

“Obituary: Francis William Newman.”

The Times Wednesday, 6 October 1897: 4.

Professor Francis Newman, brother of the late Cardinal Newman, died on Monday evening at his residence, Weston-super-Mare. He had not taken part in public affairs during the last two years, owing to failing eyesight. Senile decay had been apparent for some time, and a further enfeeblement was induced by a fall in May. He passed away peacefully in sleep.

Francis William Newman was born in London in the year 1805. His father was John Newman, a member of the banking firm of Ramsbottom, Newman, and Co., and his mother was the child of an old Huguenot family which had settled in London as paper manufacturers. She was a Calvinist, and it was from her that the two brothers learned to take great delight in the Bible. John Henry and Francis were alike passionately attached to her, and the former always ascribed a dominant influence over his early religious views to his mother's teaching. That teaching, however, was narrow, in accordance with the creed, and both brothers burst its bands soon after they entered upon their academic training. Francis Newman was educated at a private school at Ealing, and thence passed to Worcester College, Oxford, where he obtained first-class honours in classics and mathematics in 1826. The same year he was elected to a Fellowship in Balliol College.

At a period subsequent to his University experiences, Mr. Newman stated that from the very beginning of his religious life he felt that there was something wrong in his creed. He lamented the unreality of some things in the Church system with which he was connected, and also felt the difficulty of reconciling Calvinistic articles with a formal ritual. When he entered the University and subscribed the articles he came to the conclusion that “not one in five of those who were compelled to subscribe had any religious convictions at all”; and that “the whole system of compulsory subscription was hollow, false, and wholly evil.” About this time “the Oriel movement” had begun to make considerable stir in the young Oxford mind,

and, amongst other things, the broadest anti-Sabbatarian doctrines were preached, which exactly fell in with young Newman's ideas. His views on the Atonement, Baptism, &c. were very heterodox, and it was in vain that his brother John Henry endeavoured to instil into him a due reverence for the episcopal office. Moved by such convictions as these, it is scarcely surprising that he resigned his Fellowship at Oxford, and withdrew from the University altogether in 1830, when the time approached for taking his M.A. degree. He declined the subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, which was required from candidates for that degree. Going over to Ireland, he acted as private tutor for a time in a gentleman's family, and there came under the influence of a man of great force and worth, but the last person in the world to help him to a healthier and stronger faith.

Mr. Newman now became a “Millenarian,” or believer in the millennium, and having also acquired something like a religious contempt for all secular pursuits, he began to dream of being a missionary to the heathen. As this could not be accomplished under the Fgis of the Church, he went out to Bagdad with the object of assisting the late Mr. Antony Norris Groves in an independent Christian mission. But the Persian enterprise did not prosper as well as its founders hoped and desired, so Mr. Newman returned to England to see if a few more friends could be persuaded to join the enthusiasts, who were resolved upon establishing a Christian Church in which forms and ceremonies were almost wholly absent. While he was lying in quarantine off the coast of England a letter came to him from an intimate friend informing him that he was spiritually “suspect.” His brother, who by this time had been completely converted to priestly doctrines, cut him off from all private friendship and acquaintance, thereby severing him from other members of his family who were living with him. One by one, all those with whom he had previously held converse turned against him, and ceased to acknowledge him as a friend.

“My heart was ready to break,” he wrote, in recording his impressions of this period; “I wished for a woman’s soul that I might weep in floods.” With different handling, the earnest young thinker might possibly have been saved to Christianity. Convinced that he could do no good by returning to Bagdad, in 1833 Mr. Newman became classical tutor in Bristol College. By his travels in the East he had laid the foundation of that wide knowledge of Oriental philology for which he was afterwards so distinguished. In 1840 he accepted the post of Classical Professor in Manchester New College, and in 1846 his high reputation led to his being appointed to the Chair of Latin in University College, London. This latter post he held until 1863. Meanwhile he was an active contributor to numerous literary and scientific periodicals, and to various branches of ancient and modern literature. Religious controversy likewise continued to absorb him, and on all theological questions discussed, he took up positions diametrically opposed to those assumed by his eminent brother. He stated that he was eager for a religion more all-embracing than any which existed, and one that should include whatever was best in all the historical religions.

