

May 14, 1881.]

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of plodding perseverance should be reserved rather for duties than for pleasures, and that we have expressly stated that Hobbies are not to be included in the category of duties; and, secondly, that when a person takes up a subject enthusiastically for a short while, and really devotes himself to it *con amore*, the probability is that he will accomplish as much solid work in the way of increasing his knowledge, forwarding his education, and improving his character during that temporary ardour, as he would have done during a longer, steadier, and less vehement study of the same subject. If you have a certain number of colours to wear in a life-time, it will not make much difference whether you choose to wear them all simultaneously or only one at a time, without ever allowing a second to appear side by side with whatever may be the favourite hue of the moment; and will not the same rule hold good in regard to the various phases through which the mind has to pass?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND THE OATH.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR".]

SIR,—The illegality of the recent proceedings of the House of Commons in the Bradlaugh case is, in the eyes of lawyers not blinded by party spirit, too obvious for discussion. But perhaps some of your readers who are not lawyers may be interested by a short statement of the proceedings in the celebrated, or, as lawyers would call them, the leading cases, of O'Connell and Baron de Rothschild. What was done in these cases (in O'Connell's case, under the advice of some of the most famous lawyers who ever sat in Parliament) puts in the strongest light the gigantic innovation practised by the present House of Commons in the Bradlaugh case.

O'Connell, having been elected for the county of Clare, presented himself at the table of the House of Commons on May 15th, 1829 ("Hansard," New Series, Vol. XXI., p. 1378), and having had tendered to him the oaths of Allegiance, Supremacy, and Abjuration, stated that he was ready to take the oaths of Allegiance and Abjuration, but not the oath of Supremacy; and claimed to take the substituted oath provided by the Roman Catholic Relief Act, which had been passed since the date of his election. Being heard (on May 18th) at the Bar of the House in support of this claim, he over and over again avowed himself a Roman Catholic; and, of course, in the mouth of a Roman Catholic the old Oath of Supremacy would have been an utter profanation. Of the great lawyers who were in Parliament at that day—Wetherall, Tindal, Sugden, Scarlett, Doherty, and Brougham—all except Wetherall took part in the debate which followed, and none of them except Brougham maintained that O'Connell was entitled to take the oath provided by the Roman Catholic Relief Act; but they one and all took for granted his right to take the old oaths, if only he were willing to take them. Sir Edward Sugden (afterwards Lord St. Leonard's) expressly discussed the case of a man taking oaths unconscientiously for the purpose of sitting in Parliament; and while defending tests, admitted that the only security against such an evasion of a test was the reprobation that would follow. "Suppose, for instance," he said ("Hansard," same volume, pp. 1435-36), "a man to be a Roman Catholic, and under the old law, to come in and take the oaths at their table, was it likely that the experiment would not cost such a person his caste, and that his fellow-Catholics would not instantly expel him, and refuse him the hand of fellowship? Tests, therefore, detected the individual, because he could not venture to evade them with impunity; and that was at once their justification, and the reason of their imposition." In entire conformity with these views, the House resolved that O'Connell was not entitled to sit or vote unless he first took the Oath of Supremacy; and it was ordered that he should attend the House, and that the Speaker should "communicate to him the said resolution, and ask him" (him, an avowed Roman Catholic, and believer in the spiritual supremacy of the Pope) "whether he will take the Oath of Supremacy." ("Hansard," same volume, pp. 1425-1459.)

O'Connell, as is well known, refused to take this oath, and after being re-elected for Clare, took the substituted oath provided by the Roman Catholic Relief Act. Precisely similar in principle were the proceedings in the case of Baron de Rothschild. On July 28th, 1850, the Baron, who had some time previously been elected for the City of London, presented

himself to be sworn at the table of the House of Commons, and on the oaths being tendered to him, claimed to be sworn upon the Old Testament. ("Hansard," Third Series, Vol. CXIII., p. 297.) After much debate, proceeding almost entirely on the assumption that the Baron was of the Jewish faith, and on the question whether Jews ought to be admitted to sit in Parliament, it was on July 29th ordered that the Baron should be sworn on the Old Testament, and on the day following he took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy accordingly. The Clerk then proceeded to administer the oath of abjuration, which the Baron repeated as far as the words, "Upon the true faith of a Christian," but upon these words being read, he stated that he omitted them, as not binding on his conscience. Thereupon the House of Commons did not act as it has done in Mr. Bradlaugh's case, and say to the Baron, "You are a Jew, and it would be a profanation for you to swear, as the law requires you, on the true faith of a Christian, and therefore you shall not be admitted to be sworn at all." No such course was proposed, even by the most vehement opponents of the admission of Jews to Parliament. The principle acted on in O'Connell's case was recognised as established beyond question, and it was resolved that the Baron was not entitled to vote or sit in the House until he should "take the oath of abjuration in the form appointed by law." ("Hansard," Third Series, Vol. CXIII., pp. 770-771-813.)

