

VIII.—CRITICAL NOTICES.

Biographia Philosophica. By Prof. CAMPBELL FRASER, D.C.L.
etc., etc. Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1904. Pp. xiv, 335.

PROF. CAMPBELL FRASER names this a "Retrospect". As a retrospect it must, in its own nature, and on every count, have been a pleasure to him; and at least simply a pleasure, I think, it must prove to its many, and already perhaps mostly not unfamiliar, readers. Nor, if as much as this seems more particularly to concern the *Biographia*, is it to be said that the *Philosophia* has been less well tempered. Quite happily, indeed, the *Biographia* begins with the *Philosophia* that shall run, it may be, from end to end of the book; for it opens at once thus:—

"Perplexities of religious thought have been at all times springs of metaphysical reflexion. It was by them in crude forms that I was first attracted to inquiries which have engaged my life. The originating cause of the universe in which I found myself, and how I could know that this cause was God, were questions that disturbed my boyhood seventy years ago. . . . In an endless life, how can I, a million times a million years after this, remember anything that has happened in the present century, or have interest in, or identity with, the boy now living on this earth? . . .

"What am I? What sort of universe is this in which I find myself? What is to be its final upshot and mine?"

It is only as having begun with *Philosophia* thus, that he turns now to *Biographia*, and the particulars of his birth and ancestry; and on both Prof. Fraser has grounds to congratulate himself. He is a son of the Manse, and this Manse is lonely enough; but it has both charming sea and rugged mountain to look upon, while neither of them is unlegendary, unhistorical. Then for ancestry, a Fraser and a Campbell setting out into the world is again but as the young Durward, who, to the question, "Is it a gentleman's name?" could fierily reply, "By fifteen descents in our family!"

But the Manse had its within as well as its without; and its influences thence on the young Fraser are not to be counted one whit less. With his father, who had "passed his youth in the Puritan atmosphere which sheds awful solemnity over human life," there was, naturally, "Calvinistic orthodoxy at the manse". His mother, again, "had been educated in England, and afterwards lived

much in the South"; and so, if she "trained her son in the Bible" till "Old Testament History actually filled his imagination," she did not fail to inspire him also "with her own Anglican enthusiasm," which, at the same time, however, must have taken colour, it would seem, from the evangelical doctrine of the "Clapham sect".

A remote highland parish does not promise much for a stipend to its minister; and so the necessarily "modest income," further reduced, too, by "generosity to a brother," must have had its own straits under the needs of "a family of twelve," of whom Alexander was the eldest. Naturally, then, as we are told, the family "lived a self-contained life of Spartan frugality". In such circumstances, and with little more than an accordant tuition, the young Fraser grew up, as he says himself, "a shy, awkward boy; unobservant of what lay outside some strong individual tastes, physically educated by lonely walks, work in the manse garden or oaring in a boat; and with no outside youthful companionship".

It is precisely as such a boy, too, that he describes himself when in his first session, 1833-4, he entered the Junior Humanity Class at the old College off the High Street of Glasgow. "The publicity," he says, "and social collision of a Glasgow classroom came as a shock to a shy, sensitive boy, emerging for the first time from the lonely manse in Lorne. This, along with inadequate Latin and Greek, habits of desultory reading, and indifferent health in the surroundings of Glasgow, depressed me, and I felt myself a foreigner among my new associates."

Here he remained only a single session. But, "notwithstanding," he says, "I still fondly cherish the memory of college life, in that far-off winter—in quaint dingy courts, on dark winter mornings, as we gathered soon after seven to the sound of the college bell".

And so he, too, with a red gown on his back, must have seen, morning after morning, from the facing street, the twin lamps that just indicated the black devouring maw of the college entrance, as, right and left over its squared sides, they brought ever to the student's mind images of Bitias and Pandarus, supporters of the gate, while he hurried along, even agitated by the very peculiar, small, sharp, quick, quick, quick, of that strangely instant catalogue bell, the stopping of which meant the shutting also of the classroom door and the impossibility of an "*Adsum*" from him belated without to the call of his name within, with loss of the best of a certificate, uninterrupted attendance!

