

## ART. V.—CHARLES JOHN ELLIOTT.

**M**ANY others, besides the readers of *THE CHURCHMAN*, will mourn the loss of the estimable and distinguished clergyman whose name appears at the head of the present Paper. Mr. Elliott has left a void in the foremost ranks of English Biblical scholarship. In the Jerusalem Chamber a voice will be heard no more which was wont to be listened to with respect and deference by the first Hebrew critics of the age. And, with these, sympathize a yet wider range of mourners. If they are many who will miss the scholar, they are more who will miss the friend;—the bright intelligence, the gentle spirit, the tender conscience, the unselfish and kindly heart. We all feel that one is gone from us whom the Church will acknowledge to have been an ornament, and in whom the world saw an example of deep and unaffected piety.

L. Charles John Elliott was born in 1818, and thus was called away in his sixty-third year. He was the son of John Sherman Elliott, the elder half-brother of the Rev. Henry Venn Elliott, and Edward B. Elliott of Brighton, two uncles with whom he always lived on terms of affectionate intimacy; they, not slow to discern in him the promise of future usefulness; and he, holding, in natural reverence, the splendid abilities and high academical distinctions with which the names of both relatives were associated.

Canon Elliott was brought up chiefly at a school, at that time of considerable repute, at High Wycombe; leaving it only for a course of University preparation under a private tutor, Mr. Singleton of Shoreham. He entered at St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, in 1836, being then eighteen years of age. Among the men of his year, and, at that college especially, he seemed quite a junior. But only in years. In attainments, in intellectual acuteness, in force and ripeness of character, and, above all, in unswerving steadfastness to the principles of Evangelical doctrine, he was far beyond many his elders. It was no surprise that he came out first in college examinations, and great things were expected of him in his final degree. But, at the end of the second year it became evident that his health would not bear the strain of reading for honours—that is, reading for them in the way as all who knew anything of his mental habitude, knew he would read. Accordingly, he was obliged to content himself with the ordinary degree. Yet even this he was not satisfied to do in any perfunctory manner. Whatever he proposed to do, he always did with his might. To be "Captain of the Pol," as it used to be called in those days, might seem to be no high

academical distinction to aspire after, but it was the highest place attainable by those whom failing health or other circumstances excluded from the competitions of the tripos; and it was no secret, among the Examiners, that, humble as some may consider the first place among the *δι πολλοί*, our friend was *facile princeps*.

But the vigour of Canon Elliott's intellectual character, and perhaps a feeling of what was due to the honourable name he bore, made him resolve not to leave his University without a permanent place in its Calendar. From the time he found himself obliged to give up mathematical honours—at that time a necessary preliminary to an entrance for the classical tripos—he gave himself assiduously to the study of Hebrew, as well as those branches of theological and patristic literature which form the staple of the examination for the Crosse and Tyrwhitt scholarships. These distinctions, as being open to all graduates of the University of a certain standing, hold a high rank among Cambridge theological prizes. Mr. Elliott obtained them both: the Crosse scholarship in 1840, the year in which he graduated, and the First Tyrwhitt scholarship in 1842.

In the latter year, he took Orders. But this only after a good deal of mental struggle. A keen sensitiveness of conscience was a marked feature in our friend's character; and with an ardent desire to be employed in the ministry of Christ's Church, it was, for some time, a matter of painful hesitation with him, whether he could declare his hearty "assent and consent" to all things contained in the Book of Common Prayer. Eventually, however, he was able to see his way clearly to the taking of orders;—assisted probably, in the resolution of his scruples, by the clear judgment and enlightened piety of his first Vicar, the Rev. Henry Venn, the well-known Secretary to the Church Missionary Society. To this excellent clergyman he was distantly related by his own family; but the tie became strengthened by his marriage with Mr. Venn's niece, the daughter of Matthew Babington, Esq., of Rothley Temple, Leicestershire,—a name to be held in honour from the connection of the family with the great anti-slavery struggle originated by Wilberforce, and the other leaders of the great Clapham movement. Canon Elliott remained curate of Mr. Venn until 1844, when he was presented to the living of Winkfield by his relative, Dr. Pearson, the Dean of Salisbury.

