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ARTICLE I.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OPINIONS.

*The Eclipse of Faith; a Visit to a Religious Skeptic.—*  
*Third Edition. Boston: Crosby Nichols & Co., 111*  
*Washington-street: 1853.*

*Reason and Faith, and other Miscellanies of Henry Ro-*  
*gers, author of Eclipse of Faith. Boston: Crosby Ni-*  
*chols & Co. New-York: Charles S. Francis & Co.*  
*1853.*

The last named of these two volumes is made up of contributions to the Edinburgh Review, by one of its ablest recent writers. These essays are all valuable, and it is a great convenience to have them thus collected into a volume. That on the "Vanity and Glory of Literature," is worthy of the fine scholarship of the author, and presents to scholars many important lessons, both of hope and humility. The essays on the "Genius and Writings of Pascal," and on "Reason and Faith, their claims and conflicts," may, in this day, when Christianity has to meet her adversaries on a new arena, be read with advantage by all students of the Evidences. And the articles on "Luther's correspondence and character," is just such a tribute to the grandeur and nobleness of the Reformer's mind and life as we like to see. The author's views are produced in the form of an examination of Hallam's Critique upon Luther's intellect and writings. We think he demonstrates that Hallam's "excellent and well-practised judgment deserted him in this instance."

torious. A few minutes before the first shot was fired in the terrible battle of Trafalgar, Nelson retired to his cabin and wrote a prayer, which is still preserved. He returned to the deck calm and cheerful, and mused a few moments as to what should be the signal for the day. The hero in whose mind, duty as taught in the Bible, was ever uppermost, could not long hesitate, but soon ran up to the mast-head the signal, which beyond all doubt, decided the contest that day, and which will be remembered as long as the English language is spoken: "*England expects every man to do his duty.*"

He fell mortally wounded early in the action, but lingered until victory was no longer doubtful. His last words were, "Thank God, I have done my duty."

Brief as has been our glance at the Bible and its influence upon national character, we have seen enough to endorse the tribute of admiration reluctantly extorted from the infidel Rousseau:

"I will confess to you that the majesty of the Scriptures strikes me with admiration. \* \* \* Peruse the works of our Philosophers with all their pomp of diction; how mean, how contemptible are they compared with the Scriptures? Is it possible that a book at once so simple and sublime should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred Personage, whose history it contains should be himself a mere man? \* \* \* Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty without obviating it: *it is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such a history, than that one should furnish the subject of it.*"

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## ARTICLE VI.

### CONSOLATION.

Philosophers tell us, that at different depths in the ocean different currents flow; beneath the flood of the gulf stream ebbs a southward tide; thus the balance and level of the waters is maintained. So in the air, we see

the clouds that float at different elevations drifted in opposite directions. And it is not wonderful, therefore, if we find cross currents of truth and reason in this world of providence where we dwell. He who looks at the surface only, finds certain tendencies in the facts,—they seem to draw him to one set of conclusions: he who goes a little deeper is carried elsewhere by his reasonings, while the mind and thought of God may seem to set all human speculation and conclusion at defiance, and write “folly” on our profoundest wisdom.

And the reason of this plainly is, not that truth is ever really inconsistent with itself, but that one conclusion may be, practically, far more valuable than another. Your argument may be ever so perfect, showing that this or that advantage is attainable in your way; but another argument may show better fruit attainable otherwise: while, in the sight of God, each may be alike idle, because of the riches, both of glory and bliss, that his way will reach. It was true, e. g. that if Peter, when he had toiled all night and taken nothing, should come ashore at once, he would get the rest he needed; but it was also true that if, “at Christ’s word,” he should cast his net on the right side of the ship, he would “find” what would overpay his labor.

Now, it is plain, that just in proportion as we reason clearly and well upon the premises we see and realize, and as we rely confidently on the demonstrations we make, just in that measure we shall be indisposed to look farther, or to consult other authority. And thus it continually happens that knowledge, which escapes the eye of the wise and prudent,—bent down to scan the earth and its laws,—sinks into the open heart of the feeble and unlearned, and brings unutterable strength and comfort there.

