

APPENDIX

CARLYLE'S RELIGION

THE St. James' Gazette, February 11, 1881, writes :—

“It is obvious that from an early age he entirely ceased to believe, in its only true sense, the creed he had been taught. He never affected to believe it in any other sense, for he was far too manly and simple-hearted to care to frame any of those semi-honest transmutations of the old doctrines into new-fangled mysticism which had so great a charm for many of his weaker contemporaries. On the other hand, it is equally true that he never plainly avowed his unbelief. The line he took up was that Christianity, though not true in fact, had a right to be regarded as the noblest aspiration after a theory of the Universe and of human life ever formed : and that the Calvinistic version of Christianity was on the whole the best it ever assumed ; and the one which represented the largest proportion of truth and the least amount of error. He also thought that the truths which Calvinism tried to express, and succeeded in expressing in an imperfect or partially mistaken manner, were the ultimate governing principles of morals and politics, of whose systematic neglect in this age nothing but evil could come.

“Unwilling to take up the position of a rebel or revolutionist by stating his views plainly—indeed if he had done so sixty years ago he might have starved—the only resource left to him was that of approaching all the great subjects of life from the point of view of grim humour, irony, and pathos. This

was the real origin of his unique style ; though no doubt its special peculiarities were due to the wonderful power of his imagination, and to some extent—to a less extent we think than has been usually supposed—to his familiarity with German.

“What then was his creed? What were the doctrines which in his view Calvinism shadowed forth and which were so infinitely true, so ennobling to human life? First, he believed in God; secondly, he believed in an absolute opposition between good and evil; thirdly, he believed that all men do, in fact, take sides more or less decisively in this great struggle, and ultimately turn out to be either good or bad; fourthly, he believed that good is stronger than evil, and by infinitely slow degrees gets the better of it, but that this process is so slow as to be continually obscured and thrown back by evil influences of various kinds—one of which he believed to be specially powerful in the present day.

“God in his view was not indeed a personal Being, like the Christian God—still less was He in any sense identified with Jesus Christ; who, though always spoken of with rather conventional reverence in his writings, does not appear to have specially influenced him. The God in which Mr. Carlyle believed is, as far as can be ascertained, a Being possessing in some sense or other will and consciousness, and personifying the elementary principles of morals—Justice, Benevolence (towards good people), Fortitude, and Temperance—to such a pitch that they may be regarded, so to speak, as forming collectively the will of God. . . . That there is some one who—whether by the earthquake, or the fire, or the still small voice—is continually saying to mankind—‘*Discite justitiam moniti*’; and that this Being is the ultimate fact at which we can arrive . . . is what Mr. Carlyle seems to have meant by believing in God. And if any one will take the trouble to refer to the first few sentences of the Westminster Confession, and to divest them of their references to Christianity and to the Bible, he will find that between the God of Calvin and of Carlyle there is the closest possible similarity. . . . The great fact about each particular