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# CHARLES KINGSLEY AND THE *VIA MEDIA*

JOHN C. HAWLEY, S.J.

WITH THE RECENT CENTENARY of Newman's death attention has again been paid, in passing, to his notorious opponent Charles Kingsley (1819–75).<sup>1</sup> For the last century this has largely been the case: as Kingsley's most recent biographer has noted, "It was [his] misfortune to be the fly embedded in the clear amber of his antagonist's apology" (Chitty 237). Though for Roman Catholics the 1864 controversy that led to the *Apologia pro vita sua* still seems to be the most interesting aspect of Kingsley's career, its unfortunate polemics must not be allowed to cloud the larger role that this Anglican cleric played in the Victorian church. Contentious and apostolic in all his many causes, Charles Kingsley was a spokesperson for a far larger group of the English than Newman ever was, and he deserves an objective assessment. This article hopes to take a step in that direction by focusing less on Newman and more on the other religious "targets" in Kingsley's scope. Their response to his attacks, though not producing a spiritual classic like the *Apologia*, help complete the picture of a Victorian church struggling to accommodate itself to the modern age.

## DOGMATIC ANTI-DOGMATISM

Kingsley's stated desire was to enter the larger struggle between atheism and belief, imagining the wrestling match between Jacob and the angel

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, my "Newman the Novelist" and "John Henry Newman and the Anxiety of Influence."

to be a suitably muscular task for any Christian minister. In the meantime, however, and willy-nilly, Popery and Protestantism threatened to tear him limb from limb. The vehemence of the public debate with Newman late in Kingsley's life suggests that the speculative knot would not be easily untied. Even more clearly, his somewhat less publicized dealings with Dissenters suggest that the great compromise he claimed Anglicanism offered his contemporaries was tenuous even for its advocate.

Despite the fact that his seven novels sold very well, that he became a chaplain to Queen Victoria and tutor to her son, that he received many ecclesiastical honors and was named to the first chair of modern history at Cambridge, there was something of a tragic undercurrent of frustration in his life. It is helpful to recall that Charles Kingsley, of all people, derided sectarian debates as distractions from the most important religious question of the day. Whatever others might say, he saw himself as ecumenically minded; even after his debate with Newman, in fact, he told Frederick Denison Maurice that unity was "the aspiration which is working, I verily believe, in all thinking hearts, which one thrusts away fiercely at times as impossible and a phantom, and finds oneself at once so much meaner, more worldly, more careless of everything worth having, that one has to go back again to the old dream" (Kingsley, *Letters* [hereafter LK] 2: 211). As early as 1845, three years after his ordination, he had sensed an urgency to rise above sectarian squabbles, to overcome the paralysis of skepticism, and to commit himself to something even in the absence of intellectual certitude.

Like most of his contemporaries, he was an obvious intellectual heir to Thomas Carlyle. "The fault of impulse," Kingsley wrote, "is that one's whole life is not impulse! that we let worldly wisdom close again over the glimpse of heaven-simplicity in us" (LK I: 80). He had discerned in the young men of his generation what he had earlier seen in himself: a "mischievous and cowardly distrust of anything like enthusiasm" (*Alton Locke*, Prefatory Memoir, 1: 3)—but he did not blame young men for this hesitation; he blamed his fellow clergymen who, at a time when greater simplicity was demanded, were making the Bible "anything and nothing, with their commenting and squabbling, and doctrine picking" (LK I: 110).

He had therefore hoped to bridge a chasm that most threatened him as a young man—the gulf between belief itself and atheism. In 1846 he had offered a friend the following analysis of the contemporary religious scene:

A crisis, political and social, seems approaching, and religion, like a rootless plant, may be brushed away in the struggle. Maurice is full of fear—I had almost said despondence—and he, as you know, has said in his last book, that "The real struggle of the day will be not between Popery and Protestantism, but between Atheism and Christ." And here we are daubing walls with untempered mortar—quarreling about how we shall patch the superstructure, forgetting that the foundation is gone—Faith in anything. (LK 1: 142)

As he noted, many would object that the Church of England was vibrant (“Look at her piety; look at the revival; her gospel doctrines; her church-building”), but Kingsley countered that “the candle always flames up at the last with a false galvanic life, when the spirit is gone” (LK 1: 143).

