzle and death a horror and eternity a blank. More and more the wild, sad, frightened cries of men who believe nothing, and the calm earnest patient prayer of men who believe so much that they long for perfect faith, seem to blend with the great appeal which Philip of Bethsaida made to Jesus at the Last Supper: 'Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us,' and more and more the only answer seems to come from His blessed lips, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me? He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.'" Such is the man whom the Church, whom America, whom Christendom mourns to-day; of him, indeed, it is most true "He was not, for God took him." To many of us another star has set, another light has faded, and life must be in some degree all the darker, all the poorer. His people mourn him as orphans mourn their father. The other world is the richer for our loss, and shall be one day all the more a familiar meeting-place. "For all such we bless and praise Thy holy name, beseeching Thee to give us grace to follow their good examples."

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Reviews.

William Law: Characters and Characteristics. Second edition. Pp. 328. Price 9s. Hodder and Stoughton. 1893.

The celebrated non-juror and mystic, William Law, is chiefly known by his "Serious Call," which appeared in 1729, and was one of the earliest impulses to the great Evangelical movement. The present volume, which is printed in Messrs. Constable's best style at the Edinburgh University Press, contains forty-eight well-chosen passages from his numerous works, chiefly on devotional topics; then follow thirty-two characters taken from the "Christian Perfection" and the "Serious Call."