It certainly seems most objectionable that oaths should be tendered indiscriminately, as now required by law, to all Members of Parliament, men of every possible variety of religious conviction, and want of conviction. But the remedy for this evil is not to be sought in any capricious usurpation of power by the House of Commons for the time being, but in the passing of an Act of Parliament putting the law on a more reasonable footing.

Meanwhile, it is not surprising that some of the ablest lawyers and most upright men amongst the Conservatives in the present House of Commons hold entirely aloof from the action of their party in the Bradlaugh case.—I am, Sir, &c.,

A RETIRED BARRISTER.

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF TOLERATION.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR".]

SIR,—You say, with reference to what I must call the most unhappy attempt to enforce Theism or Deism as a necessary condition for the exercise of political rights, that it is the act of partisans to visit on unbelief penalties of a kind which, so far as we can see, God himself does not visit on it. But may we not go considerably further? Is not this rather what God has distinctly forbidden, at least by necessary implication, when our Lord said in the Garden, "They that take the sword, shall perish by the sword?" An hour or two previously, the same Master had commanded, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." That is, plainly, the power of the sword was to be exercised in defence of civil right, but never of religious truth. Self-defence, then, is lawful; but we may not enforce orthodoxy of opinion as a condition of political rights. So to do is to persecute, and persecution is declared to be not only unlawful, but the source of ultimate injury and possible ruin to the persecutor. To persecute in the name of any truth is to impair men's sense of that truth, and create a prejudice against it. Let us not do this injury to natural, any more than to revealed religion.—I am, Sir, &c.,

The Vicarage, Rhayader, May 11th.

ARCHER GURNEY.

THE DUTIES OF A BIOGRAPHER.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR".]

SIR,—Will you allow me, without repeating here what I have said elsewhere, to take occasion, from a passing allusion in your columns to my writing in order to say a few words on a subject unquestionably interesting and important to all readers? The responsibilities of those who minister to the most universal taste in literature, seem to me well worthy of attentive consideration; and if an unfortunate exercise of these responsibilities be the means of awakening us to their true character, a grave literary misfortune will not be without its compensation.

It is doubtless the feeling of others at this time, as well as of your reviewer, that History, to which, in some sense, every record of a life must be considered a contribution, whatever else it is, must first of all be true; that if we are to know anything about a great man, we must know his faults; and that if the

ideal of a biographer is that of sheltering his hero's infirmities from observation, then much of what he says of his hero's strength will lose its meaning. In all of which there seems to me much truth, and the reasons which prevent its being applicable to the particular illustration now in the mind of every one need not be repeated here. It is doubtless important that we should know the errors of a teacher. They teach us much concerning his doctrine. Sometimes they show us its weakness. Sometimes they show us not so much the weakness of a particular doctrine, as the weakness of all doctrine. They exhibit to us afresh a danger to which I believe we are all insufficiently alive—that of mistaking a profound insight into moral truth for a practical illustration of moral truth. We shall fail in due indulgence to men of genius, unless we remember the mighty exercise of will necessary to keep moral energy from being absorbed in mere discernment, where discernment is so active and penetrating a mode of energy as it is in a great moral teacher. Thus if the preacher of endurance failed in exercising endurance himself, if he who taught that silence is golden put into written words much that should not have been put into any words, if one whose life seemed to lead to all large and lofty interest stir up, by his posthumous writings, a perfect storm of gossip,—then, amid all the vicarious shame awakened by such a revelation, we may draw from it this gain,—that we shall look with more indulgence, more pity, less subtraction of reverence, on every teacher whose life illustrates his warnings rather than his precepts. In this particular case, I think the lesson has been bought too dear, and that, at all events, it should not have been given by the person who has given it; but it remains true, all the same.

But while conceding this most fully—while avowing a wish, indeed, that it were more acted on than it sometimes is, by those who set forth to the world the life of a great man—I must own that it seems to me very dangerous to remember the importance of truth, without remembering some other things that cannot be expressed so simply. J. S. Mill somewhere quotes with sympathy a logician who, when asked to concede that three and four made seven, said he should like, first, to know what use was to be made of the admission. I think the logician was over-scrupulous, only because, however different we may be, we all mean the same thing by three, by seven, and by four. And so, it may be urged, we all mean the same thing by Truth. I do not think so. I think the great heresy of our day is the belief that truth and knowledge are synonymous. There are many facts which, as facts, are of course a contribution to knowledge, but which, in order to become a contribution to truth, need a background that none can supply but One to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid. There are few lives, I believe, in which the endeavour to tell all that can be told would result in a true picture of the character portrayed. I will take an imaginary instance, for these principles are meaningless till they are illustrated. I will suppose that a biographer discovers his hero to have failed in some important relation of life. The perusal of his private papers, let us suppose, reveals discord and disaster in the home. Of course, there are cases in which, to set forth any picture of the life at all, leaving out some disaster of this kind, would be to tell the story untruly. And it is equally true that if this part of the story could be told truly, it would teach us to know better the person whom the biographer seeks to reveal to us. Nevertheless, I think it is rarely well that he should seek to lift a curtain that was drawn before any part of the life. It is rarely necessary. These intimate recesses of a life may be left in shadow, without any injury to the picture of that portion with which alone the public has any concern. It is rarely possible. In these invasions of privacy, we come upon one-sided accounts and expressions of transitory and distorted feeling, all of which contain, no doubt, some information as to the character of the persons involved, but information which may be quite misleading, apart from much else that is unattainable. Of course, there are some lives (I think, not many) where a biographer has no choice but to enter on a man's private relations; it may be necessary, in order to explain what is already before the world. But I should like to see an estimate of the difficulty and danger in the attempt, such as should make it a rare thing; and I do not believe truth would be any loser by this kind of reticence. There are many parts of a man's life of which we can never know all, and of which, till we do know all, we are far nearer the truth in knowing nothing.

