

English Government. It would be as much as their lives are worth to do so. And as they are nearly all men whose private means are either very slender or nothing, it becomes necessary that they should have some compensation for their trouble and labour in the so-called national cause. Thus, if they could put down the landlords, and establish their own importance in the eyes of the populace, they would drop into a comfortable means of living which, under a peaceful and loyal state of things, could have no existence for men whose sympathy and active agency are with anarchy, lawlessness, and crime.

G. W. WELDON.

ART. V.—NATURAL RELIGION.

Natural Religion. By the Author of "Ecce Homo."
London: Macmillan & Co. 1882.

THIS is the latest, and probably the most earnest, attempt we have yet witnessed, to widen and expand, to make more broad, what has been commonly called "the Broad Church." Uncertainty as to the limits of that church has been felt all along: but this book appears to disclaim, to repulse, the idea of any limits at all.

The main object of the book appears to be, to induce men to believe, that, without surrendering the Bible, they ought to be willing to embrace, to welcome, men who, although not believing the Bible, were still worshippers of some sort, believers of some sort—even while often unable to tell what it was they worshipped, what it was they believed. A writer in a weekly journal, who has in some measure forestalled us,¹ says of the author: "While he does not in any sense give up supernatural religion for himself, and does not wholly despair of it for others, he holds that there is something which may properly be called Natural Christianity, as distinguished from the supernatural Christianity of the disciples of Christ."

If we wonder, if we are curious to learn, what this "Natural Christianity" can be, or where it is to be found, the author of "Natural Religion" explains himself in this wise:—

Who that has seen the new generation of scientists at their work does not delight in their healthy and manly vigour, even when most he feels their iconoclasm to be fanatical? No great harm surely can come in the end from that frank, victorious ardour. As for the oppo-

¹ *The Spectator*, July 1.

site enthusiasm of Art, here, too, there is life, a determination to deal honestly with the question of pleasure, to have real enjoyment and that of the best kind. . . . Art and Science are not of the world, though the world may corrupt them, they have the nature of religion (pp. 132, 133).

Now this is, on the whole, about the most baseless vision, the most unreal imagination, that we have seen in our time; and we feel comfort in the belief that it will find but few sympathizers. Even such a journal as *The Spectator* can thus remonstrate—

The truth is that it is the very essence of our author's view of "Natural Religion," that man should have an ideal of humanity by which to compare his actual progress, or stationariness, or regress; and yet, as a matter of fact, we cannot find any ideal of humanity, unless we are allowed to look beyond humanity, which is just what our author, in his intense desire to gain over the humanists, will not permit. If there be a God who says to man, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," and who tells us, both through our own conscience and by outward example, what He means by holiness, then we have a basis for our human ideal, and something more—a super-physical, even if not a supernatural, power to guide and help us. But this strange book, which insists that we may have a genuine religion without trust, and founded solely on an admiration which itself has no fixed standard, does not explain to us at all, how this ideal is to be attained.

Turning to the author himself, we find him dwelling much on the desirableness of what he calls "development." He says, at p. 246—

Other religions have been stereotyped early, because their first preachers were narrow-minded, and could not conceive of development in religion. But our religion was not at first of this kind, since the most remarkable feature of our Bible is its system of successive revelations, covering many centuries, and its doctrine of an Eternal God, who from age to age makes new announcements of His will. Here, again, in archaic form we have a modern doctrine, by the help of which Christianity ought to have been preserved from the fate of other religions which have found themselves incapable of bearing a change of times. It follows that we may find in Christianity itself the principle that may revive Christianity; for the principle of historical development, which is what we need, is plainly there, and the whole Bible is built upon it. Christianity was intended to develop itself, but something arrested it. The spirit of prophecy, that is, of development, did not continue sufficiently vigorous in the Church. It was not, indeed, absent. The prophet of the Apocalypse and Paul, both show us in what way Christianity might have faced the new exigencies. In later times, too, this spirit exhibited itself occasionally. Augustine's "City of God" may be called a true prophecy (p. 247).

The chief error, plainly, of this book is the assimilating, the mingling together, things wholly different; especially the constant endeavour to raise "Science" and "Art" to a level with "Religion," or even to make each of them a religion by itself. We confess to a degree of astonishment at this strange estimate of these two human pursuits. They are far, indeed, from what this volume tries to represent them. Science should deal with *things known*; but the Science of our day is apt to deal with guesses—with surmises.

Art and Science have had, in the providence of God, a fair and ample trial; and their value, or want of value, as regards man's spiritual state, has been proved. The trial and the result are both before us in the history of Greece.

The most valorous, the most manly, the most graceful of any race or family that the earth has ever known, was surely to be found in Greece. This race of men was planted, too, in one of the most beautiful of all lands.

Turning to the higher, the intellectual qualities of men, what other race could compare with the men of Greece? If Science or Philosophy, or Literature, be asked for, what shall be said of a country or a people which produced, in the course of a few centuries, such men as Homer, Hesiod, Thales, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Æschylus, Epicurus? Or, if Art be sought, though many names are lost, that of Phidias, greatest of all, survives; but without names, such are the qualities, such the excellences, of the works of those days, that a statue of the age of Pericles, if now discovered, and without great injury, would be deemed of almost priceless value.