Therefore it is, that sorrows overwhelm the strong of this world, while the weak and tender bear the same burden steadfastly for years. Therefore it is, that some of whom we hardly expected fortitude are sustained, while those on whom they thought to lean, become dependent on them for support. For the strong will walk by sight, while the weak, taught of God, consent to walk by faith. By sight, we reach man’s conclusions, and are

overruled and disappointed; by faith, we lay hold of God's conclusions, and are safe. Oh, how secure and happy to meet surprise, and trouble, and calamity, with Christ's welcome on our lips and in our hearts,—“even so, Father! for so it seemed good in thy sight.” I profess not to understand thy wisdom; thy ways are past finding out; but what thou thinkest is truth, and what thou doest is goodness.

There is no other way than this to square our hopes and wills with our actual histories. There is no other eternal wisdom or consolation for man but faith. We propose, in a few words, to show that *the Christian's is the only right ground for content in trouble*; and to draw some inference from that truth.

And first, let us state the Christian's position fully. He is in trouble in some way. Losses have befallen him where he looked for gains. Reproach and misrepute are on him, in their exceeding bitterness. Death has made vacant some little chair, and gloom sits down at his fire-side. His body is racked with pains, or his mind with perplexities, or his heart with sorrow.

Now, we are but dust, as other men, and the first onset of a great grief affects us all very much alike. We are simply “bowed down,” in David's emphatic phrase—crushed, and as it were stunned, by the terrible blow. A few never recover from that state; the broken faculties never knit up into reason again—as that mother we have read of, who, having occasion to get some water from the little lake on whose shore she lived, saw some white cloth floating there, drew it, with its burden, to her feet, and found her only daughter in it, drowned. Still, when she has her way, she sits by some water's edge, and searches wearily for her dead child.

But of the unbelieving who revive after this stupor, some awake to passionate and frantic grief, which at last exhausts itself. Others go without this intermediate stage, into a profound and weary gloom, that seeks solitude, not as finding pleasure in it, but as less bitter than society. There it feeds upon its woe—defies consolation—rebels against God. It may wear away slowly, and the interest of life return; or it may draw a black curtain over the soul to the end of life—to be itself im-

palled and buried in death. Others seek diversion, fly early to pleasures, or gains, or duties, to drown the solemn voice of sorrow, and the sterner voice of awakened conscience, in the noisy cares and joys of carnal life. Others take refuge in a fatalist philosophy—things could not be otherwise than they are, and it is idle to mourn about what could not be avoided. Or, perhaps, it is a deistical philosophy; it recognizes a God, but a God all mercy, a mere giver, and no governor. It ignores sin and its demerit entirely; holds that our having suffered establishes a *claim* upon him, and that he must make *compensation* to us somewhere for the tears we have shed.

We are not ready yet, of course, to discuss these views; they are stated here merely to set off the Christian position, and make it more distinct, by contrast. Remember, however, that it is not every Christian that takes right ground at once, in trouble, far from it. Sad and shameful is it, but true. You may find the children of God, at one time or other, in every false position, but they return at last to the truth, and are comforted. Oh, how subtle, how tenacious, how victorious a thing is God's free grace!

The true hearted man of God in sorrow says: "I have earned all this, and more, by my sins. Since I began to be, I have continually offended God. His law, the shield and glory of all the good, I have dishonored: for years I cast it away utterly. Even now, sin dwelleth in me; my passions insult God; my heart forsakes him; my faith fails me; my life annuls my resolutions, and grieves the Holy Spirit. If this affliction came in mere justice, I could not complain. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? I confess "that thou art clear when thou art judged."

