

PREFACE TO THE NINTH EDITION

In response to appeals from various quarters, this book is once again reissued. Its importance is enhanced by the vagaries of religious thought in our day, and notably by the growth of certain religious movements which claim to be accredited by "miraculous" spiritual manifestations.

As the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches, certain great truths which are generally regarded as distinctively Christian were common to the Divine religion of Judaism upon which Christianity is based. And as the opening words of Romans remind us, "The gospel of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" was "promised afore" in Hebrew prophecy. The most distinctive truth of the Christian revelation is Grace enthroned. And that truth was lost in the interval that elapsed between the close of the New Testament Canon and the era of the Patristic theologians. That He to whom the prerogative of judgment has been committed is now sitting upon the throne of God in grace, and that, as a consequence, all judicial and punitive action against human sin is in abeyance--deferred until the day of grace is over and the day of judgment dawns--this is a truth that will be sought for in vain in the standard theology of Christendom.

"My gospel" the Apostle Paul calls it, for it was through him that this truth was revealed--not the gospel "promised afore," but "the preaching of Christ according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began."¹

Even among men, the wise and strong keep silence when they have said all they wish to say. And as this gospel of grace is the supreme revelation of Divine mercy to the world, the silence of heaven will remain unbroken until the Lord Jesus passes from the throne of grace to the throne of judgment.

It is not that the Divine moral Government of the world is in abeyance. Still less is it that *spiritual* miracles have ceased. For in our day the gospel has achieved triumphs in heathendom which transcend anything recorded in the New Testament. Infidelity is thus confronted by miracles of a kind that give far surer proof of the presence and power of God than any miracle in the natural sphere could offer--hearts so entirely changed and lives so thoroughly transformed that fierce, brutal and degraded savages have become humble, pure-living, and gracious.

But the argument of these pages is that what may be called *evidential* miracles have no place in this "Christian dispensation." In the ages before Christ came, men may well have craved tokens of the action of a personal God. But in the ministry and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has so plainly manifested not only His power, but His goodness and love toward man, that to grant evidential miracles now would be an acknowledgment that questions which have been forever settled are still open.

¹ Rom. 16:25. The word "mystery" in the Epistles means "not a thing unintelligible, but what lies hidden and secret till made known by the revelation of God." This gospel must therefore be distinguished from that of Rom. 1:1-3.

No one may limit what God will do in response to individual faith. But we may confidently assert that, in view of His supreme revelation in Christ, God will yield nothing to the petulant demands of unbelief. And that revelation supplies the key to the dual mystery of a silent heaven and the trials of the life of faith on earth. This forward is given for the benefit of persons who skim a book instead of reading it.

R.A.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In his introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne descants feelingly upon his incapacity for literary effort during the years in which he held an appointment in the Custom House. But there are spheres of work in the Public Service compared with which the Custom House might seem almost a sanctuary! And having regard to the circumstances in which the present volume was written, the demand for a new edition within a few weeks of its first appearance gives striking proof of deep and widespread interest in the subject of which it treats.

Conflicting criticisms have been passed upon the structure of the book. In the opinion of some, the middle chapters embarrass the argument, and ought to be omitted or curtailed. Others, again, have strongly urged that these very chapters should be amplified, and definite additions made to them. These seemingly contradictory suggestions are both alike legitimate. To a very limited class, such incidental dissertations seem unnecessary, and the mere critic turns from them with impatience; but in the estimation of the great majority of readers, they are of exceptional interest. The ninth and eleventh chapters, for example, which might perhaps have been excluded, seem to have attracted special notice.

It must not be forgotten, moreover, that, unlike those doctrines which belong to the Christian dispensation in common with that which preceded it, the great characteristic truth of Christianity is ignored by the religion of Christendom, and receives but scant attention even in our best religious literature. It is of vital moment, therefore, to unfold here its character and scope, and to emphasize its transcendent importance. Indeed it will probably be found that the reader's appreciation of the argument will be precisely in proportion to his apprehension of this truth.

One of the leading daily papers, for instance, informs its readers that the author "finds the sufficient cause of the silence in the doctrine of the Atonement." And another journal--a Review of the highest class²--indicates as the "main contention" of the book "that the Christian facts supply an adequate explanation of the 'Silence of God.'" It might *a priori* seem impossible that anyone could so misread these pages; but the preceding paragraph may perhaps account for the phenomenon. "The Atonement" is not a specially *Christian* doctrine at all; it holds as prominent a place in Judaism as in Christianity. And the author's "contention," most plainly expressed, is that "the Christian facts," so far from explaining the silence of Heaven, seem only to render it still more inexplicable.

In the judgment of this last-cited critic, the intensely Protestant and Christian position maintained throughout this volume is nothing more than a "peculiar view of Scripture as a supreme guide in matters of faith and speculation." And writing from the standpoint this indicates, his strictures are, of course, unsympathetic and severe. Nor can the author complain of this; for one who deals hard blows should expect hard blows in return. But there should be no "hitting below the belt." The impartial reader can decide whether

2 "Literature."

these pages afford even a colorable [seemingly valid] pretext for the charge of "occasional departures from reverence." And no less unwarrantable is the allegation that Mr. Balfour is here referred to in "a patronizing tone." Considerable freedom, indeed, is used in criticizing the arguments of a still more distinguished man. But the author's misgivings upon that score have been relieved by receiving a letter from Mr. Gladstone himself. "I am very glad," he writes, "that those arguments should be thoroughly canvassed by persons so well disposed and competent as yourself."

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