

**A CHURCH AT HOME; OR, RITUAL OF
HOUSEHOLD DIVINE WORSHIP, FORMED ON
THE GENERAL PLAN OF THE LITURGY OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND ACCORDANT
WITH THE SCRIPTURAL THEOLOGY OF
MILTON, LOCKE AND NEWTON**

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JOSEPH PLURA

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THE SCRIPTURAL THEOLOGY OF MILTON,
LOCKE AND NEWTON.



JOSEPH PLURA, S.C.L., OXON.

SOME TIME AN ASSISTANT JUDGE IN THE COURT OF K.B. AND C.P.,
IN THE ISLE ST. CHRISTOPHER.

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A CHURCH AT HOME.

INTRODUCTION.

CONSIDERING the powerful hold which religion, or whatever bears that venerable name, hath on every people wholly or partially civilized, feelings most painful arise in every honest and patriotic mind, on finding itself compelled to differ from the religious creed, theology, or theogony of all, or nearly all, around him. Some spirits, indeed, there are, that take a pride in severing themselves from the community, by a distinction so notable as that of religion. The Christian religion, however, is most unfriendly to pride of any sort; and where this haughtiness exhibits itself, we may justly suspect, not only a deficiency of human tenderness, but the presence also, more or less, of positive error. It is not in the nature of truth, of religious truth least of all, to make men haughty; though high-minded, in the best sense, the latter will assuredly make them, if the heart be no less concerned in the attainment of truth than the head; but if otherwise, religious knowledge, or the theology of any school, is as likely to puff up its possessor, as any merely scientific attainment; nay, destructively more so. Witness the Romish school, pretending to hold the keys alike of heaven, and hell! When labouring, therefore, to convince others of error in which they may be supposed involved, the truly religious man will conduct his opposition with the meekness of wisdom, as to professors of the doctrine opposed; recollecting, however, that servants of the God of truth, if such they be, have a mission to cry aloud in many cases; and to spare not in cases of manifest mental obliquity, equally as of practical delinquency.

Now, if painful in the ordinary ranks of life be a desertion

of the religion of one's country, or of any numerous denomination which had long our adherence, much more painful must such an abandonment be to one forced to disavow it. Such is, and many a year ago was, the case of the composer of the present Ritual. A student of theology from his boyhood, he may say, under the care of a tender mother, and sincerely attached to the prevalent orthodoxy, so named, and esteemed, among the multitude of denominations, howsoever dissonant on minor points; bitter, indeed, was to him the act of self-severance from a church which he sincerely honoured, and which, long after his separation from it, he engaged with others, through the medium of the public press, to defend as an establishment, when furiously assailed by a barbarian priesthood, the enemies of light and liberty, all the world over. These communications, with those of others, still exist, collected into a volume printed in Dublin. Be it, therefore, remembered, that whatever shall be found written herein, it is the farthest from the writer's design injuriously to affect the United Church of England, and Ireland, the subversion of which he apprehends might be an inlet among us of the horrors of the first French Revolution, in Ireland, if not in Great Britain. Let reform be the maxim of the Church; ruin is the cry of Papists, fools, and fanatics. Sad it is to think, that the least hint of reform in ritual only, to the cutting off even of a "vain repetition," is utterly disregarded, though recommended by the Primate of all England himself!

Speedily to afford the reader a view of the doctrines inculcated in the following ritual, and of the proofs whereon they rest, I think it expedient as concisely as possible to show in this prefatory introduction, that *its doctrines cannot possibly be false*; reserving to our comments, subjoined to its hebdomadal services, the particular proofs, that they are positively and solely true. One general remark, however, I must premise. "The pride of reason," is a common phrase in the mouths of factots of mystery, who indeed quite possibly have an unavowed feeling that reason is against them. Proud reasoners themselves may be, and commonly are; and well

* I know of proud reasoners also among controversialists of a class opposed to them. Reason, however, cannot be proud. "The inspiration of the Almighty it is that giveth to man intelligence." Therefore to oppose reason to revelation, in the sense of contradictories, is to blaspheme The Divine Inspirer of both; and the outcry against reason, in dispute theologic, is raised with none other view than to screen with the name of mysteries above reason, dogmas not a whit mysterious, but manifestly contrary to reason, and self-contradictory.

