

ISAAC TAYLOR
1787-1865

Natural History of Enthusiasm. [Anonymous.] London 1829. 8°.

Victoria College Library (Coleridge Collection)

Pencil note in an unknown hand, p 3: "from Beeching library". Ownership inscription p 2 in ink "Joseph Gurney", presumably Joseph Gurney (1804-79), shorthand writer and biblical scholar (not the Gurney who might or might not have refused the task of recording C's lectures on Shakespeare in 1811-12: *Lects 1809-1819—CC—1 lxxxiii*). Photograph of Isaac Taylor ca 1855 pasted onto title-page verso, with an explanatory note. Vertical and horizontal lines in the margins, some of them overtracing pencil, but without any connection to one of C's notes, appear on pp 9-10, 12, 14, 17, 51, 53, 140-1, 142, 145, 147. On 239 a typographical error (IV for VI) is corrected in pencil: but C did not normally bother to correct misprints.

There can be no doubt about the authorship of the notes in this volume but there is some about the handwriting. As he explained when he published a version of his annotations in *C&S* 199-207 (cf *C&S—CC—166-72*), C had used pencil for the notes because the book had been lent to him by a friend who himself had it as a loan. At some later point, however, the notes were overtraced in ink by an unknown copyist (not Gurney), making the original pencil almost entirely illegible and introducing errors that have proved difficult to correct, though C's revised versions in *C&S* provide a guide. The general note **1**, however, initially separate from the volume, was written in ink in the first place; there is no underlying trace of pencil. Though it is certainly of C's composition and was in part published among the notes in *C&S*, the hand more closely resembles that of the overtracer than C's; it appears therefore to have been either written with extraordinary care by C (with some uncharacteristic lapses, such as the occasional omission of punctuation) or, more likely, copied from a lost original. As further proof of the value of C's notes to his contemporaries, several of the annotated pages were folded in to protect the notes from cropping when the volume went to be bound.

DATE. 1829.

[1 leaf tipped in before title-page, slightly cropped](#)

Evidently the Work of a superior and well balanced Mind, at once observant and meditative. It is no every day or every year Publication. The prominent defect is, me saltem judice, in the Style—i.e. that the Metapho[rs] constitute the web of the Cloth.

TAYLOR 1

The writer who habitually reasons in metaphors will now and then reason by them^a Besides the frequency (in the Latin as well as the English use of frequens)¹ of the Figures frustrates their purpose. To imitate the faults I am condemning (no unusual thing, by the bye) one cannot see ones way thro' the wood for the swarm of Fire flies in the Path A young Writer of full and stirring Intellect likes to have his compositions all alive But let him beware of the Morbus pedicularis² of Rhetoric--tho' the Pediculi were as beautiful, each seen for itself on the Object plate of the Microscope, as the gem beetle, still it is a Disease—tho' now and then from excess of Health at least of the *Vis vitae*.³

[2 p 8, pencil overtraced in ink, marked with a line in the margin | Section I](#)

[Taylor proposes that enthusiasm is commonly a fault of “infirm constitutions”, and argues that even in cases in which enthusiasts exhibit exceptional strength and energy, they are actually weak.] . . . for though these giants of human nature greatly surpass other men in force of mind, and courage, and activity, still the heroic extravagance, and the irregular and ungovernable power, which enables them to dare and to do so much, is, in fact, nothing more than a partial accumulation of strength, necessary because the utmost energies of human nature are so small, that, if equably distributed through the system, they would be inadequate to arduous labours.

This is reasoning by, and not merely in, metaphors. S. T. C.

[3 p 11, pencil overtraced in ink](#)

The religious idealist, perhaps, sincerely believes himself to be eminently devout; and those who witness his abstraction, his elevation, his enjoyments, may reverence his piety; meanwhile this fictitious happiness creeps as a lethargy through the moral system, and is rendering him continually less and less susceptible of those emotions in which true religion consists.

Emotions! o no! no! true religion never consists in Emotions of any sort* S. T. C.

* The excellent Writer, doubtless, meant to say “with which true Religion is accompanied”

^{1a} Here is the first instance of missing punctuation; future instances will appear without comment

¹ In Latin *frequens* signifies primarily “in close proximity”, “crowded”; in English, “often recurring”. the image also in notes of 1833: see GREW 10 and n 1.

² “Louse disease”, “disease of lice”. C used

³ “Life force”.

[4 p 14, pencil overtraced in ink](#)

Superstition—the creature of guilt and fear, is almost as ancient as the human family. But ^ Enthusiasm, the child of hope, hardly appeared on earth until after the time when life and immortality had been brought to light by Christianity.

