

**BASES OF BELIEF, AN
EXAMINATION OF CHRISTIANITY
AS A DIVINE REVELATION BY THE
LIGHT OF RECOGNISED FACTS
AND PRINCIPLES. IN FOUR PARTS**

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Bases of belief, an examination of Christianity as a divine revelation by the light of recognised facts and principles. In four parts by Edward Miall

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BASES OF BELIEF.

Relig.
Theol.

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1861.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THE following treatise was first published in 1853, and was received with greater favour than the Author had ventured to anticipate. Two library editions having been all but exhausted, a third and cheaper edition is now offered to the public. This step has been taken in consequence, chiefly, of the appearance of the *Essays and Reviews*. It is believed that the main drift of those now celebrated productions is turned aside by the argument maintained in this volume—at any rate, it was originally written with an express view to fortify the reader against speculations, criticisms, and reasonings similar in almost every respect to those put forth in that work. In truth, the Author recognised in them old acquaintances. Notwithstanding their more friendly air, their more reverent bearing, and their substitution of a thoroughly English for a foreign dress, it was impossible to mistake their identity. It would seem that after having been exposed and discredited elsewhere, they have at length found an asylum in the bosom of Oxford University—nor, perhaps, is it matter of wonder that inquiring and honest minds, wearied and offended by the exacting demands made upon them by

High Church authority, should be predisposed to welcome the advent of rationalistic freedom. Whether the eminent men who have had the courage to set the example of shaking hands with this popularly-reputed foe to Christianity really imagined that they were giving it a first introduction to the British public, it would be presumptuous to offer an opinion—but it may be confidently stated that the results which dogmatic philosophy and critical analysis have put before us afresh in the *Essays and Reviews*, were already as familiar to speculative readers in this country as Hume's *Essay on Miracles* used to be about the beginning of the century.

There is no necessity, however, for supposing that these Church of England divines had in view any such purpose as that which undoubtedly animated the school to which the world is indebted for modern rationalistic theology. Whatever may be the tendency of their writings, nothing but an entire absence of charity can attribute to the writers a conscious design of undermining the basis of Divine Revelation, and destroying the very system of truth which it is their special duty to preach and to teach. Great latitude ought to be allowed to the intellectual conclusions of speculative minds as to what constitutes the authority which should govern the Reason in determining what has and what has not come to us as a Revelation from God—and it is much to be regretted that men, earnestly professing that they accept Christianity as a spiritual showing forth of the Divine character and will, should be set down as unbelievers because they repudiate the customary process by which the great majority of their fellows reach the same end. It is surely more just to infer that, in the ardour of an intellec-

tual pursuit, such persons have allowed themselves to be borne away beyond the limits which logically bound their own professions—and that subsequent reflection will convince them that they cannot go so far as they have done on the road on which they have set out, without being compelled to go much farther. It is hardly wise, it cannot be kind, to set up a shout of execration, the only effect of which must be to prevent their retracing their steps to less dangerous paths, and to drive them farther and farther from the conclusions from which we could have wished they had never departed.

But whilst the utmost tenderness and charity are due to the writers who have unitedly set forth their speculations in the *Essays and Reviews*, none whatever can be claimed for the speculations themselves. Their manifest tendency, if not their avowed design, is to eliminate supernaturalism from the Christian faith. It is evident that a historical revelation based on miracles is assumed to be unworthy of God to give, because unfit for man to receive. And this is assumed as a sort of axiom—as a self-demonstrative proposition. At least, no proof of it is attempted. But it seems to underlie the whole collection of these far-famed papers. It constitutes the rampart upon which the artillery of Biblical criticism is mounted. Let this assumption be shown to be unreasonable, and the entire machinery of assault which rests upon it becomes harmless.

That the assumption is unreasonable it is the main object of the following pages to show. How far that object has been attained it is for others to judge. But so far as success has been reached in this respect, so far it supplies an antidote to the erroneous teaching of the *Essays and Reviews*.

Possibly, it does more—for it points out that there is a sphere within which criticism may freely range without loosening the foundations upon which the faith of so large a portion of mankind is based. Let us once for all get rid of the dogma which tyrannises over Reason—namely, that no historical miraculous revelation is worthy of credit—and we may then find a fitting office and suitable functions for honest and fearless Biblical criticism. Much that is given to the world in these *Essays and Reviews* will still remain—but with this difference, that it will remain to enlarge and purify men's notions of Revelation, instead of, as now, to eat into its very substance.

The Author is satisfied that very much of the danger to which Christianity seems to be exposed from the most searching criticism, arises from the prevailing habit of confounding God's Revelation to man by Christ Jesus, with the Record of it which is contained in the Holy Scriptures. Men have gradually come to identify faith in the plenary inspiration of all the books of the Old and New Testaments with faith in Him who declared that "he who has seen ME hath seen the Father." They are more anxious to save the casket than the Pearl of great price which it encloses. The consequence is, that they place the evidence in support of Christianity, as a revelation of God, in a position of serious disadvantage. That Jesus Christ was the Anointed of God—that his mission was to show unto men the Father—and that it was inaugurated, recognised, and authenticated as divine, by "signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost," constitute a position capable of being sustained by consistent and overwhelming proof. But such proof is wholly independent of any

theories we may see reason to maintain as to the kind or degree of inspiration necessary to put men into possession of a true account of that mission, and to give them an accurate and sufficient interpretation of its spiritual significance. The writer, in the progress of his argument, has kept this fundamental distinction constantly before him, and, he presumes to think, with advantage to both questions. He has thereby, as it appears to him, gained a surer basis for faith, while he leaves to legitimate criticism as wide a sphere as reason can demand for it. His justification for doing so, such as it is, will be found in Part IV., of his treatise, under the general title of "The Record."

And now, having strongly repudiated what he understands to be the main purport of the *Essays and Reviews*, which, indeed, it was and is the object of the following pages to frustrate, the Author desires to express his belief that these productions, viewed apart from what is generally taken to be their principal design, lay before the Christian world many thoughts worthy of its calm consideration. Failing, as it is to be earnestly hoped they may fail, of their primary object, they are not ill-adapted to subserve some useful ends. They teach us some lessons needing to be learned. They smite down some idols unworthy of the homage we have paid them. And, above all, they warn us of the necessity of seeking for our faith a broad and deep foundation in admitted facts and universally recognised principles, rather than in traditional and conventional theories which shrink from the rough handling of rigid investigation. In these, and in some other respects, they may yet do some service—though whether such service, rendered in its present shape

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