He mentions his Professors, Ramsay and Sandford, with a little more knowledge of them, perhaps, than in a single session he had opportunity to learn. It is characteristic that, philosopher himself, he has most to say of the Moral Philosopher he saw, though such tuition as the latter's in a college curriculum he had yet years to wait for, and, as eventually it proved, elsewhere. This was Prof. James Mylne. It was "him I looked at with most interest," he says: he "was probably, in 1833, the most independent

thinker in the Scottish philosophical Professoriate". Independent he may have been, and "old Mylne" was certainly spoken of in the college courts as something more than usual in his place. But I know not that Destutt Tracy as the authority he set up, and the consequently advocated Sensualism, could have even approached in truth and knowledge Reid and Common Sense. So—as with Stewart and Brown afterwards—we had still a "Philosophy of the Human Mind".

Prof. Fraser mentions only two names as those of fellow-students in the Junior Latin. Alan Ker is one of them—quite an intimate of the other who is gratefully aware of all the honour done him in the welcome terms of the remembrance—and he (Ker) was first prize-man in the Junior Latin of that year, as he was medalist in the senior of the next. He was still in College as late as the Logic Class of 1836-7, but a Barrister in London when, some years later, I climbed up no end of stairs to see him in Lincoln's Inn (I remember he put on his wig for me). Years later, again, he did marry Miss Tennyson; as, finally, years later still, he did die "in high office in Jamaica". The *Biographia* mentions, in connexion with John Macleod Campbell of the famous Row Heresy, the name Alexander Scott. I am inclined to infer from his silence otherwise (he is the Scott mentioned afterwards, however, as candidate for the Edinburgh Logic Chair) that Prof. Fraser was not aware of what Scott was to Ker. This Scott was to us, students of Glasgow, A. J. Scott of Woolwich; and we had an enthusiasm for him, whether as Lecturer or Preacher. As the former we exclaimed with wonder that he was a διδάσκαλος, a διδάσκαλος, a teacher, a teacher indeed! As the latter he awed us into the deepest religious trust and absorption. Scott was the personal friend of Thomas Carlyle; and, as principal of Owens College, Manchester, he was known in his proper quality in the end. He had married an aunt of Alan Ker's, and was consequently to him an uncle.

If Alan Ker was still in College when Edmund Lushington came to fill the vacant Chair of Sir D. K. Sandford; and if he heard, in the Inaugural of that most accomplished of Professors, for the first time, as I did, that new and so peculiarly ringing voice, he could never for a moment have had a thought that both Professor that spoke, and student that heard, should have, by-and-by, the pride to be brothers-in-law not only to each other, but to Tennyson himself as the ennobled brother of the brides. By the accident of his brother practising Medicine at Cheltenham it was that all this fell to the lot of Alan. But, as Tennyson's brother-in-law, Ker went to the West Indies, firstly as Puisne Judge to another Island, but eventually as Chief Judge to Jamaica. Had the young Fraser remained longer at Glasgow College than the one session, he might have earlier had, as friends beside him, the later Profs. Sellar and Shairp (not to mention others otherwise notable); as he might have heard, too, Prof. Buchanan calling up, in the Common Hall,

as prizeman, a Tom Taylor, and explaining that "Tom" was no familiarity, but a name genuinely baptismal and full: which Tom Taylor was afterwards the celebrated Tom Taylor of *Punch* and of so many pleasing and successful dramatic pieces.

But the student from Lorne did not return to Glasgow to remain for other sessions at the College there. He went to Edinburgh instead, and from the date 1834-5 onwards, Campbell Fraser was a name more and more to do it honour.

