

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EVANGELICISM

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The philosophy of evangelicism by Robert Brown

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ROBERT BROWN

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OF EVANGELICISM**



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Robert [✓]Brown

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON :
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1867.

PREFACE.

THE point sought to be established in this Essay is—that Christianity, considered as the doctrine of “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” is a primitive element in the world’s moral constitution.

But in order to maintain that position, Christian Faith must be shown to have the same INTUITIVE ORIGIN as our other moral ideas ; and this requires a right conception of the Christian sacrifice, for unless the IDEA of it be in accord with our other moral conceptions, it cannot be the subject of a moral intuition. Hence, for the purposes of this inquiry, we must extract the Christianity on which we are to experimentalize, not from creeds or crystalised *forms* of thought, but from the living conscience, from the Christian heart. Such is the Christianity to which, in our title page, we have given the name of Evangelicism.

It has been too readily taken for granted, that the peculiarities of the evangelical system are out of harmony with natural religion. We believe the reverse to be the fact. And feeling assured that

good service would be rendered to the cause of moral and religious progress, could we establish to the general satisfaction the truth of our conviction, we ventured, in the first edition of this work, to solicit for our argument the honour of its perusal.

Having since carefully revised our first effort, and applied to it a severe censorship, re-arranging the order of thought, and eliminating everything which seemed extraneous, we again offer the argument, reconstructed and amplified, to public consideration.

Placed between two extremes, with neither of which we can entirely sympathise, there is some danger of our sharing the not unusual fate of men of no party. Strict dogmatists, whether so on conviction, or because bound by subscription to ecclesiastical formulas, are apt to turn away with repugnance from a method of investigation which partakes of the nature of free enquiry. And the lovers of free enquiry are not generally disposed to look with complacency on those who maintain evangelical opinions. Hence it is not improbable that we shall be repudiated by both, without either of them taking the trouble to look through our pages with sufficient care to enable them to give reasons for their judgment.

There lies, however, between these two extremes a large independent and intelligent middle class

who, alike heedless of ecclesiastical dictation and superior to sceptical querulousness, are earnest enquirers after truth—come from what quarter it may. To such, then, we make our appeal; and especially to that portion of the religious public which feels itself unsettled by existing controversies, and participates with us in the growing persuasion that, if we would escape an irrational Charybdis, we have no alternative but to encounter a rational Scylla.

Many attempts have been made in this direction, but, so far as we are aware, there has been in all of them a toning down of strict evangelicism to meet the supposed conditions of the question. Now, that is no part of our purpose. On the contrary, the evangel of St. Paul and of the Olden Times has, we think, been already toned down and disfigured by the Lockian transmutation to which scholastic theology has subjected it; and its restoration to its Pauline simplicity and glory is a primary step, essential to the object we contemplate.

Among the many who may deem our design laudable, it is probable that there will be not a few who, from having been long accustomed so to think, will, in anticipation, pronounce it impracticable. But let not those who concur with us in opinion that success is extremely desirable, be in haste to despair. Even a forlorn hope has chances in its

favour; and upon such a topic nothing can be won without patient perseverance. Having taxed our powers to render a subtle argument clear, consecutive, and conclusive, whether we have succeeded or failed, its very difficulty will have charms for genuine thinkers, to say nothing of its unquestionable importance. And should we be fortunate enough to engage the co-operation of minds capable of thoroughly grappling with the subject, it will be a gratification to us, next to having our views confirmed, to see error *detected*, if error exist.

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ERRATUM.

*Page 222 line 7: strike out comma, and read—*theoretical consistency requires, &c.