The pride of reason forsooth! Verily it was the greatest affliction of the writer's life temporal to discover, that reason had in certain generally received dogmas no place whatever. Nor did this unsought conviction arise from the discourse, or the writings, of any opponent of the reigning orthodoxy; but in reading a widely circulated, and highly lauded, treatise on its defensive side; put, without its being sought, into the present writer's hand by an acquaintance; then it was that his attention was seriously roused to the subject. Such, indeed, was the logical fairness of the author's exposition of the Athanasian doctrine, of the difficulties attending it, the objections made to it, and the assumed invincible replies, that my only wonder was, and is, how the author could satisfy himself, by any alleged authority of Holy Writ, allowing nought for rhetorical usage, and heedless of express contradiction, still to maintain, and to propagate, the creed of the multitude. The author of the tract in question was then living, and possibly still lives, a distinguished professor of theology in the United States of America.

Dismissing Calvinism as alike anti-rational, and anti-Christian, the professing Christian world may be divided, so far as concerns our present purpose, into Athanasians, Nonspiritualists, and Scriptural Unitarians; or Unitarians ascribing no less authority to Holy Scripture than those of the learned among the Athanasians, who insist not on the verbal inspiration of sacred Scripture; with the exception of a few instances only. The last-named class of the three

I would briefly denominate Scripturists; not to conceal their Unitarianism, but for conciseness' sake, and as expressive of their abiding by sacred Scripture as firmly as any of their learned opponents. Nay more so; for they utterly reject all Church authority as final in the exposition of Scripture; though doubting not that excellent Christians there are professing to hold the dogmas of that Satan in the Reformation, Calvin, as he also believes of many a slave to the enchantments of Rome.

By Non-spiritualists, I designate persons calling themselves Christian, yet denying *all* inspiration; holding Scripture in the same rank with the classics, such as Lucan, Herodotus, Plato, and Cicero; if, indeed, so highly, when not hesitating to deny the reality of Christ's miracles, as more than once was done in my own hearing, and so expressed as to seem a wise personal opinion merely. Materialism I abhor, and identify with Atheism; nor do I find in the writings of its professors, whatever name they may assume, any more of honesty in their statements than of rationality in their religion, fond as they are of appealing to reason. One of this class ridicules the notion, as they would term it, of the responsibility of man! Now the Scripturist founds the first principles of his religious faith whereon revelation fixeth it; entering into no learned disquisitions, but appealing at once and everywhere, to the conscience, and common sense, of every man not utterly brutalized; saying, "The heavens declare God's glory." The Scripturist admits not of a primal savage condition of man; being convinced, that without an inspiration from the Almighty, man never could rise to consciousness itself. The Creator formed man to be a rational creature, if Creator there was; if we sprang not from some pre-existent slime, nobody can tell how; while the constant improvement of mind, and condition, demonstrates the existence of an innate faculty exalting man above all others of the animal race; beings never passing the narrow limits assigned to them at their creation.

By this same power of mind imparted to us from above

the Bible itself, its contents, and the evidences of its authority, must be judged, since to none other judicature can we now possibly resort. To aver, therefore, that the Bible propounds doctrines above man's comprehension, is to withdraw it wholly from human judgment, though itself earnestly exhorting us to a diligent study of it, as able to make us wise unto salvation! The fact, however, is, that the propounders of this dogma mean only that their authority sufficeth to make credible whatever interpretation they may choose to put on holy Scripture; in short, to make of it a revelation only to themselves. This is a prime dogma in the Papacy, and makes large strides in Protestantism, though nullifying revelation itself.

By Non-spiritualists, as already observed, I also intend persons calling themselves Christians, but denying all inspiration; holding Scripture, as a merely human work, of no higher account than the classic authors generally; with whom, therefore, I should no more think of entering into a controversy than with any school of heathen philosophy. As to Arianism, it seems now to be dead; and is certainly not deserving a revival, even if advocated by so illustrious a man as Dr. Samuel Clarke. Our argument will thus be restricted to a contrast of the Athanasian faith with the Scripturist's creed; and we begin with a general remark.

If propositions, self-evidently contradictory, be discovered in the book called the Bible, they cannot, by any man in his senses, be received as divine truths; though it be quite possible that men may, for lucre's sake, declare their accord to any formulas whatever. Who can doubt that there would still be an overflow of Popish priests, let their Pontiff decree the sacredness of whatever nonsense might agitate his brain! There can, therefore, be no proof of a divine revelation, if not in accord with natural religion, and unbiassed reason. I argue not with men who would thrust what they call the idol of natural religion out of sight; and they the veriest orthodox!

Their motto should be what their maxims teach: The heavens declare *NOT* the glory of God; the firmament showeth