"But it is not justice that smites me—I thank thee, O Christ, for that relief! If it were, I might be silenced, but not consoled. A guilty outcast, just beginning to bear the penalty of the law, would find in God's justice no peace, or hope, or pity; nothing but terror and despair. It is not justice that smites me! My Father—my Heavenly Father—hath many mighty works in hand. He is redeeming me; and to that end he purifies me by sorrow, by privilege, by toil, by prayer, by bounty.

“He has linked me in with vast histories. My life, with its various incidents and deeds, touches everywhere the life of man. The thing I mourn and suffer by, brings safety, or justice, or deliverance, or happiness, somewhere. It accomplishes some worthy end—yea, many ends. It is a cutting from my humble vine; but the great Husbandman will plant it, and find fruit in it. Some one will yet rise up to call me blessed in my sorrow, or rich in my poverty, or happy in bereavement. God, in his goodness, is making me a blessing.

“This world is a labyrinth. We come, we know not whence; and Omniscience only knows whither, or how, we go. Of one thing only am I sure: I am in his hand, whose name is *love*. If, instead of leaving me, by many toils and through many errors, painfully to work out my salvation and arrive at home, he has taken the piloting upon himself, and kindly constrained me along the near and narrow way, shall I not thank him, and be content? He knows best the way to his own glory; and the thing that makes him glorious, must make me, his son or daughter, happy. “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.”

“Howsoever I consider it, I am content. My share directly in it is discipline—and Heaven. God’s kingdom is blessed by it through his providence; and is not that a joy for Heaven? God himself finds glory in it; without which there could be no Heaven. All is well; this world fades like the field-flowers; but Heaven opens on my sight, with all my treasures and God’s victory! All is well!”

Having thus shown, in the first place, what the Christian position is, we affirm *secondly*, that it contains all the elements—and shall then show *thirdly*, that *it alone* has the elements of true consolation. In other words, that the Christian, as an immortal being, can be comforted in sorrow, and that the sinner never can.

It is plain that only three things can ever reconcile us to a loss: either, first, it must put us in a better condition for our future prospects; or, secondly, it must assure some real good to us itself; or, thirdly, it must bring corresponding advantages to those we love, and whose love we desire. A young man pays willingly for education,

because it puts the means of fortune, respectability, and happiness, in his hands. No one grieves over the burning of a building he owns, if the insurance not only covers the loss, but pays him for the trouble and expense of *building a better one*. All purchase and sale proceeds on the surrender of something we possess, to acquire something more valuable to us. And every day we see parents expending toil or money for their children's benefit.

Now the Christian knows, *certainly*, that in one or other of these ways, if not in all of them, his losses will be made up to him. In which way, or by what process, he may never know in this life; he may, often does; but that does not affect the argument. His certainty depends not at all on that knowledge. *It is built upon the character of God*. Because that is sure, he is safe. He has the most delightful prospect, supported by the most unassailable evidence. And when, in these following paragraphs, we say "*may*," it is not because there is a shadow of doubt about the rich and perfect compensation, but because man cannot always divine the silent process.

We may be repaid for our griefs by the improvement in our spiritual condition; in our efficiency, our knowledge, or our holiness. It is the perfection of Christian excellence to know the truth about God, and Christ, and Heaven, with a clear, intelligent mind, and to love it with all the heart. It is the beauty of a spotless life, to do all for love's sake. It gives assured hope and promise to our coming years, that we have been "tried and found faithful" through God's grace.

Sorrow patiently borne, and with a Godward look upon the troubled face, gives us insight into the Bible. Some of us know how Jacob felt when he mourned for Joseph and feared for Benjamin. How often the darkened and grieving heart echoes David's word—"I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!" When at last we have conquered the passionate and unbelieving will, how gladly we cry, as Job did, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." But the understanding of these words is not shut up to them; they cast their light on many other words; they illuminate for us the whole Bible.

But we get insight, too, into God's character and feeling toward us. We know each other by the looks we wear, the things we do, and the spirit we show in them. And shall not these close and terrible dealings with the Lord, followed, too, by reconciliation and blessing, give us profound acquaintance with him?