On the whole, can less be said, than that the men of Plato's days, if tried by the severest tests, would be deemed to be far beyond, in natural qualifications, any race, or people, or nation, that has been seen in later times?

Yet, what is their succeeding history? Did they conquer, or convert, or absorb, all the other nations of mankind? Far from it. Not even were they themselves absorbed—on the contrary, left undisturbed, of their own vices they were the prey. No other nation attempted their extermination—they were neither massacred, nor carried captive. They simply perished, the victims of their own corruptions, they decayed, they disappeared.

Strabo, a Greek geographer, writing a few years before the coming of Christ, reports, that in travelling over Greece, he "found desolation everywhere prevailing; Messenia was for the most part deserted; the population of Lycaonia was very scanty; Arcadia was in utter decay. Acarnania and Etolia were worn out and exhausted; of the towns of Doris scarcely a trace was left; Thebes had sunk to an insignificant village; the other cities were reduced to ruins." Bishop Thirlwall, in his

history of Greece, gives these facts, and passes on to inquire the causes. These he found to be, "a want of reverence for the order of Nature—for the natural revelation of the will of God. The sanction of infanticide was by no means the most destructive or the most loathsome form in which it manifested itself." He adds:—"In the course of the seventh and eighth centuries the worst forebodings were realized. After many transient incursions, the country was permanently occupied by Slavonic settlers. The native population was swept away, and the modern Greeks are the descendants of barbarous tribes."¹ Such was the result of a real and earnest worship of Science and of Art. To exceed Greece in this sort of "Religion" is scarcely possible—to follow Greece would probably be to lose ourselves with her in the vortex of utter destruction. The idea, then, which the author before us seems to entertain, that Science and Art might become, if not the equals, if not the rivals, of Christianity itself, still, something which might be called "a Natural Religion," seems to us one of the most baseless theories that ever was offered to mankind.

We do not find it easy (unless we could give an abridged edition of the work) to give our readers a clear account of this new sort of "Religion." Here are two brief passages, which partly explain it:—

"That which is peculiar to the Bible, and has caused it to be spoken of as one book rather than many, viz., the unity reigning through a work upon which so many generations laboured, gives it a vastness beyond comparison; so that the greatest work of individual literary genius shows by the side of it like some building of human hands beside the Peak of Teneriffe" (p. 176).

"Thus we arrive at a Christianity which is independent of supernaturalism but at the same time is historic, not abstract; and does not in any way break with the Christian tradition, or discard the Christian documents as obsolete. The miracles of the Bible, if the world should ultimately decide to reject them, would fall away, and in doing so would undoubtedly damage the orthodox system. But the Natural Christianity sketched in this chapter would not be damaged" (p. 177).

A Christianity, "not damaged," in which the miracles of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ, were "rejected!" Let the reader reflect upon this strange idea—remembering that the author only describes *what may happen* "if the world should ultimately reject" those miracles!

Our "Religion," as the author of the book before us is fond of calling it, is, according to many, built upon a collection of human writings, of no higher authority than the works of Plato

¹ Bishop Thirlwall's "History of Greece," vol. viii. p. 509.
VOL. VI.—NO. XXXV.

or of Cicero. To cite, as we are constantly doing, a "passage of Scripture," is only to court the scornful retort, "Oh, yes, Scripture, indeed! but we know better, now-a-days, than to pin our faith on what you call 'Scripture.' You quote St. Paul's fifteenth chapter of the First of Corinthians. Well, our answer is, that St. Paul was not infallible. He seems to have taught that Christ actually rose from the dead. But I do not think so. Therefore, I differ from St. Paul, and many other people think as I do."

All this sort of talk only shows us the truth of Dr. Robert Vaughan's caution, thirty years ago: "If we have not a Christianity based on written documents, we can have none at all." If the position of the Bible as DIVINE, as the work of the Spirit of God, could be shaken, then nothing but uncertainty, nothing but doubt, would be left to us. We should be sent back to the position of Socrates and Plato, who despairingly confessed, "You may pass the remainder of your days in sleep, or in despair, unless God in His goodness shall be pleased to send you instruction." If God has not been so pleased, then we remain in Socrates' position, and may sigh out, as he did, "All I know is, that I know nothing!"

These opinions and their spread seem to us the chief peril of our day. The book now before us, called "Natural Religion," does not, directly, touch this question. We do not think that we have seen, in its pages, any opinion expressed as to whether the Bible is "infallible" or not. It deals with a different part of the same great subject: whether a devotee of Science or of Art may not be deemed a "religious man," seeing that he "worships" an object of his own selection. There is an unreality, a fictitiousness, about this theory, which will, we hope and trust, prevent it from gaining much serious attention. Yet the religion of "culture" is undoubtedly spreading.

The other part of the "Broad Church" system is, as we have said, far more dangerous. It goes to the root of the whole matter. JEHOVAH *has spoken to man*, the Bible is the Word of God—that fact lies at the foundation of all real religion. The denial of this fact—with criticism of a destructive tendency, which calls the fact in question or logically denies it—is, as we have said, the main peril of the day. Both, however, are parts of the same question, and both lead in the same direction: away from the Bible, and, by consequence, away from the teaching of the Church.