The two first chapters that follow here in reference to life for him in Edinburgh, are of much deeper concern for him than for it. Their substance is really the laying of the foundations of religion and philosophy on the part of the young man himself. The general mind of the city cohered with this: "Chalmers, the most eloquent of Scottish preachers, was at the head of a revived ecclesiastical life, through which Edinburgh was to become the centre of Church and State conflicts and disruptions, of which the final issues are still remote". This, as so characterised, may be referred to again; but, in the meantime, what we have to see is the vital influences it anew set a working in the young mind which, as from his very first words in his book, conditioned it. We shall quote a few passages here that may prove keys:—

"At the end the world of the senses had receded; the world of living mind appeared to reduce it to subordinate reality. Causes independent of physical nature began to take precedence of the caused causes that depend mechanically upon certain antecedent phenomena. A dualism, partly suggested by Kant, was then coming dimly into view. 'There are two things, as Kant saw, which fill the soul, etc.—the Starry Heaven and the Moral Law. . . . The Moral Law departs from my invisible spiritual Self, and reveals an originating activity that is independent of my animal system, and of the mechanical causation empirically exemplified; and it issues at last in the mystery of teleological instead of mechanical causation in the heart of the universe. It was thus that I was led to reflect upon our conception of the infinity that is latent in all that is real. . . . It was now, too, that I began to see in our Common-Sense or Common Reason a Reservoir which holds for us in a latent state the *rationale* upon which human action and knowledge at last depend, and which it is the work of the philosopher to interpret.'"

If the reader will but complete this extract, he will wonder how Prof. Fraser has been able to construct for himself, ingeniously, out of Kant's Starry Heavens, on the one side, and his Moral Law, on the other, the two contrasting sides of Philosophy. This of Kant is known to everybody, and has been repeated scores of times. It is perhaps strange that those repeating it have never thought of quoting an older passage of Kant on the starry heavens with at least reference to the thinking mind, if not exactly literally to the moral law. Kant's *Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, as probably now in most hands in the form of, and so assumed to be represented by, Prof. Hastie's translation of that celebrated production

under the title of *Kant's Cosmogony*, may partly, at least in these days, be the cause of this. For, while translating the two former parts of the writing, the late Reverend Professor, apart his class, may be fancied latterly rather to have flattered Physics and so somewhat slighted Metaphysics, and, as it were, in that regard felt disinclined to translate a whole, the Third and concluding, part of a work that Kant had entrusted to the Press as so important that, once for all exceptively for him, he had dedicated it to the King—a work in the general ear of rising importance, and so important, indeed, to Dr. Hastie himself that he is never done exalting it, and has even dedicated it himself, like Kant, to what he holds to be of most illustrious rank in science. Such a work, then, if translated at all, clearly deserved to be translated at full.

But, be that as it may, the passage I refer to occurs in, or can indeed be almost said even to constitute, the very conclusion of the entire work that is so signally in question. I translate it thus:—

"In effect, if we have filled our minds with such thoughts as these, the aspect of the starry heavens on a clear night, awakes in us a joy which only noble souls feel. In the universal calm of nature, and in the peace of sense, the hidden faculty of the immortal spirit speaks to us indescribably, and breathes into us thoughts, which may be felt but not possibly expressed."

This passage, as italicised, in the original, is italicised here.

Thomas Carlyle, when, in the letter to me, that, from Kant's letters, made out Kant "small," he wrote asking me, who it was that called Kant *Zermalmender*, and where it was that the starry skies and moral law passage appeared; might really have been won over to Kant, had I but added to my answer the above quotation from said *Natural History and Theory* book!