The principles on which we live and act through such times of crisis, are strengthened by the strife. We have bent the stubborn knee in acquiescence; we have surrendered back the gift to the giver; we have quelled repining for our dear Father's sake. Now, therefore, *love is king in us*; he has won a great battle, and received the throne.

Thus, with a larger heart full of the Bible, standing nearer our God, and more fully feeling "the powers of the world to come;" having the right principle enthroned within us, disaffection silenced and destroyed; Christ shining out upon us, our sun and shield; we have been borne along, farther from our old state of sin and death, nearer to heaven, our home. Is it not a recompense?

But there is another; our eternal reward is shaped, insured, enriched, by sorrow here. The heart, enlarged by trial, can contain more bliss, and it shall be full. The experience of battles fought and won, of danger and deliverance, of prayer and answer,—what stores of wisdom and bright recollection are here! Strengthened by these events, we shall be ready for greater thoughts, for swifter flight upon God's messages of love, for nobler ventures amid his unfolding plans, for higher knowledge, and sweeter praise of Jesus our "Saviour, Brother, Friend." Doubt not, afflicted ones, that in simply being faithful, patient, humble, we are laying up treasure in Heaven. There are joys and riches there, for which language has not yet a name, nor fancy an image of delight. Suggestions of rest, and peace, and triumph, she gives us, borrowed from Scripture promises. But her utmost is to say that all we lack here shall be given us, and what we never thought of shall be poured on us, even unto "fulness of joy." Have you ever thought of how much happiness, even now, you are capable? How, under circumstances you can conceive, the sweetest transient thrill of pleasure you ever felt might swell out into an unfaill-

ing flood? Double that, quadruple it, yea, multiply to your little utmost, and yet you will have fallen short of the truth. "This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

But do you reply here, that it is abhorrent to your feelings that another,—your child or friend,—should suffer and die to make you better and happier? Do you refuse such consolation as unworthy of a generous heart, and declare that you had rather have lost all this gain we have spoken of, than that such terrible things should befall those you love? I answer first, and in passing, that we have hitherto spoken only of your direct and personal relation to the matter. Nobody pretends, e. g. that the friend you have lost, sickened and died *solely* for your spiritual good, only that that is involved in the other reasons why it should be so, and that therefore, you may extract hope and comfort for yourself from that (when done by God's sovereign hand,) which you would rather have died a thousand times than do. But secondly, we remark, that if such is your feeling, you are ready for the purest and sweetest of all consolations, *the good accruing to others* from your affliction.

Our figures of speech often mislead us, cheat us into inferences that are false, or at least, partial. When e. g. we speak of a *chain* of events linked together by Providence and drawing on a result, we are apt to fancy each event as a link in one chain *only*, binding the nearest cause to the nearest consequence, and exhausted of its effects when that is done. A far truer idea is obtained by comparing the arrangement of events to the air, or the sea, where every shock and every motion propagates itself, and is felt everywhere. Each footfall on the earth affects each particular atom. Every utterance of every voice goes out ceaselessly upon the air; its bland, elastic volume is filled with these tremors and impulses, and is affected by their play. And though our faculties fail us at once, if we would follow any single sound or motion through those countless combinations, yet we know that God will read them all at a glance at any instant in eternity. Nothing is lost. The fall of yonder pebble in the sea wakes gentle music on some distant shore. The out-

cry of that bruised heart goes out upon the winds, and past the clouds, and is heard at Heaven's gate. Though it were uttered a thousand years ago, it rocks yet upon the breeze, and sweeps in the gale; and it will not cease its work *forever!*

But do you exclaim that your grief or affliction is lost in insignificance in such a view of the vast universe. We answer again, *nothing is lost*, not a sparrow, not a ripple on the water. To us, one grief, one life, one death, does seem to be a mere atom among the hosts that think, feel, weep, rejoice, and that forever. But nothing is really smaller because comparison with immensity makes it look small. If your grief is large and heavy to you, then will the "over payment of delight" be large to you, though among the immensities it seemed a trifle. Our earth is large enough for us, though it is but a grain of mustard seed beside the sun.