The task Kingsley felt himself ready to undertake in 1846, therefore, was the “Arnoldization” of the clergy: awakening them to social responsibilities. “My game is gradually opening before me,” he wrote; by focusing on the Gospel’s moral imperatives he would cut the Gordian knot of theological speculation and doubt (LK 1: 137–38). Work on behalf of the poor and among young men alienated from the Church were the only alternatives his fellow clergymen could seriously entertain, Kingsley warned, if they did not wish to go “either to Rome or to the workhouse, before fifty years [were] out” (LK 1: 142–43).

He had good reason to understand the plight of his contemporaries. In 1840, before he had embraced religious zealotry, he saw himself pulled from one pole to another, never finding a satisfactory answer to his own religious doubts until he met Frances Grenfell, whom he married. “If I ever believe Christianity,” he told her, “it will be in that spirit in which you believe it. There is no middle course. Either deism, or the highest and most monarchical system of Catholicism! Between these two I waver” (LK 1: 50). But he gradually calmed down and discovered a less polarized avenue for his spiritual journey. When Grenfell introduced him to the works of Carlyle, Coleridge, and Frederick Denison Maurice, these interesting writers helped turn his confused mind from abstract theological problems to concrete moral imperatives (LK 1: 49). It was not long before he was taking the lead, reshaping his fiancée’s High Church inclinations by emphasizing the pressing demands of the social Gospel.

But if this approach proved to be the salvation of his faith, it also planted the seed of latitudinarianism that later demanded such painful—and polemical—compromises in his theology. Whereas, for Kingsley, Dissenters seemed to place their trust in “assurances” and “emotions,” and Tractarians relied upon “outward formularies,” “Fanny” embodied for Charles a simple holiness in daily living (LK 1: 70). More and more, he told her, he was coming to realize that “all our vaunted intellect is nothing,” and that a simple, heartfelt faith was the one thing needful in true Christianity (LK 1: 78).

Thereafter, upon ordination, the activism of Christian Socialism provided the confirmation for Kingsley’s simplified faith. He provided his parishioners with a philosophical grounding for his less systematic theology by following the example of the “Cambridge Apostles,” who had taught him that truth could be approached from any number of avenues (Cannon 29–73). “Spiritual truths,” he wrote “present themselves to us in ‘antinomies,’ apparently contradictory pairs, pairs of poles, which however do not really contradict or even limit each other, but are only cor-

relatives, the existence of the one making the existence of the other necessary" (LK 1: 195).

Once he had found a rationale for a religious compromise, Kingsley no longer apparently "wavered" between faith and unbelief, or Dissent and Romanism, but became an outspoken advocate of a moderate Anglicanism, a Samson who *would not* topple the pillars of the temple—who, instead, did all he could to cement them in place. "The longer I live," he wrote in 1862, "the more I find the Church of England the most rational, liberal, and practical form which Christianity has yet assumed; and dread as much seeing it assimilated to dissent, as to Popery" (LK 2: 136). In his public role as chaplain to the Queen he consciously tailored his sermons, novels, and reviews to maintain a liberal centrism in theology, and the heroes of his novels became, like the earlier Kingsley himself, well-meaning but vaguely agnostic, "saved" by the love and faith of a woman.<sup>2</sup> Avoiding the shoals of Dissent and Roman Catholicism, each of these young men finds a wife, a purpose in life, and a safe harbor in the Broad Church.

Thus was the stage set for the tragicomedy of Kingsley's public life. His sense of purpose, his identity, and his marriage demanded a stance suggesting that all manner of thing would be well if only "doctrine-picking" were replaced by "heaven-simplicity." This rankled Newman, who caricatured it as "flee[ing] from extremes, without having any very definite mean to flee to," as lacking "clearness of intellect enough to pursue a truth to its limits" and "boldness enough to hold it in its simplicity" (*Loss and Gain* 1: 67–77). In what follows I will demonstrate how the other parties responded to Kingsley's call to an Anglican *via media*—with outrage, disdain, and some glee.