In the duties of this pastoral charge, he remained until he died, a period of thirty-seven years. Of his work for the parish, during that long incumbency, we cannot stay to speak particularly. The chief feature of it to be noticed was his subdivision of the parish into four separate districts, a measure, which, however beneficial to the spiritual interests of the parish,

was attended with a considerable diminution of the income of the living. This, however, was not a consideration to enter into his self-forgetting nature. He felt that the parish had largely outgrown his powers of pastoral superintendence, especially as he never hesitated to acknowledge that his *forte* did not lie in organizing and carrying out the details of parochial work. Still he did more in this way than many, less given to the language of self-depreciation. And in the restoration and beautifying of the parish church; in the contributing to the building of four new churches; in the erection and enlargement of parochial schools; in the building of almshouses for the poor; and in the organization of mission services for outlying districts—proofs, more enduring than words, are left, to tell of a faithful, earnest, constant, and unwearied pastorate. And this a grateful parish acknowledged. It was evident to all present, that the poor who assembled, in such weeping throngs, in that village churchyard on May 14th, felt as keenly the loss of the affectionate and sympathizing pastor, as did the clergy and other sorrowing friends feel the loss of the accomplished scholar and the sound divine.

II. But let us glance at the literary career of our deceased friend, both as a writer in controversial theology, and in the department of exegesis and criticism.

It is somewhat curious, that, large as was the produce of his brain-work in his later years, and wide as was the field traversed by his labours, no evidences of his literary aptitudes showed themselves till nearly twenty years after taking his degree. Dr. Arnold, in speaking of authors, used to say, a man who has not made his mark before he is forty, will never do anything noteworthy afterwards. Our friend had overpassed this intellectual zenith when he made his first important literary effort. In 1859 he published "An Enquiry into the Doctrine of the Church of England on Private Confession and Absolution." It was evidently the work of a well-instructed theologian,—of a hard reader, a close thinker, a painstaking and conscientious searcher after truth, regardless of any offence to this party in the Church or that. Regarded as a literary composition, the work was not particularly attractive. To the last, he cared very little about the graces of style;—for the clear and persuasive presentment of his argument, often too little. But the style was part of the man,—concentrative, vigorous, earnest, full of point and strength. There was, moreover, in all his controversial writing, a scrupulous carefulness to look at a question all round; and this, not more from a mathematical habit of exactitude and precision, in regard to detail, than from a tender religious shrinking from all argumentative unfairness, whether in the way of keeping back that which would tell

against the side he was advocating, or of exaggerating the force of any considerations which might be urged in its favour.

Such a habit of mind was much needed in dealing with the delicate question on which the minds of men at that time were painfully exercised, that of Confession and Absolution. Auricular confession—stated systematic, and, as precedent Holy Communion indispensable—had been openly encouraged and practised by numerous ministers of our Church; and that, as a usage, for which they could plead the plainest warrant and authority of the Prayer-book. Furthermore, they were in a condition to say of this habit of confession, "The people love to have it so." There was no necessity, they urged, for using any compulsion. Those who came to them, were, in the words of our Communion exhortation, unable to "quiet their own conscience," without so doing. They required comfort, and counsel, and the repose which comes of repairing to the minister of God's word, that they might "open their grief." The danger was increasing. Young persons, generally young women, were found to be habitually seeking private interviews with the clergy; finding, or thinking they found, in the words of comfort and assurance uttered on such occasions, a certain pledge of rest to their souls. That such rest was a false rest, founded on false views of Christian duty and Christian doctrine, it is needless to point out. Those who have recourse to it, forget that a certain degree of striving, and prayer, and waiting God's time, and persistence in the use of means, form a part of the ordained work and warfare of the Christian life. And, therefore, all this craving for present immediate, artificial sedatives, oral assurances, and priestly pardons, bespeak an impatience of the cross; a low and impoverished spirituality; a chronic and diseased fretfulness of soul, which insists on being quieted by pernicious stimulants, when the man ought to be bracing himself to effort by a patient study of the Word, and wrestling with doubts and fears upon his knees. In special and emergent crises of the spiritual life, for seasons of exceptional depression, under the accusations of the sin-burdened conscience, the seeking to a godly pastor, for Christian guidance and consolation, is both a scriptural thing and a lawful thing. But of sacramental confession, of absolution pronounced by a priest, either as essential to forgiveness, or as the ordained channel of conveying it, our reformed Church knows nothing, and our Prayer-book says nothing. "No, no," writes our noble Hooker, "these opinions have youth in their countenance: antiquity know them not, it never thought nor dreamed of it."<sup>1</sup>

In the work our friend gave to the world, the views of the soundest divines on this much controverted subject were collected

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<sup>1</sup> "Ecc. Pol.," Book VI. 14.

with his characteristic industry, and set forth with his accustomed fairness and discrimination. He was a sound but moderate Churchman. Ever true to his Evangelical principles, and perfectly loyal to his inherited sympathies and traditions, he never allowed himself to be classified as belonging to any particular party in the Church. There were points in regard to which he was at issue with them all. And, therefore, in any of the current controversies of the times, he would always reserve to himself the most unfettered freedom of speech and action.

Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri.

In this vexed question of confession and absolution his course was clear. He loved the Prayer-book, and stood by it, honestly and courageously. He had studied its history thoroughly: having a familiarity with all the phases of change and addition it had gone through, and the reasons of them, which would have secured him a foremost rank among advocates in the Court of Arches. Accordingly, he had no difficulty in admitting, to the fullest extent, all that could be urged, by the friends of sacramental confession, whether from the Exhortation to Holy Communion, or the Ordinal for the Priesthood, or the Office for the Visitation of the Sick. The course of argument adopted by him, in his treatise, we cannot, within our limits, do more than indicate. The stress of his reasoning, as might be expected, was addressed to the question of what were the real and proper "benefits of absolution?" The position had been advanced boldly, and unqualifiedly, that the absolving utterances of God's minister were not *declaratory* only, not *precatory* only, not *assuring* and comforting only, but were ordained channels of forgiveness, an actual CONVEYANCE, to the soul of the penitent, of remission of sins.

The key-note of our friend's exposure of this infatuated neresy is well furnished by the motto from Hooker, given on his title-page:—"What is then the force of absolution? What is it which the act of absolution worketh in a sinful man? Doth it, by any operation from itself, alter the state of the soul? Doth it really take away sin, or but ascertain us of God's most gracious and merciful pardon? The latter of which two is our assertion: the former theirs." This great principle is supported by a *catena* of extracts and authorities, evidencing abundantly the writer's wide and varied reading, as well as leaving it a marvel how, in the face of testimonies, gathered from divines, whom High Churchmen especially hold in the greatest veneration, these priestly pretensions could be advanced for a moment, or how any minister of the Anglican communion could presume to claim for himself a power of absolution, which Hooker, and Taylor, and Hammond, and Bingham, would have repudiated

with a righteous abhorrence. Among modern citations against the recent heresy, none will command more suffrages than the following, which our friend quotes from Dr. Hook: "Absolution is, in truth, nothing more than a verbal and authoritative application to individual persons of the great doctrine of justification by faith."<sup>1</sup>

Having dwelt at such length on Mr. Elliott's first work of controversial theology, some others which followed may be dismissed with slighter notice. His next treatise, published a few years afterwards, was entitled "The North Side of the Altar." It had reference to a phase of ritual usage, at that time considered to be of crucial importance. No attempt was made, by those who adopted it, to deny that the position recommended to the celebrant was intended to symbolize high sacramental doctrine; was, in fact, a part of a general scheme of Eucharistic adoration. In favour of the practice, an elaborate appeal had been made by Dr. Littledale to Jewish tradition, primitive usage, and to pre-Reformation, or the earlier post-Reformation rubrics, all of which, it is contended, go to prove that the right position of the priest was *in front* of the altar or table, at which he officiated. To these three sources of Biblical and Liturgical information, on their bearing on the rightful place of the celebrant, as well as in the doctrinal significance of the position itself, our friend addresses himself, with all the accumulated stores of his liturgical knowledge and all the trenchant strength of his vigorous mind. The work bristles with references, and one seems to wonder that the fruits of so much massive learning should have to be expended on a point, which, apart from any doctrinal significance, seems to be of such trivial import. A recent judgment of the Final Court of Appeal,—making the eastward position permissive, so long as the concomitant manual actions of the celebrant are visible,—has, of course, shifted the ground of the controversy on which our friend's treatise chiefly turns; but his work will remain a text-book for all who may desire to know what countenance is furnished by Jewish precedent, by early Christian practice, by the rubrics and ritual of the English Church, to the kind of theology which many suppose to underlie that ambiguous, if not self-contradictory rubric, beginning, "When the priest, standing before the table."