In bearing your affliction faithfully and humbly, as the child of God, you have made your contribution to the universal welfare. You have laid your little all of treasure in his hand, and said "since such is thy will, O Father, lay this out in blessing to my fellow-creatures, and in glory to thyself." And shall we doubt that he has employed it well? In teaching us, by the parable of the talents, what we should do, has he not told us plainly what he will do? To the utmost of his wisdom, it shall tell on the joy and safety of his people, and the praise and love he receives. Are we not repaid?

But it would be injustice to the subject, and to ourselves, not to consider another point. It is not merely the believing these things, that it is to cheer us in our woe; it is the believing them on such evidence and for such reasons as we do. The proof is better and dearer than the thing proved. The heart of God is greater than even his deed.

Yes, friends! Our faith sees that when the Lord does anything with us, especially if he afflicts us, *he has committed himself*. He has entered on a course, whose end we may not be able to calculate, but whose object we can surely divine. Something in us *understands* him; and knowing him, it knows his purpose to bless, to train, to redeem. But *the knowing him* is the true joy and

victory; the sympathy with perfect love; the hungering for righteousness that comprehends his holiness; that is balm for the deepest of our wounds.

Said we not rightly, that we have the most unassailable evidence of the most delightful truths?

We are to show now, thirdly, that the impenitent has not one of the elements of true consolation in his reach; he may direct others to them, but he must not taste them himself. Perhaps we ought to make one exception. It must be a relief, when he can think that others have been benefitted and blessed by his loss, as that the friend or child is gone to heaven. But after all, how slender a consolation, how poor and slight a relief can that thought be to one who must follow it up, as he must, with thoughts of self-accusation and dismay! He must look up, as the loved and ransomed spirit takes its flight, and say, "Farewell, perhaps forever! I have made no preparation for following thee, thou wilt not come back to me, and I may never, never, go to thee!" Small and sad, then, is his only comfort, "they are safe, but I am left to my doom: they have taken the life-boat and are rescued; but I must starve upon the wreck."

For the rest, it is plain that, so long as he remains in sin, no improvement of his spiritual state *can* take place. To improve, in these matters, is to become more accessible to motive, to draw nearer to God, to purify the heart, to abound in prayer, to gain vividness of faith. But the very fact that he continues unrepentant in the face of an angry God, a dark future, and a rebuking conscience, cuts off all hope of these things. He has not been persuaded by these terrible appeals; he has either refused, or evaded. Pain and fear, without repentance, *cannot* but repel man from God, and as we fly from heaven's light, the deeds, and the powers of darkness seize on us. So far from being taught of God, we contend against him. Our hearts cry out aloud against his decrees. We refuse to see bare justice in them, much less goodness. Ah, the blow that does not break the heart hardens it. Affliction to the obstinate sinner is like lightning; it scathes the tree, blights its verdure, dries up its fruitful juices, and leaves it, hardened and blasted, to wither up and die!

Neither can affliction work out a reward for him, here, or hereafter. Of not one solitary event in life can the sinner show, while he is a sinner, that it is a mercy; not even the prolonging of his life; for if he is to die in sin, the sooner he dies the less awful will be his woe. Blessings abused add fuel to the eternal fires; how much more these closest, most personal dealings of God with us, if they are neglected!

But will the thought of saints made happy and God glorified by these sorrows of ours, bring any comfort to the sinner? Will the contrast between their peace and our perdition relieve us? Not a particle. God has more rightly read our hearts, "*there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*, when ye see Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven, and ye yourselves cast out." Ah, remember, unbelieving reader, remember! The thought of God's love and holiness has given you no pleasure in this world of hope, and will his glory bring you happiness when you are shut up in despair? Dream not of it, it will only add torment to your pains!

