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RATIONAL THEOLOGY

AND

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

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RATIONAL THEOLOGY

AND
CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

IN ENGLAND

IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

BY

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and its Leaders'

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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"Take away Reason, and all Religions are alike true—as the
Light being removed all things are of one colour."—Preface Gen. to
Collection of H. More's Philosophical Writings.

Λόγῳ δὲ ὀρθῶ πείθεσθαι, καὶ Θεῷ, πάντων ἐστὶ—“To obey right Rea-
son is the same as to obey God.”—Hicetles.

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TO
THE VERY REVEREND
ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY, D.D.
DEAN OF WESTMINSTER
THESE VOLUMES
ARE INSCRIBED

PREFACE.

My aim in these volumes has been to describe a movement hitherto imperfectly understood. In depicting the great struggle of the seventeenth century in England, our historians have very much confined their view to the two chief parties betwixt whom it may be said to have been fought out. The religious forces of the time, which influenced so deeply the national history, have been roughly classified as Prelatical on one side, and Puritan on the other. In point of fact these forces were extremely various and complicated; and we still wait an adequate account of them—a great history of this great period, which shall do justice to all the impulses then moving the national mind, and the powerful characters which they called forth. We may have to wait long. The yet unspent prejudices and passions of the struggle, the necessity of at once sympathising with and yet critically regarding the most diverse religious phenomena, and the vast mass of documentary material which requires to be sifted

and illumined, constitute difficulties in the way of accomplishing such a task which only the highest historical genius can surmount.

In the mean time I have endeavoured to sketch in the following chapters one very significant and not the least powerful phase in the religious history of the seventeenth century. At the commencement of the contest betwixt the Parliament and the King, there was a moderate party which was neither Laudian nor Puritan—a party of which the hapless but heroic Falkland was the head, and with which many, if not a majority, of the most thoughtful minds of the country sympathised. This combination—which was even then more intellectual than political—shared the common fate of all middle parties in a period of revolution. It disappeared under the pressure of violent passions and the urgency of taking a side for the King or the Parliament. But the principles with which it was identified, and the succession of illustrious men who belong to it, made a far more powerful impression on the national mind than has been commonly supposed. The clear evidence of this is the virtual triumph of these principles, rather than those of either of the extreme parties, at the Revolution of 1688, which—and not the Restoration—was the natural outcome of the preceding struggle. The same principles, both in Church and State, have

never since ceased to influence our national thought and life. Their development constitutes one of the strongest, and—as it appears to me—one of the soundest and best strands, in the great thread of our national history. It is of importance, therefore, that their origin and primary movement should be understood.

I have spoken of the Latitudinarians of the seventeenth century as in some degree a party; but they are rather, as Döllinger somewhere says of their representatives in our own time, a band or group “of spiritually-related Savans,” than a party in the strict sense of the term. They pursued common objects, and so far acted together; but their combined action resulted from congruity of ideas, rather than from any definite, ecclesiastical, or personal aims. It is the inevitable characteristic of a moderate or liberal section in Church or State to hold together with comparative laxity. The very fact of their liberality implies a regard to more than one side of any question—a certain impartiality which refuses to lend itself to mere blind partisanship, or to that species of irrational devotion which forms the rude strength of great parties. This characteristic makes the action of such a moderating force all the more valuable; and it may be safely said that no ecclesiastical or civil organisation would long survive its elimination. The “Rational” element in all Churches