Mr. Elliott published several controversial pamphlets in his later years. One entitled, "Some Strictures on a Book entitled 'The Communicant's Manual,'" as well as another growing out of it, containing letters between Mr. Elliott and Canon King, formed the subject of a notice in *THE CHURCHMAN* in the month

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix, p. 128. Notes to Dr. Hook's "Sermon on Auricular Confession," p. 70.

of November, 1879. The only remark on these pamphlets we deem it right to make is, that the writer of them must not be supposed to be chargeable with that tendency to depreciate the Sacraments, of which the opponents of high Eucharistic doctrine are so commonly accused. Our friend was the last man to speak disparagingly of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Speaking on the subject to the writer of this Paper, he observed, "It is the highest act of worship known to the Church."

So much for the polemical writings of our lamented friend. They represent but a slight portion of the product of his unresting brain. During the last decade of his life, especially, fields of extensive usefulness were continually opening before him, in connection with commentaries, Biblical dictionaries, as well as the more influential sections of our periodical literature. His friends had felt that, respectable as were some of the smaller religious publications, to the pages of which he was continually contributing, they belonged too much to the class of *peritura chartæ*, for a man of his intellectual powers, and that his labours ought to be employed upon a larger field. Accordingly, though not without something of unaffected diffidence and humility, he, some years ago, allowed his literary claims to be brought under the notice of a leading quarterly journal. Not long was the accomplished editor of the *Edinburgh* in discovering that, in the comparatively unknown Berkshire vicar, he had found a valuable accession to his staff. As a first subject, for the trial of his critical skill, there was proposed to our friend, an article on "The Fourth Gospel." The admitted differences between this and the three synoptic gospels,—in style, and treatment, and subject-matter,—had, from the earliest ages, made St. John's Gospel the object of sceptical attack. But, of late years, these attacks had been reversed by writers of the German school—by Strauss, Baur, de Wette, and others—with a parade of critical learning and research which it could hardly be to the credit of English Biblical scholarship to pass over. The task of breaking a lance with these modern neologians was wisely and well assigned to Canon Elliott; and we think none will rise from a perusal of his article in the *Edinburgh* with a shadow of doubt remaining on their mind as to the genuineness and inspired authority of the Gospel of St. John.

Other articles, in the same Review, followed this on the Fourth Gospel, at successive intervals; and we happen to know that a most valuable Paper, on the widely interesting subject of the Revised New Testament, was far in advance, for insertion in the next number of the *Edinburgh*, when the last illness of the writer forbade the completion of his task.

This notice of the literary labours of our lamented friend would not be complete without adverting to two of them with

which Bible readers generally can scarcely fail to be familiar—namely, his work on the Committee for the Revision of the Old Testament, and his contributions to the “Speaker’s Commentary.” For seven years incessantly, and with the most scrupulous regularity, did he give himself to the work of the Revision Committee—all his colleagues testifying to the assistance derived from his wise and scholarly comments. Nor was a less high estimation of his scholarship entertained by the learned editor of the “Speaker’s Commentary.” The actual part assigned to Canon Elliott, in that invaluable work, was the portion of the Psalms included between xci.–xcix., and cxli.–cl. But we violate no literary confidences in saying that, in other portions of the work, when questions arose requiring the most exact acquaintance with Hebrew for their elucidation, with no one was the Editor more glad to take counsel than with the subject of the present memoir.

Of Canon Elliott’s contributions to other Biblical and theological works—to the Commentary edited by Bishop Ellicott, to that recently published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, to the Dictionaries of Biography and Antiquities edited by Dr. Smith—our limits will not allow us to speak. What has been said, we trust, will suffice to vindicate our opening remark, that the decease of Mr. Elliott has left a void in the foremost ranks of English Biblical scholarship.

III. Glad should we have been to have supplemented this “*in memoriam*” notice, by more of personal particulars, either in regard to the life of our dear friend, or to the circumstances attending his illness and latter end. But it is owing to the retiredness and unobtrusive quietness of the man, that only the scantiest materials are left us for this purpose. After a curacy of less than two years’ duration he entered upon an incumbency. And his first incumbency was his last. Except his honorary canonry, the so-called preferments of the Church were never offered to him, and he was the last man in the world to seek them. That, for the sake of redeeming more time for his Biblical labours, he must sometimes have desired, even as all his friends most ardently desired for him, a post affording greater opportunities for learned leisure, may be supposed; but, as a rule, during all that long incumbency, it might be said of him:—

Remote from towns he ran his godly race,  
Nor e’er had changed nor wished to change his place.