#### THE DISSENTERS

Foremost among Kingsley's earliest critics were the Evangelicals and the Dissenters, who considered him to be a materialist or a pantheist. One such reviewer concluded in 1851 that Kingsley's "theology lack[ed] the foundation of simple and reverent faith" ("Rev. of *Alton Locke*" 96). This is misinformed criticism: Kingsley in fact spent a great deal of his time writing about the need for the redemptive activity of God in a fallen world. He emphasized, however, the bright and hopeful side of Chris-

<sup>2</sup> James Thomson points this out (146–56). Macario Marmo discusses the typical Kingsleyan conversion in three stages: the love of Nature, love of humanity, and love of the Divine. Allan John Hartley sees Kingsley's program as ongoing: "Conversion and re-conversion form a natural progression in which man realizes his own true nature, and only in that realization can he begin to improve social conditions" (545). Raymond Williams also speaks of a "reconversion" in *Alton Locke*: from a Chartist to a Christian Socialist. A nonreligious Darwinian process of "transformation" is suggested by Gillian Beer.

tianity, countering a negativism he perceived in “the Spurgeon party.” Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92) was the immensely popular Baptist preacher at Park Street Chapel, London; his sermons were published weekly from 1855 to 1917. Kingsley’s optimistic theology flew in the face of many Dissenters, who concluded that with this lax Anglican “things that ought to be carefully discriminated are laboriously fused together” (“Rev. of *Sermons*” 576). Julian Sturtevant, for example, in 1855 described Kingsley’s theology as a strange compound of popery, transcendental mysticism, Shakespeare, Raphael, and Scripture: “religion reduced to a fine art, salvation without repentance or forgiveness” (179, 181). Such a hodgepodge impressed Sturtevant and other Dissenters as a misguided attempt to obfuscate the world’s crying need for judgment.

Sturtevant’s aggressive tone is understandable since it reflected Kingsley’s own. While praising the “authentic” asceticism of self-sacrifice, Kingsley condemned Calvinistic “self-annihilation” as egocentric and complained to Maurice in 1844 that his greatest worry was “the great prevalence of the Baptist form of dissent in [his] parish.” Counseling Fanny to ignore the teaching of the German quietist Tersteegen (1697–1769), which “leads back again to Self,” he suggested “when tempted to look inward, it is well to go immediately and work for others” (LK 1: 102, 106).

In his sermons of 1849 he forcefully condemns Calvinistic fear. While his impulses toward simplicity, enthusiasm, unity, and social conscience are rooted in the imagery of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, his psychoanalysis of some Dissenters is also strikingly modern:

They carry about hell in them,—they are their own hell. Everlasting shame, discontent, doubt, despair, rage, disgust at themselves, feeling that they are out of favour with God, out of tune with heaven and earth, loving nothing, believing nothing, ever hating, hating each other, hating themselves most of all—*there* is their hell! *There* is the hell in which the soul of every wicked man *is*. (*Twenty-Five Village Sermons* 73–74)

There was little chance for reconciliation when, in 1856, he described Calvin as “a child of the Devil” and the perverter of the Reformation (LK 1: 471). In the face of such personal criticism, it is little wonder that Dissenters like Sturtevant despised Kingsley.<sup>3</sup> What is more surprising is that Kingsley’s obvious distaste for Dissenters is relatively mild if compared to that of other novelists of the period (Cunningham).

To the chagrin of this same group, in the 1850s he began stressing the doctrine of purgatory, an idea he found compatible with a “God of Absolute and Unbounded Love.” It was at least more acceptable to him than the doctrine of Hell. In Kingsley’s view, “our Lord took the popular doctrine [of eternal damnation] because He found it, and tried to correct and

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, W. T. Eustis and the anonymous 1857 article in *Eclectic Review*.

purify it, and put it on a really moral ground," thereby showing "fire and worms" to be agents of cleansing and not of punishment (LK 1: 389-96).

There is a history behind Kingsley's liberal interpretation of this doctrine. Maurice, his theologian, had lost his position at King's College in 1853 for holding a similar opinion, and the *Record*, an extreme Evangelical paper, had been his severest critic during the controversy. Privately Kingsley sought to control his anger at the fundamentalists for their treatment of his mentor, asking Maurice for some of his "moderate and charitable and two-sided notions" to help counter "the very school" they were fighting against—the Evangelicals who had "at last got the upper hand in England" (LK 1: 471). But in his novels he showed little evidence of charity: he caricatured their position and literally—or literarily—killed off the most strident fundamentalists. Six years later, in his Preface to the fourth edition of *Yeast*, he also warned this "party of Spurgeon" that it had already lost its hold on the young, and within thirty years would itself be dead. This was the same desperate warning that had inspired his own conversion to the social Gospel, but it had now become, in his mouth, a harsh Jeremiad.

