

ECCE HOMO

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Ecce homo by W. E. Gladstone

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W. E. GLADSTONE

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W. E. GLADSTONE



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“ECCE HOMO.”*



PART I.

NO anonymous book, since the “Vestiges of Creation,” (now more than twenty years old)—indeed, it might almost be said no theological book, whether anonymous or of certified authorship—that has appeared within the same interval, has attracted anything like the amount of notice and of criticism which

* “Ecce Homo: a Survey of the Life and Work of Jesus Christ.” Svo. Macmillan & Co. 1866.

have been bestowed upon the remarkable volume entitled "Ecce Homo."

Probably we should have to travel much further back in order to find a work which, having drawn forth commendation so warm, and censure so sharp, had both acquired the one and incurred the other from the most directly opposite quarters. The fact, however, is undisputed, and the instances familiar enough: and the phenomenon admits, perhaps, of some explanation, though it may perhaps be a partial explanation only. On the one hand, it is plain that the author repeatedly uses language which could not consistently be employed in treating of Christianity from what is termed the orthodox point of view; and the offence which many have

taken on this account has, in such cases unhappily, put a dead stop to any real investigation of the work in its general bearings. Or, if the process has been continued, yet a determined adhesion to fixed and unelastic modes of thought has made it so repulsive, as to ensure its ending in thorough-paced condemnation. On the other hand, what is loosely called society, and is represented by the literature, if not of the age, yet of the moment, has been making of late much of what may be termed proud flesh ; a sign of ungoverned effort, and of life indeed, but of somewhat crude and disordered life. Into this tissue of proud flesh the work cuts, perhaps more deeply than any other production of recent years; not by direct insertion of the

knife, but by bringing home to the reader's mind, with a wonderful force and freshness, this impression, that there is something or other called the Gospel, which, "whatever it may be," as was said by an old Pagan poet of the Deity, has very strong, and what may even turn out to be very formidable, claims, not merely on the intellectual condescension, but on the loyal allegiance and humble obedience of mankind. To drive home this impression to the heart and mind of the nineteenth century, now already grown elderly and growing old, disturbs the self-complacency of a mind determined upon comfort, and naturally enough constitutes a grave offence in the views of those to whom the chequered but yet imposing fabric of actual Christianity, still casting

its majestic light and shadow over the whole civilised world, is a rank eyesore, and an intolerable grievance.

This offence, serious in itself, is attended with aggravating circumstances. There is a tone of familiarity, to say the least, at the outset of the volume, and particularly in the Preface, which naturally tends to raise hopes that the history of Him to whom so many lands, and so many ages, have bowed the knee, is about to receive a very free handling. And, indeed, the author, it is observed, actually by implication calls himself a critic. He apparently proposes, "to accept those conclusions about Christ, not which church doctors or even apostles have sealed with their authority, but which the facts themselves, *critically*