Connections and friendships he could number, which, in the hands of any keen preferment hunter, would have been a certain passport to high places. But he was doing the work to which God had called him. By his studies he was instructing many; by his Church ministrations he was comforting many; by his

visits to the homes of his sick and distressed parishioners, he was winning the gratitude of many. What mattered to him the much or little of worldly advantages? He would rather it should be said of him that he was "more skilled to raise the wretched than to rise." "He would have been astonished," says one who had the best means of testifying to the fact, "if he could have known how much his parishioners loved him." And not they only. As is well observed by a writer in the *Guardian*, "those who knew him only as a scholar, or through his controversial writings, could form no real view of his character. The great charm in him was his kind-heartedness." Whilst, in an address of condolence to the widow, conveyed by the Master of Wellington College, as chairman of a Clerical Society, after the mention of "his learning and ability," reference is specially made "to the gentleness, courtesy, and largeness of mind with which he used to maintain his own views, and listen to the views of others."

Of the latter end of our beloved friend, and its accompanying testimonies to the simplicity of his faith and trust in "the one only Name," there is little to be said. As a rule, he was especially reserved and reticent upon the subject of his own religious feelings. And it was probably owing to some premonition of the end approaching, not perceptible to those around him, that, in an early stage of his attack, he volunteered unusual expressions of his firm trust in the merits of his Saviour. The attack itself came on with a fainting fit during the reading of the Litany, on the morning of Sunday, May 1st. He was assisted into the vestry, and on reaching home gave most encouraging signs of recovery. But on the next and following days acute pains in the limbs set in, for the relief of which the use of strong opiates became needful, causing such brief and intermitted seasons of consciousness, that, to the last, the oral testimonies were few which he was able to give of the strength and certainty of his hope. It was characteristic of his lowliness, and meek humility of spirit, that, a short time before the end came, he said, "I have not the joy some have, but I have peace;" and then, a little afterwards, fearing that after his departure friends should speak too highly of him, he left them a solemn charge, "See that nothing to my praise be put over my grave. All I would say of myself is, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'"

So passed away this faithful servant of God. It may truly be said of him that he died in harness. The brief and distressing seasons of mental wandering which accompanied his illness, were divided between prayer and work—between devout supplications for the spiritual welfare of those he loved, and imaginary discussions, in the Jerusalem Chamber, as to the right

understanding of some passage in the Word of God. But all is light to him now. The clouds and shadows of the present state have become dissipated, as the morning mists upon the mountains; whilst all the obscurities, in that Holy Book, to the right understanding of which he gave the ripest years of his labour and thought, will now be made clear in the higher exegesis of eternity and the fuller disclosures of the Book of Life.

D. M.

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ART. VI.—THOUGHTS ABOUT LETTERS.

IT was a bright day of sunshine, when the ash-buds were showing “black against the front of March,” and the first blush of the wakening life of spring was on the beech-trees which clothe the Cotswold Hills in many parts with an ever-changing grace, when I was looking from Birdlip over one of the loveliest views in England.

The Vale of Gloucester, with all its undulations, its villages, and wooded knolls, its meadow-land, and homesteads lay below, under a nearly cloudless sky. The tower of Gloucester Cathedral was distinctly visible—Glevum, that bright city of old times, which has seen so many changes and chances within its walls. Opposite, across the valley, like sentinels on guard, rose the stately Malvern Hills, with their grand mountainous outline, and abrupt termination at the Herefordshire end. Nearer to the left rose the steep sides of Leckhampton, and Cleve Cloud; Cheltenham, lying under their protecting heights, with her many villas and church towers, clearly defined. To the right, the mouth of the Severn shone like burnished steel, and beyond, many miles away, range upon range of low-lying shadowy hills were wrapt in the soft “fine-weather haze” of the spring day.

Near us, though hidden, lay the old Roman remains which were, in 1818, discovered by some labourer who was rooting up a tree. These remains, and the probable history attached to them, led my thoughts to the posts of those days, in contrast to the swift communication of these in which we live, by the touch of that electric chain with which we are darkly bound. For the Roman villa which had been disinterred in the heart of those beech woods was the probable residence of the Post-master; and the buildings, of which traces are left in all directions in the neighbourhood of the villa, were for the breeding and rearing of horses.

The Roman system of communication by means of signals was carried to very great perfection. Stations for horses, such as the