Outside his novels he could not kill his critics so easily, and several seem intentionally to have distorted his message. The Evangelical Anglican *Christian Observer*, for example, complained that "the old distinctions between grace and nature fade before our eyes" in Kingsley's works ("Rev. of *Sermons*" 572).<sup>4</sup> But his writings in fact heavily emphasize the primacy of God's action in the world. In May 1843, recently ordained, he wrote to his fiancée: "One seems to do so much in 'business,' and yet with how little fruit! *we* bustle, and *God* works. That glorious, silent Providence—such a contrast to physical power, with its blast furnaces and roaring steam-engines!" (LK 1: 97).

Not only the godless industry of men and women, but that of nature, as well, proved ultimately pointless. This seems to be the conclusion of *Yeast* in its epilogue:

Nature brings very few of her children to perfection, in these days or any other. . . . And for grace, which does bring her children to perfection, the quantity and the quality of the perfection must depend on the quantity and quality of the grace, and that again, to an awful extent—The Giver only knows how great an extent—on the will of the recipients, and therefore in exact proportion to their lowness on the human scale, on the circumstances which environ them. (338)

Kingsley makes an effort to "teach" this lesson to each of his protagonists: over and above their material attributes they learn to put on the armor of faith. This is most obvious in *Two Years Ago* (1857). In it the

<sup>4</sup> John Coulson describes the novelist's thought as Pelagian (32). Walter Houghton states that Kingsley was so determined to affirm natural man that he ignored "the profound need of divine grace" (406). Meriol Trevor concludes that the Broad Churchman did not recognize the reality of supernatural grace (328). Ernest Baker claims that "the key to the art, as well as to the thought, of Kingsley's novels is found in reliance on nature" (8: 98).

heroine converts the materialistic physician, Tom Thurnall, to an activist Christianity. He tells her at the novel's end:

I found out that I had been trying for years which was the stronger, God or I; I found out that I had been trying whether I could not do well enough without Him; and . . . found that I could not, Grace;—could not! I felt like a child who had marched off from home, fancying it can find its way, and is lost at once. . . . Grace, you, and you only, can cure me of my new cowardice. . . . Teach me, Grace! and forgive me!" (2: 404–405)

But this novel is also the one directed most conspicuously against Dissenters; the *British Quarterly Review* objected that Thurnall should have responded to Scripture rather than to a woman ("Rev. of *Two Years Ago*" 201–203). In Kingsley's view this narrow-minded criticism confirmed the gulf between the Dissenters' theology, with its insistence on God's transcendence and man's utter corruption, and his own theology, which emphasized the Incarnation and envisioned other human beings as agents of God's "Grace."

Occasional attacks in Dissenting journals were mild, however, compared to the sustained assault by James Harrison Rigg, an editor of the Methodist *London Quarterly Review*. Rigg's opening volley had been an article on Maurice's lax, and possibly un-Christian, theology in January of 1855, and the article's implications drew a sharp response from Kingsley. He wrote to Rigg, supporting Maurice's orthodoxy, vehemently denying that Carlyle influenced his own theology, and adding, "If you wish to see whether I am a Pantheist or not, may I beg you to peruse pp. 243–247 of vol. III of *Two Years Ago*, on which a Baptist review well remarked, that whatever I was, a Pantheist I was not" (LK 2: 22). In a second letter, having learned that Rigg intended to turn his article into a book, Kingsley warned him that any accusation of rationalism, which was rumored, would be slanderous, and he added, "I cannot believe that you have studied the Neo-Platonists at first hand, or you would never dream of imputing any of their tenets, or even tendencies, to me" (LK 2: 22).

In *Modern Anglican Theology* (1857) the unrepentant Rigg proposed "to explain the meaning and tendency of that *theosophy* which Coleridge first introduced into this country and which is the 'unknown quantity,' the ingredient of perplexity, in the writings of Maurice and Kingsley" (iii). Rigg said he hoped his volume would be popular, since it endeavored to correct authors who were so widely read. The book's many editions seem to have justified those hopes.