The foregoing remarks, whatever their force or weakness,

will not be thought applicable to the specimen of biography or autobiography now fresh in the mind of every one; and as I have said what I think of that elsewhere, it is partly on that account I venture to trouble you with them. However, I am afraid the "Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle" illustrate quite as forcibly as any book that ever was written the degree to which we ordinary readers are responsible for these hasty and ill-judged publications. Exactly where an editor should become wary, we become eager. Exactly what it least imports us to know, we are most eager to learn. "Z is the greatest fool of my acquaintance," writes an eminent man in a private letter. When his biographer comes to edit his letters, "Z" has probably lost even the small interest attaching to him in his lifetime; nevertheless, there is always a strong temptation to let these sentences stand. The memoirs which are full of them (supposing that the persons to whom they refer belong to a certain social stratum) will always secure readers. Poor Z changes from an initial to a conundrum, and people who have leisure for such speculations go about asking who he was, and get much entertainment from the riddle. While the ordinary reader offers this kind of bribe, we must not expect the ordinary editor to be above corruption. If his object be to get his book widely read, no doubt he should let every personal remark stand; and ill-nature will prove quite as effective a seasoning as wit, for which, indeed, it is often mistaken. But do not let us, therefore, make a confession of our own pettiness without shame, and erect a love of gossip among readers into a standard of judgment among critics of literature.—I am, Sir, &c., JULIA WEDGWOOD.

THE VOTING AT YORK.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR."]

SIR,—Permit me to take exception to some of the positions of your leading article on the voting at York on Bishop Fraser's proposal to abolish the Ornaments Rubric, and to stereotype the usage of the last two hundred years. Had I been there, I should have voted with the small majority of the Lower House which rejected the measure.

In the first place, the Bishop's allegation that the Rubric is "ambiguous" is not true, but a false issue, raised from a partisan motive. The Judicial Committee of Privy Council declared in 1857 that all the Ornaments Rubrics and Statutes from 1559 to 1661 "*obviously* mean the same thing, that the same dresses and the same utensils or articles which were used under the first Prayer-book of Edward VI. may still be used." And Sir J. T. Coleridge, in a letter he addressed to Canon Liddon on the Purchas judgment, said thus:—"The clause [of the Act] in question (by which I mean the Rubric in question) is *perfectly unambiguous* in language, free from all difficulty as to construction."

In the second place, I must dispute your compliment to the Bishops on their "statesmanship." I should have thought that, next to moral courage, there is no quality in which they have collectively been so deficient ever since the Revolution. You have yourself, over and over again, censured the foolish impolicy of the Public Worship Regulation Act; but it was an Episcopal measure, readily accepted by the great majority of the Bishops, even after Lord Shaftesbury and Lord Cairns had turned it into a Puritan purge. And on the only occasion in my memory when all their Lordships united in a manifesto, it was to denounce Sunday trains; while they had not one word of compassion for the artisan shut up all the week in close and unhealthy quarters, nor a suggestion of how he was to get a little fresh air, even once a week. I may remind you, too, that every one of those reforms and improvements which have been effected by the Church Revival in England during the last forty years has been won in the teeth of the most dogged and vituperative opposition from the Episcopate.

I must again dispute your thesis that what the Courts lay down as the law is the law. That is a very good general maxim, but it does not hold good in the case of fraudulent attempts to set aside the law, such as the Purchas and Ridsdale judgments. One clause in a will or any similar document which proves fraud vitiates the whole document, and brands it as a forgery. The false date of Bishop Cosin's Articles and the double interpretation of the word "only" settle the point for the Purchas judgment; while the allegation of the Archbishop's Advertisements of 1564 as Royal, in despite of the disclaimers of Archbishop Parker and Secretary Cecil (which were before the Court), and then the assertion that they must be "read into" a Rubric which studiously omits that reference to the Act