

**FIVE SERMONS ON THE NATURE
OF CHRISTIANITY, PREACHED IN
ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS TIDE,
1846, BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY
OF CAMBRIDGE**

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Five Sermons on the Nature of Christianity, Preached in Advent and Christmas Tide, 1846,
Before the University of Cambridge by W. H. Mill

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University of Cambridge.

BY
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P R E F A C E.

THE topics opened in the first of the following Discourses, and pursued, but in particular and insulated illustrations, in those that follow in the series, might well admit a more thorough and methodic treatment. The preacher's consciousness of this must be his chief apology to those respected members of his University who have strongly desired this publication, for not having without some delay and vacillation thus given them at length in print, what he thought not unworthy of their attention from the pulpit.

The subject of development, though not so prominent before the public eye as when these Sermons were delivered, has lost nothing of its theological interest and importance. In the enlarged use of the word to which we have been lately familiarized,—there are some serious and earnest minds who would scruple acknowledging its reality, even in those successive economies of religion in which our greatest divines have recognized it, and which the gradual accomplishment of the Divine purposes in our redemption has distinguished as markedly and organically from each other, as the seed from the plant : there are those

who would suspect, as impeaching the immutability of the Divine law and purpose, a distinction which in reality implies no change in the Dispenser, but only in the capacities of the human recipient. Against such thinkers there is no distinct and formal argument in this volume: but the view opposed to theirs is implied throughout, and in the third and fourth Sermons particularly: while in the first and third it is expressly maintained against those who have gone out from us, that development, in this enlarged acceptance of the term, has no place in the final dispensation of Christianity.

In the assertion that the nature and genius of Christianity are to be sought in the *facts* it reveals to us,—and that in contradistinction to the conclusions or deductions which have been conceived to comprise the entire purport or idea of the facts,—some readers may think they see a verbal approximation to a theory on which the sentiment of the Church has been recently and powerfully expressed. The resemblance, as it will be readily seen, is verbal only: in the whole meaning attached to the words there is not only difference, but contrariety. For whereas the attempt of the present Discourses is to exhibit those facts in their definite dogmatic statement, as the Church has ever objectively contemplated them, and received her moral impress from them; the aim of that theory was to represent all endeavours at defining the facts as based on false philosophy, and to reduce us to an utter

indistinctness in the survey of them. The deductions which that theory deprecated were the definitions and statements by which the facts here asserted as supreme in the revelation were secured, in the progress of thought, from virtual contradiction: whereas the conclusions deprecated in these Sermons are those which set aside, or at least undervalue, the facts, in comparison with what is assumed to comprise all that is important in their spirit and purpose. It is scarcely possible to touch on some branches of this subject without coming into collision with several cherished views of later times: and though it has been the earnest desire of the author to avoid controversy, and most especially within the pale of our Church, he has not been so happy as to escape it.

It was not known to the Author till after his course was begun, that the Christmas Sermon was allotted by usage to the select preacher of December, as well as those for the Sundays preceding and following. This will account for the Sermon on the Nativity being placed after the Sermon on S. John, as not being in the order first contemplated. The publication of this has been requested, no less than of the other Sermons.