In the Preface to its second edition (1859), while acknowledging Kingsley's denials, he does not retract his charges. Instead, he ridicules Kingsley's cloudiness (and, in effect, his latitudinarianism) by citing Eleanor's closing sermon in *Alton Locke*. Here, Rigg asserts, Kingsley seems to have his heroine equate the kingdom of God with the Church, the Gospel, civilization, freedom, and democracy. Similarly, Rigg claims that in *Sermons on National Subjects, First Series* (1852) and *Alexandria and Her*



*Schools* (1854) Kingsley makes the Holy Spirit responsible for such a strange and diverse set of operations (dreams, fancies of poetry, discoveries of science, inventions of machinery, and art) that he degrades sanctifying grace from its pre-eminence above all other powers and influences (277–80). This broad interpretation of the Spirit's role in the world amounts to pantheism, in Rigg's view, and shows an unhealthy reliance upon pagan philosophers (282, 288). Again, there is real annoyance at Kingsley's comfortable "incarnation" of the Spirit's activity.

Kingsley, however, was neither a pantheist nor a materialist.<sup>5</sup> In fact, a major and obvious concern in *Hypatia and Phaethon; or Loose Thoughts for Loose Thinkers* (1852) is the tendency Kingsley saw in Greek philosophy to distance its devotees from the common, "unenlightened" human being. This was a gnosticism he repeatedly condemned; more pointedly, though, he went further and characterized predestination as a common-enough Christian form of this gnosticism—and this, no doubt, angered Rigg. At any rate, Rigg cites Kingsley's *Twenty-Five Village Sermons* (1849) in his attack, but ignores the Anglican's assertion in this volume that "no philosophies or doctrines of any sort which are not founded on a true faith in Jesus Christ and His life and death, are worth listening to" (177). As we have noted, the *Evangelical Christian Observer* described these same sermons as a confusion of the human and the divine—the first step on the descent to "Pantheistic Infidelity" (571).

Typical of many such Victorian encounters, however, and despite the strongly worded correspondence and the apparently polarized positions, Kingsley and Rigg developed a friendship—especially, it seems, after Kingsley's 1864 encounter with Newman. In many respects, their theologies were not that far apart. Kingsley taught that Jesus became for Christians the model of all that humans were called to be, but he never conceived of him as the impersonal Platonic form that Rigg rejects. "Let us follow the Logos boldly," Kingsley wrote in 1867,

whithersoever it leadeth. If Socrates had courage to say it, how much more should we, who know what he, good man, knew not, that the Logos is not a mere argument, train of thought, necessity of logic, but a Person—perfect God and perfect man, even Jesus Christ . . . who promised . . . to lead those who trust Him into all truth." (*Water of Life* 82)

The second person of the Trinity most clearly showed the way to Wisdom, which Kingsley also envisioned as a person; together, the Son and Wisdom (the Spirit) led to the Father. Though permeating all reality, this Spirit is clearly personalized for Kingsley.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kingsley's theology approached the "pantheism" of Christian nature mystics: "seeing in all created things God's 'energies,' yet moving also towards the Transcendent 'essence'" (Davies 275).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Houghton defends Rigg's charge of Neoplatonism by mistakenly concluding that Kingsley identifies Wisdom not with the Holy Spirit but with Jesus, thereby "Platonizing" him (405–407). Guy Kendall has accurately rejected Rigg's charge (124–34).

He describes this Spirit as the divine sanction to the truth of Coleridge's, and Carlyle's, and Maurice's philosophy—a philosophy that led to a heartfelt “Everlasting Yea” and a vital commitment to immediate social concerns. In fact, from Kingsley's point of view the most frustrating aspect of these exchanges with Rigg and with other Dissenters was their increasing complexity and irrelevance to the common man and woman struggling with doubt. His initial “impetuosity” in seeking to revitalize Anglicanism had alienated and infuriated a large body of dissenting Christians and had subsequently bogged him down in abstruse theological speculation.

#### LIBERALS AND THE UNCHURCHED

Kingsley increasingly discerned a double challenge in his public role: in the first place, he had to portray himself, in the face of Dissenting and Roman Catholic critics, as genuinely orthodox; and secondly, and finally more importantly, he saw that he had to portray Christianity itself as a desirable guide for rational men and women even in the face of empirical assault. As clearly as he saw the need for a religion that was socially engaged, by 1865 Kingsley had sadly concluded that the age had a prior, and desperate, need for catechetics (Maurice 2: 493). This led to what many have seen as a shift toward conservatism in his thinking.