Returning to the extracts from the *Biographia* in which it was by the allusion to the stars and the moral law that I was led to speak in that reference further, it is to be said that the passages in example are very far from exhausting the situation concerned; but they will certainly give some insight into the earnestly working mind of this most seriously interested young student. And all may be said to have gathered itself together and summed itself at last, for a time, in his two prize-essays, the one on Toleration, and the other on the Infallible Authority of the Bible. The reasoning that constitutes what we may suppose to be the substance of these two writings may be regarded as to some extent reappearing here in brief; and it is really admirable—honestly central, honestly comprehensive, honestly instructive. As that, and no less than that, it must be allowed to be properly and peculiarly valuable. To prepare himself; for example, for the latter essay his industry and sincerity lead him, so to speak, into the very confessional for themselves of all the Churches. He even attends the lectures of the Roman Bishop of Edinburgh in proof; and actually writes him an anonymous letter on his own difficulties: he was checked, he

says, by his (the Bishop's) lectures, and not encouraged "to look for the basis of religious certainty in the fallible hypothesis of an infallible ecclesiastical organisation"; and he is equally candid towards the other Churches—his own, for example, say, of "Books produced long ago in Judea," "What could be said in favour of the infallibility of this collection of revered books, as a substitute for the abandoned infallibility of the living Church?"

The *Biographia* is very full otherwise, as on the many friends, the various positions held, the events experienced, the journeys taken, etc., etc. One would like to name all this so interesting which it has been the lot of Prof. Fraser to meet, enjoy, suffer, or generally in life prove, but for the mere sketch of a review to welcome a work on its first appearance from the Press, this slight paper already grows long. Positively, with the *Biographia* in hand, it is with pain that I realise to myself the very bulk of most interesting material that must be left without a comment. The most momentous public event of Prof. Fraser's whole life in Scotland—the creation of the Free Church, namely—cannot now be adequately referred to, much as it is in evidence throughout the most important chapters of the book. It constitutes the life-excitement of the nation for many years. It was as a whirlwind in the public hall, and it agitated the hearth. It was loud on the streets, and it could almost be heard in the toll of the church bells. As it is said, "Ecclesiastical war had arisen in Scotland. . . . Scotland was in the throes of an ecclesiastical conflict" more and more flushed with every successive year of not much less than ten. Edinburgh, particularly, as we have also just seen it said, "was to become the centre of Church and State conflicts and disruptions—of which the final issues are still remote". Issues! and before what one such issue, do not men, good, the best, even stand now; appalled! This, as we write!

And, for the student from the manse, the son of the manse, how can we expect these years to have made him? For it was they that in very truth, and on the whole, did make him. They were those from 1833 to 1843, from his fourteenth year as a boy to his twenty-fourth as a man. It was these years—as has been said—that gave scope to the full formation of the first principles, the essential forces, that were innate in him—those in a word that concerned "the enigma of the universe". We have already seen extracts from page 59 that illustrate this, and they may be supplemented by many others not less strong that follow. These, in fact, are that in the *Biographia* which is most vitally pregnant for the *Philosophia*. This in the immediate neighbourhood, for example, tells: "At first I was apt to confound uninterpreted with interpreted Common Sense. I was also inclined to ask for logical proof of the trustworthiness of this offered guide." But anything like full quotation is quite out of place here. I must content myself with the few spiculæ in that reference already given—I, for my part, have been much struck by the forensic power with which, in

the discussion of main points, religious or philosophical, Prof. Fraser can set side against side, fairly at full, without a *soupeçon* of fear or favour for either the one or the other of them. It is in this that I find both a deep-thoughtedness and a power of writing which I have not been slow to speak of elsewhere. In fact with such a gift of forensic argumentation, or say Parliamentary argumentation, I have sometimes wondered that Prof. Fraser was not oftener seen publicly to the front during the Free Kirk storm. But, of course, he had, there and then, an official place where, whether as Editor or Teacher, it was the silent pen that was natural rather than the voice from the platform.

And now, too, there were suggestion of his books; but the suggestion could be righteously redeemed only by books, and never by an article. The excellences which have been spoken of as to be found in the *Biographia* are all to be found in the *Gifford Lectures* also; and these of Prof. Fraser for Locke and Berkeley are the standard editions. Care, accuracy, industry characterise them eminently, and the small *Locke*, the small *Berkeley*, the small *Reid*, are quite charming little volumes and in their dimensions full. What strikes at first, in their case, is the ease with which they are written, and, secondly, the ready obligingness with which the application of the Publishers or their most competent Editor, has been acceded to; for, of course, no one's action precisely there could have been more valuable than his. This, naturally, of the *Berkeley* and even the *Locke*; but, if a Ferrier had lived to do the *Reid* should we have expected the same thoroughness, impartiality,—in a word, objectivity?