But will any say "this is cruel language, it cuts me off from all comfort in my time of trouble?" Would to God it were the sharp remedy for all your sorrows! It might well be. This very day you might decide that there is no resource for the suffering, the sinful, the weary, like a covenant with God. To make peace there, is to be at peace forever. To refuse that hope is to bid a long farewell to all hope. What purpose will delusions and self-flattery serve? Suppose you could convince yourself that affliction would bring every benefit to you that it brings to the Christian, what would it profit you *unless it was true?*

Have we then, misstated your case at all? Does refusing to serve God prepare you to serve him? Will discontent with his providence teach you faith, patience, and resignation? Can unbelief ripen into love, or self-will sympathize with his grace and pity? Can a man be scourged by terror and despair into peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? If not, then you will not grow better by suffering, till you give God your heart. How is it with you to-day? Disappointment or misfortune has visited you; are you ready *now*, to give God that heart?

Come then, come to him straightway, confess your sins, take Christ for your redeemer, and be forgiven! Do you hesitate and drawback? Are your thoughts drawn away by grief, or are you buisy repairing your losses, and Almighty God, your jealous, tremendous judge, must wait until you have a convenient season? Then confess, at least, that sorrow has not softened or blessed you, for you "refuse him that speaketh from heaven."

There is a terrible omen and foreshadowing of the end, in this excuse for not repenting now. Fears, doubts, perplexities, then, are reasons for *not coming* to God; instead of sending us to his feet where all trouble finds its cure, they drive us away! Oh, lost sinner! What will you do in the day of desolation? When sorrows multiply, when life flashes in the socket and expires, when death and hell lay hold upon you, will repentance be plain and escape easy? Look down into the pit, and learn of those ruined thousands the worth of a death-bed repentance! But now, while life endures in the land of pardons, when God's insulted Spirit has not yet taken his everlasting flight; now Heaven's gate is open, and "whosoever will," may enter in and dwell there. Oh come, dear, dying friend, come and trust in Jesus Christ! His blood cleanseth from all sin! Let those arms enfold you once, and you are safe!

Let us, in conclusion, affectionately remind all sorrowing Christians, that they have a "God to glorify" in the fires. You have professed before men in other days, that you esteem him as infinitely wise and good; that you take his will to be your will, and renounce every other allegiance. Now is the time to prove that you meant what you said. Now is the sharp test-time of your professions. If you consent not now, in heart as well as word, to what he has done, you not only annul your own professions, but you cast a shadow of doubt on the vows of all who have promised as you did, but have not yet been tried. You reduce the value of the Christian name, and diminish the power of the church. Whereas, if your faith stands this trial, being proved much more precious than gold, men are compelled to acknowledge God as your helper, and your great physician. That shadowy after-world, of which they hear so much and

realize so little, grows palpable and solemn to them, as its powers encompass and sustain you. The Gospel is preached, not now by a plausible tongue, but by a patient, consistent, peaceful life. Conscience is roused, and does her work of warning faithfully. If it "profit a man" nothing "to gain the whole world and lose his own soul," will it not be a happy barter to have lost some one, or many, of this world's comforts or delights, and saved a soul?

Let us not forget that we hold all life's possessions by the same tenure, God's will, and that we must interpret all its history by the same rule, God's character. If the question were, why you were born in a land of prayer and grace, or why you were not cut off in infancy, or in the impenitent years that followed, why you were not richer, poorer, happier, sadder, wiser, weaker, than you are: yea, when you have entered heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, if it should be asked why you were there and others cast away, you could give but one answer. And that same answer will content you now, if your heart be right with God. The hope may be blighted, the friend departed, the heart torn, and sick, and bleeding, but the meek eye seeks Heaven. The body will be bowed down, but the believing spirit will look up even from the dust, and renew its strength from God's treasury of might. Wiping away the blinding tear, hushing the sob of agony, lifting the marred and stricken face to the cross, you whisper "even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."