The liberalism of the Unitarians, the new Biblical criticism of Strauss and Colenso, the “negativism” of the Broad Church authors of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), the deism of Comte, and the transcendentalism of Emerson all demanded a complex response from the orthodox Christian. In threatening the literal meaning of the Incarnation, such movements seriously strained Kingsley's ability as a spokesman for the Anglican mainstream. The “Arnoldization” would proceed, but its traditionally Christian inspiration had to be reasserted. Carlyle and other valuable philosophers might go their own unorthodox way, but the Broad Church was to remain within the fold.

As early as 1843 Kingsley had made an ominous prediction; “In the present day,” he wrote, “a struggle is coming. A question must be tried—Is intellectual Science, or the Bible, truth; and All Truth?” (LK 1: 112). It is true that Kingsley, more than most Victorian clergymen, recognized the values of science; he worried, nonetheless, that empiricism might do to nineteenth-century Christianity what scholastic metaphysics had done earlier: make theology irrelevant to the common man, and distract intellectuals from moral imperatives. Describing the Bible as “the great treasure-house of wisdom,” he wrote: “Man cannot know God intellectually, but the Bible says that he can know Him spiritually. . . . Here I must take my stand, or join the Positivists” (LK 2: 105).

When James Anthony Froude published his *Nemesis of Faith* (1849) explaining his fall into atheism, Maurice told Kingsley that Froude should have “clung to his belief *in* God which his childhood gave him, instead of falling into a religion *about* God which the Puseyites gave him, or into a religion of Man which he drew from Carlyle. . . . Religion against God. This is the heresy of our age” (Maurice 1: 518). In Maurice’s view, Froude exemplified the results of a problem epidemic among the young men of his day: unnecessary theological speculation that rigidified positions, divided the Church into parties, and led many to give up believing altogether.

In this concern, Maurice and Kingsley shared a great deal with the Unitarians. They, like Kingsley and Maurice, criticized theological systems for their deadening and false assurances. Like the Broad Churchmen, they stressed fellowship, the preference of deeds over creeds, and the dignity of man. Nonetheless, the greatest political and strategic challenge to Kingsley’s orthodoxy came from this group.

Unitarian journals, from the beginning, were among Kingsley’s most consistent supporters. But Unitarian support implied a latitudinarianism far beyond Kingsley’s desire for simplification of doctrines. Both Kingsley and Maurice accepted the need for doctrine, the desirability of an institutional Church, and the necessity for submission to its authority in matters of faith. A quite traditional ecclesiological framework became more crucial in Kingsley’s thinking than in Maurice’s, but both men rejected the loose structures that Unitarians preferred,<sup>7</sup> and, unlike the Unitarians, their theology was decidedly Trinitarian (LK 1: 468–69).

Because of his belief in the Incarnation, Kingsley intended his novels to move readers to accept Jesus not only as the most representative of men, but also as God. In 1859, for example, he carried on a correspondence with “an intelligent artizan, an avowed atheist, and editor of an atheist newspaper in one of the manufacturing towns in the north,” in which Kingsley protests that his novels were meant to be sermons: “It seems to me (but I may flatter myself) that you cannot like, as you say you do, my books, and yet be what I call moral Atheists” (LK 2: 74–75).

He gradually came to regret Unitarian support, correctly seeing that it was not an orthodox Christian message they found in his novels, but their own. Tom Taylor, writing in the *National Review*, praised the author for steering a course that remained truly inspiring while avoiding “the opium of Tractarianism,” “the womanish hysterics of one Evangelical school, or the Manichean self-seeking of another.” Taylor also applauded Kingsley’s hearty endorsement of a Christianity of deeds over one of heady speculation (157, 161). This was all well and good.

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<sup>7</sup> In their tendentious “defense,” for example, the *Prospective Review* criticized Kingsley for speaking of priests and sacraments, when Jesus had only proposed a “simple and formless institution of conversion and healing” (“Kingsley’s Sermons” 333).