The friends we hear of in the *Biographia* are affectionately and discriminately spoken of. Some as teachers claim respect, admiration, reverence. They are such as Chalmers and Hamilton, for example. The former, Chalmers, "atoned," it is said, "for comparative mediocrity of learning by the eloquence and moral fervour with which he delivered magnificent conceptions"; and, no doubt, it is pretty well always in some such words that we have Chalmers described nowadays. Here, for instance, is another admiring old pupil who speaks: "He (Chalmers) woke up to see and feel that the spiritual interest was the sovereign one, and to that he devoted himself body and soul; but he was not much of a scholar or even a theologian". No; it was not in depth or originality that he *thought*; but it was in both—it was both in originality and depth that he *felt*. Another man may owe his will to his intellect; but Chalmers!—Chalmers, on the contrary, owed his intellect to his will. See him stand up in a barn, and fill the barn with Professors, students, ploughmen. Not a Professor there, and not a student there, no, nor yet a ploughman, but as he looks at the man, that living presence, that face almost, as it were, of inspired reality and truth, is caught up by him—is more and more caught up by him, as, at every flash, out and in, of that lightning swift right arm, like a God-compelled piston-rod, the heat accumulates,

till all around, roof, rafters, walls, the hearers, burn—burn round him—him in the midst—who no longer speaks, but is the focus, the centre, that himself—*burns* !

Prof. Fraser enjoyed a close intimacy with Hamilton, and speaks again and again of him, and ever in the highest terms. He "tended," it seems, "to transform inductive science of mind into ultimate philosophy of the universe"; and mentions as his "an extraordinary accumulation of Greek and mediæval as well as German erudition". Hamilton, it is even said, "was perhaps the most learned Scot that ever lived". That is certainly true: Hamilton's learning is attested by the presence everywhere in his pages of all the great names, ancient or modern—mediæval, too, even to the minutest, the strangest and the most unknown. True, Thomas himself can be quoted—is quoted (in *Memoir* by Veitch, pp. 120-128) with an error or two—largely in honestest praise of Hamilton, a praise that is liberally extended to face, figure, and personal charm, as well as, implicatedly, to his "swimming and other ruggedly athletic prowess". Hamilton had all the precision, the exactitude of genius, literary genius. He had, like Chalmers, too, the decisive peremptoriness which there was no man to question: but it was of another order, and from a very different centre.

No doubt Prof. Fraser is the naturalised free man of the whole domain of philosophy; but perhaps we hardly need fear blame if we venture to associate his name with that of Berkeley. All through the now numerous and not exiguous volumes of his works there is ample testimony to no less a union. Especially we may point to the last and concluding chapter of the whole book for evidence to this effect. Throughout his whole career Prof. Fraser has never ceased in his deep-thoughted way to meditate, and in his own powerful style to write, on the philosophy of Berkeley. The Berkeley proposition is no longer the same in the hands of Fraser that it was in the hands of Berkeley. Unlike Ferrier, who, amusingly, just petulantly, *would not have* the odious word "subjective" applied to his idealism, Fraser's one labour has been to make what was subjective objective, to transform a crab on the shore into the Cancer in the sky.

It is only appropriately that Prof. Fraser dedicates his *Biographia* lovingly to his wife, the true companion of so many, and, necessarily, not a few arduous, years, of single-minded sympathy and trustful affection.

Altogether Prof. Fraser is to be congratulated on this so unpretentious autobiography of his, as yielding so pleasing a vista of a calm successful career, whether as thinker and writer, on the one hand, or as thinker and teacher, on the other.

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