

**NEWMANIANISM: A
PREFACE TO THE
SECOND EDITION
OF PHILOMYTHUS**

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Newmanianism: A Preface to the Second Edition of Philomythus by Edwin A. Abbott

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EDWIN A. ABBOTT

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NEWMANIANISM

A PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION
OF PHILOMYTHUS

CONTAINING
A REPLY TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR"
A FEW WORDS TO MR. WILFRID WARD
AND SOME REMARKS ON MR. R. H. HUTTON'S
"CARDINAL NEWMAN"

BY
EDWIN A. ABBOTT

[The Author, having regard to the circumstances in which a controversy, provoked by the Editor of the "Spectator," was "closed" by the latter, invites the attention of the Press to the question; and places at the disposal of the Editors of any Periodicals, literary or otherwise, such portions as they may desire to reproduce in their columns.]

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AND NEW YORK
1891

CORRIGENDA.

- P. 4, last line, for *quoting*, read *alleging*.
- P. 5, foot-note, last line but two, *dele* "rather," and for "tradition" read "*tradition (sic)*."
- P. 223, last line but six, *dele* inverted commas before "prominent."
- P. 229, last line but four, for "preface," read "extract."
- P. 240, lines six and foll., for *yes . . . it*, read *no*, not "*carefully*," unless the word could apply to the unconscious care and instinctive caution of a born rhetorician.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

§ 1. *The Motive of the Author*

THIS book was originally meant to be a chapter in a larger work on Newman; and the intention was to compress into it most of the severe things which, in common honesty, it seemed needful to say about Newman's use of words and evidence in controversy, so as to leave freedom for a more sympathetic treatment of the subject as a whole in the rest of the work.

But, on investigation, the grounds for censure appeared much larger than I had anticipated; and, when I came to study the *Essay on Ecclesiastical Miracles*, the mental and almost moral shock which I received from that portentous work—and from the amazing fact that it had been thought well to reprint such a production in the year 1890—caused my single chapter to grow first into several chapters and ultimately into a separate volume.

My book is intended as an attack, not against Newman himself, but against the whole of that theological "system

of safety" which would pollute the intellect with the suggestion that it is "safe" to say this, and "unsafe" to say that, about alleged historical facts. In answer to someone who had reported a saying that Cardinal (then Dr.) Wiseman "was an unscrupulous controversialist," Newman replied (*Letters* ii. 324) "I daresay he is. But who is not?" How strange an avowal, almost amounting to a condonation! And yet, is it not true? Is it not a fact—though a portentous fact—that men are expected to argue with scrupulous honesty about Thucydides or Aristotle, but not about the facts of the Bible or the history of the Christian Church? My war, then, is not with Newman, but with the system which Newman in these words (perhaps unconsciously) condemns.

Such letters as I have received already (within little more than a fortnight from the date of publication), from eminent men well fitted to weigh evidence and to discuss the special questions here treated, lead me to hope that my book is not only substantially accurate but also helpful to the cause of religious truth. But it was of course impossible to attempt to dispel that kind of legendary exaggeration which had gradually attached itself to the popular estimate of Newman's work, without giving pain to some of his admirers.

When a man of such high intellectual standing as Mr. R. H. Hutton, could quote passage after passage from Newman's works—passages teeming with fallacies or with expressions leading to erroneous conclusions—with an approval which, when combined with the intrinsic plausibility of the quota-

tions, imposes upon multitudes of readers (among whom the present writer must confess that he was, at first, one); and when so able a critic could bring himself to use the words "sobriety" and "discrimination" in connection with one of Newman's so-called "inquiries" into an alleged ecclesiastical miracle, it seemed clear that something must be done, and no less clear that nothing useful could be done without giving offence to some whom one was very loath to offend, but who were so blinded by Newman's magnetic influence that, in criticizing his works, they had lost all power of distinguishing truth from untruth.

§ 2. *The Criticism of the "Spectator"*

Hitherto, however, among many criticisms from the press, the Editor of the *Spectator* has been unique in accusing me of "unfairness"; and I trust—having regard to the good fame of British journalism—that he will remain unique in having accused me of *insincerity*. The latter accusation has indeed been withdrawn, but in so grudging a spirit as to make the recantation almost worse than the original offence: "*We suppose we had no right to say*"—here, as elsewhere, the italics are mine—"that we did not believe him to be quite sincere in denying that Newman was guilty of conscious insincerity, and we withdraw the statement" (*Spectator*, 25th April, 1891).

The accusations of "unfairness" are not withdrawn. But their insignificance may be estimated from a single specimen.

The Editor accused me of ignoring the fact that "*at the time these Essays were published*" (meaning Newman's two Essays on miracles) there was not "*any of the ground*" which exists now for attributing cures to "faith-healing." In my reply I showed, first, that in the expression italicized above he had *confused together* (and this, not once, but thrice) two quite distinct Essays, of which one was published by Newman as a Protestant, and the other about sixteen or seventeen years afterwards when he was on the verge of Romanism: I then showed that, even in the earlier Essay, Newman definitely recognized some so-called miraculous cures "as possible *effects of an excited imagination*;" I added that *a fortiori*, with the growth of science, sixteen or seventeen years afterwards, there would be still more of that "ground" of which the very existence had been denied by my censor, and I invited him to reconsider his charge of "unfairness." But it remains unwithdrawn. That being the case, it seems well to place upon record this instance of the degree to which a critic of some repute may be biassed by what he has himself described as "five-and-twenty years' study of Newman."

I *could* not sincerely call Newman dishonest or deliberately insincere. It would appear, to me at all events, a gross psychological blunder—intellectually, as well as morally, offensive.¹ That subtlety and tortuosity of mind which

¹ On the same grounds on which the *Spectator* charged me with insincerity, they might impute insincerity to Coleridge, who, in his lectures on Shakespeare, maintains that Hamlet is deceiving himself, and