

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

CRABB ROBINSON.\*

Mr. Robinson was born in 1775. He died in 1867, being in his ninety-second year. He practised some years as a barrister, and obtained a good reputation in his profession.

Having spent several years in Germany, as a student in the University of Jena, he became acquainted with the principal *literati* of that country, and was on terms of familiar intercourse with Goethe and others, whose fame is world-wide. In England, he was favoured with the friendship of Charles Lamb, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, and many more. He was one of the original promoters of the London University. It is not therefore surprising that his diary contains many interesting notices of the men of his time. It is rich in anecdotes and reports of conversations, relating to literary, philanthropic and religious matters.

Mr. Robinson was an English Nonconformist, but very broad in his views. Lately he attached himself to the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Madge, a Unitarian, and successor to the celebrated Thomas Belsham, in Essex Street, Strand, London. In his expressions of dislike to *evangelical* doctrine and preaching Mr. Robinson allowed himself great freedom of utterance, not unmingled with bitterness.

Nevertheless, the volumes before us are very fascinating, and may be read with much pleasure and benefit. We have enjoyed the perusal greatly.

We append some extracts, as specimens.

JOHN WESLEY.

"It was, I believe, in October, 1790, and not long before his death, that I heard John Wesley in the great round meeting-house at Colchester. He stood in a wide pulpit, and on each side of him stood a minister, and the two held him up, having their hands under his armpits. His feeble voice was barely audible. But his reverend countenance, especially his long white locks, formed a picture never to be forgotten. There was a vast crowd of lovers and admirers. It was for the most part pantomime, but the pantomime went to the heart. Of the kind I never saw anything comparable to it in after life."—The following particulars are given in a letter:—"After the people had sung one verse of a hymn he arose, and said—'It gives me a great pleasure to find that you have not lost your singing. Neither men nor women,—you have not forgot a single note. And I hope that by the assistance of the same God which enables you to sing well, you may do all other things well.' A universal Amen followed. At the end of every head or division of his discourse, he finished by a kind of prayer, a momentary wish as it were, not consisting of more than three or four words, which was always followed by a universal buzz. His discourse was short—the text I could not hear. After the last prayer, he rose up and addressed the people on liberality of sentiment, and spoke much against refusing to join with any congregation on account of difference of opinion. He said, 'If they do but fear God, work righteousness, and keep his commandments, we have nothing to object to.' i. 12, 13.

MRS. BARBAULD.

The following lines were written by her "in extreme old age":—

'Life! we've been long together,  
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather:  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dearer,  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;  
Then steal away, give little warning,  
Choose thine own time;  
Say not good night, but in some brighter clime  
Bid me good morning.'

The poet Wordsworth said, "I am not in the habit of grudging people their good things, but I wish I had written those lines." i. 146.

Writing respecting the incidents of the year 1812, Mr. Robinson says, "It was in the early part of this year that dear Mrs. Barbauld incurred great reproach by writing a poem entitled '1811.' It is in heroic rhyme, and prophesies that on some future day a traveller from the antipodes will from a broken arch of Blackfriars Bridge contemplate the ruins of St. Paul's." i. 259.

In 1840. Macaulay wrote his celebrated review of "Rank's History of the Popes," in which occurs the often-quoted passage, that "the Catholic Church," as he chose to call it, "may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken

\* The Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister-at-law. Two volumes, pp. 1016. Harper Brothers, New York.

arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's."

This is a singular coincidence, to say the least. The thought is the same; the variations, insignificant, though seemingly designed. Mrs. Barbauld has—"the antipodes;" Macaulay, "New Zealand;"—Mrs. B., "Blackfriars Bridge;" Macaulay, "London;"—Mrs. B., "contem-plate;" Macaulay, "sketch." Can it be supposed that he had not seen the poem, "1811"?

PASCAL.

"I am reminded of one of the famous sayings of Pascal, which Jacobi quotes repeatedly:—'The things that belong to men must be understood in order that they may be loved, the things that belong to God must be loved in order to be understood.' i. 198.

Our Lord said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." The Apostle Paul spoke of some who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

A BISHOP'S ADVICE.

"Hab. [his brother Habakkuk] told me that Clarkson had lately been to see the Bishop of Norwich, Bathurst. He found him very liberal indeed. He told Clarkson that one of his clergymen had written to him to complain that a Mr. Dewhurst had opened a meeting in his parish and was preaching against him. 'I wrote him word,' said the Bishop, 'that he must preach against Mr. Dewhurst. I could not help him!' i. 222.

Another Bishop, to whom a clergyman complained that some Dissenters had intruded into his parish, advised him to "out-preach, out-pray, out-live them."

REV. MR. HART.

"Hart was in every way the most remarkable man of our circuit. He was originally a preacher among the Calvinistic Baptists, among whom he had the reputation of being at the same time so good a preacher and so bad a liver that it was said to him once, 'Mr. Hart, when I hear you in the pulpit, I wish you were never out of it; when I see you out of it, I wish you were never in it.' i. 268.

