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NATURE, AND MISSION**

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Jean Réville & Victor Leuliette

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JEAN RÉVILLE & VICTOR LEULIETTE

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CROWN THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY

VOL. IV.
RÉVILLE'S LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

Its Origin, Nature, and Mission

BY

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Translator's Preface

M. JEAN RÉVILLE, Professor in the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Paris, and editor of the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, delivered the following lectures in Switzerland during the autumn of last year. They have already been translated into the Dutch language, and will shortly appear in German. They are now offered to the English public, at this time of growing unsettlement and anxiety, to show how a leading French Protestant endeavours to meet the needs and solve some of the difficulties of those who, in face of the ever-widening horizon of knowledge and consequent broadening of thought, are casting about for a reverent reconsideration and clear restatement of Christian doctrine in the light of the philosophic and scientific conceptions and tendencies of our time.

vi **Translator's Preface**

The translator, although in sympathy with the admirable method and spirit in which the subject is treated, desires it to be understood that he is in no wise pledged either to the general position or to any particular statements contained in the present work. He would merely say with Seneca :

*Soleo et in aliena castra transire, non
tanquam transfuga sed tanquam explorator.*

VICTOR LEULIETTE.

Preface

“WHAT is Liberal Protestantism? Where could an account of Liberal Protestantism be found, sufficiently clear and free from theological and ecclesiastical controversies, to be within the grasp of readers who are not professional theologians, and who are, further, unacquainted with Protestant controversies?”

Such or similar questions have often been put to me from different quarters, both by men of Catholic and of Protestant training, who were simply desirous to learn or anxious to gain light on religious questions for which they no longer found satisfactory solutions in the traditional catechisms, but the paramount importance of which, for social life and their own spiritual welfare, they could not fail to recognise.

Needs such as these I wish to meet in the

present little book. The few works in which this subject has been dealt with in French are now for the most part out of date, and bear the stamp of controversies within the Protestant Churches. My wish, in the following pages, is not to engage in any controversy, nor, indeed, to speak as a party man or a preacher, but rather as a teacher of religious science intent on instructing his readers and on furnishing them with the materials which will enable them to form their own personal opinions. I am certainly far from pretending to conceal the fact that I am in full sympathy with Liberal Protestantism and that I set out upon this study as a free believer. But I hope that an already long experience in the teaching of history has now so far fitted me to describe with impartiality the beliefs and doctrines of every religion and creed, as to enable me to draw a disinterested and faithful picture of a religious conception which I have made my own.

The discussion of traditional religious ideas in different passages of this book is not

prompted by a desire to confound an adversary. Had my wish been to write a controversial work, I should have given a far greater prominence to their discussion, and I should have experienced but slight difficulty in far more thoroughly refuting orthodox tradition. My sole object, however, has been to show how and for what reasons Liberal Protestants have been led to reject certain traditional doctrines and have come to profess the Christianity which I am here describing.

The successive chapters of this little book were delivered before a large and most attentive audience, in a series of five lectures which I gave in Geneva, during the present month of November, at the request and under the auspices of the Geneva Section of the *Union suisse du Christianisme libéral*. I alone, however, am responsible for the following pages; my worthy friends, who are the representatives of Liberal Protestantism in Geneva, simply urged me to publish them. I hope whoever may chance to read these lectures will