^ Religious Enthusiasm? But even with this limitation the proposition is not, I suspect, borne out by History. Egypt—India—the Jews of the Maccabaeon Period—the Corybantes (see the Atys of Catullus & the Epinicion of Debora) Druids, Bards [?contrast] Euripides, Lucan, Juvenal, [?Analeus]¹

[5 p 22, pencil overtraced in ink, marked with a line in the margin | End of Section I](#)

[The author puts the case against “philosophical abstraction” in the dissemination of doctrine.] Whatever is practically important in religion or morals may at all times be advanced and argued in the simplest terms of colloquial expression. From the pulpit, perhaps, no other style should at any time be heard; for the pulpit belongs to the poor and the uninstructed. But the press is not bound by the same conditions, for it is an instrument of knowledge foreign to the authenticated means of Christian instruction. A writer and a layman is not a recognised functionary in the Church; he may, therefore, choose his style without violating any rules or proprieties of office.

The concluding Sentences approach nearer to the Shallows, than is quite allowable in so intelligent a writer. “Whatever —— simplest terms of colloquial expression.” Be it so! (tho’ even of this I have my doubts. But why? Simply, because the terms and phrases of the Theological Schools have by their constant iteration from the Pulpit become colloquial.¹ The science of one Age becomes the Common Sense of a succeeding. I can conceive no more direct means of depriving Christian Faith of one of its peculiar Attributes that of enriching and enlarging the mind, while it purifies and in the very act of purifying the Will and Affections, than the maxim prescribed in the preceding page.² See Aids to Reflection p. 7-11 and the Note, p. 252.³

¹ C sketches out a counter-argument with examples of religious frenzy from pre-Christian times, specifically the self-castrating Atys (Attis) and dancers of the cult of Cybele and, for an OT example, the song of triumph of Deborah in Judges 5. The Attis myth is the subject of Catullus’s poem #63. The apparent readings “contrast” and “Analeus” do not make sense but the pencilled words underneath are indecipherable.

⁵ Cf *BL* ch 17 (*BL—CC—II* 54), where C makes the same point about the trickling down of

academic and theological language.

⁵ I.e. the requirement that only “the simplest terms of colloquial expression” should be heard from the pulpit.

⁵ *AR (CC)* 17-23 (including the description of Christian faith as expanding the intellect while purifying the heart), and 261, a footnote in which C affirms that “Without Metaphysics Science could have had no language, and Common Sense no Materials”). See also C’s revised longer version of this note in *C&S*.

[6 pp 26-8, pencil overtraced in ink | Section II](#)

Prayer, in its very conditions, supposes, not only a condescension of the Divine nature to meet the human, but a humbling of the human nature to a lower range than it might easily reach. . . . not only does the Supreme conceal Himself from our senses, but He reveals in His word barely a glimpse of His essential glories. By some naked affirmations we are indeed secured against false and grovelling notions of the Divine nature; but these hints are incidental, and so scanty, that every excursive mind goes beyond them in its conceptions of the infinite attributes.*

* That the Personēity of God, that the “I AM”, is presented more prominently in the S. Scriptures than the (so called) physical Attributes, is most true and constitutes one of the distinctive characters of their superior worth and value. It was by dwelling too exclusively in the infinities, that all the ancient Philosophers, Plato excepted, fell into Pantheism and so in later times Spinoza¹—Nevertheless it would be [?practicable/possible]^a to place a series of Scripture passages in synopsis before the Author of this Essay which would render it a difficult task for him to make out his assertion. Eternal, omnipresent, omniscient omnipotent the one only absolute Good, the Holy—the Living—the Creator as well as Maker of the Universe—Can the author’s mind go far beyond these? Yet these are all clearly affirmed in Scripture!

[7 pp 28-9, pencil overtraced in ink, marked with a line in the margin](#)

. . . the idea of immense separation [between man and God] would be painfully enhanced, if distinct vision were obtained of the towering hierarchy of intelligences at the basement of which the human system is founded. Were it indeed permitted for man to gaze upward from step to step, and from range to range, of the vast edifice of rational existences, and could his eye attain its summit, and then perceive, at an infinite height beyond that highest platform of created being, the lowest steps of the Eternal throne*—what liberty of heart would afterwards be left to him in drawing near to the Father of spirits? How, after such a revelation of the upper world, could the affectionate cheerfulness of earthly worship again take place?

*Has the Author then lost this Liberty of Heart!^a These are eloquent paragraphs, but Augustine’s^b single line weighs with me more than all this Cumulus of imaginary Hierarchies!!! There neither are nor can be but three essential differences, the

6^a Overtracing looks like “prup caba”; the version pub in *C&S* reads “easy”

7^a punctuation perhaps added by overtracer

7^b overtraced “disgusting”

6¹ Among C’s many statements about Greek *iquiae* COPY A 2 and n 2.
and Spinozistic pantheism see e.g. BAXTER *Rel-*

Absolute—the Finite rational—and the Finite irrational one. God—Man—Beast.¹ Besides, the whole Scheme is unscriptural if not anti-scriptural. Pile up Hierarchs on Hierarchs, and outCabalize the Cabala—what a gaudy vapor is the whole Conception to a sane mind compared with the Idea presented in the Gospel Promise to be one with God in and thro' Christ, the Son of God—