When, however, Kingsley delivered his “Message of the Church to Labouring Men” in St. John’s church, London, and was immediately denounced by the pastor as a radical and heretic, the mixed blessing of Unitarian support became evident. It was their *Prospective Review* that supported him. The reviewer described Kingsley’s mind as ill-balanced and over-excited, but he cited the embarrassment at St. John’s as an example of the “technicalities and conventionalities” that stifled creative theology in the Church of England. The reviewer portrayed Kingsley as understandably upset: “Cooped up within these antiquated barriers, her best and worthiest sons fret and chafe under the invincible consciousness of social importance; and they must either violently extinguish their noblest impulses, or in giving them vent, cause havoc and confusion by their sudden explosion” (“Kingsley’s Sermons” 333–34).

The suggestion that Kingsley might find a warmer reception outside Anglicanism was made even more explicit in Tom Taylor’s laudatory essay. The Church of England, according to Taylor, “listens, puzzled and uneasy, to the trumpet blasts of Kingsley,” and “all her antecedents lead us to fear that she will end by rejecting” him, one of her “most devoted and far most useful sons” (161). Later, in the controversy with Newman, the Unitarians supported Kingsley by emphasizing Newman’s more rigid doctrine, his less obvious candor, and his weaker common sense (“Rev. of Mr. Newman’s *Apologia*” 313, 319).

Where this might lead became obvious in 1853, when Maurice lost his position at King’s College. Julius Hare predicted that politically-minded Unitarians would say the Church of England had cast out the very man who had been trying to demonstrate that the faith was not repugnant to reason and to the conscience of mankind (Maurice 2: 184). Kingsley was more pointed, counseling Maurice on the best ways to avoid scandal to the Church and to “give least handle for heretics of the atheistic school to say, ‘Of course his opinions are incompatible with the Church. *We* always knew it, now it is proved; and he must join us, or start a schism of his own’” (LK 1: 373). That Unitarian support might inadvertently provide ammunition for the atheistic school was more than Kingsley could tolerate.

In the face of such double-edged support he and Maurice felt a pressing need to reassert the basic orthodoxy of Broad Church theology. The Unitarians seemed to be moving rapidly from an open-minded middle position like that Kingsley espoused, to an amorphous agnosticism. From them, therefore, the Broad Church feared contamination—especially a taint by association in the eyes of the public.

Kingsley told a friend in 1851 that he had come to regard the movement toward Rome as more “painfully curious, than formidable. I believe more and more that the real danger is from a very opposite quarter, and have written a little book ‘Phaeton’ about all that” (LK 1: 260). In this book and in *Hypatia* (both published in 1852) he argues strongly for the ne-

cessity of revelation, and attacks the heterodoxy of Emersonian transcendentalism. He called it “Anythingarianism” and “Neo-Platonico-Eclectico-Borboro-taraxticism”—by which, he said, he ultimately meant pantheism. He describes Emerson’s “loose thinking” as the inevitable result of setting oneself up as “the fixed datum” and trying to use reason alone to discover the existence of the persons of the Trinity (LK 1: 325).

Even more threatening, though, were the effects of the empirical method in Biblical research and in other branches of theology. In 1850, when Kingsley read the first English translation of Strauss’s *Das Leben Jesu*, there was an air of panic in his reaction. He called Strauss the great false prophet of the day, and urged his fellow clergy to fight him. Eleven years later, when Broad Church theologians applied Strauss’s methodology in their *Essays and Reviews*, Kingsley’s principal objection was, again, pragmatic: that it repeated rationalistic arguments without offering any help to the reader’s faith.

Doubts, denials, destructions—we have faced them till we are tired of them. But we have faced them in silence, hoping to find a positive solution. Here comes a book which states all the old doubts and difficulties, and gives us nothing instead. Here are men still pulling down, with far weaker hands than the Germans, from whom they borrow, and building up *nothing* instead. (LK 2: 130)

In 1862, when Bishop Colenso published a work calling into question the authorship and historicity of the Pentateuch, both Maurice and Kingsley wrote against it. Kingsley published *Sermons on the Gospel of the Pentateuch* and preached against Colenso at the Chapel Royal, reasserting the historicity of the Bible. Characteristically pragmatic, his argument dealt less with the validity of Colenso’s analysis than with the effect such unnecessary speculation would have on the faith and devotion to duty of the average reader.

