

A DEATH BED REPENTANCE. TO THE MEMORY OF SAMUEL BUTLER.

By ALEISTER CROWLEY.

I.

ACCORDING to the local G. P., there was no hope for Timothy Bird. There was nothing the matter with him beyond the fact that he was 86 and that his weakness was alarming. People snuff out at all ages: accident apart, our vital clocks vary immensely in the matter of mainspring.

The mind of Timothy Bird was extraordinarily clear and logical; in fact, so logical that he was unreasonable. He was unwilling to die until he had made one further effort to transform that which had most embittered his life into its crowning joy. At the last moment, said he, God will surely touch the heart of my dear lad.

He therefore telegraphed, with a faith which 30 years of disappointment had done nothing to shatter.

The telegram was worded thus:

John Nelson Darby Bird,
99 New Square,
Lincoln's Inn.

Jesus calls me at last unless He comes first come to your father and your God Luke XV

Father.

The curious wording of this message mirrored infallibly the mind of Timothy Bird.

Why (do you interrupt) assert religious beliefs in a telegram? Because the Holy Ghost may "use" the telegram to "reach" the clerks in the Post Office. Enough of such querulous query: to the facts!

John Nelson Darby was the founder of the "Brethren gathered together to the name of the Lord Jesus" and called "Plymouth Brethren" owing to their early great successes having been won in Plymouth. This excellent man was a very fine Hebrew scholar, to say nothing of Greek. His eminence had entitled him to the offer of a seat on the Committee of the Revision of the Bible, but he had refused to meet other scholars of heterodox theological views, quoting:

Matthew, XVIII, 17,

II Thessalonians, III, 6 and 14,

Romans, XVI, 17,

and particularly

II John, 9, 10, 11.

His undoubtedly great all-round mind led him to see that One Infallible Authority is necessary to any religion. Rome had this in the Pope; he followed the apostasy of Luther, and proposed to replace this by the Bible. Now, since the Bible is the actual word of God, dictated by the Holy Ghost—else where is its authority?—this word must be taken literally in every part as well as in the whole. Now you may formulate a *sortes* from any one text and another *sortes* from any other. But a contradiction in your conclusions will not invalidate either of your first premisses!

This involves a somewhat complex metaphysic, in spite of the fact that metaphysic, being the work of heathen philosophers, is of its father the devil.

It is, however, impossible in practice to corner a Plymouth Brother in these or any other ways, because he scents danger from afar and replies with an *argumentum ad hominem* on these simple lines:

I am saved.

You are not I.

Therefore, you are damned (I John, v., 19.)

In these degenerate days fact is supposed by the ignorant

to be truer than fancy, and one must therefore plead for belief by referring the sceptic to Mr. Edmund Gosse's "Father and Son." Reviewers of that book cast doubt on the possibility of such narrowmindedness as is shown by Philip Gosse. But in the boyhood of another writer sprung of the loins of the Brethren, the poet of "The World's Tragedy," the name of Philip Gosse was a byword, a scorn and a reproach; he was an awful warning of the evils of latitudinarianism!

And Timothy Bird was of the anti-Ravenite section of the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren. His had been the dominant voice of that Assembly Judgment which "delivered" Philip Gosse and his kind "to Satan for a season"; and he had been the mainstay of the movement which expelled a majority of the remainder when Mr. F. E. Raven had "blasphemed" in a manner so obscure and complex that not one in twenty of the most learned of the seceders ever gained even a Pisgah glimpse of the nature of the controversy.

For Timothy Bird was indeed a Gulliver in Lilliput. He had known John Nelson Darby intimately; he had been the close friend of Wigram and Crowley, even of Kelly before his heresy; he was a scholar of merit if not of eminence; he was a baronet of the United Kingdom and a man of much property. Baronets not being mentioned in the New Testament, he had refused to use his title; but the other brethren, at least those in the lower middle classes, never forgot it.

He lived simply, using his large income principally for the distribution of tracts; he evangelized greatly while he had the strength, going from town to town to establish or confirm the brethren, and it was generally known that he had left the whole of his great fortune in trust to Arthur Horne and Henry Burton for the use of the brethren to the entire exclusion of the aforesaid John Nelson Darby Bird, who had not only backslidden but gone over wholly to Satan, being in fact a barrister of repute, the most distinguished member of the Rationalist Press Association, and, worse than all, a zealous and irrefutable advocate of easy divorce.

This disinheritance weighed little with the younger Bird, who at 44 was earning some £5,000 a year, and who had such painful memories of eighteen years of the most cruel (because perfectly well-meaning) form of slavery that the word "home" was habitually used by him in moments of excitement instead of the familiar "hell" of the pious Englishman.

Now, as Herbert Spencer (a little late in the day) maintained, "Action and reaction are equal and opposite"; and experience teaches that fanaticism does not escape this law. There are no anti-Christians like the children of Plymouth Brethren. They have the Bible at their fingers' ends; they quite agree that Brethrenism is the only logical form of Bible Christianity; they associate it with every grand tyranny or petty spite of the hated home; and so they are frankly of Satan's party. Terrible opponents they make. The Plymouth Brother can find a text of Scripture to buttress his slightest act, and his son has consequently an equal armory of blasphemy, which, with a little knowledge of Greek and Hebrew and of various infidel writers, makes him unchallengeable in debate.

Timothy Bird had learnt to fear his son. From the age of puberty he had been in fierce revolt; it was the subtleties of that five years' intense struggle that had made him intellectually supreme both in strategy and tactics, the most dangerous advocate at the Bar. He had become a fine psychologist as well; he had penetrated every blind alley of his father's