[8 pp 31-7. pencil overtraced in ink](#)

The Scripture models of devotion . . . consist of such utterances of desire, or hope, or love, as seem to suppose the existence of correlative feelings, and of every *human* sympathy in Him to whom they are addressed. . . . He is to be supplicated with arguments as one who needs to be swayed and moved, to be wrought upon and influenced; nor is any alternative offered to those who would present themselves at the throne of heavenly grace, or any exemption made in favour of superior spirits, whose more elevated notions of the divine perfections may render this accommodated style distasteful. As the Hearer of prayer stoops to listen, so also must the suppliant stoop from the heights of philosophical or meditative abstractions, and either come in genuine simplicity of petition, as a son to a father, or be utterly excluded from the friendship of his Maker.

There are, ὡς ἐμοίγε δοκεῖ,¹ two errors here, and both dangerous. First, that the rational and only true ideas of the Supreme Being are incompatible with the spirit of prayer, and petitionary pleading taught and exemplified in the Scriptures. Secondly that this “supplication with arguments” and importunate requests being irrational and known by the Devotee to be such, it is never the less a duty to pray in this fashion—i.e. that the Supreme Being requires of his rational Creatures that they should, as the condition of offering acceptable worship to him, wilfully blind themselves to the Light which he himself had given them, and drugging^a their sense of the truth into a temporary Doze, make believe that they knew no better—As if the Holy One, the God of Truth and Father of Lights resembled an Oriental or African Despot whose courtiers, even those whom he has himself enriched and ennobled, must approach him in beggar’s rags, and with a beggarly whine—I find the Scripture model of Devotion, the Prayers and Thanksgiving of the Psalmist and of our Church Liturgy, conform to the clearest convictions of my Reason and I do not hesitate to

^{8^a} Overtracing reads “dragging” but “drugging” is confirmed by C&S version

^{7¹} C makes the same observation elsewhere, sometimes as here attributing it to Augustine: see for example HACKET 16, HOOKER 22. No specific passage in Augustine has been traced but some

parallels are cited in C&S (CC) 169 n 4.

^{8¹} “As it seems to me, at least”.

attribute the contrary persuasion to the three following oversights, 1st and the Queen-bee in the Hive of Error, the identification of Reason with the individual Understanding—terms not only different but diverse, not only allogeneous but heterogeneous.² 2 The substitution of the Infinite for the Absolute, in respect of God and the divine Attributes. “I forbid you, says Plato, to call God the Infinite—say rather, if you dare name him at all, the Measure of Infinity.”³ 3 lastly the habit of using the term infinite, itself as a superlative, if not as a synonyme of vast, large, or indefinitely great.

P.S. I employ the term, Reason, in its most comprehensive sense viz. for the Practical as well as the Theoric or contemplative Reason—for the Light and for the Life in the Light—in short, as the Logos, or the WORD “in whom is Life, and that Life the only true Light of Man.”⁴ Now the difference between my scheme and that of the Essayist, for whose talents and intentions I feel sincere respect, may perhaps be thus stated. The Essayist would bring down his Understanding to his religion. I would raise up my Understanding to the Reason vouchsafed to me and find my religion in the Focus resulting from their convergence. We both use the same prayers, penitential, deprecativ and petitionary, I in the full assurance of their congruity with the truth of Reason, He in the factitious oblivion of their being the contrary. S. T. C.

[9 p 37, pencil overtraced in ink](#)

Let a man of warm heart, who is happily surrounded with the dear objects of his social affections, try the effect of a parallel practice;—let him institute anxious scrutinies of his feelings towards those whom, hitherto, he has believed himself to regard with unfeigned love What, at the end of a year, would be the result of such a process? What, but a wretched debility and dejection of the heart, and a strangeness and sadness of the manners, and a suspension of the native expressions and ready offices of zealous affection?

p. 37. Just thoughts beautifully expressed; but nothing to the point in question. The folly of making a Hole in the Drum to look after the Music is surely no proof of the wisdom of playing out of tune.

⁸ This distinction between difference and diversity—otherness of degree and of kind—appears also in the 1825 “On the Prometheus of Aeschylus”: *SW&F (CC)* II 1268, 1288. For the crucial distinction between universal reason and individual understanding, see *AR (CC)* 216-19.

⁸ See *C&S (CC)* 168-9 for C’s published ver-

sion of this note and for the editor’s commentary which traces the “Plato” allusion to Jacobi via Schelling.

⁸ John 1.4.

10 p 50, pencil overtraced in ink

Yet the principles of protestantism, and the national temper, and the spirit of the formularies of the English church, all discourage the attempt to hold forth the subjects of evangelical teaching in the gorgeous colours of an artificial oratory.

* Qy¹

10¹ I.e. "Query", meaning "I question this".