In 1849 Mr. Newman published his first important work, “*The Soul; its Sorrows and Aspirations.*” It will remain one of his most abiding contributions to modern thought; and its aim was to indicate a solid ground for divine aspirations in the human heart. It was followed in 1850 by “*Phases of Faith,*” the work by which he is no doubt most widely known, though one very negative in character. This autobiographical treatise, in which the author expounded his religious struggles and changes, should be read in juxtaposition with his brother’s “*Apologia.*” Professor Henry Rogers, in his “*Eclipse of Faith,*” trenchantly replied to Newman’s “*Phases of Faith,*” shattering its positions and arguments. This drew from the author “*A Reply to the ‘Eclipse of Faith,’*” in which he made an assault on the moral character of Our Lord. As was observed of this work and its author, “He professed an unwillingness to pain the sensitive

minds of Christians; but the injury he inflicted on the conscience and hearts of those whom he would still call the best and noblest was not to be measured.” Further, in his “*Catholic Union*” he sought to create or conceive the existence of some absolute Church of good men, among whom a belief in the being of God should not be a pre-requisite for admission. This attitude, however, he considerably modified in his “*Theism, Doctrinal and Practical,*” published in 1858. Having, according to his own confession, sounded the depths of atheism, he once more found a standing place for his moral nature in the character, personality, and accessibility of the living God. But so many were the mutations of his mind on religious questions, that at a still later period in his career he was again and again beset by his old doubts. “Sceptics of all shades pointed to F. W. Newman as an example of what earnest and honest thinkers should endeavour to be. Romanists saw in J. H. Newman a pattern of what every clergyman would come to be if he were only sincere and bold enough to follow the same course of investigation.” All Protestant Christians, nevertheless, must have regretted that the two brothers could not find some middle course which would have enabled them to champion the cause of English Christianity. But long before his death Mr. Newman had ceased to call himself a Christian even; and he defined his own aim as “that of saving all that is spiritual, pure, and merciful in Christianity, amid the wreck which Erudition has made of its Mythology.”

Professor Newman’s published works exhibited the width and versatility of his learning, ranging as they did over a vast variety of religious, philological, political, and social questions. He wrote treatises on political economy, history, classics, and Oriental languages. Nor did he forget his old academical studies, Greek, Latin, and mathematical. He was recognized as one of the first Latinists of his day. He was also proficient in modern Arabic, and this led him further into the modern Zouave, and back into the ancient Numidian, Mauretanian, and Gætulian languages. He was, too, a somewhat

prolific writer on Hebrew and Christian theism and on ethical politics. He further put forth two volumes of mathematical tracts, well supplied with numerical tables, and an able treatise on Elliptical Integers (1888-89), of which an important instalment appeared in the *Dublin and Cambridge Magazine* 40 years earlier. The following is a list of Professor Newman's principle works, in addition to those already enumerated in the course of this article:—"On the Relations of Free Knowledge to Moral Sentiment," 1847; "The Odes of Horace," 1853—second edition, 1876; "Relations of Professional to Liberal Knowledge," 1859; "The Moral Influence of Law," 1860; "Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice," 1861; "Hiawatha rendered into Latin," 1862; "A Discourse against Hero-making in Religion," 1864; "A History of the Hebrew Monarchy," 1865; "A Handbook of Modern Arabic," 1866, giving the dialect now used by literary men in all Arab-speaking regions; "Forms of Government," 1867; "Translations of English Poetry into Latin Verse" and "The Text of the Iguvine Inscriptions," 1868; "Orthoëpy," 1869; "The Iliad of Homer," "A Dictionary of Modern Arabic," and "Europe of the Near Future," 1871; "Hebrew Theism," 1874; "Religion, not History," 1877; "Morning Prayers in the Household of a Believer in God," 1878; "Reorganization of English Institutions," 1880; "What is Christianity without Christ?" 1881; a

"Libyan Vocabulary," 1882; "A Christian Commonwealth" and "Essays on Diet," 1883; "Christianity in its Cradle," "Comments on the Text of Eschylus," and "Rebilius, or Robinson Crusoe in Latin," 1884; "Life after Death," 1886; and "Reminiscences of Two Exiles and Two Wars," 1888. All the minor compositions of Professor Newman were published in five volumes of "Miscellanies," which appeared at various periods as follows:—Vol. I., "Addresses, Academical and Historical," 1869; Vol. II., "Moral and Religious Essays," 1887; Vol. III., "Political Reforms," 1889; Vol. IV., "Political Economy," 1890; and Vol. V., "Chiefly Academic," 1891. The last work written by him was a memoir of the early years of his brother, Cardinal Newman, but it was conceived in a spirit which gave pain to the friends of both these distinguished men.

Mr. Newman always took a keen interest in political and social questions, though he was an adherent of no political party. He was a strong advocate of the triple abstention from alcohol, tobacco, and flesh meats. He was likewise an anti-vivisectionist, and wrote and lectured extensively on this subject and upon temperance and vegetarianism. In his case the ascetic life would certainly seem to have been conducive to longevity, though no doubt both he and his brother the Cardinal inherited strong and vigorous constitutions.