We have searched in vain for information respecting this Mr. Hart. His name does not occur in any Baptist publication that we have seen. It is probable that if he was ever connected with our denomination he soon left it, or was compelled to leave it. All denominations are occasionally troubled with such men.

GENERAL AND SPECIAL GRACE.

"A Mr. P—, a Methodist minister, called to consult me on account of an interruption which took place while preaching at Woolpit.—After this business subject had been discussed, we talked on religious matters, and I questioned Mr. P— concerning the Arminian notion about Grace. I could not quite comprehend Pascal's letters on the doctrine of *Grace sufficient* [sufficient] and *Grace efficacious* [efficacious]. Nor did Mr. P— relieve me from the difficulties entertained on the subject. The Wesleyan Methodists, it seems, maintained that a *measure of Grace* is given to all men; but since all men do not avail themselves of this, I inquired, why not? Mr. P— answered, they were not disposed. On my asking what gave the disposition, he replied, 'God's influence.'—'That, then,' said I, 'must be Grace.'—'Certainly.'—'Then it seems God gives a measure of grace to all men, and to some an additional portion, without which the common measure is of no use!' He could not parry the blow. This common measure is a subterfuge, to escape the obvious objections to the Calvinistic notion of election and reprobation, but nothing is gained by it. The difficulty is shoved off, not removed." i. 336.

The Calvinist may easily puzzle the Arminian, and the Arminian may puzzle the Calvinist. Both will confess that "whosoever will" may "take the water of life freely;"—both will grant that "God worketh in us both to will and to do." If either should ask, *why and how*—the answer may be given in the words of the Psalmist, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

"On the 9th of September [1821] an incident occurred especially amusing in connection with what took place immediately afterwards. I rose very early to see a new place, and (it was between six and seven) seeing a large building, I asked a man who looked like a journeyman weaver, what it was. He told me a grammar-school! 'But, sir,' he added, 'I think it would become you better on the Lord's day morning to be reading your Bible at home, than asking about public buildings.' I very quickly answered: 'My friend you have given me a piece of very good advice; let me give you one, and we may both profit by our meeting. Beware of spiritual pride.' The man scowled with a Scotch surli-

ness, and, apparently, did not take my counsel with as much good humour as I did his.' i. 462.

Singularly enough, in the afternoon of the same day Mr. Robinson heard Dr. Chalmers deliver "a splendid discourse against the Judaical observance of the Sabbath."

BIBLIOLATRY.

"It was at the very commencement of the Bible Societies, and just after Dr. Wordsworth had published a pamphlet about them, that I heard a word fall from Coleridge, more profound and significantly true than any I have since heard. 'Ay, sir, there can be no doubt that there are good men, very good men, who are so zealous in widely spreading these societies. It is a pity they want sagacity enough to foresee that in sending the Bible thus everywhere among the uninstructed and the reprobate, they will be propagating, instead of the old idolatry, a new *bibliolatry*.'" ii. 220.

Extremes meet. The freethinker will not submit to the Bible; the Roman Catholic is afraid of it. Each stigmatises attachment to the holy book and zeal for its diffusion as *bibliolatry*.

A LIBERAL PRIEST.

"I will mention an anecdote, which will show that a Roman Catholic priest will acknowledge what, it seems, Mr. Coleridge [in his "Table-talk"] had forgotten. I met with one in the Vale of Langern, who, I afterwards found, was popular for his benevolence and liberality, being an anti-ultramontanist. I said to him;—'All I contend for is, that a man has a right to be damned if he pleases, and that, therefore, no magistrate has a right to interpose to prevent it.' He started; but after a pause, smiled and said, 'If you mean this in a *legal* sense, I concede it.' I replied, 'I cannot mean it otherwise. It is the duty of the father, the friend, the philanthropist, and, above all, the Christian, to labour for the salvation of souls; but the sovereign, the magistrate, has nothing to do with it; for, if he can interfere, there will be nothing but persecution and murder every where. It is accident what each sovereign believes, and every one will claim the same power.'—'It is very true,' he exclaimed. I rejoined, 'When will you get his Holiness to subscribe to the doctrine?'—'Not yet,' he said, 'but we shall in time. We are on the way of Reform more than the Protestants imagine.'" ii. 233.

CALVINISM AND THE BIBLE.

"Dining the day before yesterday at a clergyman's, I related some anecdotes of my nephew's last days, and ventured on the bold remark that I thought his conduct evinced a more truly Christian feeling than that diseased anxiety about the state of his soul which certain people represent as eminently *religious*. My host did not reprove, but echoed the remark; and he said the same day: 'If I found Calvinism in the Bible, it would prove, not that Calvinism is true, but that the bible is false.'" ii. 290.

A silly bigot! And as conceited as silly! The dogmatism, two, is noticeable. "What is dogmatism?"—some one asked of Douglas Jenold. The reply was, "Puppyism full grown!" ii. 425.

FANCY PRAYERS.

"Last night heard Wordsworth read prayers from Thornton's Collection with remarkable beauty and effect. He told me that the Duke of Wellington, being on a visit, was informed by his host that he had family prayers in the morning. Would he attend? 'With great pleasure,' said the Duke. The gentleman read out of this book. 'What! you use fancy prayers?' The Duke never came down again. He expected the Church prayers, which Wordsworth uses in the morning." ii. 334.

