Father and son, biographical recollections

Gosse Edmund
FATHER AND SON
BIOGRAPHICAL RECOLLECTIONS

BY
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"Der Glaube ist wie die Liebe: er lässt sich nicht erzwingen."

SCHOPENHAUER

FOURTH EDITION

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1908
PREFACE

At the present hour, when fiction takes forms so ingenious and so specious, it is perhaps necessary to say that the following narrative, in all its parts, and so far as the punctilious attention of the writer has been able to keep it so, is scrupulously true. If it were not true, in this strict sense, to publish it would be to trifle with all those who may be induced to read it. It is offered to them as a document, as a record of educational and religious conditions which, having passed away, will never return. In this respect, as the diagnosis of a dying Puritanism, it is hoped that the narrative will not be altogether without significance.

It offers, too, in a subsidiary sense, a study of the development of moral and intellectual ideas during the progress of infancy. These have been closely and conscientiously noted, and may have some value in consequence of the unusual conditions in which they were produced. The au-
PREFACE

Thor has observed that those who have written about the facts of their own childhood have usually delayed to note them down until age has dimmed their recollections. Perhaps an even more common fault in such autobiographies is that they are sentimental, and are falsified by self-admiration and self-pity. The writer of these recollections has thought that if the examination of his earliest years was to be undertaken at all, it should be attempted while his memory is still perfectly vivid and while he is still unbiased by the forgetfulness or the sensibility of advancing years.

At one point only has there been any tampering with precise fact. It is believed that, with the exception of the son, there is but one person mentioned in this book who is still alive. Nevertheless, it has been thought well, in order to avoid any appearance of offence, to alter the majority of the proper names of the private persons spoken of.

As regards the anonymous writer himself, whether the reader does or does not recognise an old acquaintance, occasionally met with in quite other fields, is a matter of no importance. Here no effort has been made to conceal or to identify.

It is not usual, perhaps, that the narrative of a spiritual struggle should mingle merriment
and humour with a discussion of the most solemn subjects. It has, however, been inevitable that they should be so mingled in this narrative. It is true that most funny books try to be funny throughout, while theology is scandalised if it awakens a single smile. But life is not constituted thus, and this book is nothing if it is not a genuine slice of life. There was an extraordinary mixture of comedy and tragedy in the situation which is here described, and those who are affected by the pathos of it will not need to have it explained to them that the comedy was superficial and the tragedy essential.

*September, 1907.*