

**THE NEW AFFINITIES OF
FAITH: A PLEA FOR
FREE CHRISTIAN UNION
(PP.1-38 NOT COMPLETE)**

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F.M.U.

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BY

JAMES MARTINEAU.



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TO THE READER.

THE relation between the Free Christian Union and the writers whose essays may appear under its name, will readily be inferred from its fundamental principle, of spiritual fellowship with mental independence. Each writer may be presumed to approve of the design and basis of the Union; but the Union does not, conversely, assume responsibility for his individual judgments or reasonings. If its object were to recommend the opinions of a school, care would be taken to secure consistency of exposition and harmony of impression in its several productions. But, aiming as it does to release Christian Unity from the obligation of intellectual uniformity, it will rather welcome than reject the opportunity of presenting under various aspects the subjects with which its publications deal, and of helping the reader, by the influx of comparative lights, to more effective thought and larger sympathy.

Lib. of G. Carl Huber
3-25-47

THE
NEW AFFINITIES OF FAITH.

FOREIGNERS have often complained of the intricacy of English religious phenomena. The present age is eliciting from the confusion two conspicuous features: a return of Sacerdotal usage, and the erection of an ideal of secular good into a systematic faith. The first is seen not merely in the recovered vigour of Romanism, but in the ritual and monastic movement within the Anglican Church: for, however many may be drawn into this by æsthetic sentiment and the charm of sacred symbolism, it has no ultimate meaning or defence except in the doctrine of sacramental and priestly mediation. The second is seen in the denial or despair of religious truth which characterizes the scientific temper of the day, as well as in the humanistic philosophy which aims to perfect life and society with omission of their Divine relations. These two powers are undeniably burning away the Protestantism of England at its opposite ends; the one attacking dependent and susceptible minds among the educated classes, and kindling them with a new fire of devotion

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and self-sacrifice; the other taking hold of the independent and dissatisfied artisan, and wrapping him in dreams of physical well-being. Did we look at the progress of these two forces alone, we might fancy our world surrendered to the alternative so often threatened, "*Rome, or Atheism.*"

But between these extremes lies the main substance and life of English society, including an immense mass of religious character and sentiment, which has affinity with neither of them. It needs the faith of a Manning or a Comte to believe that the Scotland of Knox, and the England of Cranmer and the Puritans, can either reverse three centuries of their history, or recant the whole of their religion. Take them collectively, their future development of thought will be not away from the direction of their past genius, but out of it, carrying them into ulterior applications of principles which it is too late to contradict. Individual stragglers, however, from the main body of our national Christendom are without doubt increasingly numerous; and from these it is that the two extremes are rapidly recruiting their strength. Whence this change of relative forces? What is it that has weakened the attraction of the central mass of English Christianity? or has added new persuasive power to a religion discarded in the sixteenth century, and an irreligion out-lived in the eighteenth?

It cannot be pretended that the Priesthood and the Papacy have any fresh title to show, or can make good their supernatural claims better than before. Nor can

it be said that Nature and Humanity, more deeply known, look less Divine; since it is the very pride of science to have won more room for them in space and time, and to have found them grander, older, more progressive, than any one had dreamed. So far as the intrinsic merits of their own case go, Priest and Atheist had never less excuse than now. But weakness in the intermediate faiths is tantamount to strength in them. The Reformation did the work of its time, but not of all time: it shifted the authority, without essentially remodelling the inherited theory, of Christianity; and embodied the old scheme of theological thought in its new ecclesiastical constitutions. Nay, in its recoil from shameless laxities, and its jealousy for the Divine holiness, it increased the rigour of the older definitions; it deepened the chasm between man and God, and cast into the abyss every bridge of approach except its own hair-line of transit. Its doctrine of human nature announced a ruin more absolute, and its provision of supernatural grace promised a rescue more precarious and arbitrary, than could permanently accord with the experience and conscience of mankind. Deep as are Augustine's occasional glances into the passionate depths of the soul, scarcely are his reasonings against the possibility of antipodes more out of place in the present age, than his theory of the moral and spiritual universe, which was crystallized in the creeds of the Reformed Churches. It may be doubted whether, if it rested on an unimpeachable authority, it could retain its life in the open

air of modern sympathies and relations. But, dependent as it is on the legends of the Creation and the Fall, and on the Pauline reasonings which proceed upon them, it has been weakened, by the progress of Biblical criticism, in its external supports, whilst losing its internal credibility. The result is too notorious to be concealed, and too serious to be let alone. There is an extensive loosening of belief in the "schemes of salvation," which Protestant Churches are constructed to administer; an uneasiness in preachers who cannot enforce them without consciously refining them away, and in hearers to whom they bring no real conviction; a mutual understanding to lower the standard of religious veracity, and not ask too much sincerity in profession or in prayer. It is no longer an insult to a clergyman's honour, but rather a compliment to his intelligence, to suspect him of saying one thing and believing another: while the layman, who needs say nothing, uses a right of reticence which no earnest conviction ever claimed. The theology which is supposed to be the sole directing light of human life, and which once tintured the whole language of human intercourse, takes refuge in ecclesiastical courts and sectarian newspapers, retains a special order of writers to recommend it, and a select number of publishers to distribute it: while the teeming mass of spontaneous literature throws up no trace of it, and freely treats of social, moral, and scientific questions on principles silently at variance with it.

These are symptoms of weakened cohesion and im-

paired life in a system once compact and vigorous. Side by side with them appear evident marks of new religious sympathies, and the promise of more natural combinations. Theological groups are breaking up not simply by disintegration from within, but by an unexpected play of mutual attractions. Far apart on the great circles of belief lights have appeared which it is impossible to deny are lights of heaven. Is there a man at once intellectual and devout, in any land where the English language is spoken, who does not own spiritual obligations to *both* the Newman? or who has not on his choicest shelf both the "*Christian Year*" and the "*In Memoriam*"? Is not Mr. Maurice revered as a deliverer by numbers of people, both more and less orthodox than himself? In what cultivated home of English religion has Frederick Robertson not preached his word of power? How little has the repute of "unsoundness" thinned the mixed multitude which throngs to hear every word of a Stanley or a Jowett? Even Scotland feels the stirrings of the new spirit. It is no longer divided into two encampments,—the children of nature under Burns,—the children of grace under Knox; but, gathering the best minds of the land around such men as Lee, Caird, Tulloch, Macleod, and Wallace, renders its divinity so humane, and its humanity so devout, as to abash the ancient rigour and win over the irreverence it provoked. And this tendency to fusion and readjustment is no mere latitudinarian compromise, the result of indifference or artificial concession, and