Having retreated into a more conservative position, Kingsley soon encountered serious opposition from liberals. One particularly harsh critic was G. W. Cox, who had served in South Africa with Bishop Colenso. He wrote Colenso’s biography in 1888, and was elected bishop of Natal in 1886 to succeed him, but did not serve. Writing in the radical *Westminster Review* in 1864, Cox used the occasion of Kingsley’s controversy with Newman to settle a few scores. In his opinion, Colenso earlier had followed the advice Kingsley now so freely offered Newman—he had sought truth for truth’s sake—but had received only Kingsley’s scorn. Citing *Phaethon*’s preference for a knowledge that will make us “better men,” Cox concludes that Kingsley’s own search for truth could never be truly objective, since the truth for which he looked had to support his own idea of moral *action*.

Cox was especially threatening in his outright dismissal of Kingsley’s life project—in much the same way that Kingsley had blithely dismissed Newman’s that same year. “It is important,” Cox wrote,

that the compromise which he and others have attempted to make between reason and authority, science and Scripture, should be seen to be untenable, transitory, hollow as the Peace of Amiens. It is important that the serious character of the present crisis in religious matters should be clearly understood. That it is Yes or No, and that there is no *via media* between them. (62–68)

Cox saw two parties emerging: those who trusted in reason (the atheists), and those who trusted in authority (the Roman Catholics). In this stark polarity, the conclusions drawn by Cox and other rationalists are strikingly similar to the conclusions of Dissenters and Roman Catholics. All three groups rejected the viability of Kingsley's latitudinarian Christianity.

#### CONCLUSION

The insistent criticism from all sides suggests that Kingsley should be regarded as a failure in what he set out to offer—that is, a broad understanding of Christianity that would appeal to the consciences of those led by theological dissension to doubt their faith. Yet his large audience suggests otherwise. In 1864, following his contretemps with Newman, there was a general impression in the journals that he had irretrievably lost his position of influence. Dissenters ridiculed his clumsiness; Catholics described his attack on Newman as “one of the falsest and most reckless charges ever made in an English magazine,” whereby Kingsley “made himself the butt of ‘inextinguishable laughter’ ” (Coleridge 157–58). Yet public perception of his bigotry gradually softened. In 1872 Justin McCarthy considered him “blundering, hot-headed, boisterous, but full of brilliant imagination and thoroughly sound at heart” (189–90). T. H. S. Escott went further, concluding that “a majority of his countrymen felt that Mr. Kingsley had in a rough and rude way placed before them something like the truth” (73).

Kingsley died in 1875, and C. Kegan Paul offered a balanced assessment of his career in the *Westminster Review*. We may conclude from Cox's attack in 1864 that this was hardly a journal that found Kingsley's writings welcome. Nonetheless, Kegan Paul concluded that “for some twenty years . . . Charles Kingsley was the most popular clergyman in England; . . . no man ever appealed to so large numbers, and to so different classes” (185). In light of his near-total eclipse in the twentieth century, we may find this contemporary assessment incredible. In any case, it is no small achievement for a relatively timid man whose struggle with belief, according to his wife, continued throughout his life.

In December of 1846, early in his career as a parish priest, he advised his friend Mr. Powles, Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford:

Get hold of some one truth. Let it blaze in your sky, like a Greenland sun, never setting day or night. Give your soul up to it; see it in everything, and everything in it, and the world will call you a bigot and a fanatic, and then wonder a century

hence, how the bigot and fanatic continued to do so much more than all the sensible folk round him. (LK 1: 113)

Three years before, in September of 1843, he had told his fiancée what *his* one idea was going to be: " 'Every creature of God is good, if it be sanctified with prayer and thanksgiving!' This, to me, is the master truth of Christianity! . . . And every man's and woman's eyes too, they cry out to me, they cry to me through dim and misty strugglings: 'Oh do us justice!' " (LK 1: 78).

The message he tried to convey met with gratitude in so many quarters because he had defined, in a doubting and confused society, a persistent desire for religious simplicity and ethical immediacy. If he did not succeed in cutting the Gordian knot of theological speculation, he did, at least, help many to focus on the Gospel's moral imperatives. In the face of opposition from virtually all quarters, Kingsley staunchly defended a position somewhere in the middle, now appealing to reason, now appealing to authority, frequently emotional and ever-insistent upon the moral imperative he grounded in Jesus of Nazareth. He embodied in all his inconsistency an adaptable Christianity that Cox, Newman, Rigg, and a good many others would reject—a Christianity not far from today's norm.

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