

**FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES
OF GOD: VINDICATED FROM THE
ASPERSIONS OF PROFESSOR
JOWETT AND AUTHORS OF THE
RATIONALISTIC SCHOOL**

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First Principles of the Oracles of God: Vindicated from the Aspersions of Professor Jowett and Authors of the Rationalistic School by C. R. Alford

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BY THE

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INTRODUCTION.

THE inspired Apostle exhorts us—"As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith as ye have been taught." Col. ii. 6, 7. It is the established Christian that proves a real blessing to those around him, and, himself, apprehends and experiences the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. An unsettled state of mind is an evil greatly to be deplored, destructive of growth in grace, spiritual comfort and relative usefulness. To be "stablished in the faith" is indeed an inestimable blessing. The Christian Ministry was appointed not only for the conversion of sinners by the preaching of the gospel, but also, in the words of St. Paul, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of

Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed too and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Eph. iv. 12-14.

The distinguishing feature of much of the religious writing of the present day is its unsettling tendency. The most solemn and the plainest truths of the gospel are descanted upon with a learned pedantry and trifling freedom, and discussed in a spirit of irreverent enquiry, called "theological criticism," very flattering doubtless to that pride of heart which is natural to fallen man, but sadly prejudicial to the profitable study of Holy Scripture, and altogether foreign to the spirit of the precept, "Receive *with meekness* the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." James i. 21.

The objections raised are, generally, very similar in their character to those propounded by Dr. Priestley, and authors of the Socinian school, which have been long ago answered, in many important points, by Dr. Pye Smith and other apologists for sound doctrine. Much that is antagonistic to the

integrity of Holy Scripture has been borrowed from German critics whose works have obtained a circulation among ourselves, and it is deeply to be regretted that their spirit is becoming sadly prevalent in our English Biblical literature. Rationalistic publications of the present day, in our own country, suggest no new difficulties or arguments, and have, in fact, very little claim to originality. It is observed by a writer in the Quarterly Review, No. 195, p. 186., that even Professor Jowett's well known dissertation on the Atonement is taken almost verbatim et literatim from Coleridge's "Aids to Reflection," pp. 257-270, with this difference, that Coleridge in treating the subject "speaks with a reverential awe and gentleness of the received opinions, which Professor Jowett might, at least, have imitated."

And, if writings of this character do not possess the merit of originality, they certainly have not the charm of lucid exposition. The reader repeatedly peruses a paragraph; he think he understands it at last; but, when the author's meaning is supposed to have been with much difficulty ascertained, the reader discovers to his disappointment he has mastered some idea clothed in doubtful verbiage, with which he was long since familiar, or he finds some

thought suggested not worth remembering, — on which time was lost in the effort to apprehend it.

But the publications to which we refer are not merely unprofitable: They are positively mischievous. They demoralize the mind. Infidelity is represented as no sin, but rather as a justifiable difference of opinion. Thus, Professor Jowett's remarks on Dr. Baur's unscrupulous attack on the genuineness of 1 Thess: are altogether unworthy of the occasion. Not a word of rebuke or even regret is expressed on account of the hostile spirit of the critic. Infidelity herself is made to look respectable by the mild character of the reply. The inspiration of Holy Scripture and its supreme authority, as a Divine revelation, is virtually denied. And it may be doubted, — on consideration of the difficulties raised and left unanswered, the subtle insinuations made, the irreverent spirit of criticism displayed, the bold charges of error reiterated against the inspired writers of the New Testament, and all this connected with the high and influential position the author holds in the University of Oxford, — whether any work has ever issued from the press of this country, more calculated to serve the cause of infidelity than Professor Jowett's comments and dissertations. Not only is

Christian truth lost in a theological maze, and the reader left to adopt, as the teaching of Scripture, almost any form of error he may prefer, not only is religion divested of its saving power and sanctifying tendency, but the great facts and doctrines of the gospel, on which alone the sinner can build his hopes for eternity, are so beclouded in uncertainty, distorted by disputation, and reduced as to just proportion by a process of bold and heartless negation; nay, what are called "the subtle shafts of German criticism,"—rather, the hostile weapons of infidel attack, are so levelled at the very citadel of our faith, did we not know "the foundation of God standeth sure," we might almost tremble for its stability; and it is greatly to be feared that many a reader, unsettled and bewildered by such argumentation, may suffer much grievous loss and injury; it is well, at last, if he make not shipwreck of his faith.

It is a question of some difficulty how best to counteract the wide-spread mischief such publications necessarily diffuse. A minute examination of each comment and dissertation, with consecutive exposure of error, would necessitate a work too large for general perusal. It seems therefore preferable