

**THE SCEPTICISM OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY,
SELECTIONS FROM THE LATEST
WORKS. WITH A SHORT
ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR**

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The Scepticism of the Nineteenth Century, Selections from the Latest Works. With a Short Account of the Author by William Gresley & S. C. Austen

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WILLIAM GRESLEY & S. C. AUSTEN

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THE SCEPTICISM OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY.

Selections

FROM THE LATEST WORKS

OF THE

REV. WILLIAM GRESLEY, M.A.,

LATE VICAR OF BOYNE HILL, AND PREBENDARY OF LICHFIELD.

WITH

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR,

BY THE

REV. S. C. AUSTEN, M.A.,

Chaplain of the Salisbury Infirmary.



J. MASTERS AND CO., 78, NEW BOND STREET.

1879.

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PREFACE.

THE Editor has felt a melancholy and yet real pleasure in preparing for the press these selections from the last published writings of the Rev. W. Gresley, of Boyne Hill and Lichfield. The work was undertaken in accordance with the author's wish, and at the request of his surviving relations. In the body of the work his own words are retained with a few—a *very few*—verbal alterations, which clearness and grammatical correctness seemed to require. Illustrative notes have been added, clearly marked off from the original. For his account of the author, the Editor is indebted partly to kind information afforded by relations and friends, partly to a short memoir that appeared in the "Guardian" towards the close of 1876, written by a former Rural Dean of Maidenhead, and intimate friend of the deceased, and partly to his own personal recollections extending over a period of eleven years.

SALISBURY, 1879.

Short Account of the Author.

WILLIAM Gresley, the author of the accompanying selections, was the eldest son of Richard Gresley, Esq., of Stoner House, Lichfield, Barrister-at-Law, by his wife Caroline Grote, daughter of Andrew Grote, banker, of London. She was the aunt of Grote, the well-known Greek historian, who was consequently our author's first cousin. The family of the Gresleys is of some antiquity, an ancestor having come in with the Conqueror, and settled in Netherseale and Drakelow, in the parish of Gresley, Derbyshire. The baronetcy in the family dates from 1611. The subject of the present memoir was in early youth first cousin to the then existing baronet, Sir W. Nigel Gresley.

He was born at Kenilworth, on March 16, 1801, and was educated at Westminster School, whence he was elected to a studentship at Christ Church, Oxford. In 1822 he took a second class in the school Lit. Hum. at the same time when Denison, late Bishop of Salisbury, and the present Regius Professor of Hebrew, Dr. Pusey, whose friend, (I may add,) he was to the last, won their firsts. John Keble and the late Bishop Short of S. Asaph were among his examiners. Another friend of his and member of the same college, Christ Church, W. F. Hook, late Dean of Chichester, took his degree, though without any University distinction, only a year previously.

William Gresley had not at the first intended to take

Holy Orders, but wished to follow his father's profession and study for the bar; but in consequence of an injury to his eyesight, from which he never entirely recovered, and which tried him sorely in later years, he changed his intention, and was ordained on his studentship, Deacon in 1825, and Priest in the following year, by the then Bishop of Oxford, the Hon. and Right Rev. E. Legge. His first curacy was at Drayton Bassett near Tamworth, in the diocese of Lichfield, in 1828, where he did not remain for any length of time. In 1830 he was licensed curate of S. Chad's, Lichfield, the parish in which his own house was situated, where he remained for seven years. During a portion of that time he was also Morning Lecturer at S. Mary's, Lichfield. In 1840 he was appointed by Bishop Bowstead to the prebendal stall of Wolvey, in the Cathedral Church of Lichfield. This, his only preferment, was simply honorary, no emolument being attached thereto. During this period of his life he engaged himself in general Church and diocesan work, besides qualifying as justice of the peace, and engaging in literary labours. He was already so far known in the Church at large that he was called upon to take part in the first great Church movement in the Northern Province, the consecration of the Leeds Parish Church, and was one of the preachers through the octave.

Meanwhile in 1828 he married Miss Anne Wright Scott, daughter of J. B. Scott, Esq., banker, of Lichfield; by her he had nine children, all of whom he survived. She has been described by an old servant who lived for fifty years in the family, as having been of a singularly sweet disposition. It was a marriage of perfect and complete union and affection until her last sad and distressing affliction, which he felt most deeply. She encouraged and assisted him much in his early literary labours.

About 1850 he removed to Brighton, where he worked for some years as a volunteer assistant Priest in the Church of S. Paul, with the present vicar, the Rev. A. Wagner. This may be regarded as the period of his greatest activity, and his greatest success. He preached every Sunday evening, and by the quiet, sober, earnest style of his preaching, and the thoroughness with which he handled his subject, who knows how many were influenced for good? But it was not in the pulpit alone that his power was felt. He was held in very high esteem by all with whom he came in contact, rich and poor alike. He had a large poor district, which he was untiring in visiting, among those who were in good health as well as among the sick. His *great* work while he was there lay in his efforts to bring fallen women to repentance and amendment of life. His work also among the upper classes was no less thorough and entire. Many of the ladies who haunted that fashionable watering-place he brought to more serious and sober views of life, life's duties and wealth's responsibilities. Some of the retired officers in the army were among his friends.

At this time he exercised great power as a confessor and director of souls. His entrance hall was often lined with people waiting to see him, both clerical and lay, as a safe guide of souls. Meanwhile the hand of God was heavy upon him, and all those troubles fell upon him, which impaired his energies and saddened the close of his days, while at the same time they afforded him an opportunity of displaying a bright example of Christian patience and perseverance under suffering, far more touching and impressive than the most active actual work in more prosperous circumstances.

In 1857 he accepted the Incumbency of All Saints', Boyne Hill, where a Church, parsonage house, and schools had been built by the munificence of three ladies in a dark

part of the Oxford Diocese. One of his friends had wished that he should have a wider sphere of work, more entirely under his own control, such as had not yet been afforded to him. The plan of the new buildings had been already arranged and in part carried out when he accepted the Incumbency, and he at once repaired to his new sphere of work, although neither Church nor house were as yet ready for him. But he commenced work at once, holding service in the school, where, as he himself told me, when he attempted to organise a choir his first difficulty was *to teach his choir boys to read*. He continued at Boyne Hill to the day of his death, and there his mortal remains now lie.

When he first went to Boyne Hill, he found the whole town of Maidenhead, and the surrounding district in a sadly neglected state, spiritually and morally. The hamlet of Boyne Hill itself was such, so it was said, that no respectable female could walk through it in the evening. It is now as quiet and well ordered a village as any one could wish to see. Where the Vicar could hardly find any boy to form his choir, the schools are now in a most highly efficient state, as has been more than once mentioned by the government inspector, owing to the excellent management of the present master, who worked under the superintendence of our author from 1866. In the work of religious education he always took an active part himself, so long as health would allow.

The church was consecrated by Bishop Wilberforce on Dec. 1, 1857; on which occasion seventy clergy in surplices attended. Under the Vicar's influence, an infant school, curate's house, and almshouse for six old people followed. To these were added a spire dedicated by the Bishop of Oxford in 1866, and a peal of eight bells in the following year. In the June of 1868, the whole peal was destroyed by an accidental fire. Mr. Gresley threw himself upon his