Query—Are not "the Church prayers" as really "fancy prayers" as any other collection?

REV. ROBERT ROBINSON.

"When Robinson first occupied the pulpit of the Baptist meeting at Cambridge, he was exposed to annoyances from the younger gowmen. They incurred no danger of rustication, being put out of sittings, or even suffering an imposition, for irregularities of that kind. He succeeded, however, in the course of a few years, in effecting a change, and Mr. Dyer says, became popular with a large class. It was soon after his settlement there that a wager arose among a party of undergraduates. One of them wagered that he would take his station on the steps of the pulpit, with a large ear-trumpet in his hand, and remain there till the end of the service. Accordingly, he mounted the steps, put the trumpet to his ear, and played the part of a deaf man with all possible gravity. His friends were in the aisle below, sitting at the box; the congregation were scandalized; but the preacher alone seemed insensible to what was going on. The sermon was on God's mercy,—or whatever the subject might have been at first,

in due time it soon turned to that, and the preacher proceeded to this effect:—

"Not only, my Christian friends, does the mercy of God extend to the most enormous of criminals, so that none, however guilty, may not, if duly penitent, be partakers of the divine grace; but also there are none so low, so mean, so worthless, as not to be objects of God's fatherly solicitude and care. Indeed, I do hope that it may one day be extended to—*and then, leaning over the pulpit, he stretched out his arm to its utmost length, and placing it on the head of the gowman, finished his sentence—'to this silly boy!'*"

"The wager was lost, for the trumpet fell, and the discomfited stripling bolted."

"Robinson was acrimonious against the supporters of what he deemed the corruption in the Church and State, and especially intolerant of dulness. Arguing awhile with a dull adversary, who had nothing better to allege against Robinson's reasonings than the frequent repetition of, *I do not see that*.—'You do not see it! retorted Robinson,—do you see this?' taking a card out of his pocket and writing God upon it. 'Of course I do, replied his opponent! 'what then?'—'Do you see it now?' repeated Robinson,—at the same time covering the word with a half crown piece:—'I suspect not.'"

"In the days when Robinson flourished, an imputation of scepticism as to the existence of a personal Devil influencing the actions of men was fatal to religious character. It was at a meeting of ministers that Robinson once overheard one of them whisper to another, that on that essential point of faith he was not sound. 'Brother! brother!' he cried out, 'don't misrepresent me. How do you think I can dare to look you in the face, and at the same time deny the existence of a Devil? Is he not described in Holy Writ as the accuser of the brethren?'"

"On another occasion, a good but not very wise man asking him, in a tone of simplicity and surprise, 'Don't you believe in the Devil?' Robinson answered him in like tone, 'O dear, no! I believe in God,—don't you?' ii. 339-343.

CHRISTIANITY MISREPRESENTED.

"Heard an excellent sermon from Madge. It was the more remarkable to me, because the sermon was the expansion of a thought which I had extracted from Bunsen, so well expressed and so significant that it deserves to become an axiom:—'Let it never be forgotten that *Christianity is not thought, but action; not a system, but a life.*'" ii. 359.

This is a favourite mode of representation, adopted by some who would fain be regarded as the religious thinkers of the day. Yet it is glaringly imperfect and partial. It would be better to say, "Christianity is right thought, developed in pious action; a system of truth, harmonious and divine, embodied in a holy life."

"LIKE A BROTHER."

"I asked Babington Macaulay, the historian; 'What is the fact as to the reputed secession of Henry Wiltberforce from the Anglican to the Roman Catholic Church?' Macaulay answering, 'I believe he has gone over,' another gentleman said, 'He has announced it himself to the Archbishop of Canterbury!' Macaulay then added; 'I can tell you this—the Bishop of Oxford wrote to the Archbishop to inquire how he should behave towards his brother.' The Archbishop answered, 'Like a brother.'" ii. 402.

ROBERTSON OF BRIGHTON.

"My astonishment at this man increases every time I see him. This morning's discourse was a continuation of the last. He continued his illustration of the doctrine that Judaism indirectly taught what Christianity afterwards directly taught; that the teaching that one day in seven was to be holy, was not to intimate that the other days were to be unholy, but to lead to the recognition that all time was to be the Lord's. As he interprets even the words 'without blood [shedding of blood] there is no remission of sins,' they become inoffensive, for it means no more than this—Christ died to exhibit the perfectest christian truth, that the essence of christianity is self-sacrifice. It is the Divine principle; God and man are united wherever this principle reigns." ii. 420.

Worldly-minded men would have christianity to be "inoffensive;" the Apostle Paul said that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness."

C.

For the Christian Messenger.

AMERICAN BIBLE UNION.

HOBOKEN, N. J., Nov. 7, 1870.

Editor Christian Messenger:

DEAR SIR,—I send you a few items of the American Bible Union Anniversary, hoping it may be as interesting to you and your readers to hear of the doings of those two days, as it was to me a spectator.